

assassinate First Secretary Gomułka. His drinking, philosophizing, and a trip to Warsaw with a friend and the friend's son (the narrator) provide the canvas on which Pilch paints grotesque pictures of small-town life and ridicules the strivings of the little people. The real problem, i.e., communism and its numbing effect on millions of these little people, fades away from view; what is left is the grotesque powerlessness of those who lost.

The ill-conceived conspiracy does not work out and, toward the end of the novel, the narrator dives into fantastic realism. All this is supposed to be funny, and it is, up to a point. My point materialized somewhere in the first one-third of the book—I read the remainder with yawns punctuating the pages. The novel seems designed to derail anger at communism into a feeling of inferiority among those who lived under communism. We are told that they are irredeemable trash even though their lives are circumscribed by communist laws and police. Communism is made light of in this novel, while the small foibles of individual people are presented as monumental. There is no redemption—no Magna Carta or Shakespeare, no Joan of Arc, no George Washington. No victories are allowed to balance the present state of virtual nonbeing. Pilch seems to say that except for a small elite, his fellow citizens are trash and so they should so remain. Communism served them right—too bad it fell.

I invite the reader to ponder the puzzle of Pilch's popularity. Why should a third-rate work of fiction receive so much attention as to attract an English translator? Pilch is a feasible candidate for a writer of sketches in *Saturday Night Live*, but as a presenter of Polish life he is a caricature. ▲

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Pan Tadeusz

by

Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855)

Book Seven

The Council

Argument:

The salutary advice of Bartholomew styled the Prussian. The martial views of Matthias Baptist. The political views of Mr. Buchman. Jankiel's conciliatory plea cut short by Pocketknife. Gerwazy's speech demonstrates the efficacy of parliamentary eloquence. Old Matthias's protestations. The sudden appearance of armed reinforcements breaks up the deliberations. Harrow! Hang Soplica!

Translated by Christopher A. Zakrzewski

It was the turn of the delegate Bartholomew Dobrzynski (the one who regularly plied the waterways to Königsberg) to say his piece. His fellow clansmen jokingly styled him "The Prussian" because he loathed the Prussians and yet loved to talk about them. He was well on in years and had seen much of the world in his travels. An avid reader of the newspapers, and a canny politician besides, he was able to shed a good deal of light on the discussions.

"So, my brother Matthias, friend and father to us all," he concluded, "their aid is not to be sneezed at. In wartime I should count on the French as on four aces in the hand. Valiant folk, the French! Not since Kosciuszko's day has the world seen a military genius of the caliber of Emperor Bonaparte.

"I remember when the French crossed the River Warta in the year of grace Eighteen hundred and six. I was bidding abroad then, engaged in trading ventures in Gdansk. Having many kinsmen in the province of Poznan, I would ride down for a visit and hunt small game with Joseph Grabowski. (He is colonel of a regiment now, but at the time he was still living on his estate near Obiezierz.) Great Poland was still

at peace even as Lithuania is now. Then word came of a terrible battle. Mr. Todwen dispatched a runner to us. 'Jena! Jena!' yelled Grabowski, on reading the letter. 'They have beaten the Prussians! We've won!' Down I leapt from my horse and, falling on my knees, offered thanks to God.

"We rode into the city as if we had business there and were none the wiser. What do we see? Every hofrath, landrath, commissar, and son of a bitch bowing and scraping before us, all of them pale and trembling like cockroaches soaked in boiling water. We laugh and rub our hands. Then, all cap-in-hand-like, we ask for news. So what's the word from—Jena? You should have seen them start! They were astounded we already knew about it. *Ach, Hairy Gott! O vey!* they cried. And hanging their heads in shame, they ran home to gather their belongings, and fled. Oh, it was bedlam I tell you! Every highway and byway in Great Poland thronged with fleeing Germans. Like a swarm of ants they crawled along, dragging their conveyances behind them. ('Vagens' and 'fornagels' they call them there.) Men and women with teakettles and tobacco pipes, lugging chests and featherbeds, all decamped as best they could.'

"Meanwhile, we hold a secret council. Harrow! To horse! Snarl up Fritz's retreat! Clobber the landraths, make schnitzel of the hofraths, pull the *Hair Offiziers* by their pigtails! General Dabrowski enters Poznan and proclaims the Emperor's command. Poles! Rise up! Within a week our people have thrashed the Germans and driven them out. Not a blessed Prussian as far as the eye can see!

"Now suppose we in Lithuania went it with the same verve and panache and gave the Muscovites the same kind of drubbing? Eh? What say you to that, Matthias? If Moscow decides to have it out with Bonaparte, it will be no ordinary fight. Napoleon is the world's number-one hero; he commands troops past telling. Eh? What say you, Matthias, Little King?"

He had had his say. Everyone waited for Matthias's reply. Matthias raised neither his head nor eyes. He slapped his hip several times with his hand, as if reaching for a sword. (Since the partition of his country he had sworn off wearing one; but the very mention of Moscow still stirred up his old habit of

slapping his left side. No doubt he was feeling for his Switch, whence his other byname, *Matthias Hipsmiter*.) At last he raised his head, and a deep hush fell over the room. But Matthias merely beetled his eyebrows and dropped his head again, dashing their expectations. At long last, he spoke, slowly and emphatically, punctuating each phrase with a nod of this head.

"Silence!" he said. "Whence comes this intelligence? How close are the French? Who leads them? Have they launched an attack on Moscow? If so, where and why? Who knows their line of march? What is their strength? What foot? What horse? Who will answer these questions? Speak!"

The nobility eyed one another in silence.

"I say we wait for the Bernardine Robak," said Bartholomew the Prussian, "for it is he who brought us the news; in the meantime, we should send spies to reconnoiter the border and quietly arm the whole district. Until then we must proceed with all due caution and not betray our plans to the Muscovite."

"What? Wait! Prate! Delay!" broke in another Matthias. He was styled *The Baptist* after the prodigious mace he carried and called his *Sprinkling Brush*. He had brought the weapon with him and was now leaning on it, arms draped over the ball, chin on his wrist.

"Wait! Prate! Debate!" he bellowed. "Hem, hum, haw, and then scam. Is that it? I have never been to Prussia. Königsberg logic may be good for the Prussian, but I rely on our noblemen's sense. I say who wants to fight, let him grab his Sprinkler; who wants to die, let him call the priest—and that's it! As for me, I aim to live and fight! What need have we of the Bernardine? Are we schoolboys? Eh? What is Robak to me! Shall we be worms boring our way to Moscow? Spies! Reconnoitering! Hem! Haw! You know what that means! Why, that you're gaffers and dodderers! Eh, brothers? The pointer's job is to sniff and point, the Bernardine's to quest for alms, and mine—to soak and douse. Soak 'em! Douse 'em!—and that's it!" And saying this, he stroked his club, while the entire assembly took up after him, "Soak" 'em! Douse 'em!"

Another Bartholomew took Baptist's part, the one called *Razor* after the slender blade he wielded; and

still another Matthias styled *Watering Can* after the blunderbuss he carried: it had a muzzle so wide that buckshot poured out of it like water from a watering can. Both men yelled out, "Long live Baptist and his Sprinkling Brush!" The Prussian tried to speak, but could not make himself heard over the din and laughter. "Down with the cowardly Prussians!" they shouted. "Let the cowards among us hide under the Bernardine's habit!"

Once again old Matthias raised his head. The noise died down. "Do not make fun of Robak!" he said. "I know him. A jack-priest, aye, but a crafty one! This little maggot has gnawed tougher nuts than you. I met him only once and was on to his little game the moment I laid eyes on him. He turned his gaze from me. Afraid I would ask him for his confession. But that is not my business. I could say a lot on that score. Anyhow, he will not come here. No use calling the Bernardine. If all this news comes from him, then who knows to what purpose? Robak is one devil of a cleric! If this is all you know, then why come to me? What do you want?"

"It's war we want!" they yelled.

"What war?" he asked.

"War on Moscow!" they roared. "A fight! Thrash the Muscovites!"

All this time Bartholomew the Prussian had been at pains to make himself heard. At last, thanks in part to his numerous bows and the stridency of his high-pitched voice, he succeeded in winning a hearing.

"I too want to fight," he shouted, thumping his chest with his fist. "I may not wield Baptist's Sprinkler, but I did give a proper christening to four Prussians with a barge pole the day I had a few too many and they tried to drown me in the Pregel."

"That's the spirit, Bartholomew!" roared Baptist. "Douse 'em I say!"

"But, for the love of Jesus," Bartholomew went on, "first we must know who it is we are fighting, and why? The world must know; otherwise, how will the people follow us? Where will they go, if we ourselves have no idea when or where to go? Fellow noblemen! Gentlemen! All this has to be carefully considered. Gentlemen! We need order and organization here. If it is war we want, then let us form a confederacy and

think the matter through: where to raise our banner, under whose staff to ride. That is the way we do it in Great Poland. We see the Prussian in full retreat, and what do we do? We hold a secret council, arm the peasants and the nobility, and wait for Dabrowski's order. Then harrow! we take to horse and rise up as one man!"

"I beg the floor!" spoke up the overseer from Kleck, a good-looking young man attired after the German fashion. Though his name was Buchman, he was of Polish stock and born in Poland. No one knew if he was of noble blood and no one cared to ask. Everyone respected him for the fact that he served a great lord, loved his country, had a good deal of learning (he had taught himself the science of husbandry from foreign books), and ran his master's estate in an orderly manner. What is more, he could weave sound political arguments, write a flawless hand, and speak with great eloquence. Thus, when he began to speak, everyone stopped to listen.

"I beg the floor!" he repeated, twice clearing his throat; then bowing, he addressed the assembly in a sonorous voice.

"Our foregoing eloquent speakers have touched on all the salient, essential points. They have raised the discussion to a higher level. All that remains is to bring into focus all the cogent thoughts and arguments thus far presented. In this way I propose to reconcile the contradictory views. Our discussion, I note, runs along two distinct lines. Since the lines have been drawn, I shall pursue them accordingly. First, why undertake an insurrection and in what spirit? This first question is of paramount importance. The second touches the matter of revolutionary prerogative. The lines have been aptly drawn; only I wish to reverse the order. Begin first with the question of prerogative. When once we have grasped what that constitutes, we can then proceed to deduce the essence, spirit, and aim of the insurrection. So let us begin with the issue of prerogative.

"When we survey the history of mankind, what do we see? The human race scattered throughout the forests in a state of savagery. So men begin to band together and unite for the purpose of common defense. They begin to consult with one another. That

is your primordial council. Next, they agree to lay aside a part of their individual rights for the common good. That is your first statute from which all the other rules of law derive. We can see, then, that government is founded on man's consensus, not on Divine Will, as some mistakenly claim. Thus, government rests on a social contract, whence the division of rights follows as a necessary consequence—"

"Contracts, you say!" broke in old Matthias. "Do you mean the ones in Kiev or Minsk? There's Babin government for you! Mr. Buchman! Whether it was God or the devil who imposed the Czar on us, I am not prepared to argue. But pray tell us how best to be rid of him."

"Aye, there's the nub!" bellowed the Baptist. "If I could mount his throne and anoint him with my Sprinkler here, he would never be back, not for any transaction in Kiev or Minsk or any of Buchman's contracts. And no archpriest, nor even the great Arch-Fiend himself, would raise him back to life. Buchman! Give me Sprinklers any day! Silver-tongued you may be, but talking is so much hem and haw. Soaking's the thing!"

"That's it! That's it!" squeaked Bartholomew Razor, running back and forth between Baptist and old Matthias like a shuttle from one side of the loom to the other. "If both you Matthiases—you with your Switch and you with your Sprinkler—were to come together on this, then by God, we should make mincemeat of the Muscovites. Razor here awaits The Switch's orders!"

"Orders are for parade drills!" broke in Baptist. "Our old Kowno brigade had but one kind of order. Short and with knobs on. Strike terror and never flinch. Into the fray and never give ground. Wade in often and lay 'em on thick. Slam-bang!"

"Now you're talking!" squealed Bartholomew Razor. "There's an order for me! What need have we of treaties? Why waste ink? Do we need a confederacy? Is that what the fuss is about? Matthias is our Marshal; his Switch, our rallying staff!"

"Long live our Cock o' the Steeple!" roared Baptist. "Long live the Dousers!" returned the nobility.

But now, murmurings—vigorously suppressed in the middle of the room—could be heard from the

far corners; evidently, the deliberations were resolving into two factions.

"I do not approve of agreements!" shouted Buchman. "That is my philosophy!"

"*Veto!*" cried another. "I forbid it!"

Others chimed in from the corners. Suddenly the deep voice of the newly arrived Skoluba broke upon their ears.

"Gentlemen of Dobrzyn! What is all this? Some pretty mischief in the wind? And we deprived of our say? When the invitation arrived at our village (it was the Warden, Gerwazy Rebajlo, who summoned us), they told us great events were at hand: events involving not just Dobrzyn-folk but the entire district, every man jack of us gentlefolk! Robak hinted as much, but could never quite get it out, for he was always stammering and never fully making sense. Anyhow, after dispatching runners to all our neighbors, here we are at last. You are not alone, men of Dobrzyn. Ten score men we have mustered from the other villages. So let us all confer together. If we need a marshal, then we shall all vote together. One man, one vote. Long live equality!"

"Long live equality!" yelled both Terajewicz, the four Stypulkowskis, and the three Mickiewicz brothers. Meanwhile, Buchman, who stood behind Skoluba, shouted, "Agreement will be the ruin of us!"

"Then we shall get by without you!" bellowed Baptist. "Long live our Marshal, Matthias of Matthiases! Rally to his staff!"

"Throw in with us!" cried the Dobrzyn nobility.

"*Veto!*" yelled the outsiders.

The assembly broke up into two parties. Two clusters of heads waved in contrary directions, one shouting, "I forbid it!" the other, "Side with us!"

All the while old Matthias sat silent among them. His head remained stubbornly immobile. Across from him stood the Baptist, arms draped over his club, head swinging this way and that like a gourd impaled on a tall stake. "Douse 'em! Douse 'em!" he roared tirelessly. Nimble Razor darted back and forth between him and Matthias's bench, while Watering Can paced the room between the Dobrzynskis to the nobility from the other villages, as if seeking to reconcile the two. "Shave 'em!" yelled the one.

“Soak ‘em!” cried the other. Matthias held his peace, but he was clearly losing his patience.

For a quarter of an hour the uproar raged on. Suddenly a flashing shaft shot up above the heads of the raucous crowd. It was a rapier, a fathom long and a hand-span wide, double-edged—clearly a Teutonic blade cast of Nuremberg steel. All gazed with silent awe at the weapon. Its bearer stood concealed in the throng, but they guessed who it was at once.

“That’s Pocketknife! Long live Pocketknife!” they roared. “Long live Pocketknife, emblem of the Rebajlos! Long live Rebajlo! The Old Boy! Scarpaté! Half-Goat!”

Pushing his way through the crowd to the center of the room, Gerwazy (for it was indeed he) flourished his gleaming Pocketknife in the air, then lowered the point before Matthias as a sign of greeting.

“Pocketknife salutes The Switch!” he said. “Fellow noblemen of Dobrzyn! Far be it for me to tell you what to do. I came only to inform you why I summoned this assembly. What to do and how to go about it is for you to decide. No doubt you are aware of the rumors going about the villages. Great events are at hand. Father Robak has talked about it, so you must know something, right?”

“We know!” they roared.

“Right, then!” he went on, eyeing them sharply. “Now a clever head needs but a few words to the wise, right?”

“Right!” they answered.

“Right, then!” continued the Warden. “When the French Emperor moves east and the Russian Czar west, it’s war, see? Czar against emperor, king against king. They’ll battle it out. That is what monarchs do. Meantime shall we sit idly by? When the bigwigs go at it hammer and tongs, how say we have it out with the small fry? To each his own. A brawl at both ends. Great against great, small against small. We shall start such a swinging match that this entire piece of roguery will come crashing down; and so our Commonwealth will flourish again and happiness return, right?”

“Right!” they roared. “He puts it to a nicety.”

“You said it, brother!” roared Baptist. “It’s whack, thwack, and that’s it!”

“My barber’s shop is always open for business!” echoed Razor.

“But first, Baptist and Matthias, you must agree on who is to lead us,” begged Watering Can politely. “Agreement is for fools!” broke in Buchman.

“But debate never harms matters of the commonweal. Silence, gentlemen! Let us listen. We may even profit from it. The Warden sees the matter from a fresh point of view.”

“Not at all!” cried the Warden. “There is nothing new in my approach. Great matters are for the great to decide. For such things we have emperors, kings, senates, and parliaments. Such matters are decided in Cracow or Warsaw, not here in the village of Dobrzyn. Acts of Confederation are not writ in chalk on the mantelpiece or aboard a trading wherry, but on parchment scrolls. Writs are not for us. For that, we have our clerks of the Crown and the Duchy. My business is to slash with my Pocketknife.”

“And mine to splash with my Sprinkler!” roared Baptist.

“And mine to pierce with my Awl!” added Bartholomew Awl, drawing his rapier.

“I take you all as witnesses!” concluded Gerwazy. “Did Robak not tell us to clean house before inviting Napoleon in? All of you heard him. But did you take his meaning? Who is the scum of our district? Who is the traitor who slew the best Pole among us? Who robbed him and looted his castle and even now would seize what is left from his rightful heir? Who, I say? Need I tell you?”

“Why, Sopllica! He’s the rascal!” roared Watering Can.

“Aye, the taskmaster!” squealed Razor.

“Then douse ‘im!” roared Baptist.

“If he is a traitor, then to the gallows with him!” shouted Buchman.

“Harrow!” roared the throng. “Harrow! Hang Sopllica!”

But the Prussian stood up in the Judge’s defense. Raising his arms, he called out to his brethren:

“Noblemen! Dear, oh, dear! God’s wounds! What next? Warden, have you gone mad? Is this what we are talking about? Someone has a madman or an outlaw for a brother. So what? Punish a man for his brother’s crimes? Does that sound like Christian

charity? Something tells me the Count had a hand in this. The Judge heavy-fisted with the nobility? Not true, by thunder! Why, you are the ones suing him, while he would make terms with you. He waives his rights and even pays the fees. So he takes the Count to court. What of it? They are both rich. Let lord have it out with lord. What is that to us?

“The Judge a taskmaster?” he pursued. “But he was the first to forbid his peasants to bow before him. He said it was a sin. Many times I have seen a crowd of peasant-folk sitting around his table. He pays the village taxes. You will not see that in Kleck, Mr. Buchman, for all that German overseeing of yours. The Judge a traitor? Why, we have known him since he was a schoolboy! He was honest then, and so he is now. He loves Poland more dearly than anything else. He preserves the Polish ways and brooks no Muscovite inroads. Whenever I return from Prussia and need to wash myself of German contamination, I go to Soplica Manor as if it were the very heart of Poland. There a man can drink in and catch a whiff of his country! Men of Dobrzyn! I am your brother, but so help me I will see no harm done to the Judge. Nothing good will come of it. This is not the way they did it in Great Poland, my brothers. What spirit! What harmony! The very thought of it warms my heart! No one there would think of troubling a council with such trifles.”

“It is no trifle to hang a knave!” roared back the Warden.

The murmurs grew louder. Jankiel sought a hearing. Leaping on a bench, he drew himself up. His waist-length beard hung like a truss of straw over their heads. Removing his fox-fur cap with one hand and righting his skullcap with the other, he thrust his left hand under his belt and, bowing low with a flourish of his hat, addressed them.

“Now, gentlemen of Dobrzyn, I am but a poor Jew. The Judge is neither kith nor kin to me. I respect the Soplicas as my good lords and squires. But I also respect you Matthiases and Bartholomews as my good neighbors and patrons. Here is what I think. If you mean to do harm to the Judge, that is not a good thing. You will come to blows and there will be bloodshed. Men will die. And what about the

assessors, the constable—the dungeons? A horde of soldiers stand billeted in the village, yagers every one! The Assessor bides at the manor house. He has only to whistle and the whole troop will come marching up as ordered. *Then* see what happens! And if you are counting on the French, they still have a fair piece to come.

“I am a Jew,” he went on. “War is not in my line, but I have been to Bielica and talked to my co-religionists on the border. They tell me the French stand massed on the banks of the Lososna and that if war breaks out, it will not be until the spring. So I say wait. Soplica Manor is not a market-booth you can take apart and cart off as you please. It will still be here in the spring. As for the Judge, he is not a tenant publican. He will not run away. You will still find him in the spring. So I say disperse. No more carrying on about what is past, for this is idle talk! Come, my noble sirs, who will do me the honor? My Sarah has just given birth to a little Jankiel. Today I will stand you all to a round of drinks. We shall make loud music! I shall bring in a couple of fiddlers, a doodle sack, and a bass viol. My friend Matthias here is fond of old linden mead and new mazurkas. I have new mazurkas! Are not my brats fine little singers, eh? I taught them myself.”

Jankiel’s words went straight to their hearts, so much did they love him. Joyous shouts and applause broke out. A murmur of assent was already spreading beyond the confines of the house, when Gerwazy pointed his Pocketknife at Jankiel. The Jew leapt down and melted into the crowd.

“Begone, Jew!” roared the Warden. “Keep your nose out of this. It doesn’t concern you! And you, old boy,” he said, turning to the Prussian, “so now that you run a pair of wretched barges for the Judge, you think you can speak for him? Have you forgotten your father used to float twenty Horeszko wherries down to Prussia? That’s how he and his family came into their fortune. And not just he. All of you Dobrzynskis stand in his debt. The old timers among you cannot have forgotten and you youngsters must surely have heard what a friend and patron he was to you all. Whom did he appoint as bailiff of his Pinsk estate? A Dobrzynski! Who kept his books? Dobrzynskis! Who were his stewards? Whom did he entrust with

the charge of his pantry? None but Dobrzynskis! His household was full of Dobrzynskis. It was he who advanced your causes in court and secured pensions for you from the King. It was your children he boarded in the Piarist schools, paying out of his own pocket for their togs and victuals, then securing their preferments at his own expense. Why did he do this? Because he was your neighbor! And now the Judge's boundaries encroach on your land. What good has he ever done you?"

"Not a blessed thing!" piped up Watering Can. "That's because he's nothing but an upstart swell. And when he huffs, it's all pshaw! pshaw! nose in the air! Remember the time I invited him to my daughter's wedding? I pledge him in a drink. He turns me down, saying, 'I cannot keep up with you, gentlemen. You swill like bitterns.' There's a nob for you! A mollycoddle kneaded out of Marymont flour! He wouldn't drink with us, so we pour one down his throat. 'An outrage!' he cries. Just you wait, *I'll* pour him an outrage."

"The rogue!" roared Baptist. "I too have a reason to soak him one. My son used to have his wits about him. Now he's grown so daft they call him Nonny—all on account of Soplica. 'What do you want to go to the Manor for?' I ask the boy. 'God help you if I catch you there again!' So what does he do but dash right back to see Sophie. I catch him lurking in the hemp. I grab him by the ear and swat 'im one. He blubbers and bawls like a baby. 'Father, beat me if you will, but I must go there,' he sobs. 'What's the matter with you, lad?' I ask him. He says he's in love with Sophie! Wants to sneek a peek at her! So, feeling sorry for the young wretch, I say to Soplica, 'Judge, let Sophie wed my Nonny!' 'She is still too young,' he replies. 'Wait three years; then she can decide for herself.' The knave lied. He already had someone else in mind, as I have since learned. Just you wait! I'll invite myself to the wedding and anoint their nuptial bed with my Sprinkler."

"Is such a knave to lord it over us?" cried the Warden. "Is he to ruin our ancient lords—men far better than he? Meanwhile the Horeszko name and its memory perish? Oh, where is there gratitude in this world! Certainly none in Dobrzyn. Brothers! You wish to do battle with the Russian Czar, yet you fear

to make war on Soplica Manor? Afraid of dungeons? Is it for brigandage I summoned you? God forbid! Fellow noblemen! I have right on my side. The Count has won the case. Several awards of court have been made in his favor. All that remains is to execute them. That is how we did it in the old days. The court issued its decree; the nobility carried it out. Who exactly? Why, you men of Dobrzyn! That is how your name became famous throughout Lithuania. Was it not Dobrzynskis who, at Mysz, mounted the foray against General Voinilovich and his Muscovites; aye, and that scoundrel friend of his, Mr. Wolk of Logomowicz? Remember? We took Wolk captive. We were on the point of hanging him from the barn rafters for abusing the peasantry and serving the Muscovites, when the stupid peasants took pity on him. (One of these days I shall roast him alive on my Pocketknife.) I will not recall all the other great forays we took part in. Always we came away with booty, general acclaim, and glory, as befits noblemen! Why bother to recall them! The Count, your neighbor, wastes his time with lawsuits and winning decrees. No one will come to the poor orphan's aid! The heir to the Pantler, the one who helped to put bread on your tables, now finds himself friendless. Except for me, his Warden, and my trusty Pocketknife!"

"And my Sprinkler!" chimed in Baptist. "Where you go, dear Gerwazy, there I go too. So long as I have an arm to swing, I will make it go splish! splash! If it is just the two of us, then so much the better. By thunder! You have your sword, dear Gerwazy, and I, my Sprinkler. By thunder! You'll slash and I'll splash; and between the two of us we shall beat 'em. Splish! Splash! Let the others prattle!"

"You will not exclude Bartholomew, eh, brothers?" said Bartholomew Razor. "You just provide the lather, and I'll do the shaving."

"I'll ride with you too," cried Watering Can, "since we cannot seem to settle on a marshal. Voting and ballots mean nothing to me. I have another sort of ballot—lead!" (And drawing a fistful of shot from his pocket, he rattled it in his hand.) "Here's my kind of ballot!" he roared. "Every one of these is for the Judge!"

"We'll join with you!" bellowed Skoluba.

“Where you go, we go!” yelled the nobility. “Long live Horeszko! Long live Half-Goat! Long live Warden Rebajlo! Harrow! Hang Soplica!”

Thus did the eloquent Gerwazy twist his audience around his little finger. Everyone had his own grievance against the Judge as neighbors often do: some over an injury done, others over timber rights, still others over a boundary dispute. Anger goaded some, jealousy, others; hatred united them all. And raising their swords and clubs, they pressed up to the Warden.

At last Matthias, who had sat dour and motionless all this time, rose from his bench. Stepping slowly into the middle of the room, he set his hands on his hips and, looking directly in front of him, shook his head and addressed the assembly. Each word he uttered with deliberation, between emphatic pauses. “You stupid, stupid fools! You fools! Pay the piper, face the music. So when the restoration of Poland—the Commonwealth—is in question, you—fools!—are all at loggerheads. You cannot hold a proper debate—fools!—or bring it to order, or even—stupid fools!—settle on a man to lead you. You fools! But the moment someone raises a private grievance, you—stupid fools!—are all in agreement! Begone from my sight! As sure as my name is Matthias, I will see you all to hell. And may a hundred million barrel-loads of devils go with you!”

They fell silent, as if struck by a lighting bolt. But at that moment a tremendous clamor went up outside the house.

“Long live the Count!”

The Count had just ridden into the village with ten armed jockeys. Armed and suited in black, he sat astride a restive charger. Draped over his shoulders was a walnut-colored cloak of Italian cut, broad and sleeveless, fastened by a clasp at the throat. He wore a round plumed hat and held a sword in his hand. Wheeling about, he greeted the throng with a flourish of his blade.

“Long live the Count!” they yelled. “With him we live and die!”

The nobility looked out of the cottage window, then pressed toward the door on the heels of the Warden. Gerwazy ran out, the crowd tumbled out of the house

behind him. The rest, Matthias drove out and slammed the door shut behind them; then, opening the window, he stuck out his head and called out, “Stupid fools!” one last time.

Meanwhile, the nobility swarmed around the Count. They repaired to the tavern. There, recalling the old days, Gerwazy appealed to the nobility for their belts. With these they hoisted three casks out of the cellar, one containing vodka, another honey mead, and the third, ale. He drew the stoppers. Three rills—one silvery white, the other carnelian red, the third golden yellow—gushed out with a hiss. A tricolored bow arced forth and fell gurgling into a hundred goblets and cups. The nobility milled around, some drinking, others pledging the Count four score and ten. “Harrow!” they yelled. “Hang Soplica!”

Jankiel mounted an unsaddled horse and galloped off. The Prussian, ignored by the crowd despite his eloquent protestations, also tried to steal away. With a cry of “Traitor!” the nobility went after him. Meanwhile Mickiewicz held aloof; he had said nothing and offered no counsel, but from his expression they guessed he was up to no good. They drew their swords. Up and at him! He broke away, falling back. He was bleeding. Already he had his back to the fence; but then Zan and three Czczots arrived in the nick of time. The nobility fell back; but in the skirmish two men received cuts to their hands, another, to the ear. The rest were already mounting their horses.

Marshaling their troops, the Count and Gerwazy began to hand out arms and issue orders; at last, the entire host started down the long village street at a gallop.

“Harrow!” they shouted. “Hang Soplica!”



The Radziwiłł Castle in Nieśwież, Lithuania. A drawing by Napoleon Orda (1807–1883).