

THE ORGANIST OF PONIKILA.

BY HENRY SIENKIEWICZ.

(Translated from the Polish by S. C. de Soissons.)

A pathetic story of peasant life in Poland—The simple love tale of Klen and Olka, and its ending as the musician's oboe sounded its last notes over the snow.

THE snow was dry, crunching dry, and not very deep. Klen, having long legs, walked easily and rapidly along the road from Zagrabie to Ponikila. He walked rapidly, for it was very cold, and growing colder; and his clothing was scanty—a short coat, a still shorter overcoat of sheepskin, black woollen trousers, and thin, patched boots. He wore a light hat, and in his hand he carried an oboe. Cheerfulness was in his heart, and in his soul good reason for his joy. This morning he had signed a contract with Canon Krajewski, making him organist of Ponikila.

Hitherto he had wandered like a Bohemian from inn to inn, from wedding to wedding, from fair to fair, from pardon to pardon, trying hard to earn whatever he could with the oboe or organ, on which he played better than any one else in the neighborhood. And now he was to be established, to settle in Ponikila, and begin a respectable life under his own roof. He would have a house, a garden, a hundred and fifty rubles a year! There would also be some incidental revenue, and besides, he would have the dignity of a man who works for the glory of God. Everybody would respect him. Not long ago, any farmer in Zagrabie or in Ponikila, if he possessed but a couple of acres of land, despised Klen. Now they would all raise their caps to him. A church organist, and in such a large parish, was a person of no little importance.

For a long time Klen had aspired to this position, but had known that while Mielnicki was living it was of no use to think of it. The old man's fingers had grown stiff, and he played badly; still, the canon would not have dismissed him on any consideration, because they had lived together for twenty years. But

when Mielnicki was kicked by the canon's mule, Lysa, and died three days after the accident, Klen did not hesitate to ask the priest for the vacant place. Neither did the canon hesitate to give it to him, knowing that he could not have found a better organist, even in the city.

It is difficult to know why Klen should have possessed such skill in playing the oboe, organ, and other instruments. He had not inherited it from his father, who had served in the army, but not in the band corps. Nevertheless, Klen had been fond of music from his childhood. When he was still a lad he had blown the organ in Ponikila for Mielnicki, who, having noticed the lad's fondness for music, gave him lessons. After three years, he played better than his teacher, and later on, when some wandering musicians came to Zagrabie, Klen went with them. He wandered about in their company for several years, roaming about the world, playing wherever they chanced to be, at fairs and weddings or in churches. He returned to Zagrabie only when his band of comrades broke up.

He was as poor and thin as a church mouse, and lived as the birds in the trees live, upon what he picked up. Sometimes he played for the ears of the people, sometimes only to the Lord God; and, although they thought him a loose fellow and a wine bibber, he became famous nevertheless. They used to say of him in Zagrabie and Ponikila:

"Klen is Klen. He is incorrigible, you can't change him; but when he begins to play, even the Lord God is not displeased, and the people are delighted." Others used to say to him:

"For God's sake, Pan Klen, what kind of a devil is dwelling in you?"

In fact, it seemed as if there was an

evil spirit dwelling in this thin, long legged man. Still, while Mielnicki was living, Klen used at times to take his place on great holy days and pardons, and at these times he threw his whole soul into the music he brought out of the old organ's pipes.

In the midst of the high mass, when the people prayed and incense filled the nave, when everybody in the church chanted, Klen himself was full of enthusiasm. When the mass was at its height, the scent of myrrh, amber, and odoriferous herbs, and the sight of the blazing candles and glittering ostensory seemed to overflow and overpower the worshippers, the whole audience felt as if it were lifted into the air. Then the canon, raising and lowering the monstrance, closed his eyes in ecstasy. So, too, did Pan Klen at the organ. It seemed to him that the instrument played itself, that the voices of the pipes were rising like waves, flowing like rivers, thundering like cataracts, pattering like rain; it seemed as if they were flooding the church, as if they were flowing under the vaults and before the altar, in the clouds of incense, in the sunshine, and in the souls of his hearers: one voice threatening and majestic, like a thunderbolt, others like voices of men speaking in living words, still others like the tender notes of the nightingale.

After the mass, Pan Klen would descend from the choir with unsteady step and shining eyes; but, being a simple man, he used to think and to say that he was merely tired. The canon would praise him in whispers and give him money; then Klen would go among the people flocking out of church, who saluted him respectfully, although he did not own a house, but only roomed in Zagrabie.

But it was not in order to hear them say, "Look! Klen is there," that Pan Klen stood by the church door, but because he wished to see the person who was to him the sweetest in Ponikila, in Zagrabie, and in all the world. This was Panna Olka, the daughter of a brickmaker from Zagrabie. She had bewitched his heart with her blue eyes, her fair face, and her cherry-like mouth.

Klen knew perfectly well that the brickmaker would not give her to him, and he had tried to conquer his love for

the girl, but it was too strong for him, and he would repeat to himself, "Ay, how deep she has entered into my heart! I cannot pull her out of it, even by force."

It was for her that he had given up his wandering, for her that he lived. When he played the organ he would think that she was listening to him, and the thought was an inspiration.

As for her, at first she admired his musical genius, and then she came to love him for himself. Although he had a strange, dark face and dreamy eyes, and wore a short coat, a still shorter overcoat of sheepskin, and had thin, long legs like a stork, Pan Klen was the beloved of Olka's heart.

But her father, the brickmaker, although most of the time he had little enough money himself, did not intend to give Olka to Klen.

"Everybody is after the girl," he used to say to himself, "and why, then, should such a man as Klen keep her from making a better match?"

So he would hardly let Klen into the house. But when old Mielnicki died everything was changed at once. After having signed the contract with the canon, Klen hurried immediately to the brickmaker, who vouchsafed, in reply to the great news:

"I don't say that you are to have matters all your own way, but being an organist is quite different from being a tramp."

And having invited Klen into the *izba*, or sitting room, he treated him to vodka and honored him as a guest.

When Olka came in her father rejoiced with the young people that Klen had become a pan, a respectable and substantial member of the community, that he was to have a house and garden, and that next to the canon Pan Klen was to be the most important person in Ponikila.

Klen had remained with Olka and her father from noon to sundown—happy hours that had passed all too swiftly—and then he had started for Ponikila over the frozen, creaking snow, in the twilight of the evening. The cold was increasing, but he did not care for that except that he walked more rapidly. In walking he thought continually of Olka, and the

thought warmed his heart. This had been the happiest day in his life. On the empty road and the frozen meadows, where the covering of snow turned red and blue in the faint evening light, he carried his joy like a bright lantern with which to light his way in the darkness. He kept turning over in his mind everything that had happened—the conversation with the canon, every word he had exchanged with the brickmaker, and, above all, with Panna Olka.

She had said to him, when for a little while they had been alone together: "To me the change in your prospects is nothing. I would follow you as you were before—follow you even beyond the seas; but for papa it is better that things have turned out as they have."

And Klen, being very much moved, and very grateful, had kissed her finger tips, and had said:

"May God reward Olka for all time to come! Amen!"

Now, in remembering all this, he was sorry that he had kissed her only on the hand, and that he had said so little, because he felt that if only the brickmaker would give his consent, she would go with him anywhere, even along this forsaken road in the snow.

"My pure gold!" thought Pan Klen. "If you but love me, you shall surely be a great lady some day."

Then he walked still more swiftly, so that the snow sounded louder than ever under his feet. But soon he began to think again about Olka.

"Such a girl will never deceive a man," he repeated to himself.

A deep feeling of gratitude overwhelmed him. If really Olka were with him now, he would not hesitate or hold back; he would throw the oboe to the ground, and press her strongly yet tenderly to his breast. He wished he had done no less than this an hour ago, but it is always thus when the time comes to express the inmost thoughts of the heart. "Then one becomes stupid, and one's tongue is of wood. It is easier to play the organ."

In the mean time, the ribbon of red and gold which shone in the sky changed slowly to a shining cord, and then to a gleaming thread, and finally disappeared; the dusk came, and the stars shone in the

firmament, standing out clear and sharp, as they always do in the winter. The ears of the organist of Ponikila began to tingle with the bitter cold. Pan Klen, who knew the country, determined to cut across the meadows in order to reach his home sooner. After a-while he seemed to be but a line on the even, snowy space, standing out grotesquely tall.

It occurred to him to play a little to himself, before his fingers became stiff. Acting on the thought, he raised the instrument to his lips. The voice of the oboe resounded in the emptiness of the night. It was feeble, as if frightened by the lonely white plain, and it sounded all the stranger because Klen played only light, merry melodies. He recalled how, after a few drinks with the brickmaker, he had begun to play and sing, and how Olka had sung with him, her fine voice ringing with happiness. He wished now to play the same songs, and he began one which she had sung earlier in the evening:

Level the mountains and the ravines, O Lord!
They must be leveled.
Bring my lover unto me, O Lord,
Bring him quickly unto me.

But the brickman did not like this song, because it seemed to him too simple, and he had told them to sing something more genteel. So then they had started another, which Olka had learned in Zagrabie:

Pan Ludwik went hunting,
Leaving Helunia, picture-like.
Pan Ludwik returned; the music played,
The trumpeters trumpeted, Helunia slept.

The brickman liked this one better, and becoming more merry, they had sung "The Green Pitcher," at which they had laughed very much. In this song the girl cries bitterly at first because the pitcher is broken, though the song ends with laughter.

Oh, my green pitcher,
Broken by my lover.
"Do not cry or be sorry;
I shall pay for your pitcher."

Olka sang as long as she could "Oh, my green pitcher!" and then she laughed while Klen, taking the oboe from his mouth, answered her with great airs like a lord, "Do not cry or be sorry!"

And now, remembering how merry

they had been, he played for himself "Oh, my green pitcher!" and smiled as best he could, his lips being so much occupied with the oboe. But it was very cold, and his lips were freezing to the mouthpiece. His fingers finally became so stiff that he was obliged to stop playing.

He walked a little further, but he was out of breath, and a cloud of frozen vapor that had come from the instrument was all about his face.

He was growing tired. He had forgotten that the snow is deeper on the meadows than on the traveled road, and that it is not an easy matter to force a way through deep snow, even with such long legs. Besides, there were hollows in the meadows, and these were filled with drifts that came up to his knees. He regretted that he had left the road, on which he might have met a wagon from Ponikila.

The stars shone more clearly, and the cold increased. Klen was warm, and his skin was moist from his exertion, but when the wind blew over the river meadows it chilled him. He tried to play again, but he could not. A feeling of loneliness seized him; around him everything was frightfully empty and quiet. In Ponikila a warm house waited for him, but he preferred to think about Zagrabie.

"Olka is now going to bed," he said to himself; "but, thank God, her room is warm."

And thinking that Olka was warm and comfortable, Klen's heart rejoiced in proportion as he was cold and tired. He had

now left the meadows, and entered a pasture covered with bushes. He was so tired that he wanted to sit down with the oboe under the first bush and rest, but he thought, "I shall freeze," and walked further on.

Between the bushes and under the hedges there were deeper snow drifts. Klen struggled through some of them, but finally he was so exhausted that he said to himself:

"I will sit down. If I don't sleep I shall not freeze, and in order not to sleep I will play my oboe."

He sank down, and began to play, and again the voice of the oboe sounded over the snow amid the silence of the night. Klen's eyelids were becoming heavier and heavier, the melody of "The Green Pitcher" became weaker and weaker by degrees; finally it stopped.

Klen was still able to resist the stupor of sleep; he still remained conscious and still he thought about Olka, only in the mean time the sense of solitude was drawing in upon him. He felt as if he had been forgotten, and he wondered with sudden amazement that she was not beside him.

"Olka," he murmured.

The oboe slipped from his stiffening fingers. The night was silent.

In the morning the sun shone upon his bowed figure, with the oboe lying at his feet. His face, with the blue of the cold still upon it, kept the rapt look it had worn as Klen sang:

"Do not cry or be sorry;
I shall pay for your pitcher!"

TO MY FRIEND.

As in the depths of some cathedral dim,
A radiant window glorifies the air,
By sending through the aisles and arches grim
Its rich, sweet light replete with colors rare;
So, in the sacred places of my heart,
Your friendship stands, and sheds its tender glow,
Enriching, beautifying, in such part,
As only you and I may ever know.
Then in this sanctuary of my life,
Oh, shine forever, friendship passing dear!
With purity and strength and sweetness rife,
I'm blest, indeed, while I can claim thee here!

Ellinor Dale Runcie.



THE EMPRESS FREDERICK OF GERMANY, AGED EIGHTEEN.

From the painting by F. Winterhalter, at Windsor.

FAMOUS PORTRAIT PAINTERS.

X—FRANÇOIS XAVIER WINTERHALTER.

The Franco German artist who was the great royal favorite of the last generation, and who painted the courts of Louis Philippe and the third Napoleon in France, and of Victoria in England.

THAT chance plays a great part in the lives of some men must be acknowledged. For a man whose career depends upon patronage, it makes a tremendous difference which period fate selects for sending him into the world. Francis I,

a man of wonderful taste, sought out Benvenuto Cellini, brought him from Italy to France, and gave him the opportunity to leave an imperishable name. Marie Antoinette, with her love for prettiness, made the reputation of Vigée