IN A CLEFT STICK.

[Corahill.]

A lonely hamlet in the depths of a Moravian pine forest. It consists of but five low cottages, built of rough stones and thatched with straw. For light the peasants burn pine logs upon the hearth. The flickering gleam of their red flames shines through the small windows and is lost in the gloom of the forest. The summer night is dark with clouds, and the moon has not yet risen. The wind soughs softly over the tops of the pines, otherwise all around reigns the completest stillness.

In a small room in one of the cottages five men sit around a rough table playing cards by the light of the pine logs and smoking short wooden pipes. They are all of them of middle age, between forty and fifty, browned with the sun and the wind. Their beardless faces are covered with wrinkles and their bristling hair is cut short. They wear roughly-knitted, home-made jerseys, and are barefooted.

In a corner of the room a woman sits on a wide bed, rocking with her foot a cradle in which a baby is asleep. Two bigger children sleep on the bed behind her. The woman has a rosary in her hands and is telling her beads. The men do not speak except when the game requires it. They are playing for marks only, which they make with a piece of chalk upon the table. The monotonous amusement lasts an hour or two. Meanwhile, the woman has laid herself down on the bed and gone to sleep.

At length the old, smoke-stained wooden clock strikes 11 with a dull sound resembling that of cracked glass. As if at a word of command the men rise at once from the bench and shuffle softly from the room.

The last of them, a man of middle height who limps on one foot, carefully puts out the fire. This is the owner of the cottage, Skokan.

Outside his companions waited in the yard. One of them had in his hands four rods, each about three yards long, bent in the form of a bow, and a pole. All wore something fastened at their sides which looked like a bag. When Skokan had taken from under the eaves a little, roundish bundle of rods and another long pole, he also fastened a bag at his side. That done, he whistled to a small dog to come out of his kennel, and then they all left the yard together, Skokan closing the gate carefully, so that the dog should not get out.

Leaving the road at once, they entered under the dark vault of the branches of the great pine trees. Not a word was spoken among them. For half an hour they passed on, following Skokan, sometimes through the thick woods, sometimes through new plantations, where the branches of the young trees beat roughly against their faces. At last they came to a little brook that wound its way through the thickets. There Skokan stopped.

"Mates," he said in a low voice, "we will stop here and rest, so that we shall not go heated into the water."

They all sat down on the spongy moss, unable to see one another in the dark.

"Listen, mates," went on Skokan, "I have heard a report. You know, mates, that we have worked together these twelve years, and up to now they have never caught any of us. But yesterday evening I heard something."

"What then?" asked two voices. The third man was silent.

"You know Frantishka, who was my wife's friend, is in service with the bailiff."

"Ay, what then?" assented again the two voices.

"Yesterday my wife went with her to vespers, and Frantishka told her that they say we ought to keep an eye on you, Zinka. They say that yesterday morning you were talking for a long time with the bailiff and the forester at the office."

The man who had hitherto kept silence answered quickly, "I went to the office to pay the rent."

"But Frantishka says that you were there a long time."

"Skokan, you are not fooled by a woman's chatter," answered the man who was addressed. "All these years we have worked together you have never doubted me. The forester was there only by chance."

"Well, mate, I did think it was just woman's chatter," agreed Skokan.

"I don't believe it." "Nor I," said the other two.

"I have only told you, mates, that there was something said," replied Skokan easily. "Now we are cool, let us go down to the mere. We can jump the stream easily just below here."

The men were poachers, and to-night were going to catch carp in one of the Count's meres. They had been thither often enough before, they and the villagers, too. For they all poached—in winter game and in the summer carp; stealing out at night, when the moon rose late, from their quiet cottages in the lonely woods, to return at dawn, soaking wet, and numbed with cold; bent sometimes with the weight of the carp in the bags on their backs, and sometimes with the pain of a gunshot, and sometimes leaving behind them on the forest paths drops of blood to mark their steps. Now and again a man never came home at all.

Many of them had no occasion to poach. They could live well enough on the produce of their fields and meadows. But the poaching was a passion with them. Of them all the most daring and the most experienced was the limping Skokan. What a number of carp that man had taken home from the Count's fish-ponds for his children to eat! His wife also secretly took the fish round for sale. The neighboring country priests bought them for Fridays, the schoolmasters, and sometimes the gentlefolks in the neighboring towns. By means of this trade with the Count's carp Skokan and his companions were piling up a nice little heap of florins. The highest ambition of the Count's gamekeepers was to catch Skokan in the act. But all their ingenuity had been hitherto in vain. He always got away.

The poachers rose and groped through the dark to the edge of the stream. They knew the place well. Three of them had already jumped the brook. Only Zinka remained. Then he jumped too, but, alighting on his right foot, gave a sudden shriek of pain. The same instant he checked himself and was silent.

"What's happened, Zinka?" asked Skokan quickly.

"I jumped on the stump of a tree, and have hurt my foot."

In fact, he had jumped barefooted on the stump of a young pine, which had been sawn half through and broken off. A sharp splinter stood up like a finger, and had pierced the sole of his foot.

"It pains me fearfully," moaned Zinka.

One of the poachers tore off a strip about four inches wide from the edge of his bag and gave it to Zinka, who bound his wound with it, and, having picked up his rods, limped after his mates.

"My wound will get washed in the water, and after a few days it will be quite well," he comforted himself, bearing the keen pain with the quiet philosophy of a rough nature, not a little assisted by the fact that he had something heavier than the pain weighing upon his mind. Already he had set down his wound as a judgment come upon him for the treachery of which he had been guilty against his mates; for he was leading his friends with whom he had poached ever since he was a lad, and more particularly his old, faithful, true mate Skokan, into a trap which the Count's gamekeepers had set.

Only the day before the Count's bailiff had sent for him to come to the office, and there had said to him dryly and shortly: "Zinka, all the world knows that you poach with Skokan. Now, if you will not tell us when and where Skokan goes for the fish, so that we can take him in the act, understand this—the time is coming round for the conscription. Your only son will have to stand, and we will have him enlisted, without any chance of his getting off. You will not see him, Zinka, for fourteen years—perhaps, never again."

The Bailiff's threat struck Zinka dumb.

"Now, if you will tell us," continued the Bailiff, "when and where that old rogue goes poaching, and we catch him, I will get your son off from the conscription forever."

Zinka and his wife had no child except Tomash. Dearly they loved him, and often they talked to each other how they would give him a cottage and marry him, and reckoned up whether they had put by money enough. Already they had their eyes on several peasants' smart young daughters who would do for him. But the conscription! Fourteen years in the army!

Zinka knew very well that he had been for some time in evil odor with the Bailiff for his poaching, and that it was out of revenge that the Bailiff would get Tomash enlisted. Well, he could save Tomash. But he must betray his old and faithful mate. To steal carp out of the Count's mere—in that Zinka saw no harm at all. But to betray his mate who helped him to steal the carp, that seemed to Zinka the vilest baseness and degradation.

The conflict in the poacher's soul was fierce. Against his friendship for Skokan his instincts of a father battled hard, telling him that his first duty was to his own flesh and blood. But for all that he hesitated. The Bailiff saw it, and began to describe to him the hardships and miseries of the fourteen years' military service. "For the smallest neglect," said the Bailiff, "a soldier has to run the gauntlet, to be wounded with swords in the sides and the back until his steps are printed in blood!" And of course the soldier might come home a cripple, with only one foot, or without a hand.

"Your Honor," broke in the voice of poor, terrified Zinka, "the Lord's will must be done! This is a mean, shameful deed. I know it. But I'll do this to save my son. It would be the death of his mother if they took him away."

The Bailiff smiled quietly, patted the poacher on the shoulder, and said: "You are a good and worthy tenant of his lordship's to give information against these people who rob him. Now, tell me when and where will Skokan be going for the fish?"

"Your Honor, to-morrow at midnight we are going down to the big mere," replied the poacher in a trembling voice.

He felt as if at that moment his heart was being crushed in a vice.

"Good. The forester will attend to it. If Skokan is caught they will let you go. And," he added, "they will know Skokan by his limp." Then he changed his threatening tone to a pleasant one and set the poacher at his ease, saying: "We will get your son put down on the list as short-sighted, and he will be clear of the conscription for ever."

Zinka thanked him for his kindness. He had still to explain which way the poachers would approach the mere. After that the Bailiff let him go.

On his way home Zinka was very unhappy about having betrayed his mate, but he did his best to comfort himself with the assurance that what he had done was his duty to his son. But not a word did he say about what had passed neither to his son nor to his wife. And now he was on his way to the mere with his mates, with Skokan, whom a warning against him had reached, but who nevertheless, believing in his previous fidelity, had given the warning no credence. His other mates trusted him, too—Novak and Jarosh. Zinka was sure of it, and it pained him the more that he had betrayed them.

They were making their way now through the thickets downward from the higher ground. A few hundred steps and they were on the edge of the wood. A narrow ribbon of meadow lay before them, and beyond it, surrounded with rushes and reeds, the black surface of the wide mere; black, because the sky was strewn with thick, dark clouds, through which the rays of the moon, that had just risen, glimmered only now and then for a moment. Two of the poachers undid the bundle of rods which they had brought, bound them in pairs, in the form of a cross, and fastened upon their ends strong nets which they took out of their bags. The nets thus constructed they fastened to the ends of the two poles. A few words spoken softly, and then they silently took different ways to the different parts of the mere.

The mere, lying in a hollow, was in the form of an acute-angled triangle, whose sharpest angle pointed to the west. The dam at the other end lay toward the east. The poachers came out of the wood directly against the apex of the triangle. Skokan limped along the northern side, and with him Jarosh with the net. On the southern side were Zinka and Novak. They all looked for the places where the openings in the bushes offered a path into the water.

Three of the poachers had no suspicion at that moment that in the thick, leafy branches of the alders, that stood dark around the borders of the pool, and in the shadows of the tangled willows were hidden the Count's gamekeepers and woodmen. Only Zinka knew that, and sorely the upbraidings of his conscience tormented him. For a moment he thought that he might take his mates away from the danger, but then he remembered with a shudder the fourteen years' military service and the lost arms and legs. When he reached the pond the chill of the water was comforting to his fevered blood. Only fifteen steps from the rushes the water was clear, where the carp come to feed in the night. There the poachers let down their nets, in which, when they were after a short time lifted from the water, there were always several large fish.

Zinka's hand trembled as he lifted the slippery carp out of the net and put them into his bag. Every instant he expected that the gamekeepers and woodmen hiding themselves among the alders would present themselves before his eyes. Novak's face brightened with pleasure at the size of the fish. Skokan and Jarosh were fortunate, too. On both sides of the water the carp were travelling rapidly out of the mere of their lord and master, the Count, into the bags of the poachers.

In the valley round the mere not a sound of living thing was audible; only the reeds, bent by the wind, rustled together, as did the dark leaves of the alders, and the tangled branches of the willows bending down over the rushes, and at a little distance the ceaseless whispering of the pine forest was audible. The darkness was profound. But the quick eyes of the poachers, accustomed to the gloom, and practiced to recognize objects in the darkness, cautiously stole around, even at the busiest moments of their labor, spying keenly, and seconded by sharp hearing, to observe the approach of any danger. Suddenly the hoot of an owl sounded through the silence of the night. It floated over to Zinka and Novak from the North. Both of them instantly, as if they had been struck by a shot from an invisible weapon, dropped their fish, stooped down to their necks in the water, and hid themselves against the high reeds. A short time and again the hoot was repeated. Novak, crouched against the reeds, softly and silently drew the net to himself, cut off the net from the rods with a knife, and twisted it around his neck. Then he softly let the rods and the pole go in the water. He knew that the hoot of the owl had really came from Skokan, who, in a dim shimmer of the moon's rays peeping for a moment through the torn clouds had seen with his quick eye a gun-barrel glisten among the branches of the alders. In an instant he had guessed that the mere was surrounded and had given the owl's hoot as a warning sign to his companions to take flight.

Crouched against the high reeds the poachers could not now see what was being done around the mere. They could not see the gamekeepers creeping out of the thick bushes on both sides near the apex of the mere, nor how they came along the banks in order to cut off the retreat to the woods.

The forester and the gamekeepers, in the hands of one of whom the long gun had glistened, waited, listening breathlessly to hear the water splash somewhere in the pool. They had recognized the owl's hoot as an imitation, and knew that that was a sign for flight among the poachers, whom they had seen arrive and wade into the pool. The one of them who recognized the limping Skokan had permission from the forester to shoot at him. At the others they were not to shoot under any circumstances.

The poachers, guessing that the gamekeepers would wait for them near the upper part of the pool, crouching down to their necks in the water, waded cautiously along by the reeds in an eastward direction, downward toward the dam, in hope of getting out of the mere and taking flight to the wood.

Saving their bags filled with carp was not to be thought of. They let them go in the water and the carp struggled and wriggled in the bags until they succeeded at last in getting out the same way they went in.

Softly and cautiously the poachers crept along through the water, so as not to disturb it, lest they should be betrayed by the splashing. Skokan and Jarosh, having waded first of all about a thousand steps by the side of the rushes, crept out afterward into the deep. There, hidden by the darkness and by the mist that arose from the mere, they swam silently straight forward in the dark, where it was impossible for any human eye to descry them from the bank, downward toward the dam. When they reached it they crept in among the alders, pushed their way through them to the top of the dam, crossed it on all-fours, and slipped down behind into the thicket, where they were safe. They were not together. Neither knew anything of the other. Skokan, with his lame leg, had dropped behind in swimming. At that moment the wind for an instant cleared the clouds from the sky around the moon, and the moon, a few days past the full, shone out clear over the mere and the wide woods.

On the southern side of the mere, about half way to the dam, Novak crept out of the rushes, leaped up on the bank, and like a frightened stag shot with monster strides across the meadow into the woods and disappeared. The gamekeepers saw him plainly, but it was impossible to catch him.

Zinka, too, had crept far from the place where they had caught the carp and waited for the clouds to cover the moon to take a similar flight to the woods. He was greatly distressed, both with anxiety about his companions and with the pain that his wound gave him. The bandage had slipped off it and the sand and the mud had got in. His foot had swollen considerably, and pained him so cruelly that more than once he was near swooning. He wetted his face with the cold water to keep away the sensation of faintness. Meanwhile he awaited momentarily, with a feverish terror, the report of a gun, which would bring down one of his mates either to the earth or to the depths of the mere. Crouched up to his neck in the water against the lofty reeds, he folded his hands, swollen with the cold water, and, looking up into the sky, in which the black clouds hurried in dark flight from west to east, prayed with a wild fervor:

"Oh, God, give my mates a chance of getting away safely!"

Once more the heavy clouds veiled the scene in impenetrable darkness. Zinka raised himself. But scarcely had he got upon his feet when he became aware of a burning pain which seemed to mount from his wound to his head. It was impossible to tread upon that foot. But fly he must! The gamekeepers would let him go if he cried out; but that he dared not do, lest his mates should know that he had betrayed them.

Anxious to avail himself of the momentary gloom, he waded cautiously out of the water and the thick, sticky mud, and, parting with his hands the rustling reeds, emerged at length on the high bank, and, limping, made his way with long springs toward the woods.

Suddenly again the clouds broke. The moon shone out in all her brightness, lighting the mysterious dim woods and gleaming in silver threads upon the mere rippling beneath the wind. The sudden brightness filled the flying poacher with alarm. With a great effort he hastened with all his strength his halting steps. At that moment a red light gleamed in his eyes. In the quiet of the night the report of a gun rang out startlingly and rolled on, repeated by the echoes of the woods, till it finally died away. The moment after the shot Zinka stumbled as if he had been struck by lightning. In the light of the moon his form stood out black against the gray meadow, close by a thicket. Several times he mastered himself by an effort, but at last rolled over, as a stifled groan broke from his lips pressed against the damp moss. Then everything was quiet and the dark body lay still.

Near the place from whence the shot was fired a short whistle sounded and was answered from the other side of the mere. It was the sign of the gamekeepers that their hunt was ended.

At the head of the mere the gamekeepers and woodmen gathered in a knot round one who whispered:

"That limping beast will give us no more trouble."

"Skokan?" asked one.

"He rolled over; didn't you see?"

"At last!" said another.

None of them went near the wounded man, lest he should recognize them and give evidence against them, or, more likely, try to revenge himself. Leaving the mere they took their way home through the dark woods.

The report of the gun made the three poachers hidden in the thickets start. All of them knew that one of their companions had been shot at. Skokan and Jarosh, hidden under the dam, knew that the shot must have been fired at Zinka or Novak. Novak, being nearer, was sure that it was fired at Zinka.

Nearly an hour passed. Novak listened anxiously to assure himself that the gamekeepers were really gone, and hearing nothing more of them ventured at last out of the thicket. He was soaked to the skin and shivering with fear and cold. Cautiously he looked around the meadow, and suddenly stopped, rooted to the ground with horror. About forty steps off a man with uncovered head sat in the moonlight near a thicket. He was pressing both hands to his face and mourning, as he rocked himself from right to left. "O, my God, my God!" Then he fell flat on his back, and his hands dropped powerless at his sides.

The moonlight shone out more clearly, and Novak recognized Zinka. A few steps, without considering whether he was in danger or not, and he knelt on the grass by his side. In a stifled voice Zinka was whispering to himself, "Jesus, Maria, Joseph!" that cry of the peasant in his moments of agony.

Suddenly Novak remembered his wonted caution of a poacher. Quickly passing his left arm beneath Zinka's knees and his right around his shoulders, he lifted him and ran with him to the woods. There he laid him down again upon the moss and asked him:

"Where are you wounded?"

"On the right side, in the ribs," whispered Zinka, and added: "Nothing has happened to the rest of you, please God?"

After a time he whispered, pressing his hand to his breast: "I shan't live; they have settled me."

Novak put his thick, swollen hands to his lips and imitated the cry of an owl, "Tu-whoo, tu-whoo!"

Bending down again over the wounded man he took out of his pocket a well-corked bottle, opened it, and said:

"Taste a little powder, mate. It will drive out the sting."

Zinka took the bottle in his weak left hand, lifted it to his mouth, and poured on his tongue a few grains of gunpowder, rolled them in his mouth for a few moments, and swallowed them. That is with the Bohemian poachers a favorite preventive against the evil consequences of a wound.

"It is no good," whispered Zinka. With a sad smile he went on: "The shot has gone into my lungs." And as he spoke he coughed, and the blood ran out of his mouth.

Again Novak imitated the hoot of an owl, and this time the cry was answered from a short distance. The boughs of the pines rustled, and presently Skokan appeared pushing his way through the underwood.

"Zinka has received the whole charge in his lungs," Novak whispered into Skokan's ear. "It seems to me they have finished him."

Skokan bent over Zinka, saying: "It's I, mate, Skokan."

Zinka, feeling with his left hand in the dark, touched Skokan's face. It was the touch of a hand of ice, and he spoke disjointedly.

"Mate—you're alive—please God—forgive—for Tommy's sake only child—fourteen years—the gauntlet——"

He could say no more. There was a dull, rattling sound in his throat. Skokan could find no meaning in his words. Leaning towards Novak, he whispered: "He does not know what he is saying—he is delirious. Spread out the nets, and we will take him home."

They spread out the nets, taking them from their necks and laying them out one above the other on the grass. Opening them to half their breadth they laid the helpless Zinka in them, lifted up the ends of the nets, and proceeded into the depth of the wood. There they found a narrow path which wound like a snake. Many a time had they taken their way along it, bending under the weight of the fish they had stolen. Five times they had led or carried home a wounded comrade.

Zinka half lay and half sat in the net. Now and then he sighed, and the rattling sound was audible in his throat. They proceeded thus for half an hour through the thickest part of the wood, where the rays of the moon were unable to pierce the branches, though she shone now brightly. Presently, again, Zinka began to murmur some unintelligible words.

"Keep quiet, mate," said Skokan. "You'll be all right presently."

It seemed that Zinka heard, for he remained still. The poachers hastened as much as they could. At last a light appeared before them, and after a little while they were on the edge of the wood. The moon shone down clearly with her soft light, the wind had dropped, as the sky was cloudless.

Where the path joined the road they laid down their burden on the soft, fresh grass, moistened with dew. The moonlight fell straight on Zinka's face. It was as white as linen. A face carved in ivory might have looked so. With a sudden start Skokan put his hand to the pale cheek. It was cold as ice, stiff, and stark. In the glassy eye, that seemed to start from its socket, the dim moonlight reflected itself glitteringly.

"Jesus Maria! it's all up with him," exclaimed Skokan.

Starting up, Novak caught his hair with both his hands, as if he would with a single wrench tear it from his skull.

"The woman and the lad will go mad," said Novak. He was silent for a moment, and then asked, more as if speaking to himself than to his mate, "But how did the gamekeepers guess that we were going to-night——" He stopped, and continued, in a cautious voice, almost as if he feared lest the dead man should hear his words: "Skokan, what Frantishka said was true, then."

"I thought of that, mate, too, but—God knows," said Skokan, as if loth to judge the dead man.

"You are the stronger," said Skokan. "Carry him home. 'Tis not far. I will go in front and tell his wife that there has been an accident."

He rose from the ground as he spoke and limped away.

Novak drew together the four corners of the net with both his hands, knelt down by the corpse, and then turning away from it drew it up upon his back, rose, balanced himself, and proceeded with his burden along the lane. On his right the head and one hand of the dead man hung out of the net. On the other side jogged a wet, naked foot. And at the same time in the dim depths of the wood sounded the melodious song of the thrush welcoming the approaching dawn.

He was soon in sight of the cottages. Already a fire had been lighted in one of them. Toward that he directed his steps. Some dogs, barking wildly, ran out to meet him, then, recognizing him, were silent, and sniffed at his burden. From the cottage Skokan came out to meet him, and they both of them took the dead man in their arms.

"They think he is only wounded," whispered Skokan hurriedly.

A woman half dressed, barefooted, and with her hair in wild disorder, followed almost at Skokan's heels. It was Zinka's wife. She had her son with her, and from the lips of both of them broke the wild, heart-piercing peasant cry, "Jesus! Maria! Joseph!"

The wailing son helped the poachers to carry his father.

"I always told him it would end like this one day," said the woman, and calling him "Joseph! Joseph!" she put down her hand to his face.

In an instant she drew it back.

The poachers carried their mate in the little room, where the flickering, restless flame of the resinous pine danced on the hearth. They laid him on a bed. A single look at the glassy eyes, in which now the red flame of the pine wood pictured itself, sparkling and glistening, as the moonlight had done in the road, and woman and boy, as if a flash of lightning had struck them to the earth, fell on their knees beside the bed, in wild, harsh tones, shrieking rather than crying, "Jesus, Maria! Jesus, Maria!" Then a wailing without words, broken and piercing, filled the little chamber.

The two poachers stood by the hearth looking now at their dead companion, now at the weeping wife, now at the sobbing son. The same gloomy thought haunted them both. Perhaps some dark night their end would be the same. The minutes passed. The gray light crept into the room. Skokan turned his face toward the hearth and looked thoughtfully at the sinking flames. Then he put on another pine log. The fire took fresh life and burned up again. Again the dogs barked. Slow steps came across the yard, and Jarosh walked into the room. Unable to find his mates he had returned home, and seeing the light had come to Zinka's cottage.

The woman and the youth did not notice him. With a few signs and half a dozen words his mates enlightened him as to what had happened. Then for awhile they took counsel softly. After that Novak and Jarosh went away.

Skokan sat down on the bench by the hearth. The pine-log flames, flickering restlessly, flared up and fell, and in their shifting light it seemed to Skokan that the face of the dead man smiled coldly and then again was contorted with pain.

In half an hour Jarosh returned, having changed his clothes. He sat down in Skokan's place by the hearth. Skokan limped home. The eastern sky was colored with the red light of dawn. Jarosh, sitting down at the hearth, took a coal, with which he lighted the tobacco in his short wooden pipe and smoked, gazing pensively at the blue clouds which he blew from his lips.

The wife and boy had wept all the tears out of their weary eyes, but they were still crouched by the bed sobbing plaintively. Little suspicion had the son that he was the occasion of his father's death! In an hour or so it was known in all the cottages that Zinka was dead—shot, it was whispered. And the women said: "That's how my man will end one of these days. I'm always telling him so."

The Bailiff was in his office engaged in looking over his accounts when the forester came in with the news.

"Well, we've got rid at last of that limping, poaching beast, Skokan. One of the gamekeepers finished him off with a shot."

"Then Zinka did not deceive us," said the Bailiff coolly. "We will save his son from being enlisted."

The subject was soon dropped, and they talked of something else. Presently some one came in at the door, and they turned to see who it was. Pale as ghosts the Bailiff and the forester stood staring as if they had been turned into stone. On the other side of the table at which the rents were paid, putting down his silver florins, stood—Skokan.

The cunning old fox, in order to give an impression that he had no knowledge at all of what had taken place the previous night, had hoped up coolly and humbly to pay his rents. His experienced eye saw that there was something amiss, but he had no suspicion of the truth. For a moment the Bailiff and the forester believed they saw a ghost.

"I humbly kiss your Honor's hand," he said, bending his back in an awkward bow. "I came to pay the rent and the tax," and, turning his rough hat in his hands, he looked down at the floor.

The Bailiff wrote the receipt in his book, and Skokan, carefully placing it in the pocket of his shabby, knitted jersey, once more bowed, and repeating, "I kiss your Honor's hand," left the office.

The Bailiff turned to the forester.

"The cursed thief!" said the latter. "I myself saw him fall when the man shot at him. He must have thrown himself down on purpose to make us think that we had hit him. We'll have him some day."

Later in the day the country doctor came in. He had been sent for, he said, to see the dead body of Joseph Zinka, a peasant, who had died of a gun-shot the previous night. He had his foot wounded, too, apparently from having trodden on something sharp. The Bailiff and the forester exchanged a glance.

"He is no great loss," said the forester when the doctor was gone. "A thief and a poacher."

As the Doctor had been called in a sort of inquest was set on foot. The Bailiff was foremost in it, and that very day went down to question Zinka's wife, but could ascertain nothing except that Zinka had come home in the night from somewhere wounded and had soon afterward died. And that was all that ever came out. On the fourth day the man was buried, and the reports of the investigations lie somewhere covered with dust and mold.

Zinka, however, had saved his son. The lad was now his mother's only support, and so exempt. He kept aware from poaching, too, warned by his father's death.

Skokan, Novak, and Jarosh, shocked by the fate of their mate, abstained for a few weeks from the Count's fish-ponds. But the impression of the grizly adventure gradually became weaker, and after a time their old passion for poaching gained the victory, and they went back to the mere just as if nothing had happened.

Two years afterward Skokan disappeared. In the autumn a fleshless skeleton was found at the bottom of one of the big meres, and it was generally supposed to be the remains of the limping poacher.

Novak and Jarosh knew that it was so. They had seen the shot fired at Skokan standing up to his armpits in the water. The two surviving poachers, when they were old, were rheumatic, the consequence of the frequent wading at night in the icy meres and the wandering home in wet clothes through the freezing morning mists to their distant homes. Bent double and scarcely able to move their joints, the old sinners, unable any longer to poach on a large scale, would betake themselves to the neighboring streams and catch small fish with a rod and mean while narrate to each other the great catches of the days of their youth. Sitting on the bank under the shadow of the willows watching with their dim eyes the float dancing in the water they talked of their former mates who were now gone "there." They reminded each other of how they had come to go "there," and if ever Zinka and his fate came into their memories they shook their heads, remarking that "there was some hitch in it that time."

Dots.

When the German Emperor visits Osborne he will find in the garden a splendid myrtle. It was originally a tiny twig plucked from his mother's wedding bouquet.

One of the latest works which Sir Edward Boehm has executed for the Queen is a colossal bronze statue of John Brown, which has been erected in the grounds at Balmoral.

Mlle. Clemenceau, the daughter of the famous French politician and author, was married recently in Paris. The mother of this young woman is an American, but the daughter is wholly French.

While the Bersaglieri regiment was being reviewed in Naples recently a private, becoming suddenly insane, fired his gun, killing the major of the regiment and wounding a captain and two privates. He was finally killed with a pistol.

A man with an artificial face has been attracting much attention at an English watering-place. He had an artificial cheek, eye, and palate, fitted by a surgeon of Bristol. He eats without the slightest difficulty and speaks distinctly.

The Eiffel tower has had a chance to prove itself of practical value. A barge having become disabled on the Seine by night the electric light was turned on the river and the sailors were enabled to save both themselves and the cargo.

The Prince of Wales, beside holding on to his place at court, turns an honest pound by breeding cattle. The nobility buy specimens of his shorthorns and Southdowns, and either put them to grass or send them ringing down the grooves of primogeniture as heirlooms.

The French Minister of War has decided to place the bicycle on a strictly military footing. Henceforth four *velocipedistes militaires* are to be attached to each regiment of infantry in the French active army. A special rate of pay will be granted to these *velocipedistes*. The War Office does not intend to provide machines for them to ride, but expects them to come provided.

As an example of the spirit which animates the German army, and which doubles its force, Prince Kraft Hohenlohe tells a fine story. At the battle of Chateaudun a battery found itself without ammunition under a heavy fire. What was to be done? The officer commanding ordered the gunners to take their places on the limbers and sing the "Wacht am Rhine," "in order," as Prince Kraft says, "that they might pass the time agreeably while waiting for fresh cartridges."

A Brooklyn horse lately suffered an injury to one of his feet, and for some time travelled on three legs. Finally the wound was perfectly healed, but still the animal refused to put that hoof to the ground. A veterinary surgeon was called in, who made an examination and then pronounced it simply a case of nervousness. "Strap up the other hind foot and you'll see," he said. This was done, and the injured foot was thus forced into use. It did not take a block's travel to show the horse that his nervous fears were groundless, and when the strap was removed he trotted off squarely on four feet.

Scrofulous humors, hives, pimples, and boils are cured by Hood's Sarsaparilla. Sold by druggists.

THE HOLY LAND.

RECOLLECTIONS OF A JOURNEY THROUGH SAMARIA AND GALILEE.

Shechem a Spot of Great Beauty—The Fountain of the Virgin at Nazareth.

[Pittsburgh Dispatch.]

The vale of Shechem, for intrinsic beauty and hallowed associations, is the most interesting spot of Samaria and Central Palestine. The late Dean Stanley, who accompanied the Prince of Wales, when a boy, through the Holy Land, thus describes this vale: "A valley green with grass, gray with olives, gardens sloping down on each side, fresh springs rushing down in all directions; at the end a white town embosomed in all this verdure, the most beautiful, perhaps it might be said the only beautiful spot in Central Palestine."

The tourist travelling northward from Jerusalem follows the same thoroughfare, now only a path, that the Prophet of Nazareth and his disciples often traversed in their journeys to and from Galilee. On the eastern boundary of the vale of Shechem, where it opens upon one of the most fertile plains in all that land, is Jacob's well, at the present day partially filled with rubbish, but without a doubt the very well dug by the Israelite whose name it bears, and the very same where the Nazarene rested upon His journey from Jerusalem to Galilee and talked with the Samarian women who had come for water, while the disciples had gone down the valley to the town of Shechem to procure food. Like two sentinels, Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal rise up on the south and north sides of this narrow valley, which at this point cannot be more than 150 yards in width. On the slope of Mt. Gerizim is Jacob's well, and on Ebal, across the valley, the tomb of Joseph, who, when dying in Egypt, gave "commandment concerning his bones." Those bones were sacredly carried to this home of his boyhood in the Land of Promise.

IN THE VALE OF SHECHEM.

From this valley the favorite son of Israel had been sold to the Midianite caravan on their way to Egypt, and here his bones were permitted to rest after he had finished that wonderful career as Prime Minister of Pharaoh. There is no sacred spot in the land of Palestine better identified than this well of Jacob, who "drank thereof himself, and his children and his cattle." It is also perfectly certain that here our Lord conversed with the Samarian woman concerning the water of life and true worship. Here, resting by Jacob's well, He said: "Neither in this mountain" (referring to Gerizim, where the Samaritan temple stood), "nor yet at Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship, but they that worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and truth."

The modern name of Shechem is Nablous, a corruption of Neapolis. Here is the only Samaritan synagogue now existing, and here worship the oldest and the smallest religious sect in the world, their number being less than two hundred. Following this vale of Shechem as it winds westward and northward six miles we come to a basin, from which rises an oblong hill overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, on the crown of which are the ruins of the city of Samaria. On the summit and along the hillsides are scattered Corinthian columns and capitals, of which more than a hundred are counted, which are all that remain of Herod's great colonnade. Samaria was once the Versailles or Windsor of Shechem, the metropolis of the northern kingdom of Israel, as Jerusalem was of the southern. The ruins of Herod's summer palace and temple, and the ruins of the church of John the Baptist are all that remain of the ancient city of Samaria, monuments of the murderous king and his great victim.

THE NAZARETH OF TO-DAY.

From Samaria our course is northward across the plain of Esdraelon, where so often the Israelite and Philistine met in deadly battle, and where, in the twelfth century, the Crusaders, under Saladin, staked their all against the Saracen and lost. An hour's ride up the Galilean hills brings us to the vale and town of Nazareth. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" expressed the popular estimate of the village when the carpenter's son entered upon His wonderful career. Then it was a mere hamlet. Now it is the prettiest town of Galilee, with upward of 3,000 inhabitants. Our faith is too weak to take in the sacred objects of modern Nazareth, such as the carpenter-shop of Joseph, the vessels or water-pots used at the marriage of Cana, which contained the water converted into wine by Jesus, the row down the mountain slope on the northwestern edge of the town is one object which cannot have changed materially since the days when the Son of Mary wandered and meditated on these Galilean hills. This is the Fountain of the Virgin, as it is now called, which is the one spring of water from which Nazareth is supplied.

Our tent was pitched close by this spring on a lovely Saturday evening of May. Very early in the morning we were awakened by the chatting and laughing voices of the girls who came tripping to the Fountain of the Virgin with earthen jars upon their heads with which to bear water to the homes of Nazareth. Imagine a town of 3,000 inhabitants supplied with water carried in earthen jars upon the heads of the Oriental maidens and you have the every morning scene at Nazareth. C.

BY THE SEA OF GALILEE.

It requires no great stretch of the imagination to recall, in witnessing this troop of girls, the Rachels and Rebekahs of the olden time and the virgin espoused to the young carpenter of Nazareth, who must have often tripped down this mountain slope with her earthen jar upon her head. There is a tradition that Mary was at the spring when the angel announced to her that she was to be the mother of the world's Redeemer. The Church and Convent of the Annunciation is the one public building of Nazareth of importance. This has for generations furnished a refuge for travellers who there sought retreat from the Bedouin of Esdraelon. Among my pleasantest memories is the Sabbath service I enjoyed in company with the late Bishop Stevens, of Philadelphia, in the Church of the Annunciation at Nazareth.

From Nazareth our course is northeast to the little inland Sea of Galilee, a half-day's journey. The sea at the beginning of the Christian era was lined with important commercial cities—Capernaum, Bethsaida, Chorazin—but now has upon its shores the one unimportant town of Liberias. The Sea of Galilee a gem in the Lebanon range of mountains, thirteen by six miles, into which the Jordan empties and from which it flows on its way to the Dead Sea, certainly transtends in interest and hallowed association any spot on the globe. From our tent we could look down upon the shore where the Greatest of Teachers began His ministry. There He called the fishermen of Bethsaida to be fishers of men. On the northwestern corner of the lake is

THE PLAIN OF GENNESARET,

reaching some five miles into the foot-hills of Lebanon and six miles along the shore, rich and fertile, where grew the lilies of the field, of which the Prophet of Nazareth declared that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Standing in a fisherman's boat somewhere on the shore of Gennesaret, the multitude lining the shore, the parable of the sower was spoken. And there before our eyes are the different kinds of soil into which the seed falls—the thin earth on the mountain side, the stony places, the wayside, or path across the plain trodden down, where some seed would fall to be taken up by the birds of the air, and the thorns so prolific on the plain, which choked the good seed after it had rooted itself into the rich soil. There, too, are the tares so like the wheat which an enemy might sow and destroy the looked-for harvest.

As our eyes turn northward to Lebanon we discover nestling in the mountain ranges the city of Safed, one of the four holy cities of the Hebrews, which perfectly answers to our Saviour's picture in the Sermon on the Mount, "a city that is set on a hill which cannot be hid." When He exhorted to the multitude to "let their light so shine before the world that others might see their good works and glorify their Father in Heaven," he said, "ye are the light of the world, a city that is set on a hill which cannot be hid."

THE MOUNT WHEREON CHRIST STOOD.

From the mount where these memorable words were spoken we turn our eyes to Lebanon and see the city which to-day, as more than eighteen centuries ago, answers to the object lesson of the prophet of Nazareth. And as we look across the little inland sea at the foot of Lebanon, fed by the melting snows of Mt. Hermon, the beauty and force of that sublime conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount, is seen as never before. Before the Jordan empties itself into the lake it traverses for a few miles the plain of Gennesaret. In the olden time the cities of Capernaum and Bethsaida stood on these banks. In the springtime the Jordan often overflowed its banks and searched out the flimsy foundations of the dwellings.

THE LESSON OF THE BEATITUDES.

The greatest of teachers, who spoke as never man spoke, and who was wont to gather his most impressive lessons from objects before His eye, concluded His great sermon on the Mount of Beatitudes with those words which have become household words throughout Christendom. The man who hears and obeys the truth is likened to him who builds his house on the rock. When the rains and winds and storms beat on that house it stands because it rests on solid foundations. The man who does not obey the truth and follow its leader builds on the sand, and when the floods and storms beat on his house it is swept away.

"Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him to a wise man which built his house on the rock; and whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, I will liken him to a foolish man who built his house on the sand." And the people were astonished at His teaching.

An Illustration.

To the Editor of the Dispatch:

Your suggestion that in some parts of the Union editors must be unacquainted with the history of the United States or are careful to ignore it may be illustrated by an example neither wounding to the pride of any who live nor unjust to the memory of any who have lived. The late Mr. Thurlow Weed was a very lovable man, industrious, a good husband, father, and neighbor, a warm friend, a placable opponent, very soft-hearted, yet very shrewd; a writer always easy and graceful, and yet if necessary forcible. He was for years the influential editor of an influential newspaper, and a very important factor in the politics of New York, and consequently in Federal politics. He has left an autobiography which has been supplemented by a bi