

save me, and death seemed to require great entreaties. I hoped that, overcome by agony, he would let me pass, but he appeared implacable. The sky began to grow light; in another hour the brigands would be in pursuit! Raising my eyes towards the cursed chamber I had left without thought of ever returning, a formidable waterfall upset me, face downwards.

Pieces of turf, pebbles and fragments of rock rolled round me with a torrent of icy water. The dam was broken, and the entire lake was pouring down on my head. I quaked with fear; my blood ran cold. The dog was still at the foot of the rock, struggling with death, his eyes glued on me. I must put an end to this, so detaching my box and holding it by the straps, I struck the hideous animal so forcibly that he had to yield me the field of battle; the torrent swept him off I know not whither. Jumping into the water and holding on to the rocks, at last I reached the shore.

Four brigands seemed to spring out of the ground and seized me by the collar. "We have secured him! the king will be pleased! Vasile will be avenged!"

It seems that without either knowing or desiring it I had drowned my friend Vasile.

At that time I had not yet killed any one. Vasile was my first! Since then I have knocked down many, though always in self-defence, but Vasile is the only one who caused me any remorse, although his end was the result of innocent imprudence. No assassin could ever have hung his head more humbly than I did; I dared not raise my eyes to the brave men who had arrested me, I had not the strength to encounter their reproving glances; I dreaded having to appear before my judge in presence of my victim. How face the king after this act? How gaze upon the inanimate body of the unfortunate Vasile!

I traversed the deserted camp, the king's chamber, and descended, or rather fell, to the foot of the staircase leading to my room.

The waters had retired, leaving spots of mud on every wall and tree. The brigands, the king and the monk were kneeling in a circle round a grey, slimy object, the sight of which caused my hair to stand on end. It was Vasile!

A growl of evil omen saluted my approach. Hadgi-Stavros advanced towards me, and seizing me violently by the wrist, hurled me into the centre of the group almost on the body of my victim. "See!" he exclaimed in thundering accents, "see what you have done! rejoice over your work! Who would have believed, the day on which I received you here, that I opened my doors to an assassin?"

I stammered some excuses, endeavouring to prove that I was guilty only of imprudence. I blamed myself severely for having intoxicated my guard, but I defended myself against the charge of assassination. Was it not amply proved that I wished him no ill by the fact that I had not wounded him when in possession of his weapons, and he dead drunk?

"Unfortunate man," said the king, "are you aware how excellent a being you have deprived of life? Courage and devotion are hereditary in his family. Vasile never failed in his religious duties, he gave to the church and the poor; he would sooner have died than violate the laws of fasting and abstinence. He was saving his money so as to retire into a convent. Were you aware of this?"

I humbly acknowledged that I knew it.

"He was the very impersonification of devotion, zeal and obedience; no work was too rude for him. He would have butchered the whole kingdom had I ordered him to do it! Poor Vasile! Who will replace you? Be comforted my poor friend, you shall be avenged! Were I to give ear to my grief alone I would offer to your ghost the head of the murderer; but that head is worth fifteen thousand francs, and the thought makes me forbear. Could you, as of yore,