

man, to his great annoyance, still found the plebeian Hercules at his bridle rein.

Lord Lechus would have viewed this circumstance in the light of an evil omen, if the mysterious Tartar had not promised him victory; but even as it was, he spurred his gallant steed impatiently forward, in order to be rid of his tormentor. The blacksmith was doomed to be his evil genius, for clearing the distance, which was only a few paces from the goal, with one mighty spring, he startled the animal, which leaped on one side, and fell on the sharp spikes which his crafty master had so successfully prepared for his rivals in power. Lord Lechus lost his saddle, and his head coming violently in contact with the stone pillar, the collision was fatal, and he died amidst the hisses and groans of the enraged populace, who had discovered his treachery, ringing in his ears. The blacksmith springing forward, seized the crown, and waving it triumphantly aloft, exclaimed as he did so.

"My countrymen! Heaven has justly punished this wicked Palatine for his treachery, and he has fallen himself into the snare he laid for his rivals. Rejoice with me that you have escaped a tyrant, who would have ruled you with a rod of iron, and are now free to choose a more worthy sovereign."

"Let him who has won the victory, wear the crown!" burst spontaneously from a myriad of voices, and the air was rent with loud cries of "Long live King Lechus! long live he of the swift-foot and the strong arm. He whom heaven has declared our ruler!"

Confounded, overwhelmed with astonishment, and yet exulting at his unexpected good fortune, the newly elected monarch was unable to utter a word. He stood like one in a dream, the violent throbbing of his agitated heart excluding all other sounds, and the mist that gathered for the first time since early boyhood over those sparkling eyes, shutting out the vast plain and its swarming thousands from his aching sight.

"What can this mean?" he murmured to himself; "I the victor—I a king—nonsense! 'tis all a delusion of the evil one—a dream."

Before he could recover his self-possession, or convince himself that all he saw and heard was nothing more nor less than reality, he was surrounded by the princes and magnates of the land, who placed the crown upon his head and proclaimed him King of Poland.

"Thanks be to heaven!" he mentally exclaimed, "that I resisted the temptations of the evil one. Honesty is the best policy after all, and those who walk in the straight path need not fear a fall."

Then taking the crown from his head, he advanced with trembling steps and downcast eyes, and laid the shining circlet at the feet of the princess Rixa, who shone pre-eminent in beauty above the fair-haired daughters of the land.

The princess hastily alighted from her steed, replaced the diadem upon the head of the kneeling monarch, and with an air of modest confidence said:—

"The once lowly Lechus is now my king, and may command the services of his handmaid."

The Weyvode, who had recovered from his late overthrow, now stepped forward and joined the hands of the youthful pair, amidst the joyful exclamations of the crowds, who conducted the bride and bridegroom in triumph to the city.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

OUR story, like all other stories, must have an end, but before we consign again to oblivion the actors in this drama, who have long since mouldered into dust, we will follow our youthful monarch and his fair bride within the walls of the royal palace, and see in what manner the blacksmith conducted himself as a king.

Never, until receiving the homage of his subjects, had Lechus felt his inferiority, or become humbled in his own eyes. This is the test of great minds. Weak and vain men are always presumptuous; and if they cannot bring down superior merit to their own level, they never dream that the fault rests in themselves. Happily for Lechus he lived in a barbarous and warlike age, and was called by Providence to rule over a brave and barbarous people, and he possessed all that was requisite to the task—firmness, decision, invincible courage, moral rectitude, and mental and physical energy. The faults of his boyhood had led him into danger and difficulty, but the trials of manhood, which succeeded, had converted these into useful and important lessons, and he had become a gainer by the follies of inexperienced youth. Placed in a situation of awful responsibility, Lechus determined never to abuse the confidence of the brave people who had placed him at their head. From the moment the crown pressed his temples, he dedicated himself to his country, and the independent spirit which had made him an object of admiration to the great, as a poor man, ensured their respect and esteem when he became their equal.

When conducted to the royal chamber, in order to change his mean garments, and take upon himself the outward show of royalty, Lechus begged for a few minutes repose, and overcome by the fatigue and excitement of the two last days, he slung himself upon the rich couch and fell into a deep and quiet slumber. The shades of evening were darkening the face of nature; but our new made monarch still slept in happy unconsciousness of all the sorrows and cares of his exalted station, and the broad beams of the morning might have still found him napping, if the fool had not volunteered to awaken the king.