

## A LEGEND OF BOHEMIA

### The Midnight Mass in the Weird Castle of Kunzenburg.

BY F. P. KOPTA.

It had been one of those beautiful days that we sometimes have in Bohemia in September. The sky had been dark blue all day, and the sunlight had all the brilliancy of summer, but the air, when it fanned our cheeks, brought with it the peculiar chill of autumn, and I had been reminding my young companion of the vanity of earthly joys, and how soon we, too, would be like the withered leaves that we crushed under our feet.

It was near sunset, and the western sky was all ablaze with red and yellow clouds when I first saw the ruins of the Castle Kunzenburg, near the town of the same name. It stood on a hill, as most of the castles of Bohemia do, surrounded by almost impenetrable forests. We had been wandering all day, soliciting alms for our convent with little success, and were worn out with climbing mountains, and losing ourselves in the dense forests, to receive at the end a few coppers from some poor charcoal burner or lonely shepherd, whom I pray God will reward. Wearily my young companion (it was his first journey and he was a mere youth) and I trod the rough mountain path that led to the small town. We were footsore and faint with hunger, having eaten nothing since morning, and the people stared at us strangely; perhaps they had never seen any Minorites before, but they showed us gladly where the mayor of the town lived.

He was a pious man—God give him Paradise! When he caught sight of our white habits he bade us welcome in the name of the Lord, and placed black rye bread, with eggs and cheese, the best he had in the house, before us. As we sat at the table and feasted, we spoke of many things, and among others I asked if the lords of the castle were charitable, and if it was likely they would look upon us with favor; that our convent was exceedingly poor, and the prior had been forced to send us to solicit alms from the faithful.

"O reverend father," said our host, crossing himself devoutly, "the castle yonder has not been inhabited for half a century. Neither do the lords of the manor reside with us. Outwardly it looks stately enough, but within it is desolation."

"And why do they not repair it, my son? It seems a noble building; are the lords so wealthy as to let such a castle fall into ruins, or is it the other way, and poverty prevents their repairing it?"

"Neither, reverend father; it is haunted."

"Haunted!" said I, crossing myself. "And who haunts it?"

"That is the trouble; no one can find out; many a holy man has exorcised the castle, but no one has succeeded in bringing peace."

"This is most strange," said I. "The evil one be far from us! And how is it haunted?"

"Strange noises are heard, as though armed men were carousing in the halls; and when one goes to see, behold, there is nothing! Then there are lights, and some of the villagers, stealing wood, or laying traps in the forest, have told me they heard shrieks, and some would even have it that they had heard strange forms flying through the air, leaving a blue path behind them, and a smell of sulphur. Thou knowest, reverend father, people always make more of what they see than is necessary; but things must be bad enough without all this, for the lords could not live in the castle—had to remove elsewhere, and every time that they had nearly sold it to some noblemen, something turned up to prevent them; sometimes it was this, sometimes that; but the long and the short of it was that they could not sell it, and there it stands a warning to Christians till to-day."

"Ah!" said the mayor's wife, as she cleared the table. "What a loss it is to the town, your reverence. How many fat geese and ducks I could have sold in the castle for good money, let alone the brave weddings and christenings! Many a holy man has the town besought to try to deliver the castle, but none were equal to the task."

"Friends," I said, rising from the table, "I will go to that castle, even now, and

deliver those tormented souls or die in the undertaking. My son," I said, turning to the youth at my side, "you will accompany me in so laudable a work?"

Great was the astonishment of the mayor and his wife. At first they tried to dissuade me, pointing out the mishaps of the way, and the danger that might beset me; but I was determined to rescue those precious souls from the evil one, and would not be persuaded. When the mayor and his wife saw that it was useless to speak further with me, they set about getting the necessary things for saying Mass; they were stored in their house for safety, as the priest came over from another town, and the church was old and in bad repair.

When everything was ready they called their servants to accompany us and help carry the things; but these flatly refused to move a step. And when the mayor abused them for cowardly knaves, they said they had been hired out to serve people, Christians like themselves, but not to run into the clutches of the evil one, and perhaps lose their souls. The mayor cursed, and the good wife scolded, but I said:

"Peace, peace! I and the youth will go alone. Not many things are necessary, nor are they heavy. Commend us to the Lord's keeping, and let us be gone, as it is nearly ten."

"If you are so brave, master," said one of the knaves, "go yourself with the Rev. Father and the pious youth."

"Thou lowborn clod! Dare thou speak so to me? Hast thou not heard that I made a vow never to enter the castle, come a year next Saint John, when old Jacob told us of the sights he had seen and the noises he had heard? And have I not children, thou beast on two legs?"

I saw my young companion's face turn pale at these words, and fearing the lad might lose heart, for he had not yet received the last consecration, and was young, I commended them to God's keeping and hurried on to where I saw the towers of the castle rise against the sky. It was a beautiful moonlit night, but we were weary, and the hill was hard to climb; more than once we lost our way in the forest, and had to seek out the right path as best we could. More than once the youth Augustin said to me,—"Worthy father, had it not been better to have stayed in the village?"

"My son," I replied, "a monk should be willing to go to the very pit of hell to save a soul."

"But perhaps we shall not save them, and may be stricken with strange madness or death ourselves. I have heard of such things."

"That cannot be denied," I answered. "But we have consecrated ourselves to the Highest. If we die, we die to God and in his service, and will receive our reward in heaven. But it seems to me we are nearing the castle; let us pray for those poor souls and ourselves."

Silently we entered the great hall. Here and there the roof had fallen in, and the moonlight streamed in from the holes that had once been windows. We wandered like two shadows from one room into the other. In the banquetting hall we found great heaps of rubbish, and everywhere we saw dark openings in the ground, leading to the dungeons or into the underground stables that are so common in Bohemian ruins.

It took us quite a time to find out what had originally been the chapel, and when we had found it I lost no time in covering what remained of the altar with linen cloths and arranging the crucifix and candles upon it. Augustin's hands trembled so that he could hardly light the candles, and while I whispered to him not to be afraid, that he was in God's keeping, we heard the clock in the village strike twelve, and I began to celebrate mass, while Augustin knelt at the foot of the altar, as clerk, to make the responses and minister to me.

Hardly had I begun when I noticed that Augustin had fallen into a profound slumber, with his head resting on the stone step of the altar, and a shudder went through me when I heard a voice behind me make the responses to the "Introitus ad altare Dei." Three times the strange voice answered clearly and rightly. Then taking heart, thinking that ghosts so godly would not do me harm, I went on with the Mass, though I was still afraid to turn around to see who it was that answered and ministered to me. But when I came to the "Domine vobiscum" I had to turn round, and then I saw a number of men, all young



but with white hair, in long black cloaks; their hands were folded and they all seemed lost in prayer. My companion lay at my feet in deep sleep, but two of the young men ministered to me with scrupulous care. I went on with the Mass, and my ghostly congregation responded. The candles flared in the midnight wind, and now and then a bat would fly over my head, and I could hardly recognize my voice, so strange and solemn did it sound amidst the ruins.

When the time of the awful consecration had come, I turned round to my strange congregation, who were kneeling in the moonlight, and holding up the Host before their eyes, while they knelt before me in profound and silent adoration, I conjured them by the Living God to tell me why they haunted this castle, and why they could not find rest for their souls.

Then the eldest of them, a man of gigantic stature, said:

"All of us that you see here were once lords of the castle, but not rightful owners. My mother, who was a peasant woman, and wet nurse to the young lord, changed us at birth, and her son became the lord, and the rightful owner lived and died in poverty as a poor peasant, hated and persecuted by us all, as we feared that our crime might come to light. When my mother was near death she wished to confess her sin, but I prevented her from seeing the priest, and she died without confession, begging me to restore the lands to the rightful owner, or be sure of her curse and the vengeance of Heaven. I paid no attention to her words, neither did those who succeeded me. We lived and died as the lords, and the real heir and his descendants lived and died in poverty as breakers of stone in the hut at the foot of this castle. We could, none of us, find peace till we had acknowledged our sin; but now we shall find rest for our souls, the more that the last of the sons of the real lord will die at sunrise; our line will end at the same time, and the property will pass away to the right owners. Here on this parchment is the confession of my mother and myself, with all the necessary information required to place the estate in the hands of the rightful heirs. I wrote it before I died, but I did not have the courage to give it up. I conjure thee by the living God to fulfil my wish."

As he finished speaking he laid a roll of parchment at my feet that he had kept hidden under his coat, and a bunch of fragrant white lilies, the flowers of Mary.

"Do my bidding speedily, servant of God," he said, "for when these flowers of paradise fade, thou shalt receive the reward of the righteous."

This was written by the venerable Father Fidelis, who died three days after celebrating Mass in the Castle of Kunzenburg. The estates passed to the family of Perastein. I, the monk Augustin, of the order of the Minorites, was with the reverend father when he celebrated Mass in the castle, but, overpowered by sleep, I did not see the sights he saw, neither did I hear the words. When I awoke I found the reverend father kneeling before the altar in a swoon; on the altar lay the roll and the lilies. He related this tale to me exactly as he has written it, and after having placed the parchment in the hands of honorable men, he prepared his soul to meet his Saviour. On the third day the lilies faded, and he fell asleep never to wake in this world again.

Written in the convent of the Minorites by the monk Augustin, 1406.

He: Higbee would have run through his fortune in a year if it hadn't been for his wife. She: How did she prevent it? He: She spent it herself.

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Dame Georgiana Corriveau, wife of Narcisse Vermette, Manufacturer, of the City and District of Montreal, duly authorized to sue, Plaintiff, vs. Narcisse Vermette, of the same place, Defendant.

An action of separation of property has been instituted this day.

Montreal, 5th December, 1891.  
VILLENUEVE,  
FONTAINE & LABELLE,  
Attorneys of the Plaintiff.