

HEROES OF SERBIA



NADA ĆURČIJA-PRODANOVIĆ



Illustrated by Dušan Ristić

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FOLK BALLADS RETOLD BY

Nada Čurčija-Prodanović



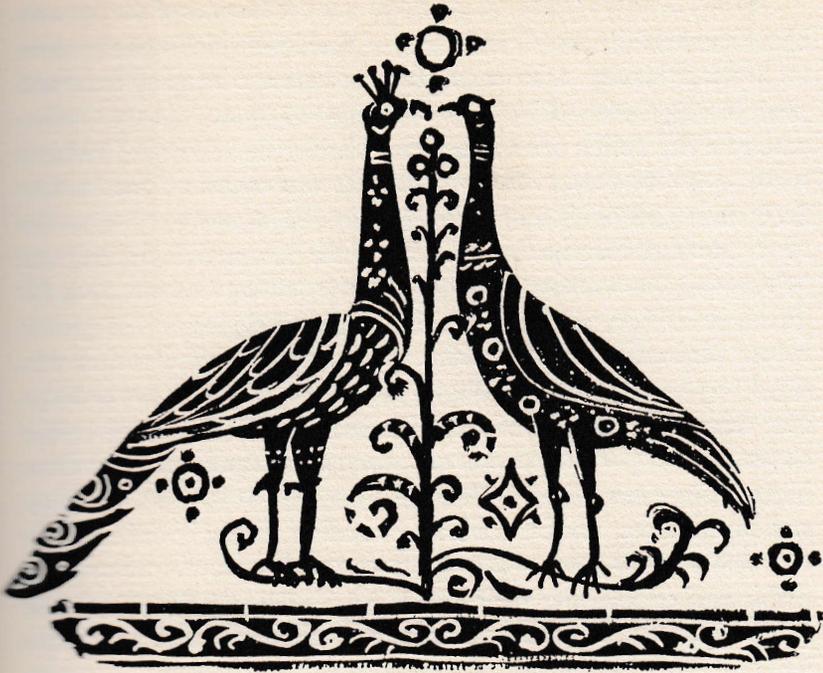
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THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE SERBIAN KINGDOM

THE Slavs came to the Balkans during the great migration, in the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. The first small states were founded in the south and southwest of the present Yugoslavia, in Macedonia, Herzegovina (then called Dukliya), Montenegro (Zeta), and in the south of what is nowadays known as Serbia (then Rashka). All of them soon embraced Christianity, which came to them mainly from Byzantium, and their religion has remained Greek Orthodox to this day. Soon after that time two Macedonian monks, Cyril and Method, devised a new alphabet which came to be called 'Cyrillic' after one of them. Somewhat altered in the course of time, it is still used in Yugoslavia, Russia, Greece, and Bulgaria.

Stevan Nemanya (eleventh century) was the founder of the dynasty of Nemanyichi: he was Grand Duke of Rashka—which was the name for Serbia in his day. After organizing the state and bringing order and peace among the feudal lords, he withdrew to Mount Athos in Greece, where he had built a fine monastery, Hilendar, and there he lived as a monk up to his death. After his death he was canonized and became St. Simeon. One of his sons succeeded him: he is known as Stevan the First Crowned. He was the first King of the Nemanyichi dynasty and he succeeded in winning autonomy for the Serbian Church. Sava, his youngest brother, was a monk and a very good diplomat who greatly helped his brother in state affairs. Sava was also a gifted writer who cared very much about the Enlightenment and brought it to the Serbs. His versatility and gifts became legendary: there are many stories about St. Sava (for he, too, was canonized after his death) which show him as a brave man who was always fighting against laziness, stupidity, and superstition. The influence he exerted in Serbia, both in his lifetime and after his death, was so great that the Turks, after conquering Serbia and establishing their rule there (during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), found it necessary to dig up his earthly remains and bring them to Belgrade. In 1594—about three hundred years after his death—they burned them on the Hill of Vratchar. Nevertheless, St. Sava continued to exert his influence and he has been considered as a patron saint of all schools and educational institutions for many, many years.

Among other kings of the Nemanyichi dynasty, Dragutin (thirteenth century) and later Milutin (thirteenth–fourteenth centuries) brought the kingdom to greatness. Milutin expanded its frontiers, brought skilled miners from Saxony to work in his silver and lead mines, and made the town of Novo Brdo (New Hill), with its forty thousand inhabitants, one of the biggest and richest in the Europe of his day. Trade with the Slavonic Republic of Dubrovnik (Raguza), with Byzantium, Venice, and other countries flourished; life in Serbia was very civilized and well organized, especially in comparison with other European countries of the same period. The capital was the town of Prizren, in south Serbia.

Dushan, first King, then Tsar (from 1346), was called ‘Dushan the Mighty’, for the state was at the peak of its prosperity and wealth during his reign. He made Skopliye (Macedonia) his capital and was crowned in it. He not only consolidated the frontiers of Serbia, but

also had drawn up and proclaimed to the people a code of laws in which he firmly regulated all aspects of public and private life in his empire. The episcopate of Pech was promoted to be a patriarchy.

Tsar Dushan died relatively young and was succeeded by his inexperienced son, the boy Urosh, who ended the dynasty in 1371.

In spite of many wars which left devastation in their wake, and in spite of the many foreign armies, including Crusaders, which have marched up and down Serbia—as the valleys of the rivers Sava, Morava, and Vardar have been the most convenient roads and links between East and West for centuries—there still remain many monasteries, pious foundations of the Nemanyichi, which speak of the greatness of their founders. Their architecture and, in particular, the splendid fresco paintings adorning their walls from top to bottom speak of an original native art of great strength and beauty, bearing evidence at the same time of a high standard of living in those days; the painters often presented saints and angels in the garb of their contemporaries, seated at tables with plates, forks (which in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were used only at King's tables in many other countries), or else working in the fields with the agricultural implements of those days. Most striking are the faces, which are bold, vivid, and so characteristic of Serbian features that one often seems to recognize them in the street, in a train, or at a village fair.

Those were the churches and monasteries Tsaritsa Militsa spoke of in the ballad about the building of Ravanitsa. And, as Milosh Obilich prophesied, the Turks did take off their roofs of lead and melt them into bullets. In some of the monasteries the Turks covered the walls of the churches with plaster and whitewashed them (which once more proves that every cloud has its silver lining, for in some cases that layer of plaster preserved the frescoes in spite of rain, snow, and hail which came through the open roofs). In other monasteries the saints' images on the frescoes were damaged by the Turks, and also by other people, out of superstition, for there was a belief that the plaster from a holy image would cure many an illness.

After the Turkish conquest the Serbs moved towards the north: there were several migration waves. One of them, the third in fact, was led by one of the Serbian Patriarchs, Tcharnoyevich. Before leaving his old country to cross the Sava and the Danube in the north and settle in Voyvodina (then under Austro-Hungarian rule), the Patriarch visited the old monastery—Sopochani—near the town of Novi Pazar

and, as a kind of sad leave-taking, carved his name, *Arsenië*, on the stone doorway of the roofless church. He seems to have been in a hurry, or his knife was perhaps a bad, clumsy tool, but his message could not be more poignant to posterity had the letters been carved by a master craftsman and filled with gold.

The Kings and Tsars became dust with time, but most of their pious thoughts, witnesses of their glory and power, weathered all the storms of the tumultuous and turbulent history of the Serbs.



TSAR DUSHAN'S WEDDING



WHEN Dushan the Mighty, Tsar of all the Serbs, decided to marry, he wrote a letter to the Latin King Mihailo asking for the hand of his daughter, the maiden Roksanda. Thus the Tsar proposed, and the King agreed to give him his daughter in marriage.

Having received this favourable answer, Tsar Dushan called his high dignitary, Todor the Vizier, and said to him: 'My servant, Todor the Vizier, I want you to go to the white town of Ledjane, to my future father-in-law, the King Mihailo, and make all

arrangements for my wedding: when we are to come with our wedding-train for the bride, and how many members my retinue should number. I also want you to see the maiden Roksanda, to judge whether she is fit to be my Tsaritsa and the mistress of this country. I want you to see her and to give her my ring in sign of betrothal.'

Todor the Vizier bowed low before his lord, and, having made his preparations, departed to the Latins.

In the white town of Ledjane, the King received him as befitted a dignitary of high rank; they feasted, drinking wine for a whole week. Then Todor the Vizier gave the Tsar's message to the King: 'My friend, King Mihailo, I have not been sent by my Tsar to drink wine in Ledjane, but to bespeak the wedding with you, to ask when my Tsar should come for his bride; and how many men he should bring with him in his wedding-train. I have also come to see the maiden Roksanda, and to place on her hand my Tsar's ring of betrothal.'

King Mihailo said to him: 'My friend, Todor the Vizier, as for the Tsar's wedding-train, he may bring as many men as he will; as for the time—he may come whenever he wishes. You will give your Tsar my greetings and with them my only request: he should not bring with him his two nephews, the two brothers Voyinovichi, Vukashin and Petrashin, for they are both very likely to pick a quarrel, and I fear they may start a brawl which would be unseemly in our peaceful, white town of Ledjane. As for the maiden, you will see her soon and give her the ring, according to custom.'

When the dark night fell, neither wax candles nor any other lights were brought in as the maiden was ushered into the chamber. All was completely dark. Seeing this, Todor the Vizier took the rings out of his purse: golden rings they were, set with pearls and precious stones. The hall glowed with the light of the jewels, and the maiden looked so beautiful to him, fairer than a white fairy; he put the Tsar's ring on Roksanda's finger and gave her a thousand ducats, his master's gift, whereupon her brothers took her away.

As dawn broke the next morning, Todor the Vizier departed and was on the road to the white town of Prizren. When he arrived at the palace, the Serbian Tsar Dushan asked him: 'Well, my servant, Todor the Vizier, have you seen my betrothed, the maiden Roksanda? Have you given her my ring? What does King Mihailo say?'

Todor told him all in good order: 'I saw her, my lord Tsar, I saw her and gave her your ring. O, what a beauty Roksanda the maiden is!

There is not her like among the Serbs! As for King Mihailo, his words were kindly: "You may go for the maiden whenever you want and take as many of your men as you wish." However, with his greetings the King sent you but one request: do not take with you your two nephews, the two Voyinovichi; they drink heavily and, when drunk, they are likely to pick a quarrel and start a brawl, which would be unseemly in the Latin city of Ledjane.'

Hearing this, Tsar Dushan struck his knee with his clenched fist: "Woe to me! Alas, what a disgrace! So the tale of the rakish ways of my nephews, the Voyinovichi, has spread as far as that! I give you my word of honour that I shall have them both hanged on the gates of the city of Vutchitern as soon as my wedding is over, for I cannot have them disgrace me in the world!"

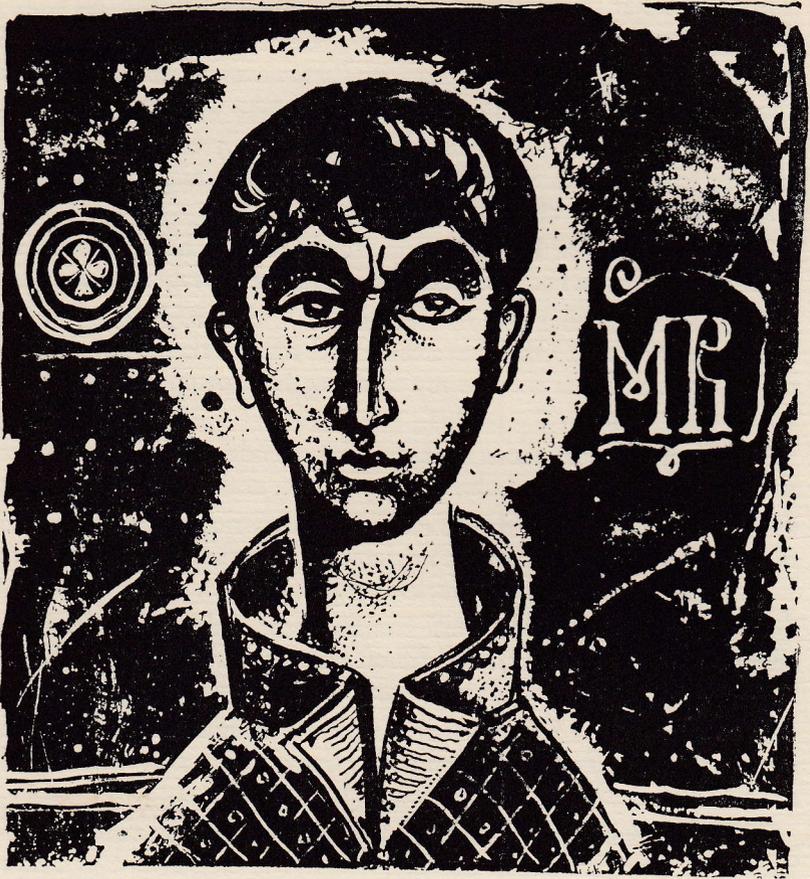
The Tsar set then about gathering his friends and retinue for the wedding; he collected twelve thousand men and set off with them down the vast Field of Kossovo. As they were passing under the towers of Vutchitern, the two young Voyinovichi saw them and wondered:

'What can have made our uncle so angry with us, so angry that he did not ask us to his wedding? Somebody must have told him lies about us: may his flesh rot and fall off his bones whoever he may be! There is our Tsar going to the Latin country, without a brave knight of his own kindred, without such a man who would be at his side in case of trouble. The Latins are an old, cunning race; they will behead our uncle; and yet we cannot go with him, uninvited!'

Their old mother heard them and said: 'My sons, my two Voyinovichi, you have yet another brother, Milosh the shepherd, who is now with the sheep in the mountains; he is the youngest yet the bravest among you, and the Tsar does not know him because he has never yet seen him. Send him a letter, asking him to come to Vutchitern, but do not tell him the reason; say, instead: "Our old mother is on her death-bed; she calls you to give you her blessing. Hurry down, unless you want a curse instead of her blessing to bear with you all your life long; make haste, that you may see your mother before she breathes her last."'

The brothers did their mother's bidding; they wrote the letter and sent it to their brother, Milosh the shepherd, in the mountain of Shara, saying:

'Oh, Milosh, our own dear brother, hurry down to the city of Vutchitern! Our old mother is dying and calls you to give you her



blessing. So come quickly unless you want to live under her curse for ever.'

When Milosh received the letter, he read it, tears streaming down his face. All his thirty shepherds asked him:

'O Milosh, our good master, letters have come before this, but you never read them with tears in your eyes! Where does this one come from, tell us, in Heaven's name?'

Milosh sprang to his feet and told his shepherds: 'O shepherds, my dear brothers, this letter comes from my home: my old mother is dying and she wishes to give me her blessing. I must go to her; guard well the sheep until I return to you.'

So Milosh went to the city of Vutchitern. As he approached he saw his two brothers, and with them his old mother coming to meet him. Milosh reproached them: 'Why, my dear brothers, did you frighten me so, and why did you make so much trouble for me, so much trouble without cause?'

His brothers answered him: 'Come along, brother, there is trouble indeed.'

The brothers embraced one another, and Milosh kissed his mother's white hand. After the greetings were over, they told him how the Tsar had gone to the far Latin country to fetch his bride, without taking his nephews with him. 'But will you, Milosh, go with our uncle's wedding-suite, uninvited though you may be? You should be there in case he meets trouble and needs you; but if that does not occur you had better return with him, without telling him who you are.'

Milosh agreed wholeheartedly. 'I will, my dear brothers! If I would not stand by my uncle, by whom else should I ever stand?'

His brothers set about preparing him for the journey: Petrashin went to harness and prepare his bay steed, and Vukashin busied himself with Milosh: he dressed him in a fine shirt, embroidered with golden thread from the neck down to the waist, all with white silk underneath; over the shirt he put three fine sleeveless jackets, and over them a splendid surcoat with thirty golden buttons and heavy gold-studded armplates; he helped him into his trousers and fixed his buckles for him; over all that he put a dark cloak such as Bulgarians usually wear. On Milosh's head he also set a black fur cap, making the youth look like a dark Bulgarian, so that his own brothers hardly knew him. They gave him the sharp pointed lance, and the beautifully wrought green sword of old Voyin, their father. Petrashin brought out his steed all wrapped up in bearskins so that the Tsar should not recognize him. Before Milosh set out, his brother gave him this wise advice:

'When you catch up with the wedding-party, they will ask you who you are and where you come from: tell them that you are from Karavlashka and that you had been serving Lord Radul who refused to pay you your due. Say then, "So I went away into the wide world, to look for a better master to serve. I heard about the Tsar's wedding and joined his train, hoping that I might be given a piece of white bread and a glass of red wine from him." Take care always to hold the reins firmly in your hands, for your steed is wont to keep abreast with the Tsar's own horses.'

Milosh mounted his steed and rode off to join the wedding-party. He reached them before long and the men in festive array asked him: 'Where do you come from, young Bulgarian lad?'

Milosh answered them as his brothers had advised him, and they welcomed him: 'Welcome to us, young Bulgarian; it is good to have one more youth with us!'

As they were advancing on the road, Milosh, who had been used to sleeping on the mountain next to his sheep about mid-day, dozed on his steed. Feeling the reins lax in his master's hands, the horse held up his head proudly and stamped through the wedding-suite, pushing to right and left the other horses and riders, many of whom fell down. So he arrived at the head of the procession. He slowed down only when he was abreast with the Tsar's own horses. The indignant lords and courtiers wanted to thrash the Bulgarian, but the Serbian Tsar Dushan held them back.

'Do not beat the young Bulgarian; the lad has been used to sleeping on the mountain by his sheep; do not strike him, but gently wake him up.'

The lords and the Tsar's courtiers shook Milosh by the shoulder saying: 'Wake up, young Bulgarian lad! Shame on your mother who bore you uncouth as you are and sent you to the Tsar's wedding!'

Startled, Milosh looked up and met the Tsar's own dark eyes; he saw where his steed was, walking abreast with the Tsar's own horses, and quickly drew the reins in and whipped his horse, who started leaping three spears in width and four in height. As for the length, it was impossible to tell how far he jumped; while out of his mouth came burning fire, and from his nostrils flared blue flames.

All the twelve thousand men stopped dead in their tracks, watching the young Bulgarian's steed and marvelling among themselves:

'Great Lord, what a wonder! What a splendid steed and what a poor rider! We have never seen his like before! There was such a horse, once upon a time, owned by the Tsar's late brother-in-law, but his sons, the Voyinovichi, own him now.'

Among those who admired the horse were three cunning men: Vuk Djakovitsa, Yanko from Nestopoliye, and a youth from Priyepoliye. Looking at the marvellous animal, they said: 'What a fine horse that young Bulgarian has! There isn't another like that in all this train. Even the Tsar's own mount is not so fine! Let us linger behind to see whether we can somehow get hold of him.'

As they neared a gorge the three cunning men lagged behind the others and spoke to Milosh the shepherd:

‘Listen to us, young Bulgarian lad! Would you exchange that horse for another and better one? We will give you a hundred ducats to boot; also a plough and oxen to till the fields and earn your bread.’

Milosh Voyinovich replied thus to them: ‘Let me be, you three cunning men! I am not looking for a better horse, for I cannot force even this one to obey me. What should I do with the hundred ducats? I could not weigh them on the scales. Why do I need the plough and the oxen? My father did no ploughing, yet he fed and brought me up well without it.’

The three shrewd men said then: ‘Look now, you Bulgarian lad, if you will not agree to exchange the horse of your own free will, we shall take it by force!’

To this Milosh Voyinovich answered: ‘Force can take towns and whole countries, let alone my horse! I would rather give you my horse in exchange for another, for I could not continue on foot.’

He drew rein and put his hand under the bearskin; the others thought he was taking the whip, but what he drew out was a six-knobbed golden mace. Milosh hit Vuk Djakovitsa with it. He touched him so lightly that Vuk whirled away, turning three times in the air before falling down. Milosh Voyinovich said to him then: ‘May your vines in Djakovitsa bring you as many grapes as there were somersaults you made in the air!’

Yanko from Nestopoliye fled, but Milosh, riding his bay steed, caught up with him; he hit him between the shoulder-blades and Yanko turned over four times. ‘Take good care of yourself, Yanko! May your trees in the gentle Nestopoliye bear you as many apples as were the turnabouts you made in the air!’

The poor youth from Priyepoliye was now running for his life, but Milosh was swift on his bay; he tapped him on the shoulder with his golden mace, and the youth rolled seven times in the air. ‘Take good care of yourself, youth from Priyepoliye! When you go back home, boast to your maidens in Priyepoliye that you took the Bulgarian’s steed by force!’

Only then did he join the rest of the wedding-train. When they came to the white town of Ledjane, they pitched their tents in the field. Oats were given to the horse of the Tsar and to the other horses, but there were none for Milosh’s steed. Seeing this, Milosh Voyinovich

hung a bag on his left arm and walked from one oat-bag to another until he had filled his own, and then he fed his horse. Afterwards, he went to the innkeeper and said to him: 'Innkeeper, give me some wine to drink!'

The innkeeper scowled: 'Go away, you black Bulgarian! Had you brought a Bulgarian wooden bowl, I might have poured you some wine in it, but these golden cups are not for the like of you!'

Milosh glanced at him from the corner of his eye and slapped him across the face: his hand was so light that three of the innkeeper's teeth fell down into his throat. The young host begged him then: 'Don't strike me again, Bulgarian! You shall have as much wine as you want, even if the Tsar must go short of it!' But Milosh did not ask him for anything now; he himself poured wine into a golden cup and drank it.

Whilst he was still feasting and drinking, daylight broke and the sun came up. A Latin youth cried from the ramparts:

'Hear me now, Serbian Tsar Dushan! There in the field beneath the city of Ledjane a knight has come out as his King's champion to fight a battle with you. You are to fight with him or you will not be allowed to depart from here, either you or any of the men in your suite; least of all will you be allowed to take away the maiden Roksanda!'

Hearing this, Tsar Dushan sent a messenger to his retinue. The messenger went about from tent to tent shouting:

'Has any mother borne and sent to the Tsar's wedding a brave knight who would be willing to fight the Tsar's battle for him? Great honours would the Tsar bestow on him.'

Alas, no such knight was to be found. The Tsar struck his knee with his fist, saying: 'Woe to me, may God have mercy on me! If I had my two nephews with me now, my two nephews, the two Voyinovich, they would go out into the field and take up the battle for me.'

The Tsar had not yet finished speaking when Milosh came to his tent, leading his bay steed.

'My lord Tsar, may I go into the field to take up the battle for you?'

The Serbian Tsar Dushan answered him: 'You may, young Bulgarian lad, but it is not seemly! However, if you slay the King's champion, I shall reward you with great honours.'

Milosh mounted his fierce steed and turned away from the Tsar's white tent, taking his lance with the spearhead pointing behind. The Tsar said to him: 'Do not carry your lance backwards, my son! Turn the spearhead the other way round or the Latins will laugh at you.'

Milosh replied: 'Do not fear for me, my lord Tsar. If I find myself in danger I shall easily turn my lance the right way; if not, I can bring it back like this too.'

Saying this, he rode down the field of Ledjane. The Latin maidens who watched him from the ramparts were saying: 'Dear Lord, what a wonder! What kind of champion is that for the Tsar? Rejoice, King's knight; there is no need for you to draw your sabre out of its scabbard at all—for there is nothing to smear it with blood!'

By then, Milosh had reached the tent where the knight was sitting. His red-coated horse was tethered to a lance stuck in the ground.

Milosh Voyinovich said to him: 'Rise to your feet, young Latin knight, rise to your feet and let us fight our battle!'

But the fair-skinned Latin answered contemptuously: 'Go away, you black Bulgarian! There is nothing on which to stain my sabre! You do not even wear clothes befitting a knight of the Tsar!'

Milosh Voyinovich grew angry: 'Get up, you fair-skinned Latin lad! True, your clothes are better than mine, but I will take them off your body and wear them myself.'

The young Latin leapt to his feet, mounted his fiery steed and made a tour of the field. Milosh, meanwhile, was standing on the mark, waiting for him. The young Latin threw his lance, aiming at Milosh's breast, but Milosh thrust his golden mace forward and, receiving the lance on it, shattered it into three pieces.

The fair-skinned Latin said to him then: 'Wait a little, you black Bulgarian! I was given a faulty lance; wait till I go and take a better one,' and rode away across the field. Milosh shouted after him:

'Stop a little, you fair-skinned Latin knight! Would you run away?' And he rode in pursuit. He chased him across the field to the city gates of Ledjane, but the gates were shut. Milosh threw his lance and nailed the fair-skinned Latin lad to the door; he cut off his head, threw it into his horse's oat-bag, took the reins of the other steed and led it to his honourable Tsar.

'Here is the head of the King's young knight, my Tsar.'

The Tsar gave him riches innumerable. 'Go now, my son, and drink some wine. I shall bestow great honours upon you!' he said.

Hardly had Milosh sat down and begun to drink when the Latin herald cried from the ramparts:

'Hear, O Tsar! In the meadow beneath the city of Ledjane there are three brave chargers, armed, and with three fiery swords stuck in their

saddles, their flaming ends pointed skywards: you are to jump over the three brave chargers! Unless you do this you will not depart from here, let alone take your bride with you!

The Tsar's messenger walked amongst the wedding-suite, shouting: 'Has any mother borne and sent to the Tsar's wedding a knight capable of jumping over three brave chargers with three flaming swords stuck in their saddles?'

It seemed there was no such knight to be found.

But there was the young Bulgarian who walked to the tent of the Serbian Tsar Dushan.

'My lord Tsar, may I go to the meadow and jump over the three brave chargers?'

'You may, my dear child, only I wish you would take off that dark Bulgarian cloak—may the tailor perish, the fool who cut it so badly, and so much too big for you!'

Milosh Voyinovich replied to him:

'Sit there and drink your red wine, my lord Tsar. Do not trouble yourself over my dark cloak! If there is a brave heart in a man, the cloak will not hinder him: if a sheep is troubled by its own wool, there is no good sheep or good wool either!'

Thereupon he walked down the field of Ledjane. Reaching the three brave chargers, he led his bay past them, saying to him:

'Wait for me to jump into the saddle, my brave bay horse!' He walked over to the other side, ran across the field, leapt over the three brave chargers, and over the three flaming swords stuck in their saddles, falling straight on to the back of his bay horse; he took the three brave chargers and led them to the Serbian Tsar Dushan.

Not much time had gone by before the young Latin shouted from the ramparts once more:

'Come now, Serbian Tsar, come under the highest tower in Ledjane; a spear is stuck on the top of it, a golden apple resting on its tip: you are to hit the apple through a ring with your arrow!'

Milosh did not wait for the messenger now. He went to his Tsar straight away and asked him:

'My lord Tsar, may I go and shoot my arrow through the ring at the apple?'

'Yes you may, my own dear son!'

Milosh went and stood beneath the white tower. He took aim with his arrow resting on its golden bow; he hit the apple through the ring,

took it into his white hands, and carried it to the honourable Tsar, who rewarded him richly.

Soon the Latin's voice was heard from the ramparts again:

'Hear, O Tsar, the two King's sons have come out under the white fortress bringing three fair maidens with them: fair they are, all three of them. They look alike and wear exactly the same gowns; you are to go now and tell which of them is Roksanda. If you choose the wrong one, you will not depart from here alive, let alone take your bride with you!'

When the Tsar understood his words, he called Todor the Vizier: 'Go, my servant, and tell which of them is my betrothed!'

Todor swore to him: 'I have not seen her, my Tsar, for she was ushered in complete darkness into the room when I gave her your ring in sign of betrothal.'

The Tsar struck his knee with his clenched fist: 'Woe to me! May God have mercy on me! We have outwitted and conquered them so far, and now the maiden will remain here to disgrace us for ever!'

Hearing this, Milosh Voyinovich went to his Tsar.

'My lord Tsar, may I go and tell which is the maiden Roksanda?'

'Yes, you may, my dear child, but poor is my trust in you: how are you to tell which is she when you have never set eyes on her!'

Milosh replied to him: 'Do not worry, my gracious lord Tsar. When I was up on the mountain of Shara, where I kept twelve thousand sheep, it sometimes happened that as many as three hundred lambs were born in the course of one single night, and I was able to tell each lamb by its mother. I shall easily tell Roksanda by her brothers.'

The Serbian Tsar Dushan told him then: 'Go then, my dear child! If God will that you should tell which is Roksanda, I shall give the rich lands of Skenderiya into your possession for the rest of your lifetime.'

Milosh walked down the wide field. Coming to the place where the maidens were standing, he threw the Bulgarian fur cap off his head and shook the dark cloak off his shoulders. The scarlet silk and velvet glowed in the sunshine; the golden arm-plates on his breast and the buckles on his legs glistened; Milosh was blazing in the green field like the fiery sun appearing behind a mountain. He drew out of his pocket some jewels and threw them on the green grass, scattering around golden rings, pearls, and precious stones. He drew out his green sword, saying to the three maidens:

'Let the one among you who is the maiden Roksanda roll up her long sleeves and bend down to gather these golden rings, pearls, and

precious stones; if any other should reach for them, I give you my word of honour that I shall cut off both her arms up to her elbows!

When they heard this, both maidens at the ends looked at the one in the middle. She lowered her gaze to the green grass, rolled up her long silken sleeves, and gathered all the rings, pearls, and precious stones. The other two maidens ran away, but Milosh did not let them escape; he caught them both by their hands and took all three of them to Tsar Dushan. He gave him the maiden Roksanda, and another one with her to be her maid-in-waiting, keeping the third for himself.

The Tsar kissed Milosh between his eyes, without knowing yet who he was nor where he came from. The wedding heralds, all in festive array, shouted: 'Prepare and make ready, O festive wedding guests! It is time to go home!'

They were soon ready, their banners flying and pipers playing merry tunes, and all in the best order they set off; taking with them Roksanda the bride. As they drew a little farther from the town, Milosh Voyinovich said to the Tsar:

'My lord Serbian Tsar Dushan, here in the city of Ledjane there is a Duke by the name of Balatchko. I know him and he knows me. He has been in the service of the King for seven years now. The King has kept him here with only one purpose—that he should drive away the wedding-party, and take back the maiden Roksanda. The King will send him to pursue us now. Balatchko has three heads on his body: out of one of them dart blue flames, and out of the other an icy wind blows, but when these two heads are cut off, Balatchko is an easy prey. Continue your way, and take the maiden with you; I shall stay here to wait for Balatchko.'

The wedding-party rode away, taking the fair maiden, and Milosh stayed in the green forest with three hundred companions.

When the wedding-train left Ledjane, the King called Duke Balatchko:

'O Balatchko, my faithful servant, can you trust yourself to go and scatter away the Tsar's wedding-train and bring back my dear daughter, the maiden Roksanda?'

Upon which Balatchko asked him: 'My lord King of Ledjane, what kind of a knight was he who achieved the most difficult feat of arms these last few days?'

The Queen of Ledjane said to him: 'Our servant Duke Balatchko, there is not a single brave knight among them to speak of, but a young, dark Bulgarian youth; so young that his cheeks are as soft as a girl's.

But Duke Balatchko said then: 'No, that is no dark Bulgarian, that is Milosh Voyinovich. Although the Tsar himself does not know who he is, I have known him for a long time now!'

Thereupon the Queen of Ledjane urged him: 'Go now, our true servant Duke Balatchko, go and take my daughter from the Serbs; if you do so, I shall give her to you to be your wedded wife.'

Balatchko saddled his mare and galloped down the road after the wedding-party, accompanied by six hundred Latin soldiers. As they reached the green forest, they saw the bay standing in the midst of the wide road, and Milosh Voyinovich looking behind him. Duke Balatchko shouted to him:

'O Milosh, did you expect me?' and he breathed out a blue flame which scorched the black bearskin; seeing that no harm was done that way, he blew out an icy wind: the bay turned over three times but Milosh did not wink an eye.

Now Milosh let his voice boom loud out of his white throat:

'There is something here you have not been expecting, Balatchko!'

And he swung his golden mace at him, touching him so lightly that Balatchko was thrown out of his saddle. Milosh then threw his sharp-pointed lance and, nailing him to the green grass, he cut off all his three heads and threw them into his horse's oat-bag. He made an onslaught on the soldiers, his three hundred companions behind him. They slew three hundred men and then turned to join the wedding-party. When they reached the Tsar and his retinue, Milosh threw Balatchko's heads at his feet. The Tsar embraced him and rewarded him richly, and they all rode on to the white city of Prizren.

As they rode across the vast Field of Kossovo, Milosh, before turning off to his city of Vutchitern, thus addressed the Serbian Tsar Dushan:

'Farewell now, my dear uncle; my dear uncle, Serbian Tsar Dushan!'

Only then did the Tsar realize that the youth was Milosh Voyinovich. He said to him: 'Is that you, my child Milosh? Is that you, my own dear nephew! Happy is the mother who gave life to you, and happy is your uncle to have you for a nephew! Why did you not tell me before who you were, for, not knowing it, I let you suffer the hardships of the journey—I let you sleep on poor beds and go short of good food and red wine!'

Woe to him who is alone in the world and has no one of his own kindred!



KING VUKASHIN'S WEDDING



ING Vukashin wrote a letter from his white town of Skadar on Boyana to the town of Pirlitor in Herzegovina, on the foot-hill of Mount Durmitor; he secretly wrote it to Vidossava, Momtchilo's wife, and secretly sent it to her:

'Vidossava, Momtchilo's wife, why should you live amidst all that ice and snow? If you look up, all you can see is Mount Durmitor, crowned with ice and snow both in summer and winter alike. If you look down from your city, you can see only the wild, muddy river Tara tumbling among the rocks, carrying trunks and boulders in its wild waters; there is no bridge, nor any other way to cross the savage river, and its steep banks are all marble rocks with just a few pine-trees growing among them. Poison your husband Duke Momtchilo, poison him or betray him to me, and then come to live in my gentle coastland. Come to my white city of Skadar on Boyana; I shall take you for my faithful wife, and you will be my lady Queen. To pass the time away, you will spin silk on a golden distaff; spinning silk, you will sit on silken cushions and wear clothes of velvet and brocades, and, moreover, all my dazzling jewels. And what a place is Skadar on Boyana! Looking up at the hills above the city, you will see them covered by olive and fig trees, and also by many fine vine-terraces; looking down from the city across the steep slopes, you will see the golden wheat, and around it many green meadows. Across them flows the emerald Boyana, full of all kinds of fish which you may eat, fresh out of the river, whenever you wish!'

The letter reached Momtchilo's wife. When she had read it, she instantly answered:

'My lord, King Vukashin, it is not easy to betray, to betray or poison Duke Momtchilo: Momtchilo has a sister, Yevrossima, who cooks his choice meals for him and tastes them before him; Momtchilo has nine beloved brothers and twelve nephews: they pour out his wine and serve it to him; they drink out of each of his cups before he does. Momtchilo also has a horse, Yabutchilo, Yabutchilo the winged one who can fly wherever his master wishes, and, finally, Momtchilo has a sabre with eyes on it; he fears no one but God.

'But listen to me, King Vukashin! Raise a numerous host, bring them to the fields around the lakes and hide them in the green forest. Momtchilo has an unusual custom: every Sunday morning he goes early to hunt by the lakes, taking with him his nine beloved brothers, his twelve nephews, and his forty servants. On the eve of next Sunday I shall burn Yabutchilo's wings and I shall dip Momtchilo's sharp sabre into salty blood so that it will stick in its scabbard and he will not be able to draw it out. That is how you will be able to slay Momtchilo.'

Receiving her letter, the King was happy and he did as he was bidden: he raised a numerous host, took it to Herzegovina, reached the lakes and hid with his men in the green forest.

In Momtchilo's mansion, on the eve of that Sunday, Momtchilo went to his bed-chamber and lay down on soft mattresses. Soon after him his wife came in too, but she would not lie on the bed: she stood above him with tears running down her face. Momtchilo asked her: 'Vidossava, my faithful wife, what is tormenting you and making you shed these tears above my head?'

Young Vidossava said to him: 'My dear lord Duke Momtchilo, nothing is tormenting me, but I have heard a very strange thing. I have heard it, but not seen it so far: they say that you have a horse, Yabutchilo, Yabutchilo the winged one. I have never seen those wings of Yabutchilo and am afraid that you might lose your life through him.'

Wise he was, Duke Momtchilo, wise he was, yet he made a mistake and thus spoke to his wife: 'Vidossava, my faithful wife, I can easily put your mind at rest. All you need do, if you wish to see the horse's wings, is to go to the new stables at cock-crow, for it is then that he spreads out his wings and you will be able to see them.' Saying this, he closed his eyes and went to sleep.

Momtchilo was sleeping, but not his wife. Lying on the bed at his

side, she was listening to hear the first cocks crow. When she heard them, she jumped from the bed, lit a candle, and went straight to the new stables. What Momtchilo had said was true: Yabutchilo had spread out his wings and unfolded them so that they reached to his hoofs. Vidossava now spread grease and tar all over the wings and set fire to them with her candle, so that Yabutchilo's wings were burned; all that did not burn out she tacked together and tied firmly under his belly. She then went to the armoury, took Momtchilo's sabre, and dipped it in salty blood. Only then did she return to the soft mattresses on their bed.

When at dawn the sky grew light, Duke Momtchilo rose and said to his wife Vidossava: 'Vidossava, my faithful wife, I had a strange dream last night: I saw in my dream a wisp of fog rising from the accursed lands of Vassoye; I saw it come over and encircle Mount Durmitor; I struck through that fog with my nine beloved brothers, my twelve nephews, and my forty soldiers, but we all lost each other in the fog. Thus we parted, never to come together again; I fear, wife, that this portends no good.'

Vidossava said to him: 'Fear nothing, my dear lord! A brave knight may dream whatever dream comes to him, yet dreams are false and only God is true!'

Duke Momtchilo prepared for the hunt then and went down from his white tower; his nine beloved brothers, his twelve nephews and forty soldiers were all in the courtyard, awaiting him. His wife led his horse to him and waited upon him as he mounted into the saddle. All his company leapt on horseback after him and rode away to the hunt by the lakes.

As the hunters approached the lakes, they were surrounded by the host which had been lying in wait for them. Seeing them, Momtchilo reached for his sabre, but it was held fast as if it had grown into its scabbard. Duke Momtchilo said then: 'Listen to me, my dear brothers! The cunning Vidossava has betrayed me: give me the best of your sabres.'

The brothers immediately complied with his wish and gave him the best of their sabres. Momtchilo then said to them: 'Listen to me, my beloved brothers! You go and attack the flanks of the enemy's host, and I shall strike my way through their midst.'

What a wonderful sight it was! If only you could have seen Momtchilo striking with his sabre right and left, and clearing the road to the

mountain for himself! His horse Yabutchilo was even fiercer than he, stamping down more enemies than his master was able to slay with his sabre. But bad luck met Momtchilo as he emerged from the enemy host, riding toward the town of Pirlitor: nine black horses came up to him, nine horses, but not a single one of his brothers in their saddles!

As Momtchilo saw that, his brave heart broke in his breast with grief for his own brothers. His white arms grew weak and he could strike not a blow more; he spurred his horse Yabutchilo, spurred him on and kicked him with his riding-boots, urging him to leave the ground and fly over to the city of Pirlitor, but the horse could not spread his wings and take off from the ground. Duke Momtchilo cursed him: 'Yabutchilo, may the wolves devour you! How many times have we flown from here, without any real need, just for pleasure! Remember, my horse! And now you will not do it to save my life!'

His horse answered him, neighing: 'O my master, Duke Momtchilo, do not curse me, or try to force me, for today I cannot fly; may God strike your wife Vidossava dead! It was she who burnt my wings, and the little that was left of them after the fire died down she tucked under my belly and tied firmly with the reins. So run away on foot for your life, dear master!'

Hearing that, Duke Momtchilo shed tears and jumped from his saddle; in three leaps he was at the city gates, but the gates were closed, closed and bolted! Seeing his plight, Momtchilo called his sister Yevrossima:

'Yevrossima, my own dear sister, let down a white linen sheet, that I may climb up to the city and escape the foe!'

The sister answered her brother, weeping: 'Oh, my brother, Duke Momtchilo, how can I let down the white linen sheet when my sister-in-law, my sister-in-law, your treacherous wife, has tied my hair to the rafters?'

His sister had a soft, loving heart; she was very sorry for her brother, and crying out like a snake caught in a cleft, she shook her head and tore off her hair which remained tied to the rafters; she then snatched a white linen sheet and let one end down over the city ramparts. Momtchilo caught it and began to climb up the walls; he had almost reached the ramparts when his treacherous wife ran to him, holding a sabre, and cut off the linen above his hands. Momtchilo fell down the walls, landing on the upturned swords and spears, on the cudgels and maces of the King's soldiers. They threw him from one to another

until he reached King Vukashin, who hit his heart with his battling-lance. Momtchilo said to him with his last breath:

‘Hear my dying words, King Vukashin: do not marry my Vidossava, Vidossava my treacherous wife, because she will be your undoing too: today she has betrayed me to you and tomorrow she will betray you to another man. Take for your wife my dear sister, my dear sister Yevrossima, for she will always be faithful to you and will bear you a son, a brave man as I have been.’

Whilst saying this, Duke Momtchilo was struggling with his soul, and as soon as he finished speaking, he breathed his last.

When Duke Momtchilo died, the city gates were opened and out walked the treacherous Vidossava to welcome King Vukashin; she took him to the white tower, set him at the golden table and brought to him wine, brandy, and all sorts of dainty food. Afterwards she went to the armoury and brought out Momtchilo’s clothes, Momtchilo’s own clothes and arms. But you should behold the wonder then: that which had reached Momtchilo’s knees dragged on the floor when Vukashin wore it; that which Momtchilo had worn as a helmet fell down on to Vukashin’s shoulders; that which had been one of Momtchilo’s boots was big enough for both of Vukashin’s legs; that which Momtchilo had worn as a golden ring, Vukashin had to wear over three fingers; that which Momtchilo had used as a sabre dragged a yard on the ground behind Vukashin; and that which had been a light blanket to Momtchilo weighed so heavily on the King that he could not rise from beneath it!

King Vukashin said then: ‘Woe to me! Alas, may God hear my repentant voice now! Look at that cunning Vidossava! When she betrayed such a brave knight, a brave man without his like in the world today, how can I trust her not to betray me tomorrow!’

He summoned his servants and they caught Vidossava, tied her to the horses’ tails, drove the horses down Mount Pirlitor and she was torn asunder.

The King ransacked Momtchilo’s mansion, and took with him Momtchilo’s sister, Yevrossima, down to Skadar on Boyana and married her, taking her for his wedded wife. He had two fine sons by her, Marko and Andriya. Marko took after his uncle, his uncle, the brave Duke Momtchilo.



UROSH AND HIS UNCLÉS

FOUR parties met on the Field of Kossovo, by the white church of Samodrezha: the first was King Vukashin's party, the second was that of Despot Uglyesha; the third belonged to Duke Goyko, and the fourth was that of the young Tsarevich, Urosh. Each of them coveted the vacant throne of the Serbian Tsar, and was prepared to fight for it and to stab his rivals with his golden knife; each of them believed that only he should inherit the Empire.

King Vukashin said: 'The throne is mine!'

Despot Uglyesha said: 'No, it is mine!'

So said Duke Goyko too: 'No, it is mine!'

The boy Tsarevich Urosh kept silent, not daring to say a word, for fear of his three uncles, his three uncles, the three Murniyavtchevichi.

King Vukashin wrote a letter and sent it by his messenger to the white town of Prizren, to the priest Nedelko, asking him to come to the Field of Kossovo and say to whom the Empire should go: for the priest had given the illustrious Tsar the last unction and heard his confession; moreover, he possessed old books which would help him to find out the truth.

Despot Uglyesha also wrote a letter, and sent it by his messenger to Prizren to the same priest, for exactly the same reason. Duke Goyko and the young Tsarevich Urosh did the same. All four of them sent their messengers secretly, not wishing the others to know what they had done.

However, the four messengers met in the white town of Prizren, at the home of the priest Nedelko. As it was Sunday, the priest was not at home, but in church, serving the early liturgy.

The haughty, short-tempered messengers, more arrogant even than their masters, rode to the church and, without dismounting, entered the holy place of worship and started to whip the priest Nedelko with their plaited whips:

‘Hurry now, priest Nedelko, hurry and come with us to the vast Field of Kossovo and say to whom the Empire should go. You gave the last unction to the late illustrious Tsar, you gave him the unction and heard his confession; moreover, you possess the old books of wisdom. If you do not obey us, you will be beheaded!’

The priest Nedelko wept and said to them:

‘Go away, arrogant messengers! Leave me to finish the holy liturgy; after that you will know to whom the Empire should go.’

When the service was over, they all left the church, and the priest Nedelko spoke thus: ‘My children, four mighty messengers, indeed I gave the illustrious Tsar his last communion and I heard his confession; but I asked him then not about the crown, but about the sins he had committed in his lifetime. Therefore you had better go to the city of Prilep, to the palace of Kralyevich Marko who was once my pupil; I taught him to read and write, and afterwards he became clerk to the Tsar. The old books of wisdom are with him and he will certainly know to whom the Empire should go. Ask Marko to go to Kossovo with you; he will tell you the truth, for Marko fears no one but God the Almighty.’

The four messengers departed, and rode to the city of Prilep, to the white palace of Kralyevich Marko. Arriving there, they struck the door with the heavy iron knocker. Marko's mother, Yevrossima, heard their knocking and called her son:

'My son Marko, my dear child, who is it knocking so hard at the door? It sounds as if it might be your father's messengers coming here.'

Marko rose and opened the door.

'God be with you, my lord Marko!' the four messengers greeted him, as one.

Marko answered: 'Welcome, my dear children! How are the Serbian knights; how are the honourable Kings and Tsars?'

The messengers bowed humbly to him: 'Our good lord, Kralyevich Marko, they are all in good health, but there is no peace between them: our lords are quarrelling bitterly on the vast Field of Kossovo, by the white church of Samodrezha. They all covet the crown, and are prepared to stab each other with their golden knives and to murder each other for it, because they do not know to whom the Empire should go. They all ask you to come to the Field of Kossovo to tell them who is to inherit the Empire.'

Marko walked back into his princely palace and called to his mother Yevrossima:

'Yevrossima, my dear mother, our mighty lords have quarrelled bitterly over the crown on the Field of Kossovo, and they ask me to go to them now, to tell them who is to inherit the Empire.'

Although Marko himself was a very righteous man, still his mother, Yevrossima, begged him:

'Marko my son, my only dear child, if you do not want me to curse you, take care: let not your judgement be swayed by any feelings you may have for your father or for your uncles. Be not unjust, but observe the righteousness of our only true Lord! Let not your soul be lost by a wrong judgement! Losing your life is better than losing your soul!'

Marko took his old books of wisdom and prepared himself for the journey. He threw himself on to his piebald horse, Sharats, and rode off to the Field of Kossovo.

As the two of them neared the King's tent, King Vukashin said: 'Happy am I: may my thanks rise to Heaven! Here comes my son Marko; he will say the Empire is mine, for he will inherit it from his father.'

Marko heard him, but said nothing; he passed the King's tent with-

out even glancing at it. Seeing him, Despot Uglyesha cried: 'Happy am I: may my thanks rise to Heaven! Here comes my nephew! He will say the Empire is mine. Speak, Marko, and we shall rule together, like two loving brothers!'

Marko kept silent, and, without uttering a single word, he passed the tent, without even glancing at it.

Duke Goyko caught sight of him then and cried: 'Happy am I: here comes my nephew! He will say the Empire is mine! When Marko was a small boy, I cherished him dearly and carried him always, pressing him to my breast as if he were a golden apple; wherever I rode in those days, I always put Marko on my horse and took him with me. Say, Marko, the Empire is mine, and you will be the first to rule over it; I shall sit at your knee and help you!'

But Marko kept silent, and rode on without once glancing at the tent of his uncle. He rode straight to the white tent of the boy Tsarevich Urosh, and at the doorway of the tent he dismounted. When the boy Urosh saw him before the tent, he leapt up from his silken cushions, he leapt to his feet and said: 'Happy am I: here comes my godfather! He will say to whom the Empire should go.'

They opened their arms wide, embraced and kissed each other, and inquired about each other's health. Then they sat down on the silken cushions and the boy Tsarevich Urosh offered his guest refreshment after his journey. Before long the day was gone and the dark night began. But the next morning, as soon as it grew light, the church bells pealed out and all the lords went to early liturgy. When the prayers were over they walked out of the white church and sat at the tables spread in the churchyard, eating sweets, roasted meats, and drinking plum-brandy.

Marko took his old books of wisdom and spoke before them all, looking at each in turn: 'O my Father, King Vukashin, is your Kingdom not enough for you? Does it not suffice you—may it become a waste desert!—but you have to fight for somebody else's lands?

'And you, my uncle, Despot Uglyesha, is your Despotdom not enough for you? Does it not suffice you—may it become a waste desert!—but you have to fight for somebody else's possessions?

'You, too, my uncle, Duke Goyko, is your Duchy not enough for you? Does it not suffice you—may it become a waste desert!—but you have to fight for somebody else's Empire?

'Do you not see—may God never see any of you!—that the books

say: the Empire belongs to Urosh! He inherited it from his father; he is his rightful heir and it is to him that the Tsar left the Crown in his dying hour, before going to eternal rest.'

Hearing this, King Vukashin leapt to his feet, and drew out his golden scimitar to stab his own son Marko. Marko fled from the King because it would not be seemly for him to fight with his own father; he ran round the white church of Samodrezha, with his father the King in pursuit. When they were rounding the church for the third time his father almost caught up with him, but suddenly a voice was heard from within the church:

'Run into the church, Kralyevich Marko! Don't you see that you are going to fall today, to be killed by your own father for having told God's truth!'

The church door opened itself to Marko, and he ran inside; the door closed behind him. The King hurled himself at the church door and struck one of the posts with his golden scimitar. As he did so, blood dripped from the wood.

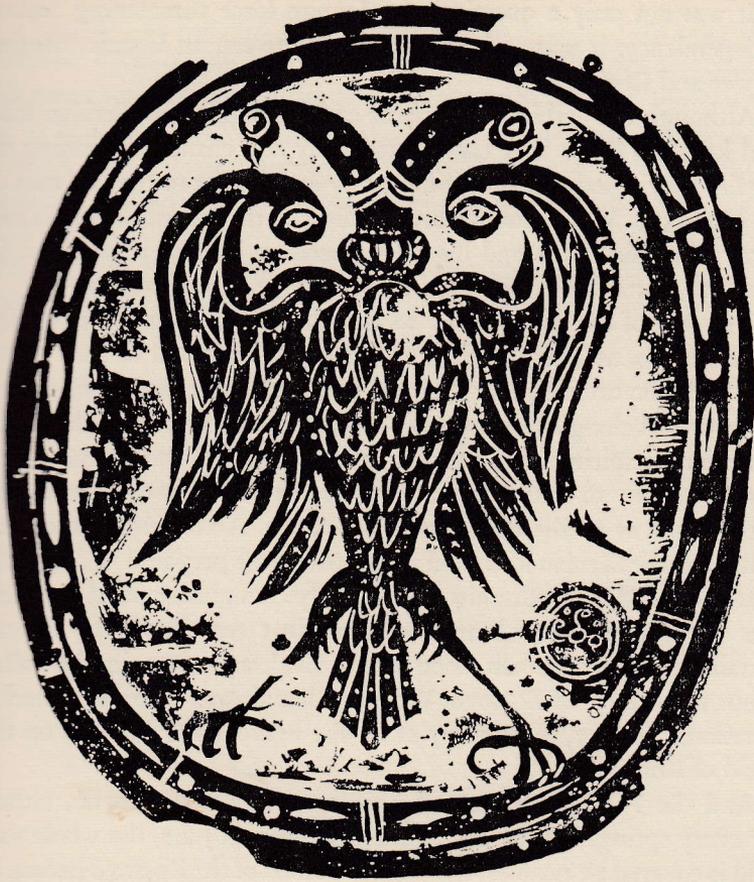
The King repented, wailing: 'Woe is me! May God have mercy on me—I have slain my own son, Marko!'

But a voice spoke from within the church: 'Hear me, O King Vukashin! It is not Marko you have slain, but one of God's own angels.'

The anger returned to the King who bitterly cursed his son now: 'My son Marko, may God kill you! May you never be blessed with your heart's offspring! And may you live to serve the Turkish Sultan!'

While the King was thus cursing Marko, the young Tsar was blessing him: 'Godfather Marko, may God always help you! May your face always shine with honour among your equals! May your sabre always be victorious in battle! May there never again be a hero like you, and may your name be remembered as long as the sun and the moon shine from the skies!'

Both these prophecies were to come true later on, but Marko, hearing them then, did not know.



THE BATTLE OF KOSSOVO

A DEFEAT WHICH BECAME A VICTORY

'If all of us were to turn into salt, there would not be enough of it to season a dinner for the Turkish host.'



VERY, very numerous and mighty, Sultan Murat's Turkish hosts were pushing up from the south of the Balkan Peninsula. After passing through the Byzantine Empire and winning the battle on the river Maritsa in Bulgaria, they threatened the Serbian lands.

It was not only a question of a foreign force threatening Serbian independence: it was to be the contest between an Islamic, Moslem power and Christianity.

Although the Serbian Tsar Lazar and his dignitaries, Serbian lords and knights, knew that there was hardly any chance of winning the battle, they stood their ground bravely and fought to the last man on 28 June 1389. Vuk Brankovich, according to the legend, kept his men away from the battle and his name therefore became a synonym for 'traitor'. Historically, however, he was not guilty of treason.

The day of the battle came to be called 'Vidovdan' by posterity, which means, as Tsar Lazar said: 'the day when it will be seen who is true and who untrue', also 'the day when it will be seen to whom the Empire will belong'. However, as Tsar Lazar had been offered the choice between the spiritual and the secular kingdom, and had, as the legend has it, chosen to embrace the kingdom of Heaven, there could be little doubt as to the outcome of the battle. According to the same ballad, all the Serbian lords and their hosts were prepared to die on the battlefield and were administered the holy communion. And yet there was hope in all their hearts, hope against reason, almost against certainty—bright human hope for survival, as shown in the ballad about the maiden of Kossovo. Vidovdan has always been celebrated as a national holiday, in memory of all the brave Serbs who fell on the Field of Kossovo.

And the Field itself seemed unable to forget the battle, either, for every spring, in May and at the beginning of June, the whole vast field is covered by peonies, red with the blood of the Kossovo heroes, as legend has it.

Two monuments stand, clearly outlined against the blue sky, on the wide, gently undulating field: the place has been marked where Tsar Lazar fell, never to be forgotten, and, not very far from it, there is the Turkish tomb of Sultan Murat who was slain by Milosh Obilich.

Dead long ago, all those heroes and brave knights—Tsar Lazar, Old Yug Bogdan (Tsaritsa Militza's father) and his nine sons, the nine Yugovichi, Milosh Obilich, Ivan Kossantchich, Pavle Orlovich, and others—still live in the hearts of all Serbs. Their readiness to fight and die for a lost cause (which even they realized was hopeless) gave courage to many Serbs in later days when times were often harsh, and they inspired them to follow their example and, eventually, to win the battle for their own lands and freedom.

This group of Kossovo ballads is unique in that it is the only full, complete cycle telling of an historical event and sung by anonymous folk poets some time after the event. It has come down to posterity in all its tragic greatness and beauty. The origin of these ballads may, perhaps, be ascribed to the need of an enslaved people for some bright, unsullied memory which would be glorious enough to make life in their plight bearable; to the pathetic need for a solace which would, like a blazing torch, light the way into the future and link it with the splendid past, passing over the gloomy darkness of their own day.



THE BUILDING OF RAVANITSA



HE illustrious Tsar Lazar was celebrating his patron saint's day by a feast, to which all the Serbian lords were invited. The Tsar set them at the long table, giving each of them the place he was entitled to by his rank and age. At the head of the table the Tsar himself sat and they all began drinking the cool wine, engaging in pleasant conversation. When the feasting was at its highest, in came Lady Militsa, Tsar Lazar's wife, richly dressed, her precious jewels glistening in the festive light of the hall: nine rows of pearls adorned her white neck; a golden crown with three great diamonds, dazzling by day and night alike, was on her head. Lady Militsa walked along the hall and, passing before Tsar Lazar, said:

'My lord, illustrious Tsar Lazar, although it is not seemly that I should look at you, let alone speak to you in such noble company, I have to say what preys on my mind. The old dynasty of Nemanychi ruled our lands and, when their time was over, they went to their graves. But they did not accumulate heaps of gold and treasures in their vaults and caskets; instead they built many churches and monasteries to ensure rest for their souls. Thus they built Vissoki Detchani above the town of Djakovitsa; they built the patriarchy of Pech in the hills above Pech, St. Peter's Church near Novi Pazar, and not far from it the splendid Sopochane by the cool river of Rashka. They also built the majestic Studenitsa amid the wooded mountains, the graceful Gratchanitsa on the Field of Kossovo, and many other monuments,



nestling on the mountain-sides or by the cool swift rivers of Serbia. All these are their pious foundations. You inherited their throne and amassed heaps of treasure without building one single church to ensure rest for your soul; all those riches can be of no good for our souls or for our bodies either. Neither we nor any of ours will have any benefit from them.'

Tsar Lazar said then: 'Do you hear what Lady Militsa says, Serbian lords? I will build a church by the river of Ravan and call it Ravanista; I have as much wealth as I could wish for. I shall have the foundations of my church made of lead, the walls of white silver, the roof of glistening gold, and I shall adorn it all over with pearls and precious stones.'

All the lords rose to their feet and bowed to him: 'Do so, our lord Tsar; it will earn peace for your soul and good health for your son, the noble Stevan.'

But Milosh Obilich, who was sitting at the opposite end of the table, did not get up or say a word. Tsar Lazar noticed this and spoke, toasting him with a golden cup:

'May you enjoy good health, Duke Milosh! I wish you would say something about my intention to build this church.'

Milosh lightly jumped to his feet, took off his fur-lined helmet and went over to pay homage to the Tsar: he was given a golden cup. Raising it in his hand, he cried:

‘Thank you for your noble speech, my liege lord! But as for your intention of building the church, I must say that this is no time for it, and it cannot be; take the wise old books, my lord Tsar, take them and see what they have to tell us: our days are numbered, and the Turks are going to take our lands over: before long the Turks will rule here; they will pull down our famous churches, our noble monasteries and your church Ravanista along with all the others. They will dig out its lead foundations and melt them into cannon-balls which they will use to destroy our cities and towns; they will pull down the silver church-walls and make armplates and harnesses for their chargers; they will take off the golden roof and make collars and chains for their heathen wives; the pearls from your church will adorn their necks, and the precious stones will be set in the hilts of their sabres, their *yataghans*.

‘But hear me now, illustrious Tsar Lazar! Let us dig out marble from the mountain-sides and let us build a church of stone: even though the Turks may take over our lands, our churches will live on and serve for worshipping God until the Judgement Day: from stone nobody can take anything but stone.’

Hearing him, Tsar Lazar answered Duke Milosh: ‘Thank you, Duke Milosh! Thank you for your noble speech, for all you said was pure honest truth.’

And so his church was built of stone, and weathered through all the storms and battles.

SULTAN MURAT'S CHALLENGE



ULTAN Murat reached with his mighty host the Field of Kossovo and wrote a letter to Tsar Lazar who resided in his city of Krushevats.

‘O Tsar Lazar, head of Serbia! It has never been, nor can it ever be, that one land be ruled by two lords; that one people pay taxes to two masters. We cannot rule over Serbia, both of us. Send me therefore the keys and the taxes—the golden keys of all your towns and the taxes for seven past years.

‘If you do not do my bidding, come to the Field of Kossovo. Let our sabres decide to whom the country shall belong!’

Receiving the letter, Tsar Lazar was greatly disturbed and worried.

He decided to accept the challenge and, along with the summons to all his lords and subjects, he let a curse fall on those who should dare to disobey his call for battle:

‘Let him who fails to join the battle of Kossovo
Fail in all he undertakes in his fields.
Let his fields go barren of the good golden wheat,
Let his vineyards remain without vines or grapes!’

WHAT IVAN KOSSANTCHICH SAW IN THE TURKISH CAMP



IF all of us were to turn into salt, there would not be enough of it to season a dinner for the Turkish host.

I have seen all over the immensely vast field; all of it is covered by the Turkish host: horse pressed to horse, lances close one to another, looking like a dense black forest; their flags flapping in the wind like clouds, their white tents close to one another—like white snow on the mountains.

‘If rain were suddenly to pour down, not a single drop would fall on parched soil, but on good chargers and their brave riders,’ said Ivan Kossantchich to his friends, the Serbian knights, after reconnoissance among the Turkish hosts.

‘Where is the tent of the Turkish Sultan Murat, tell me, Ivan my dear sworn brother?’

‘I pledged my word to my lord, the Serbian Tsar Lazar, that I would slay the Sultan on the Field of Kossovo,’ Milosh Obilich said eagerly.

‘How foolish you are, my dear brother! Sultan Murat’s tent is in the very midst of the Turkish host.’

‘Even if you had a falcon’s strong swift wings and were to fall by his tent out of the blue, you would not be able to fly back with your feathers and flesh unharmed,’ replied Ivan Kossantchich.

‘O Ivan, my dear brother, do not tell our lord, Tsar Lazar, what you have now told us: he would be assailed by worry for his men, and our soldiers would hear of it and become frightened.’

‘You had better tell Tsar Lazar that the Turkish host is numerous,

true, but say that most of the soldiers are either inexperienced youths who have never seen a battle, or old men and muezzins who hope to profit by the war between our two sides. Moreover, tell him that both their soldiers and horses have been victims of various illnesses and are no serious challenge to us.

‘Say we can fight with them and win the day, dear brother.’



TSAR LAZAR AND TSARITSA MILITSA



As Tsar Lazar sat down for supper one evening, Tsaritsa Militsa joined him, and sitting at his side, she said:

‘Tsar Lazar, golden crown of Serbia, you will go to the Field of Kossovo tomorrow, taking with you all your dukes, courtiers, and servants. Not one of them will you leave at home: there will be nobody to take my letter to you to Kossovo and bring back your answer to me, if need be. You are also taking with you my nine dear brothers, the nine Yugovichi. Leave me at least one of them, I beseech you, so that I, their sister, shall have a brother to cherish and swear by.’

‘Which of your brothers would you most wish to have with you in our white palace?’ asked Tsar Lazar, wishing to please her.

‘Leave Boshko Yugovich with me, please.’

‘My lady, Tsaritsa Militsa, when daylight comes next morning and the sun appears above this world, when the city gates open tomorrow, walk and stand by the gate through which all our host, our horsemen with their battling lances, will pass on their way to Kossovo. At the head of them all will be your brother Boshko Yugovich, carrying a flag with the sign of the holy Cross on it. Give him my blessing, lady Tsaritsa, and tell him that he may stay at our palace with you; as for the flag, let him give it over to him among his companions whom he deems worthy of it.’

Tsaritsa Militsa was pleased by his answer. She hardly slept that night, fearing that she might be late to catch her brother before he

went to Kossovo. She rose very early next morning and was standing by the city gate when Tsar Lazar's host approached on the way to the battlefield.

At the head of the numerous host was Boshko Yugovich, riding a chestnut horse whose hair shone in the sun like copper; Boshko's helmet and gold-studded armplates glistened brightly; his sister's eyes were almost dazzled by his look of splendour, but the big flag, of costly silk with the holy Cross embroidered upon it in gold, flapped in the morning breeze and occasionally covered the rider's armour. The flagpole had a shining golden apple at its top, and the flag had at the edges a golden fringe which gently tapped Boshko between the shoulder-blades as he advanced on his horse.

Tsaritsa Militsa stepped forward, held his horse by the bridle, and embraced her brother as he bowed to her to see what she wanted. She whispered into his ear:

'O dear brother, Boshko Yugovich, the Tsar has given you to me; he has given you his blessing and has agreed for you to stay away from the battle of Kossovo and to abide with me at the town of Krushevats. Give the flag to one of your companions and return to our palace with me, beloved brother.'

Boshko shook his head and answered: 'Go back to your white tower, dear sister. I would not turn back nor give the flag with the holy Cross out of my hands even if the Tsar should make me a present of his fine city of Krushevats. Nothing would induce me to do it and give cause to my friends to say: "Look at the coward, Boshko Yugovich! He did not dare to go to Kossovo, to shed his blood for the holy Cross, and die for his Christian faith!"'

He raised his head proudly and rode through the city gate in such beauty and splendour that he almost wounded his sister's heart.

Old Yug Bogdan, his father, arrived after him, followed by seven of his sons. Tsaritsa Militsa stopped each one of them, begging them to stay with her, but they all refused to comply with her wish, gently yet firmly.

Her brother Voyin was the last to come by; he was mounted on a fine grey charger, leading the Tsar's battle horses, their harnesses and trappings bright with golden adornments.

Tsaritsa Militsa seized his horse's reins desperately, embraced her brother and said, beseeching him: 'Oh my brother, Voyin Yugovich, stay away from the battle; come back to Krushevats with me. The

Tsar gave you his blessing and advised you to give over the horses in your charge to whomsoever you should choose to replace you. Come back with me, brother, I implore you!

'Go back to your white tower, dear sister, for I would not return with you, or give the Tsar's battle horses to anyone, even if I knew that I were to die! I am going to the Field of Kossovo, dear sister, to shed my blood for the holy Cross and to die with my brothers for our Christian faith.'

He spurred his grey horse and passed through the city gate following the others, whilst his sister, Militsa, fainted and fell down on the pavement. She was still lying on the cold flagstones, unconscious, when Tsar Lazar happened to pass by on his way to Kossovo. He saw his wife and, his heart full of sadness and tenderness for her, he turned round calling his servant:

'My good servant, young Goluban, dismount your white horse now, take up your mistress in your arms and carry her to the white tower. Stay with her, my faithful Goluban; I give you leave to absent yourself from the battle on the Field of Kossovo.'

The servant heard his words, tears streaming down his face. He did his Tsar's bidding and carried his mistress to the white tower, but could not resist the call of battle: as soon as he had left her lying on silken cushions Goluban hastened back, mounted his snow-white horse, and galloped after all the other Serbs to the vast Field of Kossovo.

TSAR LAZAR'S SUPPER



THE Serbian Tsar Lazar was celebrating his patron saint's day in his town of Krushevats. All the Serbian lords were invited to the festive supper and Tsar Lazar set them all at the table. At his right was old Yug Bogdan and next to him his nine sons, the nine Yugovichi. At the Tsar's left was Vuk Brankovich, and at the other end of the table, opposite the Tsar, sat Duke Milosh Obilich with two other Dukes, Ivan Kossantchich and Milan Toplitsa, at his sides.

Looking at all of them, Tsar Lazar took a golden beaker full of wine and spoke to his guests:

'Whose health shall I drink? If I am to drink the toast according to age, I should drink it for old Yug Bogdan; if I am to toast the most distinguished among you, I should drink it for Vuk Brankovich; if by affection, then I shall toast my nine dear brothers-in-law, the nine Yugovichi; if by beauty, I shall toast Ivan Kossantchich; and if by height, then Milan Toplitsa. If I am to toast the bravest knight among you, I shall drink this for Duke Milosh. To nobody else shall I drink this, but to Milosh Obilich! May God give you good health, Milosh, both faithful and unfaithful one! First faithful, then unfaithful will you prove to me! You will betray me tomorrow on Kossovo and go over to the Turkish Sultan Murat! May you enjoy good health, and now drink this toast; drink the wine and take the golden beaker!'

Milosh leapt up to his nimble feet and bowed low, almost touching the ground:

‘Thank you, illustrious Tsar Lazar! Thank you for your toast, for the toast and your gift, but not for your speech! For—may God prove me true—I never have been unfaithful and never shall be. Tomorrow, on the Field of Kossovo, I intend to give my life for Christianity! The unfaithful one sits next to you and sips his cool wine—it is the accursed Vuk Brankovich. Tomorrow is the fine holy day of Vidovdan and we shall see who is true and who untrue! I swear by God Almighty that I shall go to Kossovo, and slay the Turkish Sultan Murat. If God and good luck grant it that I should return to Krushevats unharmed, I shall catch Vuk Brankovich, tie him to the warrior’s lance, as a woman ties wool to her distaff, and thus I shall carry him to the Field of Kossovo!’



MILUTIN, TSAR LAZAR'S SERVANT



Two black ravens, flying from the vast Field of Kossovo, alighted on Tsar Lazar's white tower. One of them crowed as the other said:

'Is this the illustrious Tsar Lazar's tower? Is there nobody in it?'

Only Tsaritsa Militsa heard their voices and walked up to them. 'Tell me in God's name, you two black ravens, where did you come from? Are you coming from the Field of Kossovo? Have you seen two mighty hosts? Have the two hosts fought their battle? Which of them has carried the day?' she asked eagerly.

'Indeed we do come from the Field of Kossovo, Tsaritsa Militsa; we saw the two mighty hosts which fought their battle yesterday. Both Tsars fell in the battle; as for the others, there are some on the Turkish side who survived, but those few who did on the Serbian side are all wounded and bleeding, our lady Tsaritsa Militsa.'

Hardly had they finished speaking when the servant Milutin came, riding a horse all smeared with blood. He carried his right arm in his left, and, moreover, had seventeen wounds on his body.

'What is it, servant Milutin? Have you betrayed your Tsar on the Field of Kossovo?' Tsaritsa Militsa said, seeing him.

'Take me down off this brave charger, my lady Tsaritsa; take me down and wash my face with cool water. Wash me with cool spring water and give me red wine to drink, for heavy are my wounds, my lady Tsaritsa,' said the servant wearily.

Tsaritsa Militsa hastened to help him dismount, washed him with cool water and gave him red wine to drink. Seeing that he had recovered a little, Tsaritsa Militsa asked him anxiously:

‘What happened on the Field of Kossovo, Milutin?

‘Where did our illustrious Tsar Lazar fall?

‘Where did my father, old Yug Bogdan fall?

‘Where did my brothers, the nine Yugovichi fall?

‘Where did Duke Milosh fall?

‘Where did Banovich Strahinya fall?’

‘They all fell and remained on Kossovo for ever, my lady Tsaritsa. Where Tsar Lazar fell, many lances have been broken, battling-lances, Turkish and Serbian, yet more of the Serbian lances were broken defending their lord, their lord and ours, the glorious Tsar Lazar. Old Yug Bogdan, your father, Tsaritsa, fell in the first clash of the two hosts. Your brothers, the eight Yugovichi, fell fighting and avenging each other. Boshko Yugovich outlived them, my lady Tsaritsa; when I left the field, wounded and bleeding, he was still chasing Turkish posses across the field, his silken flag with the holy Cross waving behind him; fierce and proud, he resembled a falcon in pursuit of pigeons.

‘Where the blood was knee-high, that is where Banovich Strahinya fell. As for Milosh, my lady Tsaritsa, he fell by Sitnitsa, the clear river of ice-cold water; many Turks fell there too. Milosh slew the Turkish Sultan Murat and, beside him, twelve thousand Turks. May she who gave life to him be for ever blessed in heaven. He left a memory to the Serbian people, a story to be remembered, a name to be mentioned and cherished as long as there are men in this world, as long as there is Kossovo.

‘As for Vuk Brankovich, my lady Tsaritsa, may he himself and she who gave life to him be accursed for ever! May his seed and his kin be accursed, for he betrayed our Tsar on the Field of Kossovo and took away twelve thousand men, all on horseback with armplates and good arms, my lady Tsaritsa!’





THE FALL OF SERBIA



GREY falcon spread his wings and flew away from Jerusalem, carrying a swallow on his back. That was not a grey falcon, but it was Saint Iliya; and that on his back was not a swallow, but a letter from the Virgin which he was carrying to the Serbian Tsar on Kossovo. He dropped it on the Tsar's knees, and the letter began speaking by itself:

'Honourable Tsar Lazar, what Kingdom will you embrace now? Is it to be the Kingdom of Heaven or the Kingdom of this world? If you choose the earthly one, saddle your horses, tighten the reins! Let all your knights take up their sabres and rush all together among the Turks—all the Turkish hosts will perish by your hands. But if you prefer the Kingdom of Heaven, then build a church on the Field of Kossovo, not with marble but with pure silk and brocades, and let your host take holy communion in it, for they shall all die, and you with them, my Tsar.'

Hearing those words, the Tsar thought to himself:

'O Almighty Lord, what am I to do now? How shall I make up my mind which Kingdom to choose? Shall I embrace the Kingdom of

Heaven, or the earthly one? If I decide to embrace the secular Kingdom, it will not last long, being transitory as all on this earth is, whilst the heavenly one will last through all eternity.'

So the Tsar made up his mind and chose the Kingdom of Heaven. He built the church in Kossovo, as the bird had told him, all of silk and brocades, and not of marble, and invited the Serbian Patriarch as well as his twelve bishops to come and administer the last communion to his hosts.

Hardly had the last soldiers received it when the Turks made an onslaught on the Field of Kossovo. The old Yug Bogdan collected his army, and with his nine sons, the nine Yugovichi, each of them commanding nine thousand men, and with his own twelve thousand besides, he rushed at the Turks. They all fought fiercely and slew seven Pashas; when they were attacking the eighth old Yug Bogdan was slain, and after him fell his nine Yugovichi, his nine sons like nine grey falcons, and with them all their host.

The three lords Murniyavtchevichi rushed into the battlefield now: Despot Uglyesha, Duke Goyko, and King Vukashin, each of them followed by thirty thousand brave soldiers. They fought the Turks bitterly and slew eight Pashas; by the ninth Pasha, two brothers Murniyavtchevichi, Despot Uglyesha and Duke Goyko were killed, and the third one, King Vukashin, was badly wounded. The Turkish cavalry ran over him and their horses finally killed him, trampling upon him. The whole army of these three Serbian lords fell to the last man.

Now the Archduke Stepan made an onslaught, backed by his sixty thousand men. They fought the Turks like angry lions and slew nine Pashas, but as they reached the tenth, the Archduke Stepan was slain, and with him all his sixty thousand soldiers.

The Tsar of all the Serbs, Lazar, rushed among the Turks with his seventy-seven thousand men, chasing the Turks across the vast Field of Kossovo. They were so fiery and brave that it seemed as if they might carry the day. And so it would have been but for Vuk Brankovich who betrayed Tsar Lazar, his own father-in-law. Thus the Tsar perished and with him all his soldiers, the seventy-seven thousand Serbs.

And all that was holy and honourable and agreeable to God the Almighty.



THE MAIDEN OF KOSSOVO



HE maiden of Kossovo rose early of a Sunday; she went out long before sunrise, rolled up her long white sleeves above her elbows, put a bag full of white bread on her shoulders, and took two golden beakers into her hands, one full of cool water and the other of red wine. She went down to the vast Field of Kossovo and walked over the battlefield, looking at the fallen knights and soldiers, turning them over to see whether any of them were still alive. Those who showed signs of life she washed with cool water, gave them the red wine as the holy communion, and fed them with white bread.

Going thus from one warrior to another she came to Pavle Orlovich, the Tsar's young standard-bearer. He, too, was alive but very badly wounded. The maiden dragged him from the pool of blood where he was lying, washed his face and wounds, and gave him wine and bread. After a while, the young knight's blood began to pulse more vigorously in his veins and he spoke to the maiden:

‘My dear sister, maiden of Kossovo, what sad and great misfortune makes you walk across this field and turn over warriors lying in blood? Whom do you seek on this battlefield, young maiden? Is it a brother, a nephew, or perhaps your old father?’

The maiden of Kossovo answered Pavle:

‘My dear brother, unknown warrior, I am not seeking any one of my kindred, either brother, or nephew, or my old father. But perhaps you will be able to tell me what I want to know. When Tsar Lazar had the twelve bishops and thirty monks administering holy communion to his soldiers for three whole weeks, three famous Serbian dukes arrived at the church of Samodrezha. One of them was Duke Milosh, the other Ivan Kossantchich, and the third Milan Toplitsa. I happened to be in the doorway then and saw Duke Milosh approaching the church: what a wondrous sight he was then! His long sabre was clattering on the pavement, and on his head he wore a silk-lined helmet adorned with beautiful plumes. He had a silk scarf round his neck, and a fine cloak on his shoulders; he looked around and, seeing me, took his fine cloak off his shoulders and handed it to me:

‘“Take this cloak, young maiden; by this cloak and by my name remember me, maiden: I shall die in the battle, fighting for our honourable Tsar. Pray for me, my dear soul, pray that I may return unharmed, and if good luck should be with you too, I shall take you as a bride for Milan, Milan my beloved sworn brother, and I shall marry the two of you and be your witness at the wedding, your wedding *koom!*”

‘After him came Ivan Kossantchich: he too was a fine sight to behold. His long, shining sabre hung by his side; a dazzling, plumed helmet adorned his head, and he too had a silken scarf round his neck and a fine cloak on his shoulders. On his finger glistened a large golden ring. He looked round, saw me, and came to me handing me his golden ring with these words:

‘“Take this golden ring, fair maiden; by this ring and by my name remember me, maiden. I, too, am prepared to die on the battlefield, fighting for our honourable Tsar. Pray for me, my dear soul, and if God and good luck wills it that I should return unharmed, I shall take you as a bride for Milan, my sworn brother, and I shall be his best man, his *stari svat* at the wedding.”

‘At last came Milan Toplitsa, arrayed as splendidly as his two sworn brothers; on his arm he carried a fine veil woven of pure golden thread. Seeing me, he took the golden veil off his arm and gave it to me.

“Take this golden veil, fair maiden,” he said; “by this veil and by my name remember me, maiden. I also shall die fighting for our honourable Tsar. Pray for me, my dear soul, for if I come back unharmed, I shall take you for my dear wife.”

‘Thereupon the three dukes went away. It is them I am seeking on this battlefield, unknown warrior.’

Pavle Orlovich shook his head, saying:

‘Can you see, my dear sister, maiden of Kossovo, can you see where those battling-lances are highest and most numerous? Blood was as high as the horse’s reins and the rider’s waist there: that is where all the three of them fell!

‘Go home now, go home, lest you soil your skirts and your sleeves with blood, fair maiden.’

As she heard his words, tears streamed down the maiden’s face and she walked home wailing as loud as her voice would carry:

‘Woe to me, unfortunate that I am! If I was to touch a green pine-tree now, even that would dry up at the touch of my accursed hand!’



THE DEATH OF THE YUGOVICHI'S MOTHER



GOD Almighty, what a wondrous sight that was when the Serbian hosts pressed heavily down upon the Field of Kossovo! The nine young Yugovichi fought there and their father, the old Yug Bogdan, was the tenth Yugovich on the field.

Their mother prayed ardently, imploring God to give her the sharp eyes of a falcon and the mighty wings of a white swan to carry her above the vast Field of Kossovo so that she might see



her nine sons, the nine Yugovichi, and the tenth one, the old Yug Bogdan.

God heard her prayer and granted her the sharp eyes of a falcon and the mighty wings of a white swan, and she flew then as far as Kossovo.

She found them all dead, her nine dear sons, the nine Yugovichi, and the tenth one, the old Yug Bogdan. At their heads, nine battling-lances were stuck in the ground; nine falcons were perched on their lances; nine good chargers were tethered to the lances, and nine angry lions stood by the horses.

When they saw her, the nine horses neighed, the nine angry lions roared, the nine falcons screeched; but the mother made hard her heart and shed not a single tear.

She then loosed the nine horses and the nine angry lions, and collected the nine proud, grey falcons, and returned to her sad white mansion.

Daughters-in-law had been waiting for her and they saw her coming from afar off; they opened the gates and went forth to meet her. When they met, the daughters-in-law saw by her looks what had happened, and the nine widows wept bitterly for their lost husbands; their nine children cried for their fathers; the nine horses neighed for their riders, the nine angry lions roared, and the nine proud grey falcons screeched for their masters. But the mother

made hard her heart even then and shed no tear for her nine sons, the nine Yugovichi and the tenth one, the old Yug Bogdan.

At about midnight, however, Damyan's piebald whinnied in his stable. Calling her daughter-in-law, Damyan's wife, the mother asked:

'Daughter-in-law, and Damyan's beloved, could you tell me, why does Damyan's piebald scream so? Is he hungry for the good and white wheat? Is he thirsty for the Zvetchan water?'

'Mother-in-law, Damyan's own mother, he is not hungry for the good and white wheat, nor is he thirsty for the Zvetchan water, but he has been wont to munch his oats until midnight and then to carry his master off for a ride. He is mourning his dead master now.'

The mother made hard her heart then, too, and shed no tear at those words.

Early next morning two black ravens flew over their white mansion. Strange they were, the ill-fated birds: their wings were blood-bespattered up to their shoulders; their beaks and breasts covered by white foam. They carried a warrior's arm, with a golden ring glistening on the hand; and this they dropped in the mother's lap. The mother of the nine Yugovichi took the arm, and, turning it over in her lap, called her daughter-in-law.

'Daughter-in-law and Damyan's beloved, could you tell me whose arm this might be?'



‘Mother-in-law, Damyan’s own mother, this is the arm of our dear Damyan; I know it only too well, mother, for I know this golden ring. That is Damyan’s wedding ring, dear mother.’

The mother took the hand again, and turned it over and over in her lap, speaking softly:

‘My hand, my dear green apple, where did you grow, and where were you plucked off?’

‘You grew on my own lap, beloved hand, and you were torn off on the Field of Kossovo!’

The mother could stand it no longer. Her heart broke with grief for her nine sons, nine sons, the nine Yugovichi and the tenth one, the old Yug Bogdan.