

INTRODUCTION

Yordan Yovkov was born on November 9th 1880 in the village of Zheravna near Kotel on the southern slopes of the Balkan Mountains, the "Old Mountain" as they are called. It was in Kotel, one of the wide-awake little mountain towns that played such a part in the movement for religious and political freedom during the last century, that Georgi Rakovski the Bulgarian revolutionary and man of letters was born, while Zheravna was the birthplace of Zahari Stoyanov, the revolutionary and author of the best Bulgarian book of memoirs, *Notes on the Bulgarian Uprising*. In that village with its enterprising and alert peasantry Yovkov spent his childhood, there he received his first impressions of the wild beauty of nature, there through direct contact he familiarized himself with the life and manners of the peasants, so well preserved in that purely Bulgarian village, and listened to the legends of the past, of Shibil and Indje, and the great plague, and all that was woven afterwards into the most poetic of all his books, *Legends of the Old Mountain*. After receiving his first schooling in his home village he went to Kotel, and from there to Sofia for his secondary education, finally becoming a schoolmaster in various villages of the Dobrudja, the north-easternmost and most fertile province of Bulgaria, and the granary of the country the "flat Dobrudja" as it is called in folk-songs, where his father had already settled in 1892. There he remained till the Balkan War of 1912, attaching himself to the life and the landscape of that part of Bulgaria, which from 1913 to 1940 was under Roumanian rule. The Dobrudja was later to become an inexhaustible source of inspiration for Yovkov's narratives — it is the subject of his short novel *The Reaper*, of his books of short stories, *The Song of the Wheels*, *Evenings at Antim's Khan*, *A Wo-*