

CHAPTER III.

A FEW days later the lieutenant with his escort pressed forward briskly in the direction of Lubni. After the passage of the Dnieper, they travelled by a broad steppe road which united Chigirin with Lubni, passing through Juki, Semi Mogil, and Khorol. A similar road joined Lubni with Kieff. In times past, before the campaign of the hetman Jolkyevski against Solonitsa, these roads were not in existence. People travelled to Kieff from Lubni by the desert and the steppe; the way to Chigirin was by water, with return by land through Khorol. In general the country beyond the Dnieper, the ancient land of the Pólovtsi, was wild, scarcely more inhabited than the Wilderness, frequently visited by the Tartars, and exposed to Zaporojian bands.

On the banks of the Sula immense forests, which had never been touched by the foot of man, gave forth their voices; and in places also on the low shores of the Sula, the Ruda, Sleporek, Korovai, Orjavets, Psel, and other greater and smaller rivers and streams, marshes were formed, partly grown over with dense thickets and pine forests, and partly open in the form of meadows. In these pine woods and morasses wild beasts of every kind found commodious refuge; and in the deepest forest gloom lived in countless multitudes the bearded aurochs, bears, with wild boars, and near them wolves, lynxes, martens, deer, and wild goats. In the swamps and arms of rivers beavers built their dams. There were stories current among the Zaporojians that of these beavers were some a century old and white as snow from age.

On the elevated dry steppes roamed herds of wild horses, with shaggy foreheads and bloodshot eyes. The rivers were swarming with fish and water-fowl. It was a wonderful land, half asleep, but bearing traces of the former activity of man. It was everywhere filled with the ruins of towns of previous generations; Lubni and Khorol were raised from such ruins as these. Everywhere the country was full of grave-mounds, ancient and modern, covered already with a growth of pine. Here, as in the Wilderness,

ghosts and vampires rose up at night. Old Zaporojians, sitting around their fires, told marvellous tales of what took place in those forest depths, from which issued the howling of unknown beasts, — cries half human, half brute, — terrible sounds as of battle or the chase. Under water was heard the ringing of bells in submerged cities. The land was inhospitable, little accessible, in places too soft, in places suffering from lack of water, — parched, dry, and dangerous to live in; for when men settled down there anyhow and began to cultivate the land, they were swept away by Tartar raids. But it was frequently visited by Zaporojians while hunting — or, as they phrased it, while at “industry” — along all the rivers, ravines, forests, and reedy marshes, searching for beavers in places of which even the existence was known to few.

And still settled life struggled to cling to those regions, like a plant which seizes the ground with its roots wherever it can, and though torn out repeatedly, springs up anew. On desert sites rose towns, settlements, colonies, hamlets, and single dwellings. The earth was fruitful in places, and freedom was enticing. But life bloomed up first when these lands came into possession of the princes Vishnyevetski. Prince Michael, after his marriage with a Moldavian lady, began to put his domain beyond the Dnieper into careful order. He brought in people, settled waste regions, gave exemption from service for thirty years, built monasteries, and introduced his princely authority. Even a settler in that country from a time of unreckoned priority, who considered that he was on his own ground, was willing to descend to the status of a tribute-payer, since for his tribute he came under the powerful protection of the prince who guarded him, — defended him from the Tartars and the men from below, who were often worse than the Tartars. But real activity commenced under the iron hand of young Prince Yeremi. His possessions began immediately outside Chigirin, and ended at Konotóp and Romni. This did not constitute all the wealth of the prince, for beginning at Sandomir his lands lay in the voevodstvos of Volynia, Russia, and Kieff; but his domain beyond the Dnieper was as the eye in his head to the victor of Putívl.

The Tartar lay long in wait on the Oryól or the Vorskla, and sniffed like a wolf before he ventured to urge his horse to the north. The men from below did not attempt attack. The local disorderly bands entered service. Wild, plunder-

ing people, who had long subsisted by violence and raids, now held in check, occupied outposts on the borders, and lying on the boundaries of the state, were like a bull-dog on his chain, threatening intruders with his teeth.

Everything flourished and was full of life. Roads were laid out on the trace of ancient highways; rivers were blocked with dams, built by the captive Tartar or men from below caught robbing with armed hand. The mill now resounded where the wind used to play wildly at night in the reeds, and where wolves howled in company with the ghosts of drowned men. More than four hundred wheels, not counting the numerous windmills, ground grain beyond the Dnieper. More than forty thousand men were tributary to the prince's treasury. The woods swarmed with bees. On the borders new villages, hamlets, and single dwellings were rising continually. On the steppes, by the side of wild herds, grazed whole droves of domestic cattle and horses. The endless monotony of pine groves and steppes was varied by the smoke of cottages, the gilded towers of churches, — Catholic and orthodox. The desert was changed into a peopled land.

Lieutenant Skshetuski travelled on gladly, and without hurry, as if going over his own ground, having plenty of leisure secured to him on the road. It was the beginning of January, 1648; but that wonderful, exceptional winter gave no sign of its approach. Spring was breathing in the air; the earth was soft and shining with the water of melted snow, the fields were covered with green, and the sun shone with such heat on the road at midday that fur coats burdened the shoulders as in summer.

The lieutenant's party was increased considerably in Chigirin, for it was joined by a Wallachian embassy which the hospodar sent to Lubni in the person of Pan Rozvan Ursu. The embassy was attended by an escort, with wagons and servants. Our acquaintance, Pan Longin Podbipienta, with the shield of Zervikaptur, his long sword under his arm, and with a few servants, travelled with Pan Yan.

Sunshine, splendid weather, and the odor of approaching spring filled the heart with gladness; and the lieutenant was the more rejoiced, since he was returning from a long journey to the roof of the prince, which was at the same time his own roof. He was returning having accomplished his mission well, and was therefore certain of a good reception.

There were other causes, also, for his gladness. Besides the good-will of the prince, whom the lieutenant loved with his whole soul, there awaited him in Lubni certain dark eyes. These eyes belonged to Anusia Borzobogata Krasenska, lady-in-waiting to Princess Griselda, the most beautiful maiden among all her attendants; a fearful coquette, for whom every one was languishing in Lubni, while she was indifferent to all. Princess Griselda was terribly strict in deportment and excessively austere in manner, which, however, did not prevent young people from exchanging ardent glances and sighs. Pan Yan, in common with the others, sent his tribute to the dark eyes, and when alone in his quarters he would seize a lute and sing, —

"Thou'rt the daintiest of the dainty;"

or,

"The Tartar seizes people captive;
Thou seizest captive hearts."

But being a cheerful man, and, besides, a soldier thoroughly devoted to his profession, he did not take it too much to heart that Anusia smiled on Pan Bykhovets of the Wallachian regiment, or Pan Vurtsel of the artillery, or Pan Volodyovski of the dragoons, as well as on him, and smiled even on Pan Baranovski of the huzzars, although he was already growing gray, and lisped since his palate had been wounded by a musket-ball. Our lieutenant had even had a sabre duel with Volodyovski for the sake of Anusia; but when obliged to remain too long at Lubni without an expedition against the Tartars, life was tedious there, even with Anusia, and when he had to go on an expedition, he went gladly, without regret or remembrance.

He returned joyfully, however, for he was on his way from the Crimea after a satisfactory arrangement of affairs. He hummed a song merrily, and urged his horse, riding by the side of Pan Longin, who, sitting on an enormous Livonian mare, was thoughtful and serious as usual. The wagons of the embassy escort remained considerably in the rear.

"The envoy is lying in the wagon like a block of wood, and sleeps all the time," said the lieutenant. "He told me wonders of his Wallachian land till he grew tired. I listened, too, with curiosity. It is a rich country, — no use in denying that, — excellent climate, gold, wine, dain-

ties, and cattle in abundance. I thought to myself meanwhile: Our prince is descended from a Moldavian mother, and has as good a right to the throne of the hospodar as any one else; which rights, moreover, Prince Michael claimed. Wallachia is no new country to our warriors; they have beaten the Turks, Tartars, Wallachians, and Transylvanians."

"But the people are of weaker temper than with us, as Pan Zagloba told me in Chigirin," said Pan Longin. "If he is not to be believed, confirmation of what he says may be found in prayer-books."

"How in prayer-books?"

"I have one myself, and I can show it to you, for I always carry one with me."

Having said this, he unbuckled the saddle-straps in front of him, and taking out a small book carefully bound in calfskin, kissed it reverentially; then turning over a few leaves, said, "Read."

Skshetuski began: "'We take refuge under thy protection, Holy Mother of God—' Where is there anything here about Wallachia? What are you talking of? This is an antiphone!"

"Read on farther."

"That we may be worthy of the promises of Christ our Lord. Amen."

"Well, here we've got a question."

Skshetuski read: "'Question: Why is Wallachian cavalry called light? Answer: Because it is light-footed in flight. Amen.' H'm! this is true. Still, there is a wonderful mixture of matters in this book."

"It is a soldiers' book, where, side by side with prayers, a variety of military information is given, from which you may gain knowledge of all nations,—which of them is noblest, and which mean. As to the Wallachians, it appears that they are cowardly fellows, and terrible traitors besides."

"That they are traitors is undoubted, for that is proven by the adventures of Prince Michael. I have heard as a fact that their soldiers are nothing to boast of by nature. But the prince has an excellent Wallachian regiment, in which Bykhovets is lieutenant; but to tell the truth, I don't think it contains even two hundred Wallachians."

"Well, Lieutenant, what do you think? Has the prince many men under arms?"

"About eight thousand, not counting the Cossacks that are at the outposts. But Zatsvilikhovski tells me that new levies are ordered."

"Well, may God give us a campaign under the prince!"

"It is said that a great war against Turkey is in preparation, and that the king himself is going to march with all the forces of the Commonwealth. I know, too, that gifts are withheld from the Tartars, who, I may add, are afraid to stir. I heard of this even in the Crimea, where on this account, I suppose, I was received with such honor for the report is, that if the king moves with the hetmans, Prince Yeremi will strike the Crimea and wipe out the Tartars. It is quite certain they will not confide such an undertaking to any one else."

Pan Longin raised his hands and eyes to heaven.

"May the God of mercy grant such a holy war for the glory of Christianity and our nation, and permit me, sinful man, to fulfil my vow, so that I may receive joy in the struggle or find a praiseworthy death!"

"Have you made a vow, then, concerning the war?"

"I will disclose all the secrets of my soul to such a worthy knight, though the story is a long one; but since you incline a willing ear I will begin. You are aware that the motto on my shield is 'Tear cowl;' and this has the following origin: When my ancestor, Stoveiko Podbipienta, at the battle of Grünwald saw three knights in monks' cowls riding in a row, he dashed up to them and cut the heads off all three with one blow. Touching this glorious deed, the old chroniclers write in great praise of my ancestor."

"Your ancestor had not a lighter hand than you, and he was justly 'Tear cowl.'"

"To him the king granted a coat of arms, and upon it three goat-heads on a silver field in memory of those knights, because the same heads were depicted on their shields. Those arms, together with this sword, my ancestor, Stoveiko Podbipienta, left to his descendants with the injunction to strive to uphold the glory of their race and sword."

"It is not to be denied that you come of gentle stock."

Here Pan Longin began to sigh earnestly; and when he had comforted himself somewhat he continued:—

"Being the last of my race, I made a vow in Troki to the Most Holy Lady to live in continence and not marry till, in

emulation of my ancestor Stoveiko Podbipienta, I should sweep off with this same sword three heads at one blow. Oh, merciful God, thou seest that I have done all in my power. I have preserved my purity to this day; I have commanded a tender heart to be still; I have sought war and I have fought, but without good fortune."

The lieutenant smiled under his mustache. "And you have not taken off three heads?"

"No! it has not come to pass! No luck! Two at a blow I have taken more than once, but never three. I've never been able to come up to them, and it would be hard to ask enemies to stand in line for a blow. God knows my grief. There is strength in my bones, I have wealth, youth is passing away, I am approaching my forty-fifth year, my heart rushes forth in affection, my family is coming to an end, and still the three heads are not there! Such a Zervikap-tur am I. A laughing-stock for the people, as Pan Zagloba truly remarks. All of which I endure patiently and offer to the Lord."

The Lithuanian began again to sigh, noticing which his Livonian mare from sympathy for her master fell to groaning and snorting.

"Well, I can only tell you," said the lieutenant, "if you do not find an opportunity under Prince Yeremi, then you will find it nowhere."

"God grant!" answered Podbipienta; "this is why I am going to beg a favor of the prince."

Further conversation was interrupted by an unusual sound of wings. As has been stated, birds of passage did not go beyond the sea that winter; the rivers did not freeze over, therefore the whole country was full of water-fowl, especially over the marshes. Just as the lieutenant and Pan Longin were approaching the bank of the Kagamlik there was a sudden rushing noise above their heads of a whole flock of storks, which flew so near the ground that it was almost possible to strike them with a stick. The flock flew with a tremendous outcry, and instead of settling in the reeds rose unexpectedly through the air.

"They rush as if hunted," said Skshetuzki.

"Ah, see!" said Pan Longin, pointing to a white bird which, cutting the air in sidelong flight, tried to overtake the flock.

"A falcon stops them from alighting," said the lieutenant.

"The envoy has a falcon; it must be that he has let her out."

At that moment Pan Rozvan Ursu rode up at full speed on a black Anatolian steed, and after him a number of his service.

"I beg you to come to the sport, Lieutenant," said he.

"This falcon is yours, then?"

"Yes, and a very noble bird, as you will see."

All three rushed forward, followed by the Wallachian falconer with a hoop, who, fixing his eyes on the bird, shouted with all his might, urging her to the struggle.

The valiant bird immediately forced the flock to rise in the air, and then in a flash shot up still higher and hung over it. The storks arranged themselves in one enormous circle, making the noise of a storm with their wings. They filled the air with terrible cries, stretched their necks, pointed their bills upward like lances, and waited the attack. The falcon circled above them, at one time descending, at another rising, as if hesitating to sweep down since a hundred sharp beaks were waiting for her breast. Her white plumage, shone on by rays of light, gleamed like the sun itself on the clear blue of the sky. Suddenly, instead of rushing on the flock, the falcon darted like an arrow into the distance, and disappeared at once behind the trees and the reeds.

Skshetuzki at first rushed after her at full speed. The envoy, the falconer, and Longin followed his example.

At the crossing of the roads the lieutenant checked his horse. A new and wonderful sight met his eye. In the middle of the road a carriage lay on its side with a broken axle. Horses detached from the carriage were held by two Cossacks. There was no driver at hand; he had evidently gone for assistance. At the side of the carriage stood two women. One wore a fox-skin cloak and a round-topped cap of the same material; her face was stern and masculine. The other was a young lady of tall stature, and gentle features of great regularity. On the shoulder of the young lady the falcon was sitting quietly. Having parted the feathers on her breast, the bird was stroking them with her bill.

The lieutenant reined in his horse till its hoofs dug into the sand of the road, and raised his hand to his cap in uncertainty, not knowing what to say, — whether to greet the ladies or to speak to the falcon. He was confused also because there looked upon him from under a marten-skin hood eyes such as he had never seen in his life, — black, satin-like, liquid, full of life and fire, — near which the eyes of

Anusia Borzobogata would be as a tallow candle before a torch. Above those eyes dark velvety brows were defined in two delicate arches; her blushing face bloomed like the most beautiful flower, and through her slightly opened lips of raspberry hue were seen teeth like pearls, and from under her hood flowed out rich dark tresses.

"Are you Juno in person or some other divinity?" thought the lieutenant, seeing the form straight as an arrow, the swelling bosom, and the white falcon on her shoulder. Our lieutenant stood with uncovered head and forgot himself as before a marvellous image; his eyes gleamed, and something, as if with a hand, seized his heart, and he was about to begin, "If you are a mortal and not a divinity," when the envoy, the falconer with his hoop, and Pan Longin came up. On seeing them the goddess held her hand to the falcon, which, leaving the shoulder, came to the hand at once, shifting from foot to foot.

The lieutenant, anticipating the falconer, wished to remove the bird, when suddenly a wonderful omen was seen. The falcon, leaving one foot on the hand of the lady, caught with the other hand of the lieutenant, and instead of going to it began to scream joyfully and pull the hands together with such power that they touched. A quiver ran over the lieutenant. The bird allowed herself to be taken only after being hooded by the falconer. Then the old lady began to speak.

"Gentlemen!" said she, "whoever you are, you will not deny your assistance to women who, left helpless on the road, know not themselves what to do. It is no more than fifteen miles to our house; but the carriage is broken, and we shall surely have to spend the night in the field. I hurried off the driver to have my sons send even a wagon; but before he reaches the house and returns, darkness will come, and it is a terrible thing to be out in this place, for there are graves in the neighborhood."

The old lady spoke rapidly and with such a rough voice that the lieutenant was astonished; still he answered politely, —

"Do not think that we should leave you and your beautiful daughter without assistance. We are going to Lubni, for we are soldiers in the service of Prince Yeremi, and likely our roads are in the same direction; and even if they are not, we shall be glad to go out of our way in case our assistance is acceptable. As to a carriage I have none, for



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"THE FALCON BEGAN TO DRAW THE HANDS TOGETHER."

From a drawing by J. Wages.

with my companions I am travelling, soldier-fashion, on horseback; but the envoy has, and being an affable gentleman will be glad, I think, to put it at the service of yourself and your daughter."

The envoy removed his sable cap, for knowing the Polish language he understood the conversation, and with a delicate compliment as became a gracious boyar, he yielded his carriage to the ladies, and straightway ordered the falconer to gallop for it to the wagons, which had lagged considerably in the rear. Meanwhile the lieutenant looked at the young lady, who, unable to endure his eager glance, dropped her eyes; and the elderly lady, who had a Cossack face, continued, —

"God reward you, gentlemen, for your assistance; and since there is still a long road to Lubni, do not reject my roof and that of my sons, under which we shall be glad to see you. We are from Rozlogi-Siromakhi. I am the widow of Prince Kurtsevich Bulyga; and this is not my daughter, but the daughter of the elder Kurtsevich, brother of my husband, who left his orphan to our care. My sons are not all at home this moment, and I am returning from Cherkasi, where I was performing devotions at the altar of the Holy Mother, and on our way back this accident has met us, and were it not for your politeness, gentlemen, we should undoubtedly have to pass the night on the road."

The princess would have said still more, but at that moment the wagons appeared in the distance, approaching at a trot, surrounded by a crowd of the envoy's retinue and the soldiers of Pan Yan.

"Then you are the widow of Prince Vassily Kurtsevich?" asked the lieutenant.

"No!" retorted the princess, quickly and as if in anger; "I am the widow of Constantine, and this is the daughter of Vassily," said she, pointing to the young lady.

"They speak of Prince Vassily often in Lubni. He was a great soldier, and a confidant of the late Prince Michael."

"I have not been in Lubni," said she, with a certain haughtiness. "Of his military virtues I have no knowledge. There is no need of mentioning his later acts, since all know what they were."

Hearing this, Princess Helena dropped her head on her breast like a flower cut with a scythe, and the lieutenant answered quickly, —

"Do not say that, madam. Prince Vassily, sentenced,

through a terrible error in the administration of human justice, to the loss of life and property, was forced to save himself by flight; but later his entire innocence was discovered. By the publication of this innocence he was restored to honor as a virtuous man; and the greater the injustice done him, the greater should be his glory."

The princess glanced quickly at the lieutenant, and in her disagreeable sharp face anger was clearly expressed. But though Skshetuski was a young man, he had so much knightly dignity and such a clear glance that she did not dare to dispute him; she turned instead to Princess Helena.

"It is not proper for you to hear these things," said she. "Go and see that the luggage is removed from our carriage to the equipage in which, with the permission of these gentlemen, we are to ride."

"You will allow me to help you," said the lieutenant to Princess Helena.

Both went to the carriage; but as soon as they stood opposite, at the doors on each side of it, the princess raised the lashes of her eyes, and her glance fell upon the face of the lieutenant like a bright, warm ray of the sun.

"How can I thank you," said she, in a voice which to him seemed music as sweet as the sound of lyres and flutes, — "How can I thank you for defending the good name of my father against the injustice which is put upon it by his nearest relatives?"

The lieutenant felt his heart melting like snow in spring-time, and answered: "May God be as good to me as I am ready to rush into the fire or shed my blood for such thanks, though the service is so slight that I ought not to accept a reward."

"If you condemn my thanks, then I, poor orphan, have no other way to show my gratitude."

"I do not condemn them," said he, with growing emphasis; "but for such favor I wish to perform true and enduring service, and I only beg you to accept me for that service."

The princess, hearing these words, blushed, was confused, then suddenly grew pale, raised her hands to her face, and said in a sad voice: "Such a service could bring only misfortune to you."

The lieutenant bent through the door of the carriage, and spoke quietly and feelingly: "Let it bring what God gives;

even should it bring suffering, still I am ready to fall at your feet and beg for it."

"It cannot be that you, who have just seen me for the first time, should conceive such a great desire for that service."

"I had scarcely seen you when I had forgotten myself altogether, and I see that it has come to the soldier hitherto free to be changed to a captive; but such clearly is the will of God. Love is like an arrow which pierces the breast unexpectedly; and now I feel its sting, though yesterday I should not have believed this if any man had told it me."

"If you could not have believed it yesterday, how am I to believe it to-day?"

"Time will convince you best; but you can see my sincerity even now, not only in my words but in my face."

Again the princess raised her eyes, and her glance met the manly and noble face of the young soldier, and his look, so full of rapture that a deep crimson covered her face. But she did not lower her glance, and for a time he drank in the sweetness of those wonderful eyes, and they looked at each other like two beings who, though they have met merely on the highroad through the steppe, feel in a flash that they have chosen each other, and that their souls begin to rush to a meeting like two doves.

The moment of exaltation was disturbed for them by the sharp voice of Constantine's widow calling to the princess. The carriages had arrived. The attendants began to transfer the packages from the carriages, and in a moment everything was ready. Pan Rozvan Ursu, the gracious boyar, gave up his own carriage to the two ladies, the lieutenant mounted his horse, and all moved forward.

The day was nearing its rest. The swollen waters of the Kagamlik were bright with gold of the setting sun, and purple of the evening light. High in the heavens flocks of small clouds reddening drifted slowly to the horizon, as if, tired from flying through the air, they were going to sleep somewhere in an unknown cradle.

Pan Yan rode by the side of Princess Helena, but without conversation, since he could not speak to her before strangers as he had spoken a few moments before, and frivolous words would not pass his lips now. But in his heart he felt happiness, and in his head something sounding as if from wine.

The whole caravan pushed on briskly, and quiet was

broken only by the snorting of the horses or the clank of stirrup against stirrup. After a time the escort at the rear wagons began a plaintive Wallachian song; soon, however, they stopped, and immediately the nasal voice of Pan Longin was heard singing piously, —

"In heaven I caused an endless light to dwell,
And mist I spread o'er all the earth."

That moment it grew dark, the stars twinkled in the sky, and from the damp plains white mists rose, boundless as the sea.

They entered a forest, but had gone only a few furlongs when the sound of horses' feet was heard and five riders appeared before the caravan. They were the young princes, who, informed by the driver of the accident which had happened to their mother, were hurrying to meet her, bringing a wagon drawn by four horses.

"Is that you, my sons?" called out the old princess.

The riders approached the carriage. "We, mother!"

"Come this way! Thanks to these gentlemen, we need no more assistance. These are my sons, whom I commend to your favor, gentlemen, — Simeon, Yury, Andrei, Nikolai — And who is the fifth?" asked she, looking around attentively. "Oh! if my old eyes can see in the darkness, it is Bogun."

The princess drew back quickly to the depth of the carriage.

"Greetings to you, Princess, and to you, Princess Helena!" said the fifth.

"Ah, Bogun! You have come from the regiment, my falcon? And have you brought your lute? Welcome, welcome! Well, my sons, I have asked these gentlemen to spend the night with us at Rozlogi; and now greet them! A guest in the house is God in the house. Be gracious to our house, gentlemen!"

The young men removed their caps. "We entreat you most respectfully to cross our lowly threshold."

"They have already promised me, — the envoy has promised and the lieutenant. We shall receive honorable guests, but I am not sure that our poor fare will be savory for men accustomed to castle dainties."

"We are reared on the fare of soldiers, not of castles," said SkshetSKI.

And Pan Rozvan added: "I have tried the hospitality of

country-houses, and know that it is better than that of castles."

The carriages moved on, and the old princess continued: "Our best days have passed long ago. In Volynia and Lithuania there are still members of the Kurtsevich family who have retinues of attendants and live in lordly fashion, but they do not recognize their poor relations, for which God punish them. We live in real Cossack poverty, which you must overlook, and accept with a good heart what we offer with sincerity. I and my five sons live on one village and a few hamlets, and in addition we have this young lady to care for."

These words astonished the lieutenant not a little, for he had heard in Lubni that Rozlogi was no small estate, and also that it belonged to Prince Vassily, the father of Helena. He did not deem it proper, however, to inquire how the place had passed into the hands of Constantine and his widow.

"Then you have five sons, Princess?" asked Pan Rozvan Ursu.

"I had five, all like lions," answered she; "but the infidels in Belgorod put out the eyes of the eldest, Vassily, with torches, wherefore his mind has failed him. When the young men go on an expedition I stay at home with him and this young lady, with whom I have more suffering than comfort."

The contemptuous tone with which the princess spoke of her niece was so evident that it did not escape the attention of the lieutenant. His breast boiled up in anger, and he had almost allowed an unseemly oath to escape him; but the words died on his lips when he looked at the young princess, and in the light of the moon saw her eyes filled with tears.

"What has happened? Why do you weep?" asked he, in a low voice.

She was silent.

"I cannot endure to see you weep," said Pan Yan, and bent toward her. Seeing that the old princess was conversing with the envoy and not looking toward him, he continued: "In God's name, speak but one word, for I would give blood and health to comfort you!"

All at once he felt one of the horsemen press against him so heavily that the horses began to rub their sides together. Conversation with the princess was interrupted. Skshe-

tuski, astonished and also angered, turned to the intruder. By the light of the moon he saw two eyes, which looked at him insolently, defiantly, sneeringly. Those terrible eyes shone like those of a wolf in a dark forest.

"What devil is that?" thought the lieutenant, — "a demon or who?" And then, looking closely into those burning eyes, he asked: "Why do you push on me with you horse, and dig your eyes into me?"

The horseman did not answer, but continued to look with equal persistence and insolence.

"If it is dark, I can strike a light; and if the road is too narrow, then to the steppe with you!" said the lieutenant, in a distinct voice.

"Off with you from the carriage, Pole, if you see the steppe!" answered the horseman.

The lieutenant, being a man quick of action, instead of an answer struck his foot into the side of his enemy's horse with such force that the beast groaned and in a moment was on the very edge of the road.

The rider reined him in on the spot, and for a moment it seemed that he was about to rush on the lieutenant; but that instant the sharp, commanding voice of the old princess resounded.

"Bogun, what's the matter?"

These words had immediate effect. Bogun whirled his horse around, and passed to the other side of the carriage to the princess, who continued: "What is the matter? You are not in Pereyaslav nor the Crimea, but in Rozlogi. Remember this! But now gallop ahead for me, conduct the carriages; the ravine is at hand, and it is dark. Hurry on, you vampire!"

Skshetuski was astonished, as well as vexed. Bogun evidently sought a quarrel and would have found it; but why did he seek it, — whence this unexpected attack? The thought flashed through the lieutenant's mind that Princess Helena had something to do with this; and he was confirmed in the thought, for, looking at her face, he saw, in spite of the darkness, that it was pale, and evident terror was on it.

Bogun spurred forward immediately in obedience to the command of the princess, who, looking after him, said half to herself and half to Pan Yan, —

"That's a madcap, a Cossack devil."

"It is evident that he is not in his full mind," answered

the lieutenant, contemptuously. "Is that Cossack in the service of your sons?"

The old princess threw herself back in the seat.

"What do you mean? Why, that is Bogun, lieutenant-colonel, a famous hero, a friend of my sons, and adopted by me as a sixth son. Impossible that you have not heard his name, for all know of him."

This name was, in fact, well known to Pan Yan. From among the names of various colonels and Cossack atamans this one had come to the top, and was on every lip on both banks of the Dnieper. Blind minstrels sang songs of Bogun in market-places and shops, and at evening meetings they told wonders about the young leader. Who he was, whence he had come, was known to no man. This much was certain, — the steppes, the Dnieper, the Cataracts, and Chertomelik, with its labyrinth of narrows, arms, islands, rocks, ravines, and reeds, had been his cradle. From childhood he had lived and communed with that wild world.

In time of peace he went with others to fish and hunt, battered through the windings of the Dnieper, wandered over swamps and reeds with a crowd of half-naked comrades; then again he spent whole months in forest depths. His school was in raids to the Wilderness on the herds of the Tartars, in ambushes, battles, campaigns against Tartar coast towns, against Belgorod, Wallachia, or with boats on the Black Sea. He knew no days but days on his horse, no nights but nights at a steppe fire.

Soon he became the favorite of the entire lower country, a leader of others, and surpassed all men in daring. He was ready to go with a hundred horse even to Bageche Sarai, and start up a blaze under the very eyes of the Khan; he burned Tartar towns and villages, exterminated the inhabitants, tore captive murzas to pieces with horses, came down like a tempest, passed by like death. On the sea he fell upon Turkish galleys with frenzy, swept down upon the centre of Budjak, — rushed into the lion's mouth, as 't is said. Some of his expeditions were simple madness. Men less daring, less fond of danger, perished impaled on stakes in Stamboul, or rotted at the oar on Turkish galleys; he always escaped unhurt, and with rich booty. It was said that he had collected immense treasures, which he had hidden in the reeds of the Dnieper; but it was also seen more than once how with muddy boots he had stamped upon cloth of gold, and spread carpets under the hoofs of

his horse, — how, dressed in satin, he had spotted himself with tar, on purpose to show Cossack contempt for these lordly stuffs.

He never warmed any place long. Caprice was the motive of his deeds. At times, when he came to Chigirin, Cherkasi, or Pereyasláv, he had terrible frolics with other Zaporojians; at times he lived like a monk, spoke to no man, escaped to the steppe. Then again he surrounded himself with blind minstrels, and listened to their songs and stories for days at a time, heaping gold on them. Among nobles he knew how to be a polished cavalier; among Cossacks he was the wildest of Cossacks. In knightly company he was a knight; among robbers, a robber. Some held him to be insane; for he was an unbridled, mad spirit. Why he was living in the world, what he wanted, whither he was tending, whom he served, he knew not himself. He served the steppes, the whirlwinds, war, love, his own fancy. This fancy of his distinguished him from all the other rule leaders, and from the whole robber herd who had only plunder as an object, and for whom it was the same whether they plundered Tartars or their own. Bogun took plunder, but preferred war to pillage; he was in love with peril for its own charm; he gave gold for songs; he hunted for glory, and cared for no more.

Of all leaders, he alone personified best the Cossack knight; therefore songs had sought him out as a favorite, and his name was celebrated throughout the whole Ukraine.

He had recently become the Pereyasláv lieutenant-colonel, but he exercised the power of colonel; for old Loboda held the baton feebly in his stiffening hand.

Pan Yan, therefore, knew well who Bogun was, and if he asked the old princess whether the Cossack was in the service of her sons, he did it through studied contempt; for he felt in him an enemy, and in spite of all the reputation of Bogun, his blood boiled up because the Cossack had begun with him so insolently. He understood, too, that what had been begun would not end in a trifle. But Skshetuski was as unbending as an axle, self-confident to excess, yielding before nothing, and really eager for danger. He was ready even that moment to urge his horse after Bogun, but he rode near the princess. Besides, the wagon had already passed the ravine, and lights were gleaming in Rozlogi.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Kurtsevichi Bulygi were of an ancient princely stock which used the escutcheon of Kurts, claimed to be from Koryat, but was really from Rurik. Of the two main lines, one lived in Lithuania, the other in Volynia, till Prince Vassily, one of the numerous descendants of the Volynian line, settled beyond the Dnieper. Being poor, he did not wish to remain among his powerful relatives, and entered the service of Prince Michael Vishnyevetski, father of the renowned "Yarema."¹

Having covered himself with glory in that service, he received from the latter, as a permanent possession, Krasnie Rozlogi, which subsequently, by reason of its vast number of wolves, was called Volchie Rozlogi; and there he settled for good. He went over to the Latin rite in 1629, and married a lady of a distinguished Austrian family of Italian descent. From that marriage a daughter, Helena, came into the world a year later, her mother dying at her birth. Prince Vassily, without thinking of a second marriage, gave himself up altogether to the management of his land and the rearing of his only daughter. He was a man of great character and uncommon virtue. Having acquired a moderate fortune rather rapidly, he remembered at once his eldest brother Constantine, who, rejected by his powerful family, remained in Volynia, and was obliged to live on rented land. He brought him, with his wife and five sons, to Rozlogi, and shared every bit of bread with him.

The two Kurtsevichi lived in this way quietly till the end of 1634, when Vassily went with King Vladislav to the siege of Smolensk, where that unfortunate event took place which caused his ruin. In the royal camp was intercepted a letter written to Sheyin (the Russian commander), signed with the name of the prince, with the seal of Kurts added. Such a clear proof of treason on the part of a knight who till then had enjoyed an unspotted fame, astonished and confounded every one. It was in vain that Vassily called God to witness that neither the hand nor the signature on the paper was his; the arms of Kurts on the seal removed

¹ This is the popular form in Little Russian; therefore it is quoted.