

"You'll get it next quarter. So you were in Pereyasláv?"
 "I was, but did n't find Bogun. Old Colonel Loboda is sick. They say Bogun will succeed him soon. But something strange is going on. Hardly a handful of Cossacks have remained in the regiment; the others, they say, have gone after Bogun, or run away to the Saitch; and this is very important, for some rebellion is on foot. I wanted to know something certain about Bogun, but all they told me was that he had crossed to the Russian bank.¹ 'Well,' thought I, 'if that is true, then our princess is safe from him;' and I returned."

"You did well. Had you any adventures on the road?"
 "No, but I want awfully to eat something."

Jendzian went out; and the lieutenant, being alone, began to read Helena's letter again, and to press to his lips those characters that were not so shapely as the hand that had penned them. Confidence entered his heart, and he thought, —

"The road will soon dry, if God gives good weather. The Kurtsevichi, too, knowing that Bogun has nothing, will be sure not to betray me. I will leave Rozlogi to them, and add something of my own to get that dear little star."

He dressed with a bright face, and with a bosom full of happiness went to the chapel to thank God humbly for the good news.

¹ The right bank of the Dnieper was called Russian; the left, Tartar.

CHAPTER VI.

OVER the whole Ukraine and beyond the Dnieper strange sounds began to spread like the heralds of a coming tempest; certain wonderful tidings flew from village to village, from farmhouse to farmhouse, — like those plants which the breezes of spring push along the steppes, and which the people call field-rollers. In the towns there were whispers of some great war, though no man knew who was going to make war, nor against whom. Still the tidings were told. The faces of people became unquiet. The tiller of the soil went with his plough to the field unwillingly, though the spring had come early, mild and warm, and long since the larks had been singing over the steppes. Every evening people gathered in crowds in the villages, and standing on the road, talked in undertones of terrible things. Blind men wandering around with lyres and songs were asked for news. Some persons thought they saw in the night-time reflections in the sky, and that a moon redder than usual rose from behind the pine woods. Disaster or the death of the king was predicted. And all this was the more wonderful, since fear found no easy approach to those lands, long accustomed to disturbances, conflicts, and raids. Some exceptionally ominous currents must have been playing in the air, since the alarm had become universal.

It was the more oppressive and stifling, because no one was able to point out the danger. But among the signs of evil omen, two especially seemed to show that really something was impending. First, an unheard-of multitude of old minstrels appeared in all the villages and towns, and among them were forms strange, and known to no one; these, it was whispered, were counterfeit minstrels. These men, strolling about everywhere, told with an air of mystery that the day of God's judgment and anger was near. Secondly, the men of the lower country began to drink with all their might.

The second sign was the more serious. The Saitch, confined within too narrow limits, was unable to feed all its inhabitants; expeditions were not always successful; besides,

the steppes yielded no bread to the Cossacks. In time of peace, therefore, a multitude of Zaporojians scattered themselves yearly over the inhabited districts. The Ukraine, and indeed all Russia, was full of them. Some rose to be land stewards; some sold liquor on the highways; some labored in hamlets and towns, in trade and industry. In every village there was sure to be a cottage on one side, at a distance from the rest, in which a Zaporojian dwelt. Some of them had brought their wives with them, and kept house in these cottages. But the Zaporojian, as a man who usually had passed through every experience, was generally a benefactor to the village in which he lived. There were no better blacksmiths, wheelwrights, tanners, wax-refiners, fishermen, and hunters than they. The Cossack understood everything, did everything; he built a house, he sewed a saddle. But the Cossacks were not always such quiet inhabitants, for they lived a temporary life. Whoever wished to carry out a decision with armed hand, to make an attack on a neighbor, or to defend himself from an expected attack, had only to raise the cry, and straightway the Cossacks hurried to him like ravens to a ready spoil. The nobility and magnates, involved in endless disputes among themselves, employed the Cossacks. When there was a lack of such undertakings the Cossacks stayed quietly in the villages, working with all diligence, earning their daily bread in the sweat of their brows.

They would continue in this fashion for a year or two, till sudden tidings came of some great expedition, either of an ataman against the Tartars or the Poles, or of Polish noblemen against Wallachia; and that moment the wheelwrights, blacksmiths, tanners, and wax-refiners would desert their peaceful occupations, and begin to drink with all their might in every dram-shop of the Ukraine. After they had drunk away everything, they would drink on credit,—not on what they had, but on what they would have. Future booty must pay for the frolic.

This phenomenon was repeated so regularly that after a while people of experience in the Ukraine used to say: "The dram-shops are bursting with men from below; something is on foot in the Ukraine."

The starostas strengthened the garrisons in the castles at once, looking carefully to everything; the magnates increased their retinues; the nobility sent their wives and children to the towns.

That spring the Cossacks began to drink as never before, squandering at random all they had earned, not in one district, not in one province, but throughout all Russia,—the length and the breadth of it.

Something was on foot, indeed, though the men from below had no idea of what it was. People had begun to speak of Hmelnitski, of his flight to the Saitech, of the men from Cherkasi, Boguslav, Korsún, and other places who had followed him; but something else was talked of too. For years reports had been current of a great war with the Pagans,—a war desired by the king to give booty to the Cossacks, but opposed by the Poles. This time all reports were blended, and roused in the brains of men uneasiness and the expectation of something uncommon.

This uneasiness penetrated the walls of Lubni also. It was not proper to shut one's eyes to such signs, and Prince Yeremi especially had not that habit. In his domain the disturbance did not really come to an outbreak, fear kept all within bounds; but for some time reports had been coming from the Ukraine, that here and there peasants were beginning to resist the nobles, that they were killing Jews, that they wished to force their own enrolment for war against the Pagans, and that the number of deserters to the Saitech was increasing continually.

The prince sent envoys in various directions,—to Pan Pototski, to Pan Kalinovski, to Loboda in Pereyasláv,—and collected in person the herds from the steppes and the troops from the outposts. Meantime peaceful news was brought. The Grand Hetman communicated all that he knew concerning Hmelnitski; he did not think, however, that any storm could rise out of the affair. The full hetman wrote that the rabble were accustomed "to bustle in spring like bees." Zatsvilikhovski was the only man who sent a letter imploring the prince to underestimate nothing, for a mighty storm was coming on from the Wilderness. He wrote that Hmelnitski had hurried to the Crimea to ask assistance of the Khan.

"And as friends from the Saitech inform me," wrote he, "the koshevoi is collecting the army, horse and foot, from all the meadows and streams, telling no one why he does it. I think, therefore, that this storm will come on us. If it comes with Tartar aid, then God save all Russian lands from ruin!"

The prince had more confidence in Zatsvilikhovski than

in the hetmans, for he knew that no one in all Russia had such knowledge of the Cossacks and their devices as he. He determined, therefore, to concentrate as many troops as possible, and also to get to the bottom of the truth.

One morning he summoned to his presence the lieutenant of the Wallachian regiment, Pan Bykhovets, to whom he said, —

"You will go for me to the Saitch on a mission to the koshevoi, and give him this letter with the seal of my lordship. But that you may know what plan of action to follow, I tell you this letter is a pretext, and the whole meaning of the mission lies in your own wit. You are to see everything that is done there, — what troops they have assembled, and whether they are assembling more. I enjoin you specially to win some people to your person, and find out for me carefully all about Hmelnitski, — where he is, and if it is true that he has gone to the Crimea to ask aid of the Tartars. Do you understand what I say?"

"As if it had been written on the palm of my hand."

"You will go by Chigirin. Rest but one night on the way. When you arrive, go to Zatsvilikhovski for letters, which you will deliver secretly to his friends in the Saitch. They will tell you all they know. From Chigirin you will go by water to Kudák. Give my respects with this letter to Pan Grodzitski. He will issue orders to convey you over the Cataracts by proper guides. Be fearless in the Saitch, keep your eyes and ears open, and come back if you survive, for the expedition is no easy one."

"Your Highness is the steward of my blood. Shall I take many men?"

"You will take forty attendants. Start to-day; before evening come for further instructions. Your mission is important."

Pan Bykhovets went out rejoicing. In the antechamber he met Skshetuski with some artillery officers.

"Well, what is going on?" asked they.

"I take the road to-day."

"Where, where?"

"To Chigirin, and from there farther on."

"Then come with me," said Pan Yan.

And taking him to his quarters, he began to tease him to transfer his mission to him.

"As my friend," said he, "ask what you like, — a Turkish horse, an Arab steed, — you shall have one. I'll spare

nothing if I can only go, for my soul is rushing out in that direction. If you want money I'll give it, if you will only yield. The trip will bring you no glory; for if war breaks out it will begin here, and you may be killed in the Saitch. I know, too, that Anusia is as dear to you as to others; if you go they will get her away from you."

This last argument went home to the mind of Pan Bykhovets more than any other, but still he resisted. What would the prince say if he should withdraw? Would n't he take it ill of him? An appointment like this was such a favor.

Hearing this, Skshetuski rushed off to the prince and directed the page at once to announce him.

The page returned soon with the answer that the prince permitted him to enter.

The lieutenant's heart beat like a hammer, from fear that he should hear a curt "No!" after which he would be obliged to let the matter drop entirely.

"Well, what have you to say?" asked the prince, looking at the lieutenant.

Skshetuski bent down to his feet.

"Mighty prince, I have come to implore you most humbly to intrust me with the expedition to the Saitch. Bykhovets would give it up, perhaps, for he is my friend, and to me it is as important as life. Bykhovets' only fear is that you may be angry with him for yielding the place."

"As God lives!" said the prince, "I should have sent no one else, but I thought you would not like to go just after returning from a long journey."

"I should rejoice to be sent even every day in that direction."

The prince looked at him very attentively with his black eyes, and after a while inquired: "What have you got there?"

The lieutenant grew confused, like a culprit unable to bear a searching glance.

"I must tell the truth, I see," said he, "since no secret can stand before your reason. Of one thing I am not sure, — your favorable hearing."

Thereupon he began to tell how he had become acquainted with the daughter of Prince Vassily, had fallen in love with her and would like to visit her, and on his return from the Saitch to Lubni to remove and save her from Cossack turmoil and the importunities of Bogun. But he said nothing

of the machinations of the old princess, for in this he was bound by his word. He began then to beg the prince so earnestly to give him the mission confided to Bykhovets, that Vishnyevetski said, —

"I should permit you to go on your own account and give you men; but since you have planned everything so cleverly that your personal affection agrees with your office, I must arrange this affair for you."

Then he clapped his hands and commanded the page to call Pan Bykhovets.

The lieutenant kissed the prince's hand with joy. Yermi took him by the head and commanded him to be quiet. He loved Skshetuski beyond measure as a splendid soldier and officer whom he could trust in all things. Besides, there was between them that bond which is formed between a subordinate reverencing his chief with his whole soul and a chief who feels this clearly. There were not a few courtiers and flatterers who circled around the prince for their own profit; but the eagle eye of Yermi knew well whom to choose. He knew that Pan Yan was a man without blemish; he valued him, and was grateful to him for his feelings. He rejoiced, too, that his favorite had fallen in love with the daughter of the old servant of the Vishnyevetskis, Vassily Kurtsevich, whose memory was the dearer because of its sadness.

"It was not from ungratefulness to the prince," said he, "that I made no inquiry concerning his daughter. Since the guardians did not visit Lubni, and I received no complaint against them, I supposed they were good people. But as you have put me in mind of the lady, I will care for her as for my own daughter."

Skshetuski, hearing this, could not admire sufficiently the kindness of the prince, who reproached himself, notwithstanding the multitude of his occupations, with inattention to the child of his former soldier and official.

Bykhovets now came in.

"Well," said the prince, "my word is given, and if you wish to go you will go; but I ask you to do this for me: yield your mission to Skshetuski, — he has his own special and solid reasons for wanting it, — and I will think of another reward for you."

"Oh, your Highness," said Bykhovets, "your favor is great; for while able to command, you ask that which if I refused to give I should be unworthy of your favor."

"Thank your friend," said the prince, turning to Pan Yan, "and prepare for the road."

Skshetuski thanked Bykhovets heartily indeed, and in a few hours he was ready. For some time it had been irksome for him in Lubni, and this expedition accorded with all his wishes. First, he was to see Helena. True, he had to go from her for a long time; but just such an interval was needed to make the roads passable for wheels, after such measureless rains. The princess and Helena could not come earlier to Lubni. Skshetuski therefore must either wait in Lubni or live at Rozlogi, — which would be against his covenant with the princess, and, what was more, rouse the suspicions of Bogun. Helena could be really safe against his attacks only in Lubni; but since she must in every case wait some time yet in Rozlogi, it appeared best to Pan Yan to depart, and on his return take her under the protection of the armed power of the prince. Having settled the matter thus, the lieutenant hastened his journey, — got everything ready, took letters and instructions from the prince, money for expenses from the treasurer, and made a good start over the road before night, having with him Jendzian and forty horsemen from the Cossack regiment.

CHAPTER VII.

It was now the second half of March; the grass was growing luxuriantly, the field-roller was blooming, the steppe was stirring with life. In the morning the lieutenant, travelling at the head of his men, rode as if over a sea whose moving wave was the wind-stirred grass. Every place was filled with joy and the voices of spring,—chirruping, whistling, clattering, the shaking of wings, the glad hum of insects; the steppe sounded like a lyre touched by the hand of the Lord. Above the heads of the horsemen floated falcons motionless in the blue ether, like suspended crosses, triangles of wild geese, lines of storks; and on the ground the coursing of flocks run wild. Behold, a herd of steppe horses rush on! They move like a storm, stop before the mounted men in a half-circle suddenly, as if spiked to the earth, their manes spread to the wind, their nostrils dilated, their eyes full of wonder. You would say they are here to trample the unbidden guests. But a moment more they are gone, vanishing as suddenly as they came. Now we have only the sound of the grass and the gleam of the flowers; the clatter is still. Again nothing is heard save the play of birds. The land seems full of joy; yet a kind of sadness is in that joy. It seems crowded, and it is an empty land. Oh, it is wide, and it is roomy! With a horse you cannot surround it; in thought you cannot grasp it,—unless you love the sadness, the desert, and the steppes, and with yearning soul circle above them, linger upon their grave-mounds, hearken to their voices, and give answer.

It was early morning. Great drops glittered on the grass and reeds; the quick movement of the wind dried the ground, on which after the rains broad ponds were spread, like lakes shining in the sun. The retinue of the lieutenant moved on slowly, for it was difficult to hasten when the horses sank to their knees at times in the soft earth; and he gave them only short resting-spells on the grave-mounds, for he was hastening to a greeting and a parting.

The second day, about noon, after he had passed a strip of forest, he saw the windmills of Rozlogi scattered on the

hillsides and mounds. His heart beat like a hammer. No one there expected him; no one knew he was coming. What will she say when she sees him? Now he beholds the cottages of the neighbors, nearly hidden, covered in the cherry-orchards; farther on is a straggling village of cottages; and still farther is seen the well-sweep on the square in front of the house. The lieutenant, putting spurs to his horse, galloped swiftly; and after him flew his suite through the village with a clatter and a noise. Here and there a peasant, rushing out of his cottage, made a sign of the cross—Devils!—not devils? Tartars!—not Tartars? The mud spatters from under their hoofs so that you don't know who is hurrying on. Meanwhile they are at the square, and have halted before the closed gate.

"Hallo there! Who lives, open!"

The bustle and pounding, the barking of dogs, called out the people from the house. They hurried to the gate frightened, thinking it was an attack.

"Who goes?"

"Open!"

"The princes are not at home."

"But open, you son of an infidel! We are from the prince at Lubni."

The servants at last recognized Skshetuski. "Oh, that is you! Right away! right away!"

The gate was thrown open. Then the princess herself appeared before the entrance, and shading her eyes with her hand, looked at the new-comers.

Skshetuski sprang from his horse, and coming up to her said: "Don't you know me?"

"Oh! that is you, Lieutenant. I thought it was a Tartar raid. I salute you and beg you to enter."

"You wonder, no doubt," said Pan Yan, "at seeing me in Rozlogi. Still I have not broken my word, for the prince sends me to Chigirin and farther. He asked me also to stop at Rozlogi and inquire for your health."

"I am thankful to his Highness. Does he think of driving us from Rozlogi soon?"

"He does n't think of it at all, for he knows of no cause to drive you out; and what I have said will take place. You will remain in Rozlogi; I have bread enough of my own."

Hearing this, the princess grew good-humored at once, and said: "Be seated, and be as glad as I am to see you."

"Is Princess Helena well? Where is she?"

"I know you. You have not come to see me, my cavalier. She is in good health, she is well; the girl has improved in appearance. But I'll call her to you this minute, and I'll dress a little myself, for I am ashamed to receive guests in this gown."

The princess was wearing a faded dress, with a fur coat outside, and heavy boots.

At this moment Helena, though not called, rushed into the room; for she had heard from the old Tartar, Chehly, who the visitor was. She ran in panting, and red as a cherry, barely able to catch her breath, but her eyes were laughing from happiness and joy. Skshetuski sprang to her hand, and when the princess had withdrawn discreetly, kissed her on the lips, for he was an impulsive man. She did not defend herself vigorously, feeling that weakness had come upon her from an overflow of happiness and joy.

"I did not expect to see you," whispered she, half closing her eyes. "But don't kiss me that way, for it is n't proper."

"Why should n't I kiss when honey is not half so sweet? I thought I should wither away without you, till the prince himself sent me here."

"What does the prince know?"

"I told him all, and he was glad when he remembered your father. Oh, you must have given me some herb, my girl, for I cannot see the light of day on account of you."

"Your blindness is a favor from God."

"But do you remember that omen which the falcon gave when she drew our hands together? It was destiny beyond a doubt."

"I remember."

"When at Lubni I used to go from sadness to Solonitsa and see you there just as if present, if I stretched forth my hand you disappeared; but you will not escape me again, for I think that nothing will stand in our way now."

"If anything does, it will not be my will."

"Tell me again that you love me."

Helena dropped her eyes, but answered with dignity and decision: "As nobody in the world."

"If any one should surround me with honor and gold, I should prefer those words of yours; for I feel that you speak the truth, though I do not know why I deserve such favor from you."

"Because you had pity on me, drew me to you, took my part, and spoke words such as I had never heard before."

Helena was silent from emotion, and the lieutenant began again to kiss her hand.

"You will be my ruler, not my wife."

They were silent for a while, but he did not take his eyes from her, wishing to make up for the long time in which he had not seen her. She seemed to him more beautiful than before. In that dim room, in the sunlight broken into rays by the glass window-panes, she looked like those pictures of holy virgins in dusky chapels. At the same time such warmth and life surrounded her, so many splendid womanly graces and charms were pictured in her face and whole form, that it was possible to lose one's head, fall desperately in love with her, and love forever.

"I shall lose my sight from your beauty," said the lieutenant.

The white teeth of the princess glittered joyously in a smile. "Undoubtedly Anusia Borzobogata is a hundred times better looking than I!"

"She is to you as a pewter plate to the moon."

"But Jendzian told me a different story."

"Jendzian deserves a slap on the mouth. What do I care for her? Let other bees take honey from that flower, and there are plenty of them there."

Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of old Chehly, who came to greet the lieutenant. He looked on him already as his future master, and he bowed to him at the threshold, giving the salaam in Oriental fashion.

"Well, old Chehly, I take you too with your mistress. You will serve her till you die."

"She won't have long to wait for my death; but while I live I will serve her. God is one!"

"In a month or so, when I return from the Saitch, we will go to Lubni," said the lieutenant, turning to Helena; "and there Mukhovetski is ready with his robes."

Helena was startled. "Then you are going to the Saitch?"

"The prince sends me with letters. But have no fear; the person of an envoy is sacred, even among pagans. I should send you and the princess immediately to Lubni, but the roads are fearful. Even on horseback it is hard to get along."

"Will you stay long in Rozlogi?"

"I leave this evening for Chigirin. The sooner I go the sooner I shall return. Besides, it is the prince's service; neither my time nor will is at my disposal."

"Will you come to dinner, if you have had enough of billing and cooing?" said the princess, coming in. "Ho! ho! the young woman's cheeks are red; 'tis evident you have not been idle, sir! Well, I'm not surprised at you."

Saying this, she stroked Helena affectionately on the shoulder, and they went to dinner. The princess was in perfectly good humor. She had given up Bogun long ago, and all was arranged now, owing to the liberality of the lieutenant, so that she could look on Rozlogi, "with its pine woods, forests, boundaries, and inhabitants," as belonging to her and her sons, — no small property, indeed.

The lieutenant asked for the princes, — whether they would return soon.

"I expect them every day. They were angry at first with you, but afterward, when they scrutinized your acts, they conceived a great affection for you as their future relative; for in truth it is difficult in these mild times to find a man of such daring."

After dinner the lieutenant and Helena went to the cherry orchard, which came up to the ditch beyond the square. The orchard was covered with early white blossoms as if with snow; beyond the orchard was a dark oak grove in which a cuckoo was heard.

"That is a happy augury for us," said Skshetuski, "but we must make the inquiry." And turning to the oak grove he asked: "Good cuckoo, how many years shall I live in marriage with this lady?"

The cuckoo began to call, and counted fifty and more.

"God grant it!"

"The cuckoo always tells the truth," remarked Helena.

"If that's the case, I'll ask another question," said the enamoured lieutenant.

"No, it is not necessary."

In converse and merriment like this the day passed as a dream. In the evening came the moment of tender and long parting, and the lieutenant set out for Chigirin.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN Chigirin, Skshetuski found the old man Zatsvilikhovski in great excitement and fever. He looked impatiently at the prince's envoy, for tidings more and more terrible kept coming from the Saitch. There was no doubt that Hmel-nitski was preparing to demand with armed hand justice for himself and the ancient rights of the Cossacks. Zatsvilikhovski had news that he had been with the Khan in the Crimea to beg Tartar aid, with which he was expected every day in the Saitch. Then there would be a general campaign from the lower country against the Commonwealth, which with Tartar assistance might be destructive. The storm drew nearer and nearer, more definite and more terrible. It was no longer vague undefined alarm that swept over the Ukraine, but clear certainty of slaughter and war. The Grand Hetman, who at first had made light of the whole affair, was pushing forward with his troops to Cherkasi. The advance guard of the royal armies was advancing mainly to prevent desertion; for the Cossacks of the towns, and the mob had begun to flee to the Saitch in masses. The nobility assembled in the towns. It was said that the general militia were to be called out in the southern provinces. Some, not waiting for the call, sent their wives and children to castles, and assembled in person at Cherkasi. The ill-fated Ukraine was divided into two parties, — one of these hastened to the Saitch, the other to the royal camp; one declared for the existing order of affairs, the other for wild freedom; one desired to keep possession of that which was the fruit of ages of labor, the other desired to deprive these possessors of that property. Both were to imbrue fraternal hands in the blood of each other. The terrible dispute, before it found religious rallying-cries which were completely foreign to the lower country, was breaking out as a social war.

But though black clouds were gathering on the heaven of the Ukraine, though a dark and ominous night was descending from these clouds, though within them it rumbled and roared and thunder-claps rolled from horizon to horizon, people still could not tell to what degree the storm would

burst forth. Perhaps even Hmelnitski himself could not, — Hmelnitski, who had just sent letters to Pan Pototski, to the Cossack commissioner, and to the royal standard-bearer, full of accusation and complaints, and at the same time of assurances of loyalty to Vladislav IV. and the Commonwealth. Did he wish to win time, or did he suppose that some agreement might yet end the dispute? On this there was a variety of opinions. There were only two men who did not deceive themselves for a single moment. These men were Zatsvilikhovski and Barabash.

The old colonel had also received a letter from Hmelnitski. The letter was sarcastic, threatening, and full of abuse. Hmelnitski wrote: —

"We shall begin, with the whole Zaporozian army, to beg most fervently and to ask for that charter of rights which you secreted. And because you secreted it for your own personal profit and advantage, the whole Zaporozian army creates you a colonel over sheep or swine, but not over men. I beg pardon if in any way I failed to please you in my poor house in Chigirin on the feast-day of Saint Nicholas, and that I went off to the Zaporozie without your knowledge or permission."

"Do you see," said Barabash to Zatsvilikhovski and Pan Yan, "how he ridicules me? Yet it was I who taught him war, and was in truth a father to him."

"He says, then, that the whole Zaporozian army will demand their rights," said Zatsvilikhovski. "That is simply a civil war, of all wars the most terrible."

"I see that I must hasten," said Skshetuski. "Give me the letters to those men with whom I am to come in contact."

"You have one to the koshevoi ataman?"

"I have, from the prince himself."

"I will give you a letter to one of the kuren atamans. Barabash has a relative there, — Barabash also. From these you will learn everything. Who knows, though, but it is too late for such an expedition? Does the prince wish to hear what is really to be heard there? The answer is brief: 'Evil!' And he wants to know what to do? Short advice: 'Collect as many troops as possible and join the hetmans.'"

"Despatch a messenger, then, to the prince with the answer and the advice," said Skshetuski. "I must go; for I am on a mission, and I cannot alter the decision of the prince."

"Are you aware that this is a terribly dangerous expedition?" asked Zatsvilikhovski. "Even here the people are so excited that it is difficult for them to keep still. Were it not for the nearness of the army of the crown, the mob would rush upon us. But there you are going into the dragon's mouth."

"Jonah was in the whale's belly, not his mouth, and with God's aid he came out in safety."

"Go, then! I applaud your courage. You can go to Kudák in safety, and there you will see what is to be done further. Grodzitski is an old soldier; he will give you the best of advice. And I will go to the prince without fail. If I have to fight in my old age, I would rather fight under him than any one else. Meanwhile I will get boats for you, and guides who will take you to Kudák."

Skshetuski slipped out, and went straight to his quarters on the square, in the prince's house, to make his final preparations. In spite of the dangers of the journey mentioned by Zatsvilikhovski, the lieutenant thought of it not without a certain satisfaction. He was going to behold the Dnieper in its whole length, almost to the lower country and the Cataracts; and for the warrior of that time it was a sort of enchanted and mysterious land, to which every adventurous spirit was drawn. Many a man had passed his whole life in the Ukraine, and still was unable to say that he had seen the Saitch, — unless he wished to join the Brotherhood, and there were fewer volunteers among the nobility than formerly. The times of Samek Zborovski had passed never to return. The break between the Saitch and the Commonwealth which began in the time of Nalivaika and Pavlyuk had not lessened, but, on the contrary, had increased continually; and the concourse of people of family, not only Polish, but Russian, differing from the men of the lower country neither in speech nor faith, had greatly decreased. Such persons as the Bulygi Kurtsevichi did not find many imitators. In general, nobles were forced into the Brotherhood at that time either by misfortune or outlawry, — in a word, by offences which were inconvenient for repentance. Therefore a certain mystery, impenetrable as the fogs of the Dnieper, surrounded the predatory republic of the lower country. Concerning it men related wonders, which Pan Yan was curious to see with his own eyes. To tell the truth, he expected to come out of it safely; for an envoy is an envoy, especially from Prince Yermi.

While meditating in this fashion he gazed through the windows into the square. Meanwhile one hour had followed another, when suddenly it appeared to Pan Yan that he recognized a couple of figures going toward the Bell-ringers' Corner to the wine-cellar of Dopula, the Wallachian. He looked more carefully, and saw Zagloba with Bogun. They went arm in arm, and soon disappeared in the dark doorway over which was the sign denoting a drinking-place and a wine-shop.

The lieutenant was astonished at the presence of Bogun in Chigirin and his friendship with Zagloba.

"Jendzian! are you here?" called he to his attendant.

Jendzian appeared in the doorway of the adjoining room.

"Listen to me, Jendzian! Go to the wine-shop where the sign hangs. You will find a fat nobleman with a hole in his forehead there. Tell him that some one wants to see him quickly. If he asks who it is, don't tell him."

Jendzian hurried off, and in a short time Skshetuski saw him returning in company with Zagloba.

"I welcome you," said Pan Yan, when the noble appeared in the door of the room. "Do you remember me?"

"Do I remember you? May the Tartars melt me into tallow and make candles of me for the mosques if I forget you! Some months ago you opened the door at Dopula's with Chaplinski, which suited my taste exactly, for in the selfsame way I got out of prison once in Stamboul. And what is Pan Povsinoga, with the escutcheon Zerviopludry, doing with his innocence and his sword? Don't the sparrows always perch on his head, taking him for a withered tree?"

"Pan Podbipienta is well, and asked to be remembered to you."

"He is a very rich man, but fearfully dull. If he should cut off three heads like his own, it would be only a head and a half, for he would cut off three half-heads. Pshaw! how hot it is, though it is only March yet! The tongue dries up in one's throat."

"I have some excellent triple mead; maybe you would take a glass of it?"

"It is a fool who refuses when a wise man offers. The barber has enjoined me to drink mead to draw melancholy from my head. Troublesome times for the nobility are approaching, — *dies iræ et calamitatis*. Chaplinski is breathless from fear; he visits Dopula's no longer, for the Cossack

elders drink there. I alone set my forehead bravely against danger, and keep company with those colonels, though their dignity smells of tar. Good mead! really very excellent! Where do you get it?"

"I got this in Lubni. Are there many Cossack elders here?"

"Who is not here? Fedor Yakubovich, Old Filon Daidyalo, Danilo Nechai, and their eye in the head, Bogun, who became my friend as soon as I outdrank him and promised to adopt him. Chigirin is filled with the odor of them. They are looking which way to turn, for they do not dare yet to take the side of Hmelnitski openly. But if they do not declare for him, it will be owing to me."

"How is that?"

"While drinking with them I bring them over to the Commonwealth and argue them into loyalty. If the king does not give me a crown estate for this, then believe me there is no justice in the Commonwealth, nor reward for services; and in such a case it would be better to breed chickens than to risk one's head *pro bono publico*."

"It would be better for you to risk your head fighting with them; but it appears to me you are only throwing away your money for nothing in treating them, for in that way you will never win them."

"I throw money away! For whom do you take me? Isn't it enough for me to hobnob with trash, without paying their scores? I consider it a favor that I allow them to pay mine."

"And that fellow Bogun, what is he doing here?"

"He? He keeps his ears open to hear reports from the Saitch, like the rest. That is why he came here. He is the favorite of all the Cossacks. They are after him like monkeys, for it is certain that the Pereyaslav regiment will follow him, and not Loboda. And who knows, too, whom Krechovski's registered Cossacks will follow? Bogun is a brother to the men of the lower country when it is a question of attacking the Turks or the Tartars; but this time he is calculating very closely, for he confessed to me, in drink, that he was in love with a noblewoman, and intended to marry her. On this account it would not befit him, on the eve of marriage, to be a brother to slaves. He wishes, too, that I should adopt him and give him my arms. That is very excellent triple mead!"

"Take another drink of it."

"I will, I will. They don't sell such mead as that behind tavern-signs."

"You did not ask, perhaps, the name of the lady whom Bogun wants to marry?"

"Well, my dear sir, what do I care about her name? I know only that when I put horns on Bogun, she will be Madame Deer. In my youthful years I was a fellow of no ordinary beauty. Only let me tell you how I carried off the palm of martyrdom in Galáts. You see that hole in my forehead? It is enough for me to say that the eunuchs in the harem of the local pasha made it."

"But you said the bullet of a robber made it."

"Did I? Then I told the truth; for every Turk is a robber, as God is my aid!"

Further conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Zatsvilikhovski.

"Well, my dear lieutenant," said the old man, "the boats are ready, you have trusty men for attendants; you can start, in God's name, this moment, if you like. And here are the letters."

"Then I'll tell my people to be off for the shore at once."

"But where are you going?" asked Zagloba.

"To Kudák."

"It will be hot for you there."

The lieutenant did not hear his prophecy, for he went out of the room into the court, where the Cossacks with horses were almost ready for the road.

"To horse and to the shore!" commanded Pan Yan.

"Put the horses on the boats, and wait for me."

Meanwhile the old man said to Zagloba: "I hear that you court the Cossack colonels, and drink with them."

"For the public good, most worthy standard-bearer."

"You have a nimble mind, but inclining rather to disgrace. You wish to bring the Cossacks to your side in their cups, so they may befriend you in case they win."

"Even if that were true, having been a martyr to the Turks, I do not wish to become one to the Cossacks; and there is nothing wonderful in that, for two mushrooms would spoil the best soup. And as to disgrace, I ask no one to drink it with me, — I drink it alone; and God grant that it taste no worse than this mead. Merit, like oil, must come to the top."

At that moment Skshetuski returned. "The men have started already," said he.

Zatsvilikhovski poured out a measure. "Here is to a pleasant journey!"

"And a return in health!" added Zagloba.

"You will have an easy journey, for the water is tremendous."

"Sit down, gentlemen, and drink the rest. It is not a large vessel."

They sat down and drank.

"You will see a curious country," said Zatsvilikhovski. "Greet Pan Grodzitski in Kudák for me. Ah, that is a soldier! He lives at the end of the world, far from the eyes of the hetman, and he maintains such order that God grant its like might be in the whole Commonwealth. I know Kudák and the Cataracts well. Years ago I used to travel there, and there is gloom on the soul when one thinks of what is past and gone; but now —"

Here the standard-bearer rested his milk-white head on his hand, and fell into deep thought. A moment of silence followed, broken only by the tramp of horses heard at the gate; for the rest of Skshetuski's men were going to the boats at the shore.

"My God!" said Zatsvilikhovski, starting from his meditation; "and there were better times formerly, though in the midst of turmoil. I remember Khotim, twenty-seven years ago, as if it were to-day! When the hussars under Lyubomirski moved to attack the janissaries, then the Cossacks in the trenches threw up their caps and shouted to Sahaidachny, till the earth trembled, 'Let us die with the Poles!' And what do we see to-day? To-day the lower country, which should be the first bulwark of Christendom, lets Tartars into the boundaries of the Commonwealth, to fall upon them when they are returning with booty. It is still worse; for Hmelnitski allies himself directly with Tartars, with whom he will murder Christians."

"Let us drink by reason of this sorrow!" said Zagloba. "What triple mead this is!"

"God grant me the grave as soon as possible!" said the old man, continuing. "Mutual crimes will be washed out in blood, but not blood of atonement, for here brother will murder brother. Who are in the lower country? Russians. Who in the army of Prince Yermi? Russians. Who in the retinues of the magnates? Russians. And are there few of them in the king's camp? And I myself, — who am I? Oh, unhappy Ukraine! pagans of the Crimea