

"I will take even you, if there is no one else!" Having said this, the wild Tugai Bey laughed ominously; then he added: "Still I should be glad to have those 'Franks.'"

The battle had ended. Tugai Bey turned his horse to the camp.

"Now for Jóltya Vodi!" cried Hmelnitski.

## CHAPTER XV.

SKSHETUSKI, hearing the battle, waited with trembling for the conclusion of it. He thought at first that Hmelnitski was meeting all the forces of the hetmans. But toward evening old Zakhar led him out of his error. The news of the treason of the Cossacks under Krechovski and the destruction of the Germans agitated Pan Yan to the bottom of his soul; for it was prophetic of future desertions, and the lieutenant knew perfectly that no small part of the armies of the hetmans was made up of Cossacks.

The anguish of the lieutenant increased, and triumph in the Zaporozhian camp added bitterness to his sorrow. Everything foreshadowed the worst. There were no tidings of Prince Yermi, and evidently the hetmans had made a terrible mistake; for instead of moving with all their forces to Kudák or waiting for the enemy in fortified camps in the Ukraine, they had divided their forces, weakened themselves of their own accord, and opened a wide field to breach of faith and treason. It is true that mention had been made previously in the Zaporozhian camp of Krechovski, and of the special despatch of troops under the leadership of Stephen Pototski; but the lieutenant had given no faith to those reports. He supposed that these troops were strong advance guards which would be withdrawn in time. But it turned out otherwise. Hmelnitski was strengthened several thousand men by the treason of Krechovski, and terrible danger hung over young Pototski. Deprived of assistance and lost in the Wilderness, Hmelnitski might easily surround and crush him completely.

In pain from his wounds, in disquiet, during sleepless nights, Skshetuski had consoled himself with the single thought of the prince. The star of Hmelnitski must pale when that of the prince rises in Lubni. And who knows whether he has not joined the hetmans already? Though the forces of Hmelnitski were considerable, though the beginning of the campaign was favorable, though Tugai Bey marched with him, and in case of failure the "Tsar of the Crimea" had promised to move with reinforcements in



person, the thought never rose in the mind of Skshetuski that the disturbance could endure long, that one Cossack could shake the whole Commonwealth and break its terrible power. "That wave will be broken at the threshold of the Ukraine," thought the lieutenant. "How have all the Cossack rebellions ended? They have burst out like a flame and have been stifled at the first meeting with the hetmans." Such had been the outcome up to that time. For on one side there rose a crowd of bandits from the lower country, and on the other the power whose shores were washed by two seas. The end was easily foreseen: the storm could not be lasting; it would pass, and calm would follow. This thought strengthened Skshetuski, and perhaps kept him on his feet while he was weighted with such a burden as he had never carried in his life before. The storm, though it would pass, might desolate fields, wreck houses, and inflict unspeakable harm. In this storm he had almost lost his life, had lost his strength, and had fallen into bitter captivity just at the time when freedom was worth really as much to him as life itself. What, then, must be the suffering, in this uproar, of beings without power to defend themselves? What was happening to Helena in Rozlogi?

But Helena must be in Lubni already. The lieutenant in his sleep saw her surrounded by friendly faces, petted by Princess Griselda and the prince himself, admired by the knights,—and still grieving for her hussar, who had disappeared somewhere in the Saitch. But the time would come at last when he would return. Hmelnitski himself had promised freedom; and besides, the Cossack wave would flow on and on, to the threshold of the Commonwealth, where it would be broken; then would come the end of anxiety, affliction, and dread.

The wave flowed on, indeed. Hmelnitski moved forward without delay, and marched to meet the son of the hetman. His power was really formidable; for with the Cossacks of Krechovski and the party of Tugai Bey, he led nearly twenty-five thousand trained men eager for battle. There was no reliable information concerning Pototski's numbers. Deserters declared that he had two thousand heavy cavalry and a number of field-pieces. A battle with that proportion of forces might be doubtful; for one attack of the terrible hussars was often sufficient to destroy ten times the number of troops. Thus Pan Hodkyevich, the Lithuanian hetman, in his time, with three thousand hussars at Kirchholm,

ground into the dust eighteen thousand chosen men of the Swedish infantry and cavalry; and at Klushin one armored regiment with wild fury dispersed several thousand English and Scotch mercenaries. Hmelnitski remembered this, and marched, as the Russian chronicler has it, slowly and carefully; "looking, with the many eyes of his mind, on every side, like a cunning hunter, and having sentries posted five miles and farther from his camp."

In this fashion he approached Jóltya Vodi. Two new informants were brought in. These gave assurance of the small number of Pototski's forces, and stated that the castellan had already crossed Jóltya Vodi.

Hearing this, Hmelnitski stopped as if pinned to the earth, and intrenched himself. His heart beat joyfully. If Pototski would venture on a storm, he must be beaten. The Cossacks were unequal to armored men in the field, but behind a rampart they fought to perfection; and with such great preponderance of power they would surely repulse an assault. Hmelnitski reckoned on the youth and inexperience of Pototski. But at the side of the young castellan was an accomplished soldier,—the starosta of Jiwets, Stephen Charnetski, colonel of hussars. He saw the danger, and persuaded Pototski to withdraw beyond Jóltya Vodi.

Nothing was left to Hmelnitski but to follow him. Next day he crossed the swamps of Jóltya Vodi. The armies stood face to face, but neither of the leaders wished to strike the first blow. The hostile camps began to surround themselves hurriedly with trenches. It was Saturday, the 5th of May. Rain fell all day; clouds so covered the sky that from noon darkness reigned as on a winter day. Toward evening the rain increased still more. Hmelnitski rubbed his hands with joy.

"Only let the steppe get soft," said he to Krechovski, "and I shall not hesitate to meet even the hussars on the offensive; for they will be drowned in the mud with their heavy armor."

The rain fell and fell, as if Heaven itself wished to come to the aid of the Zaporojians. The armies intrenched themselves lazily and gloomily amidst streams of water. It was impossible to kindle fires. Several thousand Tartars issued from the camp to watch lest the Polish tabor, taking advantage of the fog, the rain, and the night, might try to escape. Then profound stillness fell upon the camp. Nothing was



heard but the patter of rain and the sound of wind. It was certain that no one slept on either side that night.

In the morning the trumpets sounded in the Polish camp, prolonged and plaintive, as if giving an alarm; then drums began to rattle here and there. The day rose gloomy, dark, damp; the storm had ceased, but still there was rain, fine as if strained through a sieve.

Hmelnitski ordered the firing of a cannon. After it, was heard a second, a third, — a tenth; and when the usual "correspondence" of camp with camp had begun, Pan Yan said to Zakhar, his Cossack guardian: "Take me out on the rampart, that I may see what is passing."

Zakhar was curious himself, and therefore made no opposition. They mounted a lofty bastion, whence could be seen, as if on the palm of the hand, the somewhat sunken valley in the steppe, the swamp of Jóltya Vodi, and both armies. But Pan Yan had barely given a glance when, seizing his head, he cried, —

"As God is living! it is the advance guard, — nothing more!"

In fact, the ramparts of the Cossack camp extended almost a mile and a quarter, while the Polish intrenchment looked like a little ditch in comparison with it. The disparity of forces was so great that the victory for the Zaporozhians was beyond a doubt.

Pain straitened the lieutenant's heart. The hour of fall had not come yet for pride and rebellion, and that which was coming was to be a new triumph for them. At least, so it appeared.

Skirmishing under cannon-fire had already begun. From the bastion single horsemen, or groups of them, could be seen in hand-to-hand conflict. Now the Tartars fought with Pototski's Cossacks, dressed in dark blue and yellow. The cavalry rushed on one another and retreated quickly; approached from the flanks, hit one another from pistols and bows or with lances, tried to catch one another with lariats. These actions seemed from a distance more like amusement than fighting; and only the horses, running along the field without riders, showed that it was a question of life and death.

The Tartars came out thicker and thicker. Soon the plain was black from the dense mass of them. Then, too, new regiments began to issue from the Polish camp, and arrange themselves in battle-array before the intrenchment.

This was so near that Pan Yan, with his quick eye, was able to distinguish clearly the flags and ensigns, and also the cavalry captains and lieutenants, who were on horseback a little on one side of the regiments.

His heart began to leap within him. A ruddy color appeared on his pale face; and just as if he could find a favorable audience in Zakhar and the Cossacks standing to their guns on the bastion, he cried with enthusiasm as the regiments marched out of the intrenchments, —

"Those are the dragoons of Balaban; I saw them in Cherkasi! That is the Wallachian regiment; they have a cross on their banner! Oh! now the infantry comes down from the ramparts!" Then with still greater delight, opening his hands: "The hussars! Charnetski's hussars!"

In fact the hussars came out, above their heads a cloud of wings; a forest of lances embellished with golden tassels and with long green and black bannerets, stood above them in the air. They went out six abreast, and formed under the wall. At the sight of their calmness, dignity, and good order tears of joy came into Skshetuski's eyes, dimming his vision for a moment.

Though the forces were so disproportionate; though against these few regiments there was blackening a whole avalanche of Zaporozhians and Tartars, which, as is usual, occupied the wings; though their ranks extended so far into the steppe that it was difficult to see the end of them, — Pan Yan believed now in the victory of the Poles. His face was smiling, his strength came back; his eyes, intent on the field, shot fire, but he was unable to stand.

"Hei, my child!" muttered old Zakhar, "the soul would like to enter paradise."

A number of detached Tartar bands rushed forward, with cries and shouts of "Allah!" They were answered from the camp with shots. But these were merely threats. The Tartars, before reaching the Polish regiments, retreated on two sides to their own people and disappeared in the host.

Now the great drum of the Saitch was sounded, and at its voice a gigantic crescent of Cossacks and Tartars rushed forward swiftly. Hmelnitski was trying, apparently, to see whether he could not with one sweep dislodge those regiments and occupy the camp. In case of disorder, that was possible. But nothing of the kind took place with the Polish regiments. They remained quietly, deployed in rather a long line, the rear of which was covered by the in



trenchment, and the flanks by the cannon of the camp; so it was possible to strike them only in front. For a while it seemed as if they would receive battle on the spot; but when the crescent had passed half the field, the trumpets in the intrenchment were sounded for attack, and suddenly the fence of spears, till then pointing straight to the sky, was lowered to a line with the heads of the horses.

"The hussars are charging!" cried Pan Yan.

They had, in fact, bent forward in the saddles, and were moving on, and immediately after them the dragoon regiments and the whole line of battle.

The momentum of the hussars was terrible. At the first onset they struck three kurens, — two of Stebloff, and one of Mirgorod, — and crushed them in the twinkling of an eye. The roar reached the ears of Skshetuski. Horses and men, thrown from their feet with the gigantic weight of the iron riders, fell like grain at the breath of a storm. The resistance was so brief that it seemed to Pan Yan as though some enormous dragons had swallowed the three kurens at a gulp. And they were the best troops of the Saitch. Terrified by the noise of the wings, the horses began to spread disorder in the Zaporojian ranks. The Irkleyeff, Kalnibolok, Minsk, Shkurinsk, and Titareff regiments fell into complete disorder, and pressed by the mass of the fleeing, began to retreat in confusion. Meanwhile the dragoons came up with the hussars, and began to help them in the bloody harvest. The Vasyurinsk kuren, after a desperate resistance, turned in flight to the Cossack intrenchments. The centre of Hmelnitski's forces, shaken more and more, beaten, pushed into a disorderly mass, slashed with swords, forced back in the iron onset, was unable to get time to stop and re-form.

"Devils! not Poles!" cried old Zakhar.

Skshetuski was as if bewildered. Being ill, he could not master himself. He laughed and cried at once, and at times screamed out words of command, as if he were leading the regiments himself. Zakhar held him by the skirts, and had to call others to his aid.

The battle came so near the Cossack camp that faces could be almost distinguished. There were artillery discharges from the intrenchments; but the Cossack balls, striking their own men as well as the enemy, increased the disorder. The hussars struck upon the Pashkoff kuren, which formed the guard of the hetman, in the centre of

which was Hmelnitski himself. Suddenly a fearful cry was heard through all the Cossack ranks. The great red standard had tottered and fallen.

But at that moment Krechovski, at the head of his five thousand Cossacks, rushed to the fight. Sitting on an enormous cream-colored horse, he flew on in the first rank, without a cap, a sabre above his head, gathering before him the disordered Zaporojians, who, seeing the approaching succor, though without order, returned to the attack. The battle raged again in the centre of the line.

On both flanks fortune in like manner failed Hmelnitski. The Tartars, repulsed twice by the Wallachian regiments and Pototski's Cossacks, lost all eagerness for the fight. Two horses were killed under Tugai Bey. Victory inclined continually to the side of young Pototski.

But the battle did not last long. The rain, which for some time had been increasing every moment, soon became so violent that through the rush of water nothing could be seen. Not streams, but torrents of rain fell on the ground from the open flood-gates of heaven. The steppe was turned into a lake. It grew so dark that one man could not distinguish another at a few paces' distance. The noise of the storm drowned the words of command. The wet muskets and guns grew silent. Heaven itself put an end to the slaughter.

Hmelnitski, drenched to the skin, furious, rushed into his camp. He spoke not a word to any man. A tent of camel-skin was pitched, under which, hiding himself, he sat alone with his sad thoughts.

Despair seized him. He understood at last what work he had begun. See! he is beaten, repulsed, almost broken, in a battle with such a small force that it could be properly considered as a scouting party. He knew how great was the power of resistance in the armies of the Commonwealth, and he took that into account when he ventured on a war. And still he had failed in his reckoning, — so at least it seemed to him at that moment. Therefore he seized himself by his shaven head, and wished to break it against the first cannon he saw. What would the resistance be at his meeting with the hetmans and the whole Commonwealth?

His thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of Tugai Bey. The eyes of the Tartar were blazing with rage; his face was pale, and his teeth glittered from behind his lips, unhidden by mustaches.



"Where is the booty, where the prisoners, where the heads of the leaders, — where is victory?" asked he, in a hoarse voice.

Hmelnitski sprang from his place. "There!" answered he loudly, pointing to the Polish camp.

"Go there, then!" roared Tugai Bey; "and if you don't go, I will drag you by a rope to the Crimea."

"I will go," said Hmelnitski, — "I will go to-day! I will take booty and prisoners; but you shall give answer to the Khan, for you want booty and you avoid battle."

"Dog!" howled Tugai Bey, "you are destroying the army of the Khan!"

For a moment they stood snorting in front of each other. Hmelnitski regained his composure first.

"Tugai Bey," said he, "be not disturbed! Rain interrupted the battle, just as Krehovski was breaking the dragoons. I know them! They will fight with less fury to-morrow. The steppe will be mud to the bottom. The hussars will be beaten. To-morrow everything will be ours."

"That's your word!" blurted out Tugai Bey.

"And I will keep it. Tugai Bey, my friend, the Khan sent you for my assistance, not for my misfortune."

"You prophesied victory, not defeat."

"A few prisoners of the dragoons are taken; I will give them to you."

"Let me have them. I will order them to be empaled."

"Don't do that. Give them their liberty. They are men from the Ukraine, from Balaban's regiment. I will send them to bring the dragoons over to our side. It will be with them as with Krehovski."

Tugai Bey was satisfied; he glanced quickly at Hmelnitski, and muttered: "Serpent!"

"Craft is the equal of courage. If we persuade the dragoons to our side, not a man of the Poles will escape, — you understand!"

"I will have Pototski."

"I will give him to you, and Charnetski also."

"Let me have some vudka now, for it is cold."

"Agreed."

At that moment entered Krehovski. The colonel was as gloomy as night. His future starostships, dignities, castles, and wealth were covered as if with a fog. To-morrow they may disappear altogether, and perhaps out of that fog will

rise in their place a rope or a gibbet. Were it not that the colonel had burned the bridges in his rear by destroying the Germans, he would surely have begun to think how to betray Hmelnitski in his turn, and go over with his Cossacks to Pototski's camp. But that was impossible now.

The three sat down, therefore, to a decanter of vudka, and began to drink in silence. The noise of the rain ceased gradually. It was growing dark.

Skshetuskii, exhausted from joy, weak and pale, lay motionless in the telega. Zakhar, who had become attached to him, ordered the Cossacks to put a little felt roof over him. The lieutenant listened to the dreary sound of the rain, but in his soul it was clear, bright, and joyful. Behold, his hussars had shown what they could do; his Commonwealth had shown a resistance worthy of its majesty; the first impetus of the Cossack storm had broken on the sharp spears of the royal army. And besides there are the hetmans, there is also Prince Yermi, and so many lords, so many nobles, so much power, and above all these the king, *primus inter pares*. Pride expanded the breast of Skshetuskii, as if at that moment it contained all that power.

In feeling this, he felt, for the first time since he had lost his freedom in the Saitch, a certain pity for the Cossacks; they were guilty, but blinded, since they tried to go to the sun on a spade. They were guilty, but unfortunate, since they allowed themselves to be carried away by one man, who is leading them to evident destruction.

Then his thoughts wandered farther. Peace would come, when every one would have the right to think of his own private happiness. Then in memory and spirit he hovers above Rozlogi. There, near the lion's den, it must be as quiet as the falling of poppy-seeds. There the rebellion will never raise its head; and though it should, Helena is already in Lubni beyond a doubt.

Suddenly the roar of cannon disturbed the golden thread of his thoughts. Hmelnitski, after drinking, led his regiments again to the attack. But it ended with the play of cannon-firing. Krehovski restrained the hetman.

The next morning was Sunday. The whole day passed quietly and without a shot. The camps lay opposite each other, like the camps of two allied armies.

Skshetuskii attributed that silence to the discouragement of the Cossacks. Alas! he did not know that then Hmelnitski, "looking forward with the many eyes of his