in advance, — a lofty Cossack telega, and after it a line of others, all surrounded by Cossacks of the Pashkoff kuren, in yellow caps; they pass near the house where the Mirgorod men are standing.

Skshetuski put his hand over his eyes, for the glare of the burning blinded him, and looked at the prisoners sitting in the first wagon. Suddenly he sprang back, began to beat the air with his hands, like a man struck with an arrow in the breast, and from his lips came a terrible unearthly cry: "Jesus, Mary! the hetmans!"

He dropped into the arms of Zakhar; his eyes became leaden, his face grew stiff and rigid as that of a corpse.

A few minutes later three horsemen rode into the square of Korsún, at the head of countless regiments. The middle rider, in red uniform, sat on a white horse, holding a gilded baton at his side. He looked as proud as a king. This was Hmelnitski. On one side of him rode Tugai Bey, on the other Krechovski.

The Commonwealth lay prostrate in dust and blood at the feet of a Cossack.

CHAPTER XVI.

Some days passed by. It appeared to men as if the vault of heaven had suddenly dropped on the Commonwealth. Jóltiya Vodi; Korsún; the destruction of the armies of the crown, ever victorious hitherto in struggles with the Cossacks; the capture of the hetmans; the awful conflagration in the whole Ukraine; slaughters, murders, unheard of since the beginning of the world, — all these came so suddenly that men almost refused to believe that so many misfortunes could come upon one land at a time. Many, in fact, did not believe it; some became helpless from terror, some lost their senses, some prophesied the coming of antichrist and the approach of the day of judgment. All social ties were severed; all intercourse between people and families was interrupted. Every authority ceased; distinction of persons vanished. Hell had freed from its chains all crimes, and let them out on the world to revel; therefore murder, pillage, perfidy, brutality, violence, robbery, frenzy, took the place of labor, uprightness, and conscience. It seemed as though henceforth people would live not through good, but through evil; that the hearts and intentions of men had become inverted, and that they held as sacred that which hitherto had been infamous, and that as infamous which hitherto had been sacred. The sun shone no longer upon the earth, for it was hidden by the smoke of conflagrations; in the night, instead of stars and moon, shone the light of fires. Towns, villages, churches, palaces, forests, went up in flames. People ceased to converse; they only groaned or howled like dogs. Life lost its value. Thousands perished without an echo, without remembrance. And from out all these calamities, deaths, groans, smoke, and burnings, there rose only one man. Every moment loftier and higher, every moment more terribly gigantic, he wellnigh obscured the light of day, and cast his shadow from sea to sea. That man was Bogdan Hmelnitski.

A hundred and twenty thousand men, armed and drunk with victory, stood ready at his nod. The mob had risen on all sides; the Cossacks of the towns joined him in every

place. The country from the Pripet to the borders of the Wilderness was on fire. The insurrection extended in the provinces of Rus, Podolia, Volynia, Bratslav, Kieff, and Chernigoff. The power of the hetman increased each day. Never had the Commonwealth opposed to its most terrible enemy half the forces which he then commanded. The German emperor had not equal numbers in readiness. The storm surpassed every expectation. The hetman himself did not recognize at first his own power, and did not understand how he had risen so high. He shielded himself yet with justice, legality, and loyalty to the Commonwealth, for he did not know then that he might trample upon these expressions as empty phrases; but as his forces grew there rose in him that immeasurable, unconscious egotism the equal of which is not presented by history. The understanding of good and evil, of virtue and vice, of violence and justice, were confounded in the soul of Hmelnitski with the understanding of injuries done him, or with his personal profit. That man was honorable who was with him; that man was a criminal who was against him. He was ready to complain of the sun, and to count it as a personal injustice if sunshine were not given at his demand. Men, events, nay, the whole world, he measured with his own *ego*. But in spite of all the cunning, all the hypocrisy of the hetman, there was a kind of deformed good faith in this theory of his. All Hmelnitski's crimes flowed from this theory, but his good deeds as well; for if he knew no bounds in his cruelty and tyranny to an enemy, he knew how to be thankful for every even involuntary service which was rendered him.

Only when he was drunk did he forget even good deeds, and bellowing with fury, with foam on his lips, issue bloody orders, for which he grieved afterward. And in proportion as his success grew, was he oftener drunk, for unquiet took increasing possession of him. It would seem that triumph carried him to heights which he did not wish to occupy. His power amazed other men, but it amazed himself too. The gigantic hand of rebellion seized and bore him on with the swiftness of lightning and inexorably. But whither? How was all this to end? Commencing sedition in the name of his own wrongs, that Cossack diplomat might calculate that after his first successes, or even after defeats, he could begin negotiations; that forgiveness would be offered him, satisfaction and

VLADISLAV IV., KING OF POLAND.

From an engraving by Moncornet.

recompense for injustice and injuries. He knew the Commonwealth intimately, — its patience, inexhaustible as the sea; its compassion, knowing neither bounds nor measure, which flowed not merely from weakness, for pardon was offered Nalivaika when he was surrounded and lost. But after the victory at Jóltiya Vodi, after the destruction of the hetmans, after the kindling of civil war in all the southern provinces, affairs had gone too far. Events had surpassed all expectations, and now the struggle must be for life and death. To whose side would victory incline?

Hmelnitski inquired of soothsayers, took counsel of the stars, and strained his eyes into the future, but saw nothing ahead save darkness. At times, therefore, an awful unquiet raised the hairs on his head, and in his breast despair raged like a whirlwind. What will be? — what will be? For Hmelnitski, observing more closely than others, understood at once, better than many, that the Commonwealth knew not how to use its own forces, — was unconscious of them, — but had tremendous power. If the right man should grasp that power in his hand, who could stand against him? And who could guess whether terrible danger, the nearness of the precipice and destruction, might not put an end to broils, internal dissensions, private grievances, rivalries of magnates, wrangling, the babbling of the Diets, the license of the nobility, and the weakness of the king? Then a half-million of escutcheoned warriors alone could move to the field, and crush Hmelnitski, even if he were aided not only by the Khan of the Crimea, but by the Sultan of Turkey himself.

Of this slumbering power of the Commonwealth the late King Vladislav was aware, as well as Hmelnitski; and therefore he labored all his life to initiate a mortal struggle with the greatest potentate on earth, for only in this way could that power be called into life. In accordance with this conviction, the king did not hesitate to throw sparks on the Cossack powder. Were the Cossacks really destined to cause that inundation, in order to be overwhelmed in it at last?

Hmelnitski understood, too, that in spite of all the weakness of the Commonwealth its resistance was tremendous. Against this Commonwealth, so disorderly, ill-united, insubordinate, the Turkish waves, the most terrible of all, were broken as against a cliff. Thus it was at Khotím, which he saw almost with his own eyes. That Common-

wealth, even in times of weakness, planted its standards on the walls of foreign capitals. What resistance will it offer, what will it not do when brought to despair, when it must either die or conquer?

In view of this, every triumph of Hmelnitski was to him a new danger, for it hastened the moment when the sleeping lion would wake, and brought negotiations nearer the impossible. In every victory lay a future defeat, and in every intoxication bitterness at the bottom. After the storm of the Cossacks would come the storm of the Commonwealth. Already it seemed to Hmelnitski that he heard its dull and distant roar. Behold, from Great Poland, Prussia, populous Mazovia, Little Poland, and Lithuania will come crowds of warriors! They need but a leader.

Hmelnitski had taken the hetmans captive, but in that good fortune there lurked also an ambush of fate. The hetmans were experienced warriors, but no one of them was the man demanded by that period of tempest, terror, and distress. The leader at that time could be but one man. That man was Prince Yeremi Vishnyevetski. Just because the hetmans had gone into captivity the choice would be likely to fall on the prince. Hmelnitski in common with all had no doubt of this.

Meanwhile news flew from beyond the Dnieper to Korsún, where the Zaporojian hetman had stopped to rest after the battle, that the terrible prince had started for Lubni; that on the road he was stamping out rebellion; that after his passage villages, hamlets, towns, farmhouses, had vanished, and the places in which they had been were bristling with bloody impaling-stakes and gibbets. Terror doubled and trebled the number of his forces; it was said that he led fifteen thousand of the choicest troops to be found in the Commonwealth.

In the Cossack camp, shortly after the battle at Krutaya Balka, the cry, "Yeremi is coming!" was heard among the Cossacks and spread a panic among the mob, who began to run away unreasoningly. This alarm astonished Hmelnitski greatly.

He had his choice then, — either to march with all his power against the prince and seek him beyond the Dnieper, or, leaving a part of his forces to capture the castles of the Ukraine, move into the heart of the Commonwealth. An expedition against the prince was not without danger,

Hmelnitski, in spite of the preponderance of his forces, might suffer defeat in a general engagement, and then all would be lost at once. The mob, who composed the great majority, gave evidence that they would flee at the very name of Yeremi. Time was necessary to change this mob into an army capable of facing the regiments of the prince. Besides, Yeremi would not be likely to accept a general battle, but would be content with defence in castles and partisan war which might last entire months, if not years, and by that time the Commonwealth would surely collect new forces and move to reinforce him.

Hmelnitski therefore determined to leave Vishnyevetski beyond the Dnieper, strengthen himself in the Ukraine, organize his power, then march on the Commonwealth and force it to terms. He calculated that the suppression of the rebellion on the east of the Dnieper alone would occupy for a long time all the forces of the prince, and leave a free field to himself. He hoped therefore to foment rebellion by sending single regiments to aid the mob, and finally he thought it would be possible to deceive the prince by negotiations, and retard matters by waiting till the power of Vishnyevetski should be broken. In view of this he remembered Pan Yan.

Some days after Krutaya Balka, and on the very day of the alarm of the mob, he had Skshetuski called before him. He received him in the house of the starosta, in presence of Krechovski only, who was long known to Skshetuski; and after he had greeted him kindly, though not without a lofty air corresponding to his present position, he said, —

"Lieutenant Skshetuski, for the kindness which you have shown me I have ransomed you from Tugai Bey and promised you freedom. Now the hour has come. I give you this baton of a colonel to secure a free passage, in case any of the forces should meet you, and a guard for protection against the mob. You may return to your prince."

Skshetuski was silent; no smile of joy appeared on his face.

"But are you able to take the road, for I see that illness of some kind is looking out through your eyes?"

Pan Yan, in truth, seemed like a shadow. Wounds and recent events had weakened the young giant, who looked as though he could give no promise of surviving till the morrow. His face had grown yellow, and the black beard, long untrimmed, added to the wretchedness of his appearance.

This rose from internal suffering. The knight's heart was almost broken. Dragged after the Tartar camp, he had been a witness of all that had happened since they issued from the Saitch. He had seen the defeat and disgrace of the Commonwealth, and the hetmans in captivity; he had seen the Cossack's triumph, pyramids of heads cut from fallen soldiers, noblemen hanged by the ribs, the breasts of women cut off, and maidens dishonored; he had seen the despair of daring and the baseness of fear; he had seen everything, endured everything, and suffered the more because the thought was in his bosom and brain, like the stab of a knife, that he himself was the remote cause, for he and no other had cut Hmelnitski loose from the lariat. But was a Christian knight to suppose that succor given one's neighbor could bring such fruit? His pain therefore was beyond measure.

When he asked himself what was happening to Helena, and when he thought what might happen if an evil fate should keep her in Rozlogi, he stretched his hands to heaven and cried in a voice in which quivered deep despair, almost a threat: "O God! take my life, for I am punished beyond my deserts!" Then he saw that he was blaspheming, fell on his face, and prayed for salvation, for forgiveness, for mercy on his country and that innocent dove, who maybe had called in vain for God's help and his. In one word, he had suffered so much beyond his power that the freedom granted did not rejoice him; and that Zaporojian hetman, that conqueror who wished to be magnanimous by showing his favor, made no impression upon him at all. Seeing this, Hmelnitski frowned and said, —

"Hasten to take advantage of my favor, lest I change my mind; for it is my kindness and belief in a just cause which makes me so careless as to provide an enemy for myself, for I know well that you will fight against me."

To which Skshetuski answered: "If God gives me strength."

And he gazed at Hmelnitski, till he looked into the depth of his soul. The hetman, unable to endure the gaze, cast his eyes to the ground, and after a moment said, —

"Enough of this! I am too powerful to be troubled by one sick man. Tell the prince your lord what you have seen, and warn him to be less insolent; for if my patience fails I will visit him beyond the Dnieper, and I do not think my visit will be pleasant to him."

Skshetuski was silent.

"I say, and repeat once more," added Hmelnitski, "I am carrying on war, not with the Commonwealth, but with the kinglets; and the prince is in the first rank among them. He is an enemy to me and to the Russian people, an apostate from our church, and a savage tyrant. I hear that he is quelling the uprising in blood; let him see to it that he does not spill his own."

Thus speaking, he became more and more excited, till the blood began to rush to his face, and his eyes flashed fire. It was evident that one of those paroxysms of anger and rage in which he lost his memory and presence of mind altogether was seizing him.

"I will command Krivonos to bring him with a rope!" cried he. "I will trample him under foot, and mount my horse on his back!"

Skshetuski looked down on the raging Hmelnitski, and then said calmly: "Conquer him first."

"Hetman," said Krechovski, "let this insolent noble go his way, for it does not become your dignity to be affected by anger against him; and since you have promised him freedom he calculates that either you will break your word or listen to his invectives."

Hmelnitski bethought himself, panted awhile, then said, —

"Let him go then, and give him a baton, as I have said, and forty Tartars, who will take him to his own camp, so that he may know that Hmelnitski returns good for good." Then turning to Pan Yan, he added: "You know that we are even now. I liked you in spite of your insolence, but if you fall into my hands again you will not escape."

Skshetuski went out with Krechovski.

"Since the hetman has let you off with your life," said Krechovski, "and you can go where you please, I tell you, for old acquaintance' sake, to seek safety in Warsaw rather than beyond the Dnieper, for you will not leave there alive. Your time has passed. If you were wise you would come to our side, but I know that it is useless to tell you this. You would rise as high as we."

"To the gallows," muttered Skshetuski.

"They would not give me the starostaship of Lita, but now I can take, not only one, but ten such places. We will drive out the Konyetspolskis, Kalinovskis, Pototskis, Lyubomirskis, Vishnyevetskis, Zaslavskis, and all the