

"What are you muttering there, brother?" asked the peasant.

"Oh, nothing! I am praying for your health. Amen, amen!"

"Here is my cottage."

"Glory be to God!"

"For the ages of ages!"

"I beg you to eat my bread and salt."

"God will reward you."

A little later the minstrel had strengthened himself powerfully with mutton and a good portion of mead. Next morning early, he moved on with his attendant lad, in a comfortable telega, toward Zólotonosha, escorted by a number of mounted peasants armed with pikes and scythes.

They went through Kovraiets, Chernobái, and Krapivna. The wayfarers saw that everything was seething; the peasants were arming at all points, the forges were working from morning till night, and only the terrible name and power of Prince Yeremi still restrained the bloody outburst. West of the Dnieper the tempest was let loose in all its fury. News of the defeat at Korsún had spread over all Russia with the speed of lightning, and every living soul was rushing forth.

CHAPTER XXI.

NEXT morning after the flight of Zagloba, the Cossacks found Bogun half suffocated in the coat in which Zagloba had wrapped him; but since his wounds were not serious he returned soon to consciousness. Remembering everything that had happened, he fell into a rage, roared like a wild beast, stained his hands with blood from his own wounded head, and struck at the men with his dagger, so that the Cossacks dared not come near him. At last, being unable to support himself in the saddle, he ordered them to bind a Jew cradle between two horses, and sitting in it, he hurried on as if insane in the direction of Lubni, supposing that the fugitives had gone thither. Resting on the Jew bed on down, and in his own blood, he raced over the steppe like a vampire hurrying back to its grave before daybreak; and after him speeded his trusty Cossacks, with the thought in mind that they were hurrying to evident death. They flew on in this way to Vassilyevka, where there was a garrison of one hundred Hungarian infantry belonging to Prince Yeremi. The furious leader, as if life had become loathsome to him, fell upon these without hesitation, rushing first into the fire himself, and after a struggle of some hours' duration cut the men to pieces, with the exception of a few whom he spared to gain from them a confession through torture. Learning that no noble with a maiden had escaped by that road, and not knowing himself what to do, he tore away his bandages from excess of pain.

To go farther was impossible; for everywhere toward Lubni were stationed the forces of the prince, whom the villagers that had run away during the battle at Vassilyevka must have already informed of the attack. The faithful Cossacks therefore bore away their ataman weakened from rage, and took him back to Rozlogi. On their return they found not a trace of the buildings; for the peasants of the neighborhood had plundered and burned them, together with Prince Vassily, thinking that in case the Kurtsevichi or Prince Yeremi should wish to inflict punishment, the blame could be cast easily on Bogun and his

Cossacks. They had burned every out-house, cut down the cherry-orchard, and killed all the servants. The peasants had taken unsparing vengeance for the harsh rule and oppression which they had endured from the Kurtsevichi.

Just beyond Rozlogi, Pleshnyevski, who was carrying tidings of the defeat at Jóltya Vodi from Chigirin, fell into the hands of Bogun. When asked where and for what purpose he was going, he hesitated and failed to give clear answers; he fell under suspicion, and when burned with fire, told of the victory of Hmelnitski, and also of Zagloba, whom he had met the day before. The leader rejoiced, and drew a long breath. After he had hanged Pleshnyevski, he hurried on, feeling certain that Zagloba would not escape him. The herdsmen gave some new indications, but beyond the ford all traces disappeared. The ataman did not meet the minstrel whom Zagloba had stripped of his clothing, for he had gone lower down along the Kagamlik, and besides was so frightened that he had hidden like a fox in the reeds.

A day and a night more passed; and since the pursuit toward Vassilyevka occupied two days precisely, Zagloba had much time on his side. What was to be done then? In this difficult juncture the essaul came to Bogun with advice and assistance. He was an old wolf of the steppe, accustomed from youth to track Tartars through the Wilderness.

"Father," said he, "they fled to Chigirin, — and they have done wisely, for they have gained time, — but when they heard of Hmelnitski and Jóltya Vodi from Pleshnyevski, they changed their road. You have seen yourself, father, that they left the high-road and rushed to one side."

"To the steppe?"

"In the steppe I could find them, father; but they went toward the Dnieper, to go to the hetmans; therefore they went either through Cherkas or Zólotonosha and Próhorovka; and if they went even to Pereyaslav, though I don't believe that, still we shall find them. We should go, one to Cherkasi, another to Zólotonosha, along the wagon-road; and quickly, for as soon as they cross the Dnieper, they will hasten to the hetmans, or Hmelnitski's Tartars will pick them up."

"You hurry to Zólotonosha, and I will go to Cherkasi," said Bogun.

"All right, father."

"And keep a sharp lookout, for he is a cunning fox."

"Ai, father! I am cunning too."

Having settled the plan of pursuit in this way, the leader and the essaul turned immediately, — one to Cherkasi; the other higher up, to Zólotonosha. In the evening of the same day the old essaul Anton reached Demianovka.

The village was deserted; only the women were left, for all the men had gone beyond the river to Hmelnitski. Seeing armed men and not knowing who they were, the women had hidden in the thatch and in the barns. The Cossacks had to search long; but at last they found an old woman, who feared nothing, not even the Tartars.

"And where are the men, mother?" asked Anton.

"Do I know?" answered she, showing her yellow teeth.

"We are Cossacks, mother, don't be afraid; we are not from the Poles."

"The Poles? May the evil one —"

"You are glad to see us, I suppose?"

"You?" The old woman hesitated a moment. "The plague take you!"

Anton was at a loss what to do, when suddenly the door of one of the cottages squeaked, and a young, fair-looking woman came out.

"Ai! good men, I heard that you were not Poles."

"True, we are not."

"Are you from Hmelnitski?"

"Yes."

"Not from the Poles?"

"By no means."

"And why do you ask for the men?"

"I ask if they have gone already."

"They have gone."

"Glory be to God! And tell us now, did a noble go by here, — a cursed Pole with a young woman?"

"A noble? A Pole? I did n't see them."

"Was no one here?"

"There was a 'grandfather.' He persuaded the men to go to Hmelnitski through Zólotonosha, for he said that Prince Yeremi was coming here."

"Where?"

"Here. And from here would go to Zólotonosha, so the old man said."

"And the old man persuaded the men to rise?"

"He did."

"And he was alone?"

"No. With a dumb boy."

"How did he look?"

"Who?"

"The old man."

"Oh, ai! old, very old. He played on a lyre, and complained of the lords. But I did not see him."

"And he persuaded the men to rise?" asked Anton.

"He did."

"Well, good-by, young woman."

"God be with you!"

Anton stopped in deep thought. If the old man was Zagloba disguised, why did he persuade the peasants to go to Hmelnitski, and where did he get the disguise? Where did he leave the horses, for he fled on horseback? But, above all, why did he incite peasants to rebellion and warn them of the coming of the prince? A noble would not have warned them, and first of all he would have taken refuge under the protection of the prince. And if the prince is really going to Zólotonosha, in which there is nothing strange, then he will pay for Vassilyevka without fail. Here Anton shuddered; for that moment he saw a new picket in the gate, exactly like an empaling stake.

"No! That old man was only a minstrel and nothing more. There is no reason to go to Zólotonosha unless they fled that way."

But Zagloba had disappeared. What was to be done further? Wait? — but the prince might come up. Go to Próhorovka and cross the Dnieper? — that would be to fall into the hands of the hetmans.

It was growing rather narrow for the old wolf of the Wilderness in the broad steppes. He felt also that being a wolf he had come upon a fox in Pan Zagloba. Then he struck his forehead. But why did that "grandfather" take the people to Zólotonosha, beyond which is Próhorovka, and beyond that and the Dnieper the hetmans and the whole camp of the king? Anton determined that come what might, he would go to Próhorovka.

"When I am at the river, if I hear that the forces of the hetmans are on the other side, then I will not cross, I will go along the bank and join Bogun opposite Cherkasi. Besides, I shall get news of Hmelnitski along the road."

Anton already knew, from the story of Pleshnyevski,

that Hmelnitski had occupied Chigirin; that he had sent Krivonos against the hetmans, and was to follow him at once with Tugai Bey. Anton was an experienced soldier, and knowing the situation of the country well, was sure that the battle must have been fought already. In such an event it was necessary to know what was to be done. If Hmelnitski had been beaten, the forces of the hetmans would spread over the whole country along the Dnieper in pursuit; in that case there would be no sense in looking for Zagloba. But if Hmelnitski had won, — which in truth Anton did not greatly believe, — it was easier to beat the son of the hetman than the hetman, a van detachment than the whole army.

"Oh," thought the old Cossack, "our ataman would do better to think of his own skin than of a young girl! Near Chigirin he might have crossed the Dnieper, and from there slipped off to the Saitch in time. Here between Prince Yeremi and the hetmans it will be difficult for him to make his way."

With these thoughts he moved on quickly with the Cossacks in the direction of the Sula, which he had to cross just beyond Demiánovka, wishing to go to Próhorovka. They went to Mogilna, situated at the river itself. Here fortune served Anton; for Mogilna, like Demiánovka, was deserted. He found, however, scows ready, and ferrymen who took over peasants fleeing to the Dnieper.

The Trans-Dnieper did not dare to rise under the hand of the prince; but to make up for this the peasants left all the hamlets, settlements, and villages, to join Hmelnitski and rally to his banners. The news of the victory of the Zaporozhians at Jóltya Vodi flew like a bird through the whole Trans-Dnieper. The wild inhabitants could not remain in quiet, though there especially they had experienced hardly any oppression; for, as has been said, the prince, merciless to rebels, was a real father to peaceful settlers. His overseers on this account feared to commit injustice on people intrusted to them. But that people, changed not long before from robbers into agriculturists, were weary of the harshness of regulations and order. They fled therefore to where the hope of wild freedom gleamed. In many villages even the women fled to Hmelnitski. In Chabanovets and Vysoki the whole population turned out, burning the houses behind them so as to have no place for return. In those villages in which a few people still remained, they were forced to arms.

Anton began to inquire at once of the ferrymen for news beyond the Dnieper. There were reports, but contradictory, confused, unintelligible. It was said that Hmelnitski was fighting with the hetmans; some said that he was beaten, others that he was victorious. A peasant fleeing toward Demianovka said that the hetmans were taken captive. The ferrymen suspected that he was a noble in disguise, but were afraid to detain him because they had heard that the forces of the prince were at hand. A certain fear increased the number of the prince's armies everywhere, and made of them omnipresent divisions; for there was not a single village in the whole Trans-Dnieper in which it was not said that the prince was "right here, close by." Anton saw that they considered his party everywhere as belonging to Prince Yermi.

But soon he set the ferrymen at rest, and began to inquire about the Demianovka peasants.

"Oh yes; they passed. We took them to the other side," said a ferryman.

"And there was a minstrel with them?"

"Yes, there was."

"And a dumb boy with the old man, — a lad?"

"Yes; there was."

"What did the minstrel look like?"

"He was not old, heavy, had eyes like a fish, and on one of them a cataract."

"Oh, that is he!" muttered Anton, and inquired further: "And the boy?"

"Oh, father ataman," said the ferryman, "an angel, out and out! We have never seen such a boy."

In the mean while they were coming to the shore.

"Ah, we will bring her to the ataman!" muttered Anton to himself. Then he turned to the Cossacks: "To horse!"

They shot on like a flock of frightened bustards, though the road was difficult, for the country was broken into gorges. But they entered a broad ravine at the bottom of which was a kind of natural path formed by the flowing of a spring. The ravine extended to Kavraiets. They rushed on some miles without halting; Anton, on the best horse, ahead. The broad mouth of the ravine was already visible when Anton suddenly pulled in his horse till his hind shoes crushed the stones.

"What is this?"

The entrance was suddenly darkened with men and

horses. A troop entered in pairs, and formed six abreast. There were about three hundred horsemen. Anton looked; and although he was an old soldier hardened to every danger, his heart thumped within his breast and on his face came a deathly pallor. He recognized the dragoons of Prince Yermi.

It was too late to flee. Anton's party was separated from the dragoons by scarcely two hundred yards, and the tired horses of the Cossacks could not go far in escape. The dragoons, seeing them, rode up on a trot. In a moment the Cossacks were surrounded on every side.

"Who are you?" asked the commander, sternly.

"Bogun's men!" answered Anton, seeing that it was necessary to tell the truth. But recognizing the lieutenant whom he had seen in Pereyaslav, he cried out at once with pretended joy: "Oh, Pan Kushel! Thank God!"

"Ah! is that you, Anton?" asked the lieutenant, looking at the essaul. "What are you doing here? Where is your ataman?"

"The Grand Hetman has sent our ataman to the prince to ask for assistance; so he has gone to Lubni, and he has commanded us to go along through the villages to catch deserters."

Anton lied as if for hire; but he trusted in this, — since the dragoons were going away from the Dnieper, they could not know yet of the attack on Rozlogi, nor of the battle at Vas-silyevka, nor of any of Bogun's undertakings.

Still the lieutenant added: "One might say you wanted to steal over to the rebellion."

"Oh, Lieutenant, if we wanted to go to Hmelnitski, we should not be on this side of the Dnieper."

"That," said Kushel, — "is an evident truth which I am not able to deny. But the ataman will not find the prince in Lubni."

"Where is he?"

"He was in Priluka; but it is possible that he started yesterday for Lubni."

"Too bad! The ataman has a letter from the hetman to the prince. And may I make bold to ask if you are coming from Zolotonosha?"

"No; we were stationed at Kalenki, and now we have received orders to go to Lubni, like the rest of the army. From there the prince will move, with all his forces. But where are you going?"

"To Próhorovka, for the peasants are crossing there."

"Have many of them fled?"

"Oh, many, many!"

"Well, then, go! God be with you!"

"Thank you kindly, Lieutenant. God conduct you!"

The dragoons opened their ranks, and Anton's escort rode out from among them to the mouth of the ravine.

After he had issued from the ravine, Anton stopped and listened carefully; and when the dragoons had vanished from sight, and the last echo had ceased, he turned to his Cossacks, and said, —

"Do you know, you simpletons, that were it not for me, you would soon be gasping, empaled on stakes, in Lubni? And now, forward, even if we drive the last breath out of our horses!"

They rushed on with all speed.

"We are lucky, and doubly so," thought Anton, — "first, in escaping with sound skins, and then because those dragoons were not marching from Zólotonosha, and Zagloba missed them; for if he had met them, he would have been safe from every pursuit."

In truth, fortune was very unfavorable to Zagloba in not letting him come upon Kushel and his company; for then he would have been rescued at once, and freed from every fear.

Meanwhile the news of the catastrophe at Korsún came upon Zagloba at Próhorovka like a thunderbolt. Reports had already been passing through the villages and farm-houses on the road to Zólotonosha of a great battle, even of the victory of Hmelnitski; but Zagloba did not lend them belief, for he knew from experience that every report grows and grows among the common people to unheard of dimensions, and that specially of the preponderance of the Cossacks the people willingly told wonders. But in Próhorovka it was difficult to doubt any longer. The terrible and ominous truth struck like a club on the head. Hmelnitski had triumphed, the army of the king was swept away, the hetmans were in captivity, and the whole Ukraine was on fire.

Zagloba lost his head at first, for he was in a terrible position. Fortune had not favored him on the road, for at Zólotonosha he did not find the garrison, and the old fortress was deserted. He doubted not for a moment that Bogun was pursuing him, and that sooner or later he

would come upon his trail. He had doubled back, it is true, like a hunted hare; but he knew, through and through, the hound that was hunting him, and he knew that that hound would not allow himself to be turned from the trail. Zagloba had Bogun behind, and before him a sea of peasant rebellion, slaughter, conflagration, Tartar raids, and raging mobs. To flee in such a position was a task difficult of accomplishment, especially with a young woman who, though disguised as a minstrel boy, attracted attention everywhere by her extraordinary beauty. In truth, it was enough to make a man lose his head.

But Zagloba never lost it long. Amid the greatest chaos in his brain he saw perfectly one thing, or rather felt it most clearly, — that he feared Bogun a hundred times more than fire, water, rebellion, slaughter, or Hmelnitski himself. At the very thought that he might fall into the hands of the terrible leader, the skin crept on his body. "He would flay me," repeated he, continually. "But in front is a sea of rebellion!"

One method of salvation remained, — to desert Helena, and leave her to the will of God; but Zagloba did not wish to do that, and did not let the thought enter his head. What was he to do?

"Ah," thought he, "it is not the time to look for the prince. Before me is a sea; I will give a plunge into this sea. At least I shall hide myself, and with God's aid swim to the other shore." And he determined to cross to the right bank of the Dnieper.

This was no easy task at Próhorovka. Nikolai Pototski had already collected for Krechovski and his men all the scows and boats, large and small, from Pereyasláv to Chigirin. In Próhorovka there was only one leaky scow. Thousands of people, fleeing from the neighborhood of the Dnieper, were waiting for that scow. All the cottages, cow-houses, barns, sheds in the entire village were taken. Everything was enormously dear. Zagloba was in truth forced to earn a bit of bread with his lyre and his song. For twenty-four hours there was no passage. The scow was injured twice, and had to be repaired. Zagloba passed the night sitting on the bank of the river with Helena, together with crowds of drunken peasants who were sitting around fires. The night, too, was windy and cold. The princess was worn out and in pain, for the peasant boots galled her feet; she was afraid of becoming so ill as

to be unable to move. Her face grew dark and pale, her marvellous eyes were quenched; every moment she feared that she should be recognized under her disguise, or that Bogun's men would come up. That same night she beheld a terrible sight. A number of nobles who had tried to take refuge in the domains of Vishnyevetski from Tartar attack were brought from the mouth of the Ros by peasants, and put to death on the bank of the river.

Besides this, in Próhorovka there were two Jews, with their families. The maddened crowd hurled them into the river; and when they did not go to the bottom at once, they were pushed down with long sticks, together with their wives and children. This was accompanied by uproar and drunkenness. Topsy men frolicked with tippy women. Terrible outbursts of laughter sounded ominously on the dark shores of the Dnieper. The winds scattered the fire; red brands, and sparks driven by the wind, flew along, and died on the waves. Occasionally alarm sprang up. At one time and another a drunken, hoarse voice would cry in the darkness, "Save yourselves! Yeremi is coming!" And the crowd rushed blindly to the shore, trampled on one another, and pushed one another into the water. Once they came near running over Zagloba and the princess. It was an infernal night, and seemed endless. Zagloba begged a quart of vudka, drank himself, and forced the princess to drink; otherwise she would have fainted or caught a fever. At last the waves of the Dnieper began to whiten and shine. Light had come. The day was cloudy, gloomy, pale. Zagloba wished to cross, with all haste, to the other side. Happily the scow was repaired, but the throng in front of it was enormous.

"A place for the grandfather, a place for the grandfather!" cried Zagloba, holding Helena between his outstretched arms, and defending her from the pressure. "A place for the grandfather! I am going to Hmel'nitski and Krivonos. A place for the grandfather, good people! My dear fellows, may the black death choke you and your children! I cannot see well; I shall fall into the water; my boy will be drowned. Give way, children! May the paralysis shake every limb of you; may you die on the stake!"

Thus brawling, begging, pushing the crowd apart with powerful arms, he urged Helena forward to the scow, clambered on himself, and then began to brawl again,—

"There are plenty of you here already. Why do you

crowd so? You will sink the scow. Why do so many of you push on here? Enough, enough! Your turn will come; and if it does n't, small matter!"

"Enough, enough!" cried those who had got on the scow. "Push off, push off!"

The oars bent, and the scow began to move from the shore. A swift current bore it downward at once, somewhat in the direction of Domontov.

They had passed about one half the stream, when on the Próhorovka side shouts and cries were heard. A terrible disturbance rose among the people near the river. Some ran as if wild toward Domontov; others jumped into the water. Some shouted and waved their hands, or threw themselves on the ground.

"What is that? What has happened?" was asked on the scow.

"Yeremi!" cried one voice.

"Yeremi, Yeremi! Let us flee," cried others.

The oars began to beat feverishly on the water; the scow sped on through the waves like a Cossack boat. At the same moment horsemen appeared on the Próhorovka shore.

"The armies of Yeremi!" shouted some on the boat.

The horsemen rode along the shore, turned, asked the people about something. At last they began to call out to the boatmen: "Stop, stop!"

Zagloba looked, and cold sweat covered him from head to foot. He recognized Bogun's Cossacks. It was, in fact, Anton with his men.

But, as already stated, Zagloba never lost his head long. He covered his eyes like a man of poor sight, looking; he must have looked a good while. At last he began to cry, as if some one were pulling him out of his skin,—

"Oh, children, those are the Cossacks of Vishnyevetski! Oh, for the sake of God and his Holy Purest Mother, quick, to the shore! We will resign ourselves to the loss of those who are left, and break the scow; if not, death to us all!"

"Oh, hurry, hurry! break the scow!" cried others.

A shouting was raised, in which nothing could be heard of the cries from the Próhorovka side. Then the scow grated upon the gravel of the shore. The peasants began to spring out; but some of them were not able to land before others were breaking the railing and cutting the bottom

with their axes. The planks and broken pieces began to fly through the air. The ill-fated boat was destroyed with frenzy, torn to pieces; terror lent strength to the raging people.

And all this time Zagloba was screaming: "Cut! slash! break! tear! burn! Save yourselves! Yeremi is coming! Yeremi is coming!"

Shouting in this fashion, he looked with his sound eye at Helena and began to mutter significantly.

Meanwhile from the other shore the shouts increased in view of the destruction of the boat, but it was so far away they could not understand what was said. The waving of hands seemed like threatening, and only increased the speed of destruction.

The scow disappeared after a while, but suddenly from every breast there came a cry of horror.

"They are springing into the water! they are swimming to us!" roared the peasants.

In fact, one horseman in advance and after him a number of others urged their horses into the water to swim to the other shore. It was a deed of almost insane daring; for increased by the spring flood, the river rushed on more powerfully than usual, forming here and there many eddies and whirlpools. Borne away by the impetus of the river, the horses could not swim straight across; the current began to bear them on with extraordinary swiftiness.

"They will not swim across!" cried the peasants.

"They are drowning!"

"Glory be to God! Oh! oh! one horse has gone down already! Death to them!"

The horses had swum a third part of the river, but the water bore them down with increasing speed. Evidently they began to lose strength; gradually too they sank deeper and deeper. After a little the men on their backs were in the water to their girdles. The peasants from Shelepukhi ran to the water to see what was going on; now only the horses' heads looked out above the water, which reached the breasts of the men. But now they had swum half the river. Suddenly one horse's head and one man disappeared under the water; after that a second, a third, a fourth, a fifth,—the number of swimmers decreased each moment. On both sides of the river a deep silence reigned in the crowds, but all ran with the course of the water to see what would happen. Now two thirds of the river was crossed;

the number of swimmers still decreased, but the heavy snorting of horses and the voices of the heroes urging them on was heard; it was clear that some would cross.

"Hi, children! to your muskets! Destruction to the prince's men!"

Puffs of smoke burst forth; then the rattle of muskets. A cry of despair was heard from the river, and after a while horses and men had vanished. The river was cleared; only here and there in the distance, in the whirl of the waves, looked black for an instant the belly of a horse, gleamed red for a moment the cap of a Cossack.

Zagloba looked at Helena, and muttered.