

CHAPTER XXII.

PRINCE VISHNYEVETSKI knew of the defeat at Korsún before Skshetuski had been found sitting on the ruins of Rozlogi, since Polyanski, one of his hussar officers, had brought news of it to Segotin. Previous to that the prince had been in Priluka, and from there had sent Boguslav Mashkevich with a letter to the hetmans, inquiring when they would order him to march with all his forces. But as Pan Mashkevich did not return for a long time with the answer of the hetmans, the prince moved on toward Pereyaslav, sending orders on every side to the detachments that the regiments which were scattered here and there in the Trans-Dnieper should assemble as quickly as possible at Lubni.

But news came that some Cossack regiments disposed in outposts along the borders next the Tartars had dispersed or joined the insurrection. Thus the prince saw his forces suddenly decreased, and was grieved not a little; for he did not expect that those men whom he had led so often to victory could ever desert him. However, upon meeting with Pan Polyanski and receiving news of the unexampled catastrophe, he concealed it from the army and went on toward the Dnieper, thinking to march at random into the midst of the storm and uprising, and either revenge the defeat, wipe away the disgrace of the armies, or shed his own blood. He judged that there must be some, and perhaps large, portions of the army of the Crown left after the defeat. These, if joined to his division of six thousand, might measure themselves with Hmelnitski with hope of victory.

Halting at Pereyaslav, he ordered Pan Volodyovski and Pan Kushel to send their dragoons in every direction, — to Cherkasi, Mantovo, Sekirnaya, Buchach, Staiki, Trakhtimiroff, and Rjischeff, — to collect all the boats and craft which they could find anywhere. Then the army was to cross from the left side to Rjischeff.

The messengers heard of the defeat from fugitives whom they met here and there; but at all the above-mentioned places they could not find a single boat, since, as already

stated, the Grand Hetman of the Crown had taken one half of them long before for Kreehovski and Barabash, and the rebellious mob on the right bank had destroyed the rest through fear of the prince. But Volodyovski crossed over with ten men to the right bank on a raft which he had fashioned in haste from tree-trunks, and seized a number of Cossacks, whom he brought to the prince, who learned from them of the enormous extent of the rebellion and the terrible fruits of the defeat at Korsún. The whole Ukraine had risen to the last man. The insurrection had spread like a deluge, which covering a level land occupies more and more space at each twinkle of an eye. The nobles defended themselves in large and small castles; but many of these castles had been already captured.

Hmelnitski was increasing in power every moment. The captured Cossacks gave the number of his army at two hundred thousand men, and in a couple of days it might be doubled. For this reason he remained in Korsún after the battle, and took immediate advantage of the peace to marshal the people into his countless hosts. He divided the mob into regiments, appointed colonels from the atamans and experienced Zaporozian assaults, and sent detachments or whole divisions to capture neighboring castles. Considering all this, Prince Yeremi saw that on account of the absence of boats the construction of which for an army of six thousand men would occupy several weeks' time, and on account of the strength of the enemy which had increased beyond measure, there was no means of crossing the Dnieper in those parts in which he then found himself. Pan Polyanski, Colonel Baranovski, the commander of the camp, Alexander Baranovski, Volodyovski, and Vurtsel were in favor of moving to the north toward Chernigoff, which was on the other side of dense forests, thence they would march on Lubech, and cross the river to Braginoff. It was a long and perilous journey; for beyond the Chernigoff forests, in the direction of Braginoff, were enormous swamps, which were not easy of passage even for infantry, and what must they be for heavy cavalry-wagons and artillery. The proposal, however, pleased the prince; but he wished, before going on that long and as he considered unavoidable road, to show himself once more in his Trans-Dnieper domains, prevent immediate outbreak, gather the nobles under his wing, transfix the people with terror, and leave behind the memory of that terror, which in

the absence of the master would be the only safeguard to the country and the guardian of all who were unable to march with the army. Besides this, Princess Griselda, the Princesses Zbaraskie, the ladies in waiting, the whole court, and some regiments, — namely, the infantry, — were still in Lubni. The prince therefore determined to go to Lubni for a last farewell.

The troops moved that very day, and at their head Pan Volodyovski with his dragoons, who, though all Russian without exception, still held by the bonds of discipline and trained as regular soldiers, almost surpassed in loyalty the other regiments. The country was quiet yet. Here and there had been formed ruffianly bands which plundered castle and cottage alike. These bands the prince destroyed in great part along the road and empaled on stakes. The common people had risen in no place. Their minds were seething, fire was in the eyes and souls of the peasants, they armed in secret and fled beyond the Dnieper; but fear was still superior to the thirst for blood and murder. It might be considered of ill-omen for the future, however, that the inhabitants of those villages from which the peasants had not gone to Hmelnitski fled at the approach of the army, as if fearing that the terrible prince would read in their faces that which was hidden in their hearts and would punish them in advance. And he did punish wherever he found the least sign of incipient rebellion; and as he had a nature unbounded both in rewarding and punishing, he punished without measure and without mercy. It might have been said at that time that two vampires were careering along both banks of the Dnieper, — one, Hmelnitski, devouring nobles; the other, Prince Yeremi, destroying the uprisen people. It was whispered among the peasants that when these two met the sun would be darkened and the water in all rivers run red. But the meeting was not at hand; for Hmelnitski, the conqueror at Jóltya Vodi and Korsún, — that Hmelnitski who had battered into fragments the armies of the Crown, who had taken captive the hetmans, and who was then at the head of hundreds of thousands of warriors, — simply feared that lord of Lubni, who was going to look for him west of the Dnieper. The armies of the prince had passed Slepore. The prince himself stopped to rest at Philipovo, where he was informed that envoys had come from Hmelnitski with a letter and begged for an audience. The prince gave

orders to produce them at once. Then the six Zaporojians entered the house of the under-starosta where the prince was stopping. They entered boldly enough, especially the chief of them, the ataman Sukhaya Ruká, distinguished through the victory of Korsún and his new rank of colonel. But when they saw the prince such fear seized them that they fell at his feet, not daring to utter a word.

The chieftain, surrounded by his principal knights, ordered them to rise, and asked what they had brought.

"A letter from the hetman," answered Sukhaya Ruká.

The prince fixed his eyes on the Cossack, and answered quietly, but with emphasis on every word, —

"From a bandit, a ruffian, and a robber, — not from a hetman!"

The Zaporojians grew pale, or blue rather, and dropping their heads on their breasts stood in silence at the door. Then the prince ordered Pan Mashkevich to take the letter and read it.

The letter was humble, though it was after Korsún. The fox had gained the upper hand of the lion in Hmelnitski, the serpent of the eagle, for he remembered that he was writing to Vishnyevetski. He flattered in order to quiet, and then the more easily to sting. He wrote that what had happened was through the fault of Chaplinski, and that the fickleness of fortune had met the hetmans; hence it was not his fault, but their evil fate and the oppressions which the Cossacks had endured in the Ukraine. Still he asked the prince not to be offended, to pardon him, and he would ever remain his obedient and willing servant; and to win favor for his envoys and save them from anger, he declared that he had dismissed in safety Pan Skshetuski, the hussar officer taken in the Saich.

Now followed complaints against the haughtiness of Skshetuski, who had refused to take letters from Hmelnitski to the prince, by which action he had put a great slight upon the dignity of the hetman and the whole Zaporojian army. To haughtiness and contempt like this which the Cossacks met with from the Poles at every step, did Hmelnitski attribute specially all that had happened from Jóltya Vodi to Korsún. The letter ended with assurances of regret, and of loyalty to the Commonwealth, together with offers of service to Yeremi.

The envoys themselves were astonished when they heard this letter, for they had no previous knowledge of its con-

tents, and supposed that it contained abuse and harsh challenges rather than requests. One thing was clear to them, — Hmelnitski had no wish to risk everything with such a famous leader, and instead of moving on him with all his forces, was delaying and deceiving him with humility, and waiting apparently till the forces of the prince should be worn out on campaigns and struggles with various detachments; in one word, he seemed to fear the prince. The envoys became still more subservient, and during the reading perused the prince's face carefully to see if they could find in it the hour of their death. Though in coming they were prepared to die, still fear seized them then. The prince listened quietly, but from time to time dropped the lids of his eyes as if wishing to restrain the thunderbolts hidden within, and it was as visible as if on the palm of the hand that he was holding terrible anger in check. When the letter was finished he answered no word to the envoys, but merely ordered Volodyovski to remove and keep them under guard; then he turned to the colonels himself and said, —

"Great is the cunning of this enemy, for he wishes to lull me with that letter so as to attack me asleep; or he will move into the heart of the Commonwealth, conclude terms, and receive immunity from the yielding estates and the king, and then he will feel himself safe, — for if I wanted to war with him after that, not he, but I should act against the will of the Commonwealth, and be held as a rebel."

Vurtsel caught himself by the head. "Oh, vulpes astuta!"

"Well, gentlemen, what action do you advise?" asked the prince. "Speak boldly, and then I will indicate to you my own will."

Old Zatsvilikhovski, who had left Chigirin some time before and joined the prince, said, —

"Let it be according to the will of your Highness; but if we are permitted to speak, then I will say that you have sounded the intentions of Hmelnitski with your usual quickness, for they are what you say and no other. I should think, therefore, that there is no need of paying attention to his letter, but after securing the future safety of the princess, to cross the Dnieper and begin war before Hmelnitski settles any conditions. It would be a shame and dishonor for the Commonwealth to suffer such insults to pass unpunished. But," here he turned to the colonels, "I wait your opinions, not giving my own as infallible."

The commander of the camp, Alexander Zamoiski, struck his sabre and said, —

"Worthy colonel, age speaks through you, and wisdom also. We must tear off the head of that hydra before it grows and devours us."

"Amen!" said the priest Mukhovetski.

Other colonels, instead of speaking, followed the example of the commander, shook their sabres, breathed hard, and gritted their teeth; but Vurtsel said, —

"It is a downright insult to the name of your Highness that that ruffian should dare to write to you. A koshevoi ataman has rank confirmed and recognized by the Commonwealth, with which the kuren atamans can cloak their action. But this is a pretended hetman, who can be considered in no light but that of a robber; and Pan Skshetuski acted in a praiseworthy manner when he refused to take his letters to your Highness."

"That is just what I think," said the prince; "and since I cannot reach him, he will be punished in the persons of his envoys." Then he turned to the colonel of the Tartar regiment of his guard: "Vershul, order your Tartars to behead those Cossacks; and for their chief let a stake be trimmed, and seat him on it without delay."

Vershul inclined his head, which was red as a flame. The priest Mukhovetski, who usually restrained the prince, crossed his hands as if in prayer, and looked imploringly into his eyes, wishing to find mercy.

"I know, priest, what you want," said the prince, "but it cannot be. This is necessary on account of the cruelties which they have committed west of the Dnieper, for our own dignity, and for the good of the Commonwealth. It must be shown convincingly that there is some one yet who is not afraid of that outcast, and treats him as a bandit, — who, though he writes with submission, acts with insolence, and conducts himself in the Ukraine as if he were an independent prince, and has brought such a paroxysm on the Commonwealth as it has not gone through for many a day."

"Your Highness, as he states, he liberated Pan Skshetuski unharmed," said the priest, timidly.

"I thank you in Skshetuski's name for comparing him with butchers." Here the prince frowned. "But enough! I see," continued he, turning to the colonels, "that your voices are all for war; this too is my will. We march

on Chigirin, collecting nobles by the way. We will cross at Bragin, then move to the south. Now to Lubni!"

"God be on our side!" said the colonels.

At this moment the door opened, and in it appeared Roztvorovski, lieutenant of the Wallachian regiment, sent two days before with three hundred horse on a reconnaissance.

"Your Highness," cried he, "the rebellion is spreading. Rozlogi is burned. The garrison at Vassilyevka is cut to pieces!"

"How? what? where?" was asked on every side.

But the prince motioned with his hand to be silent, and asked: "Who did it, — marauders or troops?"

"They say Bogun did it."

"Bogun?"

"Yes."

"When did it happen?"

"Three days ago."

"Did you follow the trace, catch up with them, seize informants?"

"I followed, but could not come up, for I was three days too late. I collected news along the road. They returned to Chigirin, then separated, — one half going to Cherkasi, the other to Zólotonosha and Próhorovka."

Here Pan Kushel said: "I met the detachment that was going to Próhorovka, and informed your Highness. They said they were sent by Bogun to prevent peasants from crossing the Dnieper; therefore I let them pass."

"You committed a folly, but I do not blame you. It is difficult not to be deceived when there is treason at every step, and the ground under one's feet is burning," said the prince.

Suddenly he seized himself by the head. "Almighty God!" cried he, "I remember that Skshetuski told me Bogun was making attempts on the honor of Kurtsevichovna; I understand now why Rozlogi was burned. The girl must have been carried away. Here, Volodyovski!" said the prince, "take five hundred horse and move on again to Cherkasi; let Bykhovets take five hundred Wallachians and go through Zólotonosha to Próhorovka. Don't spare the horses; whoever rescues the girl for me will have Yeremiovka for life. On! on!" Then to the colonels: "And we will go to Lubni through Rozlogi."

Thereupon the colonels hurried out of the under-starosta's

house and galloped to their regiments. Soldiers rushed to their horses. They brought to the prince the chestnut steed which he usually rode on his expeditions. And soon the regiments moved, and stretched out like a long and many-colored gleaming serpent over the Philipovo road.

Near the gate a bloody sight struck the eyes of the soldiers. On stakes of the hurdle-fence were to be seen the severed heads of the five Cossacks, which gazed on the army marching past with the dead whites of their open eyes; and some distance beyond the gate, on a green mound struggled and quivered the ataman Sukhaya Ruká, sitting upright, empaled on a stake. The point had already passed through half his body; but long hours of dying were indicated yet for the unfortunate ataman, for he might quiver there till night before death would put him to rest. At that time he was not only living, but he turned his terrible eyes on the regiments as each one of them passed by, — eyes which said: "May God punish you, and your children, and your grandchildren to the tenth generation, for the blood, for the wounds, for the torments! God grant that you perish, you and your race; that every misfortune may strike you! God grant that you be continually dying, and that you may never be able either to die or to live!" And although he was a simple Cossack, — although he died not in purple nor cloth of gold but in a common blue coat, and not in the chamber of a castle but under the naked sky on a stake, — still that torment of his, that death circling above his head, clothed him with dignity, and put such a power into his look, such an ocean of hate into his eyes, that all understood well what he wanted to say, and the regiments rode past in silence. But he in the golden gleam of the midday towered above them, shining on the freshly smoothed stake like a torch.

The prince rode by, not turning an eye; the priest Mukhovetski made the sign of the cross on the unfortunate man; and all had passed, when a youth from the hussar regiment, without asking any one for permission, urged his horse to the mound, and putting a pistol to the ear of the victim, ended his torments with a shot. All trembled at such daring infraction of military rules, and knowing the rigor of the prince, they looked on the youth as lost; but the prince said nothing. Whether he pretended not to hear or was buried in thought, it is sufficient that he rode on in

silence, and only in the evening did he order the young man to be called.

The stripling stood before the face of his lord barely alive, and thought that the ground was opening under his feet. But the prince inquired, —

"What is your name?"

"Jelenski."

"You fired at the Cossack?"

"I did," groaned he, pale as a sheet.

"Why did you do it?"

"Because I could not look at the torment."

"Oh, you will see so much of their deeds that at a sight like this pity will fly from you like an angel; but because on account of your pity you risked your life, the treasurer in Lubni will pay you ten golden ducats, and I take you into my personal service."

All wondered that the affair was finished in this way; but meanwhile it was announced that a detachment from Zólotonosha had come, and attention was turned in another direction.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LATE in the evening the army arrived in Rozlogi by moonlight. There they found Pan Yan sitting on his Calvary. The knight, as is known, had lost his senses altogether from pain and torment; and when the priest Mukhovetski brought him to his mind, the officers bore him away and began to greet and comfort him, especially Pan Longin Podbipienta, who for three months past had been a popular officer in Skshetuski's regiment. Pan Longin was ready also to be his companion in sighing and weeping, and for his benefit made a new vow at once, that he would fast every Tuesday of his life, if God would in any way send solace to the lieutenant.

Skshetuski was conducted straightway to Vishnyevetski at a peasant's cottage. When the prince saw his favorite he said not a word; he only opened his arms to him and waited. Skshetuski threw himself into those arms with loud weeping. Yeremi pressed him to his bosom and kissed him on the forehead, and the officers present saw the tears in his worthy eyes. After a while he began to speak, —

"I greet you as a son, for I thought I should never see you again. Bear your burden manfully, and remember that you will have thousands of comrades in misfortune who will leave wives, children, parents, and friends; and as a drop of water is lost in an ocean, so let your suffering sink in the sea of universal pain. When such terrible times have come on our dear country, whoever is a man and has a sword at his side will not yield himself to weeping over his own loss, but will hasten to the rescue of the common mother, and either find relief in his conscience or lie down in a glorious death, receive a heavenly crown, and with it eternal happiness."

"Amen!" said the priest Mukhovetski.

"Oh, I should rather see her dead!" groaned the knight.

"Weep, then, for great is your loss, and we will weep with you; for you have come not to Pagans, wild Scythians, or Tartars, but to brothers and loving comrades. Say to yourself, 'To-day I will weep over myself, but to-morrow