

CHAPTER XXV.

AFTER the nine days' march of which Mashkevich was the Xenophon, and the three days' passage of the Desna, the army reached Chernigoff at last. Skshetuski entered first of all with the Wallachians. The prince ordered him to the place on purpose, so that he might inquire sooner about the princess and Zagloba. But here, as in Lubni, neither in the town nor the castle did he hear anything of them. They had vanished somewhere without a trace, like a stone in the water, and the knight himself knew not what to think. Where could they have hidden themselves? Certainly not in Moscow, nor in the Crimea, nor in the Saitch. There remained only one hypothesis, that they had crossed the Dnieper; but in such an event they would find themselves at once in the midst of the storm. On that side there were slaughter and swarms of drunken peasants, Zaporojians, and Tartars, from whom not even a disguise would protect Helena; for those wild Pagans were glad to take boys captive, for whom they found a great demand in the markets of Stamboul. A terrible suspicion entered Skshetuski's head, — that possibly Zagloba had taken her to that side on purpose to sell her to Tugai Bey, who might pay him more liberally than Bogun; and this thought drove him to the very verge of madness. But Podbipienta, who had known Zagloba longer than Skshetuski, quieted him considerably in this respect.

"My dear brother," said he, "cast that thought out of your head! That noble has done nothing of the sort. The Kurtsevichi had treasures enough, which Bogun would have been willing to give him. Had he wished to ruin the girl, he would not have exposed his life, and he would have made his fortune."

"True," said the lieutenant; "but why has he fled with her across the Dnieper, instead of going to Lubni or Chernigoff?"

"Well, quiet your mind, my dear fellow! I know that Zagloba. He drank with me and borrowed money of me. He does not care for money, — either his own or another man's. If he has his own he will spend it, and he won't

repay another's if he borrows; but that he would undertake such a deed I do not believe."

"He is a frivolous man," said Pan Yan.

"Frivolous he may be, but he is a trickster who will outwit any man, and slip out of every danger himself. And as the priest with prophetic spirit said that God would give her back to you, so will it be; for it is just that every sincere affection should be rewarded. Console yourself with this hope, as I console myself."

Here Pan Longin began to sigh deeply, and after a while added: "Let us inquire once more at the castle. Maybe they passed by here."

They inquired everywhere, but to no purpose. There was not a trace even of the passage of the fugitives. The castle was full of nobles with their wives and children, who had shut themselves in against the Cossacks. The prince endeavored to persuade them to go with him, and warned them that the Cossacks were following in his tracks. They did not dare to attack the army, but it was likely they would attack the castle and the town after his departure. The nobles in the castle, however, were strangely blinded.

"We are safe behind the forests," said they to the prince. "No one will come to us here."

"But I have passed through these forests," said he.

"You have passed, but the rabble will not. These are not the forests for them."

The nobles refused to go, continuing in their blindness, for which they paid dearly later on. After the passage of the prince the Cossacks came quickly. The castle was defended manfully for three weeks, then was captured and all in it were cut to pieces. The Cossacks committed terrible cruelties, and no one took vengeance on them.

When the prince arrived at Lubech on the Dnieper he disposed his army there for rest, but went himself with the princess and court to Bragin, situated in the midst of forests and impassable swamps. A week later the army crossed over too. They marched then through Babitsa to Mozir, where, on the day of Corpus Christi, came the moment of separation; for the princess with the court had to go to Turoff to the wife of the voevoda of Vilna, her aunt, but the prince with the army into fire in the Ukraine.

At the farewell dinner the prince and princess, the ladies in waiting, and most of the distinguished officers were present. But the usual animation was not evident among

the ladies and cavaliers, for more than one soldier heart was cut by the thought that he would soon have to leave the chosen one, for whom he wished to live, fight, and die; more than one pair of bright or dark maiden eyes were filled with tears of sorrow because "*he* is going to the war among bullets and swords, among Cossacks and wild Tartars, — is going and may not return."

When the prince began to speak in taking farewell of his wife and court, the young ladies fell to crying one after another as plaintively as kittens; but the knights, being of sterner stuff, rose from their places, and seizing the hilts of their swords, shouted in unison, —

"We will conquer and return!"

"God give you strength!" answered the princess.

Then there rose a shout that made the walls and windows tremble.

"Long life to the princess! Long life to our mother and benefactress! Long life to her! long life to her!"

The officers loved her for her love to them, for her greatness of soul, her liberality and kindness, for her care of their families. Prince Yeremi loved her above all things; for theirs were two natures created as it were for each other, as much alike as two goblets of gold and bronze.

Then all went up to her, and each one knelt with his goblet before her chair, and she, embracing the head of each one, spoke some word of kindness. But to Skshetuski she said, —

"It is likely that more than one knight here will receive a scapula or a ribbon at parting; and since you have not here the one from whom most of all you would wish to receive a memento, take this from me as from a mother."

While saying this, she removed a golden cross set with turquoise and hung it upon his neck. He kissed her hands with reverence.

It was evident that the prince was greatly pleased at this attention shown Skshetuski; for of late he had given him increased affection because in his mission to the Saitch he had upheld the dignity of the prince and refused to take letters from Hmelnitski. They rose from the table. The young ladies, catching on the wing the words of the princess spoken to Pan Yan and receiving them as a sign of approval and permission, began immediately to bring, one a scapula, another a scarf, a third a cross, which seeing, the knights present approached, if not his

chosen, at least his favorite one. Therefore Ponyatovski came to Jitinska; Bykhovets to Bogovitinyanka, for recently he had grown pleasing to her; Roztvorovski to Jukovna; red Vershul to Skoropadska; Colonel Makhnitski, though old, to Zavyeska. Only Anusia Borzobogata Krassenska, though the most beautiful of all, stood under the window deserted and alone; her face was flushed, her eyes with drooping lids shot from their corners glances full of anger and of a prayer not to put such an affront on her. Seeing this, the traitor Volodyovski came up and said, —

"I too wished to beg Panna Anna for a memento, but I abandoned, resigned, my wish, thinking I should not be able to push my way to her through the dense throng."

Anusia's cheeks burned still more hotly, but without a moment's hesitation she answered, —

"You would like to get a keepsake from other hands than mine, but you will not get it; for if it is not too crowded for you there, it is too high."

The blow was well directed and double, for in the first place it turned the sarcasm to the low stature of the knight, and in the second to his passion for Princess Barbara Zbaraska. Pan Volodyovski fell in love first with the elder sister Anna; but when she was betrothed he recovered from his pain and in silence made an offering of his heart to Barbara, thinking that no one suspected it. When therefore he heard this from Anusia, though he was a champion of the first degree both with sword and tongue, he was so confused that he forgot his speech and muttered something wide of the mark, —

"You are aiming high too, as high indeed as the head of Pan Podbipienta."

"He is in truth higher than you in arms and in manners," said the resolute girl. "Thank you for reminding me!" Then she called to the Lithuanian: "Will you come this way? I wish to have my knight too, and I do not know that I could bind my scarf on a braver breast than yours."

Pan Podbipienta stared as if uncertain whether he heard correctly; finally he cast himself on his knees, so that the floor trembled.

"My benefactress!"

Anusia fastened the scarf, and then her little hands disappeared entirely under the blond mustaches of Pan

Longin. There was heard only the sound of kissing and muttering, hearing which Volodyovski said to Lieutenant Migurski, "One would swear that a bear had broken into a bee-hive and was eating the honey." Then he went away with a certain anger, for he felt Anusia's sting, and moreover he had been in love with her in his time.

But the prince had already begun to take farewell of the princess, and an hour later the court set out for Turoff, and the army for the Pripet.

During the night at the crossing, while they were building rafts to carry over the cannon, and the hussars were doing the work, Pan Longin said to Skshetuski, —

"Look here, brother, a misfortune!"

"What has happened?" asked the lieutenant.

"Why, the news from the Ukraine!"

"What news?"

"The Zaporojians tell me that Tugai Bey has gone with the horde to the Crimea."

"Well, what of that? You will not cry over that, I suppose."

"But, my brother, you told me — and you were right, were you not? — that I could not count Cossacks' heads, and if the Tartars are gone where am I to get the three Pagan heads? Where should I look for them? and oh, how much I need them!"

Skshetuski, though suffering himself, laughed, and answered: "I understand what the matter is, for I saw how you were made a knight to-day."

"That is true. Why hide it longer? I have fallen in love, brother, — fallen in love. That is the misfortune."

"Don't torment yourself. I do not believe that Tugai Bey has gone, and besides you will meet as many Pagans as there are mosquitoes over our heads."

In fact, whole clouds of mosquitoes swept over the horses and men; for the troops went into a country of impassable morasses, swampy forests, soft meadows, rivers, creeks, and streams, — into an empty, gloomy land, one howling wilderness, concerning the inhabitants of which it was said in those times, —

"Nobleman Nakedness (Holota)¹
Gave with his daughter

¹ "Holota" (Nakedness) was used as a nickname in those days to designate a poor nobleman. Abstract nouns were used by the Cossacks also as names; e. g., Colonel Chernota, which means "blackness."

Two kegs of wagon grease,
One wreath of mushrooms,
One jar of mud-fish,
And one ridge of swamp."

In this swamp, however, there grew not only mushrooms, but, in spite of the above sarcasm, great lordly fortunes. But at this time the prince's men, who, for the greater part had been reared on the lofty dry steppes of the Trans-Dnieper, could not believe their own eyes. True, there were swamps in their country and forests in places, but here the whole region seemed to be one swamp. The nights were clear and bright. As far as the eye could see by the light of the moon not two yards of dry ground were visible. Only tufts of earth looked black above the water, the trees appeared to grow out of the water, water splattered from under the feet of the horses, water sprinkled the wheels of the wagons and the cannon.

Vurtsel fell into despair: "A wonderful march!" said he; "near Chernigoff we were in danger from fire, and now water is drowning us."

Indeed the earth, in contradiction to its nature, did not give a firm support to the foot, but bent and trembled as if wishing to open and swallow those who moved upon it.

The troops were four days passing the Pripet; then they had to cross almost every day rivers and streams flowing through shaky ground. And nowhere was there a bridge. All the people crossed in boats. After a few days fog and rain began. The men did their utmost to get out of those enchanted regions at last, and the prince urged and pushed them on. The soldiers, seeing too that he did not spare himself, — he was on horseback from dawn till dark, leading the army and overseeing its advance, directing everything in person, — did not dare to murmur, though really they labored beyond their strength. To toil from morning till night and in the water was the common lot of all. The horses began to lose their hoofs; many of the artillery horses died, so that the infantry and Volodyovski's dragoons drew cannon themselves. The picked regiments, such as Skshetuski's and Zatsvilikhovski's hussars, and the armored regiments took their axes to make roads. It was a famous march, in cold and water and hunger, in which the will of the leader and the ardor of the soldiers broke through every barrier. No one hitherto had dared to lead an army through that country during the high water of spring.

Happily the march was not interrupted by any accident. The people were peaceable and without thought of rebellion; though afterward roused by the Cossacks and incited by example, they did not wish to rally to the banners of sedition. They looked with sleepy eyes on the passing legions, who issued from the pine woods and swamps as if enchanted, and passed on like a dream; they furnished guides, and did quietly and obediently all that was asked of them.

In view of this the prince punished severely every military license, and the army was not followed by groans, curses, and complaints; and when after the passage of the army it was learned in some smoky village that Prince Yeremi had passed, the people shook their heads and said quietly, "Why, he is good-natured."

At last, after twenty days of superhuman toil and effort, the forces of the prince appeared in the region of revolt. "Yarema is coming! Yarema is coming!" was heard over the whole Ukraine, to the Wilderness, to Chigirin and Yagorlik. "Yarema is coming!" was heard in the towns, villages, farms, and clearings; and at the report the scythes, forks, and knives dropped from the hands of the peasants, faces grew pale, wild bands hurried toward the south in the night, like wolves at the sound of the hunter's horn; the Tartar, wandering around for plunder, sprang from his horse and put his ear to the ground from time to time; in the castles and fortresses that were still uncaptured, bells were sounded and "Te Deum laudamus" was sung.

And that terrible lion laid himself down on the threshold of a rebellious land and rested. He was gathering his strength.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HMELNITSKI remained awhile at Korsún, and then pushed on to Bélava Tserkoff, where he established his capital. The horde was disposed in camp on the other side of the river, sending out parties through the whole province of Kieff. Pan Longin Podbipienta therefore had been grieving in vain over the dearth of Tartar heads. Skshetuski foresaw correctly that the Zaporojians seized by Ponyatovski at Kanyeff gave false information. Tugai Bey not only had not departed, but had not gone even to Chigirin. What is more, new Tartar reinforcements came from every side. The petty sovereigns of Azoff and Astrakhan, who had never been in Poland before, came with four thousand warriors. Twelve thousand of the Nogai horde came, and twenty thousand of the Bélgorod and Budjak hordes, — all sworn enemies hitherto of the Zaporojians and the Cossacks, now brothers and sworn allies against Christian blood. Finally the Khan Islam Giréi himself came with twelve thousand from Perekop. The whole Ukraine suffered from these friends; not only the nobles suffered, but the Russian people, whose villages were burned, cattle driven away, and whose wives and children were hurried into captivity. In those times of murder, burning, and bloodshed there was only one rescue for the peasant, and that was to flee to Hmelnitski, — where from being a victim he became a destroyer, and ravaged his own country; but at least his life was safe. Unhappy country! When rebellion broke out in it Pan Nikolai Pototski punished and wasted it to begin with; then the Zaporojians and the Tartars, who came as if for its liberation; and now Yeremi Vishnyevetski hovered over it.

Therefore all who were able fled to Hmelnitski's camp; even nobles fled, for other means of safety were not to be found. Thanks to this, Hmelnitski increased in power; and if he remained long in Bélava Tserkoff and did not move at once to the heart of the Commonwealth, it was above all to give order to these lawless and wild elements.

In his iron hands they changed quickly into military strength. Skeleton regiments of trained Zaporojians were at hand; the mob was divided among these. Colonels were