

"But," said the young officer, "how did you do it?"

"I defended myself up there. They stormed me from below and through the roof. I don't know how long it was, for in battle a man doesn't reckon time. It was Bogun, with a strong force and chosen men. He will remember you; he will remember me too. At another time I will tell you how I fell into captivity, what I passed through, and how I settled Bogun; for I had an encounter of tongues with him. But now I am so wearied that I can scarcely stand."

"Well," repeated Volodyovski, "it is not to be denied you defended yourself manfully; but I will say this, you are a better swordsman than general."

"Pan Michael," said the noble, "it is no time for discussion. Better thank God, who has sent down to us to-day so mighty a victory, the memory of which will not soon vanish from among men."

Volodyovski looked with astonishment at Zagloba, since it had appeared to him hitherto that he alone had gained that victory which Zagloba evidently wished to share with him. But he only looked, shook his head, and said, "Let it be so."

An hour later the two friends, at the head of their united parties, moved on to Yarmolintsi.

Almost no one was missing from Zagloba's men; for sprung upon in their sleep, they offered no resistance. Bogun, being sent specially for informants, had given orders not to kill, but to take prisoners.

CHAPTER XLI.

BOGUN, though a brave, clear-sighted leader, had no luck in this expedition against the supposed division of Prince Yeremi. He was merely confirmed in the belief that the prince had really moved his whole force against Krivonos; for this was the information given by the captives from among Zagloba's men, who believed most sacredly that the prince was marching after them. Nothing remained then for the unfortunate ataman but to withdraw with all speed to Krivonos; but the task was not easy. Scarcely on the third day was a party of two hundred and a few tens of Cossacks collected around him; the others had either fallen in the fight, were lying wounded on the field of struggle, or were wandering yet among the ravines and reeds, not knowing what to do, how to turn, or where to go. Besides, the party left to Bogun was not good for much; for it was beaten, inclined to flee at every alarm, demoralized, frightened. And it was made up too of chosen men; better soldiers it would be difficult to find in the whole Saitech. But the heroes didn't know with what a small force Pan Volodyovski had struck them, and that, thanks only to the unexpected attack on sleeping and unprepared men, could he inflict such a defeat. They believed most sacredly that they had been fighting, if not with the prince himself, at least with a strong detachment several times more numerous than it was. Bogun raged like fire; cut in the hand, run over, sick, beaten, he had let his inveterate enemy out of his hands, and belittled his own fame. For now those Cossacks who on the eve of the defeat would have followed him blindly to the Crimea, to hell, and against the prince himself, had lost faith and courage, and were thinking only how to carry their lives out of the defeat. Still Bogun had done everything that a leader was bound to do; he had neglected nothing, he had established pickets at a distance from the house, and rested only because the horses which had come from Kamenyets almost at one course were altogether unfit for the road. But Volodyovski, whose youth had been passed in surprising and hunting Tartars, approached the pickets like a fox

in the night, seized them before they could shout or fire, and fell upon them in such fashion that Bogun could escape only in his shirt and trousers. When the chief thought of this the light grew dark in his eyes, his head swam, and despair gnawed his soul like a mad dog. He who on the Black Sea had rushed upon Turkish galleys, and galloped on the necks of Tartars to Perekop, and lighted up the eyes of the Khan with the blaze of his villages, and under the hand of the prince near Lubni itself had cut a garrison to pieces at Vassilyevka, had to flee in his shirt, bareheaded and without a sabre, — for he had lost that too in his meeting with the little knight. So at the stopping-places where the horses were fed, when no man was looking, the chief seized himself by the head and cried: "Where is my Cossack glory, where my sabre friend?" When he cried in this way a wild raving carried him away, and then he drank as if he were not a creature of God, and wanted to march against the prince, attack all his forces, — perish and disappear for the ages.

He wished it, but the Cossacks did not. "Though you kill us, father, we will not go!" was their gloomy answer to his outbursts; and vainly in accessions of fury he cut at them with his sabre and singed their faces with his pistol, — they would not, they did not go.

You would have said that the ground was slipping away from the ataman's feet, for this was not the end of his misfortune. Fearing on account of probable pursuit to go straight to the south, and thinking that perhaps Krivonos had already given up the siege, he rushed straight to the east, and came upon the party of Pan Podbipienta. Pan Longin, wakeful as a stork, did not permit an attack, but falling first on Bogun, defeated him the more easily because his Cossacks were unwilling to fight; when he had defeated him he turned him over to Skshetuski, who beat him worst of all; so that Bogun, after long wanderings in the steppes with a few horses only, without glory, without Cossacks, without booty, without informants, made his way back at last to Krivonos.

But the wild Krivonos, usually so terrible to subordinates whom fortune did not favor, was not angry this time. He knew from his own experience what an affair with Yeremi meant; therefore he even petted Bogun, comforted him, quieted him, pacified him, and when he fell into a violent fever, gave orders to nurse and cure him with all care.

The four officers of the prince, having filled the country with terror and dismay, returned safely to Yarmolintsi, where they remained several days to give rest to the men and horses. There, when they came into the same quarters, they gave to Skshetuski, each in turn, an account of what had happened to them and what they had accomplished; then they sat down by the bottle to relieve their hearts in friendly converse and satisfy their mutual curiosity.

But Zagloba gave little chance to any man to speak. He had no desire to listen, but wished only that others should listen to him, — in truth it came out that he had the most to tell.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I fell into captivity, it is true; but fortune turns around. Bogun has been all his life victorious, but we beat him this time. That is how it is usually in war. To-day you tan people, to-morrow they tan you. But God punished Bogun because he fell upon us, sleeping sweetly the sleep of the just, and roused us in such a dishonorable way. Ho, ho! he thought to terrify me with his filthy tongue; but I tell you here, gentlemen, that I cornered him so that he lost his boldness, became confused, and said what he did n't want to say. What's the use of talking long? If I had n't got into captivity, Pan Michael and I would not have defeated him. I say both of us, because in this affair magna pars fui, and I shall not cease to insist on it to my death. So God give me health! Hear my reasons further: If I and Volodyovski had not beaten him, then Podbipienta would not have beaten him, and further Skshetuski would not have beaten him; and finally if we had n't beaten him he would have beaten us, and who was the cause that this did n't take place?"

"Ah! it is with you as with a fox," said Pan Longin; "you wave your tail here, slink away there, and always get out."

"It's a foolish hound that runs after his own tail, for he will not catch it and will not smell anything honorable, and besides will lose his wind. How many men have you lost?"

"Twelve in all, and some wounded; they did n't strike us very hard."

"And you, Pan Michael?"

"About thirty, for I fell upon them unawares."

"And you, Lieutenant?"

"As many as Pan Longin."

"And I lost two. See yourselves who is the best leader!"

That's the question. Why did we come here? On the service of the prince, to get news of Krivonos. Well, I tell you, gentlemen, that I first got news of him, and from the best source, because I got it from Bogun; and I know that he is at Kamenyets, but he thinks of raising the siege, for he is afraid. I know this openly; but I know something else which will put joy into your heart, and of which I have not spoken because I wanted that we should counsel about it together. I was sick till now, for weariness overpowered me, and my bowels rose up against that villanous binding on a stick. I thought my blood would boil over."

"Tell us, for God's sake!" cried Volodyovski, "have you heard anything of our unfortunate lady?"

"Yes, God bless her," said Zagloba.

Skshetuski rose to his full height and then sat down. There followed such a silence that the buzzing of the mosquitoes was heard on the windows till Zagloba began again,—

"She lives, I know that certainly; she is in Bogun's hands. Gentlemen, it is a terrible thing; however, God has not permitted harm or disgrace to meet her. Bogun himself told me this,—he who would rather boast of something else."

"How can that be? how can that be?" asked Skshetuski, feverishly.

"If I lie, may a thunderbolt strike me!" said Zagloba, with importance, "for this is a sacred thing. Listen to what Bogun said when he wished to jeer at me before I settled him at last. 'Did you think,' said he, 'that you brought her to Bar for a peasant; that I was a peasant to constrain her by force; that I was not to be married in Kieff in the church, and monks sing for me, and three hundred candles burn for me,—me, an ataman, a hetman!' And he stamped his feet and threatened me with his knife, for he thought he was frightening me; but I told him to frighten the dogs!"

Skshetuski had now recovered himself. His monk's face lighted up; gladness and uncertainty played on it again. "Where is she now, where is she?" he asked hurriedly. "If you have found that out, then you have come from heaven."

"He did not tell me that, but two words are enough for a wise head. Remember, gentlemen, he jeered me all the while till I planted him, and then he went in. 'First I'll

take you,' said he, 'to Krivonos, and then I would invite you to the wedding; but now there is war, so it will not come off soon.' Think of it, gentlemen,—'not come off soon;' therefore we have plenty of time. Secondly, think,—'first to Krivonos, then to the wedding;' therefore in no way is she at the camp of Krivonos, but somewhere farther, where the war has not reached."

"You are a man of gold," said Volodyovski.

"I thought at first," said the delightfully flattered Zagloba, "that maybe he had sent her to Kieff; but no, for he said he would go for the wedding to Kieff with her. If they will go, it means that she is not there; and he is too shrewd to take her there now, for if Hmelnitiski should push into Red Russia, Kieff could be taken easily by the Lithuanian forces."

"Surely, surely!" cried Pan Longin. "Now, as God is just to me, no man could change minds with you."

"But I should n't change with every one, lest I might get soup instead of reason,—a thing which might easily happen among the Lithuanians."

"Oh, he is beginning again!" said Pan Longin.

"Well, since she is not with Krivonos nor in Kieff, where is she?"

"There's the difficulty."

"If you have worked it out, then tell me quickly, for fire is burning me," said Skshetuski.

"Beyond Yampol," said Zagloba, and rolled his one sound eye triumphantly.

"How do you know?" inquired Volodyovski.

"How do I know? Here is how: I was sitting in the stable,—for that brigand had me shut up in the stable, may the wild boars rip him!—and the Cossacks were talking among themselves all around. I put my ear to the wall then, and what did I hear? 'Now maybe the ataman will go beyond Yampol,' said one; and then the other answered, 'Be silent, if your young head is dear to you!' I'll give my neck that she is beyond Yampol."

"Oh, as sure as God is in heaven!" cried Volodyovski.

"He did not take her to the Wilderness; therefore, according to my head, he must have hidden her somewhere between Yampol and Yagorlik. I was once in that region when the judges of the king and the Khan met; for in Yagorlik, as you know, cattle questions of the boundary are tried, of which cases there is never a lack. Along the

whole Dniester there are ravines, hidden places, and reeds in which living by themselves are people who know no authority, dwell in the wilderness, and see no neighbors. He has hidden her surely among such wild solitaires, for he would be surest of her there."

"But how can we go there now, when Krívonos bars the way?" asked Pan Longin. "Yampol too, I hear, is a nest of robbers."

To this Skshetuski replied: "Though I had to risk my life ten times, I should try to save her. I will go disguised and look for her. God will help me, I shall find her."

"I will go with you, Yan," said Volodyovski.

"And I as a minstrel with my lute. Believe me, gentlemen, that I have more experience than any of you; but since the lute has disgusted me to the last degree, I'll take bagpipes."

"I too shall be good for something," said Podbipienta.

"Of course," added Zagloba. "Whenever we need to cross the Dnieper you will carry us over, like Saint Christopher."

"I thank you from my soul, gentlemen," said Pan Yan; "and I accept your readiness with a willing heart. There is nothing to be compared with trusty friends, of whom as I see Providence has not deprived me. May the great God grant me to repay you with my health and property!"

"We are all as one man!" shouted Zagloba. "God is pleased with concord, and you will find that we shall soon see the fruit of our labors."

"Then nothing else remains to me," said Skshetuski, after a moment's silence, "but to deliver up the squadron to the prince, and start at once. We will go by the Dniester, along through Yampol to Yagorlik, and look everywhere. But if, as I hope, Hmelnitiski is already crushed or will be before we reach the prince, then public service will not be in the way. Certain regiments will go to the Ukraine, to finish the remnant of the rebellion, but they will get on without us."

"Wait!" said Volodyovski; "doubtless after Hmelnitiski, Krívonos's turn will come; maybe we shall go together with the regiments to Yampol."

"No, we must go there before," answered Zagloba. "But first of all give up the squadron, so as to have free hand. I hope, too, that the prince will be satisfied with us."

"Especially with you."

"That's true, for I shall bring him the best news. Believe me, I expect a reward."

"When shall we take the road?"

"We must rest till morning," said Volodyovski. "Let Skshetuski command, however, for he is chief here; but I forewarn you, if we start to-day my horses will all give out."

"I know that it is impossible to start to-day," said Skshetuski; "but I think after good oats we can go to-morrow."

They started on the following day. According to the orders of the prince, they were to return to Zbaraj and wait further orders. They went consequently through Kuzmin, aside from Felstin, to Volochisk, from which the old highway led through Hlebanovka to Zbaraj. The roads were bad; for rain was falling, though quietly. Pan Longin, going ahead with one hundred horses, broke up a few disorderly bands that had gathered around the rear of the forces of the commander-in-chief. At Volochisk they stopped for the night.

But they had barely begun a pleasant sleep after the long road, when they were roused by an alarm, and the guards informed them that cavalry detachments were approaching. Immediately came the news that it was Vershul's Tartar squadron, therefore their own men. Zagloba, Pan Longin, and Volodyovski met at once in Skshetuski's room; and right after them rushed in, like a storm, an officer of the light cavalry, breathless and covered with mud. When he had looked at him, Skshetuski cried out: "Vershul!"

"Yes, it is I," said the newly arrived, unable to catch his breath.

"From the prince?"

"Yes. Oh for breath, breath!"

"What news? All over with Hmelnitiski?"

"All — over with — the Commonwealth!"

"By the wounds of Christ, what do you say? Defeat!"

"Defeat, disgrace, shame! — without a battle — a panic — oh! oh!"

Skshetuski could not believe his ears. "But speak! speak, in the name of the living God! The commanders —"

"Ran away."

"Where is our prince?"

"Retreating — without an army — I am here from the prince — the order to Lvoff — at once — they are pursuing us —"

"Who? Vershul, Vershul, come to your senses, man! Who is pursuing?"

"Hmelnitski and the Tartars."

"In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!" cried Zagloba. "The earth is opening."

But Skshetuski understood already what the matter was. "Questions later on; now to horse!"

"To horse! to horse!"

The hoofs of the horses under Vershul's Tartars were clattering by the windows. The townspeople, roused by the arrival of troops, burst from their houses with lanterns and torches in their hands. The news flew through the town like lightning. The alarm was sounded. The town, silent a moment before, was filled with yells, tramping of horses, shouting of orders, and wailing of Jews. The inhabitants wishing to leave with the troops got ready wagons, in which they put their wives and children, with featherbeds. The mayor, at the head of a number of citizens, came to beg Skshetuski not to depart at once, but to convey the inhabitants even to Tarnopol. Skshetuski would not listen; for the order received was explicit, to go to Lvoff as fast as his breath would let him. They hurried away therefore; and on the road Vershul, recovering breath, told what had happened, and how.

"Since the Commonwealth has been a commonwealth," said he, "never has it borne such a defeat. Tsetsora, Jol'tiya Vodi, Korsun, are nothing in comparison."

Skshetuski, Volodyovski, and Pan Longin bent down to the necks of their horses, now grasping their own heads, now raising their hands to heaven. "The thing passes human belief," said they. "But where was the prince?"

"Deserted by all, thrust aside on purpose; he did not command, in fact, his own division."

"Who had command?"

"No man, and all men. I have been long in service, I have eaten my teeth in war, and yet up to this day I have not seen such armies and such leaders."

Zagloba, who had no great love for Vershul and knew him but little, began to shake his head and smack his lips; at last he said, —

"My dear sir, either your vision is confused, or you have taken some partial defeat for a general one; for what you relate passes imagination completely."

"That it passes imagination, I confess; and I'll say more

to you, — that I should gladly give my head to be severed if by some miracle it should appear that I am mistaken."

"But how did you get to Volochisk first after the defeat? For I don't wish to admit that you were the first to run away. Where, then, are the forces in flight? In what direction are they fleeing? What has happened to them? Why did n't the fugitives get ahead of you? To all these questions I seek an answer in vain."

Vershul at any other time would not have permitted such questions, but at that moment he could think of nothing but the defeat; therefore he merely answered, —

"I came first to Volochisk, for the others are retreating to Ojigovtsi, and the prince hurried me off on purpose toward the place in which he thought you were, so the avalanche might not catch you through hearing the news too late; and secondly, because the five hundred horse which you have are no small comfort to him, for the greater part of his division is killed or in flight."

"Wonderful things!" said Zagloba.

"It's a terror to think of! Desperation seizes one, the heart is cut, tears flow," said Volodyovski, wringing his hands. "The country destroyed; disgrace after death, — such forces dispersed, lost. It cannot be that there is anything but the end of the world and the approach of the last judgment."

"Don't interrupt him," said Skshetuski; "let him tell all."

Vershul was silent for a time, as if collecting his strength; nothing was heard but the plashing of hoofs in the mud, for rain was falling. It was still the depth of night, and very dark, because cloudy; and in that darkness and rain the words of Vershul, who began thus to speak, had a wonderful sound of ill-omen, —

"If I had not expected to fall in battle, I should have lost my reason. You speak of the last judgment, — and I think it will come soon, for everything is going to pieces; wickedness rises above virtue, and antichrist is walking through the world. You have not seen what took place; but if you are not able to bear even the story of it, how is it with me, who saw with my own eyes the defeat and measureless disgrace? God gave us a happy beginning in this war. Our prince, after getting satisfaction at Cholganski Kamen from Pan Lashch, gave the rest to oblivion, and made peace with Prince Dominik. We were all pleased with this concord, — really a blessing of God. The prince

gained a second victory at Konstantinoff, and took the place; for the enemy left it after the first storm. Then we marched to Pilavtsi, though the prince did not advise going there. But immediately on the road various machinations were manifest against him, — ill-will, envy, and evident intrigue. He was not listened to in councils, no attention was paid to his words, and above all, efforts were made to separate our division, so that the prince should not have it all in hand. If he should oppose, the blame of defeat would be thrown on him. He was silent, therefore, suffered and endured. By order of the commander-in-chief the light cavalry, together with Vurtsel and the cannon, Colonel Makhnitski, Osinski, and Koritski, were detached, so that there remained with the prince only the hussars and Zatsvilikhovski, two regiments of dragoons, and I, with a part of my squadron, — altogether not more than two thousand men. And they paid no attention to the prince; he was despised; and I heard how the clients of Prince Dominik said: 'They won't say now, after the victory, that it came through Vishnyevetski.' And they said openly that if such immeasurable glory covered Yeremi, his candidate, Prince Karl, could carry the election, and they want Kazimir. The whole army was infected with factions, so that harangues were held in circles, as if they were sending delegates to the Diets; they were thinking of everything but battle, just as if the enemy had been beaten already. But if I were to tell you of the feasting and the applauding, you would not believe me. The legions of Pyrrhus were nothing in comparison with those armies, all in gold, jewels, and ostrich feathers, with two hundred thousand camp followers. Legions of wagons followed us, horses dropped dead under the weight of gold-tipped and silken tents; wagons were breaking under provision chests. You would have thought we were going to the conquest of the world. Nobles of the general militia shook their sticks, saying, 'This is how we will pacify the trash, and not kill them with swords.' We old soldiers, accustomed to fighting without talking, had a foreboding of evil at the sight of this unheard of pride. Then began tumults against Kisel, — that he was a traitor; and tumults for him, — that he was a worthy senator. They cut one another with sabres when they were drunk; there were no commanders of camps, no one looked after order; there was no general. Each one did what he liked, went where it pleased him best, stopped, took his place

where it suited him; and the camp followers raised such an uproar! Oh, merciful God! that was a carnival, not a campaign, — a carnival at which the salvation of the Commonwealth was danced away, drunk away, ridden away, and chaffered away, to the last bit."

"But we are still alive," said Volodyovski.

"And God is in heaven," added Skshetuski.

A moment of silence followed; then Vershul said, —

"We shall perish totally, unless God performs a miracle and ceases to chastise us for our sins and shows us unmerited mercy. At times I do not believe myself what I saw with my own eyes, and it seems to me that a nightmare was choking me in my sleep."

"Tell further," said Zagloba; "you came to Pilavtsi, and then what?"

"We stopped. What the commanders counselled I know not. At the last judgment they will answer for that; if they had struck Hmelnitski at once he would have been shattered and swept away, as God is in heaven, in spite of disorder, insubordination, tumult, and want of a leader. On their side was panic among the rabble; they were already taking counsel how to give up Hmelnitski and the elders, and he himself was meditating flight. Our prince rode from tent to tent, begged, implored, threatened. 'Let us strike,' said he, 'before the Tartar comes!' He tore the hair from his head. Men looked at one another, but did nothing and nothing. They drank, they had meetings. Reports came that the Tartars were marching, — the Khan with two hundred thousand horsemen. The commanders counselled and counselled. The prince shut himself up in his tent, for they had set him aside altogether. In the army they began to say that the chancellor had forbidden Prince Dominik to give battle; that negotiations were going on. Still greater disorder appeared. At last the Tartars came, but God gave us luck the first day. The prince and Pan Osinski fought, and Pan Lashch did very well. They drove the Tartar horde from the field, cut them up considerably; but afterward —" Here Vershul's voice died in his breast.

"But afterward?" asked Zagloba.

"—came the terrible, inexplicable night which I remember. I was on guard with my men by the river, when on a sudden I heard firing of cannon in the Cossack camp as if in applause, and I heard shouts. Then it occurred to me that yesterday it was said in the camp that

the whole Tartar force had not arrived yet, — only Tugai Bey with a part. I thought then: 'If they are making such uproarious applause, the Khan must have come in his own person.' Then in our camp rose a tumult. I hurried thither with a few men. 'What's the matter?' They shout to me: 'The commanders have gone!' I hasten to Prince Dominik's quarters, — he is not to be found; to Ostrorog, — he is gone; to Konyetspolski, — he is not there! Jesus of Nazareth! Soldiers are flying over the square; there are shouts, tumult, yells, blazing torches. 'Where are the commanders? where are the commanders?' cry some. 'To horse! to horse!' cry others. Still others: 'Save yourselves, brothers! Treason! treason!' Hands are raised to heaven, faces are pale, eyes wild. They rush, trample, suffocate one another, mount their horses, flee weaponless at random. Others leave helmets, breastplates, arms, tents. The prince rides up at the head of the hussars in his silver armor, with six torches around him. He stands in the stirrups and cries: 'I am here, gentlemen! Rally around me!' What can he do? They don't hear him, don't see him; they rush on his hussars, break their ranks, overturn horses and men. We were barely able to save the prince himself. Then over the trampled-out fires, in darkness, like a dammed-up torrent, like a river, the whole army in wild panic rush from the camp, flee, scatter, disappear. No more an army, no more leaders, no more a Commonwealth, — nothing but unwashed disgrace and the foot of the Cossack on your neck!"

Here Vershul began to groan and to pull at his horse, for the madness of despair had caught him. This madness he communicated to the others, and they rode on in that rain and night as if bewildered. They rode a long time. Zagloba broke silence first, —

"Without battle. Oh, the rascals! Oh, such sons of — You remember what lordly figures they cut at Zbaraj, — how they promised to eat Hmelnitski without pepper and salt. Oh, the scoundrels!"

"How could they?" shouted Vershul. "They ran away after the first battle gained over the Tartars and the mob, — after a battle in which the general militia fought like lions."

"The finger of God is in this," said Skshetuski; "but there is some secret too, which must be explained."

"If the army had fled, why that sort of thing happens

in the world," said Volodyovski; "but here the leaders left the camp first, as if on purpose to lighten the victory for the enemy and give the army to slaughter."

"True, true!" said Vershul. "It is said even that they did this on purpose."

"On purpose? By the wounds of Christ, that cannot be!"

"It is said they did so on purpose; but why? Who can discover, who can guess?"

"May their graves crush them, may their race perish, and only a memory of infamy remain behind them!" said Zagloba.

"Amen!" said Skshetuski.

"Amen!" said Volodyovski.

"Amen!" repeated Pan Longin.

"There is one man who can save the fatherland yet, if they give him the baton and the remaining power of the Commonwealth. There is only one, for neither the army nor the nobles will hear of another."

"The prince!" said Skshetuski.

"Yes."

"We will rally to him; we will perish with him. Long live Yermi Vishnyevetski!" cried Zagloba.

"Long life!" repeated a few uncertain voices. But the cry died away immediately; for when the earth was opening under their feet and the heavens seemed falling on their heads, there was no time for shouts.

Day began to break, and in the distance appeared the walls of Tarnopol.