

## CHAPTER XLII.

THE first wrecks from Pilavtsi reached Lvoff at daybreak, September 26; and with the opening of the gates the news spread like lightning through the city, rousing incredulity in some, panic in others, and in still others a desperate desire for defence. Skshetuski with his party arrived two days later, when the whole city was packed with fugitive soldiers, nobles, and armed citizens. They were thinking of defence, for the Tartars were expected any moment; but it was not known yet who would stand at the head of the defence or how it would begin. For this reason disorder and panic prevailed everywhere. Some fled from the place, taking their families and their property with them; dwellers in the region round about sought refuge in the city. Those departing and arriving crowded the streets, fought for passage; every place was filled with wagons, packs, bags, horses, soldiers from the greatest variety of regiments; on every face was seen either uncertainty, feverish expectation, despair, or resignation. Every little while terror broke out like a sudden whirlwind, and the cries were heard: "They are coming! they are coming!" and the crowd swept like a wave, sometimes running straight ahead infected with the madness of alarm, until it appeared that another one of the fragments of the wreck was coming, — fragments which increased more and more.

But how sad was the sight of these soldiers who a short time before had marched in gold and plumes, with song on their lips and pride in their eyes, to that campaign against peasants! To-day, torn, starved, emaciated, covered with mud, on wasted horses, with shame in their faces, more like beggars than knights, they could only rouse pity, if there was time for pity in that place against the walls of which the whole power of the enemy might soon hurl itself. And each one of those disgraced knights comforted himself in this alone, that he had so many thousands of companions in shame. All concealed themselves in the first hour, so that afterward when they had recovered they might spread complaints, blame, scatter curses with threats, drag along through the streets, drink in the shops, and only increase disorder

and alarm. For each one repeated: "The Tartars are here, right here!" Some saw conflagrations in the rear; others swore by all the saints that they had been forced to defend themselves against scouting-parties. The crowds surrounding the soldiers listened with strained attention. The roofs and steeples of the churches were covered with thousands of curious people; the bells tolled alarm, and crowds of women and children suffocated one another in churches in which amid flaming tapers shone the most holy sacrament.

Skshetuski pushed slowly from the Galitian gate with his party through dense masses of horses, wagons, soldiers, city guilds standing under their banners, and through people who looked with wonder at that squadron entering the town, not in disorder, but in battle-array. Men shouted that succor was coming; and again joy justified by nothing took possession of the throng, which swayed forward in order to seize Skshetuski's stirrups. Soldiers too ran up, crying: "These are Vishnyevetski men! Long live Yeremi!" The pressure became so great that the squadron was barely able to push forward step by step.

At length a party of dragoons appeared opposite, with an officer at the head. The soldiers pushed aside the throng, and the officer cried: "Out of the road! out of the road!" and struck with the side of his sword those who failed to clear the way quickly. Skshetuski recognized Kushel.

The young officer greeted his acquaintance heartily. "What times! what times!" said he.

"Where is the prince?" asked Pan Yan.

"You would have killed him with anxiety if you had delayed. He is looking for you and your men intently. He is now at the Church of the Bernardines. I am sent out to keep order in the city; but the grozwayer has just taken it in hand, and I will go with you to the church. There is a council there at this moment."

"In the church?"

"Yes. They will offer the command to the prince, for the soldiers declare that they will not defend the town under another leader."

"Let us go; I have urgent business also with the prince."

The united parties moved on. Along the road Skshetuski inquired about everything that was passing in Lvoff, and if defence was already determined on.

"That is just the question under consideration," said Kushel. "The citizens want to defend themselves. What



times! People of insignificant position show more courage than nobles and soldiers."

"But the commanders, what has happened to them? Are they not here, and will there not be opposition to the prince?"

"No, unless he makes it himself. There was a fitter time to give him the command; it is late now. The commanders dare not show their faces. Prince Dominik merely took refreshments in the archbishop's palace, and went away immediately. He did well, for you cannot believe what hatred there is for him among the soldiers. He is gone already, and still they cry: 'Give him up! We will cut him to pieces!' It is sure he would not have escaped such a fate. The royal cup-bearer, Ostrorog, arrived here first, and he began to talk against the prince; but now he sits in silence, for a tumult rose against him. They laid all the blame on him to his face, and he only gulps his tears. In general it is awful, what is going on; such times have come. I say to you, thank God that you were not at Pilavtsi, that you did not flee from the place; for it is a real miracle to us who were there that we did not lose our senses altogether."

"And our division?"

"Exists no longer, — scarcely anything is left; Vurtsel gone, Makhnitski gone, Zatsvilikhovski gone. Vurtsel and Makhnitski were not at Pilavtsi, for they remained in Konstantinoff. That Beelzebub, Prince Dominik, left them there so as to weaken the power of our prince. Old Zatsvilikhovski has vanished like a stone in water. God grant he has not perished!"

"And of all the soldiers have many come here?"

"In number sufficient, but what of that? The prince alone could use them, if he would take the command; they will obey no one else. The prince was terribly alarmed about you and the soldiers. This is the only sound squadron. We were already mourning for you."

"At present he is the happy man for whom people are mourning!"

They rode in silence for a time, looking at the crowd and listening to the shouts and yells: "The Tartars! the Tartars!" In one place they beheld the terrible sight of a man torn to pieces by the mob on suspicion of being a spy. The bells were tolling incessantly.

"Will the horde be here soon?" asked Zagloba.

"The devil knows, — maybe to-day. This city will not

defend itself long, for it cannot hold out. Hmelnitski is coming with two hundred thousand, besides Tartars."

"Caput!" answered Zagloba. "It would have been better for us to have gone on at breakneck speed. What have we gained so many victories for?"

"Over whom?"

"Over Krivonos, over Bogun, — devil knows whom else."

"But," said Kushel, in a low voice, turning to Skshetuski, "Yan, has God not comforted you in any way? Have you not found the one whom you were seeking? Have you not at least learned something?"

"No time to think of that," said Skshetuski. "What do I and my affairs signify in view of what has happened? All is vanity, vanity, and death at the end."

"It seems to me that the whole world will perish before long," said Kushel.

Meanwhile they reached the Bernardine Church, which was blazing with light. Immense crowds stood before the door; but they could not enter, for a line of men with halberds closed the passage, admitting only the most important officers of the army.

Skshetuski ordered his men to form a second line.

"Come," said Kushel; "half the Commonwealth is in this church."

They entered. Kushel had not exaggerated greatly. All who were best known in the army and city had assembled for council, including the voevoda, the castellans, the colonels, the captains, officers of foreign regiments, the clergy, as many nobles as the church could hold, a multitude of military of the lower grades, and a number of the town councillors with the grozwyer at their head, who was the leader of the citizens. The prince too was present, the royal cup-bearer, and one of the commanders, the voevoda of Kieff, the starosta of Stobnik, Vessel, Artsishevski, and Osinski. They sat in front of the great altar, so that the public might see them. The council was held hastily and excitedly, as is usual on such occasions. Speakers stood on benches and implored the elders not to yield the city to the hands of the enemy without defending it. "Even if we have to perish, the city will detain the enemy, the Commonwealth will recover. What is needed for defence? There are walls, there are troops, there is determination, — only a leader is wanted." And after speeches of this kind, through the crowd flew murmurs which passed into loud



shouts; excitement seized the assembly. "We will perish, we will perish willingly!" they cry. "We will wipe out the disgrace of Pilavtsi, we will shield the fatherland!" And they began to shake their sabres, and the naked edges glittered in the blaze of the candles. Others cried: "Be quiet! Let the deliberations be orderly! Shall we defend or not defend?" "Defend! defend!" roared the assembly till the echo thrown back from the arches repeated, "Defend!" Who is to be the leader? Who should be the leader? "Prince Yeremi, — he is a leader, he is a hero! Let him defend the city; let the Commonwealth give him the baton. Long life to him!"

Then such a thundering roar burst forth from a thousand lungs that the walls trembled and the glass rattled in the windows of the church.

"Prince Yeremi! Prince Yeremi! Long life to Prince Yeremi! Long life, victory to him!"

A thousand sabres flashed; all eyes were turned to the prince. He rose calmly with wrinkled brow. There was silence at once, as if only poppy-seeds were falling.

"Gentlemen," said the prince, with a resonant voice, which in that silence reached every ear, "when the Cymbri and the Teutons fell upon the Commonwealth of Rome no one would accept the consulate till Marius took it. But Marius had a right to take it, for there were no leaders appointed by the senate. And I in the present straits would not avoid power, since I wish to serve my dear country with my life; but I cannot accept the command since I should offend the country, the senate, and the authorities, and a self-elected chief I will not be. Among us is the man to whom the Commonwealth has given the baton of command, — the cup-bearer of the Crown."

Here the prince could speak no further; for hardly had he mentioned the cup-bearer when there rose a terrible din and the clattering of sabres. The crowd swayed and there was a burst as of powder on which a spark has fallen. "Away with him! Destruction to him! Pereat!" was heard in the throng. "Pereat! pereat!" was roared louder and louder. The cup-bearer sprang from his seat, pale, with drops of cold sweat on his forehead; and then threatening figures approached the stalls, near the altar, and ominous words were heard: "Give him here!"

The prince, seeing whither this was tending, rose and stretched out his right hand. The crowds restrained them-

selves, thinking that he wished to speak. There was silence in the twinkle of an eye. But the prince wished merely to allay the storm and tumult, not to permit the shedding of blood in the church. When he saw that the most threatening moment had passed, he took his seat again.

On the second chair from the voevoda of Kieff sat the unfortunate cup-bearer; his gray hair had dropped upon his breast, his hands were hanging, and from his mouth came words interrupted by sobs: "O Lord, for my sins I accept the cross with resignation."

The old man might rouse pity in the hardest heart; but a crowd is generally pitiless. Again therefore the tumult began when the voevoda of Kieff rose and gave a sign with his hand that he wanted to speak. He was a partner in the victories of Yeremi, therefore they listened to him willingly. He turned to the prince then, and in the most feeling words adjured him not to reject the baton of command and not to hesitate to save the country. "When the Commonwealth is perishing, let laws slumber; let not the appointed chief save it, but him who has the most power to save. Take the command, then, invincible leader, take it and rescue, not this city alone, but the whole Commonwealth. Behold I, an old man, with the lips of the Commonwealth implore you, and with me all ranks of people, — all men, women, and children, — Save us! save us!"

Here followed an incident which moved all hearts. A woman in mourning approached the altar, and casting at the feet of the prince her golden ornaments and jewels, knelt before him, and sobbing loudly, cried out: "We bring you our goods; we give our lives into your hands. Save us, save us; for we perish!"

At the sight of this senators, soldiers, and then the whole throng roared with a mighty cry, and there was one voice in that church: "Save us!"

The prince covered his face with his hands; and when he raised his head tears were glittering in his eyes. Still he hesitated. What would become of the dignity of the Commonwealth if he should accept the command?

Then rose the cup-bearer of the Crown. "I am old," said he, "unfortunate, and crushed. I have a right to resign the charge which is beyond my powers, and to place it on younger shoulders. Here in the presence of this crucified God and of all the knighthood, I deliver the



baton to you, — take it." And he extended the insignia to Vishnyevetski.

A moment of such silence followed that flies on the wing could be heard. At last the solemn voice of Yeremi was heard: "For my sins — I accept it."

Then a frenzy of enthusiasm ruled the assembly. The crowds broke the benches, fell at the feet of Vishnyevetski, cast down their money and treasures before him. The news spread like lightning through the whole city. The soldiers were losing their senses from joy, and shouted that they wished to go against Hmelnitski, the Tartars, the Sultan; the citizens thought no longer of surrender, but of defence to the last drop of blood; the Armenians brought money of their own accord to the city hall, before anything was said of a levy; the Jews in the synagogue raised an uproar of thanksgiving; the guns on the walls thundered forth the glad tidings; along the streets was firing of muskets, pistols, and guns. Shouts of "Long life!" continued all night. Any one not knowing the state they were in might suppose that the city was celebrating a triumph or some solemn festival. And still three hundred thousand enemies — an army greater than any which the German Emperor or the King of France could place in the field, an army wilder than the legions of Tamerlane — might at any moment invest the walls of that city.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

A WEEK later, on the morning of the 6th of October, news as unexpected as terrible burst upon Lvoff. Prince Yeremi, with the greater part of the army, had left the city secretly and had gone it was unknown whither.

Crowds gathered before the archbishop's palace; they would not believe the report at first. The soldiers insisted that if the prince had gone, he had gone without doubt at the head of a powerful division on a reconnoissance of the surrounding country. It appeared, they said, that lying spies had spread reports announcing Hmelnitski and the Tartars at any moment; for since September 26 ten days had passed, and the enemy was not yet in sight. The prince wished undoubtedly to convince himself of the danger by actual inspection, and after obtaining intelligence would return without fail. Besides, he had left a number of regiments, and everything was ready for defence.

The last was true. Every disposition had been made, the places marked out, the cannon planted on the walls. In the evening Captain Tsikhotski arrived at the head of fifty dragoons. He was surrounded immediately by the curious, but would not speak with the crowd, and went directly to General Artsishevski. Both called the grozwayer, and after consultation they went to the city hall. There Tsikhotski informed the astonished councillors that the prince had gone, not to return.

At the first moment the hands of all dropped at their sides, and some insolent lips uttered the word, "Traitor!" But that moment Artsishevski, an old leader famed for achievements in the Dutch service, rose and began to speak as follows to the military and the councillors: —

"I have heard the injurious word, which I wish no one had spoken, for even despair cannot justify it. The prince has gone and will not return. But what right have you to force a leader on whose shoulders the salvation of a whole country rests to defend your city only? What would have happened if the enemy had surrounded in this place the remaining forces of the Commonwealth? There are neither supplies of food nor of arms for so many troops