

CHAPTER XLIV.

A NUMBER of weeks passed. The nobles assembled in greater and greater numbers for the election. The population of the city increased tenfold; for with the crowds of nobles poured in thousands of merchants and shopkeepers of the whole world, from distant Persia to England beyond the sea. On the field of Vola a booth was built for the senate, and around it whitened already thousands of tents, with which the spacious meadows were entirely covered. No one could tell yet which of the two candidates — Prince Kazimir, the cardinal, or Karl Ferdinand, the bishop of Plotsk — would be elected. On both sides great were the efforts and exertions made. Thousands of pamphlets were given to the world, relating the merits and defects of the candidates. Both had numerous and powerful adherents. On the side of Karl stood, as is known, Prince Yeremi, who was the more terrible for his opponents, as it was always likely that he would draw after him the inferior nobles, who were enamoured of him; and with the inferior nobles lay the ultimate decision. But neither did Kazimir lack power. Seniority was in his favor. On his side was the influence of the chancellor; the primate appeared to incline to him. On his side stood the majority of the magnates, each of whom had numerous clients; and among the magnates also was Prince Dominik Zaslavski Ostrogski, voevoda of Sandomir, with greatly injured reputation after Pilavtsi and even threatened with prosecution, but always the greatest lord in the Commonwealth, nay, even in all Europe, and able at any moment to throw the immense weight of his wealth into the scale of his candidate.

Still the adherents of Kazimir more than once had bitter hours of doubt; for as has been said, everything depended on the inferior nobles, who, beginning from the 4th of October, had camped in crowds around Warsaw and were coming still in thousands from every side of the Commonwealth, and who in an incalculable majority declared for Prince Karl, attracted by the magic of Vishnyevetski's name and the liberality of the prince in public objects. Karl was a good manager and wealthy; he did not hesitate

at that moment to devote considerable sums to the formation of new regiments which were to be placed under command of Yeremi. Kazimir would have followed his example willingly; it was certainly not greed that held him back, but just the opposite, — excessive liberality, the immediate result of which was an insufficiency, and continual lack of money in his treasury.

Meanwhile both sides were canvassing. Every day messengers were flying between Nyporente and Yablonna. Kazimir in the name of his own seniority and brotherly affection adjured Karl to resign; but the bishop held back, answering that it would not become him to condemn the fortune which might meet him, since that fortune was in the free gift of the Commonwealth, and was his to whom the Lord had designed it. Time passed; the term of six weeks was approaching, and together with it the Cossack storm. News had come that Hmelnitski, having raised the siege of Lvoff, which had ransomed itself after a number of assaults, had invested Zamost, and night and day was storming that last rampart of the Commonwealth.

It was said too that besides the delegates whom Hmelnitski had sent to Warsaw with a letter and declaration that as a noble of Poland he would give his vote to Kazimir, there were nobles hidden among the crowd, and that the city itself was full of disguised Cossack elders whom no one could detect, for they had come like regular and wealthy nobles, differing in nothing, even in speech, from other electors, especially those from the Russian provinces. Some, as was said, had crept in through simple curiosity to look at the election and Warsaw; others to spy, to obtain news, to hear talk about the war, — how many troops the Commonwealth thought of putting in the field, and what grants it proposed for the levies. Perhaps there was much truth in the reports concerning these guests; for among the Zaporozhian elders were many nobles who had become Cossacks, who had picked up some Latin and therefore were not to be recognized in any way. Besides, in the distant steppes Latin did not flourish as a rule, and such princes as the Kurtsevichi did not know it any better than Bogun and other atamans.

But reports like these with which the election field as well as the city were filled, together with news of the movements of Hmelnitski and the Cossack-Tartar expeditions, — which had reached, it was said, the Vistula, — filled people's

minds with alarm, and more than once became causes of tumult. In the crowd of nobles to cast on a man the suspicion of being a Zaporozian in disguise was enough to insure his being sabred into small pieces before he could show who he was. In this way innocent men might perish and the dignity of deliberations be destroyed, especially since with the custom of the time sobriety was not too much observed. The chapter "propter securitatem loci" (concerning public peace) was inadequate to stop the endless quarrels in which people were cut down for the slightest cause. But if those tumults, sabre-slashings, and drinking-bouts alarmed orderly people, penetrated with a love of good and peace, through the danger with which they threatened the country, on the other hand the reckless, the disorderly, the gamblers and disturbers felt as it were in their element; they considered this as their own special season, their day of harvest, and the more boldly permitted themselves various misdeeds.

It is needless to add that among these Zagloba was first. His primacy was secured by his great fame as a knight, his unquenchable thirst upheld by a supply of drink, a tongue so tanned that it had no equal, and by a self-confidence which nothing could shake. But he had at times his attacks of "melancholy;" then he shut himself up in a room or a tent, and did not go out, or if he did go he was in angry humor, inclined to quarrels and genuine fighting. It happened, in fact, that in such a humor he hacked up Pan Dunchevski badly, only because he had knocked against his sabre in passing. At such times he endured only the presence of Pan Michael, to whom he complained that a longing for Skshetuski and the "poor young lady" was devouring him. "We have deserted her, Pan Michael," he used to say; "we have betrayed her like Judas into godless hands. Don't excuse yourself to me with your *nemine excepto*. What is happening to her, Pan Michael, tell me that?"

In vain Pan Michael explained that had it not been for Pilavtsi, they would have been searching for "the poor young lady," but that now when the whole power of Hmelnitski separated them from her it was an impossible thing. Zagloba did not yield himself to consolation, but fell into still greater passion, cursing by what the world stands on, — "Feather-bed," "Baby," and "Latin."¹

¹ Nicknames given by Hmelnitski to the three Polish commanders.

But these periods of gloom were of short duration. When they were over Zagloba, as if wishing to reward himself for lost time, generally revelled and drank more than ever. He spent his time in taverns in company with the mightiest drinkers or with women of the capital, in which occupation Pan Michael held him trusty companionship.

Pan Michael, a soldier and a splendid officer, possessed not, however, a farthing's worth of that seriousness which misfortune and suffering had developed, for instance, in Skshetuski. Volodyovski understood his duty to the Commonwealth in this way: he killed whomsoever he was ordered to kill, — cared for naught else. He knew nothing of public questions; he was always ready to bewail a military defeat, but it never entered his head that quarrels and tumults were as harmful to public affairs as defeats; in one word, he was a thoughtless young man who, having entered the bustle of the capital, sank in it to his ears, and stuck like a thistle to Zagloba, for he was his master in license. He went therefore with him among the nobles, to whom Zagloba at his cups related things uncreated, winning at the same time adherents for Prince Karl; he drank with him, protected him when necessary; they both circled around in the field of election and the city like flies in a pot, and there was no corner into which they did not crawl. They were at Nyeporente and in Yablonna; they were at all the feasts and dinners given by magnates; they were at taverns, — they were everywhere, and took part in everything. Pan Michael's youthful hand was restive; he wanted to exhibit himself, and to prove at the same time that the nobility of the Ukraine was better than any other and that the soldiers of the prince were higher than all. They went therefore to seek adventures on purpose among the Poles of the kingdom, as the most skilled with the sword, and specially among the partisans of Prince Dominik Zaslavski, for whom both felt a particular hatred. They engaged only with the most celebrated champions, men of undoubted and settled fame, and plotted the quarrels beforehand. "You pick the quarrel," said Pan Michael, "and then I will step in." Zagloba, very skilful in fence and by no means timid in duelling with a brother noble, did not always agree to have a substitute, especially in affairs with adherents of Zaslavski; but when it was a question with some famous swordsman, he halted in the dispute; if the noble was eager for the sword and challenged, Zagloba said: "My good sir, I should be without

conscience if I were to expose you to evident death by fighting with you myself; better try my little son and pupil here, and I am not sure that you will be able to manage him." After such words Volodyovski appeared on the scene with his little upturned mustaches, nose in the air, and gaping face. Whether accepted or not, he opened the fight, and being in truth a master above masters, he generally stretched out his antagonist after a few blows. In this fashion the two found sport from which their fame increased among restless spirits and the nobles, but especially the fame of Pan Zagloba, for it was said: "If the pupil is such a man, what must the master be!" Pan Kharlamp was the one person that Volodyovski could not find for a long time. He thought: "Perhaps they have sent him back to Lithuania on business of some sort."

In this way nearly six weeks had gone, during which time public affairs had advanced notably. The protracted battle of the candidate brothers, the efforts of their adherents, the fever and storm of passion among partisans had passed, leaving scarcely trace or memory. It was now known to all that Yan Kazimir would be chosen; for Prince Karl had yielded to his brother, and resigned the candidature of his own good-will. It is a wonderful thing that the voice of Hmelnitski had great weight; for it was hoped on every side that he would yield to the authority of the king, especially when chosen according to his wish. These provisions were justified in great part. But for Vishnyevetski — who, like Cato of old, ceased not one moment from repeating that the Zaporozian Carthage must be destroyed — this turn of affairs was a fresh blow. Negotiations must be the order of the day. The prince knew, it is true, that these negotiations would either result in nothing from the start or would be broken off soon from the nature of the case, and saw war in the future; but disquiet seized him at the thought: "What will be the issue of that war? After negotiations the justified Hmelnitski will be still stronger, and the Commonwealth still weaker. And who will lead its forces against a chief so famous as Hmelnitski? Will not there be new defeats and new catastrophes which will exhaust its forces to the last?" For the prince did not deceive himself, and knew that to him, the most eager adherent of Karl, the command would not be given. Kazimir had promised, it is true, to favor his brother's adherents as much as his own. Kazimir was high-souled, but he was a

partisan of the chancellor's policy. Some one else will receive the command, not the prince; and woe to the Commonwealth if he be not a leader superior to Hmelnitski! At this thought a twofold pain straitened the soul of Yeremi, — fear for the future of the country, and the unendurable feeling of a man who sees that his services are passed over, that justice will not be done him, and that others will raise their heads above his. He would not have been Yeremi Vishnyevetski if he had not been proud. He felt within himself the power to wield the baton, and he had earned the baton; therefore he suffered doubly.

It was reported among officers that the prince would not wait for the close of the election, and would leave Warsaw; but that was not true. The prince not only did not leave, but he visited, in Nyeporente, Prince Kazimir, who received him with unbounded favor; then he returned to the city for a prolonged stay, caused by military affairs. It was a question of finding support for the army, which the prince urged diligently. Besides, new regiments of dragoons and infantry were equipped at Karl's expense. Some had been sent to Russia already; others were to be drilled. For this purpose the prince sent out on every side officers expert in organizing troops. Kushel and Vershul had been sent, and finally the turn came for Volodyovski. One day he was summoned to the prince, who gave him the following order:—

"You will go by way of Babitse and Lipki to Zaborovo, where horses for the regiment are waiting; you will inspect them, reject those unfit, and pay Pan Tshaskovski for those accepted; then you will bring them for the soldiers. The money you will receive here in Warsaw from the paymaster on this my order."

Volodyovski set about the work briskly. He took the money, and on the same day he and Zagloba with eight others set out with a wagon bearing the money. They moved slowly, for that side of Warsaw was swarming with nobles, attendants, and horses; the villages as far as Babitse were so packed that in every cottage there were guests. It was easy to meet adventures in a press of people of various humors; and in spite of their greatest efforts and modest bearing, our two friends did not escape them.

On reaching Babitse they saw before the public house a number of nobles who were just mounting to continue their journey. The two parties, after saluting each other, were about to pass, when suddenly one of the riders looked at

Volodyovski, and without saying a word rode up to him on a trot.

"Ah, you are here, my little fellow!" cried he. "You have been skulking, but I have found you. You won't escape me this time! Eh, gentlemen!" shouted he to his comrades, "just wait a bit. I have something to say to this little stub of an officer, and I should like to have you as witnesses of my words."

Volodyovski smiled with pleasure, for he recognized Pan Kharlamp. "God is my witness that I was not hiding," said he; "more than that, I was looking for you myself to ask if you still cherished rancor against me, but somehow we could n't meet."

"Pan Michael," whispered Zagloba, "you are on duty."

"I remember," muttered Volodyovski.

"Come to business!" roared Kharlamp. "Gentlemen, I have promised this milksop, this bald mustache, to clip his ears for him, and I'll clip them as true as I am Kharlamp. Be witnesses, gentlemen, and you, youngster, come up here!"

"I cannot, as God is dear to me, I cannot," said Volodyovski; "let me off even for a couple of days."

"Why can you not? You are frightened, I suppose. If you do not meet me at once, I will slap you so with my sword that you'll think of your grandfather and grandmother. Oh, you dodger, you venomous gadfly, you know how to get in the way, you know how to buzz, you know how to bite, but when it comes to the sabre you are not there."

Here Zagloba interfered. "It seems to me that you are pressing matters rather far," said he to Kharlamp, "and look out that this fly does not sting; if he does, no plaster will help you. Tfu! the devil take it, don't you see that this officer is on duty? Look at that wagon with money which we are taking to the regiment, and understand that his person is not at his own disposal and he cannot meet you. Whoever can't understand that is a dunce and not a soldier. We serve under the voevoda of Rus, and we have fought men different from you; but to-day it is impossible, and what is deferred will not escape."

"It is certain," said one of Kharlamp's comrades, "that they are transporting money; he cannot meet you."

"What is their money to me?" screamed the irrepressible Kharlamp; "let him stand before me or I'll slap him with my sword."

"I will not meet you to-day, but I give you the word of a soldier to meet you in three or four days, wherever you please, the moment I have carried out my orders. And if this does not satisfy you, gentlemen, I shall give order to touch the triggers, for I shall believe that I have to do not with soldiers, but with brigands. Take yourselves off then to all the devils, for I have no time to loiter."

On hearing this, the dragoons of the escort turned the muzzles of their guns on the aggressors. That movement, as well as the decisive words of Pan Michael, produced an evident impression on the comrades of Kharlamp. "Oh, let him off!" said they. "You are a soldier yourself, you know what service is; it is certain that you will receive satisfaction. He is a bold piece, like all men of the Russian squadron; restrain yourself, since we ask you."

Pan Kharlamp blustered awhile longer, but saw at last that he would either make his companions angry or expose them to an uncertain struggle with the dragoons. He turned therefore to Volodyovski, and said: "Give me your word that you will meet me."

"I will seek you myself, were it only because you have asked twice about such a thing. To-day is Wednesday, and let it be Saturday at two o'clock in the afternoon. Select your ground."

"Here in Babitse there is a crowd of travellers," said Kharlamp; "something might interfere. Let it be over there at Lipki; it is quieter, and not far for me, because our quarters are in Babitse."

"Will there be as large a company of you as to-day?" asked the prudent Zagloba.

"Oh, it's not necessary," said Kharlamp; "I shall come only with the Selitskis, my relatives. You will be without your dragoons, I trust."

"Perhaps they fight duels with the aid of soldiers among you," replied Pan Michael; "but it is not the custom with us."

"In four days then, on Saturday," said Kharlamp. "We shall be in front of the public house at Lipki; and now with God!"

"With God!" said Volodyovski and Zagloba.

The opponents parted quietly. Pan Michael was made happy by the coming amusement, and promised himself to make a present to Pan Longin of mustaches shorn from the light-horseman. He went therefore in good spirits to Zaborovo, where he found Prince Kazimir, who had come to

hunt. But Pan Michael saw his future lord only at a distance, for he was in a hurry. In two or three days he carried out his orders, inspected the horses, paid Pan Tshaskovski, returned to Warsaw, and at the appointed time, yes, an hour earlier, he was at Lipki with Zagloba and Pan Kushel, whom he had asked to be his other second.

On arriving in front of the inn kept by a Jew, they entered to moisten their throats a little with mead and amuse themselves with conversation at the glass.

"Here, scald-head! is your master at the castle?" asked Zagloba of the innkeeper.

"He is away in the town."

"Are there many nobles stopping in Lipki?"

"My house is empty. Only one has stopped with me, and he is sitting in the next room, — a rich man, with servants and horses."

"And why did he not go to the castle?"

"Because it is evident he does not know our master. Besides, the place has been closed for a month past."

"Maybe it is Kharlamp," said Zagloba.

"No," said Volodyovski.

"Well, Pan Michael, it seems to me that it is he. I'll go and see who it is. Jew, has this gentleman been long here?"

"He came to-day, not two hours ago."

"And don't you know where he came from?"

"I do not; but it must be from a distance, for his horses are used up; his men said, from beyond the Vistula."

"Why did he come here then to Lipki?"

"Who knows?"

"I'll go and see," repeated Zagloba; "perhaps it is some acquaintance." Approaching the closed door of the room, he knocked with his sword-hilt and said: "Worthy sir, may I enter?"

"Who is there?" answered a voice within.

"A friend," said Zagloba, opening the door. "Ah, begging your pardon, maybe I'm not in season," he added, pushing his head into the room. He drew back suddenly, and slammed the door as if he had looked on death. On his face was depicted terror coupled with the greatest astonishment. His mouth was open, and he looked with vacant stare on Volodyovski and Kushel.

"What's the matter?" asked Volodyovski.

"By the wounds of Christ, be quiet!" said Zagloba. "Bogun is there!"

"Who? What's happened to you?"

"There — Bogun!"

Both officers rose to their feet.

"Have you lost your reason? Compose yourself! Who is it?"

"Bogun! Bogun!"

"Impossible!"

"As I live! As I stand before you here, I swear to you by God and all the saints."

"Why are you so disturbed?" asked Volodyovski. "If he is there, then God has given him into our hands. Compose yourself! Are you sure that it is he?"

"As sure as that I am speaking to you, I saw him; he was changing his clothes."

"And did he see you?"

"I don't know; I think not."

Volodyovski's eyes gleamed like coals. "Jew," whispered he, beckoning hurriedly with his hand. "This way! Are there doors from the room?"

"No, only through this room."

"Kushel, you go under the window!" whispered Pan Michael. "Oh, he will not escape us this time!"

Kushel, without speaking a word, ran out of the room.

"Come to your senses," said Volodyovski. "Not over you, but over his neck hangs destruction. What can he do to you? Nothing!"

"Nothing; but from astonishment I am unable to catch my breath." And he thought to himself: "True, I have nothing to fear. Pan Michael is with me. Let Bogun be afraid!" And putting on a terribly savage look, he grasped the hilt of his sabre. "Pan Michael, he must not escape us." "But is it he? — for still I can't believe. What should he be doing here?"

"Hmelnitski has sent him as a spy; that is most certain. Wait! Pan Michael, we will seize him and lay down the condition that unless he gives up the princess, we will deliver him to justice. If he gives up the princess, then let the devil take him."

"But are there not too few of us, — two, and Kushel? He will defend himself like a madman, and he has attendants also."

"Kharlamp will come with two; there will be six of us. That's enough; be quiet!"

At that moment the door opened, and Bogun entered the

room. He could not have seen Zagloba looking into his room, for at the sight of him he quivered suddenly, a flush as it were went over his face, and his hand as quick as lightning rested on the hilt of his sabre; but all this lasted only the twinkle of an eye. The flush went from his face, which grew slightly pale.

Zagloba looked at him, and said nothing. The ataman also remained silent, and in the room a fly on the wing could be heard. Those two persons whose fates had crossed in such a wonderful manner pretended at the moment not to know each other. The interval was rather long; it appeared to Pan Michael that whole ages were passing.

"Jew," said Bogun, all at once, "is it far from here to Zaborovo?"

"Not far," answered the Jew. "Are you going now?"

"Yes," said Bogun, and turned toward the door leading to the anteroom.

"With your permission," sounded the voice of Zagloba.

The chief halted at once as if he had grown to the floor, and turning to Zagloba, fastened his dark and terrible eyes on him. "What do you wish?" asked he, curtly.

"It seems to me that we made acquaintance somewhere, — at a wedding on a farm in Russia, was it not?"

"Yes," said the chief haughtily, putting his hand again on the hilt.

"How does your health serve you?" asked Zagloba. "For you rode off in such haste that I had no time to bid you farewell."

"And were you sorry for that?"

"Of course I was sorry. We should have had a dance, and the company would have been larger." Here Zagloba pointed to Volodyovski. "This is the cavalier who came in, and he would have been glad of a nearer acquaintance with you."

"Enough of this!" shouted Pan Michael, rising suddenly. "I arrest you, traitor!"

"With what authority?" asked the ataman, raising his head haughtily.

"You are a rebel, an enemy of the Commonwealth, and have come here as a spy."

"And who are you?"

"Oh, I will not explain that to you; but you won't escape me!"

"We shall see," said Bogun. "I should not explain to

you who I am if you had challenged me to sabres like a soldier; but since you threaten with arrest, then I will explain. Here is a letter which I carry from the Zaporozian hetman to Prince Kazimir, and not finding him in Nyeporente, I am going with it to Zaborovo. How will you arrest me now?"

Bogun looked haughtily and sneeringly at Volodyovski. Pan Michael was greatly confused, like a hound which feels that the game is escaping him; and not knowing what to do, he turned an inquiring look at Zagloba. A painful moment of silence followed.

"It is difficult indeed," said Zagloba. "Since you are an envoy, we cannot arrest you; and you will not meet this cavalier with a sabre, for you have already fled before him till the earth groaned."

Bogun's face grew purple, for that moment he recognized Volodyovski. Shame and wounded pride sprang into play in the fearless chief. The remembrance of that flight scorched him like fire. It was the single stain on the fame of his heroism, — the fame which he loved beyond life, beyond all.

The inexorable Zagloba continued in cold blood: "You had almost lost your trousers, when pity penetrated this cavalier. Tfu! young hero, you have a woman's face, and a woman's heart too. You were brave with the old princess and the lad her son, but with a knight you are a wind-bag. Carry letters, steal young ladies, — that's your work, not war! As God is dear to me, I saw with my own eyes how your trousers were flying around. Tfu, tfu! Now you talk of the sabre, for you are carrying a letter. How are we to meet you when you shield yourself with that letter? All dust in the eyes, young hero! Hmelnitski is a good soldier, Krivonos a good one; but among the Cossacks there is many a cowardly sneak."

Bogun pushed up suddenly to Zagloba, and Zagloba drew back with equal swiftness behind Volodyovski, so that the two young knights stood before each other, eye to eye.

"Not from fear did I retreat before you, but to save my men," said Bogun.

"I know not your reasons for fleeing, but I know that you fled," said Volodyovski.

"I will meet you anywhere, even here, this minute."

"Will you challenge me?" asked Volodyovski, half closing his eyes.