

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

So Pan Longin went to Cracow, his heart pierced with an arrow, and the cruel Zagloba with Volodyovski to Zamost, where they remained only one day; for the commandant informed them that he had received no news for a long time from Skshetuski, and thought the regiments which had set out under Skshetuski would go to Zbaraj to protect those regions from disorderly bands. This was the more likely since Zbaraj, being the property of the Vishnyevetskis, was specially exposed to the attacks of the mortal enemies of the prince. There lay therefore before Volodyovski and Zagloba a road long and difficult enough; but since they were going after the princess, they were obliged to pass it; therefore it was all one to them whether they should enter on it earlier or later, and they moved without delay, halting only to rest, or disperse robber bands wandering here and there.

They went through a country so ruined that frequently for whole days they did not meet a living soul. Hamlets lay in ashes, villages were burned and empty, the people either killed or gathered into captivity. They saw only corpses along the road, the skeletons of houses, of Polish and Russian churches, the unburnt remnants of villages and cottages, dogs howling on burnt ruins. Whoever had survived the Tartar-Cossack passage hid in the depth of the forest, and was freezing from cold or dying of hunger, not daring yet to leave the forest, not believing that misfortune could have passed so soon. Volodyovski was obliged to feed the horses of his squadron with the bark of trees or with half-burnt grain taken from the ruins of former granaries. But they advanced quickly, supporting themselves mainly by supplies taken from bands of robbers. It was already the end of November; and inasmuch as the preceding winter had passed, to the greatest wonder of people, without snow, frost, and ice, so that the whole order of Nature seemed reversed by it, by so much did the present one promise to be of more than usual rigor. The ground had stiffened, snow was on the fields, river-banks were bordered each morning with a transparent, glassy shell.

The weather was dry; the pale sunbeams warmed the world but feebly in the midday hours. Red twilight of morning and evening flamed in the sky,—an infallible herald of an early and stern winter.

After war and hunger a third enemy of wretched humanity had to appear,—frost; and still people looked for it with desire because more surely than all negotiations was it a restrainer of war. Volodyovski, as a man of experience and knowing the Ukraine through and through, was full of hope that the expedition for the princess would take place without fail; for the chief obstacle, war, would not soon hinder it.

"I do not believe in the sincerity of Hmelnitski, that out of love for the king he withdrew to the Ukraine; for he is a cunning fox! He knows that when the Cossacks cannot intrench themselves they are useless; for in the open field, though five times the number, they cannot stand against our squadrons. They will go to winter quarters now, and send their flocks to the snow-fields; the Tartars also need to take home their captives, and if the winter is severe there will be peace till next grass."

"Perhaps longer, for still they respect the king. But we do not need so much time. With God's help we shall celebrate Skshetuski's wedding at the carnival."

"If we don't miss him this time, for that would be a new vexation."

"There are three squadrons with him, therefore it is not like hunting for a kernel of grain in a pile of chaff. Perhaps we shall come up with him yet at Zbaraj, if he is occupied in the neighborhood of robber bands."

"We cannot come up with him, but we ought to find some news of him along the road," answered Volodyovski.

Still it was difficult to get news. The peasants had seen passing squadrons here and there; they had heard of their battles with robbers, but did not know whose squadrons they were,—they might be Rogovski's as well as Skshetuski's; therefore the two friends learned nothing certain. But other news flew to their ears of great disasters to the Cossacks from the Lithuanian armies. It circled around in the form of rumors on the eve of Volodyovski's departure from Warsaw, but it was doubted then; now it flew through the whole country with great detail as an undoubted truth. The defeats inflicted by Hmelnitski on the armies of the Crown the Lithuanian armies had avenged with defeat.



Polksenjits, an old leader and experienced, had yielded his head, and the wild Nebaba; and more powerful than both, Krechovski, who raised himself not to starostaships and voevodaships, nor to dignities and offices, but to the em-paling stake in the ranks of insurgents. It seemed as if some marvellous Nemesis had wished to take vengeance on him for the German blood spilled on the Dnieper, — the blood of Flick and Werner, since he fell into the hands of a German regiment of Radzivil, and though shot and severely wounded was immediately empaled on a stake, on which the unfortunate quivered a whole day before he breathed out his gloomy soul. Such was the end of him who by his bravery and military skill might have become a second Stephan Hmeletski, but whom an overweening desire of wealth and dignities pushed upon the road of treason, perjury, and awful murders worthy of Krívonos himself.

With him, with Polksenjits and Nebaba, nearly twenty thousand Cossacks laid down their heads on the field of battle, or were drowned in the morasses of the Pripet; terror then flew like a whirlwind over the rich Ukraine, for it appeared to all that after the great triumphs — after Jóltya Vodi, Korsún, Pilavtsi — the hour was coming for such defeats as the former rebellions had experienced at Solonitsa and Kuméiki. Hmelnitski himself, though at the summit of glory, though stronger than ever before, was frightened when he heard of the death of his "friend" Krechovski, and again he began to inquire of wizards about the future. They gave various prophecies, — they foretold great wars, victories, and defeats, — but they could not tell the hetman what would happen to himself.

The defeat of Krechovski and with it the winter made a prolonged peace more certain. The country began to heal, devastated villages to be populous, and hope entered slowly, gradually, into all weakened and terrified hearts. With that same hope our two friends after a long and difficult journey arrived safely at Zbaraj, and announcing themselves at the castle, went straightway to the commandant, in whom with no small astonishment they beheld Vershul.

"And where is Skshetuski?" asked Zagloba, after the first greetings.

"He is not here," answered Vershul.

"Then you have command over the garrison?"

"Yes. Skshetuski had, but he went out and gave me the garrison till his return."

"When did he promise to return?"

"He said nothing, for he didn't know himself, but he said at parting: 'If any one comes to me, tell him to wait for me here.'"

Zagloba and Volodyovski looked at each other.

"How long since he went away?" asked Volodyovski.

"Ten days."

"Pan Michael," said Zagloba, "let Pan Vershul give us supper, for men give poor counsel on an empty stomach. At supper we can talk."

"I serve you with my heart, for I was just about to sit down myself. Besides, Pan Volodyovski, as senior officer, takes command. I am with him, not he with me."

"Remain in command, Pan Kryshtof," said Volodyovski, "for you are older in years; besides I shall have to go on without doubt."

After a while supper was served. They took their places and ate. When Zagloba had quieted somewhat his first hunger with two plates of broth, he said to Vershul, —

"Can you imagine where Skshetuski has gone?"

Vershul ordered the attendant serving at the table to go out, and after a moment's reflection began, —

"I can imagine that for Skshetuski secrecy is important, therefore I did not speak before the servant. Pan Yan has taken advantage of a favorable time, for we are sure of peace till spring, and according to my calculation he has gone to seek the princess, who is in Bogun's hands."

"Bogun is no longer in the world," said Zagloba.

Zagloba related now for the third or fourth time everything as it was, for he told it always with delight. Vershul, like Pan Longin, could not wonder sufficiently at the event; at last he said, —

"Then it will be easier for Pan Yan."

"The question is, Will he find her? Did he take any men?"

"No, he went alone, with one Russian, a servant, and three horses."

"He acted wisely, for in that region the only help is in stratagem. To Kamenyets he might go with a small squadron perhaps; but in Ushitsi and Mogileff Cossacks are surely stationed, for there are good winter quarters in those places, and in Yampol, where their nest is, it is necessary to go either with a division or alone."

"And how do you know that he went specially in that direction?" asked Volodyovski.



"Because she is secreted beyond Yampol, and he knows it; but there are ravines, hollows, and reeds there so numerous that even for one knowing the place well, it is difficult to find the way, and what would it be for one not knowing? I used to go for horses to Yagorlik, and to lawsuits. I know all about the place. If we were together, perhaps we could succeed; but for him alone — I have doubts. I have doubts, unless some chance indicates the road to him, for he will not be able to make inquiries."

"Then did you wish to go with him?"

"Yes. But what shall we do now, Pan Michael? Follow him or not?"

"I rely on your prudence."

"H'm! He went ten days ago — we cannot come up with him; and besides he asked us to wait here. God knows too what road he took. Maybe through Ploskiroff and Bar along the old highway, and maybe through Kamenyets Podolsk. It is a hard question."

"Remember, besides," said Vershul, "that these are only suppositions. You are not sure that he went after the princess."

"That's it, that's it!" said Zagloba. "Perhaps he went merely to get informants somewhere, and then return to Zbaraj; for he knows that we were to go with him, and that he might expect us at this time, since it is the most favorable. This is a difficult question to settle."

"I should advise you to wait about ten days," said Vershul.

"Ten days are nothing; we should either wait or not wait at all."

"I think we should not wait; for what shall we lose if we move at once? If Skshetuski does not find the princess, God may favor us," said Volodyovski.

"You see, Pan Michael, we must not overlook anything in this case. You are still young and want adventures," said Zagloba; "but here is this danger: if he is looking for her by himself, and we look for her by ourselves, some suspicion will be easily roused in the people there. The Cossacks are cunning, and afraid that some one may find out their plans. They may have a secret understanding with the Pasha of the boundary near Khotim, or with the Tartars beyond the Dniester about a future war, — who knows? They will be watchful of strangers, particularly of strangers inquiring the way. I know them. It is easy to betray yourself, and then what?"

"The greater the reason to go. Skshetuski may fall into some difficulty where help would be required."

"That is true too."

Zagloba fell into such deep thought that his temples quivered; at last he roused himself, and said: "Taking everything into consideration, it will be necessary to go."

Volodyovski drew a deep breath with satisfaction. "And when?"

"When we have rested about three days, so that body and soul may be fresh."

Next day the two friends began to make preparations for the road, when unexpectedly on the eve of their journey Tsiga, a young Cossack, Skshetuski's attendant, arrived with news and letters for Vershul. Hearing of this, Zagloba and Volodyovski hurried to the quarters of the commandant, and read the following: —

"I am in Kamenyets, to which the road through Satanoff is safe. I am going to Yampol with Armenian merchants whom Pan Bukovski found for me. They have Tartar and Cossack passes for a free journey to Akerman. We shall go through Ushitsi, Mogileff, and Yampol with silk stuffs, stopping at all places along the road wherever there are living people. God may aid me in finding what I seek. Tell my comrades, Volodyovski and Zagloba, to wait for me in Zbaraj if they have nothing else to do; for by this road which I travel it would be impossible to go in a larger company by reason of deep distrust in the minds of Cossacks who winter in Yampol on the Dniester as far as Yagorlik, where they keep their horses in the snow. What I cannot do alone we three could not do, and I can pass more readily for an Armenian. Thank them, Pan Kryshtof, from the heart's soul for their resolution, which I shall not forget while I live; but I was not able to wait, since every day was a torment to me, and I could not know whether they would come, and it is the best time now to go when all the merchants are travelling with goods. I send back my trusty attendant whom you will care for, as I have no need of him; but I am afraid of his youth, lest he might say something somewhere. Pan Bukovski vouches for these merchants; says they are honest, and I think they are, believing as I do that everything is in the hands of the high God, who if he wishes will show his mercy to us, and shorten our sufferings."

Zagloba finished the letter, and looked at his comrades; but they were silent, till at length Vershul said, —

"I knew he went there."

"And what are we to do?" asked Volodyovski.

"What?" said Zagloba, opening his arms. "We have



nothing to go for. "It is well that he is with merchants, for he can look in everywhere, and no one will wonder. In every country-house there is something to be bought, for half the Commonwealth has been plundered. It would be difficult for us, Pan Michael, to go beyond Yampol. Skshetuski is as black as a Wallachian, and can pass easily for an Armenian, but they would know you at once by your little oat-colored mustaches. In peasant disguise it would be equally difficult. There is no use for us there, I must confess, though I am sorry that we shall not put our hands to freeing that poor young lady. But we did a great service to Skshetuski when we killed Bogun; for if he were alive, then I would not guarantee the health of Pan Yan."

Volodyovski was very much dissatisfied. He had promised himself a journey full of adventures, and now there was left to him a long and tedious stay at Zbaraj. "We might go as far as Kamenyets."

"What should we do there, and on what should we live?" asked Zagloba. "It's all one to what walls we fasten like mushrooms. We must wait and wait, for such a journey may occupy Skshetuski long. While a man moves he is young [here Zagloba dropped his head in melancholy on his breast]; he grows old in inaction, but it is hard. Let him get on without us. To-morrow we will offer a solemn prayer for his success. We killed Bogun; that is the main thing. Give orders to have your horses unpacked, Pan Michael! We must wait."

In fact, on the morrow began for the two friends long and dreary days of waiting, to which neither drinking nor dice could lend variety, and they dragged on without end. Meanwhile a severe winter had begun. Snow covered the ramparts of Zbaraj, and the whole land, in a shroud three feet thick. Beasts and wild birds approached the dwellings of men. Day after day came the cawing of crows and ravens, in flocks without number. All December passed; then January and February. Of Skshetuski there was not a sound.

Volodyovski went to Tarnopol to seek adventures. Zagloba was gloomy, and insisted that he was growing old.