

## CHAPTER LVI.

THE horses were given barely time to rest, and the return was begun with such speed that when the moon had risen on the steppe the party was already in the neighborhood of Studenka, beyond the Valadinka. Volodyovski rode in front, looking carefully on every side. Next came Zagloba at the side of Helena; and Jendzian closed the procession, driving the pack animals and two saddle-horses, which he had not failed to take from Horpyna's stable. Zagloba's mouth was not closed; and in truth he had something to tell the princess, who shut up in the wild ravine knew nothing of what was passing in the world. He told her how they had looked for her at first; how Skshetuski, without knowing of the duel, had sought Bogun as far as Pereyasláv; how finally Jendzian gained the secret of her concealment from the ataman and brought it to Zbaraj.

"Merciful God!" said Helena, raising her beautiful pale face to the moon; "then Pan Skshetuski went beyond the Dnieper for me?"

"To Pereyasláv, as I tell you. And surely he would have come with us now, but we had no time to send for him as we wished to hurry to your aid at once. He knows nothing as yet of your safety, and offers prayers for your soul every day; but have no sorrow for him now. Let him suffer a while longer since such a reward is awaiting him."

"And I thought that all had forgotten me, and I was only imploring the Lord for death."

"Not only did we not forget you, but all the time our single thought was how to come to your aid. Wonders we planned. I was drying my brain, and so was Skshetuski; but that was to be expected. This knight too who is riding in front of us spared neither toil nor sword."

"May God reward him!"

"It is clear that you both have that which makes people cleave to you; but in truth you owe Volodyovski gratitude, for as I said we cut up Bogun like a pike."

"In Rozlogi, Pan Skshetuski spoke much of Volodyovski as of his best friend."

"And justly. He has a great soul in a little body. This moment he is somehow dull. It is evident that your beauty

has stunned him; but wait, let him only grow used to it and he will come to himself. Oh! he and I worked wonders at the election."

"Then there is a new king?"

"Poor girl! In this cursed wilderness you don't know that Yan Kazimir was elected last autumn and has been reigning eight months. There will be a great war this time with the rabble. God grant us good fortune, for Yeremi has been set aside and others appointed who are altogether unfitted."

"And will Pan Skshetuski go to the war?"

"He is a true soldier, and I don't think you can stop him. He and I are alike! When powder entices, nothing can restrain us. Oh, we gave it to the ruffians in grand fashion last year! The whole night would be short were I to tell you all as it happened. We shall be sure to go, but with a light heart now. The main thing is that we have found you, poor girl, without whom life was a burden to us."

The princess inclined her sweet face to Zagloba. "I know not why you love me, but it is sure that you do not love me more than I do you."

Zagloba began to puff with satisfaction. "Then you love me?"

"As I live, I do."

"God reward you, for my old age will be lighter. Women pursue me yet, as was the case in Warsaw more than once during the election. Volodyovski is witness of that. But I don't care for love, and in spite of my hot blood, I am content with the feeling of a father."

Silence followed; but the horses began to snort violently, one after another, — a favorable omen.

"Good health, good health!" said the travellers.

The night was clear; the moon rose higher and higher in the sky, which was filled with twinkling stars, that became weaker and paler. The tired horses lessened their speed, and weariness seized the travellers. Volodyovski reined in his horse first.

"The dawn is not distant," said he; "it is time to rest."

"It is," said Zagloba. "I am so sleepy that my horse seems to have two heads."

But before resting, Jendzian prepared supper. He made a fire, removed the saddle-bags from a horse, and took out provisions which he had obtained from Burlai in Yampol, such as corn bread, cold meat, and Wallachian wine. At the sight of these two leather bags, well filled out with



liquid which gave forth a pleasant sound, Zagloba forgot his sleep; the others also fell to eating and drinking with a good will. There was abundance for all; and when they were satisfied, Zagloba wiped his mouth and said,—

"Till death I shall not cease to repeat, 'Wondrous are the judgments of God!' Now, my young lady, you are free; and here we sit comforted under the sky, drinking Burlai's wine. I will not say that Hungarian would not be better, for this smells of the skin, but on the road it will pass."

"There is one thing at which I cannot wonder sufficiently," said Helena,—"that Horpyna consented so easily to give me up to you."

Zagloba looked at Volodyovski, then at Jendzian, and blinked rapidly.

"She consented, for she had to. There is nothing to hide, for it is no shame that we rubbed out both Cheremis and the witch."

"How?" asked the princess, with fright.

"Did n't you hear the shots?"

"I heard them, but thought Cheremis was firing."

"It was not Cheremis, but this young fellow here, who shot the witch through and through. The devil sits in him, we don't dispute that. But he could not act otherwise; for the witch—whether it was because she knew something, or was stubborn—insisted on going with us. It was difficult to permit that, for she would have seen at once that we were not going to Kieff. He shot her, and I killed Cheremis,—a real African monster,—and I think that God will not count it ill of me. There must be a universal disgust of him in even the regions below. Just before leaving the ravine I went ahead and pulled the bodies aside a little, so that you might not be frightened at them or take it as a bad omen."

"In these terrible times I have seen too many dead persons who were kindred of mine to be frightened at the sight of slain bodies," said the princess; "still I should prefer not to have blood shed, so that God might not punish us for it."

"It was not a knightly deed," said Volodyovski, harshly. "I would not put my hand to it."

"What is the use of thinking over it," said Jendzian, "when it could not be avoided? If we had destroyed some good person I should not speak; but an enemy of God may be killed; and I myself saw how that witch entered into fellowship with devils. It is not for her that I am sorry."

"And why is Pan Jendzian sorry?" asked the princess.

"Because money is buried there, of which Bogun told me; but you gentlemen were so urgent that I had no time to dig it up, though I know well where it is, near the mill. My heart was cut also at having to leave so much property of every kind in that room where you, my lady, lived."

"Just see what a servant you are going to have!" said Zagloba to the princess. "With the exception of his master, there is no one, not the devil himself, from whom he would not strip skin to make a coat-collar for himself."

"With God's help, Jendzian will not complain of my ingratitude," answered Helena.

"I thank you humbly," said he, kissing her hand.

During this time Volodyovski sat with a sullen look, drinking wine quietly from the skin, till his unusual silence attracted Zagloba's attention.

"Ah, Pan Michael," said he, "you have given us scarcely a word." Here the old man turned to Helena. "I have not told you that your beauty has deprived him of reason and speech."

"You would better take a nap before daylight," was the little knight's reply; and he began to move his mustaches like a rabbit trying to gain courage.

But the old noble was right. The beauty of the princess had kept the little knight in a sort of continual ecstasy. He looked at her, looked again, and in his mind he asked: "Can it be that such a woman moves upon the earth?"

He had seen much beauty in his day. Beautiful were the Princesses Anna and Barbara Zbaraska, and Anusia Borzobogata, charming beyond expression. Panna Jukovkna, to whom Roztvorovski was paying court, had many a charm, and so had Vershulovna and Skoropadska and Bohovitnianka; but none of these could compare with that marvellous flower of the steppe. In presence of the others Volodyovski was vivacious, full of speech; but now, when he looked on those velvet eyes, sweet and languishing, on the silken lashes, the shade of which fell on the pupils, on the arrowy form, on the bosom lightly moved by the breath, on the bloom of the lips,—when Volodyovski looked at all this, he simply forgot the tongue in his mouth; and what was worse, he seemed awkward, stupid, and above all diminutive,—so small as to be ridiculous. "She is a princess, and I am a little boy," thought he, in bitterness; and he would have rejoiced could some giant



have issued from the darkness by chance, for then poor Pan Michael would have shown that he was not so small as he seemed. He was irritated also because Zagloba, evidently glad that his daughter was so attractive, coughed every little while, quizzed, and winked fearfully. And each instant she was more beautiful, as calm and sweet she sat before the fire, shone on by the rosy flame and the white moon.

"Confess, Pan Michael," said Zagloba, early next day, when they found themselves alone for a moment, "that there is not such another girl in the Commonwealth. If you show me another such, I will let you call me idiot and give me a drubbing."

"I do not deny," said the little knight, "that she is dainty and rare, such as I have not seen till this hour; for even those forms of goddesses cut from marble which seem alive, and which we saw in the Kazanovski palace, are not to be compared with her. I do not wonder that the best men are risking their lives for her, for she is worth it."

"Well, well," said Zagloba, "as God lives, you cannot tell when she is better, morning or evening, for she always moves in beauty, like a rose. I have told you that I was once of extraordinary beauty myself, but I should have been forced to yield to her, though some say she resembles me as one cup does another."

"Go to the devil!" cried the little knight.

"Don't be angry, Pan Michael, for you are bad enough to the eye already. You gaze on her as a goat on a head of cabbage. One might swear that longing has seized you; but the sausage is not for the dog."

"Tfu!" cried Volodyovski. "Are you not ashamed, being an old man, to talk such nonsense?"

"And why are you frowning?"

"Because you think we have passed all danger, like a bird in the air, and are entirely safe; but now careful deliberation is needed, so that when we have escaped one evil we may avoid another. There is a terrible road before us yet, and God knows what may happen, for these regions to which we are going must be already on fire."

"When I stole her from Bogun out of Rozlogi it was worse, for there was pursuit in the rear and rebellion in front; still I passed through the whole Ukraine as through a flame, and went to Bar. And why is the head on my shoulders? At the worst, it is not far to Kamenyets."

"True; but it is not far for the Turks and Tartars, either."

"Oh, what stuff do you tell me?"

"I tell you the truth, and say that it is worth thinking over. It is better to avoid Kamenyets and move on towards Bar; for the Cossacks will respect the baton. With the rabble we can get on; but if the Tartars see us, all is lost. I know them of old, and I could flee before a Tartar party with the birds and the wolves; but if we were to meet them I could be of no service."

"Then let us go through Bar or around Bar; let the plague take the limes and cherries of Kamenyets. You don't know that Jendzian took a baton from Burlai. We can go everywhere among the Cossacks singing. We have passed the worst of the Wilderness; we shall enter a settled country. We must think of stopping here and there at a farm about the time of evening milking, for such a place is more proper and comfortable for the princess. But it seems to me, Pan Michael, that you look at things in too sombre a light. Just think that three men like us — without flattery to you or me — should not be able to make our way in the steppe! We'll join our stratagems to your sabre; and now for it! Nothing better can be done. Jendzian has Burlai's baton; and that is the main thing, for Burlai commands all Podolia at present, and if we are once beyond Bar, Lant-skoronski is there, with the squadrons of the Crown. On, Pan Michael, let us lose no time!"

And in fact they lost no time, but tore on through the steppes toward the north and the west as fast as their horses could go. On the heights of Mogileff they entered a more settled land, so that in the evening it was not difficult anywhere to find farms or villages in which to spend the night; but the ruddy dawn always found them on horseback and on the road. Fortunately the summer was dry, — warm days, with dewy nights, and in the early morning the whole steppe was silvered as with frost. The wind dried the waters, the rivers decreased, and they crossed without difficulty.

Going for some time along and above Lozova, they stopped for a somewhat longer rest than usual in Shargorod, where there was a Cossack regiment not belonging to Burlai's command. There they found messengers from Burlai, and among them Kuna, a sotnik (captain), whom they had seen in Yampol at the feast with Burlai. He was somewhat surprised that they were not going through Bratslav, Raigorod, and Skvira to Kieff; but no suspicion remained



in his mind, especially when Zagloba explained to him that they had not taken that road from fear of the Tartars, who were about to march from the direction of the Dnieper. Kuna told them then that Burlai had sent him to proclaim the campaign, and that he himself was ready to come at any moment, with all the forces at Yampol and the Budjak-Tartars to Shargorod, whence they would advance immediately.

Couriers had come from Hmelnitski to Burlai with news that war had begun, and with orders to lead all the regiments to Volynia. Burlai had long wished to move on Bar, and was merely awaiting the Tartar reinforcements, for somehow it had begun to go badly at Bar for the rebellion. Lantskoronski, the Polish commander, had cut up considerable bands there, captured the place, and put a garrison in the castle. Several thousand Cossacks had been killed. Burlai wished to avenge these and recapture the castle; but Kuna said that the final orders of Hmelnitski to march on Volynia prevented these plans, and Bar would not be besieged unless the Tartars should insist on it.

"Well, Pan Michael," said Zagloba the next day, "Bar is before us and we might hide the princess there a second time; but the devil take it, I have no more trust in Bar, or any other fortress, since these ruffians have more cannon than the armies of the Crown. This, however, troubles me somewhat, that clouds are gathering around."

"Not only are clouds gathering," answered the knight, "but a storm is rolling up behind, namely the Tartars; and if Burlai should come up with us he would be greatly astonished that we are not going to Kieff, but in the opposite direction."

"He would be ready to show us another road. May the devil show him first the straightest road to his own kingdom! Let us make an agreement, Pan Michael. I will explain everything to the Cossacks, but let your wit work against the Tartars."

"It is easier for you to manage the ruffians who take us for their own," answered Volodyovski. "Against the Tartars there is but one help, — to flee with all swiftmess, to slip out of the snare while there is time. We must buy good horses on the road wherever we can, so as to have fresh ones at any moment."

"Pan Longin's purse will suffice for that, and if it does not we will take Burlai's money from Jendzian. But now forward!"

And they pushed on still more hurriedly, till foam covered the sides of the ponies and fell like snow-flakes on the green steppe. After they had passed Derla and Ladava, Volodyovski bought new horses in Barek, without leaving the old ones; for those which they had as a gift from Burlai were of rare breed, and they kept them attached by the bridle, and drove on, making shorter stops and night-rests. Every one was in good health, and Helena in excellent spirits. Though wearied with the road, she felt that every day gave her new strength. In the ravine she had passed a secluded life and scarcely left her gilded room, not wishing to meet the shameless Horpyna and listen to her talk and persuasion; now the fresh breeze of the steppe brought back her health. The roses bloomed on her face, the sun darkened her complexion, but her eyes gained brightness; and when at times the wind blew the hair over her forehead, you would have said she was some gypsy, the most wonderful soothsayer, or that a gypsy queen was travelling in the wide steppe, — flowers springing up before her, knights following behind.

Volodyovski grew accustomed to her beauty by degrees, as the journey brought them together, so that finally he became used to her; then he regained his speech and cheerfulness, and often while riding at her side told of Lubni, and especially of his friendship for Pan Yan, thinking she heard this with gladness; at times he even teased her, saying: "I am Bogun's friend and am taking you to him."

Then she would fold her hands as if in great dread, and say in a sweet voice: "Oh, cruel knight, better kill me at once than do that!"

"Impossible, I must take you!" answered the stern knight.

"Strike!" said she, closing her eyes and stretching her neck to him.

Then the ants began to travel along the back of the little knight. "That girl goes to the head like wine!" thought he; "but I cannot drink this wine, for it is another's." The honest Pan Michael then shook himself and urged his horse forward. When he plunged into the grass like a seaweed into water, the ants fell from him; he turned all his attention to the journey. Was it safe, were they going well, or was any adventure approaching them from any side? He straightened himself in the stirrups, raised his yellow mustaches over the waving grass, looked, sniffed,



listened like a Tartar when he is prowling in the wild fields through the grass of the steppe.

Zagloba too was in the best of spirits. "It is easier for us to escape now," said he, "than when on the Kagamlik we had to sneak off on foot like dogs, with our tongues hanging out. My tongue at that time was so dried up in my mouth that I could have planed a tree with it, but now, thanks be to God, I have something to sleep on in the evening, and something to wet my throat with from time to time."

"Do you remember how you carried me over the water?"

"God grant us to wait! you'll have something to carry in your arms; I'll bet Skshetuski's head on that."

"Ho! ho!" laughed Jendzian.

"Desist, I beg you," whispered the princess, blushing and dropping her eyes.

Thus they conversed over the steppe, to shorten the time. Finally, beyond Barek and Yeltushkoff they entered a country recently gnawed by the teeth of war. There bands of armed ruffians raged; there also, not long before, Lant-skoronski burned and slew, for it was only a few days since he had withdrawn to Zbaraj. Our travellers learned also from the people of the town that Hmelnitski and the Khan had set out with all their forces against the Poles, or rather against the commanders whose forces were in mutiny and refused to serve except under the command of Prince Yeremi. In this connection it was generally prophesied that destruction or the end of either the Poles or the Cossacks would surely come, for Father Hmelnitski and Yeremi were to meet. The whole country was as if on fire. All were rushing to arms and marching to the north to join Hmelnitski. From the lower Dniester, Burlai was advancing with his entire force; and along the road every regiment was in motion from garrisons, quarters, and pastures, for the order had come to all. They marched then in hundreds, in squadrons, in thousands; and at their flank rolled on like a river the mob, armed with flails, forks, knives, and pikes. Horseboys and herdsmen left their herds, settlers their lands, bee-keepers their bees, wild fishermen their reeds by the Dnieper, hunters the woods. Hamlets, villages, and towns were deserted. In three provinces there remained at home but old women and children, for even the young women had gone with the men against the Poles. Simultaneously from the east approached with his en-

tire main army Hmelnitski, like an ominous storm, crushing by the way with his mighty hand castles, great and small, and killing all who were left from the previous defeats.

Having passed Bar, full of gloomy reminiscences for the princess, our travellers took the high-road leading through Latichi and Ploskiri to Tarnopol, and farther to Lvoff. Now, they met more frequently, at one time regular tabors of wagons, at another detachments of Cossack infantry and cavalry; now parties of peasants; now countless herds of cattle surrounded with clouds of dust, and driven on as food for the Cossack and the Tartar armies. The road became dangerous, for they were asked continually what they wanted, whence they came, and where they were going. Zagloba showed the Cossack companies Burlai's baton, and said, —

"We are sent from Burlai; we are taking Bogun's wife."

At sight of the baton of the terrible colonel, the Cossacks generally opened the way the more readily, since every one understood that if Bogun was alive he must be near the forces of the commanders in the neighborhood of Zbaraj or Konstantinoff. But it was far more difficult for the travellers to pass the mob with its wild parties of herdsmen, ignorant, drunk, and having almost no idea of the ensigns given by colonels for a safe conduct. Had it not been for Helena, these half-savage people would have taken Zagloba, Volodyovski, and Jendzian for their own, — in fact they did so even as it was; but Helena attracted universal attention by her sex and unusual beauty, hence the dangers had to be overcome with the greatest care.

At one time Zagloba showed the baton, at another Volodyovski his teeth, and more than one corpse fell behind them. A number of times the unapproachable steeds of Burlai alone saved them from too grievous adventure, and the journey so favorable at the beginning grew more difficult each day. Helena, although brave by nature, began to fail in health from continual alarm and sleeplessness, and looked in truth like a captive dragged against her will into the tent of an enemy. Zagloba exerted himself savagely, and was continually inventing new stratagems which the little knight put into practice at once; both of them consoled the princess as best they could.

"We have only to pass the swarm which is now in front," said Volodyovski, "and reach Zbaraj, before Hmelnitski with the Tartars fills the region about."