НИКОЛАЙ ГОГОЛЬ

TARAS BULBA, AND OTHER TALES

Николай Гоголь

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Гоголь Н. В.

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INTRODUCTION

Russian literature, so full of enigmas, contains no greater creative mystery than Nikolai Vasil'evich Gogol (1809-1852), who has done for the Russian novel and Russian prose what Pushkin has done for Russian poetry. Before these two men came Russian literature can hardly have been said to exist. It was pompous and effete with pseudo-classicism; foreign influences were strong; in the speech of the upper circles there was an over-fondness for German, French, and English words. Between them the two friends, by force of their great genius, cleared away the debris which made for sterility and erected in their stead a new structure out of living Russian words. The spoken word, born of the people, gave soul and wing to literature; only by coming to earth, the native earth, was it enabled to soar. Coming up from Little Russia, the Ukraine, with Cossack blood in his veins, Gogol injected his own healthy virus into an effete body, blew his own virile spirit, the spirit of his race, into its nostrils, and gave the Russian novel its direction to this very day.

More than that. The nomad and romantic in him, troubled and restless with Ukrainian myth, legend, and song, impressed upon Russian literature, faced with the realities of modern life, a spirit titanic and in clash with its material, and produced in the mastery of this every-day material, commonly called sordid, a phantasmagoria intense with beauty. A clue to all Russian realism may be found in a Russian critic's observation about Gogol: "Seldom has nature created a man so romantic in bent, yet so masterly in portraying all that is unromantic in life." But this statement does not cover the whole ground, for it is easy to see in almost all of Gogol's work his "free Cossack soul" trying to break through the shell of sordid to-day like some ancient demon, essentially Dionysian. So that his works, true though they are to our life, are at once a reproach, a protest, and a challenge, ever calling for joy, ancient joy, that is no more with us. And they have all the joy and sadness of the Ukrainian songs he loved so much. Ukrainian was to Gogol "the language of the soul," and it was in Ukrainian songs rather than in old chronicles, of which he was not a little contemptuous, that he read the history of his people. Time and again, in his essays and in his letters to friends, he expresses his boundless joy in these songs: "O songs, you are my joy and my life! How I love you. What are the bloodless chronicles I pore over beside those clear, live chronicles! I cannot live without songs; they… reveal everything more and more clearly, oh, how clearly, gone-by life and gone-by men.... The songs of Little Russia are her everything, her poetry, her history, and her ancestral grave. He who has not penetrated them deeply knows nothing of the past of this blooming region of Russia."

Indeed, so great was his enthusiasm for his own land that after collecting material for many years, the year 1833 finds him at work on a history of "poor Ukraine," a work planned to take up six volumes; and writing to a friend at this time he promises to say much in it that has not been said before him. Furthermore, he intended to follow this work with a universal history in eight volumes with a view to establishing, as far as may be gathered, Little Russia and the world in proper relation, connecting the two; a quixotic task, surely. A poet, passionate, religious, loving the heroic, we find him constantly impatient and fuming at the lifeless chronicles, which leave him cold as he seeks in vain for what he cannot find. "Nowhere," he writes in 1834, "can I find anything of the time which ought to be richer than any other in events. Here was a people whose whole existence was passed in activity, and which, even if nature had made it inactive, was compelled to go forward to great affairs and deeds because of its neighbours, its geographic situation, the constant danger to its existence.... If the Crimeans and the Turks had had a literature I am convinced that no history of an independent nation in Europe would prove so interesting as that of the Cossacks." Again he complains of the

"withered chronicles"; it is only the wealth of his country's song that encourages him to go on with its history.

Too much a visionary and a poet to be an impartial historian, it is hardly astonishing to note the judgment he passes on his own work, during that same year, 1834: "My history of Little Russia's past is an extraordinarily made thing, and it could not be otherwise." The deeper he goes into Little Russia's past the more fanatically he dreams of Little Russia's future. St. Petersburg wearies him, Moscow awakens no emotion in him, he yearns for Kieff, the mother of Russian cities, which in his vision he sees becoming "the Russian Athens." Russian history gives him no pleasure, and he separates it definitely from Ukrainian history. He is "ready to cast everything aside rather than read Russian history," he writes to Pushkin. During his seven-year stay in St. Petersburg (1829-36) Gogol zealously gathered historical material and, in the words of Professor Kotlyarevsky, "lived in the dream of becoming the Thucydides of Little Russia." How completely he disassociated Ukrainia from Northern Russia may be judged by the conspectus of his lectures written in 1832. He says in it, speaking of the conquest of Southern Russia in the fourteenth century by Prince Guedimin at the head of his Lithuanian host, still dressed in the skins of wild beasts, still worshipping the ancient fire and practising pagan rites: "Then Southern Russia, under the mighty protection of Lithuanian princes, completely separated itself from the North. Every bond between them was broken; two kingdoms were established under a single name—Russia—one under the Tatar yoke, the other under the same rule with Lithuanians. But actually they had no relation with one another; different laws, different customs, different aims, different bonds, and different activities gave them wholly different characters."

This same Prince Guedimin freed Kieff from the Tatar yoke. This city had been laid waste by the golden hordes of Ghengis Khan and hidden for a very long time from the Slavonic chronicler as behind an impenetrable curtain. A shrewd man, Guedimin appointed a Slavonic prince to rule over the city and permitted the inhabitants to practise their own faith, Greek Christianity. Prior to the Mongol invasion, which brought conflagration and ruin, and subjected Russia to a two-century bondage, cutting her off from Europe, a state of chaos existed and the separate tribes fought with one another constantly and for the most petty reasons. Mutual depredations were possible owing to the absence of mountain ranges; there were no natural barriers against sudden attack. The openness of the steppe made the people war-like. But this very openness made it possible later for Guedimin's pagan hosts, fresh from the fir forests of what is now White Russia, to make a clean sweep of the whole country between Lithuania and Poland, and thus give the scattered princedoms a much-needed cohesion. In this way Ukrainia was formed. Except for some forests, infested with bears, the country was one vast plain, marked by an occasional hillock. Whole herds of wild horses and deer stampeded the country, overgrown with tall grass, while flocks of wild goats wandered among the rocks of the Dnieper. Apart from the Dnieper, and in some measure the Desna, emptying into it, there were no navigable rivers and so there was little opportunity for a commercial people. Several tributaries cut across, but made no real boundary line. Whether you looked to the north towards Russia, to the east towards the Tatars, to the south towards the Crimean Tatars, to the west towards Poland, everywhere the country bordered on a field, everywhere on a plain, which left it open to the invader from every side. Had there been here, suggests Gogol in his introduction to his never-written history of Little Russia, if upon one side only, a real frontier of mountain or sea, the people who settled here might have formed a definite political body. Without this natural protection it became a land subject to constant attack and despoliation. "There where three hostile nations came in contact it was manured with bones, wetted with blood. A single Tatar invasion destroyed the whole labour of the soil-tiller; the meadows and the cornfields were trodden down by horses or destroyed by flame, the lightly-built habitations reduced to the ground, the inhabitants scattered or driven off into captivity together with cattle. It was a land of terror, and for this reason there could develop in it only a warlike people, strong

in its unity and desperate, a people whose whole existence was bound to be trained and confined to war."

This constant menace, this perpetual pressure of foes on all sides, acted at last like a fierce hammer shaping and hardening resistance against itself. The fugitive from Poland, the fugitive from the Tatar and the Turk, homeless, with nothing to lose, their lives ever exposed to danger, forsook their peaceful occupations and became transformed into a warlike people, known as the Cossacks, whose appearance towards the end of the thirteenth century or at the beginning of the fourteenth was a remarkable event which possibly alone (suggests Gogol) prevented any further inroads by the two Mohammedan nations into Europe. The appearance of the Cossacks was coincident with the appearance in Europe of brotherhoods and knighthood-orders, and this new race, in spite of its living the life of marauders, in spite of turnings its foes' tactics upon its foes, was not free of the religious spirit of its time; if it warred for its existence it warred not less for its faith, which was Greek. Indeed, as the nation grew stronger and became conscious of its strength, the struggle began to partake something of the nature of a religious war, not alone defensive but aggressive also, against the unbeliever. While any man was free to join the brotherhood it was obligatory to believe in the Greek faith. It was this religious unity, blazed into activity by the presence across the borders of unbelieving nations, that alone indicated the germ of a political body in this gathering of men, who otherwise lived the audacious lives of a band of highway robbers. "There was, however," says Gogol, "none of the austerity of the Catholic knight in them; they bound themselves to no vows or fasts; they put no self-restraint upon themselves or mortified their flesh, but were indomitable like the rocks of the Dnieper among which they lived, and in their furious feasts and revels they forgot the whole world. That same intimate brotherhood, maintained in robber communities, bound them together. They had everything in common—wine, food, dwelling. A perpetual fear, a perpetual danger, inspired them with a contempt towards life. The Cossack worried more about a good measure of wine than about his fate. One has to see this denizen of the frontier in his half-Tatar, half-Polish costume—which so sharply outlined the spirit of the borderland—galloping in Asiatic fashion on his horse, now lost in thick grass, now leaping with the speed of a tiger from ambush, or emerging suddenly from the river or swamp, all clinging with mud, and appearing an image of terror to the Tatar...."

Little by little the community grew and with its growing it began to assume a general character. The beginning of the sixteenth century found whole villages settled with families, enjoying the protection of the Cossacks, who exacted certain obligations, chiefly military, so that these settlements bore a military character. The sword and the plough were friends which fraternised at every settler's. On the other hand, Gogol tells us, the gay bachelors began to make depredations across the border to sweep down on Tatars' wives and their daughters and to marry them. "Owing to this co-mingling, their facial features, so different from one another's, received a common impress, tending towards the Asiatic. And so there came into being a nation in faith and place belonging to Europe; on the other hand, in ways of life, customs, and dress quite Asiatic. It was a nation in which the world's two extremes came in contact; European caution and Asiatic indifference, niavete and cunning, an intense activity and the greatest laziness and indulgence, an aspiration to development and perfection, and again a desire to appear indifferent to perfection."

All of Ukraine took on its colour from the Cossack, and if I have drawn largely on Gogol's own account of the origins of this race, it was because it seemed to me that Gogol's emphasis on the heroic rather than on the historical—Gogol is generally discounted as an historian—would give the reader a proper approach to the mood in which he created "Taras Bulba," the finest epic in Russian literature. Gogol never wrote either his history of Little Russia or his universal history. Apart from several brief studies, not always reliable, the net result of his many years' application to his scholarly projects was this brief epic in prose, Homeric in mood. The sense of intense living, "living dangerously"—to use a phrase of Nietzsche's, the recognition of courage as the greatest of all virtues—the God in man, inspired Gogol, living in an age which tended toward grey tedium, with admiration for his more

fortunate forefathers, who lived in "a poetic time, when everything was won with the sword, when every one in his turn strove to be an active being and not a spectator." Into this short work he poured all his love of the heroic, all his romanticism, all his poetry, all his joy. Its abundance of life bears one along like a fast-flowing river. And it is not without humour, a calm, detached humour, which, as the critic Bolinsky puts it, is not there merely "because Gogol has a tendency to see the comic in everything, but because it is true to life."

Yet "Taras Bulba" was in a sense an accident, just as many other works of great men are accidents. It often requires a happy combination of circumstances to produce a masterpiece. I have already told in my introduction to "Dead Souls"[1] how Gogol created his great realistic masterpiece, which was to influence Russian literature for generations to come, under the influence of models so remote in time or place as "Don Quixote" or "Pickwick Papers"; and how this combination of influences joined to his own genius produced a work quite new and original in effect and only remotely reminiscent of the models which have inspired it. And just as "Dead Souls" might never have been written if "Don Quixote" had not existed, so there is every reason to believe that "Taras Bulba" could not have been written without the "Odyssey." Once more ancient fire gave life to new beauty. And yet at the time Gogol could not have had more than a smattering of the "Odyssey." The magnificent translation made by his friend Zhukovsky had not yet appeared and Gogol, in spite of his ambition to become a historian, was not equipped as a scholar. But it is evident from his dithyrambic letter on the appearance of Zhukovsky's version, forming one of the famous series of letters known as "Correspondence with Friends," that he was better acquainted with the spirit of Homer than any mere scholar could be. That letter, unfortunately unknown to the English reader, would make every lover of the classics in this day of their disparagement dance with joy. He describes the "Odyssey" as the forgotten source of all that is beautiful and harmonious in life, and he greets its appearance in Russian dress at a time when life is sordid and discordant as a thing inevitable, "cooling" in effect upon a too hectic world. He sees in its perfect grace, its calm and almost childlike simplicity, a power for individual and general good. "It combines all the fascination of a fairy tale and all the simple truth of human adventure, holding out the same allurement to every being, whether he is a noble, a commoner, a merchant, a literate or illiterate person, a private soldier, a lackey, children of both sexes, beginning at an age when a child begins to love a fairy tale—all might read it or listen to it, without tedium." Every one will draw from it what he most needs. Not less than upon these he sees its wholesome effect on the creative writer, its refreshing influence on the critic. But most of all he dwells on its heroic qualities, inseparable to him from what is religious in the "Odyssey"; and, says Gogol, this book contains the idea that a human being, "wherever he might be, whatever pursuit he might follow, is threatened by many woes, that he must need wrestle with them—for that very purpose was life given to him—that never for a single instant must he despair, just as Odysseus did not despair, who in every hard and oppressive moment turned to his own heart, unaware that with this inner scrutiny of himself he had already said that hidden prayer uttered in a moment of distress by every man having no understanding whatever of God." Then he goes on to compare the ancient harmony, perfect down to every detail of dress, to the slightest action, with our slovenliness and confusion and pettiness, a sad result—considering our knowledge of past experience, our possession of superior weapons, our religion given to make us holy and superior beings. And in conclusion he asks: Is not the "Odyssey" in every sense a deep reproach to our nineteenth century?

An understanding of Gogol's point of view gives the key to "Taras Bulba." For in this panoramic canvas of the Setch, the military brotherhood of the Cossacks, living under open skies, picturesquely and heroically, he has drawn a picture of his romantic ideal, which if far from perfect at any rate seemed to him preferable to the grey tedium of a city peopled with government officials. Gogol has written in "Taras Bulba" his own reproach to the nineteenth century. It is sad and joyous like one

[1] Everyman's Library, No. 726.

of those Ukrainian songs which have helped to inspire him to write it. And then, as he cut himself off more and more from the world of the past, life became a sadder and still sadder thing to him; modern life, with all its gigantic pettiness, closed in around him, he began to write of petty officials and of petty scoundrels, "commonplace heroes" he called them. But nothing is ever lost in this world. Gogol's romanticism, shut in within himself, finding no outlet, became a flame. It was a flame of pity. He was like a man walking in hell, pitying. And that was the miracle, the transfiguration. Out of that flame of pity the Russian novel was born.

JOHN COURNOS

Evenings on the Farm near the Dikanka, 1829-31; Mirgorod, 1831-33; Taras Bulba, 1834; Arabesques (includes tales, The Portrait and A Madman's Diary), 1831-35; The Cloak, 1835; The Revizor (The Inspector-General), 1836; Dead Souls, 1842; Correspondence with Friends, 1847; Letters, 1847, 1895, 4 vols. 1902.

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS: Cossack Tales (The Night of Christmas Eve, Tarass Boolba), trans. by G. Tolstoy, 1860; St. John's Eve and Other Stories, trans. by Isabel F. Hapgood, New York, Crowell, 1886; Taras Bulba: Also St. John's Eve and Other Stories, London, Vizetelly, 1887; Taras Bulba, trans. by B. C. Baskerville, London, Scott, 1907; The Inspector: a Comedy, Calcutta, 1890; The Inspector-General, trans. by A. A. Sykes, London, Scott, 1892; Revizor, trans. for the Yale Dramatic Association by Max S. Mandell, New Haven, Conn., 1908; Home Life in Russia (adaptation of Dead Souls), London, Hurst, 1854; Tchitchikoff's Journey's; or Dead Souls, trans. by Isabel F. Hapgood, New York, Crowell, 1886; Dead Souls, London, Vizetelly, 1887; Dead Souls, London, Maxwell 1887; Dead Souls, London, Fisher Unwin, 1915; Dead Souls, London, Everyman's Library (Intro. by John Cournos), 1915; Meditations on the Divine Liturgy, trans. by L. Alexeieff, London, A. R. Mowbray and Co., 1913.

LIVES, etc.: (Russian) Kotlyarevsky (N. A.), 1903; Shenrok (V. I.), Materials for a Biography, 1892; (French) Leger (L.), Nicholas Gogol, 1914.

TARAS BULBA

CHAPTER I

"Turn round, my boy! How ridiculous you look! What sort of a priest's cassock have you got on? Does everybody at the academy dress like that?"

With such words did old Bulba greet his two sons, who had been absent for their education at the Royal Seminary of Kief, and had now returned home to their father.

His sons had but just dismounted from their horses. They were a couple of stout lads who still looked bashful, as became youths recently released from the seminary. Their firm healthy faces were covered with the first down of manhood, down which had, as yet, never known a razor. They were greatly discomfited by such a reception from their father, and stood motionless with eyes fixed upon the ground.

"Stand still, stand still! let me have a good look at you," he continued, turning them around. "How long your gaberdines are! What gaberdines! There never were such gaberdines in the world before. Just run, one of you! I want to see whether you will not get entangled in the skirts, and fall down."

"Don't laugh, don't laugh, father!" said the eldest lad at length.

"How touchy we are! Why shouldn't I laugh?"

"Because, although you are my father, if you laugh, by heavens, I will strike you!"

"What kind of son are you? what, strike your father!" exclaimed Taras Bulba, retreating several paces in amazement.

"Yes, even my father. I don't stop to consider persons when an insult is in question."

"So you want to fight me? with your fist, eh?"

"Any way."

"Well, let it be fisticuffs," said Taras Bulba, turning up his sleeves. "I'll see what sort of a man you are with your fists."

And father and son, in lieu of a pleasant greeting after long separation, began to deal each other heavy blows on ribs, back, and chest, now retreating and looking at each other, now attacking afresh.

"Look, good people! the old man has gone mad! he has lost his senses completely!" screamed their pale, ugly, kindly mother, who was standing on the threshold, and had not yet succeeded in embracing her darling children. "The children have come home, we have not seen them for over a year; and now he has taken some strange freak—he's pommelling them."

"Yes, he fights well," said Bulba, pausing; "well, by heavens!" he continued, rather as if excusing himself, "although he has never tried his hand at it before, he will make a good Cossack! Now, welcome, son! embrace me," and father and son began to kiss each other. "Good lad! see that you hit every one as you pommelled me; don't let any one escape. Nevertheless your clothes are ridiculous all the same. What rope is this hanging there?—And you, you lout, why are you standing there with your hands hanging beside you?" he added, turning to the youngest. "Why don't you fight me? you son of a dog!"

"What an idea!" said the mother, who had managed in the meantime to embrace her youngest. "Who ever heard of children fighting their own father? That's enough for the present; the child is young, he has had a long journey, he is tired." The child was over twenty, and about six feet high. "He ought to rest, and eat something; and you set him to fighting!"

"You are a gabbler!" said Bulba. "Don't listen to your mother, my lad; she is a woman, and knows nothing. What sort of petting do you need? A clear field and a good horse, that's the kind of petting for you! And do you see this sword? that's your mother! All the rest people stuff your heads

with is rubbish; the academy, books, primers, philosophy, and all that, I spit upon it all!" Here Bulba added a word which is not used in print. "But I'll tell you what is best: I'll take you to Zaporozhe[2] this very week. That's where there's science for you! There's your school; there alone will you gain sense."

"And are they only to remain home a week?" said the worn old mother sadly and with tears in her eyes. "The poor boys will have no chance of looking around, no chance of getting acquainted with the home where they were born; there will be no chance for me to get a look at them."

"Enough, you've howled quite enough, old woman! A Cossack is not born to run around after women. You would like to hide them both under your petticoat, and sit upon them as a hen sits on eggs. Go, go, and let us have everything there is on the table in a trice. We don't want any dumplings, honey-cakes, poppy-cakes, or any other such messes: give us a whole sheep, a goat, mead forty years old, and as much corn-brandy as possible, not with raisins and all sorts of stuff, but plain scorching corn-brandy, which foams and hisses like mad."

Bulba led his sons into the principal room of the hut; and two pretty servant girls wearing coin necklaces, who were arranging the apartment, ran out quickly. They were either frightened at the arrival of the young men, who did not care to be familiar with anyone; or else they merely wanted to keep up their feminine custom of screaming and rushing away headlong at the sight of a man, and then screening their blushes for some time with their sleeves. The hut was furnished according to the fashion of that period—a fashion concerning which hints linger only in the songs and lyrics, no longer sung, alas! in the Ukraine as of yore by blind old men, to the soft tinkling of the native guitar, to the people thronging round them—according to the taste of that warlike and troublous time, of leagues and battles prevailing in the Ukraine after the union. Everything was cleanly smeared with coloured clay. On the walls hung sabres, hunting-whips, nets for birds, fishing-nets, guns, elaborately carved powder-horns, gilded bits for horses, and tether-ropes with silver plates. The small window had round dull panes, through which it was impossible to see except by opening the one moveable one. Around the windows and doors red bands were painted. On shelves in one corner stood jugs, bottles, and flasks of green and blue glass, carved silver cups, and gilded drinking vessels of various makes—Venetian, Turkish, Tscherkessian, which had reached Bulba's cabin by various roads, at third and fourth hand, a thing common enough in those bold days. There were birch-wood benches all around the room, a huge table under the holy pictures in one corner, and a huge stove covered with particoloured patterns in relief, with spaces between it and the wall. All this was quite familiar to the two young men, who were wont to come home every year during the dog-days, since they had no horses, and it was not customary to allow students to ride afield on horseback. The only distinctive things permitted them were long locks of hair on the temples, which every Cossack who bore weapons was entitled to pull. It was only at the end of their course of study that Bulba had sent them a couple of young stallions from his stud.

Bulba, on the occasion of his sons' arrival, ordered all the sotniks or captains of hundreds, and all the officers of the band who were of any consequence, to be summoned; and when two of them arrived with his old comrade, the Osaul or sub-chief, Dmitro Tovkatch, he immediately presented the lads, saying, "See what fine young fellows they are! I shall send them to the Setch[3] shortly." The guests congratulated Bulba and the young men, telling them they would do well and that there was no better knowledge for a young man than a knowledge of that same Zaporozhian Setch.

"Come, brothers, seat yourselves, each where he likes best, at the table; come, my sons. First of all, let's take some corn-brandy," said Bulba. "God bless you! Welcome, lads; you, Ostap, and you, Andrii. God grant that you may always be successful in war, that you may beat the Musselmans and the Turks and the Tatars; and that when the Poles undertake any expedition against our faith, you may beat the Poles. Come, clink your glasses. How now? Is the brandy good? What's corn-brandy

[2] The Cossack country beyond (za) the falls (porozhe) of the Dnieper.

[3] The village or, rather, permanent camp of the Zaporozhian Cossacks.

in Latin? The Latins were stupid: they did not know there was such a thing in the world as corn-brandy. What was the name of the man who wrote Latin verses? I don't know much about reading and writing, so I don't quite know. Wasn't it Horace?"

"What a dad!" thought the elder son Ostap. "The old dog knows everything, but he always pretends the contrary."

"I don't believe the archimandrite allowed you so much as a smell of corn-brandy," continued Taras. "Confess, my boys, they thrashed you well with fresh birch-twigs on your backs and all over your Cossack bodies; and perhaps, when you grew too sharp, they beat you with whips. And not on Saturday only, I fancy, but on Wednesday and Thursday."

"What is past, father, need not be recalled; it is done with."

"Let them try it know," said Andrii. "Let anybody just touch me, let any Tatar risk it now, and he'll soon learn what a Cossack's sword is like!"

"Good, my son, by heavens, good! And when it comes to that, I'll go with you; by heavens, I'll go too! What should I wait here for? To become a buckwheat-reaper and housekeeper, to look after the sheep and swine, and loaf around with my wife? Away with such nonsense! I am a Cossack; I'll have none of it! What's left but war? I'll go with you to Zaporozhe to carouse; I'll go, by heavens!" And old Bulba, growing warm by degrees and finally quite angry, rose from the table, and, assuming a dignified attitude, stamped his foot. "We will go to-morrow! Wherefore delay? What enemy can we besiege here? What is this hut to us? What do we want with all these things? What are pots and pans to us?" So saying, he began to knock over the pots and flasks, and to throw them about.

The poor old woman, well used to such freaks on the part of her husband, looked sadly on from her seat on the wall-bench. She did not dare say a word; but when she heard the decision which was so terrible for her, she could not refrain from tears. As she looked at her children, from whom so speedy a separation was threatened, it is impossible to describe the full force of her speechless grief, which seemed to quiver in her eyes and on her lips convulsively pressed together.

Bulba was terribly headstrong. He was one of those characters which could only exist in that fierce fifteenth century, and in that half-nomadic corner of Europe, when the whole of Southern Russia, deserted by its princes, was laid waste and burned to the quick by pitiless troops of Mongolian robbers; when men deprived of house and home grew brave there; when, amid conflagrations, threatening neighbours, and eternal terrors, they settled down, and growing accustomed to looking these things straight in the face, trained themselves not to know that there was such a thing as fear in the world; when the old, peacable Slav spirit was fired with warlike flame, and the Cossack state was instituted—a free, wild outbreak of Russian nature—and when all the river-banks, fords, and like suitable places were peopled by Cossacks, whose number no man knew. Their bold comrades had a right to reply to the Sultan when he asked how many they were, "Who knows? We are scattered all over the steppes; wherever there is a hillock, there is a Cossack."

It was, in fact, a most remarkable exhibition of Russian strength, forced by dire necessity from the bosom of the people. In place of the original provinces with their petty towns, in place of the warring and bartering petty princes ruling in their cities, there arose great colonies, kurens[4], and districts, bound together by one common danger and hatred against the heathen robbers. The story is well known how their incessant warfare and restless existence saved Europe from the merciless hordes which threatened to overwhelm her. The Polish kings, who now found themselves sovereigns, in place of the provincial princes, over these extensive tracts of territory, fully understood, despite the weakness and remoteness of their own rule, the value of the Cossacks, and the advantages of the warlike, untrammelled life led by them. They encouraged them and flattered this disposition of mind. Under their distant rule, the hetmans or chiefs, chosen from among the Cossacks themselves, redistributed the territory into military districts. It was not a standing army, no one saw it; but in case

[4] Cossack villages. In the Setch, a large wooden barrack.

of war and general uprising, it required a week, and no more, for every man to appear on horseback, fully armed, receiving only one ducat from the king; and in two weeks such a force had assembled as no recruiting officers would ever have been able to collect. When the expedition was ended, the army dispersed among the fields and meadows and the fords of the Dnieper; each man fished, wrought at his trade, brewed his beer, and was once more a free Cossack. Their foreign contemporaries rightly marvelled at their wonderful qualities. There was no handicraft which the Cossack was not expert at: he could distil brandy, build a waggon, make powder, and do blacksmith's and gunsmith's work, in addition to committing wild excesses, drinking and carousing as only a Russian can—all this he was equal to. Besides the registered Cossacks, who considered themselves bound to appear in arms in time of war, it was possible to collect at any time, in case of dire need, a whole army of volunteers. All that was required was for the Osaul or sub-chief to traverse the market-places and squares of the villages and hamlets, and shout at the top of his voice, as he stood in his waggon, "Hey, you distillers and beer-brewers! you have brewed enough beer, and lolled on your stoves, and stuffed your fat carcasses with flour, long enough! Rise, win glory and warlike honours! You ploughmen, you reapers of buckwheat, you tenders of sheep, you danglers after women, enough of following the plough, and soiling your yellow shoes in the earth, and courting women, and wasting your warlike strength! The hour has come to win glory for the Cossacks!" These words were like sparks falling on dry wood. The husbandman broke his plough; the brewers and distillers threw away their casks and destroyed their barrels; the mechanics and merchants sent their trade and their shop to the devil, broke pots and everything else in their homes, and mounted their horses. In short, the Russian character here received a profound development, and manifested a powerful outwards expression.

Taras was one of the band of old-fashioned leaders; he was born for warlike emotions, and was distinguished for his uprightness of character. At that epoch the influence of Poland had already begun to make itself felt upon the Russian nobility. Many had adopted Polish customs, and began to display luxury in splendid staffs of servants, hawks, huntsmen, dinners, and palaces. This was not to Taras's taste. He liked the simple life of the Cossacks, and quarrelled with those of his comrades who were inclined to the Warsaw party, calling them serfs of the Polish nobles. Ever on the alert, he regarded himself as the legal protector of the orthodox faith. He entered despotically into any village where there was a general complaint of oppression by the revenue farmers and of the addition of fresh taxes on necessaries. He and his Cossacks executed justice, and made it a rule that in three cases it was absolutely necessary to resort to the sword. Namely, when the commissioners did not respect the superior officers and stood before them covered; when any one made light of the faith and did not observe the customs of his ancestors; and, finally, when the enemy were Mussulmans or Turks, against whom he considered it permissible, in every case, to draw the sword for the glory of Christianity.

Now he rejoiced beforehand at the thought of how he would present himself with his two sons at the Setch, and say, "See what fine young fellows I have brought you!" how he would introduce them to all his old comrades, steeled in warfare; how he would observe their first exploits in the sciences of war and of drinking, which was also regarded as one of the principal warlike qualities. At first he had intended to send them forth alone; but at the sight of their freshness, stature, and manly personal beauty his martial spirit flamed up and he resolved to go with them himself the very next day, although there was no necessity for this except his obstinate self-will. He began at once to hurry about and give orders; selected horses and trappings for his sons, looked through the stables and storehouses, and chose servants to accompany them on the morrow. He delegated his power to Osaul Tovkatch, and gave with it a strict command to appear with his whole force at the Setch the very instant he should receive a message from him. Although he was jolly, and the effects of his drinking bout still lingered in his brain, he forgot nothing. He even gave orders that the horses should be watered, their cribs filled, and that they should be fed with the finest corn; and then he retired, fatigued with all his labours.

"Now, children, we must sleep, but to-morrow we shall do what God wills. Don't prepare us a bed: we need no bed; we will sleep in the courtyard."

Night had but just stole over the heavens, but Bulba always went to bed early. He lay down on a rug and covered himself with a sheepskin pelisse, for the night air was quite sharp and he liked to lie warm when he was at home. He was soon snoring, and the whole household speedily followed his example. All snored and groaned as they lay in different corners. The watchman went to sleep the first of all, he had drunk so much in honour of the young masters' home-coming.

The mother alone did not sleep. She bent over the pillow of her beloved sons, as they lay side by side; she smoothed with a comb their carelessly tangled locks, and moistened them with her tears. She gazed at them with her whole soul, with every sense; she was wholly merged in the gaze, and yet she could not gaze enough. She had fed them at her own breast, she had tended them and brought them up; and now to see them only for an instant! "My sons, my darling sons! what will become of you! what fate awaits you?" she said, and tears stood in the wrinkles which disfigured her once beautiful face. In truth, she was to be pitied, as was every woman of that period. She had lived only for a moment of love, only during the first ardour of passion, only during the first flush of youth; and then her grim betrayer had deserted her for the sword, for his comrades and his carouses. She saw her husband two or three days in a year, and then, for several years, heard nothing of him. And when she did see him, when they did live together, what a life was hers! She endured insult, even blows; she felt caresses bestowed only in pity; she was a misplaced object in that community of unmarried warriors, upon which wandering Zaporozhe cast a colouring of its own. Her pleasureless youth flitted by; her ripe cheeks and bosom withered away unkissed and became covered with premature wrinkles. Love, feeling, everything that is tender and passionate in a woman, was converted in her into maternal love. She hovered around her children with anxiety, passion, tears, like the gull of the steppes. They were taking her sons, her darling sons, from her—taking them from her, so that she should never see them again! Who knew? Perhaps a Tatar would cut off their heads in the very first skirmish, and she would never know where their deserted bodies might lie, torn by birds of prey; and yet for each single drop of their blood she would have given all hers. Sobbing, she gazed into their eyes, and thought, "Perhaps Bulba, when he wakes, will put off their departure for a day or two; perhaps it occurred to him to go so soon because he had been drinking."

The moon from the summit of the heavens had long since lit up the whole courtyard filled with sleepers, the thick clump of willows, and the tall steppe-grass, which hid the palisade surrounding the court. She still sat at her sons' pillow, never removing her eyes from them for a moment, nor thinking of sleep. Already the horses, divining the approach of dawn, had ceased eating and lain down upon the grass; the topmost leaves of the willows began to rustle softly, and little by little the rippling rustle descended to their bases. She sat there until daylight, unwearied, and wishing in her heart that the night might prolong itself indefinitely. From the steppes came the ringing neigh of the horses, and red streaks shone brightly in the sky. Bulba suddenly awoke, and sprang to his feet. He remembered quite well what he had ordered the night before. "Now, my men, you've slept enough! 'tis time, 'tis time! Water the horses! And where is the old woman?" He generally called his wife so. "Be quick, old woman, get us something to eat; the way is long."

The poor old woman, deprived of her last hope, slipped sadly into the hut.

Whilst she, with tears, prepared what was needed for breakfast, Bulba gave his orders, went to the stable, and selected his best trappings for his children with his own hand.

The scholars were suddenly transformed. Red morocco boots with silver heels took the place of their dirty old ones; trousers wide as the Black Sea, with countless folds and plaits, were kept up by golden girdles from which hung long slender thongs, with tassles and other tinkling things, for pipes. Their jackets of scarlet cloth were girt by flowered sashes into which were thrust engraved Turkish pistols; their swords clanked at their heels. Their faces, already a little sunburnt, seemed to have grown handsomer and whiter; their slight black moustaches now cast a more distinct shadow on

this pallor and set off their healthy youthful complexions. They looked very handsome in their black sheepskin caps, with cloth-of-gold crowns.

When their poor mother saw them, she could not utter a word, and tears stood in her eyes.

"Now, my lads, all is ready; no delay!" said Bulba at last. "But we must first all sit down together, in accordance with Christian custom before a journey."

All sat down, not excepting the servants, who had been standing respectfully at the door.

"Now, mother, bless your children," said Bulba. "Pray God that they may fight bravely, always defend their warlike honour, always defend the faith of Christ; and, if not, that they may die, so that their breath may not be longer in the world."

"Come to your mother, children; a mother's prayer protects on land and sea."

The mother, weak as mothers are, embraced them, drew out two small holy pictures, and hung them, sobbing, around their necks. "May God's mother—keep you! Children, do not forget your mother—send some little word of yourselves—" She could say no more.

"Now, children, let us go," said Bulba.

At the door stood the horses, ready saddled. Bulba sprang upon his "Devil," which bounded wildly, on feeling on his back a load of over thirty stone, for Taras was extremely stout and heavy.

When the mother saw that her sons were also mounted, she rushed towards the younger, whose features expressed somewhat more gentleness than those of his brother. She grasped his stirrup, clung to his saddle, and with despair in her eyes, refused to loose her hold. Two stout Cossacks seized her carefully, and bore her back into the hut. But before the cavalcade had passed out of the courtyard, she rushed with the speed of a wild goat, disproportionate to her years, to the gate, stopped a horse with irresistible strength, and embraced one of her sons with mad, unconscious violence. Then they led her away again.

The young Cossacks rode on sadly, repressing their tears out of fear of their father, who, on his side, was somewhat moved, although he strove not to show it. The morning was grey, the green sward bright, the birds twittered rather discordantly. They glanced back as they rode. Their paternal farm seemed to have sunk into the earth. All that was visible above the surface were the two chimneys of their modest hut and the tops of the trees up whose trunks they had been used to climb like squirrels. Before them still stretched the field by which they could recall the whole story of their lives, from the years when they rolled in its dewy grass down to the years when they awaited in it the dark-browed Cossack maiden, running timidly across it on quick young feet. There is the pole above the well, with the waggon wheel fastened to its top, rising solitary against the sky; already the level which they have traversed appears a hill in the distance, and now all has disappeared. Farewell, childhood, games, all, all, farewell!

CHAPTER II

All three horsemen rode in silence. Old Taras's thoughts were far away: before him passed his youth, his years—the swift-flying years, over which the Cossack always weeps, wishing that his life might be all youth. He wondered whom of his former comrades he should meet at the Setch. He reckoned up how many had already died, how many were still alive. Tears formed slowly in his eyes, and his grey head bent sadly.

His sons were occupied with other thoughts. But we must speak further of his sons. They had been sent, when twelve years old, to the academy at Kief, because all leaders of that day considered it indispensable to give their children an education, although it was afterwards utterly forgotten. Like all who entered the academy, they were wild, having been brought up in unrestrained freedom; and whilst there they had acquired some polish, and pursued some common branches of knowledge which gave them a certain resemblance to each other.

The elder, Ostap, began his scholastic career by running away in the course of the first year. They brought him back, whipped him well, and set him down to his books. Four times did he bury his primer in the earth; and four times, after giving him a sound thrashing, did they buy him a new one. But he would no doubt have repeated this feat for the fifth time, had not his father given him a solemn assurance that he would keep him at monastic work for twenty years, and sworn in advance that he should never behold Zaporozhe all his life long, unless he learned all the sciences taught in the academy. It was odd that the man who said this was that very Taras Bulba who condemned all learning, and counselled his children, as we have seen, not to trouble themselves at all about it. From that moment, Ostap began to pore over his tiresome books with exemplary diligence, and quickly stood on a level with the best. The style of education in that age differed widely from the manner of life. The scholastic, grammatical, rhetorical, and logical subtle ties in vogue were decidedly out of consonance with the times, never having any connection with, and never being encountered in, actual life. Those who studied them, even the least scholastic, could not apply their knowledge to anything whatever. The learned men of those days were even more incapable than the rest, because farther removed from all experience. Moreover, the republican constitution of the academy, the fearful multitude of young, healthy, strong fellows, inspired the students with an activity quite outside the limits of their learning. Poor fare, or frequent punishments of fasting, with the numerous requirements arising in fresh, strong, healthy youth, combined to arouse in them that spirit of enterprise which was afterwards further developed among the Zaporozhians. The hungry student running about the streets of Kief forced every one to be on his guard. Dealers sitting in the bazaar covered their pies, their cakes, and their pumpkin-rolls with their hands, like eagles protecting their young, if they but caught sight of a passing student. The consul or monitor, who was bound by his duty to look after the comrades entrusted to his care, had such frightfully wide pockets to his trousers that he could stow away the whole contents of the gaping dealer's stall in them. These students constituted an entirely separate world, for they were not admitted to the higher circles, composed of Polish and Russian nobles. Even the Waiwode, Adam Kisel, in spite of the patronage he bestowed upon the academy, did not seek to introduce them into society, and ordered them to be kept more strictly in supervision. This command was quite superfluous, for neither the rector nor the monkish professors spared rod or whip; and the lictors sometimes, by their orders, lashed their consuls so severely that the latter rubbed their trousers for weeks afterwards. This was to many of them a trifle, only a little more stinging than good vodka with pepper: others at length grew tired of such constant blisters, and ran away to Zaporozhe if they could find the road and were not caught on the way. Ostap Bulba, although he began to study logic, and even theology, with much zeal, did not escape the merciless rod. Naturally, all this tended to harden his character, and give him that firmness which distinguishes the Cossacks. He always held himself aloof from his comrades.

He rarely led others into such hazardous enterprises as robbing a strange garden or orchard; but, on the other hand, he was always among the first to join the standard of an adventurous student. And never, under any circumstances, did he betray his comrades; neither imprisonment nor beatings could make him do so. He was unassailable by any temptations save those of war and revelry; at least, he scarcely ever dreamt of others. He was upright with his equals. He was kind-hearted, after the only fashion that kind-heartedness could exist in such a character and at such a time. He was touched to his very heart by his poor mother's tears; but this only vexed him, and caused him to hang his head in thought.

His younger brother, Andrii, had livelier and more fully developed feelings. He learned more willingly and without the effort with which strong and weighty characters generally have to make in order to apply themselves to study. He was more inventive-minded than his brother, and frequently appeared as the leader of dangerous expeditions; sometimes, thanks to the quickness of his mind, contriving to escape punishment when his brother Ostap, abandoning all efforts, stripped off his gaberdine and lay down upon the floor without a thought of begging for mercy. He too thirsted for action; but, at the same time, his soul was accessible to other sentiments. The need of love burned ardently within him. When he had passed his eighteenth year, woman began to present herself more frequently in his dreams; listening to philosophical discussions, he still beheld her, fresh, black-eyed, tender; before him constantly flitted her elastic bosom, her soft, bare arms; the very gown which clung about her youthful yet well-rounded limbs breathed into his visions a certain inexpressible sensuousness. He carefully concealed this impulse of his passionate young soul from his comrades, because in that age it was held shameful and dishonourable for a Cossack to think of love and a wife before he had tasted battle. On the whole, during the last year, he had acted more rarely as leader to the bands of students, but had roamed more frequently alone, in remote corners of Kief, among low-roofed houses, buried in cherry orchards, peeping alluringly at the street. Sometimes he betook himself to the more aristocratic streets, in the old Kief of to-day, where dwelt Little Russian and Polish nobles, and where houses were built in more fanciful style. Once, as he was gaping along, an old-fashioned carriage belonging to some Polish noble almost drove over him; and the heavily moustached coachman, who sat on the box, gave him a smart cut with his whip. The young student fired up; with thoughtless daring he seized the hind-wheel with his powerful hands and stopped the carriage. But the coachman, fearing a drubbing, lashed his horses; they sprang forward, and Andrii, succeeding happily in freeing his hands, was flung full length on the ground with his face flat in the mud. The most ringing and harmonious of laughs resounded above him. He raised his eyes and saw, standing at a window, a beauty such as he had never beheld in all his life, black-eyed, and with skin white as snow illumined by the dawning flush of the sun. She was laughing heartily, and her laugh enhanced her dazzling loveliness. Taken aback he gazed at her in confusion, abstractedly wiping the mud from his face, by which means it became still further smeared. Who could this beauty be? He sought to find out from the servants, who, in rich liveries, stood at the gate in a crowd surrounding a young guitar-player; but they only laughed when they saw his besmeared face and deigned him no reply. At length he learned that she was the daughter of the Waiwode of Koven, who had come thither for a time. The following night, with the daring characteristic of the student, he crept through the palings into the garden and climbed a tree which spread its branches upon the very roof of the house. From the tree he gained the roof, and made his way down the chimney straight into the bedroom of the beauty, who at that moment was seated before a lamp, engaged in removing the costly earrings from her ears. The beautiful Pole was so alarmed on suddenly beholding an unknown man that she could not utter a single word; but when she perceived that the student stood before her with downcast eyes, not daring to move a hand through timidity, when she recognised in him the one who had fallen in the street, laughter again overpowered her.

Moreover, there was nothing terrible about Andrii's features; he was very handsome. She laughed heartily, and amused herself over him for a long time. The lady was giddy, like all Poles;

but her eyes—her wondrous clear, piercing eyes—shot one glance, a long glance. The student could not move hand or foot, but stood bound as in a sack, when the Waiwode's daughter approached him boldly, placed upon his head her glittering diadem, hung her earrings on his lips, and flung over him a transparent muslin chemisette with gold-embroidered garlands. She adorned him, and played a thousand foolish pranks, with the childish carelessness which distinguishes the giddy Poles, and which threw the poor student into still greater confusion.

He cut a ridiculous feature, gazing immovably, and with open mouth, into her dazzling eyes. A knock at the door startled her. She ordered him to hide himself under the bed, and, as soon as the disturber was gone, called her maid, a Tatar prisoner, and gave her orders to conduct him to the garden with caution, and thence show him through the fence. But our student this time did not pass the fence so successfully. The watchman awoke, and caught him firmly by the foot; and the servants, assembling, beat him in the street, until his swift legs rescued him. After that it became very dangerous to pass the house, for the Waiwode's domestics were numerous. He met her once again at church. She saw him, and smiled pleasantly, as at an old acquaintance. He saw her once more, by chance; but shortly afterwards the Waiwode departed, and, instead of the beautiful black-eyed Pole, some fat face or other gazed from the window. This was what Andrii was thinking about, as he hung his head and kept his eyes on his horse's mane.

In the meantime the steppe had long since received them all into its green embrace; and the high grass, closing round, concealed them, till only their black Cossack caps appeared above it.

"Eh, eh, why are you so quiet, lads?" said Bulba at length, waking from his own reverie. "You're like monks. Now, all thinking to the Evil One, once for all! Take your pipes in your teeth, and let us smoke, and spur on our horses so swiftly that no bird can overtake us."

And the Cossacks, bending low on their horses' necks, disappeared in the grass. Their black caps were no longer to be seen; a streak of trodden grass alone showed the trace of their swift flight.

The sun had long since looked forth from the clear heavens and inundated the steppe with his quickening, warming light. All that was dim and drowsy in the Cossacks' minds flew away in a twinkling: their hearts fluttered like birds.

The farther they penetrated the steppe, the more beautiful it became. Then all the South, all that region which now constitutes New Russia, even as far as the Black Sea, was a green, virgin wilderness. No plough had ever passed over the immeasurable waves of wild growth; horses alone, hidden in it as in a forest, trod it down. Nothing in nature could be finer. The whole surface resembled a golden-green ocean, upon which were sprinkled millions of different flowers. Through the tall, slender stems of the grass peeped light-blue, dark-blue, and lilac star-thistles; the yellow broom thrust up its pyramidal head; the parasol-shaped white flower of the false flax shimmered on high. A wheat-ear, brought God knows whence, was filling out to ripening. Amongst the roots of this luxuriant vegetation ran partridges with outstretched necks. The air was filled with the notes of a thousand different birds. On high hovered the hawks, their wings outspread, and their eyes fixed intently on the grass. The cries of a flock of wild ducks, ascending from one side, were echoed from God knows what distant lake. From the grass arose, with measured sweep, a gull, and skimmed wantonly through blue waves of air. And now she has vanished on high, and appears only as a black dot: now she has turned her wings, and shines in the sunlight. Oh, steppes, how beautiful you are!

Our travellers halted only a few minutes for dinner. Their escort of ten Cossacks sprang from their horses and undid the wooden casks of brandy, and the gourds which were used instead of drinking vessels. They ate only cakes of bread and dripping; they drank but one cup apiece to strengthen them, for Taras Bulba never permitted intoxication upon the road, and then continued their journey until evening.

In the evening the whole steppe changed its aspect. All its varied expanse was bathed in the last bright glow of the sun; and as it grew dark gradually, it could be seen how the shadow flitted across it and it became dark green. The mist rose more densely; each flower, each blade of grass,

emitted a fragrance as of ambergris, and the whole steppe distilled perfume. Broad bands of rosy gold were streaked across the dark blue heaven, as with a gigantic brush; here and there gleamed, in white tufts, light and transparent clouds: and the freshest, most enchanting of gentle breezes barely stirred the tops of the grass-blades, like sea-waves, and caressed the cheek. The music which had resounded through the day had died away, and given place to another. The striped marmots crept out of their holes, stood erect on their hind legs, and filled the steppe with their whistle. The whirr of the grasshoppers had become more distinctly audible. Sometimes the cry of the swan was heard from some distant lake, ringing through the air like a silver trumpet. The travellers, halting in the midst of the plain, selected a spot for their night encampment, made a fire, and hung over it the kettle in which they cooked their oatmeal; the steam rising and floating aslant in the air. Having supped, the Cossacks lay down to sleep, after hobbling their horses and turning them out to graze. They lay down in their gaberdines. The stars of night gazed directly down upon them. They could hear the countless myriads of insects which filled the grass; their rasping, whistling, and chirping, softened by the fresh air, resounded clearly through the night, and lulled the drowsy ear. If one of them rose and stood for a time, the steppe presented itself to him strewn with the sparks of glow-worms. At times the night sky was illumined in spots by the glare of burning reeds along pools or river-bank; and dark flights of swans flying to the north were suddenly lit up by the silvery, rose-coloured gleam, till it seemed as though red kerchiefs were floating in the dark heavens.

The travellers proceeded onward without any adventure. They came across no villages. It was ever the same boundless, waving, beautiful steppe. Only at intervals the summits of distant forests shone blue, on one hand, stretching along the banks of the Dnieper. Once only did Taras point out to his sons a small black speck far away amongst the grass, saying, “Look, children! yonder gallops a Tatar.” The little head with its long moustaches fixed its narrow eyes upon them from afar, its nostrils snuffing the air like a greyhound’s, and then disappeared like an antelope on its owner perceiving that the Cossacks were thirteen strong. “And now, children, don’t try to overtake the Tatar! You would never catch him to all eternity; he has a horse swifter than my Devil.” But Bulba took precautions, fearing hidden ambushes. They galloped along the course of a small stream, called the Tatarka, which falls into the Dnieper; rode into the water and swam with their horses some distance in order to conceal their trail. Then, scrambling out on the bank, they continued their road.

Three days later they were not far from the goal of their journey. The air suddenly grew colder: they could feel the vicinity of the Dnieper. And there it gleamed afar, distinguishable on the horizon as a dark band. It sent forth cold waves, spreading nearer, nearer, and finally seeming to embrace half the entire surface of the earth. This was that section of its course where the river, hitherto confined by the rapids, finally makes its own away and, roaring like the sea, rushes on at will; where the islands, flung into its midst, have pressed it farther from their shores, and its waves have spread widely over the earth, encountering neither cliffs nor hills. The Cossacks, alighting from their horses, entered the ferry-boat, and after a three hours’ sail reached the shores of the island of Khortitz, where at that time stood the Setch, which so often changed its situation.

A throng of people hastened to the shore with boats. The Cossacks arranged the horses’ trappings. Taras assumed a stately air, pulled his belt tighter, and proudly stroked his moustache. His sons also inspected themselves from head to foot, with some apprehension and an undefined feeling of satisfaction; and all set out together for the suburb, which was half a verst from the Setch. On their arrival, they were deafened by the clang of fifty blacksmiths’ hammers beating upon twenty-five anvils sunk in the earth. Stout tanners seated beneath awnings were scraping ox-hides with their strong hands; shop-keepers sat in their booths, with piles of flints, steels, and powder before them; Armenians spread out their rich handkerchiefs; Tatars turned their kabobs upon spits; a Jew, with his head thrust forward, was filtering some corn-brandy from a cask. But the first man they

encountered was a Zaporozhetz[5] who was sleeping in the very middle of the road with legs and arms outstretched. Taras Bulba could not refrain from halting to admire him. “How splendidly developed he is; phew, what a magnificent figure!” he said, stopping his horse. It was, in fact, a striking picture. This Zaporozhetz had stretched himself out in the road like a lion; his scalp-lock, thrown proudly behind him, extended over upwards of a foot of ground; his trousers of rich red cloth were spotted with tar, to show his utter disdain for them. Having admired to his heart’s content, Bulba passed on through the narrow street, crowded with mechanics exercising their trades, and with people of all nationalities who thronged this suburb of the Setch, resembling a fair, and fed and clothed the Setch itself, which knew only how to revel and burn powder.

At length they left the suburb behind them, and perceived some scattered kurens[6], covered with turf, or in Tatar fashion with felt. Some were furnished with cannon. Nowhere were any fences visible, or any of those low-roofed houses with verandahs supported upon low wooden pillars, such as were seen in the suburb. A low wall and a ditch, totally unguarded, betokened a terrible degree of recklessness. Some sturdy Zaporozhtzi lying, pipe in mouth, in the very road, glanced indifferently at them, but never moved from their places. Taras threaded his way carefully among them, with his sons, saying, “Good-day, gentles.”—“Good-day to you,” answered the Zaporozhtzi. Scattered over the plain were picturesque groups. From their weatherbeaten faces, it was plain that all were steeled in battle, and had faced every sort of bad weather. And there it was, the Setch! There was the lair from whence all those men, proud and strong as lions, issued forth! There was the spot whence poured forth liberty and Cossacks all over the Ukraine.

The travellers entered the great square where the council generally met. On a huge overturned cask sat a Zaporozhetz without his shirt; he was holding it in his hands, and slowly sewing up the holes in it. Again their way was stopped by a whole crowd of musicians, in the midst of whom a young Zaporozhetz was dancing, with head thrown back and arms outstretched. He kept shouting, “Play faster, musicians! Begrudge not, Thoma, brandy to these orthodox Christians!” And Thoma, with his blackened eye, went on measuring out without stint, to every one who presented himself, a huge jugful.

About the youthful Zaporozhetz four old men, moving their feet quite briskly, leaped like a whirlwind to one side, almost upon the musicians’ heads, and, suddenly, retreating, squatted down and drummed the hard earth vigorously with their silver heels. The earth hummed dully all about, and afar the air resounded with national dance tunes beaten by the clanging heels of their boots.

But one shouted more loudly than all the rest, and flew after the others in the dance. His scalp-lock streamed in the wind, his muscular chest was bare, his warm, winter fur jacket was hanging by the sleeves, and the perspiration poured from him as from a pig. “Take off your jacket!” said Taras at length: “see how he steams!”—“I can’t,” shouted the Cossack. “Why?”—“I can’t: I have such a disposition that whatever I take off, I drink up.” And indeed, the young fellow had not had a cap for a long time, nor a belt to his caftan, nor an embroidered neckerchief: all had gone the proper road. The throng increased; more folk joined the dancer: and it was impossible to observe without emotion how all yielded to the impulse of the dance, the freest, the wildest, the world has ever seen, still called from its mighty originators, the Kosachka.

“Oh, if I had no horse to hold,” exclaimed Taras, “I would join the dance myself.”

Meanwhile there began to appear among the throng men who were respected for their prowess throughout all the Setch—old greyheads who had been leaders more than once. Taras soon found a number of familiar faces. Ostap and Andrii heard nothing but greetings. “Ah, it is you, Petcheritza! Good day, Kozolup!”—“Whence has God brought you, Taras?”—“How did you come here, Doloto? Health to you, Kirdyaga! Hail to you, Gustui! Did I ever think of seeing you, Remen?” And these

[5] Sometimes written Zaporovian.

[6] Enormous wooden sheds, each inhabited by a troop or kuren.

heroes, gathered from all the roving population of Eastern Russia, kissed each other and began to ask questions. “But what has become of Kasyan? Where is Borodavka? and Koloper? and Pidsuitok?” And in reply, Taras Bulba learned that Borodavka had been hung at Tolopan, that Koloper had been flayed alive at Kizikirmen, that Pidsuitok’s head had been salted and sent in a cask to Constantinople. Old Bulba hung his head and said thoughtfully, “They were good Cossacks.”

CHAPTER III

Taras Bulba and his sons had been in the Setch about a week. Ostap and Andrii occupied themselves but little with the science of war. The Setch was not fond of wasting time in warlike exercises. The young generation learned these by experience alone, in the very heat of battles, which were therefore incessant. The Cossacks thought it a nuisance to fill up the intervals of this instruction with any kind of drill, except perhaps shooting at a mark, and on rare occasions with horse-racing and wild-beast hunts on the steppes and in the forests. All the rest of the time was devoted to revelry —a sign of the wide diffusion of moral liberty. The whole of the Setch presented an unusual scene: it was one unbroken revel; a ball noisily begun, which had no end. Some busied themselves with handicrafts; others kept little shops and traded; but the majority caroused from morning till night, if the wherewithal jingled in their pockets, and if the booty they had captured had not already passed into the hands of the shopkeepers and spirit-sellers. This universal revelry had something fascinating about it. It was not an assemblage of topers, who drank to drown sorrow, but simply a wild revelry of joy. Every one who came thither forgot everything, abandoned everything which had hitherto interested him. He, so to speak, spat upon his past and gave himself recklessly up to freedom and the good-fellowship of men of the same stamp as himself—idlers having neither relatives nor home nor family, nothing, in short, save the free sky and the eternal revel of their souls. This gave rise to that wild gaiety which could not have sprung from any other source. The tales and talk current among the assembled crowd, reposing lazily on the ground, were often so droll, and breathed such power of vivid narration, that it required all the nonchalance of a Zaporozhetz to retain his immovable expression, without even a twitch of the moustache—a feature which to this day distinguishes the Southern Russian from his northern brethren. It was drunken, noisy mirth; but there was no dark ale-house where a man drowns thought in stupefying intoxication: it was a dense throng of schoolboys.

The only difference as regarded the students was that, instead of sitting under the pointer and listening to the worn-out doctrines of a teacher, they practised racing with five thousand horses; instead of the field where they had played ball, they had the boundless borderlands, where at the sight of them the Tatar showed his keen face and the Turk frowned grimly from under his green turban. The difference was that, instead of being forced to the companionship of school, they themselves had deserted their fathers and mothers and fled from their homes; that here were those about whose neck a rope had already been wound, and who, instead of pale death, had seen life, and life in all its intensity; those who, from generous habits, could never keep a coin in their pockets; those who had thitherto regarded a ducat as wealth, and whose pockets, thanks to the Jew revenue-farmers, could have been turned wrong side out without any danger of anything falling from them. Here were students who could not endure the academic rod, and had not carried away a single letter from the schools; but with them were also some who knew about Horace, Cicero, and the Roman Republic. There were many leaders who afterwards distinguished themselves in the king's armies; and there were numerous clever partisans who cherished a magnanimous conviction that it was of no consequence where they fought, so long as they did fight, since it was a disgrace to an honourable man to live without fighting. There were many who had come to the Setch for the sake of being able to say afterwards that they had been there and were therefore hardened warriors. But who was not there? This strange republic was a necessary outgrowth of the epoch. Lovers of a warlike life, of golden beakers and rich brocades, of ducats and gold pieces, could always find employment there. The lovers of women alone could find naught, for no woman dared show herself even in the suburbs of the Setch.

It seemed exceedingly strange to Ostap and Andrii that, although a crowd of people had come to the Setch with them, not a soul inquired, "Whence come these men? who are they? and what are their names?" They had come thither as though returning to a home whence they had departed only an hour before. The new-comer merely presented himself to the Koschevoi, or head chief of the Setch,

who generally said, “Welcome! Do you believe in Christ?”—“I do,” replied the new-comer. “And do you believe in the Holy Trinity?”—“I do.”—“And do you go to church?”—“I do.” “Now cross yourself.” The new-comer crossed himself. “Very good,” replied the Koschevoi; “enter the kuren where you have most acquaintances.” This concluded the ceremony. And all the Setch prayed in one church, and were willing to defend it to their last drop of blood, although they would not hearken to aught about fasting or abstinence. Jews, Armenians, and Tatars, inspired by strong avarice, took the liberty of living and trading in the suburbs; for the Zaporozhtzi never cared for bargaining, and paid whatever money their hand chanced to grasp in their pocket. Moreover, the lot of these gain-loving traders was pitiable in the extreme. They resembled people settled at the foot of Vesuvius; for when the Zaporozhtzi lacked money, these bold adventurers broke down their booths and took everything gratis. The Setch consisted of over sixty kurens, each of which greatly resembled a separate independent republic, but still more a school or seminary of children, always ready for anything. No one had any occupation; no one retained anything for himself; everything was in the hands of the hetman of the kuren, who, on that account, generally bore the title of “father.” In his hands were deposited the money, clothes, all the provisions, oatmeal, grain, even the firewood. They gave him money to take care of. Quarrels amongst the inhabitants of the kuren were not unfrequent; and in such cases they proceeded at once to blows. The inhabitants of the kuren swarmed into the square, and smote each other with their fists, until one side had finally gained the upper hand, when the revelry began. Such was the Setch, which had such an attraction for young men.

Ostap and Andrii flung themselves into this sea of dissipation with all the ardour of youth, forgot in a trice their father’s house, the seminary, and all which had hitherto exercised their minds, and gave themselves wholly up to their new life. Everything interested them—the jovial habits of the Setch, and its chaotic morals and laws, which even seemed to them too strict for such a free republic. If a Cossack stole the smallest trifle, it was considered a disgrace to the whole Cossack community. He was bound to the pillar of shame, and a club was laid beside him, with which each passer-by was bound to deal him a blow until in this manner he was beaten to death. He who did not pay his debts was chained to a cannon, until some one of his comrades should decide to ransom him by paying his debts for him. But what made the deepest impression on Andrii was the terrible punishment decreed for murder. A hole was dug in his presence, the murderer was lowered alive into it, and over him was placed a coffin containing the body of the man he had killed, after which the earth was thrown upon both. Long afterwards the fearful ceremony of this horrible execution haunted his mind, and the man who had been buried alive appeared to him with his terrible coffin.

Both the young Cossacks soon took a good standing among their fellows. They often sallied out upon the steppe with comrades from their kuren, and sometimes too with the whole kuren or with neighbouring kurens, to shoot the innumerable steppe-birds of every sort, deer, and goats. Or they went out upon the lakes, the river, and its tributaries allotted to each kuren, to throw their nets and draw out rich prey for the enjoyment of the whole kuren. Although unversed in any trade exercised by a Cossack, they were soon remarked among the other youths for their obstinate bravery and daring in everything. Skilfully and accurately they fired at the mark, and swam the Dnieper against the current —a deed for which the novice was triumphantly received into the circle of Cossacks.

But old Taras was planning a different sphere of activity for them. Such an idle life was not to his mind; he wanted active employment. He reflected incessantly how to stir up the Setch to some bold enterprise, wherein a man could revel as became a warrior. At length he went one day to the Koschevoi, and said plainly:—

“Well, Koschevoi, it is time for the Zaporozhtzi to set out.”

“There is nowhere for them to go,” replied the Koschevoi, removing his short pipe from his mouth and spitting to one side.

“What do you mean by nowhere? We can go to Turkey or Tatary.”

"Impossible to go either to Turkey or Tatary," replied the Koschevoi, putting his pipe coolly into his mouth again.

"Why impossible?"

"It is so; we have promised the Sultan peace."

"But he is a Mussulman; and God and the Holy Scriptures command us to slay Mussulmans."

"We have no right. If we had not sworn by our faith, it might be done; but now it is impossible."

"How is it impossible? How can you say that we have no right? Here are my two sons, both young men. Neither has been to war; and you say that we have no right, and that there is no need for the Zaporozhtzi to set out on an expedition."

"Well, it is not fitting."

"Then it must be fitting that Cossack strength should be wasted in vain, that a man should disappear like a dog without having done a single good deed, that he should be of no use to his country or to Christianity! Why, then, do we live? What the deuce do we live for? just tell me that. You are a sensible man, you were not chosen as Koschevoi without reason: so just tell me what we live for?"

The Koschevoi made no reply to this question. He was an obstinate Cossack. He was silent for a while, and then said, "Anyway, there will not be war."

"There will not be war?" Taras asked again.

"No."

"Then it is no use thinking about it?"

"It is not to be thought of."

"Wait, you devil's limb!" said Taras to himself; "you shall learn to know me!" and he at once resolved to have his revenge on the Koschevoi.

Having made an agreement with several others, he gave them liquor; and the drunken Cossacks staggered into the square, where on a post hung the kettledrums which were generally beaten to assemble the people. Not finding the sticks, which were kept by the drummer, they seized a piece of wood and began to beat. The first to respond to the drum-beat was the drummer, a tall man with but one eye, but a frightfully sleepy one for all that.

"Who dares to beat the drum?" he shouted.

"Hold your tongue! take your sticks, and beat when you are ordered!" replied the drunken men.

The drummer at once took from his pocket the sticks which he had brought with him, well knowing the result of such proceedings. The drum rattled, and soon black swarms of Cossacks began to collect like bees in the square. All formed in a ring; and at length, after the third summons, the chiefs began to arrive—the Koschevoi with staff in hand, the symbol of his office; the judge with the army-seal; the secretary with his ink-bottle; and the osaul with his staff. The Koschevoi and the chiefs took off their caps and bowed on all sides to the Cossacks, who stood proudly with their arms akimbo.

"What means this assemblage? what do you wish, gentles?" said the Koschevoi. Shouts and exclamations interrupted his speech.

"Resign your staff! resign your staff this moment, you son of Satan! we will have you no longer!" shouted some of the Cossacks in the crowd. Some of the sober ones appeared to wish to oppose this, but both sober and drunken fell to blows. The shouting and uproar became universal.

The Koschevoi attempted to speak; but knowing that the self-willed multitude, if enraged, might beat him to death, as almost always happened in such cases, he bowed very low, laid down his staff, and hid himself in the crowd.

"Do you command us, gentles, to resign our insignia of office?" said the judge, the secretary, and the osaul, as they prepared to give up the ink-horn, army-seal, and staff, upon the spot.

"No, you are to remain!" was shouted from the crowd. "We only wanted to drive out the Koschevoi because he is a woman, and we want a man for Koschevoi."

"Whom do you now elect as Koschevoi?" asked the chiefs.

"We choose Kukubenko," shouted some.

"We won't have Kukubenko!" screamed another party: "he is too young; the milk has not dried off his lips yet."

"Let Schilo be hetman!" shouted some: "make Schilo our Koschevoi!"

"Away with your Schilo!" yelled the crowd; "what kind of a Cossack is he who is as thievish as a Tatar? To the devil in a sack with your drunken Schilo!"

"Borodaty! let us make Borodaty our Koschevoi!"

"We won't have Borodaty! To the evil one's mother with Borodaty!"

"Shout Kirdyanga!" whispered Taras Bulba to several.

"Kirdyanga, Kirdyanga!" shouted the crowd. "Borodaty, Borodaty! Kirdyanga, Kirdyanga! Schilo! Away with Schilo! Kirdyanga!"

All the candidates, on hearing their names mentioned, quitted the crowd, in order not to give any one a chance of supposing that they were personally assisting in their election.

"Kirdyanga, Kirdyanga!" echoed more strongly than the rest.

"Borodaty!"

They proceeded to decide the matter by a show of hands, and Kirdyanga won.

"Fetch Kirdyanga!" they shouted. Half a score of Cossacks immediately left the crowd—some of them hardly able to keep their feet, to such an extent had they drunk—and went directly to Kirdyanga to inform him of his election.

Kirdyanga, a very old but wise Cossack, had been sitting for some time in his kuren, as if he knew nothing of what was going on.

"What is it, gentles? What do you wish?" he inquired.

"Come, they have chosen you for Koschevoi."

"Have mercy, gentles!" said Kirdyanga. "How can I be worthy of such honour? Why should I be made Koschevoi? I have not sufficient capacity to fill such a post. Could no better person be found in all the army?"

"Come, I say!" shouted the Zaporozhtzi. Two of them seized him by the arms; and in spite of his planting his feet firmly they finally dragged him to the square, accompanying his progress with shouts, blows from behind with their fists, kicks, and exhortations. "Don't hold back, you son of Satan! Accept the honour, you dog, when it is given!" In this manner Kirdyanga was conducted into the ring of Cossacks.

"How now, gentles?" announced those who had brought him, "are you agreed that this Cossack shall be your Koschevoi?"

"We are all agreed!" shouted the throng, and the whole plain trembled for a long time afterwards from the shout.

One of the chiefs took the staff and brought it to the newly elected Koschevoi. Kirdyanga, in accordance with custom, immediately refused it. The chief offered it a second time; Kirdyanga again refused it, and then, at the third offer, accepted the staff. A cry of approbation rang out from the crowd, and again the whole plain resounded afar with the Cossacks' shout. Then there stepped out from among the people the four oldest of them all, white-bearded, white-haired Cossacks; though there were no very old men in the Setch, for none of the Zaporozhtzi ever died in their beds. Taking each a handful of earth, which recent rain had converted into mud, they laid it on Kirdyanga's head. The wet earth trickled down from his head on to his moustache and cheeks and smeared his whole face. But Kirdyanga stood immovable in his place, and thanked the Cossacks for the honour shown him.

Thus ended the noisy election, concerning which we cannot say whether it was as pleasing to the others as it was to Bulba; by means of it he had revenged himself on the former Koschevoi. Moreover, Kirdyanga was an old comrade, and had been with him on the same expeditions by sea and land, sharing the toils and hardships of war. The crowd immediately dispersed to celebrate the election, and such revelry ensued as Ostap and Andrii had not yet beheld. The taverns were attacked and mead,

corn-brandy, and beer seized without payment, the owners being only too glad to escape with whole skins themselves. The whole night passed amid shouts, songs, and rejoicings; and the rising moon gazed long at troops of musicians traversing the streets with guitars, flutes, tambourines, and the church choir, who were kept in the Setch to sing in church and glorify the deeds of the Zaporozhtzi. At length drunkenness and fatigue began to overpower even these strong heads, and here and there a Cossack could be seen to fall to the ground, embracing a comrade in fraternal fashion; whilst maudlin, and even weeping, the latter rolled upon the earth with him. Here a whole group would lie down in a heap; there a man would choose the most comfortable position and stretch himself out on a log of wood. The last, and strongest, still uttered some incoherent speeches; finally even they, yielding to the power of intoxication, flung themselves down and all the Setch slept.

CHAPTER IV

But next day Taras Bulba had a conference with the new Koschevoi as to the method of exciting the Cossacks to some enterprise. The Koschevoi, a shrewd and sensible Cossack, who knew the Zaporozhtzi thoroughly, said at first, "Oaths cannot be violated by any means"; but after a pause added, "No matter, it can be done. We will not violate them, but let us devise something. Let the people assemble, not at my summons, but of their own accord. You know how to manage that; and I will hasten to the square with the chiefs, as though we know nothing about it."

Not an hour had elapsed after their conversation, when the drums again thundered. The drunken and senseless Cossacks assembled. A myriad Cossack caps were sprinkled over the square. A murmur arose, "Why? What? Why was the assembly beaten?" No one answered. At length, in one quarter and another, it began to be rumoured about, "Behold, the Cossack strength is being vainly wasted: there is no war! Behold, our leaders have become as marmots, every one; their eyes swim in fat! Plainly, there is no justice in the world!" The other Cossacks listened at first, and then began themselves to say, "In truth, there is no justice in the world!" Their leaders seemed surprised at these utterances. Finally the Koschevoi stepped forward: "Permit me, Cossacks, to address you."

"Do so!"

"Touching the matter in question, gentles, none know better than yourselves that many Zaporozhtzi have run in debt to the Jew ale-house keepers and to their brethren, so that now they have not an atom of credit. Again, touching the matter in question, there are many young fellows who have no idea of what war is like, although you know, gentles, that without war a young man cannot exist. How make a Zaporozhetz out of him if he has never killed a Mussulman?"

"He speaks well," thought Bulba.

"Think not, however, gentles, that I speak thus in order to break the truce; God forbid! I merely mention it. Besides, it is a shame to see what sort of church we have for our God. Not only has the church remained without exterior decoration during all the years which by God's mercy the Setch has stood, but up to this day even the holy pictures have no adornments. No one has even thought of making them a silver frame; they have only received what some Cossacks have left them in their wills; and these gifts were poor, since they had drunk up nearly all they had during their lifetime. I am making you this speech, therefore, not in order to stir up a war against the Mussulmans; we have promised the Sultan peace, and it would be a great sin in us to break this promise, for we swore it on our law."

"What is he mixing things up like that for?" said Bulba to himself.

"So you see, gentles, that war cannot be begun; honour does not permit it. But according to my poor opinion, we might, I think, send out a few young men in boats and let them plunder the coasts of Anatolia a little. What do you think, gentles?"

"Lead us, lead us all!" shouted the crowd on all sides. "We are ready to lay down our lives for our faith."

The Koschevoi was alarmed. He by no means wished to stir up all Zaporozhe; a breach of the truce appeared to him on this occasion unsuitable. "Permit me, gentles, to address you further."

"Enough!" yelled the Cossacks; "you can say nothing better."

"If it must be so, then let it be so. I am the slave of your will. We know, and from Scripture too, that the voice of the people is the voice of God. It is impossible to devise anything better than the whole nation has devised. But here lies the difficulty; you know, gentles, that the Sultan will not permit that which delights our young men to go unpunished. We should be prepared at such a time, and our forces should be fresh, and then we should fear no one. But during their absence the Tatars may assemble fresh forces; the dogs do not show themselves in sight and dare not come while the master is at home, but they can bite his heels from behind, and bite painfully too. And if I must tell

you the truth, we have not boats enough, nor powder ready in sufficient quantity, for all to go. But I am ready, if you please; I am the slave of your will."

The cunning hetman was silent. The various groups began to discuss the matter, and the hetmans of the kurens to take counsel together; few were drunk fortunately, so they decided to listen to reason.

A number of men set out at once for the opposite shore of the Dnieper, to the treasury of the army, where in strictest secrecy, under water and among the reeds, lay concealed the army chest and a portion of the arms captured from the enemy. Others hastened to inspect the boats and prepare them for service. In a twinkling the whole shore was thronged with men. Carpenters appeared with axes in their hands. Old, weatherbeaten, broad-shouldered, strong-legged Zaporozhtzi, with black or silvered moustaches, rolled up their trousers, waded up to their knees in water, and dragged the boats on to the shore with stout ropes; others brought seasoned timber and all sorts of wood. The boats were freshly planked, turned bottom upwards, caulked and tarred, and then bound together side by side after Cossack fashion, with long strands of reeds, so that the swell of the waves might not sink them. Far along the shore they built fires and heated tar in copper cauldrons to smear the boats. The old and the experienced instructed the young. The blows and shouts of the workers rose all over the neighbourhood; the bank shook and moved about.

About this time a large ferry-boat began to near the shore. The mass of people standing in it began to wave their hands from a distance. They were Cossacks in torn, ragged gaberdines. Their disordered garments, for many had on nothing but their shirts, with a short pipe in their mouths, showed that they had either escaped from some disaster or had caroused to such an extent that they had drunk up all they had on their bodies. A short, broad-shouldered Cossack of about fifty stepped out from the midst of them and stood in front. He shouted and waved his hand more vigorously than any of the others; but his words could not be heard for the cries and hammering of the workmen.

"Whence come you!" asked the Koschevoi, as the boat touched the shore. All the workers paused in their labours, and, raising their axes and chisels, looked on expectantly.

"From a misfortune!" shouted the short Cossack.

"From what?"

"Permit me, noble Zaporozhtzi, to address you."

"Speak!"

"Or would you prefer to assemble a council?"

"Speak, we are all here."

The people all pressed together in one mass.

"Have you then heard nothing of what has been going on in the hetman's dominions?"

"What is it?" inquired one of the kuren hetmans.

"Eh! what! Evidently the Tatars have plastered up your ears so that you might hear nothing."

"Tell us then; what has been going on there?"

"That is going on the like of which no man born or christened ever yet has seen."

"Tell us what it is, you son of a dog!" shouted one of the crowd, apparently losing patience.

"Things have come to such a pass that our holy churches are no longer ours."

"How not ours?"

"They are pledged to the Jews. If the Jew is not first paid, there can be no mass."

"What are you saying?"

"And if the dog of a Jew does not make a sign with his unclean hand over the holy Easter-bread, it cannot be consecrated."

"He lies, brother gentles. It cannot be that an unclean Jew puts his mark upon the holy Easter-bread."

"Listen! I have not yet told all. Catholic priests are going about all over the Ukraine in carts. The harm lies not in the carts, but in the fact that not horses, but orthodox Christians[7], are harnessed to them. Listen! I have not yet told all. They say that the Jewesses are making themselves petticoats out of our popes' vestments. Such are the deeds that are taking place in the Ukraine, gentles! And you sit here revelling in Zaporozhe; and evidently the Tatars have so scared you that you have no eyes, no ears, no anything, and know nothing that is going on in the world."

"Stop, stop!" broke in the Koschevoi, who up to that moment had stood with his eyes fixed upon the earth like all Zaporozhtzi, who, on important occasions, never yielded to their first impulse, but kept silence, and meanwhile concentrated inwardly all the power of their indignation. "Stop! I also have a word to say. But what were you about? When your father the devil was raging thus, what were you doing yourselves? Had you no swords? How came you to permit such lawlessness?"

"Eh! how did we come to permit such lawlessness? You would have tried when there were fifty thousand of the Lyakhs[8] alone; yes, and it is a shame not to be concealed, when there are also dogs among us who have already accepted their faith."

"But your hetman and your leaders, what have they done?"

"God preserve any one from such deeds as our leaders performed!"

"How so?"

"Our hetman, roasted in a brazen ox, now lies in Warsaw; and the heads and hands of our leaders are being carried to all the fairs as a spectacle for the people. That is what our leaders did."

The whole throng became wildly excited. At first silence reigned all along the shore, like that which precedes a tempest; and then suddenly voices were raised and all the shore spoke:—

"What! The Jews hold the Christian churches in pledge! Roman Catholic priests have harnessed and beaten orthodox Christians! What! such torture has been permitted on Russian soil by the cursed unbelievers! And they have done such things to the leaders and the hetman? Nay, this shall not be, it shall not be." Such words came from all quarters. The Zaporozhtzi were moved, and knew their power. It was not the excitement of a giddy-minded folk. All who were thus agitated were strong, firm characters, not easily aroused, but, once aroused, preserving their inward heat long and obstinately. "Hang all the Jews!" rang through the crowd. "They shall not make petticoats for their Jewesses out of popes' vestments! They shall not place their signs upon the holy wafers! Drown all the heathens in the Dnieper!" These words uttered by some one in the throng flashed like lightning through all minds, and the crowd flung themselves upon the suburb with the intention of cutting the throats of all the Jews.

The poor sons of Israel, losing all presence of mind, and not being in any case courageous, hid themselves in empty brandy-casks, in ovens, and even crawled under the skirts of their Jewesses; but the Cossacks found them wherever they were.

"Gracious nobles!" shrieked one Jew, tall and thin as a stick, thrusting his sorry visage, distorted with terror, from among a group of his comrades, "gracious nobles! suffer us to say a word, only one word. We will reveal to you what you never yet have heard, a thing more important than I can say —very important!"

"Well, say it," said Bulba, who always liked to hear what an accused man had to say.

"Gracious nobles," exclaimed the Jew, "such nobles were never seen, by heavens, never! Such good, kind, and brave men there never were in the world before!" His voice died away and quivered with fear. "How was it possible that we should think any evil of the Zaporozhtzi? Those men are not of us at all, those who have taken pledges in the Ukraine. By heavens, they are not of us! They are not Jews at all. The evil one alone knows what they are; they are only fit to be spit upon and cast aside. Behold, my brethren, say the same! Is it not true, Schloma? is it not true, Schmul?"

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[7] That is of the Greek Church. The Poles were Catholics.

[8] Lyakhs, an opprobrious name for the Poles.

"By heavens, it is true!" replied Schloma and Schmul, from among the crowd, both pale as clay, in their ragged caps.

"We never yet," continued the tall Jew, "have had any secret intercourse with your enemies, and we will have nothing to do with Catholics; may the evil one fly away with them! We are like own brothers to the Zaporozhtzi."

"What! the Zaporozhtzi are brothers to you!" exclaimed some one in the crowd. "Don't wait! the cursed Jews! Into the Dnieper with them, gentles! Drown all the unbelievers!"

These words were the signal. They seized the Jews by the arms and began to hurl them into the waves. Pitiful cries resounded on all sides; but the stern Zaporozhtzi only laughed when they saw the Jewish legs, cased in shoes and stockings, struggling in the air. The poor orator who had called down destruction upon himself jumped out of the caftan, by which they had seized him, and in his scant parti-coloured under waistcoat clasped Bulba's legs, and cried, in piteous tones, "Great lord! gracious noble! I knew your brother, the late Doroscha. He was a warrior who was an ornament to all knighthood. I gave him eight hundred sequins when he was obliged to ransom himself from the Turks."

"You knew my brother?" asked Taras.

"By heavens, I knew him. He was a magnificent nobleman."

"And what is your name?"

"Yankel."

"Good," said Taras; and after reflecting, he turned to the Cossacks and spoke as follows: "There will always be plenty of time to hang the Jew, if it proves necessary; but for to-day give him to me."

So saying, Taras led him to his waggon, beside which stood his Cossacks. "Crawl under the waggon; lie down, and do not move. And you, brothers, do not surrender this Jew."

So saying, he returned to the square, for the whole crowd had long since collected there. All had at once abandoned the shore and the preparation of the boats; for a land-journey now awaited them, and not a sea-voyage, and they needed horses and waggons, not ships. All, both young and old, wanted to go on the expedition; and it was decided, on the advice of the chiefs, the hetmans of the kurens, and the Koschevoi, and with the approbation of the whole Zaporozhtzian army, to march straight to Poland, to avenge the injury and disgrace to their faith and to Cossack renown, to seize booty from the cities, to burn villages and grain, and spread their glory far over the steppe. All at once girded and armed themselves. The Koschevoi grew a whole foot taller. He was no longer the timid executor of the restless wishes of a free people, but their untrammelled master. He was a despot, who know only to command. All the independent and pleasure-loving warriors stood in an orderly line, with respectfully bowed heads, not venturing to raise their eyes, when the Koschevoi gave his orders. He gave these quietly, without shouting and without haste, but with pauses between, like an experienced man deeply learned in Cossack affairs, and carrying into execution, not for the first time, a wisely matured enterprise.

"Examine yourselves, look well to yourselves; examine all your equipments thoroughly," he said; "put your teams and your tar-boxes[9] in order; test your weapons. Take not many clothes with you: a shirt and a couple of pairs of trousers to each Cossack, and a pot of oatmeal and millet apiece —let no one take any more. There will be plenty of provisions, all that is needed, in the waggons. Let every Cossack have two horses. And two hundred yoke of oxen must be taken, for we shall require them at the fords and marshy places. Keep order, gentles, above all things. I know that there are some among you whom God has made so greedy that they would like to tear up silk and velvet for foot-cloths. Leave off such devilish habits; reject all garments as plunder, and take only weapons: though if valuables offer themselves, ducats or silver, they are useful in any case. I tell you this beforehand, gentles, if any one gets drunk on the expedition, he will have a short shrift: I will have him dragged

[9] The Cossack waggons have their axles smeared with tar instead of grease.

by the neck like a dog behind the baggage waggons, no matter who he may be, even were he the most heroic Cossack in the whole army; he shall be shot on the spot like a dog, and flung out, without sepulture, to be torn by the birds of prey, for a drunkard on the march deserves no Christian burial. Young men, obey the old men in all things! If a ball grazes you, or a sword cuts your head or any other part, attach no importance to such trifles. Mix a charge of powder in a cup of brandy, quaff it heartily, and all will pass off—you will not even have any fever; and if the wound is large, put simple earth upon it, mixing it first with spittle in your palm, and that will dry it up. And now to work, to work, lads, and look well to all, and without haste."

So spoke the Koschevoi; and no sooner had he finished his speech than all the Cossacks at once set to work. All the Setch grew sober. Nowhere was a single drunken man to be found, it was as though there never had been such a thing among the Cossacks. Some attended to the tyres of the wheels, others changed the axles of the waggons; some carried sacks of provisions to them or leaded them with arms; others again drove up the horses and oxen. On all sides resounded the tramp of horses' hoofs, test-shots from the guns, the clank of swords, the lowing of oxen, the screech of rolling waggons, talking, sharp cries and urging-on of cattle. Soon the Cossack force spread far over all the plain; and he who might have undertaken to run from its van to its rear would have had a long course. In the little wooden church the priest was offering up prayers and sprinkling all worshippers with holy water. All kissed the cross. When the camp broke up and the army moved out of the Setch, all the Zaporozhtzi turned their heads back. "Farewell, our mother!" they said almost in one breath. "May God preserve thee from all misfortune!"

As he passed through the suburb, Taras Bulba saw that his Jew, Yankel, had already erected a sort of booth with an awning, and was selling flint, screwdrivers, powder, and all sorts of military stores needed on the road, even to rolls and bread. "What devils these Jews are!" thought Taras; and riding up to him, he said, "Fool, why are you sitting here? do you want to be shot like a crow?"

Yankel in reply approached nearer, and making a sign with both hands, as though wishing to impart some secret, said, "Let the noble lord but keep silence and say nothing to any one. Among the Cossack waggons is a waggon of mine. I am carrying all sorts of needful stores for the Cossacks, and on the journey I will furnish every sort of provisions at a lower price than any Jew ever sold at before. 'Tis so, by heavens! by heavens, 'tis so!"

Taras Bulba shrugged his shoulders in amazement at the Jewish nature, and went on to the camp.

CHAPTER V

All South-west Poland speedily became a prey to fear. Everywhere the rumour flew, "The Zaporozhtzi! The Zaporozhtzi have appeared!" All who could flee did so. All rose and scattered after the manner of that lawless, reckless age, when they built neither fortresses nor castles, but each man erected a temporary dwelling of straw wherever he happened to find himself. He thought, "It is useless to waste money and labour on an izba, when the roving Tatars will carry it off in any case." All was in an uproar: one exchanged his plough and oxen for a horse and gun, and joined an armed band; another, seeking concealment, drove off his cattle and carried off all the household stuff he could. Occasionally, on the road, some were encountered who met their visitors with arms in their hands; but the majority fled before their arrival. All knew that it was hard to deal with the raging and warlike throng known by the name of the Zaporozhian army; a body which, under its independent and disorderly exterior, concealed an organisation well calculated for times of battle. The horsemen rode steadily on without overburdening or heating their horses; the foot-soldiers marched only by night, resting during the day, and selecting for this purpose desert tracts, uninhabited spots, and forests, of which there were then plenty. Spies and scouts were sent ahead to study the time, place, and method of attack. And lo! the Zaporozhtzi suddenly appeared in those places where they were least expected: then all were put to the sword; the villages were burned; and the horses and cattle which were not driven off behind the army killed upon the spot. They seemed to be fiercely revelling, rather than carrying out a military expedition. Our hair would stand on end nowadays at the horrible traits of that fierce, half-civilised age, which the Zaporozhtzi everywhere exhibited: children killed, women's breasts cut open, the skin flayed from the legs up to the knees, and the victim then set at liberty. In short, the Cossacks paid their former debts in coin of full weight. The abbot of one monastery, on hearing of their approach, sent two monks to say that they were not behaving as they should; that there was an agreement between the Zaporozhtzi and the government; that they were breaking faith with the king, and violating all international rights. "Tell your bishop from me and from all the Zaporozhtzi," said the Koschevoi, "that he has nothing to fear: the Cossacks, so far, have only lighted and smoked their pipes." And the magnificent abbey was soon wrapped in the devouring flames, its tall Gothic windows showing grimly through the waves of fire as they parted. The fleeing mass of monks, women, and Jews thronged into those towns where any hope lay in the garrison and the civic forces. The aid sent in season by the government, but delayed on the way, consisted of a few troops which either were unable to enter the towns or, seized with fright, turned their backs at the very first encounter and fled on their swift horses. However, several of the royal commanders, who had conquered in former battles, resolved to unite their forces and confront the Zaporozhtzi.

And here, above all, did our young Cossacks, disgusted with pillage, greed, and a feeble foe, and burning with the desire to distinguish themselves in presence of their chiefs, seek to measure themselves in single combat with the warlike and boastful Lyakhs, prancing on their spirited horses, with the sleeves of their jackets thrown back and streaming in the wind. This game was inspiriting; they won at it many costly sets of horse-trappings and valuable weapons. In a month the scarcely fledged birds attained their full growth, were completely transformed, and became men; their features, in which hitherto a trace of youthful softness had been visible, grew strong and grim. But it was pleasant to old Taras to see his sons among the foremost. It seemed as though Ostap were designed by nature for the game of war and the difficult science of command. Never once losing his head or becoming confused under any circumstances, he could, with a cool audacity almost supernatural in a youth of two-and-twenty, in an instant gauge the danger and the whole scope of the matter, could at once devise a means of escaping, but of escaping only that he might the more surely conquer. His movements now began to be marked by the assurance which comes from experience, and in them could be detected the germ of the future leader. His person strengthened, and his bearing grew

majestically leonine. “What a fine leader he will make one of these days!” said old Taras. “He will make a splendid leader, far surpassing even his father!”

Andrii gave himself up wholly to the enchanting music of blades and bullets. He knew not what it was to consider, or calculate, or to measure his own as against the enemy’s strength. He gazed on battle with mad delight and intoxication: he found something festal in the moments when a man’s brain burns, when all things wave and flutter before his eyes, when heads are stricken off, horses fall to the earth with a sound of thunder, and he rides on like a drunken man, amid the whistling of bullets and the flashing of swords, dealing blows to all, and heeding not those aimed at himself. More than once their father marvelled too at Andrii, seeing him, stirred only by a flash of impulse, dash at something which a sensible man in cold blood never would have attempted, and, by the sheer force of his mad attack, accomplish such wonders as could not but amaze even men grown old in battle. Old Taras admired and said, “And he too will make a good warrior if the enemy does not capture him meanwhile. He is not Ostap, but he is a dashing warrior, nevertheless.”

The army decided to march straight on the city of Dubno, which, rumour said, contained much wealth and many rich inhabitants. The journey was accomplished in a day and a half, and the Zaporozhtzi appeared before the city. The inhabitants resolved to defend themselves to the utmost extent of their power, and to fight to the last extremity, preferring to die in their squares and streets, and on their thresholds, rather than admit the enemy to their houses. A high rampart of earth surrounded the city; and in places where it was low or weak, it was strengthened by a wall of stone, or a house which served as a redoubt, or even an oaken stockade. The garrison was strong and aware of the importance of their position. The Zaporozhtzi attacked the wall fiercely, but were met with a shower of grapeshot. The citizens and residents of the town evidently did not wish to remain idle, but gathered on the ramparts; in their eyes could be read desperate resistance. The women too were determined to take part in the fray, and upon the heads of the Zaporozhians rained down stones, casks of boiling water, and sacks of lime which blinded them. The Zaporozhtzi were not fond of having anything to do with fortified places: sieges were not in their line. The Koschevoi ordered them to retreat, saying, “It is useless, brother gentles; we will retire: but may I be a heathen Tatar, and not a Christian, if we do not clear them out of that town! may they all perish of hunger, the dogs!” The army retreated, surrounded the town, and, for lack of something to do, busied themselves with devastating the surrounding country, burning the neighbouring villages and the ricks of unthreshed grain, and turning their droves of horses loose in the cornfields, as yet untouched by the reaping-hook, where the plump ears waved, fruit, as luck would have it, of an unusually good harvest which should have liberally rewarded all tillers of the soil that season.

With horror those in the city beheld their means of subsistence destroyed. Meanwhile the Zaporozhtzi, having formed a double ring of their waggons around the city, disposed themselves as in the Setch in kurens, smoked their pipes, bartered their booty for weapons, played at leapfrog and odd-and-even, and gazed at the city with deadly cold-bloodedness. At night they lighted their camp fires, and the cooks boiled the porridge for each kuren in huge copper cauldrons; whilst an alert sentinel watched all night beside the blazing fire. But the Zaporozhtzi soon began to tire of inactivity and prolonged sobriety, unaccompanied by any fighting. The Koschevoi even ordered the allowance of wine to be doubled, which was sometimes done in the army when no difficult enterprises or movements were on hand. The young men, and Taras Bulba’s sons in particular, did not like this life. Andrii was visibly bored. “You silly fellow!” said Taras to him, “be patient, you will be hetman one day. He is not a good warrior who loses heart in an important enterprise; but he who is not tired even of inactivity, who endures all, and who even if he likes a thing can give it up.” But hot youth cannot agree with age; the two have different natures, and look at the same thing with different eyes.

But in the meantime Taras’s band, led by Tovkatch, arrived; with him were also two osauls, the secretary, and other regimental officers: the Cossacks numbered over four thousand in all. There were among them many volunteers, who had risen of their own free will, without any summons, as soon

as they had heard what the matter was. The osauls brought to Taras's sons the blessing of their aged mother, and to each a picture in a cypress-wood frame from the Mezhigorski monastery at Kief. The two brothers hung the pictures round their necks, and involuntarily grew pensive as they remembered their old mother. What did this blessing prophecy? Was it a blessing for their victory over the enemy, and then a joyous return to their home with booty and glory, to be everlastingly commemorated in the songs of guitar-players? or was it…? But the future is unknown, and stands before a man like autumnal fogs rising from the swamps; birds fly foolishly up and down in it with flapping wings, never recognising each other, the dove seeing not the vulture, nor the vulture the dove, and no one knowing how far he may be flying from destruction.

Ostap had long since attended to his duties and gone to the kuren. Andrii, without knowing why, felt a kind of oppression at his heart. The Cossacks had finished their evening meal; the wonderful July night had completely fallen; still he did not go to the kuren, nor lie down to sleep, but gazed unconsciously at the whole scene before him. In the sky innumerable stars twinkled brightly. The plain was covered far and wide with scattered waggons with swinging tar-buckets, smeared with tar, and loaded with every description of goods and provisions captured from the foe. Beside the waggons, under the waggons, and far beyond the waggons, Zaporozhtzi were everywhere visible, stretched upon the grass. They all slumbered in picturesque attitudes; one had thrust a sack under his head, another his cap, and another simply made use of his comrade's side. Swords, guns, matchlocks, short pipe-stems with copper mountings, iron awls, and a flint and steel were inseparable from every Cossack. The heavy oxen lay with their feet doubled under them like huge whitish masses, and at a distance looked like gray stones scattered on the slopes of the plain. On all sides the heavy snores of sleeping warriors began to arise from the grass, and were answered from the plain by the ringing neighs of their steeds, chafing at their hobbled feet. Meanwhile a certain threatening magnificence had mingled with the beauty of the July night. It was the distant glare of the burning district afar. In one place the flames spread quietly and grandly over the sky; in another, suddenly bursting into a whirlwind, they hissed and flew upwards to the very stars, and floating fragments died away in the most distant quarter of the heavens. Here the black, burned monastery like a grim Carthusian monk stood threatening, and displaying its dark magnificence at every flash; there blazed the monastery garden. It seemed as though the trees could be heard hissing as they stood wrapped in smoke; and when the fire burst forth, it suddenly lighted up the ripe plums with a phosphoric lilac-coloured gleam, or turned the yellowing pears here and there to pure gold. In the midst of them hung black against the wall of the building, or the trunk of a tree, the body of some poor Jew or monk who had perished in the flames with the structure. Above the distant fires hovered a flock of birds, like a cluster of tiny black crosses upon a fiery field. The town thus laid bare seemed to sleep; the spires and roofs, and its palisade and walls, gleamed quietly in the glare of the distant conflagrations. Andrii went the rounds of the Cossack ranks. The camp-fires, beside which the sentinels sat, were ready to go out at any moment; and even the sentinels slept, having devoured oatmeal and dumplings with true Cossack appetites. He was astonished at such carelessness, thinking, "It is well that there is no strong enemy at hand and nothing to fear." Finally he went to one of the waggons, climbed into it, and lay down upon his back, putting his clasped hands under his head; but he could not sleep, and gazed long at the sky. It was all open before him; the air was pure and transparent; the dense clusters of stars in the Milky Way, crossing the sky like a belt, were flooded with light. From time to time Andrii in some degree lost consciousness, and a light mist of dream veiled the heavens from him for a moment; but then he awoke, and they became visible again.

During one of these intervals it seemed to him that some strange human figure flitted before him. Thinking it to be merely a vision which would vanish at once, he opened his eyes, and beheld a withered, emaciated face bending over him, and gazing straight into his own. Long coal-black hair, unkempt, dishevelled, fell from beneath a dark veil which had been thrown over the head; whilst the strange gleam of the eyes, and the death-like tone of the sharp-cut features, inclined him to think that

it was an apparition. His hand involuntarily grasped his gun; and he exclaimed almost convulsively: “Who are you? If you are an evil spirit, avaunt! If you are a living being, you have chosen an ill time for your jest. I will kill you with one shot.”

In answer to this, the apparition laid its finger upon its lips and seemed to entreat silence. He dropped his hands and began to look more attentively. He recognised it to be a woman from the long hair, the brown neck, and the half-concealed bosom. But she was not a native of those regions: her wide cheek-bones stood out prominently over her hollow cheeks; her small eyes were obliquely set. The more he gazed at her features, the more he found them familiar. Finally he could restrain himself no longer, and said, “Tell me, who are you? It seems to me that I know you, or have seen you somewhere.”

“Two years ago in Kief.”

“Two years ago in Kief!” repeated Andrii, endeavouring to collect in his mind all that lingered in his memory of his former student life. He looked intently at her once more, and suddenly exclaimed at the top of his voice, “You are the Tatar! the servant of the lady, the Waiwode’s daughter!”

“Sh!” cried the Tatar, clasping her hands with a supplicating glance, trembling all over, and turning her head round in order to see whether any one had been awakened by Andrii’s loud exclamation.

“Tell me, tell me, why are you here?” said Andrii almost breathlessly, in a whisper, interrupted every moment by inward emotion. “Where is the lady? is she alive?”

“She is now in the city.”

“In the city!” he exclaimed, again almost in a shriek, and feeling all the blood suddenly rush to his heart. “Why is she in the city?”

“Because the old lord himself is in the city: he has been Waiwode of Dubno for the last year and a half.”

“Is she married? How strange you are! Tell me about her.”

“She has eaten nothing for two days.”

“What!”

“And not one of the inhabitants has had a morsel of bread for a long while; all have long been eating earth.”

Andrii was astounded.

“The lady saw you from the city wall, among the Zaporozhtzi. She said to me, ‘Go tell the warrior: if he remembers me, let him come to me; and do not forget to make him give you a bit of bread for my aged mother, for I do not wish to see my mother die before my very eyes. Better that I should die first, and she afterwards! Beseech him; clasp his knees, his feet: he also has an aged mother, let him give you the bread for her sake!’”

Many feelings awoke in the young Cossack’s breast.

“But how came you here? how did you get here?”

“By an underground passage.”

“Is there an underground passage?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“You will not betray it, warrior?”

“I swear it by the holy cross!”

“You descend into a hole, and cross the brook, yonder among the reeds.”

“And it leads into the city?”

“Straight into the monastery.”

“Let us go, let us go at once.”

“A bit of bread, in the name of Christ and of His holy mother!”

"Good, so be it. Stand here beside the waggon, or, better still, lie down in it: no one will see you, all are asleep. I will return at once."

And he set off for the baggage waggons, which contained the provisions belonging to their kuren. His heart beat. All the past, all that had been extinguished by the Cossack bivouacks, and by the stern battle of life, flamed out at once on the surface and drowned the present in its turn. Again, as from the dark depths of the sea, the noble lady rose before him: again there gleamed in his memory her beautiful arms, her eyes, her laughing mouth, her thick dark-chestnut hair, falling in curls upon her shoulders, and the firm, well-rounded limbs of her maiden form. No, they had not been extinguished in his breast, they had not vanished, they had simply been laid aside, in order, for a time, to make way for other strong emotions; but often, very often, the young Cossack's deep slumber had been troubled by them, and often he had lain sleepless on his couch, without being able to explain the cause.

His heart beat more violently at the thought of seeing her again, and his young knees shook. On reaching the baggage waggons, he had quite forgotten what he had come for; he raised his hand to his brow and rubbed it long, trying to recollect what he was to do. At length he shuddered, and was filled with terror as the thought suddenly occurred to him that she was dying of hunger. He jumped upon the waggon and seized several large loaves of black bread; but then he thought, "Is this not food, suited to a robust and easily satisfied Zaporozhetz, too coarse and unfit for her delicate frame?" Then he recollected that the Koschevoi, on the previous evening, had reproved the cooks for having cooked up all the oatmeal into porridge at once, when there was plenty for three times. Sure that he would find plenty of porridge in the kettles, he drew out his father's travelling kettle and went with it to the cook of their kuren, who was sleeping beside two big cauldrons, holding about ten pailfuls, under which the ashes still glowed. Glancing into them, he was amazed to find them empty. It must have required supernatural powers to eat it all; the more so, as their kuren numbered fewer than the others. He looked into the cauldron of the other kurens—nothing anywhere. Involuntarily the saying recurred to his mind, "The Zaporozhtzi are like children: if there is little they eat it, if there is much they leave nothing." What was to be done? There was, somewhere in the waggon belonging to his father's band, a sack of white bread, which they had found when they pillaged the bakery of the monastery. He went straight to his father's waggon, but it was not there. Ostap had taken it and put it under his head; and there he lay, stretched out on the ground, snoring so that the whole plain rang again. Andrii seized the sack abruptly with one hand and gave it a jerk, so that Ostap's head fell to the ground. The elder brother sprang up in his sleep, and, sitting there with closed eyes, shouted at the top of his lungs, "Stop them! Stop the cursed Lyakhs! Catch the horses! catch the horses!"—"Silence! I'll kill you," shouted Andrii in terror, flourishing the sack over him. But Ostap did not continue his speech, sank down again, and gave such a snore that the grass on which he lay waved with his breath.

Andrii glanced timidly on all sides to see if Ostap's talking in his sleep had waked any of the Cossacks. Only one long-locked head was raised in the adjoining kuren, and after glancing about, was dropped back on the ground. After waiting a couple of minutes he set out with his load. The Tatar woman was lying where he had left her, scarcely breathing. "Come, rise up. Fear not, all are sleeping. Can you take one of these loaves if I cannot carry all?" So saying, he swung the sack on to his back, pulled out another sack of millet as he passed the waggon, took in his hands the loaves he had wanted to give the Tatar woman to carry, and, bending somewhat under the load, went boldly through the ranks of sleeping Zaporozhtzi.

"Andrii," said old Bulba, as he passed. His heart died within him. He halted, trembling, and said softly, "What is it?"

"There's a woman with you. When I get up I'll give you a sound thrashing. Women will lead you to no good." So saying, he leaned his hand upon his hand and gazed intently at the muffled form of the Tatar.

Andrii stood there, more dead than alive, not daring to look in his father's face. When he did raise his eyes and glance at him, old Bulba was asleep, with his head still resting in the palm of his hand.

Andrii crossed himself. Fear fled from his heart even more rapidly than it had assailed it. When he turned to look at the Tatar woman, she stood before him, muffled in her mantle, like a dark granite statue, and the gleam of the distant dawn lighted up only her eyes, dull as those of a corpse. He plucked her by the sleeve, and both went on together, glancing back continually. At length they descended the slope of a small ravine, almost a hole, along the bottom of which a brook flowed lazily, overgrown with sedge, and strewed with mossy boulders. Descending into this ravine, they were completely concealed from the view of all the plain occupied by the Zaporovian camp. At least Andrii, glancing back, saw that the steep slope rose behind him higher than a man. On its summit appeared a few blades of steppe-grass; and behind them, in the sky, hung the moon, like a golden sickle. The breeze rising on the steppe warned them that the dawn was not far off. But nowhere was the crow of the cock heard. Neither in the city nor in the devastated neighbourhood had there been a cock for a long time past. They crossed the brook on a small plank, beyond which rose the opposite bank, which appeared higher than the one behind them and rose steeply. It seemed as though this were the strong point of the citadel upon which the besieged could rely; at all events, the earthen wall was lower there, and no garrison appeared behind it. But farther on rose the thick monastery walls. The steep bank was overgrown with steppe-grass, and in the narrow ravine between it and the brook grew tall reeds almost as high as a man. At the summit of the bank were the remains of a wattled fence, which had formerly surrounded some garden, and in front of it were visible the wide leaves of the burdock, from among which rose blackthorn, and sunflowers lifting their heads high above all the rest. Here the Tatar flung off her slippers and went barefoot, gathering her clothes up carefully, for the spot was marshy and full of water. Forcing their way among the reeds, they stopped before a ruined outwork. Skirting this outwork, they found a sort of earthen arch—an opening not much larger than the opening of an oven. The Tatar woman bent her head and went first. Andrii followed, bending low as he could, in order to pass with his sacks; and both soon found themselves in total darkness.

CHAPTER VI

Andrii could hardly move in the dark and narrow earthen burrow, as he followed the Tatar, dragging after him his sacks of bread. “It will soon be light,” said his guide: “we are approaching the spot where I placed a light.” And in fact the dark earthen walls began to be gradually lit up. They reached a widening in the passage where, it seemed, there had once been a chapel; at least, there was a small table against the wall, like an altar, and above, the faded, almost entirely obliterated picture of a Catholic Madonna. A small silver lamp hanging before it barely illumined it. The Tatar stooped and picked up from the ground a copper candlestick which she had left there, a candlestick with a tall, slender stem, and snuffers, pin, and extinguisher hanging about it on chains. She lighted it at the silver lamp. The light grew stronger; and as they went on, now illumined by it, and again enveloped in pitchy shadow, they suggested a picture by Gerard Dow.

The warrior’s fresh, handsome countenance, overflowing with health and youth, presented a strong contrast to the pale, emaciated face of his companion. The passage grew a little higher, so that Andrii could hold himself erect. He gazed with curiosity at the earthen walls. Here and there, as in the catacombs at Kief, were niches in the walls; and in some places coffins were standing. Sometimes they came across human bones which had become softened with the dampness and were crumbling into dust. It was evident that pious folk had taken refuge here from the storms, sorrows, and seductions of the world. It was extremely damp in some places; indeed there was water under their feet at intervals. Andrii was forced to halt frequently to allow his companion to rest, for her fatigue kept increasing. The small piece of bread she had swallowed only caused a pain in her stomach, of late unused to food; and she often stood motionless for minutes together in one spot.

At length a small iron door appeared before them. “Glory be to God, we have arrived!” said the Tatar in a faint voice, and tried to lift her hand to knock, but had no strength to do so. Andrii knocked hard at the door in her stead. There was an echo as though a large space lay beyond the door; then the echo changed as if resounding through lofty arches. In a couple of minutes, keys rattled, and steps were heard descending some stairs. At length the door opened, and a monk, standing on the narrow stairs with the key and a light in his hands, admitted them. Andrii involuntarily halted at the sight of a Catholic monk—one of those who had aroused such hate and disdain among the Cossacks that they treated them even more inhumanly than they treated the Jews.

The monk, on his part, started back on perceiving a Zaporovian Cossack, but a whisper from the Tatar reassured him. He lighted them in, fastened the door behind them, and led them up the stairs. They found themselves beneath the dark and lofty arches of the monastery church. Before one of the altars, adorned with tall candlesticks and candles, knelt a priest praying quietly. Near him on each side knelt two young choristers in lilac cassocks and white lace stoles, with censers in their hands. He prayed for the performance of a miracle, that the city might be saved; that their souls might be strengthened; that patience might be given them; that doubt and timid, weak-spirited mourning over earthly misfortunes might be banished. A few women, resembling shadows, knelt supporting themselves against the backs of the chairs and dark wooden benches before them, and laying their exhausted heads upon them. A few men stood sadly, leaning against the columns upon which the wide arches rested. The stained-glass window above the altar suddenly glowed with the rosy light of dawn; and from it, on the floor, fell circles of blue, yellow, and other colours, illuminating the dim church. The whole altar was lighted up; the smoke from the censers hung a cloudy rainbow in the air. Andrii gazed from his dark corner, not without surprise, at the wonders worked by the light. At that moment the magnificent swell of the organ filled the whole church. It grew deeper and deeper, expanded, swelled into heavy bursts of thunder; and then all at once, turning into heavenly music, its ringing tones floated high among the arches, like clear maiden voices, and again descended into

a deep roar and thunder, and then ceased. The thunderous pulsations echoed long and tremulously among the arches; and Andrii, with half-open mouth, admired the wondrous music.

Then he felt some one plucking the shirt of his caftan. “It is time,” said the Tatar. They traversed the church unperceived, and emerged upon the square in front. Dawn had long flushed the heavens; all announced sunrise. The square was empty: in the middle of it still stood wooden pillars, showing that, perhaps only a week before, there had been a market here stocked with provisions. The streets, which were unpaved, were simply a mass of dried mud. The square was surrounded by small, one-storied stone or mud houses, in the walls of which were visible wooden stakes and posts obliquely crossed by carved wooden beams, as was the manner of building in those days. Specimens of it can still be seen in some parts of Lithuania and Poland. They were all covered with enormously high roofs, with a multitude of windows and air-holes. On one side, close to the church, rose a building quite detached from and taller than the rest, probably the town-hall or some official structure. It was two stories high, and above it, on two arches, rose a belvedere where a watchman stood; a huge clock-face was let into the roof.

The square seemed deserted, but Andrii thought he heard a feeble groan. Looking about him, he perceived, on the farther side, a group of two or three men lying motionless upon the ground. He fixed his eyes more intently on them, to see whether they were asleep or dead; and, at the same moment, stumbled over something lying at his feet. It was the dead body of a woman, a Jewess apparently. She appeared to be young, though it was scarcely discernible in her distorted and emaciated features. Upon her head was a red silk kerchief; two rows of pearls or pearl beads adorned the beads of her head-dress, from beneath which two long curls hung down upon her shrivelled neck, with its tightly drawn veins. Beside her lay a child, grasping convulsively at her shrunken breast, and squeezing it with involuntary ferocity at finding no milk there. He neither wept nor screamed, and only his gently rising and falling body would have led one to guess that he was not dead, or at least on the point of breathing his last. They turned into a street, and were suddenly stopped by a madman, who, catching sight of Andrii’s precious burden, sprang upon him like a tiger, and clutched him, yelling, “Bread!” But his strength was not equal to his madness. Andrii repulsed him and he fell to the ground. Moved with pity, the young Cossack flung him a loaf, which he seized like a mad dog, gnawing and biting it; but nevertheless he shortly expired in horrible suffering, there in the street, from the effect of long abstinence. The ghastly victims of hunger startled them at every step. Many, apparently unable to endure their torments in their houses, seemed to run into the streets to see whether some nourishing power might not possibly descend from the air. At the gate of one house sat an old woman, and it was impossible to say whether she was asleep or dead, or only unconscious; at all events, she no longer saw or heard anything, and sat immovable in one spot, her head drooping on her breast. From the roof of another house hung a worn and wasted body in a rope noose. The poor fellow could not endure the tortures of hunger to the last, and had preferred to hasten his end by a voluntary death.

At the sight of such terrible proofs of famine, Andrii could not refrain from saying to the Tatar, “Is there really nothing with which they can prolong life? If a man is driven to extremities, he must feed on what he has hitherto despised; he can sustain himself with creatures which are forbidden by the law. Anything can be eaten under such circumstances.”

“They have eaten everything,” said the Tatar, “all the animals. Not a horse, nor a dog, nor even a mouse is to be found in the whole city. We never had any store of provisions in the town: they were all brought from the villages.”

“But how can you, while dying such a fearful death, still dream of defending the city?”

“Possibly the Waiwode might have surrendered; but yesterday morning the commander of the troops at Buzhana sent a hawk into the city with a note saying that it was not to be given up; that he was coming to its rescue with his forces, and was only waiting for another leader, that they might march together. And now they are expected every moment. But we have reached the house.”

Andrii had already noticed from a distance this house, unlike the others, and built apparently by some Italian architect. It was constructed of thin red bricks, and had two stories. The windows of the lower story were sheltered under lofty, projecting granite cornices. The upper story consisted entirely of small arches, forming a gallery; between the arches were iron gratings enriched with escutcheons; whilst upon the gables of the house more coats-of-arms were displayed. The broad external staircase, of tinted bricks, abutted on the square. At the foot of it sat guards, who with one hand held their halberds upright, and with the other supported their drooping heads, and in this attitude more resembled apparitions than living beings. They neither slept nor dreamed, but seemed quite insensible to everything; they even paid no attention to who went up the stairs. At the head of the stairs, they found a richly-dressed warrior, armed cap-a-pie, and holding a breviary in his hand. He turned his dim eyes upon them; but the Tatar spoke a word to him, and he dropped them again upon the open pages of his breviary. They entered the first chamber, a large one, serving either as a reception-room, or simply as an ante-room; it was filled with soldiers, servants, secretaries, huntsmen, cup-bearers, and the other servitors indispensable to the support of a Polish magnate's estate, all seated along the walls. The reek of extinguished candles was perceptible; and two were still burning in two huge candlesticks, nearly as tall as a man, standing in the middle of the room, although morning had long since peeped through the wide grated window. Andrii wanted to go straight on to the large oaken door adorned with a coat-of-arms and a profusion of carved ornaments, but the Tatar pulled his sleeve and pointed to a small door in the side wall. Through this they gained a corridor, and then a room, which he began to examine attentively. The light which filtered through a crack in the shutter fell upon several objects—a crimson curtain, a gilded cornice, and a painting on the wall. Here the Tatar motioned to Andrii to wait, and opened the door into another room from which flashed the light of a fire. He heard a whispering, and a soft voice which made him quiver all over. Through the open door he saw flit rapidly past a tall female figure, with a long thick braid of hair falling over her uplifted hands. The Tatar returned and told him to go in.

He could never understand how he entered and how the door was shut behind him. Two candles burned in the room and a lamp glowed before the images: beneath the lamp stood a tall table with steps to kneel upon during prayer, after the Catholic fashion. But his eye did not seek this. He turned to the other side and perceived a woman, who appeared to have been frozen or turned to stone in the midst of some quick movement. It seemed as though her whole body had sought to spring towards him, and had suddenly paused. And he stood in like manner amazed before her. Not thus had he pictured to himself that he should find her. This was not the same being he had formerly known; nothing about her resembled her former self; but she was twice as beautiful, twice as enchanting, now than she had been then. Then there had been something unfinished, incomplete, about her; now here was a production to which the artist had given the finishing stroke of his brush. That was a charming, giddy girl; this was a woman in the full development of her charms. As she raised her eyes, they were full of feeling, not of mere hints of feeling. The tears were not yet dry in them, and framed them in a shining dew which penetrated the very soul. Her bosom, neck, and arms were moulded in the proportions which mark fully developed loveliness. Her hair, which had in former days waved in light ringlets about her face, had become a heavy, luxuriant mass, a part of which was caught up, while part fell in long, slender curls upon her arms and breast. It seemed as though her every feature had changed. In vain did he seek to discover in them a single one of those which were engraved in his memory—a single one. Even her great pallor did not lessen her wonderful beauty; on the contrary, it conferred upon it an irresistible, inexpressible charm. Andrii felt in his heart a noble timidity, and stood motionless before her. She, too, seemed surprised at the appearance of the Cossack, as he stood before her in all the beauty and might of his young manhood, and in the very immovability of his limbs personified the utmost freedom of movement. His eyes beamed with clear decision; his velvet brows curved in a bold arch; his sunburnt cheeks glowed with all the ardour of youthful fire; and his downy black moustache shone like silk.

"No, I have no power to thank you, noble sir," she said, her silvery voice all in a tremble. "God alone can reward you, not I, a weak woman." She dropped her eyes, her lids fell over them in beautiful, snowy semicircles, guarded by lashes long as arrows; her wondrous face bowed forward, and a delicate flush overspread it from within. Andrii knew not what to say; he wanted to say everything. He had in his mind to say it all ardently as it glowed in his heart—and could not. He felt something confining his mouth; voice and words were lacking; he felt that it was not for him, bred in the seminary and in the tumult of a roaming life, to reply fitly to such language, and was angry with his Cossack nature.

At that moment the Tatar entered the room. She had cut up the bread which the warrior had brought into small pieces on a golden plate, which she placed before her mistress. The lady glanced at her, at the bread, at her again, and then turned her eyes towards Andrii. There was a great deal in those eyes. That gentle glance, expressive of her weakness and her inability to give words to the feeling which overpowered her, was far more comprehensible to Andrii than any words. His heart suddenly grew light within him, all seemed made smooth. The mental emotions and the feelings which up to that moment he had restrained with a heavy curb, as it were, now felt themselves released, at liberty, and anxious to pour themselves out in a resistless torrent of words. Suddenly the lady turned to the Tatar, and said anxiously, "But my mother? you took her some?"

"She is asleep."

"And my father?"

"I carried him some; he said that he would come to thank the young lord in person."

She took the bread and raised it to her mouth. With inexpressible delight Andrii watched her break it with her shining fingers and eat it; but all at once he recalled the man mad with hunger, who had expired before his eyes on swallowing a morsel of bread. He turned pale and, seizing her hand, cried, "Enough! eat no more! you have not eaten for so long that too much bread will be poison to you now." And she at once dropped her hand, laid her bread upon the plate, and gazed into his eyes like a submissive child. And if any words could express—But neither chisel, nor brush, nor mighty speech is capable of expressing what is sometimes seen in glances of maidens, nor the tender feeling which takes possession of him who receives such maiden glances.

"My queen!" exclaimed Andrii, his heart and soul filled with emotion, "what do you need? what do you wish? command me! Impose on me the most impossible task in all the world: I fly to fulfil it! Tell me to do that which it is beyond the power of man to do: I will fulfil it if I destroy myself. I will ruin myself. And I swear by the holy cross that ruin for your sake is as sweet—but no, it is impossible to say how sweet! I have three farms; half my father's droves of horses are mine; all that my mother brought my father, and which she still conceals from him—all this is mine! Not one of the Cossacks owns such weapons as I; for the pommel of my sword alone they would give their best drove of horses and three thousand sheep. And I renounce all this, I discard it, I throw it aside, I will burn and drown it, if you will but say the word, or even move your delicate black brows! But I know that I am talking madly and wide of the mark; that all this is not fitting here; that it is not for me, who have passed my life in the seminary and among the Zaporozhtzi, to speak as they speak where kings, princes, and all the best of noble knighthood have been. I can see that you are a different being from the rest of us, and far above all other boyars' wives and maiden daughters."

With growing amazement the maiden listened, losing no single word, to the frank, sincere language in which, as in a mirror, the young, strong spirit reflected itself. Each simple word of this speech, uttered in a voice which penetrated straight to the depths of her heart, was clothed in power. She advanced her beautiful face, pushed back her troublesome hair, opened her mouth, and gazed long, with parted lips. Then she tried to say something and suddenly stopped, remembering that the warrior was known by a different name; that his father, brothers, country, lay beyond, grim avengers; that the Zaporozhtzi besieging the city were terrible, and that the cruel death awaited all who were within its walls, and her eyes suddenly filled with tears. She seized a silk embroidered handkerchief and threw it over her face. In a moment it was all wet; and she sat for some time with her beautiful

head thrown back, and her snowy teeth set on her lovely under-lip, as though she suddenly felt the sting of a poisonous serpent, without removing the handkerchief from her face, lest he should see her shaken with grief.

"Speak but one word to me," said Andrii, and he took her satin-skinned hand. A sparkling fire coursed through his veins at the touch, and he pressed the hand lying motionless in his.

But she still kept silence, never taking the kerchief from her face, and remaining motionless.

"Why are you so sad? Tell me, why are you so sad?"

She cast away the handkerchief, pushed aside the long hair which fell over her eyes, and poured out her heart in sad speech, in a quiet voice, like the breeze which, rising on a beautiful evening, blows through the thick growth of reeds beside the stream. They rustle, murmur, and give forth delicately mournful sounds, and the traveller, pausing in inexplicable sadness, hears them, and heeds not the fading light, nor the gay songs of the peasants which float in the air as they return from their labours in meadow and stubble-field, nor the distant rumble of the passing waggon.

"Am not I worthy of eternal pity? Is not the mother that bore me unhappy? Is it not a bitter lot which has befallen me? Art not thou a cruel executioner, fate? Thou has brought all to my feet —the highest nobles in the land, the richest gentlemen, counts, foreign barons, all the flower of our knighthood. All loved me, and any one of them would have counted my love the greatest boon. I had but to beckon, and the best of them, the handsomest, the first in beauty and birth would have become my husband. And to none of them didst thou incline my heart, O bitter fate; but thou didst turn it against the noblest heroes of our land, and towards a stranger, towards our enemy. O most holy mother of God! for what sin dost thou so pitilessly, mercilessly, persecute me? In abundance and superfluity of luxury my days were passed, the richest dishes and the sweetest wine were my food. And to what end was it all? What was it all for? In order that I might at last die a death more cruel than that of the meanest beggar in the kingdom? And it was not enough that I should be condemned to so horrible a fate; not enough that before my own end I should behold my father and mother perish in intolerable torment, when I would have willingly given my own life twenty times over to save them; all this was not enough, but before my own death I must hear words of love such as I had never before dreamed of. It was necessary that he should break my heart with his words; that my bitter lot should be rendered still more bitter; that my young life should be made yet more sad; that my death should seem even more terrible; and that, dying, I should reproach thee still more, O cruel fate! and thee— forgive my sin—O holy mother of God!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.