

HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

THE LION OF THE NORTH:
A TALE OF THE TIMES OF
GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS

George Henty

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G. A. Henty

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PREFACE

MY DEAR LADS,

You are nowadays called upon to acquire so great a mass of learning and information in the period of life between the ages of twelve and eighteen that it is not surprising that but little time can be spared for the study of the history of foreign nations. Most lads are, therefore, lamentably ignorant of the leading events of even the most important epochs of Continental history, although, as many of these events have exercised a marked influence upon the existing state of affairs in Europe, a knowledge of them is far more useful, and, it may be said, far more interesting than that of the comparatively petty affairs of Athens, Sparta, Corinth, and Thebes.

Prominent among such epochs is the Thirty Years' War, which arose from the determination of the Emperor of Austria to crush out Protestantism throughout Germany. Since the invasion of the Huns no struggle which has taken place in Europe has approached this in the obstinacy of the fighting and the terrible sufferings which the war inflicted upon the people at large. During these thirty years the population of Germany decreased by nearly a third, and in some of the states half the towns and two-thirds of the villages absolutely disappeared.

The story of the Thirty Years' War is too long to be treated in one volume. Fortunately it divides itself naturally into two parts. The first begins with the entry of Sweden, under her chivalrous monarch Gustavus Adolphus, upon the struggle, and terminates with his death and that of his great rival Wallenstein. This portion of the war has been treated in the present story. The second period begins at the point when France assumed the leading part in the struggle, and concluded with the peace which secured liberty of conscience to the Protestants of Germany. This period I hope to treat some day in another story, so that you may have a complete picture of the war. The military events of the present tale, the battles, sieges, and operations, are all taken from the best authorities, while for the account of the special doings of Mackay's, afterwards Munro's Scottish Regiment, I am indebted to Mr. J. Grant's Life of Sir John Hepburn.

Yours sincerely,
G. A. HENTY

CHAPTER I THE INVITATION

It was late in the afternoon in the spring of the year 1630; the hilltops of the south of Scotland were covered with masses of cloud, and a fierce wind swept the driving rain before it with such force that it was not easy to make way against it. It had been raining for three days without intermission. Every little mountain burn had become a boiling torrent, while the rivers had risen above their banks and flooded the low lands in the valleys.

The shades of evening were closing in, when a lad of some sixteen years of age stood gazing across the swollen waters of the Nith rushing past in turbid flood. He scarce seemed conscious of the pouring rain; but with his lowland bonnet pressed down over his eyes, and his plaid wrapped tightly round him, he stood on a rising hummock of ground at the edge of the flood, and looked across the stream.

“If they are not here soon,” he said to himself, “they will not get across the Nith tonight. None but bold riders could do so now; but by what uncle says, Captain Hume must be that and more. Ah! here they come.”

As he spoke two horsemen rode down the opposite side of the valley and halted at the water’s edge. The prospect was not a pleasant one. The river was sixty or seventy feet wide, and in the centre the water swept along in a raging current.

“You cannot cross here,” the boy shouted at the top of his voice. “You must go higher up where the water’s deeper.”

The wind swept his words away, but his gestures were understood.

“The boy is telling us to go higher up,” said one of the horsemen.

“I suppose he is,” the other replied; “but here is the ford. You see the road we have travelled ends here, and I can see it again on the other side. It is getting dark, and were we to cross higher up we might lose our way and get bogged; it is years since I was here. What’s the boy going to do now? Show us a place for crossing?”

The lad, on seeing the hesitation of the horsemen, had run along the bank up the stream, and to their surprise, when he had gone a little more than a hundred yards he dashed into the water. For a time the water was shallow, and he waded out until he reached the edge of the regular bank of the river, and then swam out into the current.

“Go back,” the horseman shouted; but his voice did not reach the swimmer, who, in a few strokes, was in the full force of the stream, and was soon lost to the sight of the horsemen among the short foaming waves of the torrent.

“The boy will be drowned,” one of the horsemen said, spurring his horse up the valley; but in another minute the lad was seen breasting the calmer water just above the ford.

“You cannot cross here, Captain Hume,” he said, as he approached the horsemen. “You must go nigh a mile up the river.”

“Why, who are you, lad?” the horseman asked, “and how do you know my name?”

“I’m the nephew of Nigel Graheme. Seeing how deep the floods were I came out to show you the way, for the best horse in the world could not swim the Nith here now.”

“But this is the ford,” Captain Hume said.

“Yes, this is the ford in dry weather. The bottom here is hard rock and easy to ride over when the river is but waist deep, but below and above this place it is covered with great boulders. The water is six feet deep here now, and the horses would be carried down among the rocks, and would never get across. A mile up the river is always deep, and though the current is strong there is nothing to prevent a bold horseman from swimming across.”

“I thank you heartily, young sir,” Captain Hume said. “I can see how broken is the surface of the water, and doubt not that it would have fared hard with us had we attempted to swim across here. In faith, Munro, we have had a narrow escape.”

“Ay, indeed,” the other agreed. “It would have been hard if you and I, after going through all the battlefields of the Low Countries, should have been drowned here together in a Scottish burn. Your young friend is a gallant lad and a good swimmer, for in truth it was no light task to swim that torrent with the water almost as cold as ice.”

“Now, sirs, will you please to ride on,” the boy said; “it is getting dark fast, and the sooner we are across the better.”

So saying he went off at a fast run, the horses trotting behind him. A mile above he reached the spot he had spoken of. The river was narrower here, and the stream was running with great rapidity, swirling and heaving as it went, but with a smooth even surface.

“Two hundred yards farther up,” the boy said, “is the beginning of the deep; if you take the water there you will get across so as to climb up by that sloping bank just opposite.”

He led the way to the spot he indicated, and then plunged into the stream, swimming quietly and steadily across, and allowing the stream to drift him down.

The horsemen followed his example. They had swum many a swollen river, and although their horses snorted and plunged at first, they soon quieted down and swam steadily over. They just struck the spot which the boy had indicated. He had already arrived there, and, without a word, trotted forward.

It was soon dark, and the horsemen were obliged to keep close to his heels to see his figure. It was as much as they could do to keep up with him, for the ground was rough and broken, sometimes swampy, sometimes strewn with boulders.

“It is well we have a guide,” Colonel Munro said to his companion; “for assuredly, even had we got safely across the stream, we should never have found our way across such a country as this. Scotland is a fine country, Hume, a grand country, and we are all proud of it, you know, but for campaigning, give me the plains of Germany; while, as for your weather here, it is only fit for a water rat.”

Hume laughed at this outburst.

“I sha’n’t be sorry, Munro, for a change of dry clothes and a corner by a fire; but we must be nearly there now if I remember right. Graheme’s hold is about three miles from the Nith.”

The boy presently gave a loud shout, and a minute later lights were seen ahead, and in two or three minutes the horsemen drew up at a door beside which two men were standing with torches; another strolled out as they stopped.

“Welcome, Hume! I am glad indeed to see you; and—ah! is it you, Munro? it is long indeed since we met.”

“That is it, Graheme; it is twelve years since we were students together at St. Andrews.”

“I did not think you would have come on such a night,” Graheme said.

“I doubt that we should have come tonight, or any other night, Nigel, if it had not been that that brave boy who calls you uncle swam across the Nith to show us the best way to cross. It was a gallant deed, and I consider we owe him our lives.”

“It would have gone hard with you, indeed, had you tried to swim the Nith at the ford; had I not made so sure you would not come I would have sent a man down there. I missed Malcolm after dinner, and wondered what had become of him. But come in and get your wet things off. It is a cold welcome keeping you here. My men will take your horses round to the stable and see that they are well rubbed down and warmly littered.”

In a quarter of an hour the party were assembled again in the sitting room. It was a bare room with heavily timbered ceiling and narrow windows high up from the ground; for the house was built for purposes of defence, like most Scottish residences in those days. The floor was thickly strewn

with rushes. Arms and trophies of the chase hung on the walls, and a bright fire blazing on the hearth gave it a warm and cheerful aspect. As his guests entered the room Graheme presented them with a large silver cup of steaming liquor.

“Drain this,” he said, “to begin with. I will warrant me a draught of spiced wine will drive the cold of the Nith out of your bones.”

The travellers drank off the liquor.

“’Tis a famous drink,” Hume said, “and there is nowhere I enjoy it so much as in Scotland, for the cold here seems to have a knack of getting into one’s very marrow, though I will say there have been times in the Low Countries when we have appreciated such a draught. Well, and how goes it with you, Graheme?”

“Things might be better; in fact, times in Scotland have been getting worse and worse ever since King James went to England, and all the court with him. If it were not for an occasional raid among the wild folks of Galloway, and a few quarrels among ourselves, life would be too dull to bear here.”

“But why bear it?” Captain Hume asked. “You used to have plenty of spirit in our old college days, Graheme, and I wonder at your rusting your life out here when there is a fair field and plenty of honour, to say nothing of hard cash, to be won in the Low Country. Why, beside Hepburn’s regiment, which has made itself a name throughout all Europe, there are half a score of Scottish regiments in the service of the King of Sweden, and his gracious majesty Gustavus Adolphus does not keep them idle, I warrant you.”

“I have thought of going a dozen times,” Graheme said, “but you see circumstances have kept me back; but I have all along intended to cross the seas when Malcolm came of an age to take the charge of his father’s lands. When my brother James was dying from that sword thrust he got in a fray with the Duffs, I promised him I would be a father to the boy, and see that he got his rights.”

“Well, we will talk of the affair after supper, Graheme, for now that I have got rid of the cold I begin to perceive that I am well nigh famished.”

As the officer was speaking, the servitors were laying the table, and supper was soon brought in. After ample justice had been done to this, and the board was again cleared, the three men drew their seats round the fire, Malcolm seating himself on a low stool by his uncle.

“And now to business, Nigel,” Colonel Munro said. “We have not come back to Scotland to see the country, or to enjoy your weather, or even for the pleasure of swimming your rivers in flood.

“We are commissioned by the King of Sweden to raise some 3000 or 4000 more Scottish troops. I believe that the king intends to take part in the war in Germany, where the Protestants are getting terribly mauled, and where, indeed, it is likely that the Reformed Religion will be stamped out altogether unless the Swedes strike in to their rescue. My chief object is to fill up to its full strength of two thousand men the Mackay Regiment, of which I am lieutenant colonel. The rest of the recruits whom we may get will go as drafts to fill up the vacancies in the other regiments. So you see here we are, and it is our intention to beat up all our friends and relations, and ask them each to raise a company or half a company of recruits, of which, of course, they would have the command.

“We landed at Berwick, and wrote to several of our friends that we were coming. Scott of Jedburgh has engaged to raise a company. Balfour of Lauderdale, who is a cousin of mine, has promised to bring another; they were both at St. Andrew’s with us, as you may remember, Graheme. Young Hamilton, who had been an ensign in my regiment, left us on the way. He will raise a company in Douglasdale. Now, Graheme, don’t you think you can bring us a band of the men of Nithsdale?”

“I don’t know,” Graheme said hesitatingly. “I should like it of all things, for I am sick of doing nothing here, and my blood often runs hot when I read of the persecutions of the Protestants in Germany; but I don’t think I can manage it.”

“Oh, nonsense, Nigel!” said Hume; “you can manage it easily enough if you have the will. Are you thinking of the lad there? Why not bring him with you? He is young, certainly, but he could carry a colour; and as for his spirit and bravery, Munro and I will vouch for it.”

“Oh, do, uncle,” the lad exclaimed, leaping to his feet in his excitement. “I promise you I would not give you any trouble; and as for marching, there isn’t a man in Nithsdale who can tire me out across the mountains.”

“But what’s to become of the house, Malcolm, and the land and the herds?”

“Oh, they will be all right,” the boy said. “Leave old Duncan in charge, and he will look after them.”

“But I had intended you to go to St. Andrews next year, Malcolm, and I think the best plan will be for you to go there at once. As you say, Duncan can look after the place.”

Malcolm’s face fell.

“Take the lad with you, Graheme,” Colonel Munro said. “Three years under Gustavus will do him vastly more good than will St. Andrews. You know it never did us any good to speak of. We learned a little more Latin than we knew when we went there, but I don’t know that that has been of any use to us; whereas for the dry tomes of divinity we waded through, I am happy to say that not a single word of the musty stuff remains in my brains. The boy will see life and service, he will have opportunities of distinguishing himself under the eye of the most chivalrous king in Europe, he will have entered a noble profession, and have a fair chance of bettering his fortune, all of which is a thousand times better than settling down here in this corner of Scotland.”

“I must think it over,” Graheme said; “it is a serious step to take. I had thought of his going to the court at London after he left the university, and of using our family interest to push his way there.”

“What is he to do in London?” Munro said. “The old pedant James, who wouldn’t spend a shilling or raise a dozen men to aid the cause of his own daughter, and who thought more of musty dogmatic treatises than of the glory and credit of the country he ruled over, or the sufferings of his co-religionists in Germany, has left no career open to a lad of spirit.”

“Well, I will think it over by the morning,” Graheme said. “And now tell me a little more about the merits of this quarrel in Germany. If I am going to fight, I should like at least to know exactly what I am fighting about.”

“My dear fellow,” Hume laughed, “you will never make a soldier if you always want to know the ins and outs of every quarrel you have to fight about; but for once the tenderest conscience may be satisfied as to the justice of the contention. But Munro is much better versed in the history of the affair than I am; for, to tell you the truth, beyond the fact that it is a general row between the Protestants and Catholics, I have not troubled myself much in the matter.”

“You must know,” Colonel Munro began, “that some twenty years ago the Protestant princes of Germany formed a league for mutual protection and support, which they called the Protestant Union; and a year later the Catholics, on their side, constituted what they called the Holy League. At that time the condition of the Protestants was not unbearable. In Bohemia, where they constituted two-thirds of the population, Rudolph II, and after him Mathias, gave conditions of religious freedom.

“Gradually, however, the Catholic party about the emperor gained the upper hand; then various acts in breach of the conditions granted to the Protestants were committed, and public spirit on both sides became much embittered. On the 23d of May, 1618, the Estates of Bohemia met at Prague, and the Protestant nobles, headed by Count Thurn, came there armed, and demanded from the Imperial councillors an account of the high handed proceedings. A violent quarrel ensued, and finally the Protestant deputies seized the councillors Martinitz and Slavata, and their secretary, and hurled them from the window into the dry ditch, fifty feet below. Fortunately for the councillors the ditch contained a quantity of light rubbish, and they and their secretary escaped without serious damage. The incident, however, was the commencement of war. Bohemia was almost independent of Austria, administering its own internal affairs. The Estates invested Count Thurn with the command of the army. The Protestant Union supported Bohemia in its action. Mathias, who was himself a tolerant and well meaning man, tried to allay the storm; but, failing to do so, marched an army into Bohemia.

“Had Mathias lived matters would probably have arranged themselves, but he died the following spring, and was succeeded by Ferdinand II. Ferdinand is one of the most bigoted Catholics living, and is at the same time a bold and resolute man; and he had taken a solemn vow at the shrine of Loretto that, if ever he came to the throne, he would re-establish Catholicism throughout his dominions. Both parties prepared for the strife; the Bohemians renounced their allegiance to him and nominated the Elector Palatine Frederick V, the husband of our Scotch princess, their king.

“The first blow was struck at Zablati. There a Union army, led by Mansfeldt, was defeated by the Imperial general Bucquoi. A few days later, however, Count Thurn, marching through Moravia and Upper Austria, laid siege to Vienna. Ferdinand’s own subjects were estranged from him, and the cry of the Protestant army, ‘Equal rights for all Christian churches,’ was approved by the whole population—for even in Austria itself there were a very large number of Protestants. Ferdinand had but a few soldiers, the population of the city were hostile, and had Thurn only entered the town he could have seized the emperor without any resistance.

“Thurn hesitated, and endeavoured instead to obtain the conditions of toleration which the Protestants required; and sixteen Austrian barons in the city were in the act of insisting upon Ferdinand signing these when the head of the relieving army entered the city. Thurn retired hastily. The Catholic princes and representatives met at Frankfort and elected Ferdinand Emperor of Germany. He at once entered into a strict agreement with Maximilian of Bavaria to crush Protestantism throughout Germany. The Bohemians, however, in concert with Bethlem Gabor, king of Hungary, again besieged Vienna; but as the winter set in they were obliged to retire. From that moment the Protestant cause was lost; Saxony and Hesse-Darmstadt left the Union and joined Ferdinand. Denmark, which had promised its assistance to the Protestants, was persuaded to remain quiet. Sweden was engaged in a war with the Poles.

“The Protestant army was assembled at Ulm; the army of the League, under the order of Maximilian of Bavaria, was at Donauworth. Maximilian worked upon the fears of the Protestant princes, who, frightened at the contest they had undertaken, agreed to a peace, by which they bound themselves to offer no aid to Frederick V.

“The Imperial forces then marched to Bohemia and attacked Frederick’s army outside Prague, and in less than an hour completely defeated it. Frederick escaped with his family to Holland. Ferdinand then took steps to carry out his oath. The religious freedom granted by Mathias was abolished. In Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, and Austria proper. Many of the promoters of the rebellion were punished in life and property. The year following all members of the Calvinistic sect were forced to leave their country, a few months afterwards the Lutherans were also expelled, and in 1627 the exercise of all religious forms except those of the Catholic Church was forbidden; 200 of the noble, and 30,000 of the wealthier and industrial classes, were driven into exile; and lands and property to the amount of 5,000,000 or 6,000,000 pounds were confiscated.

“The hereditary dominions of Frederick V were invaded, the Protestants were defeated, the Palatinate entirely subdued, and the electorate was conferred upon Maximilian of Bavaria; and the rigid laws against the Protestants were carried into effect in the Palatinate also. It had now become evident to all Europe that the Emperor of Austria was determined to stamp out Protestantism throughout Germany; and the Protestant princes, now thoroughly alarmed, besought aid from the Protestant countries, England, Holland, and Denmark. King James, who had seen unmoved the misfortunes which had befallen his daughter and her husband, and who had been dead to the general feeling of the country, could no longer resist, and England agreed to supply an annual subsidy; Holland consented to supply troops; and the King of Denmark joined the League, and was to take command of the army.

“In Germany the Protestants of lower Saxony and Brunswick, and the partisan leader Mansfeldt, were still in arms. The army under the king of Denmark advanced into Brunswick, and was there confronted by that of the league under Tilly, while an Austrian army, raised by Wallenstein, also

marched against it. Mansfeldt endeavoured to prevent Wallenstein from joining Tilly, but was met and defeated by the former general. Mansfeldt was, however, an enterprising leader, and falling back into Brandenburg, recruited his army, joined the force under the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, and started by forced marches to Silesia and Moravia, to join Bethlem Gabor in Hungary. Wallenstein was therefore obliged to abandon his campaign against the Danes and to follow him. Mansfeldt joined the Hungarian army, but so rapid were his marches that his force had dwindled away to a mere skeleton, and the assistance which it would be to the Hungarians was so small that Bethlem Gabor refused to cooperate with it against Austria.

“Mansfeldt disbanded his remaining soldiers, and two months afterwards died. Wallenstein then marched north. In the meantime Tilly had attacked King Christian at Lutter, and completely defeated him. I will tell you about that battle some other time. When Wallenstein came north it was decided that Tilly should carry the war into Holland, and that Wallenstein should deal with the King of Denmark and the Protestant princes. In the course of two years he drove the Danes from Silesia, subdued Brandenburg and Mecklenburg, and, advancing into Pomerania, besieged Stralsund.

“What a siege that was to be sure! Wallenstein had sworn to capture the place, but he didn’t reckon upon the Scots. After the siege had begun Lieutenant General Sir Alexander Leslie, with 5000 Scots and Swedes, fought his way into the town; and though Wallenstein raised fire upon it, though we were half starved and ravaged by plague, we held out for three months, repulsing every assault, till at last the Imperialists were obliged to draw off; having lost 12,200 men.

“This, however, was the solitary success on our side, and a few months since, Christian signed a peace, binding himself to interfere no more in the affairs of Germany. When Ferdinand considered himself free to carry out his plans, he issued an edict by which the Protestants throughout Germany were required to restore to the Catholics all the monasteries and land which had formerly belonged to the Catholic Church. The Catholic service was alone to be performed, and the Catholic princes of the empire were ordered to constrain their subjects, by force if necessary, to conform to the Catholic faith; and it was intimated to the Protestant princes that they would be equally forced to carry the edict into effect. But this was too much. Even France disapproved, not from any feeling of pity on the part of Richelieu for the Protestants, but because it did not suit the interests of France that Ferdinand should become the absolute monarch of all Germany.

“In these circumstances Gustavus of Sweden at once resolved to assist the Protestants in arms, and ere long will take the field. That is what has brought us here. Already in the Swedish army there are 10,000 Scotchmen, and in Denmark they also form the backbone of the force; and both in the Swedish and Danish armies the greater part of the native troops are officered and commanded by Scotchmen.

“Hitherto I myself have been in the Danish service, but my regiment is about to take service with the Swedes. It has been quietly intimated to us that there will be no objection to our doing so, although Christian intends to remain neutral, at any rate for a time. We suffered very heavily at Lutter, and I need 500 men to fill up my ranks to the full strength.

“Now, Graheme, I quite rely upon you. You were at college with Hepburn, Hume, and myself, and it will be a pleasure for us all to fight side by side; and if I know anything of your disposition I am sure you cannot be contented to be remaining here at the age of nine-and-twenty, rusting out your life as a Scotch laird, while Hepburn has already won a name which is known through Europe.”

CHAPTER II SHIPWRECKED

Upon the following morning Nigel Graheme told his visitors that he had determined to accept their offer, and would at once set to work to raise a company.

“I have,” he said, “as you know, a small patrimony of my own, and as for the last eight years I have been living here looking after Malcolm I have been laying by any rents, and can now furnish the arms and accoutrements for a hundred men without difficulty. When Malcolm comes of age he must act for himself, and can raise two or three hundred men if he chooses; but at present he will march in my company. I understand that I have the appointment of my own officers.”

“Yes, until you join the regiment,” Munro said. “You have the first appointments. Afterwards the colonel will fill up vacancies. You must decide how you will arm your men, for you must know that Gustavus’ regiments have their right and left wings composed of musketeers, while the centre is formed of pikemen, so you must decide to which branch your company shall belong.”

“I would choose the pike,” Nigel said, “for after all it must be by the pike that the battle is decided.”

“Quite right, Nigel. I have here with me a drawing of the armour in use with us. You see they have helmets of an acorn shape, with a rim turning up in front; gauntlets, buff coats well padded in front, and large breast plates. The pikes vary from fourteen to eighteen feet long according to the taste of the commander. We generally use about sixteen. If your company is a hundred strong you will have two lieutenants and three ensigns. Be careful in choosing your officers. I will fill in the king’s commission to you as captain of the company, authorizing you to enlist men for his service and to appoint officers thereto.”

An hour or two later Colonel Munro and Captain Hume proceeded on their way. The news speedily spread through Nithsdale that Nigel Graheme had received a commission from the King of Sweden to raise a company in his service, and very speedily men began to pour in. The disbandment of the Scottish army had left but few careers open at home to the youth of that country, and very large numbers had consequently flocked to the Continent and taken service in one or other of the armies there, any opening of the sort, therefore, had only to be known to be freely embraced. Consequently, in eight-and-forty hours Nigel Graheme had applications from a far larger number than he could accept, and he was enabled to pick and choose among the applicants. Many young men of good family were among them, for in those days service in the ranks was regarded as honourable, and great numbers of young men of good family and education trailed a pike in the Scotch regiments in the service of the various powers of Europe. Two young men whose property adjoined his own, Herries and Farquhar, each of whom brought twenty of his own tenants with him, were appointed lieutenants, while two others, Leslie and Jamieson, were with Malcolm named as ensigns. The noncommissioned officers were appointed from men who had served before. Many of the men already possessed armour which was suitable, for in those days there was no strict uniformity of military attire, and the armies of the various nationalities differed very slightly from each other. Colonel Munro returned in the course of a fortnight, Nigel Graheme’s company completing the number of men required to fill up the ranks of his regiment.

Captain Hume had proceeded further north. Colonel Munro stopped for a week in Nithsdale, giving instructions to the officers and noncommissioned officers as to the drill in use in the Swedish army. Military manoeuvres were in these days very different to what they have now become. The movements were few and simple, and easily acquired. Gustavus had, however, introduced an entirely new formation into his army. Hitherto troops had fought in solid masses, twenty or more deep. Gustavus taught his men to fight six deep, maintaining that if troops were steady this depth of formation should be able to sustain any assault upon it, and that with a greater depth the men behind were useless in the fight. His cavalry fought only three deep. The recruits acquired the new tactics

with little difficulty. In Scotland for generations every man and boy had received a certain military training, and all were instructed in the use of the pike; consequently, at the end of a week Colonel Munro pronounced Nigel Graheme's company capable of taking their place in the regiment without discredit, and so went forward to see to the training of the companies of Hamilton, Balfour, and Scott, having arranged with Graheme to march his company to Dunbar in three weeks' time, when he would be joined by the other three companies. Malcolm was delighted with the stir and bustle of his new life. Accustomed to hard exercise, to climbing and swimming, he was a strong and well grown lad, and was in appearance fully a year beyond his age. He felt but little fatigued by the incessant drill in which the days were passed, though he was glad enough of an evening to lay aside his armour, of which the officers wore in those days considerably more than the soldiers, the mounted officers being still clad in full armour, while those on foot wore back and arm pieces, and often leg pieces, in addition to the helmet and breastplate. They were armed with swords and pistols, and carried besides what were called half pikes, or pikes some 7 feet long. They wore feathers in their helmets, and the armour was of fine quality, and often richly damascened, or inlaid with gold.

Very proud did Malcolm feel as on the appointed day he marched with the company from Nithsdale, with the sun glittering on their arms and a drummer beating the march at their head. They arrived in due course at Dunbar, and were in a few hours joined by the other three companies under Munro himself. The regiment which was now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Munro had been raised in 1626 by Sir Donald Mackay of Farre and Strathnaver, 1500 strong, for the service of the King of Denmark. Munro was his cousin, and when Sir Donald went home shortly before, he succeeded to the command of the regiment. They embarked at once on board a ship which Munro had chartered, and were landed in Denmark and marched to Flensburg, where the rest of the regiment was lying.

A fortnight was spent in severe drill, and then orders were received from Oxenstiern, the chancellor of Sweden, to embark the regiment on board two Swedish vessels, the Lillynichol and the Hound. On board the former were the companies of Captains Robert Munro, Hector Munro, Bullion, Nigel Graheme, and Hamilton. Colonel Munro sailed in this ship, while Major Sennot commanded the wing of the regiment on board the Hound. The baggage horses and ammunition were in a smaller vessel.

The orders were that they were to land at Wolgast on the southern shore of the Baltic. Scarcely had they set sail than the weather changed, and a sudden tempest burst upon them. Higher and higher grew the wind, and the vessels were separated in the night. The Lillynichol laboured heavily in the waves, and the discomfort of the troops, crowded together between decks, was very great. Presently it was discovered that she had made a leak, and that the water was entering fast. Munro at once called forty-eight soldiers to the pumps. They were relieved every quarter of an hour, and by dint of the greatest exertions barely succeeded in keeping down the water. So heavily did the vessel labour that Munro bore away for Dantzic; but when night came on the storm increased in fury. They were now in shoal water, and the vessel, already half waterlogged, became quite unmanageable in the furious waves. Beyond the fact that they were fast driving on to the Pomeranian coast, they were ignorant of their position.

"This is a rough beginning," Nigel said to his nephew. "We bargained to run the risk of being killed by the Germans, but we did not expect to run the hazard of being drowned. I doubt if the vessel can live till morning. It is only eleven o'clock yet, and in spite of the pumps she is getting lower and lower in the water."

Before Malcolm had time to answer him there was a tremendous crash which threw them off their feet. All below struggled on deck, but nothing could be seen in the darkness save masses of foam as the waves broke on the rock on which they had struck. There were two more crashes, and then another, even louder and more terrible, and the vessel broke in two parts.

"Come aft all," Colonel Munro shouted; "this part of the wreck is fixed."

With great efforts all on board managed to reach the after portion of the vessel, which was wedged among the rocks, and soon afterwards the forepart broke up and disappeared. For two hours the sea broke wildly over the ship, and all had to hold on for life.

Malcolm, even in this time of danger, could not but admire the calmness and coolness of his young colonel. He at once set men to work with ropes to drag towards the vessel the floating pieces of wreck which were tossing about in the boiling surf. The masts and yards were hauled alongside, and the colonel instructed the men to make themselves fast to these in case the vessel should go to pieces.

Hour after hour passed, and at last, to the joy of all, daylight appeared. The boats had all been broken to pieces, and Munro now set the men to work to bind the spars and timbers together into a raft. One of the soldiers and a sailor volunteered to try to swim to shore with lines, but both were dashed to pieces.

At one o'clock in the day some natives were seen collecting on the shore, and these presently dragged down a boat and launched it, and with great difficulty rowed out to the ship. A line was thrown to them, and with this they returned to shore, where they made the line fast. The storm was now abating somewhat, and Munro ordered the debarkation to commence.

As many of the troops as could find a place on the raft, or could cling to the ropes fastened on its sides, started first, and by means of the line hauled the raft ashore. A small party then brought it back to the ship, while others manned the boat; and so after a number of trips the whole of the troops and crew were landed, together with all the weapons and armour that could be saved.

From the peasantry Munro now learned that they had been wrecked upon the coast of Rugenwalde, a low lying tract of country in the north of Pomerania. The forts upon it were all in the possession of the Imperialists, while the nearest post of the Swedes was eighty miles away.

The position was not a pleasant one. Many of the arms had been lost, and the gunpowder was of course destroyed. The men were exhausted and worn out with their long struggle with the tempest. They were without food, and might at any moment be attacked by their enemies.

"Something must be done, and that quickly," Munro said, "or our fate will be well nigh as bad as that of the Sinclairs; but before night we can do nothing, and we must hope that the Germans will not discover us till then."

Thereupon he ordered all the men to lie down under shelter of the bushes on the slopes facing the shore, and on no account to show themselves on the higher ground. Then he sent a Walloon officer of the regiment to the Pomeranian seneschal of the old castle of Rugenwalde which belonged to Bogislaus IV, Duke of Pomerania, to inform him that a body of Scotch troops in the service of the Swedish king had been cast on the coast, and begging him to supply them with a few muskets, some dry powder, and bullets, promising if he would do so that the Scotch would clear the town of its Imperial garrison.

The castle itself, which was a very old feudal building, was held only by the retainers of the duke, and the seneschal at once complied with Munro's request, for the Duke of Pomerania, his master, although nominally an ally of the Imperialists, had been deprived of all authority by them, and the feelings of his subjects were entirely with the Swedes.

Fifty old muskets, some ammunition, and some food were sent out by a secret passage to the Scots. There was great satisfaction among the men when these supplies arrived. The muskets which had been brought ashore were cleaned up and loaded, and the feeling that they were no longer in a position to fall helplessly into the hands of any foe who might discover them restored the spirits of the troops, and fatigue and hunger were forgotten as they looked forward to striking a blow at the enemy.

"What did the colonel mean by saying that our position was well nigh as bad as that of the Sinclairs?" Malcolm asked Captain Hector Munro, who with two or three other officers was sheltering under a thick clump of bushes.

"That was a bad business," Captain Munro replied. "It happened now nigh twenty years ago. Colonel Monkhoven, a Swedish officer, had enlisted 2300 men in Scotland for service with Gustavus,

and sailed with them and with a regiment 900 strong raised by Sinclair entirely of his own clan and name. Sweden was at war with Denmark, and Stockholm was invested by the Danish fleet when Monkhoven arrived with his ships. Finding that he was unable to land, he sailed north, landed at Trondheim, and marching over the Norwegian Alps reached Stockholm in safety, where the appearance of his reinforcements discouraged the Danes and enabled Gustavus to raise the siege.

“Unfortunately Colonel Sinclair’s regiment had not kept with Monkhoven, it being thought better that they should march by different routes so as to distract the attention of the Norwegians, who were bitterly hostile. The Sinclairs were attacked several times, but beat off their assailants; when passing, however, through the tremendous gorge of Kringellen, the peasantry of the whole surrounding country gathered in the mountains. The road wound along on one side of the gorge. So steep was the hill that the path was cut in solid rock which rose almost precipitously on one side, while far below at their feet rushed a rapid torrent. As the Sinclairs were marching along through this rocky gorge a tremendous fire was opened upon them from the pine forests above, while huge rocks and stones came bounding down the precipice.

“The Sinclairs strove in vain to climb the mountainside and get at their foes. It was impossible, and they were simply slaughtered where they stood, only one man of the whole regiment escaping to tell the story.”

“That was a terrible massacre indeed,” Malcolm said. “I have read of a good many surprises and slaughters in our Scottish history, but never of such complete destruction as that only one man out of 900 should escape. And was the slaughter never avenged?”

“No,” Munro replied. “We Scots would gladly march north and repay these savage peasants for the massacre of our countrymen, but the King of Sweden has had plenty of occupation for his Scotchmen in his own wars. What with the Russians and the Poles and the Danes his hands have been pretty full from that day to this, and indeed an expedition against the Norsemen is one which would bring more fatigue and labour than profit. The peasants would seek shelter in their forests and mountains, and march as we would we should never see them, save when they fell upon us with advantage in some defile.”

At nightfall the troops were mustered, and, led by the men who had brought the arms, they passed by the secret passage into the castle, and thence sallied suddenly into the town below. There they fell upon a patrol of Imperial cavalry, who were all shot down before they had time to draw their swords. Then scattering through the town, the whole squadron of cuirassiers who garrisoned it were either killed or taken prisoners. This easy conquest achieved, the first care of Munro was to feed his troops. These were then armed from the stores in the town, and a strong guard being placed lest they should be attacked by the Austrian force, which was, they learned, lying but seven miles away, on the other side of the river, the troops lay down to snatch a few hours of needed rest.

In the morning the country was scoured, and a few detached posts of the Austrians captured. The main body then advanced and blew up the bridge across the river. Five days later an order came from Oxenstiern, to whom Munro had at once despatched the news of his capture of Rugenwalde, ordering him to hold it to the last, the position being a very valuable one, as opening an entrance into Pomerania.

The passage of the river was protected by entrenchments, strong redoubts were thrown up round Rugenwalde, and parties crossing the river in boats collected provisions and stores from the country to the very gates of Dantzig. The Austrians rapidly closed in upon all sides, and for nine weeks a constant series of skirmishes were maintained with them.

At the end of that time Sir John Hepburn arrived from Spruce, having pushed forward by order of Oxenstiern by forced marches to their relief. Loud and hearty was the cheering when the two Scotch regiments united, and the friends, Munro and Hepburn, clasped hands. Not only had they been at college together, but they had, after leaving St. Andrews, travelled in companionship on the Continent for two or three years before taking service, Munro entering that of France, while Hepburn

joined Sir Andrew Gray as a volunteer when he led a band to succour the Prince Palatine at the commencement of the war.

“I have another old friend in my regiment, Hepburn,” the colonel said after the first greeting was over—“Nigel Graheme, of course you remember him.”

“Certainly I do,” Hepburn exclaimed cordially, “and right glad will I be to see him again; but I thought your regiment was entirely from the north.”

“It was originally,” Munro said; “but I have filled up the gaps with men from Nithsdale and the south. I was pressed for time, and our glens of Farre and Strathnaver had already been cleared of all their best men. The other companies are all commanded by men who were with us at St. Andrews—Balfour, George Hamilton, and James Scott.”

“That is well,” Hepburn said. “Whether from the north or the south Scots fight equally well; and with Gustavus ‘tis like being in our own country, so large a proportion are we of his majesty’s army. And now, Munro, I fear that I must supersede you in command, being senior to you in the service, and having, moreover, his majesty’s commission as governor of the town and district.”

“There is no one to whom I would more willingly resign the command. I have seen some hard fighting, but have yet my name to win; while you, though still only a colonel, are famous throughout Europe.”

“Thanks to my men rather than to myself,” Hepburn said, “though, indeed, mine is no better than the other Scottish regiments in the king’s service; but we have had luck, and in war, you know, luck is everything.”

There were many officers in both regiments who were old friends and acquaintances, and there was much feasting that night in the Scotch camp. In the morning work began again. The peasants of the district, 8000 strong, were mustered and divided into companies, armed and disciplined, and with these and the two Scotch regiments Hepburn advanced through Pomerania to the gates of Colberg, fifty miles away, clearing the country of the Austrians, who offered, indeed, but a faint resistance.

The Lord of Kniphausen, a general in the Swedish service, now arrived with some Swedish troops, and prepared to besiege the town. The rest of Munro’s regiment accompanied him, having arrived safely at their destination, and the whole were ordered to aid in the investment of Colberg, while Hepburn was to seize the town and castle of Schiefelbrune, five miles distant, and there to check the advance of the Imperialists, who were moving forward in strength towards it.

Hepburn performed his mission with a party of cavalry, and reported that although the castle was dilapidated it was a place of strength, and that it could be held by a resolute garrison; whereupon Munro with 500 men of his regiment was ordered to occupy it. Nigel Graheme’s company was one of those which marched forward on the 6th of November, and entering the town, which was almost deserted by its inhabitants, set to work to prepare it for defence. Ramparts of earth and stockades were hastily thrown up, and the gates were backed by piles of rubbish to prevent them being blown in by petards.

Scarcely were the preparations completed before the enemy were seen moving down the hillside.

“How many are there of them, think you?” Malcolm asked Lieutenant Farquhar.

“I am not skilled in judging numbers, Malcolm, but I should say that there must be fully five thousand.”

There were indeed eight thousand Imperialists approaching, led by the Count of Montecuculi, a distinguished Italian officer, who had with him the regiments of Colorado, Isslani, Goetz, Sparre, and Charles Wallenstein, with a large force of mounted Croats.

Munro’s orders were to hold the town as long as he could, and afterwards to defend the castle to the last man. The Imperial general sent in a message requesting him to treat for the surrender of the place; but Munro replied simply, that as no allusion to the word treaty was contained in his instructions

he should defend the place to the last. The first advance of the Imperialists was made by the cavalry covered by 1000 musketeers, but these were repulsed without much difficulty by the Scottish fire.

The whole force then advanced to the attack with great resolution. Desperately the Highlanders defended the town, again and again the Imperialists were repulsed from the slight rampart, and when at last they won their way into the place by dint of numbers, every street, lane, alley, and house was defended to the last. Malcolm was almost bewildered at the din, the incessant roll of musketry, the hoarse shouts of the contending troops, the rattling of the guns, and the shrieks of pain.

Every time the Imperialists tried to force their way in heavy columns up the streets the Scots poured out from the houses to resist them, and meeting them pike to pike hurled them backwards. Malcolm tried to keep cool, and to imitate the behaviour of his senior officers, repeating their orders, and seeing that they were carried out.

Time after time the Austrians attempted to carry the place, and were always hurled back, although outnumbering the Scots by nigh twenty to one. At last the town was in ruins, and was on fire in a score of places. Its streets and lanes were heaped with dead, and it was no longer tenable. Munro therefore gave orders that the houses should everywhere be set on fire, and the troops fall back to the castle.

Steadily and in good order his commands were carried out, and with levelled pikes, still facing the enemy, the troops retired into the castle. The Imperial general, seeing how heavy had been his losses in carrying the open town, shrank from the prospect of assaulting a castle defended by such troops, and when night fell he quietly marched away with the force under his command.

CHAPTER III SIR JOHN HEPBURN

Munro's first care, when he found that the Imperialists had retreated in the direction of Colberg, was to send out some horsemen to discover whether the Swedes were in a position to cover that town. The men returned in two hours with the report that Field Marshal Horn, with the Swedish troops from Stettin, had joined Kniphausen and Hepburn, and were guarding the passage between the enemy and Colberg.

Two days later a message arrived to the effect that Sir Donald Mackay, who had now been created Lord Reay, had arrived to take the command of his regiment, and that Nigel Graheme's company was to march and join him; while Munro with the rest of his command was to continue to hold the Castle of Schiefelbrune.

Shortly afterwards General Bauditzen arrived with 4000 men and 18 pieces of cannon to press the siege of Colberg, which was one of the strongest fortresses in North Germany. On the 13th of November the news arrived that Montecuculi was again advancing to raise the siege; and Lord Reay with his half regiment, Hepburn with half his regiment, and a regiment of Swedish infantry marched out to meet him, Kniphausen being in command. They took up a position in a little village a few miles from the town; and here, at four o'clock in the morning, they were attacked by the Imperialists, 7000 strong. The Swedish infantry fled almost without firing a shot, but the Scottish musketeers of Hepburn and Reay stood their ground.

For a time a desperate conflict raged. In the darkness it was utterly impossible to distinguish friend from foe, and numbers on both sides were mown down by the volleys of their own party. In the streets and gardens of the little village men fought desperately with pikes and clubbed muskets. Unable to act in the darkness, and losing many men from the storm of bullets which swept over the village, the Swedish cavalry who had accompanied the column turned and fled; and being unable to resist so vast a superiority of force, Kniphausen gave the word, and the Scotch fell slowly back under cover of the heavy mist which rose with the first breath of day, leaving 500 men, nearly half their force, dead behind them.

Nigel Graheme's company had suffered severely; he himself was badly wounded. A lieutenant and one of the ensigns were killed, with thirty of the men, and many others were wounded with pike or bullet. Malcolm had had his share of the fighting. Several times he and the men immediately round him had been charged by the Imperialists, but their long pikes had each time repulsed the assaults.

Malcolm had before this come to the conclusion, from the anecdotes he heard from the officers who had served through several campaigns, that the first quality of an officer is coolness, and that this is even more valuable than is reckless bravery. He had therefore set before himself that his first duty in action was to be perfectly calm, to speak without hurry or excitement in a quiet and natural tone.

In his first fight at Schiefelbrune he had endeavoured to carry this out, but although he gained much commendation from Nigel and the other officers of the company for his coolness on that occasion, he had by no means satisfied himself; but upon the present occasion he succeeded much better in keeping his natural feelings in check, forcing himself to speak in a quiet and deliberate way without flurry or excitement, and in a tone of voice in no way raised above the ordinary. The effect had been excellent, and the soldiers, in talking over the affair next day, were loud in their praise of the conduct of the young ensign.

"The lad was as cool as an old soldier," one of the sergeants said, "and cooler. Just as the Austrian column was coming on for the third time, shouting, and cheering, and sending their bullets in a hail, he said to me as quietly as if he was giving an order about his dinner, 'I think, Donald, it would be as well to keep the men out of fire until the last moment. Some one might get hurt, you see, before the enemy get close enough to use the pikes.' And then when they came close he said, 'Now, sergeant, I think it is time to move out and stop them.' When they came upon us he was fighting

with his half pike with the best of us. And when the Austrians fell back and began to fire again, and we took shelter behind the houses, he walked about on the road, stooping down over those who had fallen, to see if all were killed, and finding two were alive he called out, 'Will one of you just come and help me carry these men under shelter? They may get hit again if they remain here.' I went out to him, but I can tell you I didn't like it, for the bullets were coming along the road in a shower. His helmet was knocked off by one, and one of the men we were carrying in was struck by two more bullets and killed, and the lad seemed to mind it no more than if it had been a rainstorm in the hills at home. I thought when we left Nithsdale that the captain was in the wrong to make so young a boy an officer, but I don't think so now. Munro himself could not have been cooler. If he lives he will make a great soldier."

The defence of the Scots had been so stubborn that Montecuculi abandoned his attempt to relieve Colberg that day, and so vigilant was the watch which the besiegers kept that he was obliged at last to draw off his troops and leave Colberg to its fate. The place held out to the 26th of February, when the garrison surrendered and were allowed to march out with the honours of war, with pikes carried, colours flying, drums beating, matches lighted, with their baggage, and with two pieces of cannon loaded and ready for action. They were saluted by the army as they marched away to the nearest town held by the Austrians, and as they passed by Schiefelbrune Munro's command were drawn up and presented arms to the 1500 men who had for three months resisted every attempt to capture Colberg by assault.

Nigel Graheme's wound was so severe that he was obliged for a time to relinquish the command of his company, which he handed over to Herries.

As there had been two vacancies among the officers Malcolm would naturally have been promoted to the duties of lieutenant, but at his urgent request his uncle chose for the purpose a young gentleman of good family who had fought in the ranks, and had much distinguished himself in both the contests. Two others were also promoted to fill up the vacancies as ensigns.

The troops after the capture of Colberg marched to Stettin, around which town they encamped for a time, while Gustavus completed his preparations for his march into Germany. While a portion of his army had been besieging Colberg, Gustavus had been driving the Imperialists out of the whole of Pomerania. Landing on the 24th of June with an army in all of 15,000 infantry, 2000 cavalry, and about 3000 artillery, he had, after despatching troops to aid Munro and besiege Colberg, marched against the Imperialists under Conti. These, however, retreated in great disorder and with much loss of men, guns, and baggage, into Brandenburg; and in a few weeks after the Swedish landing only Colberg, Greifswald, and Demming held out. In January Gustavus concluded a treaty with France, who agreed to pay him an annual subsidy of 400,000 thalers on the condition that Gustavus maintained in the field an army of 30,000 infantry and 6000 cavalry, and assured to the princes and peoples whose territory he might occupy the free exercise of their religion. England also promised a subsidy, and the Marquis of Hamilton was to bring over 6000 infantry; but as the king did not wish openly to take part in the war this force was not to appear as an English contingent. Another regiment of Highlanders was brought over by Colonel John Munro of Obstell, and also a regiment recruited in the Lowlands by Colonel Sir James Lumsden.

Many other parties of Scotch were brought over by gentlemen of rank. Four chosen Scottish regiments, Hepburn's regiment, Lord Reay's regiment, Sir James Lumsden's musketeers, and Stargate's corps, were formed into one brigade under the command of Hepburn. It was called the Green Brigade, and the doublets, scarfs, feathers, and standards were of that colour. The rest of the infantry were divided into the Yellow, Blue, and White Brigades.

One evening when the officers of Reay's regiment were sitting round the campfire Lieutenant Farquhar said to Colonel Munro:

"How is it that Sir John Hepburn has, although still so young, risen to such high honour in the counsel of the king; how did he first make his way?"

“He first entered the force raised by Sir Andrew Gray, who crossed from Leith to Holland, and then uniting with a body of English troops under Sir Horace Vere marched to join the troops of the Elector Palatine. It was a work of danger and difficulty for so small a body of men to march through Germany, and Spinola with a powerful force tried to intercept them. They managed, however, to avoid him, and reached their destination in safety.

“Vere’s force consisted of 2200 men, and when he and Sir Andrew Gray joined the Margrave of Anspach the latter had but 4000 horse and 4000 foot with him. There was a good deal of fighting, and Hepburn so distinguished himself that although then but twenty years old he obtained command of a company of pikemen in Sir Andrew Gray’s band, and this company was specially selected as a bodyguard for the king.

“There was one Scotchman in the band who vied even with Hepburn in the gallantry of his deeds. He was the son of a burgher of Stirling named Edmund, and on one occasion, laying aside his armour, he swam the Danube at night in front of the Austrian lines, and penetrated to the very heart of the Imperial camp. There he managed to enter the tent of the Imperialist general, the Count de Bucquoi, gagged and bound him, carried him to the river, swam across with him and presented him as a prisoner to the Prince of Orange, under whose command he was then serving.

“It was well for Hepburn that at the battle of Prague he was guarding the king, or he also might have fallen among the hosts who died on that disastrous day. When the elector had fled the country Sir Andrew Gray’s bands formed part of Mansfeldt’s force, under whom they gained great glory. When driven out of the Palatinate they still kept up the war in various parts of Germany and Alsace. With the Scotch companies of Colonel Henderson they defended Bergen when the Marquis of Spinola besieged it. Morgan with an English brigade was with them, and right steadily they fought. Again and again the Spaniards attempted to storm the place, but after losing 12,000 men they were forced to withdraw on the approach of Prince Maurice.

“The elector now made peace with the emperor, and Mansfeldt’s bands found themselves without employment. Mansfeldt in vain endeavoured to obtain employment under one of the powers, but failing, marched into Lorraine. There, it must be owned, they plundered and ravaged till they were a terror to the country. At last the Dutch, being sorely pressed by the Spaniards, offered to take them into their pay, and the bands marched out from Lorraine in high spirits.

“They were in sore plight for fighting, for most of them had been obliged to sell even their arms and armour to procure food. Spinola, hearing of their approach pushed forward with a strong force to intercept them, and so came upon them at Fleurus, eight miles from Namur, on the 30th of August, 1622.

“The Scots were led by Hepburn, Hume, and Sir James Ramsay; the English by Sir Charles Rich, brother to the Earl of Warwick, Sir James Hayes, and others. The odds seemed all in favour of the Spaniards who were much superior in numbers, and were splendidly accoutred and well disciplined, and what was more, were well fed, while Mansfeldt’s bands were but half armed and almost wholly starving.

“It was a desperate battle, and the Spaniards in the end remained masters of the field, but Mansfeldt with his bands had burst their way through them, and succeeded in crossing into Holland. Here their position was bettered; for, though there was little fighting for them to do, and they could get no pay, they lived and grew fat in free quarters among the Dutch. At last the force broke up altogether; the Germans scattered to their homes, the English crossed the seas, and Hepburn led what remained of Sir Andrew Gray’s bands to Sweden, where he offered their services to Gustavus. The Swedish king had already a large number of Scotch in his service, and Hepburn was made a colonel, having a strong regiment composed of his old followers inured to war and hardship, and strengthened by a number of new arrivals. When in 1625 hostilities were renewed with Poland Hepburn’s regiment formed part of the army which invaded Polish Prussia. The first feat in which he distinguished himself in the service of Sweden was at the relief of Mewe, a town in Eastern Prussia, which was blockaded

by King Sigismund at the head of 30,000 Poles. The town is situated at the confluence of the Bersa with the Vistula, which washes two sides of its walls.

“In front of the other face is a steep green eminence which the Poles had very strongly entrenched, and had erected upon it ten batteries of heavy cannon. As the town could only be approached on this side the difficulties of the relieving force were enormous; but as the relief of the town was a necessity in order to enable Gustavus to carry out the campaign he intended, the king determined to make a desperate effort to effect it.

“He selected 3000 of his best Scottish infantry, among whom was Hepburn’s own regiment, and 500 horse under Colonel Thurn. When they were drawn up he gave them a short address on the desperate nature of the service they were about to perform, namely, to cut a passage over a strongly fortified hill defended by 30,000 men. The column, commanded by Hepburn, started at dusk, and, unseen by the enemy, approached their position, and working round it began to ascend the hill by a narrow and winding path encumbered by rocks and stones, thick underwood, and overhanging trees.

“The difficulty for troops with heavy muskets, cartridges, breastplates, and helmets, to make their way up such a place was enormous, and the mountain side was so steep that they were frequently obliged to haul themselves up by the branches of the trees; nevertheless, they managed to make their way through the enemy’s outposts unobserved, and reached the summit, where the ground was smooth and level.

“Here they fell at once upon the Poles, who were working busily at their trenches, and for a time gained a footing there; but a deadly fire of musketry with showers of arrows and stones, opened upon them from all points, compelled the Scots to recoil from the trenches, when they were instantly attacked by crowds of horsemen in mail shirts and steel caps. Hepburn drew off his men till they reached a rock on the plateau, and here they made their stand, the musketeers occupying the rock, the pikemen forming in a wall around it.

“They had brought with them the portable chevaux-de-frise carried by the infantry in the Swedish service. They fixed this along in front, and it aided the spearmen greatly in resisting the desperate charges of the Polish horsemen. Hepburn was joined by Colonel Mostyn, an Englishman, and Count Brahe, with 200 German arquebusiers, and this force for two days withstood the incessant attacks of the whole of the Polish army.

“While this desperate strife was going on, and the attention of the enemy entirely occupied, Gustavus managed to pass a strong force of men and a store of ammunition into the town, and the Poles, seeing that he had achieved his purpose, retired unmolested. In every battle which Gustavus fought Hepburn bore a prominent part. He distinguished himself at the storming of Kesmark and the defeat of the Poles who were marching to its relief.

“He took part in the siege and capture of Marienburg and in the defeat of the Poles at Dirschau. He was with Leslie when last year he defended Stralsund against Wallenstein, and inflicted upon the haughty general the first reverse he had ever met with. Truly Hepburn has won his honours by the edge of the sword.”

“Wallenstein is the greatest of the Imperial commanders, is he not?” Farquhar asked.

“He and Tilly,” Munro replied. “Tis a question which is the greatest. They are men of a very different stamp. Tilly is a soldier, and nothing but a soldier, save that he is a fanatic in religion. He is as cruel as he is brave, and as portentously ugly as he is cruel.

“Wallenstein is a very different man. He has enormous ambition and great talent, and his possessions are so vast that he is a dangerous subject for any potentate, even the most powerful. Curiously enough, he was born of Protestant parents, but when they died, while he was yet a child, he was committed to the care of his uncle, Albert Slavata, a Jesuit, and was by him brought up a strict Catholic. When he had finished the course of his study at Metz he spent some time at the University of Altdorf, and afterwards studied at Bologna and Padua. He then travelled in Italy, Germany, France, Spain, England, and Holland, studying the military forces and tactics of each country.

“On his return to Bohemia he took service under the Emperor Rudolph and joined the army of General Basta in Hungary, where he distinguished himself greatly at the siege of Grau. When peace was made in 1606 Wallenstein returned to Bohemia, and though he was but twenty-three years old he married a wealthy old widow, all of whose large properties came to him at her death eight years afterwards.

“Five years later he raised at his own cost two hundred dragoons to support Ferdinand of Gratz in his war against the Venetians. Here he greatly distinguished himself, and was promoted to a colonelcy. He married a second time, and again to one of the richest heiresses of Austria. On the outbreak of the religious war of 1618 he raised a regiment of Cuirassiers, and fought at its head. Two years later he was made quartermaster general of the army, and marched at the head of an independent force into Moravia, and there re-established the Imperial authority.

“The next year he bought from the Emperor Ferdinand, for a little over 7,000,000 florins, sixty properties which the emperor had confiscated from Protestants whom he had either executed or banished. He had been made a count at the time of his second marriage; he was now named a prince, which title was changed into that of the Duke of Friedland. They say that his wealth is so vast that he obtains two millions and a half sterling a year from his various estates.

“When in 1625 King Christian of Denmark joined in the war against the emperor, Wallenstein raised at his own cost an army of 50,000 men and defeated Mansfeldt’s army. After that he cleared the Danes out of Silesia, conquered Brandenburg and Mecklenburg, and laid siege to Stralsund, and there broke his teeth against our Scottish pikes. For his services in that war Wallenstein received the duchy of Mecklenburg.

“At present he is in retirement. The conquests which his army have made for the emperor aroused the suspicion and jealousy of the German princes, and it may be that the emperor himself was glad enough of an excuse to humble his too powerful subject. At any rate, Wallenstein’s army was disbanded, and he retired to one of his castles. You may be sure we shall hear of him again. Tilly, you know, is the Bavarian commander, and we shall probably encounter him before long.”

New Brandenburg and several other towns were captured and strongly garrisoned, 600 of Reay’s regiment under Lieutenant Colonel Lindsay being left in New Brandenburg. Nigel Grahame was still laid up, but his company formed part of the force.

“This is ill fortune indeed,” Malcolm said to Lieutenant Farquhar, “thus to be shut up here while the army are marching away to win victories in the field.”

“It is indeed, Malcolm, but I suppose that the king thinks that Tilly is likely to try and retake these places, and so to threaten his rear as he marches forward. He would never have placed as strong a force of his best soldiers here if he had not thought the position a very important one.”

The troops were quartered in the larger buildings of New Brandenburg; the officers were billeted upon the burghers. The position of the country people and the inhabitants of the towns of Germany during this long and desolating war was terrible; no matter which side won, they suffered. There were in those days no commissariat wagons bringing up stores from depots and magazines to the armies. The troops lived entirely upon the country through which they marched. In exceptional cases, when the military chest happened to be well filled, the provisions acquired might be paid for, but as a rule armies upon the march lived by foraging. The cavalry swept in the flocks and herds from the country round. Flour, forage, and everything else required was seized wherever found, and the unhappy peasants and villagers thought themselves lucky if they escaped with the loss of all they possessed, without violence, insult, and ill treatment. The slightest resistance to the exactions of the lawless foragers excited their fury, and indiscriminate slaughter took place. The march of an army could be followed by burned villages, demolished houses, crops destroyed, and general ruin, havoc, and desolation.

In the cases of towns these generally escaped indiscriminate plunder by sending deputies forward to meet advancing armies, when an offer would be made to the general to supply so much

food and to pay so much money on condition that private property was respected. In these cases the main body of the troops was generally encamped outside the town. Along the routes frequently followed by armies the country became a desert, the hapless people forsook their ruined homes, and took refuge in the forests or in the heart of the hills, carrying with them their portable property, and driving before them a cow or two and a few goats.

How great was the general slaughter and destruction may be judged by the fact that the population of Germany decreased by half during the war, and in Bohemia the slaughter was even greater. At the commencement of the war the population of Bohemia consisted of 3,000,000 of people, inhabiting 738 towns and 34,700 villages. At the end of the war there were but 780,000 inhabitants, 230 towns, and 6000 villages. Thus three out of four of the whole population had been slaughtered during the struggle.

Malcolm was, with Lieutenant Farquhar, quartered upon one of the principal burghers of New Brandenburg, and syndic of the weavers. He received them cordially.

“I am glad,” he said, “to entertain two Scottish officers, and, to speak frankly, your presence will be of no slight advantage, for it is only the houses where officers are quartered which can hope to escape from the plunder and exactions of the soldiers. My wife and I will do our best to make you comfortable, but we cannot entertain you as we could have done before this war began, for trade is altogether ruined. None have money wherewith to buy goods. Even when free from the presence of contending armies, the country is infested with parties of deserters or disbanded soldiers, who plunder and murder all whom they meet, so that none dare travel along the roads save in strong parties. I believe that there is scarce a village standing within twenty miles, and many parts have suffered much more than we have. If this war goes on, God help the people, for I know not what will become of them. This is my house, will you please to enter.”

Entering a wide hall, he led them into a low sitting room where his wife and three daughters were at work. They started up with looks of alarm at the clatter of steel in the hall.

“Wife,” the syndic said as he entered, “these are two gentlemen, officers of the Scottish regiment; they will stay with us during the occupation of the town. I know that you and the girls will do your best to make their stay pleasant to them.”

As the officers removed their helmets the apprehensions of the women calmed down on perceiving that one of their guests was a young man of three or four and twenty, while the other was a lad, and that both had bright pleasant faces in no way answering the terrible reputation gained by the invincible soldiers of the Swedish king.

“I hope,” Farquhar said pleasantly, “that you will not put yourselves out of your way for us. We are soldiers of fortune accustomed to sleep on the ground and to live on the roughest fare, and since leaving Scotland we have scarcely slept beneath a roof. We will be as little trouble to you as we can, and our two soldier servants will do all that we need.”

Farquhar spoke in German, for so large a number of Germans were serving among the Swedes that the Scottish officers had all learned to speak that language and Swedish, German being absolutely necessary for their intercourse with the country people. This was the more easy as the two languages were akin to each other, and were less broadly separated from English in those days than they are now.

It was nearly a year since Farquhar and Malcolm had landed on the shores of the Baltic, and living as they had done among Swedes and Germans, they had had no difficulty in learning to speak both languages fluently.

CHAPTER IV NEW BRANDENBURG

Farquhar and Malcolm Graheme were soon at home with their hosts. The syndic had offered to have their meals prepared for them in a separate chamber, but they begged to be allowed to take them with the family, with whom they speedily became intimate.

Three weeks after the capture of New Brandenburg the news came that Tilly with a large army was rapidly approaching.

Every effort was made to place the town in a position of defence. Day after day messengers came in with the news that the other places which had been garrisoned by the Swedes had been captured, and very shortly the Imperialist army was seen approaching. The garrison knew that they could expect no relief from Gustavus, who had ten days before marched northward, and all prepared for a desperate resistance. The townsfolk looked on with trembling apprehension, their sympathies were with the defenders, and, moreover, they knew that in any case they might expect pillage and rapine should the city be taken, for the property of the townspeople when a city was captured was regarded by the soldiery as their lawful prize, whether friendly to the conquerors or the reverse. The town was at once summoned to surrender, and upon Lindsay's refusal the guns were placed in position, and the siege began.

As Tilly was anxious to march away to the north to oppose Gustavus he spared no effort to reduce New Brandenburg as speedily as possible, and his artillery fired night and day to effect breaches in the walls. The Scotch officers saw little of their hosts now, for they were almost continually upon the walls.

At the first news of the approach of the Imperialists the syndic had sent away his daughters to the house of a relative at Stralsund, where his son was settled in business. When Farquhar and Malcolm returned to eat a meal or to throw themselves on their beds to snatch a short sleep, the syndic anxiously questioned them as to the progress of the siege. The reports were not hopeful. In several places the walls were crumbling, and it was probable that a storm would shortly be attempted. The town itself was suffering heavily, for the balls of the besiegers frequently flew high, and came crashing among the houses. Few of the inhabitants were to be seen in the streets; all had buried their most valuable property, and with scared faces awaited the issue of the conflict.

After six days' cannonade the walls were breached in many places, and the Imperialists advanced to the assault. The Scotch defended them with great resolution, and again and again the Imperialists recoiled, unable to burst their way through the lines of pikes or to withstand the heavy musketry fire poured upon them from the walls and buildings.

But Tilly's army was so strong that he was able continually to bring up fresh troops to the attack, while the Scotch were incessantly engaged. For eight-and-forty hours the defenders resisted successfully, but at last, worn out by fatigue, they were unable to withstand the onslaught of the enemy, and the latter forced their way into the town. Still the Scots fought on. Falling back from the breaches, they contested every foot of the ground, holding the streets and lanes with desperate tenacity, and inflicting terrible losses upon the enemy.

At last, twelve hours later, they were gathered in the marketplace, nearly in the centre of the town, surrounded on all sides by the enemy. Several times the Scottish bugles had sounded a parley, but Tilly, furious at the resistance, and at the loss which the capture of the town had entailed, had issued orders that no quarter should be given, and his troops pressed the now diminished band of Scotchmen on all sides.

Even now they could not break through the circle of spears, but from every window and roof commanding them a deadly fire was poured in. Colonel Lindsay was shot dead. Captain Moncrieff, Lieutenant Keith, and Farquhar fell close to Malcolm. The shouts of "Kill, kill, no quarter," rose from

the masses of Imperialists. Parties of the Scotch, preferring to die sword in hand rather than be shot down, flung themselves into the midst of the enemy and died fighting.

At last, when but fifty men remained standing, these in a close body rushed at the enemy and drove them by the fury of their attack some distance down the principal street. Then numbers told. The band was broken up, and a desperate hand-to-hand conflict raged for a time.

Two of the Scottish officers alone, Captain Innes and Lieutenant Lumsden, succeeded in breaking their way down a side lane, and thence, rushing to the wall, leapt down into the moat, and swimming across, succeeded in making their escape, and in carrying the news of the massacre to the camp of Gustavus, where the tale filled all with indignation and fury. Among the Scotch regiments deep vows of vengeance were interchanged, and in after battles the Imperialists had cause bitterly to rue having refused quarter to the Scots at New Brandenburg.

When the last melee was at its thickest, and all hope was at an end, Malcolm, who had been fighting desperately with his half pike, found himself for a moment in a doorway. He turned the handle, and it opened at once. The house, like all the others, was full of Imperialists, who had thrown themselves into it when the Scots made their charge, and were now keeping up a fire at them from the upper windows. Closing the door behind him, Malcolm stood for a moment to recover his breath. He had passed unscathed through the three days' fighting, though his armour and helmet were deeply dented in many places.

The din without and above was tremendous. The stroke of sword on armour, the sharp crack of the pistols, the rattle of musketry, the shouts of the Imperialists, and the wild defiant cries of the Highlanders mingled together.

As Malcolm stood panting he recalled the situation, and, remembering that the syndic's house was in the street behind, he determined to gain it, feeling sure that his host would shelter him if he could. Passing through the house he issued into a courtyard, quickly stripped off his armour and accoutrements, and threw them into an outhouse. Climbing on the roof of this he got upon the wall, and ran along it until behind the house of the syndic. He had no fear of being observed, for the attention of all in the houses in the street he had left would be directed to the conflict below.

The sound of musketry had already ceased, telling that the work of slaughter was well nigh over, when Malcolm dropped into the courtyard of the syndic; the latter and his wife gave a cry of astonishment as the lad entered the house, breathless and pale as death.

"Can you shelter me awhile?" he said. "I believe that all my countrymen are killed."

"We will do our best, my lad," the syndic said at once. "But the houses will be ransacked presently from top to bottom."

"Let him have one of the servant's disguises," the wife said; "they can all be trusted."

One of the serving men was at once called in, and he hurried off with Malcolm.

The young Scotchmen had made themselves very popular with the servants by their courtesy and care to avoid giving unnecessary trouble, and in a few minutes Malcolm was attired as a serving man, and joined the servants who were busy in spreading the tables with provisions, and in broaching a large cask of wine to allay the passions of the Imperialists.

It was not long before they came. Soon there was a thundering knocking at the door, and upon its being opened a number of soldiers burst in. Many were bleeding from wounds. All bore signs of the desperate strife in which they had been engaged.

"You are welcome," the host said, advancing towards them. "I have made preparations for your coming; eat and drink as it pleases you."

Rushing to the wine casks, the soldiers appeased their thirst with long draughts of wine, and then fell upon the eatables. Other bands followed, and the house was soon filled from top to bottom with soldiers, who ransacked the cupboards, loaded themselves with such things as they deemed worth carrying away, and wantonly broke and destroyed what they could not. The servants were all kept

busy bringing up wine from the cellars. This was of good quality, and the soldiers, well satisfied, abstained from personal violence.

All night long pandemonium reigned in the town. Shrieks and cries, oaths and sounds of conflict arose from all quarters, as citizens or their wives were slaughtered by drunken soldiers, or the latter quarrelled and fought among themselves for some article of plunder. Flames broke out in many places, and whole streets were burned, many of the drunken soldiers losing their lives in the burning houses; but in the morning the bugles rang out, the soldiers desisted from their orgies, and such as were able to stand staggered away to join their colours.

A fresh party marched into the town; these collected the stragglers, and seized all the horses and carts for the carriage of the baggage and plunder. The burgomaster had been taken before Tilly and commanded to find a considerable sum of money the first thing in the morning, under threat that the whole town would be burned down, and the inhabitants massacred if it was not forthcoming.

A council of the principal inhabitants was hastily summoned at daybreak. The syndics of the various guilds between them contributed the necessary sum either in money or in drafts, and at noon Tilly marched away with his troops, leaving the smoking and ruined town behind him. Many of the inhabitants were forced as drivers to accompany the horses and carts taken away. Among these were three of the syndic's serving men, Malcolm being one of the number.

It was well that the Pomeranian dialect differed so widely from the Bavarian, so Malcolm's German had consequently passed muster without suspicion. The Imperialist army, although dragging with them an immense train of carts laden with plunder, marched rapidly. The baggage was guarded by horsemen who kept the train in motion, galloping up and down the line, and freely administering blows among their captives whenever a delay or stoppage occurred.

The whole country through which they passed was desolated and wasted, and the army would have fared badly had it not been for the herds of captured cattle they drove along with them, and the wagons laden with flour and wine taken at New Brandenburg and the other towns they had stormed. The marches were long, for Tilly was anxious to accomplish his object before Gustavus should be aware of the direction he was taking.

This object was the capture of the town of Magdeburg, a large and important city, and one of the strongholds of Protestantism. Here he was resolved to strike a blow which would, he believed, terrify Germany into submission.

When Gustavus heard that Tilly had marched west, he moved against Frankfort-on-the-Oder, where the Imperialists were commanded by Count Schomberg. The latter had taken every measure for the defence of the town, destroying all the suburbs, burning the country houses and mills, and cutting down the orchards and vineyards.

Gustavus, accompanied by Sir John Hepburn, at once reconnoitred the place and posted his troops. The Blue and Yellow Brigades were posted among the vineyards on the road to Custrin; the White Brigade took post opposite one of the two gates of the town. Hepburn and the Green Brigade were stationed opposite the other.

As the Swedes advanced the Imperialist garrison, who were 10,000 strong, opened fire with musketry and cannon from the walls. The weakest point in the defence was assigned by Schomberg to Colonel Walter Butler, who commanded a regiment of Irish musketeers in the Imperialist service. In the evening Hepburn and some other officers accompanied the king to reconnoitre near the walls. A party of Imperialists, seeing some officers approaching, and judging by their waving plumes they were of importance, sallied quietly out of a postern gate unperceived and suddenly opened fire. Lieutenant Munro, of Munro's regiment, was shot in the leg, and Count Teuffel, a colonel of the Life Guards, in the arm. A body of Hepburn's regiment, under Major Sinclair, rushed forward and drove in the Imperialists, a lieutenant colonel and a captain being captured.

So hotly did they press the Imperialists that they were able to make a lodgment, on some high ground near the rampart, on which stood an old churchyard surrounded by a wall, and whence their

fire could sweep the enemy's works. Some cannon were at once brought up and placed in position here, and opened fire on the Guben gate. Captain Gunter, of Hepburn's regiment, went forward with twelve men, and in spite of a very heavy fire from the walls reconnoitred the ditch and approaches to the walls.

The next day all was ready for the assault. It was Palm Sunday, the 3d of April, and the attack was to take place at five o'clock in the afternoon. Before advancing, Hepburn and several of the other officers wished to lay aside their armour, as its weight was great, and would impede their movements. The king, however, forbade them to do so.

"No," he said; "he who loves my service will not risk life lightly. If my officers are killed, who is to command my soldiers?"

Fascines and scaling ladders were prepared. The Green Brigade were to head the assault, and Gustavus, addressing them, bade them remember New Brandenburg.

At five o'clock a tremendous cannonade was opened on the walls from all the Swedish batteries, and under cover of the smoke the Green Brigade advanced to the assault. From the circle of the walls a cloud of smoke and fire broke out from cannon and arquebus, muskets, and wall pieces. Sir John Hepburn and Colonel Lumsden, side by side, led on their regiments against the Guben gate; both carried petards.

In spite of the tremendous fire poured upon them from the wall they reached the gate, and the two colonels fixed the petards to it and retired a few paces. In a minute there was a tremendous explosion, and the gate fell scattered in fragments. Then the Scottish pikemen rushed forward. As they did so there was a roar of cannon, and a storm of bullets ploughed lanes through the close ranks of the pikemen, for the Imperialists, expecting the attack, had placed cannon, loaded to the muzzle with bullets, behind the gates.

Munro's regiment now leapt into the moat, waded across, and planting their ladders under a murderous fire, stormed the works flanking the gate, and then joined their comrades, who were striving to make an entrance. Hepburn, leading on the pikemen, was hit on the knee, where he had in a former battle been badly wounded.

"Go on, bully Munro," he said jocularly to his old schoolfellow, "for I am wounded."

A major who advanced to take his place at the head of the regiment was shot dead, and so terrible was the fire that even the pikemen of Hepburn's regiment wavered for a moment; but Munro and Lumsden, with their vizors down and half pikes in their hands, cheered on their men, and, side by side, led the way.

"My hearts!" shouted Lumsden, waving his pike—"my brave hearts, let's enter."

"Forward!" shouted Munro; "advance pikes!"

With a wild cheer the Scots burst forward; the gates were stormed, and in a moment the cannon, being seized, were turned, and volleys of bullets poured upon the dense masses of the Imperialists. The pikemen pressed forward in close column, shoulder to shoulder, the pikes levelled in front, the musketeers behind firing on the Imperialists in the houses.

In the meantime Gustavus, with the Blue and Yellow Swedish Brigades, stormed that part of the wall defended by Butler with his Irishmen. These fought with extreme bravery, and continued their resistance until almost every man was killed, when the two brigades burst into the town, the White Brigade storming the wall in another quarter. Twice the Imperialist drums beat a parley, but their sound was deadened by the roar of musketry and the boom of cannon from wall and battery, and the uproar and shouting in every street and house. The Green Brigade, under its commander, maintained its regular order, pressing forward with resistless strength. In vain the Austrians shouted for quarter. They were met by shouts of—"Remember New Brandenburg!"

Even now, when all was lost, Tilly's veterans fought with extreme bravery and resolution; but at last, when Butler had fallen, and Schomberg and Montecuculi, and a few other officers had succeeded

in escaping, all resistance ceased. Four colonels, 36 officers, and 3000 men were killed. Fifty colours and ten baggage wagons, laden with gold and silver plate, were captured.

Many were taken prisoners, and hundreds were drowned in the Oder, across which the survivors of the garrison made their escape. Plundering at once began, and several houses were set on fire; but Gustavus ordered the drums to beat, and the soldiers to repair to their colours outside the town, which was committed to the charge of Sir John Hepburn, with his regiment.

The rumour that Magdeburg was the next object of attack circulated among Tilly's troops the day after they marched west from New Brandenburg. It originated in some chance word dropped by a superior officer, and seemed confirmed by the direction which they were taking which was directly away from the Swedish army. There was a report, too, that Count Pappenheim, who commanded a separate army, would meet Tilly there, and that every effort would be made to capture the town before Gustavus could march to its assistance.

Malcolm could easily have made his escape the first night after leaving New Brandenburg; but the distance to be traversed to join the Swedish army was great, confusion and disorder reigned everywhere, and he had decided that it would be safer to remain with the Imperialist army until Gustavus should approach within striking distance. On the road he kept with the other two men who had been taken with the horses from the syndic of the weavers, and, chatting with them when the convoy halted, he had not the least fear of being questioned by others. Indeed, none of those in the long train of carts and wagons paid much attention to their fellows, all had been alike forced to accompany the Imperialists, and each was too much occupied by the hardships of his own lot, and by thoughts of the home from which he had been torn, to seek for the companionship of his comrades in misfortune.

As soon, however, as Malcolm heard the report of Tilly's intentions, he saw that it was of the utmost importance that the King of Sweden should be informed of the Imperialist plans as early as possible, and he determined at once to start and endeavour to make his way across the country. At nightfall the train with the baggage and plunder was as usual so placed that it was surrounded by the camps of the various brigades of the army in order to prevent desertion. The previous night an escape would have been comparatively easy, for the soldiers were worn out by their exertions at the siege of New Brandenburg, and were still heavy from the drink they had obtained there; but discipline was now restored, and the sentries were on the alert. A close cordon of these was placed around the baggage train; and when this was passed, there would still be the difficulty of escaping through the camps of soldiery, and of passing the outposts. Malcolm waited until the camp became quiet, or rather comparatively quiet, for the supplies of wine were far from exhausted, and revelling was still going on in various parts of the camp, for the rigid discipline in use in modern armies was at that time unknown, and except when on duty in the ranks a wide amount of license was permitted to the soldiers. The night was fine and bright, and Malcolm saw that it would be difficult to get through the line of sentries who were stationed some thirty or forty yards apart.

After thinking for some time he went up to a group of eight or ten horses which were fastened by their bridles to a large store wagon on the outside of the baggage camp. Malcolm unfastened the bridles and turned the horses heads outwards. Then he gave two of them a sharp prick with his dagger, and the startled animals dashed forward in affright, followed by their companions. They passed close to one of the sentries, who tried in vain to stop them, and then burst into the camp beyond, where their rush startled the horses picketed there. These began to kick and struggle desperately to free themselves from their fastenings. The soldiers, startled at the sudden noise, sprang to their feet, and much confusion reigned until the runaway horses were secured and driven back to their lines.

The instant he had thus diverted the attention of the whole line of sentries along that side of the baggage camp, Malcolm crept quietly up and passed between them. Turning from the direction in which the horses had disturbed the camp, he made his way cautiously along. Only the officers had tents, the men sleeping on the ground around their fires. He had to move with the greatest caution

to avoid treading upon the sleepers, and was constantly compelled to make detours to get beyond the range of the fires, round which groups of men were sitting and carousing.

At last he reached the outside of the camp, and taking advantage of every clump of bushes he had no difficulty in making his way through the outposts, for as the enemy was known to be far away, no great vigilance was observed by the sentries. He had still to be watchful, for fires were blazing in a score of places over the country round, showing that the foragers of the army were at their usual work of rapine, and he might at any moment meet one of these returning laden with spoil.

Once or twice, indeed, he heard the galloping of bodies of horse, and the sound of distant pistol shots and the shrieks of women came faintly to his ears. He passed on, however, without meeting with any of the foraging parties, and by morning was fifteen miles away from Tilly's camp. Entering a wood he threw himself down and slept soundly for some hours. It was nearly noon before he started again. After an hour's walking he came upon the ruins of a village. Smoke was still curling up from the charred beams and rafters of the cottages, and the destruction had evidently taken place but the day before. The bodies of several men and women lay scattered among the houses; two or three dogs were prowling about, and these growled angrily at the intruder, and would have attacked him had he not flourished a club which he had cut in the woods for self defence.

Moving about through the village he heard a sound of wild laughter, and going in that direction saw a woman sitting on the ground. In her lap was a dead child pierced through with a lance. The woman was talking and laughing to it, her clothes were torn, and her hair fell in wild disorder over her shoulders. It needed but a glance to tell Malcolm that the poor creature was mad, distraught by the horrors of the previous day.

A peasant stood by leaning on a stick, mournfully regarding her. He turned suddenly round with the weapon uplifted at the sound of Malcolm's approach, but lowered it on seeing that the newcomer was a lad.

"I hoped you were a soldier," the peasant said, as he lowered his stick. "I should like to kill one, and then to be killed myself. My God, what is life worth living for in this unhappy country? Three times since the war began has our village been burned, but each time we were warned of the approach of the plunderers, and escaped in time. Yesterday they came when I was away, and see what they have done;" and he pointed to his wife and child, and to the corpses scattered about.

"It is terrible," Malcolm replied. "I was taken a prisoner but two days since at the sack of New Brandenburg, but I have managed to escape. I am a Scot, and am on my way now to join the army of the Swedes, which will, I hope, soon punish the villains who have done this damage."

"I shall take my wife to her mother," the peasant said, "and leave her there. I hope God will take her soon, and then I will go and take service under the Swedish king, and will slay till I am slain. I would kill myself now, but that I would fain avenge my wife and child on some of these murderers of Tilly's before I die."

Malcolm felt that the case was far beyond any attempt at consolation.

"If you come to the Swedish army ask for Ensign Malcolm Graheme of Reay's Scottish regiment, and I will take you to one of the German corps, where you will understand the language of your comrades." So saying he turned from the bloodstained village and continued his way.

CHAPTER V MARAUDERS

Malcolm had brought with him from Tilly's camp a supply of provisions sufficient for three or four days, and a flask of wine. Before he started from New Brandenburg the syndic had slipped into his band a purse containing ten gold pieces, and whenever he came to a village which had escaped the ravages of the war he had no difficulty in obtaining provisions.

It was pitiable at each place to see the anxiety with which the villagers crowded round him upon his arrival and questioned him as to the position of the armies and whether he had met with any parties of raiders on the way. Everywhere the cattle had been driven into the woods; boys were posted as lookouts on eminences at a distance to bring in word should any body of men be seen moving in that direction; and the inhabitants were prepared to fly instantly at the approach of danger.

The news that Tilly's army was marching in the opposite direction was received with a deep sense of thankfulness and relief, for they were now assured of a respite from his plunderers, although still exposed to danger from the arrival of some of the numerous bands. These, nominally fighting for one or other of the parties, were in truth nothing but marauders, being composed of deserters and desperadoes of all kinds, who lived upon the misfortunes of the country, and were even more cruel and pitiless than were the regular troops.

At one of these villages Malcolm exchanged his attire as a serving man of a rich burgher for that of a peasant lad. He was in ignorance of the present position of the Swedish army, and was making for the intrenched camp of Schwedt, on the Oder, which Gustavus had not left when he had last heard of him.

On the fourth day after leaving the camp of Tilly, as Malcolm was proceeding across a bare and desolate country he heard a sound of galloping behind him, and saw a party of six rough looking horsemen coming along the road. As flight would have been useless he continued his way until they overtook him. They reined up when they reached him.

"Where are you going, boy, and where do you belong to?" the leader of the party asked.

"I am going in search of work," Malcolm answered. "My village is destroyed and my parents killed."

"Don't tell me that tale," the man said, drawing a pistol from his holster. "I can tell by your speech that you are not a native of these parts."

There was nothing in the appointments of the men to indicate which party they favoured, and Malcolm thought it better to state exactly who he was, for a doubtful answer might be followed by a pistol shot, which would have brought his career to a close.

"You are right," he said quietly; "but in these times it is not safe always to state one's errand to all comers. I am a Scotch officer in the army of the King of Sweden. I was in New Brandenburg when it was stormed by Tilly. I disguised myself, and, passing unnoticed, was forced to accompany his army as a teamster. The second night I escaped, and am now making my way to Schwedt, where I hope to find the army."

The man replaced his pistol.

"You are an outspoken lad," he said laughing, "and a fearless one. I believe that your story is true, for no German boor would have looked me in the face and answered so quietly; but I have heard that the Scotch scarce know what danger is, though they will find Tilly and Pappenheim very different customers to the Poles."

"Which side do you fight on?" Malcolm asked.

"A frank question and a bold one!" the leader laughed. "What say you, men? Whom are we for just at present? We were for the Imperialists the other day, but now they have marched away, and as it may be the Swedes will be coming in this direction, I fancy that we shall soon find ourselves on the side of the new religion."

The men laughed. "What shall we do with this boy? To begin with, if he is what he says, no doubt he has some money with him."

Malcolm at once drew out his purse. "Here are nine gold pieces," he said. "They are all I have, save some small change."

"That is better than nothing," the leader said, pocketing the purse. "And now what shall we do with him?"

"He is a Protestant," one of the men replied; "best shoot him."

"I should say," another said, "that we had best make him our cook. Old Rollo is always grumbling at being kept at the work, and his cooking gets worse and worse. I could not get my jaws into the meat this morning."

A murmur of agreement was raised by the other horsemen.

"So be it," the leader said. "Dost hear, lad? You have the choice whether you will be cook to a band of honourable gentlemen or be shot at once."

"The choice pleases me not," Malcolm replied. "Still, if it must needs be, I would prefer for a time the post of cook to the other alternative."

"And mind you," the leader said sharply, "at the first attempt to escape we string you up to the nearest bough. Carl, do you lead him back and set him to work, and tell the men there to keep a sharp watch upon him."

One of the men turned his horse, and, with Malcolm walking by his side, left the party. They soon turned aside from the road, and after a ride of five miles across a rough and broken country entered a wood. Another half mile and they reached the foot of an eminence, on the summit of which stood a ruined castle. Several horses were picketed among the trees at the foot of the hill, and two men were sitting near them cleaning their arms. The sight of these deterred Malcolm from carrying into execution the plan which he had formed—namely, to strike down his guard with his club as he dismounted, to leap on his horse, and ride off.

"Who have you there, Carl?" one of the men asked as they rose and approached the newcomers.

"A prisoner," Carl said, "whom the captain has appointed to the honourable office of cook instead of old Rollo, whose food gets harder and tougher every day. You are to keep a sharp eye over the lad, who says he is a Scotch officer of the Swedes, and to shoot him down if he attempts to escape."

"Why, I thought those Scots were very devils to fight," one of the men said, "and this is but a boy. How comes he here?"

"He told the captain his story, and he believed it," Carl said carelessly, "and the captain is not easily taken in. He was captured by Tilly at New Brandenburg, which town we heard yesterday he assaulted and sacked, killing every man of the garrison; but it seems this boy put on a disguise, and being but a boy I suppose passed unnoticed, and was taken off as a teamster with Tilly's army. He gave them the slip, but as he has managed to fall into our hands I don't know that he has gained much by the exchange. Now, youngster, go up to the castle."

Having picketed his horse the man led the way up the steep hill. When they reached the castle Malcolm saw that it was less ruined than it had appeared to be from below. The battlements had indeed crumbled away, and there were cracks and fissures in the upper parts of the walls, but below the walls were still solid and unbroken, and as the rock was almost precipitous, save at the point at which a narrow path wound up to the entrance, it was still capable of making a stout defence against attack.

A strong but roughly made gate, evidently of quite recent make, hung on the hinges, and passing through it Malcolm found himself in the courtyard of the castle. Crossing this he entered with his guide what had once been the principal room of the castle. A good fire blazed in the centre; around this half a dozen men were lying on a thick couch of straw. Malcolm's guide repeated the history of the newcomer, and then passed through with him into a smaller apartment, where a man was attending to several sauce pans over a fire.

“Rollo,” he said, “I bring you a substitute. You have been always grumbling about being told off for the cooking, just because you happened to be the oldest of the band. Here is a lad who will take your place, and tomorrow you can mount your horse and ride with the rest of us.”

“And be poisoned, I suppose, with bad food when I return,” the man grumbled—“a nice lookout truly.”

“There’s one thing, you old grumbler, it is quite certain he cannot do worse than you do. My jaws ache now with trying to eat the food you gave us this morning. Another week and you would have starved the whole band to death.”

“Very well,” the man said surlily; “we will see whether you have gained by the exchange. What does this boy know about cooking?”

“Very little, I am afraid,” Malcolm said cheerfully; “but at least I can try. If I must be a cook I will at least do my best to be a good one. Now, what have you got in these pots?”

Rollo grumblingly enumerated their contents, and then putting on his doublet went out to join his comrades in the hall, leaving Malcolm to his new duties.

The latter set to work with a will. He saw that it was best to appear contented with the situation, and to gain as far as possible the goodwill of the band by his attention to their wants. In this way their vigilance would become relaxed, and some mode of escape might open itself to him. At dusk the rest of the band returned, and Malcolm found that those who had met him with the captain were but a portion of the party, as three other companies of equal strength arrived at about the same time, the total number mounting up to over thirty.

Malcolm was conscious that the supper was far from being a success; but for this he was not responsible, as the cooking was well advanced when he undertook it; however the band were not dissatisfied, for it was much better than they had been accustomed to, as Malcolm had procured woodwork from the disused part of the castle, and had kept the fire briskly going; whereas his predecessor in the office had been too indolent to get sufficient wood to keep the water on the boil.

In the year which Malcolm had spent in camp he had learned a good deal of rough cookery, for when on active duty the officers had often to shift for themselves, and consequently next day he was able to produce a dinner so far in advance of that to which the band was accustomed that their approbation was warmly and loudly expressed.

The stew was juicy and tender, the roast done to a turn, and the bread, baked on an iron plate, was pronounced to be excellent. The band declared that their new cook was a treasure. Malcolm had already found that though he could move about the castle as he chose, one of the band was now always stationed at the gate with pike and pistols, while at night the door between the room in which he cooked and the hall was closed, and two or three heavy logs thrown against it.

Under the pretence of getting wood Malcolm soon explored the castle. The upper rooms were all roofless and open to the air. There were no windows on the side upon which the path ascended, and by which alone an attack upon the castle was possible. Here the walls were pierced only by narrow loopholes for arrows or musketry. On the other sides the windows were large, for here the steepness of the rock protected the castle from attack.

The kitchen in which he cooked and slept had no other entrance save that into the hall, the doorway into the courtyard being closed by a heap of fallen stones from above. Two or three narrow slits in the wall allowed light and air to enter. Malcolm saw that escape at night, after he had once been shut in, was impossible, and that in the daytime he could not pass out by the gate; for even if by a sudden surprise he overpowered the sentry there, he would be met at the bottom of the path by the two men who were always stationed as guards to the horses, and to give notice of the approach of strangers.

The only chance of escape, therefore, was by lowering himself from one of the windows behind, down the steep rock. To do this a rope of some seventy feet long was necessary, and after a careful search through the ruins he failed to discover even the shortest piece of rope.

That afternoon some of the band on their return from foraging drove in half a dozen cattle, and one of these was with much difficulty compelled to climb up the path to the castle, and was slaughtered in the yard.

“There, Scot, are victuals for the next week; cut it up, and throw the head and offal down the rock behind.”

As Malcolm commenced his unpleasant task a thought suddenly struck him, and he laboured away cheerfully and hopefully. After cutting up the animal into quarters he threw the head, the lower joints of the legs, and the offal, from the window. The hide he carried, with the four quarters, into his kitchen, and there concealed it under the pile of straw which served for his bed.

When the dinner was over, and the usual carousal had begun, and he knew there was no chance of any of the freebooters coming into the room, he spread out the hide on the floor, cut off the edges, and trimmed it up till it was nearly circular in form, and then began to cut a strip two inches wide round and round till he reached the centre. This gave him a thong of over a hundred feet long. Tying one end to a ring in the wall he twisted the long strip until it assumed the form of a rope, which was, he was sure, strong enough to bear many times his weight.

This part of the work was done after the freebooters had retired to rest. When he had finished cutting the hide he went in as usual and sat down with them as they drank, as he wished to appear contented with his position. The freebooters were discussing an attack upon a village some thirty miles away. It lay in a secluded position, and had so far escaped pillage either by the armies or wandering bands. The captain said he had learned that the principal farmer was a well-to-do man with a large herd of cattle, some good horses, and a well stocked house. It was finally agreed that the band should the next day carry out another raid which had already been decided upon, and that they should on the day following that sack and burn Glogau.

As soon as the majority of the band had started in the morning Malcolm made his way with his rope to the back of the castle, fastened it to the window, and launched himself over the rock, which, although too steep to climb, was not perpendicular; and holding by the rope Malcolm had no difficulty in lowering himself down. He had before starting taken a brace of pistols and a sword from the heap of weapons which the freebooters had collected in their raids, and as soon as he reached the ground he struck off through the wood.

Enough had been said during the conversation the night before to indicate the direction in which Glogau lay, and he determined, in the first place, to warn the inhabitants of the village of the fate which the freebooters intended for them.

He walked miles before seeing a single person in the deserted fields. He had long since left the wood, and was now traversing the open country, frequently turning round to examine the country around him, for at any moment after he had left, his absence from the castle might be discovered, and the pursuit begun. He hoped, however, that two or three hours at least would elapse before the discovery was made.

He had, before starting, piled high the fire in the hall, and had placed plenty of logs for the purpose of replenishing it close at hand. He put tankards on the board, and with them a large jug full of wine, so that the freebooters would have no occasion to call for him, and unless they wanted him they would be unlikely to look into the kitchen. Except when occasionally breaking into a walk to get breath, he ran steadily on. It was not until he had gone nearly ten miles that he saw a goatherd tending a few goats, and from him he learned the direction of Glogau, and was glad to find he had not gone very far out of the direct line. At last, after asking the way several times, he arrived within a short distance of the village. The ground had now become undulating, and the slopes were covered with trees. The village lay up a valley, and it was evident that the road he was travelling was but little frequented, ending probably at the village itself. Proceeding for nearly two miles through a wood he came suddenly upon Glogau.

It stood near the head of the valley, which was here free of trees, and some cultivated fields lay around it. The houses were surrounded by fruit trees, and an air of peace and tranquillity prevailed such as Malcolm had not seen before since he left his native country. One house was much larger than the rest; several stacks stood in the rick yard, and the large stables and barns gave a proof of the prosperity of its owner. The war which had already devastated a great part of Germany had passed by this secluded hamlet.

No signs of work were to be seen, the village was as still and quiet as if it was deserted. Suddenly Malcolm remembered that it was the Sabbath, which, though always kept strictly by the Scotch and Swedish soldiers when in camp, for the most part passed unobserved when they were engaged in active service. Malcolm turned his steps towards the house; as he neared it he heard the sound of singing within. The door was open, and he entered and found himself on the threshold of a large apartment in which some twenty men and twice as many women and children were standing singing a hymn which was led by a venerable pastor who stood at the head of the room, with a powerfully built elderly man, evidently the master of the house, near him.

The singing was not interrupted by the entrance of the newcomer. Many eyes were cast in his direction, but seeing that their leaders went on unmoved, the little congregation continued their hymn with great fervour and force. When they had done the pastor prayed for some time, and then dismissed the congregation with his blessing. They filed out in a quiet and orderly way, but not until the last had left did the master of the house show any sign of observing Malcolm, who had taken his place near the door.

Then he said gravely, "Strangers do not often find their way to Glogau, and in truth we can do without them, for a stranger in these times too often means a foe; but you are young, my lad, though strong enough to bear weapons, and can mean us no ill. What is it that brings you to our quiet village?"

"I have, sir, but this morning escaped from the hands of the freebooters at Wolfsburg, and I come to warn you that last night I heard them agree to attack and sack your village tomorrow; therefore, before pursuing my own way, which is to the camp of the Swedish king, in whose service I am, I came hither to warn you of their intention."

Exclamations of alarm arose from the females of the farmer's family, who were sitting at the end of the room. The farmer waved his hand and the women were instantly silent.

"This is bad news, truly," he said gravely; "hitherto God has protected our village and suffered us to worship Him in our own way in peace and in quiet in spite of the decrees of emperors and princes. This gang of Wolfsburg have long been a scourge to the country around it, and terrible are the tales we have heard of their violence and cruelty. I have for weeks feared that sooner or later they would extend their ravages even to this secluded spot."

"And, indeed, I thank you, brave youth, for the warning you have given us, which will enable us to send our womenkind, our cattle and horses, to a place of safety before these scourges of God arrive here. Gretchen, place food and wine before this youth who has done us so great a service; doubtless he is hungry and thirsty, for 'tis a long journey from Wolfsburg hither."

"What think you, father, shall I warn the men at once of the coming danger, or shall I let them sleep quietly this Sabbath night for the last time in their old homes?"

"What time, think you, will these marauders leave their hold?" the pastor asked Malcolm.

"They will probably start by daybreak," Malcolm said, "seeing that the journey is a long one; but this is not certain, as they may intend to remain here for the night, and to return with their plunder on the following day to the castle."

"But, sir," he went on, turning to the farmer, "surely you will not abandon your home and goods thus tamely to these freebooters. You have here, unless I am mistaken, fully twenty stout men capable of bearing arms; the marauders number but thirty in all, and they always leave at least five to guard the castle and two as sentries over the horses; thus you will not have more than twenty-three to cope with. Had they, as they expected, taken you by surprise, this force would have been ample

to put down all resistance here; but as you will be prepared for them, and will, therefore, take them by surprise, it seems to me that you should be able to make a good fight of it, stout men-at-arms though the villains be.”

“You speak boldly, sir, for one but a boy in years,” the pastor said; “it is lawful, nay it is right to defend one’s home against these lawless pillagers and murderers, but as you say, evil though their ways are, these freebooters are stout men-at-arms, and we have heard that they have taken a terrible vengeance on the villages which have ventured to oppose them.”

“I am a Scottish officer in the King of Sweden’s army,” Malcolm said, “and fought at Schiefelbrune and New Brandenburg, and in the fight when the Imperialists tried to relieve Colberg, and having, I hope, done my duty in three such desperate struggles against the Imperialist veterans, I need not shrink from an encounter with these freebooters. If you decide to defend the village I am ready to strike a blow at them, for they have held me captive for five days, and have degraded me by making me cook for them.”

A slight titter was heard among the younger females at the indignant tone in which Malcolm spoke of his enforced culinary work.

“And you are truly one of those Scottish soldiers of the Swedish hero who fight so stoutly for the Faith and of whose deeds we have heard so much!” the pastor said. “Truly we are glad to see you. Our prayers have not been wanting night and morning for the success of the champions of the Reformed Faith. What say you, my friend? Shall we take the advice of this young soldier and venture our lives for the defence of our homes?”

“That will we,” the farmer said warmly. “He is used to war, and can give us good advice. As far as strength goes, our men are not wanting. Each has his sword and pike, and there are four or five arquebuses in the village. Yes, if there be a chance of success, even of the slightest, we will do our best as men in defence of our homes.”

CHAPTER VI THE ATTACK ON THE VILLAGE

“And now,” the farmer said to Malcolm, “what is your advice? That we will fight is settled. When, where, and how? This house is strongly built, and we could so strengthen its doors and windows with beams that we might hold out for a long time against them.”

“No,” Malcolm said, “that would not be my advice. Assuredly we might defend the house; but in that case the rest of the village, the herds and granaries, would fall into their hands. To do any good, we must fight them in the wood on their way hither. But although I hope for a favourable issue, I should strongly advise that you should have the herds and horses driven away. Send off all your more valuable goods in the wagons, with your women and children, to a distance. We shall fight all the better if we know that they are all in safety. Some of the old men and boys will suffice for this work. And now, methinks, you had best summon the men, for there will be work for them tonight.”

The bell which was used to call the hands from their work in the fields and woods at sunset soon sounded, and the men in surprise came trooping in at the summons. When they were assembled the farmer told them the news he had heard, and the determination which had been arrived at to defend the village.

After the first movement of alarm caused by the name of the dreaded band of the Wolfsburg had subsided Malcolm was glad to see an expression of stout determination come over the faces of the assemblage, and all declared themselves ready to fight to the last. Four of the elder men were told off at once to superintend the placing of the more movable household goods of the village in wagons, which were to set out at daybreak with the cattle and families.

“Now,” Malcolm said, “I want the rest to bring mattocks and shovels and to accompany me along the road. There is one spot which I marked as I came along as being specially suited for defence.”

This was about half a mile away, and as darkness had now set in the men lighted torches, and with their implements followed him. At the spot which he had selected there was for the distance of a hundred yards a thick growth of underwood bordering the track on either side. Across the road, at the end of the passage nearest to the farm, Malcolm directed ten of the men to dig a pit twelve feet wide and eight feet deep. The rest of the men he set to work to cut nearly through the trunks of the trees standing nearest the road until they were ready to fall.

Ten trees were so treated, five on either side of the road. Standing, as they did, among the undergrowth, the operation which had been performed on them was invisible to any one passing by. Ropes were now fastened to the upper part of the trees and carried across the road, almost hidden from sight by the foliage which met over the path. When the pit was completed the earth which had been taken from it was scattered in the wood out of sight. Light boughs were then placed over the hole. These were covered with earth and sods trampled down until the break in the road was not perceptible to a casual eye.

This was done by Malcolm himself, as the lightest of the party, the boughs sufficing to bear his weight, although they would give way at once beneath that of a horse. The men all worked with vigour and alacrity as soon as they understood Malcolm’s plans. Daylight was breaking when the preparations were completed. Malcolm now divided the party, and told them off to their respective posts. They were sixteen in all, excluding the pastor.

Eight were placed on each side of the road. Those on one side were gathered near the pit which had been dug, those on the other were opposite to the tree which was farthest down the valley. The freebooters were to be allowed to pass along until the foremost fell into the pit. The men stationed there were at once to haul upon the rope attached to the tree near it and to bring it down. Its fall would bar the road and prevent the horsemen from leaping the pit. Those in the rear were, if they heard the crash before the last of the marauders had passed through, to wait until they had closed up, which they were sure to do when the obstacle was reached, and then to fell the tree to bar their retreat.

The instant this was done both parties were to run to other ropes and to bring down the trees upon the horsemen gathered on the road, and were then to fall upon them with axe, pike, and arquebus.

“If it works as well as I expect,” Malcolm said, “not one of them will escape from the trap.”

Soon after daybreak bowls of milk and trays of bread and meat were brought down to the workers by some of the women. As there was no immediate expectation of attack, the farmer himself, with the pastor, went back to the village to cheer the women before their departure.

“You need not be afraid, wife,” the farmer said. “I shall keep to my plans, because when you have once made a plan it is foolish to change it; but I deem not that there is any real need for sending you and the wagons and beasts away. This young Scotch lad seems made for a commander, and truly, if all his countrymen are like himself, I wonder no longer that the Poles and Imperialists have been unable to withstand them. Truly he has constructed a trap from which this band of villains will have but little chance of escape, and I trust that we may slay them without much loss to ourselves. What rejoicings will there not be in the fifty villages when the news comes that their oppressors have been killed! The good God has assuredly sent this youth hither as His instrument in defeating the oppressors, even as He chose the shepherd boy David out of Israel to be the scourge of the Philistines.”

By this time all was ready for a start, and having seen the wagons fairly on their way the farmer returned to the wood, the pastor accompanying the women. Three hours passed before there were any signs of the marauders, and Malcolm began to think that the idea might have occurred to them that he had gone to Glogau, and that they might therefore have postponed their raid upon that village until they could make sure of taking it by surprise, and so capturing all the horses and valuables before the villagers had time to remove them. Glogau was, however, quite out of Malcolm’s direct line for the Swedish camp, and it was hardly likely that the freebooters would think that their late captive would go out of his way to warn the village, in which he had no interest whatever; indeed they would scarcely be likely to recall the fact that he had been present when they were discussing their proposed expedition against it.

All doubts were, however, set at rest when a boy who had been stationed in a high tree near the edge of the wood ran in with the news that a band of horsemen were riding across the plain, and would be there in a few minutes. Every one fell into his appointed place. The farmer himself took the command of the party on one side of the road, Malcolm of that on the other. Matches were blown, and the priming of the arquebuses looked to; then they gathered round the ropes, and listened for the tramp of horses.

Although it was but a few minutes before it came, the time seemed long to those waiting; but at last a vague sound was heard, which rapidly rose into a loud trampling of horses. The marauders had been riding quietly until they neared the wood, as speed was no object; but as they wished to take the village by surprise—and it was just possible that they might have been seen approaching—they were now riding rapidly.

Suddenly the earth gave way under the feet of the horses of the captain and his lieutenant, who were riding at the head of the troop, and men and animals disappeared from the sight of those who followed. The two men behind them pulled their horses back on their haunches, and checked them at the edge of the pit into which their leaders had fallen.

As they did so a loud crack was heard, and a great tree came crashing down, falling directly upon them, striking them and their horses to the ground. A loud cry of astonishment and alarm rose from those behind, followed by curses and exclamations of rage. A few seconds after the fall of the tree there was a crash in the rear of the party, and to their astonishment the freebooters saw that another tree had fallen there, and that a barricade of boughs and leaves closed their way behind as in front. Deprived of their leaders, bewildered and alarmed at this strange and unexpected occurrence, the marauders remained irresolute. Two or three of those in front got off their horses and tried to make their way to the assistance of their comrades who were lying crushed under the mass of foliage, and of their leaders in the pit beyond.

But now almost simultaneously two more crashes were heard, and a tree from each side fell upon them. Panic stricken now the horsemen strove to dash through the underwood, but their progress was arrested, for among the bushes ropes had been fastened from tree to tree; stakes had been driven in, and the bushes interlaced with cords. The trees continued to fall till the portion of the road occupied by the troop was covered by a heap of fallen wood and leaf. Then for the first time the silence in the wood beyond them was broken, the flashes of firearms darted out from the brushwood, and then with a shout a number of men armed with pikes and axes sprang forward to the attack.

A few only of the marauders were in a position to offer any resistance whatever. The greater portion were buried under the mass of foliage. Many had been struck down by the trunks or heavy arms of the trees. All were hampered and confused by the situation in which they found themselves. Under such circumstances it was a massacre rather than a fight. Malcolm, seeing the inability of the freebooters to oppose any formidable resistance, sheathed his sword, and left it to the peasants to avenge the countless murders which the band had committed, and the ruin and misery which they had inflicted upon the country.

In a few minutes all was over. The brigands were shot down, piked, or slain by the heavy axes through the openings in their leafy prison. Quarter was neither asked for nor given. The freebooters knew that it would be useless, and died cursing their foes and their own fate in being thus slaughtered like rats in a trap. Two or three of the peasants were wounded by pistol shots, but this was all the injury that their success cost them.

“The wicked have digged a pit, and they have fallen into it themselves,” the farmer said as he approached the spot where Malcolm was standing, some little distance from the scene of slaughter. “Verily the Lord hath delivered them into our hands. I understand, my young friend, why you as a soldier did not aid in the slaughter of these villains. It is your trade to fight in open battle, and you care not to slay your enemies when helpless; but with us it is different. We regard them as wild beasts, without heart or pity, as scourges to be annihilated when we have the chance; just as in winter we slay the wolves who come down to attack our herds.”

“I blame you not,” Malcolm said. “When men take to the life of wild beasts they must be slain as such. Now my task is done, and I will journey on at once to join my countrymen; but I will give you one piece of advice before I go.

“In the course of a day or two the party left at Wolfsburg will grow uneasy, and two of their number are sure to ride hither to inquire as to the tarrying of the band. Let your men with arquebuses keep watch night and day and shoot them down when they arrive. Were I in your place I would then mount a dozen of your men and let them put on the armour of these dead robbers and ride to Wolfsburg, arriving there about daybreak. If they see you coming they will take you to be the band returning. The two men below you will cut down without difficulty, and there will then be but three or four to deal with in the castle.

“I recommend you to make a complete end of them; and for this reason: if any of the band survive they will join themselves with some other party and will be sure to endeavour to get them to avenge this slaughter; for although these bands have no love for each other, yet they would be ready enough to take up each other’s quarrel as against country folk, especially when there is a hope of plunder. Exterminate them, then, and advise your men to keep their secret. Few can have seen the brigands riding hither today. When it is found that the band have disappeared the country around will thank God, and will have little curiosity as to how they have gone. You will of course clear the path again and bury their bodies; and were I you I would prepare at once another ambush like that into which they have fallen, and when a second band of marauders comes into this part of the country set a watch night and day. Your men will in future be better armed than hitherto, as each of those freebooters carries a brace of pistols. And now, as I would fain be off as soon as possible, I would ask you to let your men set to work with their axes and cut away the boughs and to get me out a horse.

Several of them must have been killed by the falling trees, and some by the fire of the arquebuses; but no doubt there are some uninjured.”

In a quarter of an hour a horse was brought up, together with the helmet and armour worn by the late captain of the band.

As Malcolm mounted, the men crowded round him and loaded him with thanks and blessings for the danger from which he had delivered them, their wives and families.

When the fugitives had left the village a store of cooked provisions had been left behind for the use of the defenders during the day. As the women could not be fetched back before nightfall, the farmer had despatched a man for some of this food and the wallets on the saddle were filled with sufficient to last Malcolm for three or four days.

A brace of pistols were placed in the holsters, and with a last farewell to the farmer Malcolm gave the rein to his horse and rode away from the village. He travelled fast now and without fear of interruption. The sight of armed men riding to join one or other of the armies was too common to attract any attention, and avoiding large towns Malcolm rode unmolested across the plain.

He presently heard the report that the Swedes had captured Frankfort-on-the-Oder, and as he approached that town, after four days' riding, heard that they had moved towards Landsberg. Thither he followed them, and came up to them outside the walls of that place six days after leaving Glogau. The main body of the Swedish army had remained in and around Frankfort, Gustavus having marched against Landsberg with only 3200 musketeers, 12 pieces of cannon, and a strong body of horse. Hepburn and Reay's Scotch regiments formed part of the column, and Malcolm with delight again saw the green scarves and banners.

As he rode into the camp of his regiment he was unnoticed by the soldiers until he reached the tents of the officers, before which Colonel Munro was standing talking with several others. On seeing an officer approach in full armour they looked up, and a cry of astonishment broke from them on recognizing Malcolm.

“Is it you, Malcolm Graheme, or your wraith?” Munro exclaimed.

“It is I in the flesh, colonel, sound and hearty.”

“Why, my dear lad,” Munro exclaimed, holding out his hand, “we thought you had fallen at the sack of New Brandenburg. Innes and Lumsden were believed to be the only ones who had escaped.”

“I have come through it, nevertheless,” Malcolm said; “but it is a long story, colonel, and I would ask you first if the king has learned what Tilly is doing.”

“No, he has received no news whatever of him since he heard of the affair at New Brandenburg, and is most anxious lest he should fall upon the army at Frankfort while we are away. Do you know aught about him?”

“Tilly marched west from New Brandenburg,” Malcolm said, “and is now besieging Magdeburg.”

“This is news indeed,” Munro said; “you must come with me at once to the king.”

Malcolm followed Colonel Munro to the royal tent, which was but a few hundred yards away. Gustavus had just returned after visiting the advanced lines round the city. On being told that Colonel Munro wished to speak to him on important business, he at once came to the entrance of his tent.

“Allow me to present to you, sire, Malcolm Graheme, a very gallant young officer of my regiment. He was at New Brandenburg, and I deemed that he had fallen there; how he escaped I have not yet had time to learn, seeing that he has but now ridden into the camp; but as he is bearer of news of the whereabouts of Tilly and his army, I thought it best to bring him immediately to you.”

“Well, sir,” Gustavus said anxiously to Malcolm, “what is your news?”

“Tilly is besieging Magdeburg, sire, with his whole strength.”

“Magdeburg!” Gustavus exclaimed incredulously. “Are you sure of your news? I deemed him advancing upon Frankfort.”

“Quite sure, sire, for I accompanied his column to within two marches of the city, and there was no secret of his intentions. He started for that town on the very day after he had captured New Brandenburg.”

“This is important, indeed,” Gustavus said; “follow me,” and he turned and entered the tent. Spread out on the table was a large map, which the king at once consulted.

“You see, Colonel Munro, that to relieve Magdeburg I must march through Kustrin, Berlin, and Spandau, and the first and last are strong fortresses. I can do nothing until the Elector of Brandenburg declares for us, and gives us leave to pass those places, for I dare not march round and leave them in my rear until sure that this weak prince will not take sides with the Imperialists. I will despatch a messenger tonight to him at Berlin demanding leave to march through his territory to relieve Magdeburg. In the meantime we will finish off with this place, and so be in readiness to march west when his answer arrives. And now, sir,” he went on, turning to Malcolm, “please to give me the account of how you escaped first from New Brandenburg, and then from Tilly.”

Malcolm related briefly the manner of his escape from the massacre at New Brandenburg, and how, after accompanying Tilly’s army as a teamster for two days, he had made his escape. He then still more briefly related how he had been taken prisoner by a band of freebooters, but had managed to get away from them, and had drawn them into an ambush by peasants, where they had been slain, by which means he had obtained a horse and ridden straight to the army.

Gustavus asked many questions, and elicited many more details than Malcolm had deemed it necessary to give in his first recital.

“You have shown great prudence and forethought,” the king said when he had finished, “such as would not be looked for in so young a soldier.”

“And he behaved, sire, with distinguished gallantry and coolness at Schiefelbrune, and in the destructive fight outside Colberg,” Colonel Munro put in. “By the slaughter on the latter day he would naturally have obtained his promotion, but he begged to be passed over, asserting that it was best that at his age he should remain for a time an ensign.”

“Such modesty is unusual,” the king said, “and pleases me; see the next time a step is vacant, colonel, that he has it. Whatever his age, he has shown himself fit to do man’s work, and years are of no great value in a soldier; why, among all my Scottish regiments I have scarcely a colonel who is yet thirty years old.”

Malcolm now returned with Colonel Munro to the regiment, and there had to give a full and minute account of his adventures, and was warmly congratulated by his fellow officers on his good fortune in escaping from the dangers which had beset him. The suit of armour was a handsome one, and had been doubtless stripped off from the body of some knight or noble murdered by the freebooters. The leg pieces Malcolm laid aside, retaining only a cuirass, back piece, and helmet, as the full armour was too heavy for service on foot.

Two days later the king gave orders that the assault upon Landsberg was to be made that night. The place was extremely strong, and Gustavus had in his previous campaign twice failed in attempts to capture it. Since that time the Imperialists had been busy in strengthening the fortification, and all the peasantry for ten miles round had been employed in throwing up earthworks; but its principal defence was in the marsh which surrounded it, and which rendered the construction of approaches by besiegers almost impossible. Its importance consisted in the fact that from its great strength its garrison dominated the whole district known as the Marc of Brandenburg. It was the key to Silesia, and guarded the approaches to Pomerania, and its possession was therefore of supreme importance to Gustavus. The garrison consisted of five thousand Imperialist infantry and twelve troops of horse, the whole commanded by Count Gratz. The principal approach to the town was guarded by a strong redoubt armed with numerous artillery.

Colonel Munro had advanced his trenches to within a short distance of this redoubt, and had mounted the twelve pieces of cannon to play upon it, but so solid was the masonry of the fort that their

fire produced but little visible effect. Gustavus had brought from Frankfort as guide on the march a blacksmith who was a native of Landsberg, and this man had informed him of a postern gate into the town which would not be likely to be defended, as to reach it it would be necessary to cross a swamp flanked by the advanced redoubt and covered with water.

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