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"THE KNOT:"

A TALE OF POLAND.

(Translated from the French by Mrs. J. Sadlier.)
CHAPTER XII.

Three Polish brigades, forming altogether about ten thousand men, successively and at short intervals, entered Lithuania, leaving with them about thirty pieces of cannon. One of these divisions, making its way through the vast forest of Bialowiez, arrived within a short distance of the Castle, and immediately communicated with the Count. The appearance of these Polish troops at once revived the flagging spirits of the people, and filled them with hope and joy. The artillery, above all, was greeted with transport, and it was no uncommon sight to see the peasantry crowding around the field-pieces, touching them, as though to be certain of their reality, and even kissing them with cries of joy and exultation. All fear was at an end, and victory was sure to rest on the unfurled flag of Poland. And in truth we can scarcely doubt that if the main body of the Polish army had sustained this first expedition, with the insurrection in Lithuania, where almost the entire province was perfectly organized, the destiny of Poland might have been changed and the oppressor driven from her soil. But what could be effected by a detached corps, when the main body itself, after a murderous battle, retreated on Warsaw! With the clear and quick perception of a veteran commander, the Count at once perceived that they were again to be disappointed, and his foresight was but too soon justified. The brigade which had encamped for a short time near his castle, suddenly received orders to repair by forced marches into Samogitia, where the two corps by which it had been preceded had already obtained some success against the Russians. These three brigades, when joined together, were to have marched on Wilna, and taken it at all hazards; but most unfortunately, jealousy glided in between the three commanders—the time for action passed away in vain contention, and when the greatest unanimity was required in order to keep the Russians at bay, discord and envy were suffered to do their fatal work, and the national cause was the sacrifice. The enemy at once covered Wilna, easily repulsed the ill-concerted attack of the Polish army (though to do the Poles justice they fought with heroic courage) and extending his lines he drove those demoralized bands before him to the Prussian frontier. A number of the Polish soldiers, betrayed and abandoned by their chiefs, gave up their arms to the Prussians with many a bitter curse; while another division of the army fought on with desperate courage, and with loud cries implored their comrades to come back over the lines and aid them for the honor of Poland, whereupon the latter, disarmed and prisoners as they were, were roused with sudden fury when they saw their brethren refusing to fly, and dying like heroes beneath the overwhelming blows of the Russians; and snatching their arms from the pile where they lay, they shook off the grasp of the Prussians, and springing over the ditch which formed the frontier line, they flew to the assistance of their gallant brethren. In vain would their unworthy commanders have interposed their authority to restrain them—the greater number heard not a word they said, and resolutely preferred death to slavery. Some there were, nevertheless, who still hesitated, being intimidated by the positive prohibition of their officers, and the menaces of the Prussian soldiers. These brave Poles, who of course regarded discipline as sacred, but whose hearts were with their struggling companions, conjured their officers with tearful eyes to lead them back to the battle.

Just at this moment a cavalier was seen to break forth from amidst the tumultuous line beyond the frontier, and he was quickly recognised for an aid-de-camp of the commander-in-chief.—Urging his horse to the utmost he quickly joined the prisoners, paused, pistol in hand, within twenty paces of the group of renegade generals, and taking aim at the chief amongst them, he shot him dead on the spot, with a curious malice. After this retributive act, the whole body of the Poles ranged themselves again under their banners and made a desperate attack to pierce the enemy's lines, in order to get back into Poland. Some days sooner they might have succeeded, but as it was the attempt was a signal failure. The time lost through the perfidy of the generals, and the indecision of the troops, had crushed the insurrection, so that after a most disastrous retreat, and several severe engagements, when surrounded by the overpowering number of the Russians, the poor harassed Poles, were finally driven to take refuge on the inhospitable territory of Prussia. Four thousand infantry, and two thousand cavalry, there gave up their arms, together with twenty pieces of artillery. Another division, consisting of two thousand foot, and twelve hundred horse, had a little before done the same. Upwards of three thousand of the insurgents returned to their homes, while some other bands, with persevering, but

alas! fruitless bravery, took up their abode in the woods and marshes whence they waged a war of extermination on the enemy. There remained about three thousand of the regular army, who, under the command of an intrepid officer, determined to make their way back into Poland.—Now fighting, and anon escaping the enemy by skilful manoeuvres they had traversed all Lithuania, bending their course towards the forest of Bialowiez, where they hoped to enjoy a brief respite, being there sheltered from all pursuit. It was from this heroic band that Count Bialewski received the confirmation of the melancholy news which had already reached him.

"All is over, my dear Count," said one of the principal officers, who was an old friend; "Lithuania is lost to Poland, and Poland herself can only now be saved by miracle. The Russians are after us with a superior force, and before two hours their van-guard will appear on the plain.—Resistance would now be useless, and your best course is to follow us to Warsaw as soon as you can gather up your most valuable effects."

"Don't you think," answered the Count, "that we could keep the enemy for some time before the castle, which is no tolerably well fortified, so as to cover your retreat?"

"And do you imagine," returned the generous officer, "that we would consent to leave you exposed to all the vengeful fury of the Russians, that we ourselves might escape? No, rather would we remain, that all might perish together. But the voice of duty calls us to Warsaw to aid our comrades in its defence. Come, then, with us, Bialewski! any if any of your people will follow us, they will render a last service to the national cause."

"You are right," said the Count, "we should never yield to despair, and must try our fortune while even one chance remains to us."

And so saying he quickly entered the castle, informed Raphael, Casimir and Rosa of his newly-formed resolution; then bade a kind farewell to the vicar, whom he charged to watch over the tenantry whom he so unwillingly left, and proceeded to collect together the faithful band which had hitherto followed his banners.

"My comrades!" said the Count, "we have nothing more to do in Lithuania—the game is up with us here, but if the jade Fortune has played us false, she has not, thank God, extinguished our courage. Let all those then who owe her a spite come with me and seek revenge in Poland proper—remembering always that you are free either to come or stay. For myself, I have resolved to follow these true sons of Poland and share their fate whatever it may be. Whoever decides on following my example will meet me in half an hour at the bivouac on the plain."

At the time appointed, three or four hundred brave and resolute men appeared before the Count, and were immediately admitted into the ranks of the soldiers, who received them with melancholy satisfaction. The signal for departure was given, and for the second time the Count bade adieu to the ancient halls of his fathers.—And so the column moved on in profound silence, and with a double quick pace, being apprehensive of a surprise from the Russians who, with vastly superior numbers, were constantly manœuvring to hem in the devoted little army. The Poles were already within a league or so of the great forest where they were sure of finding a safe refuge—the tops of its tallest trees were already visible on the horizon, when, in traversing a plain towards a small river, they discovered that the Russians were drawn up on the opposite bank to dispute the passage.

"Fear nothing, my lads!" cried the Polish commander, in a loud, cheerful voice, "it is only their van-guard. Forward to the charge, and let not a trigger be drawn till you are within arm's length."

The Poles advanced with fearless intrepidity; one party throwing themselves on the narrow bridge which crossed the river, while the others sprang into the river, which was fortunately fordable, and both together charged the Russian cavalry with a force which made them reel backwards. But the confusion was only momentary, for they quickly drew up again in good order on the plain which the Poles must necessarily cross and sought to obstruct their progress by vigorous and repeated charges. The Polish regulars, firm as rocks in their places, still marched on and made good their way, presenting to the enemy an unbroken array of bristling bayonets. Unfortunately the Count's followers, fully as courageous, but being utterly inexperienced in the rude trade of war, could not resist the mighty force of the Russian cavalry, and though still keeping their ground they suffered their ranks to be broken through and disorder of course ensued. At the voice of the Count a square was formed around Rosa who had been thus left in the midst of the confusion. Raphael and Casimir threw themselves forward drawing after them the bravest of their followers—their fearless valor drove back the Russian troopers, and thus gave time for their people to close up their broken ranks. Yet another effort and the enemy fell back still farther,

but just as Raphael stretched out his arm to prevent Casimir from pursuing them too far, he saw him stagger, and received him in his arms. The ill-fated young man made a sign that all was over with him, murmured his father's name and expired. A ball had pierced his bosom. Raphael could not desert the body of his friend, and carried it aside, with the assistance of some of his friends, contriving as they did so, to conceal their mournful burden from the Count, who, on his part, was seeking Rosa, believing that she alone was in danger. Meanwhile the plain was crossed; the soil became rough and uneven, and the Russian cavalry, jaded and exhausted, could urge their horses no farther. Upon this the Poles quickened their march, reached the forest, and when they found themselves safe within its giant enclosure they embraced and congratulated each other with many a joyous acclamation.

"But Casimir—where is he?" demanded the Count, as he fixed his astonished gaze on the dejected countenance of Raphael. The latter could not speak, but his tears rushed forth unbidden.

"Ha! then my son is dead!" cried the poor father, at once catching in the fatal truth. The tears—the scalding tears of anguish rolled fast from his eyes, and his head sank heavily on his bosom; but suppressing his emotion by an effort worthy of himself, he pressed his daughter to his heart, as though fearful lest she, too, might be torn from him; he looked around on his sympathizing friends, and said in a firm voice:

"But wherefore do I weep? Surely my boy could not have died a more glorious death. To my country, then, do I offer up this sacrifice—to my country and my God—may it be one of propitiation!" Whereupon he proceeded with equal firmness to take the necessary measures for having the beloved remains conveyed in safety to the spot which he selected for its last resting place—for poor Casimir might not lie in the tomb of his fathers. Again the march was resumed, and having soon after received a slight reinforcement sent by the commander-in-chief, this remnant of the Polish army once more entered Prussia. The Count took his daughter immediately to Warsaw, where a sister of his late wife resided. Here he gave a few days to the indulgence of his heavy sorrow, for though the soldier could not openly give way to his feelings, yet the heart of the father was deeply wounded by the loss of his only, his brave and noble son. But he was soon aroused from his lethargy of woe by the stirring importance of what was passing around him. It was then the middle of August. The Polish army was encamped under the walls of Warsaw, and was still exceedingly formidable, for though compromised at first by the excessive circumspection of its chiefs, and seriously weakened by a constant succession of new generals, it was still an effective force of 70,000 men. Such was the position of the Polish army when 120,000 Russians, furnished with four hundred pieces of cannon, took up their quarters in the neighborhood, and prepared for a general attack. Meanwhile the city was a prey to anarchy and discord. That unhappy people, always suspicious, and always divided amongst themselves, slaughtered in their prisons either those whom they had reason to expect of being Russian spies, or the generals to whom they attributed the failure of the revolution. And at a time when the voice of their suffering country called them to rally on their ramparts for the defence of the city, they were found debating in their club-rooms, and in the municipal chambers, each putting forth his claim to an authority which was now but a phantom, and discussing public reforms with the hosts of the Czar before their gates, ready to pounce on the last remaining hope of Poland. Nevertheless there was still one vigorous arm to curb these devastating passions, and to make at least a dignified preparation for the death-agony of the Polish nation, which could not be far distant. Count Bialewski, seeing the deplorable condition of the city, hastened to offer his services to the newly-installed governor, who was certainly doing his utmost to restore order, and his proposal was thankfully accepted. Raphael, with his corps of Lithuanian volunteers, joined the ranks of the army, and were stationed in one of the principal redoubts not far from the gates of the city. The army stood prepared for a desperate resistance, and notwithstanding the great inequality of the opposing forces, no true Pole had ceased to hope for a favorable result. The field-marshal in command of the Russian army was not blind to the determination of the Poles, and having taken good note of their preparations, he saw that he could enter Warsaw by a tremendous sacrifice, and, therefore, tried to effect a compromise offering to the Polish army an honorable capitulation. He promised, in his master's name, a free pardon for the past, promises for the future, together with a redress of those grievances, which were the immediate cause of the rebellion, and an investigation into the affairs of certain provinces which were considered peculiarly aggrieved.—But as the Poles had made up their minds to expiate their numerous faults and errors by a glo-

rious end, they would listen to no terms that did not include their complete independence, and such was the answer officially returned to the Russian commander. Warsaw was surrounded by a double belt of fortifications, which would have required for their defence a much larger force than they could now have, for a body of twenty thousand men had been detached from the main army some days before in order to provide a commissariat for the city, with order at the time to turn the enemy's flank, not more to create a serious diversion in that quarter than to prove that the Poles were still bold enough to make an attack. Yet with all these disadvantages, each individual within the city applied himself courageously to the performance of his duty.

Amidst all the melancholy bustle of preparation for the last act of the tragedy, the Count and Raphael were grievously anxious about Rosa, and fearfully asked each other what was to become of her if Warsaw was taken by the Russians of which there was, alas! but too much probability. Who was to protect her amid the horrors likely to be enacted in Warsaw? When the Count repeated to Raphael his terrible apprehensions, the latter was stunned into silence, but after some reflection, he found voice to say:

"My dear Count! notwithstanding the sad scenes going on every where around us, suffer me to entreat that the probationary term may be abridged, so that I may acquire a legal title to become the protector of Rosa. Were she only mine in reality, I could do and dare every thing for her, and though the war may wage around, she will have a double chance of safety when her father and her husband will be near to guard her."

"I am so thoroughly convinced of your prudence and discretion, my dear Raphael, not to speak of your sincere devotion to our interests, that I cheerfully approve of your suggestion.—At any moment I may fall as my poor son Casimir has done, and I can die contented when I leave my daughter such a protector. Come, then, let us speak to Rosa on the subject, and if she consents, three days hence she shall become your wife."

Rosa, as she listened to her father's representations, appeared deeply moved by the generous devotion of Raphael, and when she had heard all, she unhesitatingly placed her hand in his, and told him that she was perfectly willing to have the ceremony performed at whatever time her father and he deemed it advisable. Raphael was not slow in acting on this gracious permission, for the truth was that he could scarcely absent himself even for a short time from his military duties, which formed, alas! a sad contrast to those which he now so eagerly set about. The marriage was to take place (in the most private manner) on the 6th of September, at 5 o'clock in the morning, when on the eve of that day the Russian columns were put in motion, and opened a terrible fire on the Poles, with the hope of dividing their ranks, and of enfeebling their strength, by forcing them to spread their lines farther than they could with safety. The redoubt occupied by Raphael and his Lithuanians was attacked with the utmost fury, and the shock was truly terrific—sixty guns played for several hours on that devoted spot, and it was by superhuman courage and fortitude that its gallant defenders kept their position, exposed as they were to a murderous fall of grape-shot and cannon-balls. Yet still they wavered not though the foe was evidently advancing for a closer and more deadly assault.

In the meantime, a fierce struggle was going on amid the ruins; everywhere the Russians prevailed, for they numbered twenty to one, yet the Poles, the brave unfortunate Poles, died with heroic courage, nor flinched a step until they were mowed down like ripe grain in harvest. So fiercely and successfully did they deal their vengeance that they had soon before them a new rampart, composed of the dead bodies of their mortal foes. But, oh, despair! with all their audacity and all their fortitude, they were forced to abandon their redoubt and retire within the walls, owing to a want of ammunition. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when another redoubt, which had been carried by the Russians, blew up with a tremendous explosion, a Polish officer having, as he quitted the place, set fire to a small train of powder, so that the victors might be buried under the ruins. Yet still the Russians went on, and on, pursuing their success with inconceivable rapidity; already they had gained the heights which command the suburbs called Czyska, when on a sudden the Polish artillery, directed by a master hand, opened upon them a terrific fire; being entirely exposed to the dread range of the balls, the Russian columns wavered and hesitated, and being just then attacked by two battalions of Polish infantry they retreated and took refuge in the outer line of the fortifications, of which they had long since gained possession. Both armies being faint and exhausted, it was now tacitly agreed to postpone the contest till the morrow. During the day, negotiations were again opened, but nothing decisive could be arranged, owing to the diversity of opinion amongst

the different members of the Executive, some of whom were willing to give up a struggle whose end it was easy to foresee, and to submit at once, while others declared that they would die sword in hand, resisting to the last an unjust and lawless oppression.

It was during this short armistice that Raphael stole away from his post to kneel with Rosa before the altar. A gloom like that of death overhung the devoted city. Scarcely time had they to say farewell after the ceremony was concluded, for even the tocsin pealed, and the drum beat to arms, and Raphael could only exclaim as he pressed Rosa to his heart in a first embrace:

"Now, I have acquired the right to die in your defence. Oh! that I may be enabled to save you, and life itself will be but a poor sacrifice."

"And I," murmured Rosa, as her tears fell fast on the bosom of her husband, "and I, Raphael, am now entitled to share the dangers and the trials of your future life, and be sure, my beloved, that you will never find me shrink from danger, or from suffering when it is to be met by your side." The moments were pressing, and having again bade farewell to his drooping bride, Raphael hastened away to resume his post, while the Count returned to his place in the council, where the fate of Warsaw was then under discussion.

The squares were filled with the piteous-stricken inhabitants, who were discussing in low tones the mournful news of the day. All those who were able to carry arms hastened to the ramparts, and to the different outlets of the city. Women and children toiled away at the barricades, and in preparing cartridges for the soldiers and wadding for the guns. Hour after hour long trains of carts arrived with the wounded, and each fresh arrival was greeted with mournful cries and lamentations. The truce having expired ere yet the council had reached any satisfactory conclusion, the cannonading was again heard, "and the discharge incessantly poured out by three hundred and fifty fiery mouths," says one of the writers from whom we have borrowed our historical facts, "caused the earth to tremble for miles around." And this went on without a single pause from one o'clock in the afternoon till the darkness of night closed in. In the very midst of the frightful carnage and the increasing conflagration of the now ruined suburb of Czyska, Raphael was still seen, by the light of the flames, urging on his brave followers, though himself bleeding from many a wound, and enfeebled from loss of blood; nor could he be prevailed upon to retire while yet one lingering hope remained.—But vain—all vain—this heroic valor, and vain the unexampled devotion of the gallant few who still held out, for even then the Russians were entering the doomed city in ruthless triumph, and Poland—poor, unfortunate Poland—was again at the mercy of her deadly enemies.

CHAPTER XIII.

Notwithstanding the sublime efforts of her defenders, Warsaw was just about to become the prey of the Russians, when the government, in opposition to the legislative assembly which was then sitting, took upon itself to order a cessation of arms, and commanded the retreat of the Polish battalions. Twenty thousand Russians, between killed and wounded, lay on the field, a striking proof that the victory had been dearly earned. And the Polish army, conquered as it was, gave the Russians serious alarm, so that dreading their vengeance, should they be driven to despair, the victors gave them permission to depart with their arms and baggage. Twenty thousand of the bravest and best of the sons of Poland, availing themselves of these favorable terms, marched that day from the gates of that city they had gallantly, but vainly, defended, and bearing with them eighty pieces of cannon, they took their way towards the fortress of Modlia, hoping to rally around them some scattered Polish corps which would have made them, as they calculated, about sixty thousand strong. But the timidity of the officers of those detachments destroyed this reasonable hope and the main body thus left to its own resources, wandered about sometime longer without end or aim.

The Capitol being lost, and each one considering that the national cause was definitively ruined, it was generally thought that the army would very soon make a formal submission to the Russian Government. Raphael, though serving only as a volunteer, could not think of deserting the national banner while yet it was unfurled, and therefore thought himself obliged to accompany the army, having merely found time to say farewell to the Count and Rosa; and to tell them that he hoped for a speedy return as the army must soon be broken up. But, alas! for that gallant army, having no commander of sufficient energy to mark out a course of action and see it executed, the troops were left entirely to their own guidance, and when the first effects of their disappointment had somewhat passed away a violent reaction succeeded, and while it lasted, some were of the opinion that they should march back