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THE DOUBLE SACRIFICE OR THE PONTIFICAL ZOUAVES.

A TALE OF CASTELFIDARDO.

Translated from the Flemish of the Rev. S. Daems
Canon Regular of the Order of Premostratensians,
(Abbey of Tongerlo, Belgium.)

CHAPTER XIII.—CONTINUED.

The moment was come to fall upon the second farm house; De Pimodan gave the word of command, and his chosen little band advanced with heroic courage.

But alas! they knew not with what overwhelming numbers they had to deal. A whole army awaited them in the wood behind. A hailstorm of bullets and balls gave the brave assailants so terrible a reception that they were compelled to retreat.

The enemy followed them, but at the moment they approached the Papal position the little company turned upon them, received them with a well directed fire, and then attacked them at the point of the bayonet.

Astonished at their determination, the Piedmontese, though far more numerous than their assailants, retreated and left the soldiers of De Pimodan once more in possession of the place.

But the general was wounded, his face was pale and streaked with blood.

'Forward!' cried he unmoved, 'forward, boys!'

'Long live De Pimodan!' shouted they.

'Do not shout,' he answered, 'but forward!'

A second ball broke his right arm—he grasped his sword with his left.

'Forward, boys,' cried he once more; 'God is with us!'

De Beedelievere, on foot, in the midst of his men, with his arms crossed on his breast, was giving his orders composedly. On a third attack, De Pimodan received a third bullet in his leg.

'Boys,' cried he, immovable in his saddle, 'God is with us. Forward!'

But the Sardinians poured down upon them like a flood. The Zouaves fought like lions, but the Swiss and the cavalry, broken and beaten down by the fire, retreated in disorder.

Daudier at last stood alone, all his soldiers, (so writes Tresvaux de Fraval) were slain or fugitives. A field piece was standing about fifty paces from the enemy.

'Tresvaux,' cried Daudier, 'let us save the cannon.'

Tresvaux hastened on, followed by Le Camus, De Saint Brieux, and a third of their countrymen, under a shower of balls. With the help of Daudier, they unfastened the cannon, dragged it over the brow of the hill, and made their way back to their comrades.

The battle raged fiercely and furiously. On one side were two hundred brave hearts which knew not how to retreat; on the other side fresh bodies of Sardinians seemed to rise from the earth. The two hundred heroes lost not courage. But, alas! every attack thinned their numbers.

De Pimodan ordered a fresh assault. They rushed forward and threw themselves manfully on the enemy. But a bullet struck the general on the right side, passed through his body, and made its way out on the left side. It was his death wound.

'Renouvel,' said he, reeling in his saddle, 'I am dying. Go and collect our Chasseurs.'

Among the combatants at Castelfidardo was the noble hearted Ernest Maestraeten, a medical student of Louvain.

'During the battle,' he wrote afterwards to his parents from Alessandria, 'I filled two offices—those of sergeant and of surgeon. Our field hospital was erected about five hundred paces from the line of battle. I went from the battalion to the hospital, carrying the wounded, firing my piece, using my bayonet, or binding wounds—in short, discharging any office which came to hand.'

De Pimodan was brought to our brave countryman, who was at with work another medical man. His body was covered with blood.

The surgeon had just begun, with Maestraeten's assistance, to bind up the General's wounds, when the Pontifical soldiers were compelled to retreat, crushed by the overpowering numbers of the Piedmontese. The doctor observed the danger.

'Maestraeten,' said he in terror, 'it is time to depart.'

'Never,' answered the noble young man; 'never will I leave our General and the rest of our wounded.'

The surgeon made no answer and took his departure.

'It is unnecessary,' writes Maestraeten, 'to tell you that he was no Belgian.'

The brave Zouave, himself slightly wounded, remained thus alone with his dying general and wounded comrades.

It was a heart-rending sight. They were about thirty men, officers and soldiers. The wounds of some were being dressed, others waiting their turn; blood was streaming on every side. Pain wrung sharp cries even from these brave hearts.

The Piedmontese soon surrounded the house and they who had accused the Zouaves so falsely, shamed not to give the rein to their treacherous cruelty. The black flag was hoisted, and nevertheless, the cowardly assailants fired through doors and windows ten times on the poor wounded sufferers, happily without much effect. There was nothing now left but to surrender.

The noble De Pimodan, so justly compared by Bresciani to Judas Machabeus, fully knew the extent of his danger, and awaited death with marvellous tranquility. Cialdini consented, at his request, that Maestraeten should remain with him to the end.

'Alas! the end was not far off. De Pimodan,' so writes one of our countrymen to his parents, 'suffered fearfully, and bore his sufferings with the courage and patience of a martyr. He breathed his last about midnight.'

God had crowned his soldier.

To turn to the field of battle. The commander-in-chief of the Pontifical army had endeavored to form the fugitives behind the dyke and round the house, where they were sheltered from the batteries. It was all in vain.

He then gave orders to retreat behind the heights of the Musone, crossing the river to proceed to Umana, and returned to the farm house, where for the last time he shook hands with his brave friend, De Pimodan.

'General,' said the dying man, 'they fight like heroes; the honor of the Church is saved. Farewell.'

De Lamoriciere commanded the retreat to be sounded, and directed Colonel Coudenhoven to proceed to the farm, and as it could no longer be defended, to lead the troops still remaining there towards the river, but to do everything in his power to save the heavy artillery. They fought like lions. At last but eight able bodied Zouaves were left in the farm-house of the Crocette, the last defenders of the two and twenty wounded, but they kept the place for a whole hour against the assault of more than a thousand Piedmontese.

They saw the straw and faggot wood burning on the barn floor. The slightest wind might carry the flames to the farm-house, and yet they flinched not. They fired and fired incessantly, and every shot struck down an enemy.

'Fire yonder!' cried Dhont, and the Sardinian whom he pointed out fell to the ground; so fell one and twenty, one after the other.

The fire arms were so hot that there was danger of their bursting in the hand. The ground was strewn with corpses.

The eight champions still continued to deal death around them. They were fearful to look upon as they stood there, like spirits of vengeance, covered with sweat and black with gun-powder, with flashing eyes, close-pressed lips, and panting breath.

At last a can-on-shot was heard, which carried away half the roof. A ball fell into the room. Instantly the floor shakes, the walls burst, the room is filled with smoke, and the flames press greedily through the opening. The Piedmontese finding it impossible to take that fearful place, had set it on fire.

'Surrender!' cried a voice from without.

'Rather die a thousand deaths,' answered Le Camus and Tresvaux.

But the flames rage faster and more fiercely, the beams crack, the suppressed cries of the wounded are heard.

Then the fury of those invincible lions gave place to compassion. A white handkerchief was hoisted on the stock of a musket. The Piedmontese ceased firing, and the Zouaves placed the most severely wounded on their shoulders, and carried them through smoke and flame out of the burning house.

They looked around them; the Pontifical camp was destroyed.

'Our honor is unstained,' cried they.—'Blessed are the dead. They are already with God.'

Thus ended this fearful battle, wherein all the glory remained with the conquered, and eternal shame was the meed of the conqueror.

Belgium had her full share of the honor of the day.

Two illustrious conquerors have borne their testimony in other times to the valor of her sons.

'Of all these,' wrote Cæsar, 'the Belgians are the bravest.'

'Send me Belgians,' wrote the Christian conqueror, S. Francis Xavier.

The Belgians of our day have not degenerated from the fame of their fathers.

The waters of the Musone ran red with the blood of the chivalrous houses of Flanders mingled with that of her simple faithful burghers.

Their names are too many to be recorded here.

Among the survivors of this fearful battle we find the name of an English student of the College of St. Louis, at Bruges, Henry Woodward, then a boy of sixteen, who having been first incorporated among the Irish Volunteers had left them to serve as a private soldier among the Zouaves. The following letter conveyed to his parents the history of the engagement and of his subsequent perils and sufferings:

St. Jean de Maurienne, Savoy,
October 13, 1850.

'My dear Father and Mother, — I take the very first opportunity of writing to you. I say the very first, because, since the 12th of September we have been marching. Many things have happened since then. I have been first a soldier, then I have been in battle, then a fugitive, then a prisoner, and then set at liberty.'

I will tell you how all this happened. Soon after I wrote to say that I was entering the Franco Belge, the battalion passed through Spoleto. It was late at night. I saw the Major Beedelievere, and the next morning I started at three o'clock. We marched about thirty miles that day, then reposed for about six hours, marched twenty-five miles more, and so on.—

We arrived at last near Loreto, and learned that the Piedmontese were about three miles off. We camped. At night prayers were said—the Priest gave us absolution, for the next day the battle was to take place—and then we went to bed. An attack was expected all night, but nothing happened. The next morning we started, after having eaten our day's allowance.—

After about a mile and a half we crossed a river, but scarcely had we passed when the Piedmontese set up an awful fire. We dashed at them, firing as we went along. They retired on a very high mountain where they had about 40,000 men, and six cannon per regiment. We had in one division 6,000 men and three cannon, and in another eight cannon and 5,000 men. The last division did not fire a shot. We dashed up the hill, firing all the way, sometimes from behind a tree, sometimes lying in a ditch, running a hundred yards on our hands and feet. We got half way up to a house where the most awful firing took place. All the Piedmontese artillery were thundering on us. We had but two cannons, but all our shots told well. We had Maie rifles, which were very good. We picked off many a Piedmontese rifleman between us and the wood. In the wood was a Piedmontese division, so that all our balls that missed a rifleman outside killed each his man in the wood. Near the house I spoke of above were some haystacks which we set on fire. The Piedmontese were not fifty yards from us. I am sure of two men; I killed them as dead as d-r-nails. One was just taking aim when I knocked him over. The battle was getting very hot, and there were only about 1,500 men of the Papal army; the Italian battalion did nothing but fire on us. At last we were obliged to run. We were so few, and we went down the mountain. The Piedmontese set up an awful fire of grape shot, &c. At last we got out of reach, and everybody went his way.

About a mile off I met some French fellows of our battalion, and off we set together. We travelled about one hundred miles on foot through the mountains, sleeping sometimes in the open air, sometimes in a church, &c. I suffered greatly; my feet were one mass of blisters. It would be too long to tell you all we went through. But at last I was taken prisoner by the Piedmontese. At first they treated me very well, but afterwards very badly. They led us all through Italy. At Spoleto I received the money you sent me. They then sent us by land to Leghorn, from that by sea to Genoa, from that to Turin, then to Suze, where we were set at liberty. At Turin, to get off, I was put down as a Frenchman, and received a French passport to Lille.'

Chambery, Oct. 14, 1850.

'Not having had time I resume my letter at Chambery. After leaving Turin, I went by train to Suze. From thence we started for France. The first day we went through the Alps, passing Mount Cenis; the cold was awful. We arrived at Lanslebourg, passed the night there, and marched on to Modan. Next morning we marched on to S. Jean Maurienne, and from thence to Chambery. Here I intend to stay till you send me money; please send it by return of post, as I have not a half-penny left. If nothing between turn up, I shall enter a hospital till I receive it. I hope to be home very soon—in four or five days after the receipt of your letter. As for my future prospects, I intend returning to Rome, for the Pope is getting

up another army, and I should like to have another crack at the Piedmontese.

'Good bye, dear Father and Mother, &c.,
'Your dutiful and affectionate son,
'HENRY WOODWARD.'

'P.S.—Most of the French of our battalion are going direct to Rome.
'A Monsieur J. H. Woodward, Bruges.'

CHAPTER XIV.—THE CARBONARO'S REVENGE
AND THE CHRISTIAN'S REVENGE.

The storm was over, but the poor flowers lay broken and crushed. The heroic commander of the Pontifical soldiers had carried his resolve into execution. He had, though with but a small remnant of his brave army, made his way through the countless hosts of the enemy, and before nightfall had reached the fortress of Ancona.

'When De Lamoriciere saw all was lost,' writes our noble countryman, De Resimont, 'he called us together. To my great amazement, only three or four of us were thrown from the saddle, but they came off with a whole skin, and with only the loss of their horses.'

'We soon came to the sea-shore, for the Piedmontese had already occupied the highroads which we should naturally have taken. A regiment of lancers was soon in full gallop at our heels.'

'Caught between two fires, and not numerous enough to have any hope to withstand the masses of the enemy, we closed our ranks behind the General, and made all speed to the mountains. The roads were frightful. We were obliged to dismount and lead our horses by the bridle.'

'After an hour's painful work, we came to the Convent of the Camaldolese, where we could bear the bombardment of Ancona. Our position was perilous; we knew not whether Ancona was beleaguered by land. Retreat was impossible. Forwards! We proceeded without impediment.'

Meanwhile the remaining division of the Papal army retreated to Loreto, and Mary's temple soon swarmed with the wounded and the dying.

The brave heroes of Christendom who had come hither that morning to receive strength unshrinkingly to meet their martyrdom, now returned to ask the Queen of Martyrs to obtain strength for them to remain steadfast unto the end.

Glorious heroes of Christendom! at once lions and lambs.

Lions, by the testimony of their enemies.

'These troops,' said Cialdini, in a report to General Cucchiari, 'fell upon us furiously. The conflict was short, but fierce and bloody.'

Lambs, in the tender compassion which more than once stayed the deadly bullet in its course.

'An!' said they to one another, 'I cannot shoot at that poor boy yonder. Perhaps he has got a mother who will weep over him. I cannot find it in my heart to kill him.' (See 'Sergent,' Les Martyrs de Castelfidardo, p. 49, 1861.)

Victor and his two comrades had distinguished themselves among the lions and the lambs. They belonged to the same company and fought bravely side by side. As Martin had truly said, the enemy soon found that they had no helpless flock of sheep to slaughter, for with his own hand alone he had struck many a Piedmontese to the ground.

His giant stature seemed to grow in the conflict; his usually calm eyes glowed with fire, his vigorous arm directed his musket with unerring aim, and poured death and destruction on the heads of the enemy.

Victor and Joseph kept close by his side and directed their aim with such accuracy that every shot brought down an enemy. The three seemed to be endued with supernatural strength. The bullets hissed about their ears; they saw and heard nothing but the enemy. Several times a hostile party had attacked the three heroes, and as often had been forced to retreat from the deadly fire which greeted all assailants, and laid them in the dust.

At last they were compelled, with the rest of their companions, to give away before the numbers by which they were overmatched.

Martin retreated slowly, and step by step. It seemed to cost him dear to leave the position once taken up.

When he at last joined the rest of his companions he missed his two friends.

'Joseph! Victor!' he cried, in a tone of bitter self reproach, 'I have forsaken you! Mother, mother! shall I no longer be able to watch over them according to your bidding?'

Without a moment's delay the brave fellow hastened, if possible, at the cost of his life, to fulfil the duty of gratitude.

Meanwhile, Victor and Joseph, in the disorder

of retreat, had been separated from their comrade. They had just reached the skirts of a wood beyond the reach of the enemy's fire, when Joseph, turning, perceived that they were closely pursued by two Piedmontese. Flight was impossible. The enemy, at full speed, were but a few paces from them. Moreover, the numbers were not unequal.

'Victor!' cried Joseph, 'to arms. We are pursued.' But before they could place themselves on the defensive, two soldiers fell upon them, sword in hand.

'Ah, cowardly bigots, I have found you at last. This is the hour of my vengeance.'

It was Gennaro, with his worthy accomplice Orazio.

Had some demon set him on their track! Now began a struggle for life or death.

All was still around, but in the far distance a dropping fire was heard from the Piedmontese camp.

Gennaro had fallen upon Victor. Joseph defended himself against Orazio.

Joseph for you, but Victor—but Victor for me alone, was the injunction laid on his friend by the carbonaro.

The two Zouaves defended themselves manfully. Orazio found Joseph a formidable antagonist. The Piedmontese, though an experienced soldier, found all his blows so skilfully warded off, that he had not been able to make one of them tell upon his opponent.

But fearful was the spectacle of the conduct between Victor and Gennaro. Victor had hitherto defended himself successfully, and Gennaro was furious at finding all his efforts ineffectual. The carbonaro's eyes started frightfully out of his head, the veins of his forehead were swollen, his lips were pressed tight together, and ever and anon a hoarse sound escaped his throat, like the howl of a wild beast of the wilderness.

Gradually Victor's defence lost energy. The poor youth was overcome with deadly fatigue, and the fire which had exulted his soul in the conflict for the Church, seemed in a great measure to have forsaken him now that he had to fight in self-defence, and at the risk of his adversary's soul. What was life to him, that he should purchase it by the everlasting perdition of the miserable Gennaro?

Nevertheless, at one moment, Gennaro, by an unwary movement fell to the ground, and Victor's sword already flashed over his head. But the noble hearted Zouave drew back his arm.

'Nunziata, Stefano,' cried he, 'shall I murder your brother?'

The carbonaro was on his feet again. He had heard his enemy's exclamation, which only redoubled his fiendish fury.

'Murder!' echoed he, 'one of us two shall die this day.' With renewed frenzy he struck at his adversary, who now defended himself with difficulty.

Ah, Gennaro, is the hour of your vengeance now come indeed?

On the other side the conflict still continued. Joseph had at last dealt his enemy a severe wound, but the sight of his blood excited Orazio to fresh efforts. His sword flashed on every side, and threatened the brave Van Dael in every direction. Suddenly the blood flowed over the Zouave's face; the Piedmontese had wounded him on the forehead. Joseph faltered for a moment, but recovered himself immediately, and then was heard a loud cry, and, like a thunderbolt, a blow fell with crushing force upon Orazio's head, which stretched him upon the ground, while a stream of blood poured from his mouth. His skull was literally shattered.

It was Martin who had come so suddenly to the rescue.

Thus unexpected aid did not escape Gennaro. Must he miss his aim once more?

He sprang like a tiger upon Victor, whose attention had been, moreover, distracted by the scene which had been passing at his side.

He sprang upon him like a tiger, and plunged his sword with a cry of fiendish joy into his breast.

Victor uttered a piercing cry, and fell upon the green turf.

But Martin had heard it.

'Ah, coward,' thundered he; 'murderer, now for you.' And with the speed of lightning he flew upon the carbonaro, who had already stooped to deal his victim another blow.

'Hands off! vile robber!' cried Martin, and struck Gennaro so mightily a blow that he rolled upon the ground.

But the carbonaro sprang once more to his feet, and fell with fiendish rage upon his new adversary.

Joseph, in the meanwhile, had hastened to Victor. He thought no more of his own wound, which indeed was slight, for Orazio's sword had not pierced far into the flesh.

The carbonaro's victim lay motionless. His clothes were covered with blood, which was still streaming from his wound.

'Victor, dear Victor,' said Joseph weeping