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THE STORY OF A CONSCRIPT.

(From the Catholic World.)

For some moments a cannonade had been going on at the other side of the city, where Blucher was attacking the faubourg of Halle. Soon after, the firing stretched along to the right: it was Bernadotte attacking the faubourg of Kohlgrathenthor, and at the same time the first shells, of the Austrians fell among us. They formed their columns of attack on the Caunewitz road, and poured down on us from all sides. Nevertheless, we held our own until about ten o'clock, and then were forced back to the old ramparts, through the breaches of which the Kaiserliks pursued us under the cross-fire of the fourteenth and twenty-ninth of the line. The poor Austrians were not inspired with the fury of the Prussians, but nevertheless, showed a true courage; for, in half an hour, they had won the ramparts, and although from the neighboring windows, we kept up a deadly fire, we could not force them back. Six months before, it would have horrified me to think of men being thus slaughtered, but now I was as sensible as any old soldier, and the death of one man, of a hundred, would not cost me a thought.

Until this time all had gone well, but how were we to get out of the houses? The enemy held every avenue, and it seemed that we would be caught like foxes in their holes, and I thought it not unlikely that the Austrians, in revenge for the loss we had inflicted upon them, might put us to the point of the bayonet. Meditating thus, I ran back to a room, where a dozen of us yet remained, and there I saw Sergeant Pinto leaning against the wall, his arms hanging by his face white as paper. He had just received a bullet in the breast; but the old man's warrior soul was still strong within him, as he cried:

'Defend yourselves, conscripts! Defend yourselves! Show the Kaiserliks that a French soldier is yet worth four of them! Ah, the villains.'

We heard the sound of blows on the door below thundering like cannon shots. We still kept up our fire, but hopelessly, when we heard the clatter of hoofs without. The firing ceased, and we saw through the smoke four squadrons of lancers dashing like a troop of lions through the midst of the Austrians. All yielded before them. The Kaiserliks fled, but the long, blue lancers, with their red pennons, were swifter than they, and many a white coat was pierced from behind. The lancers were Poles—the most terrible warriors I have ever seen, and, to speak truth, our friends and our brothers. They never turned from us in our hour of need; they gave us the last drop of their blood. And what have we done for their unhappy country? When I think of our ingratitude, my heart bleeds.

The Poles rescued us. Seeing them so proud and brave, we rushed out, attacking the Austrians with the bayonet, and driving them into the trenches. We were for the time victorious, but it was time to beat a retreat, for the enemy were already filling Leipsic; the gates of the Halle and Grimma were forced, and that of Peters-Thau delivered by our friends the Badeniers and our other friends the Saxons. Soldiers, citizens, and students kept up a fire from the windows on our retiring troops.

We had only time to reform and take the road along the Pleisse; the lancers awaited us there; we defiled behind them, and, as the Austrians again pressed around us, they charged once more to drive them back. What brave fellows and magnificent horsemen were those Poles!

The division, reduced from fifteen to eight thousand men, retired step by step before fifty thousand foes, and not without often turning and replying to the Austrian fire.

We neared the bridge—with what joy, I need not say. But it was no easy task to reach it, for infantry and horse crowded the whole width of the avenue, and arrived from all the neighboring roads, until the crowd formed an impenetrable mass, which advanced slowly, with groans and smothered cries, which might be heard at a distance of half a mile, despite the rattling of musketry. Woe to those upon the outer side of the bridge! they were forced into the water and no one stretched a hand to save them. In the middle, men and even horses were carried along with the crowd; they had no need of making any exertion of their own. But how were we to get there? The enemy were advancing nearer and nearer every moment. It is true we had stationed a few cannon so as to sweep the principal approaches, and those troops yet remained in line to repulse their attacks; but they had guns to sweep the bridge, and those who remained behind received their whole fire. This accounted for the press on the bridge.

At two or three hundred paces from the crowd, the idea of rushing forward and throwing myself into the midst entered my mind; but Captain Vidal, Lieutenant Bretonville, and other old officers said:

'Shoot down the first man that leaves the ranks!'

It was horrible to be so near safety, and yet unable to escape. This was between eleven and twelve o'clock. The fusillade grew nearer on the right and left, and a few bullets began to whistle over our heads. From the side of Halle we saw the Prussians rush out pell-mell with our own soldiers. Terrible cries now arose from the bridge. Cavalry, to make way for themselves, sabred the infantry, who reaped with the bayonet. It was a general *sauve qui peut*. At every step of the crowd, some one fell from the bridge, and, trying to regain his place, dragged fire or six with him into the water.

In the midst of this horrible confusion, this pandemonium of shouts, cries, groans, musket-shots, and sabre-strokes, a crash like a peal of thunder was heard, and the first arch of the bridge rose upward into the air with all upon it. Hundred of wretches were torn to pieces, and hundreds of others crushed beneath the falling ruins.

A sapper had blown up the arch! At this sight, the cry of treason rang from mouth to mouth. 'We are lost—betrayed!' was now the cry on all sides. The tumult was fearful. Some, in the rage of despair, turned upon the enemy like wild beasts at bay, thinking only of vengeance; others broke their arms, cursing heaven and earth for their misfortunes. Mounted officers and generals dashed into the river to cross it by swimming, and many soldiers followed them without taking time to throw off their knapsacks. The thought that the last hope of safety was gone, and nothing now remained but to be massacred, made men mad.—I had seen the Partha choked with dead bodies the day before, but this scene was a thousand times more horrible: drowning wretches dragging down those who happened to be near them; shrieks and yells of rage, or for help; a broad river concealed by a mass of heads and struggling arms.

Captain Vidal, who, by his coolness and steady eye, had hitherto kept us to our duty even Captain Vidal now appeared discouraged. He thrust his sabre into the scabbard, and cried, with a strange laugh:

'The game is up! Let us be gone.'

I touched his arm; he looked sadly and kindly at me.

'What do you wish, my child?' he asked.

'Captain,' said I, 'I was four months in the hospital at Leipsic; I have bathed in the Elster, and I know a ford.'

'Where?'

'Ten minutes' march above the bridge.'

He drew his sabre at once from its sheath, and shouted:

'Follow me, mes enfants! and you, Bertha, lead.'

The entire battalion, which did not now number more than two hundred men, followed: a hundred others, who saw us start confidently forward, joined us. I recognized the road which Zannier and I had traversed so often in July, when the ground was covered with flowers. The enemy fired on us, but we did not reply. I entered the water first; Captain Vidal next, then the others, two abreast. It reached our shoulders, for the river was swollen by the autumn rains; but we crossed, notwithstanding, without the loss of a man. We pressed onward across the fields, and soon reached the little wooden bridge at Schlessig, and thence turned to Lindenau.

We marched silently, turning from time to time to gaze on the other side of the Elster, where the battle still raged in the streets of Leipsic. The furious shouts, and the deep boom of cannon still reached our ears; and it was only when, about two o'clock, we overtook the long column which stretched, till lost in distance, on the road to Erfurt, that the sounds of conflict were lost in the roll of wagons and artillery trains.

Hitherto I have described the grandeur of war—battles glorious to France, notwithstanding our mistakes and misfortunes. When we were fighting all Europe alone, always one against two, and often one to three; when we finally succumbed, not through the courage of our foes, but borne down by treason and the weight of numbers, we had no reason to blush for our defeat, and the victors have little reason to exult in it. It is not numbers that makes the glory of a people or an army—it is virtue and bravery.

But now I must relate the horrors of retreat. It is said that confidence gives strength, and this is especially true of the French. While they advanced in full hope of victory, they were united; the will of their chiefs was their only law; they knew that they could succeed only by strict observance of discipline. But when driven back, no one had confidence save in him-

self, and commands were forgotten. Then these men—once so brave and so proud who marched so gayly to the fight—scattered to right and left; sometimes in groups. Then those who, a little while before trembled at their approach, grew bold; they came on, first timidly, but, meeting no resistance, became insolent. Then they would swoop down and carry off three or four laggards at a time, as I have seen crows swoop upon a fallen horse, which they did not dare approach while he could yet remain on his feet.

I have seen miserable Cossacks—very beggars, with nothing but old rags hanging around them; an old cap of tattered skin over their ears; unshorn beards, covered with vermin; mounted on old worn-out horses, without saddles, and with only a piece of rope by way of stirrups, an old rusty pistol all their fire arms, and a nail at the end of a pole for a lance; I have seen these wretches, who resembled sorrow and decrepit Jews more than soldiers, stop ten, fifteen of our men, and lead them off like sheep.

And the tall, lank peasants, who, a few months before, trembled if we only looked at them—I have seen them arrogantly repulse old soldiers—cuirassiers, artillerymen, dragoons who had fought through the Spanish war, men who could have crushed them with a blow of their fist; I have seen these peasants insist that they had no bread to sell, while the odor of the oven arose on all sides of us; that they had no wine, no beer, when we heard glasses clinking to right and left. And no one dared punish them; no one dared take what he wanted from the wretches who laughed to see us in such straits, for each one was retreating on his own account; we had no leaders, no discipline, and they could easily outnumber us.

And to hunger, misery, weariness, and fever, the horrors of an approaching winter were added. The rain never ceased, falling from the gray sky, and the winds pierced us to the bones. How could poor headless conscripts, mere shadows, fleshless and worn out, endure all this? They perished by thousands; their bodies covered the roads. The terrible typhus pursued us. Some said it was a plague, engendered by the dead not being buried deep enough; others, that it was the consequence of sufferings that required more than human strength to bear. I know not how this may be, but the villages of Alsace and Lorraine, to which we brought it; will long remember their sufferings; of a hundred attacked by it, not more than ten or twelve, at the most, recovered.

At length, on the evening of the nineteenth, we bivouacked at Lutzen, where our regiments reformed as best they might. The next day we skirmished with the Westphalians, and at Erfurt we received new shoes and uniforms. Five or six disbanded companies joined our battalion—nearly all conscripts. Our new coats and shoes were miles too large for us; but they were warm. The Cossacks reconnoitred us from a distance. Our Hussars would drive them off; but they returned the moment pursuit was relaxed. Many of our men went pillaging in the night, and were absent at roll-call, and the sentries received orders to shoot all who attempted to leave their bivouacs.

I had had the fever ever since we left Leipsic; it increased day by day, and I became so weak that I could scarcely rise in the mornings to follow the march. Zebede looked sadly at me, and sometimes said:

'Courage, Joseph! We will soon be at home!'

These words reanimated me; I felt my face flush.

'Yes, yes!' I said; 'we will soon be home; I must see home once more.'

The tears forced themselves to my eyes.—Zebede carried my knapsack when I was tired, and continued:

'Lean on my arm. We are getting nearer every day, now, Joseph. A few dozen leagues are nothing.'

My heart beat more bravely, but my strength was gone. I could no longer carry my musket; it was heavy as lead. I could not eat; my knees trembled beneath me; still I did not despair, but kept murmuring to myself: 'This is nothing. When you see the spire of Phalsbourg, your fever will leave you. You will have good air, and Catharine will nurse you.—All will yet be well!'

Others, no worse than I, fell by the roadside, but still I toiled on; when, near Folde, we learned that fifty thousand Bavarians were posted in the forests through we were to pass, for the purpose of cutting off our retreat. This was my finishing stroke, for I knew I could no longer load, fire, or defend myself with the bayonet. I felt that all my sufferings to get so far toward home were useless. Nevertheless, I made an effort when we were ordered to march, and tried to rise.

'Come, come, Joseph!' said Zebede; 'courage!'

But I could not move, and lay sobbing like a child.

'Come! stand up!' he said.

'I cannot. O God! I cannot!'

I clutched his arm. Tears streamed down his face. He tried to lift me, but he was too weak. I held fast to him, crying:

'Zebede, do not abandon me!'

Captain Vidal approached, and gazed sadly on me:

'Cheer up, my lad,' said he; 'the ambulances will be along in half an hour.'

But I knew what that meant, and I drew Zebede closer to me. He embraced me, and I whispered in his ear:

'Kiss Catharine for me—for my last farewell. Tell her that I died thinking of God's holy mother and of her?'

'Yes, yes!' he sobbed. 'My poor Joseph!'

I could cling to him no longer. He placed me on the ground, and ran away without turning his head. The column departed, and I gazed at it as one who sees his last hope fading away from his eyes. The last of the battalion disappeared over the ridge of a hill.—I closed my eyes. An hour passed, or perhaps a longer time, when the boom of cannon startled me, and I saw a division of the guard pass at a quick step with artillery and wagons. Seeing some sick in the wagons, I cried wistfully:

'Take me! Take me!'

But no one listened; still they kept on, while the thunder of artillery grew louder and louder. More than ten thousand men, cavalry and infantry passed me, but I had no longer strength to call out to them.

At last the long line ended; I saw knapsacks and shakos disappear behind the hill, and I lay down to sleep for ever, when once more I was aroused by the rolling of five or six pieces of artillery along the road. The cannoners sat sabre in hand, and behind came the caissons. I hoped no more from these than from the others, when suddenly I perceived a tall, lean, red-bearded veteran mounted beside one of the pieces, and bearing the cross upon his breast.—It was my old friend Zannier, my old comrade of Leipsic. He was passing without seeing me, when I cried, with all the strength that remained to me:

'Christian! Christian!'

He heard me in spite of the noise of the guns; stopped, and turned round.

'Christian! I cried, 'take pity on me!'

He saw me lying at the foot of a tree, and came to me with a pale face and staring eyes:

'What! Is it you, my poor Joseph?' cried he, springing from his horse.

He lifted me in his arms as if I were an infant, and shouted to the men who were driving the last wagon:

'Halt!'

Then embracing me, he placed me in it, my head upon a knapsack. I saw too that he wrapped a great cavalry cloak around my feet, as he cried:

'Forward! Forward! It is growing warm yonder!'

I remember no more, but I have a faint impression of hearing again the sound of heavy guns and rattle of musketry, mingled with shouts and commands. Branches of tall pines seemed to pass between me and the sky through the night; but all this might have been a dream.—But that day, behind Solmunster, in the woods of Hanau, we had a battle with the Bavarians, and routed them.

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On the fifteenth of January, 1814, two months and a half after the battle of Hanau, I awoke in a good bed, and at the end of a little, well-warmed room; and gazing at the rafters over my head, then at the little windows, where the frost had spread its silver sheen, I exclaimed, 'It is winter!' At the same time I heard the crash of artillery and the crackling of a fire, and turning over on my bed in a few moments, I saw seated at its side a pale young woman, with her arms folded, and I recognized—Catharine! I recognized, too, the room where I had spent so many Sundays before going to the wars. But the thunder of the cannon made me think I was dreaming. I gazed for a long while at Catharine, who seemed more beautiful than ever, and the question rose, 'Where is Aunt Gredel? am I at home once more? God grant that this be not a dream!'

At last I took courage and called softly:

'Catharine!' And she, turning her head, cried:

'Joseph! Do you know me?'

'Yes,' I replied, holding out my hand. She approached, trembling and sobbing, when again and again the cannon thundered.

'What are those shots I hear?' I cried.

'The guns of Phalsbourg,' she answered.—'The city is besieged.'

I could speak no more. Thus had so much

suffering, so many tears, so many thousands of lives gone for nothing, for the foe was at our homes. For an hour I could think of nothing else; and even now, old and gray-haired as I am, the thought fills me with bitterness. Yes, we old men have seen the German, the Russian, the Swede, the Spaniard, the Englishman, masters of France, garrisoning our cities, taking whatever suited them from our fortresses, inslaving our soldiers, changing our flag, and dividing among themselves, not only our conquests since 1804, but even those of the republic. These were the fruits of ten years of glory!

But let us not speak of these things. They will tell us that after Lutzen and Bautzen, the enemy offered to leave us Belgium, part of Holland, all the left bank of the Rhine as far as Bale, with Saroy and the kingdom of Italy; and that the emperor refused to accept these conditions, brilliant as they were, because he placed the satisfaction of his own pride before the happiness of France!

But to return to my story. For two weeks after the battle of Hanau, thousands of wagons, filled with wounded, crowded the road from Strasbourg to Nancy, and passed through Phalsbourg. Not one in the sad cortege escaped the eyes of Aunt Gredel and Catharine, and thousands of fathers and mothers sought among them for their children. The third day Catharine found me among a heap of other wretches, with sunken cheeks and glaring eyes—dying of hunger.

She knew me at once, but Aunt Gredel gazed long before she cried, 'Yes! it is he! It is Joseph!'

They took me home. Why should I describe my long illness, my shrieks for water, my almost miraculous escape from what seemed certain death? Let it suffice the kind reader to know that, six months after, Catharine and I were married; that Monsieur Goulden gave me half his business, and that we lived together as happy as birds.

The wars were ended, but the Bourbons had been taught nothing by their misfortunes, and the emperor only awaited the moment of vengeance. But here let us at rest. If people of sense tell me that I have done well in relating my campaign of 1813—that my story may show youth the vanity of military glory, and prove that no man can gain happiness save by peace, liberty, and labor—thea I will take up my pen once more, and give you the story of Waterloo!

THE END.

THE IRISH QUESTION.

LETTER FROM DEAN O'BRIEN OF LIMERICK.

The following letter has been published in the *London Star*, to the Editor of which it was addressed:—

Sir,—Forty-seven parishes assembled simultaneously last Sunday in the diocese of Limerick to protest against the Irish Church Establishment, and to petition the legislature for its entire abolition. I have reason to know that hundreds of other meetings were held on the same day, or are in course of being held during the next week or two, and that millions of subjects of the Queen will once more appeal to the House of Commons for a redemption from what is a dishonor as well as a wrong. I am bound to admit that there is more hope than I have seen for twenty years, and much more than I feel, and that men's minds are profoundly stirred by the broad span of Mr. Gladstone's sympathy and statesmanship. The twelve or thirteen hundred dignitaries, parish priests, and curates, who still hold for the wisdom and efficacy of native rule, have unitedly ranged themselves on the side of the Liberals, as an act of sound policy as well as a course demanded by the courageous honesty of Mr. Bright and his friends; and I am sure I do not misrepresent them when I say that whatever may be the issue of the present singular struggle, they believe the sincere desire of the Liberal party (not the Whigs) to make 'Ireland what she ought to be.'

I have communicated with a large number of clergymen, and I find a uniform agreement on the striking change in the ideas of the masses.—Three months ago it was difficult to induce the farmers, shopkeepers, and working men to sign any petition, and I have seen them doggedly refuse; on every occasion since the speech of Mr. Bright and the vote on last Saturday morning they have begun to think that they are within the pale of the Constitution, and they sign petitions most readily.

It is a good beyond price to have united the Liberal party—the solitary 'good' which the Irish Church Establishment has done for the cause of progress. But I feel certain the said Liberal party will be tried severely by the James policy of the Premier. The leaders are, I suppose, on their guard; but it is worth while to say that the 'good' to be declined, as well as the 'evil' to be eradicated, ought to be well defined before the holidays are over. Mr. Dis-