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"THE KNOUT."

A TALE OF POLAND.

(Translated from the French by Mrs. J. Sullier.) CHAPTER II.

Viewed from the farther extremity of the plain on which it was situated, the castle formed an exceedingly fine perspective. Though made up of various styles of architecture, its outline was anything but discordant. In the centre rose a massive tower of three stories, crenelated and surmounted by a pointed spire, reminding the beholder of the pure and light architectural forms of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The Count came forth and received his guests with a kind and friendly welcome. In person he was tall and robust, and might have counted some three score years, yet though his head wore the silver hue of age, there was about him no trace or token of declining strength, and his fine countenance had at once a noble and a martial look.

"My dear friend," said the Count, addressing himself more particularly to Raphael, whose hand he affectionately took, "notwithstanding the difference of opinion which has within the last year or two sprung up between us, I am yet fain to regard you as one of the worthiest, and most devoted sons of Poland. Hence I am about to tell you what now engrosses our exclusive attention. Rendered desperate by the multiplied sufferings of this our native land, we have come to the final resolution of making yet another attempt to obtain her independence.

"Our distance from Warsaw, together with the extreme danger of committing such matters to paper, effectually prevents us from knowing the day appointed for the insurrection; but as soon as it has declared itself, and that there will be no danger of further procrastination, we shall be at once apprised, for my son Casimir, who is, as you know, keeping garrison in Warsaw, has promised to brave every danger to open a communication between us and the centre of action. And now, Raphael, may I ask, without giving offence, what course do you propose taking amid the stirring scenes before us?"

This question was followed by a profound silence, each one awaiting with lively interest the young noble. Even Stanislaus suspended his admirable discourse, and Rosa, pensive and thoughtful, seemed to listen with earnest attention.

"Yes, it would undoubtedly offend me," replied Raphael, with visible emotion, "were one to doubt my willingness to sacrifice life, fortune and all for our beloved Poland! Yet, permit me to say, my lord, that I am responsible to my country alone for the course, which, I deem

the best. Your views are excellent—that I will readily allow—but if, in your eagerness to see them accomplished, you are led to adopt means which, to me, appear more likely to draw down still deeper ruin on the land we all seek to serve, does it not become my sacred duty to oppose your designs, even though at the sacrifice of your friendship?"

"What! then," cried the Count, "can you be yet insensible to the weight of the yoke that crushes this unhappy land! Are you not yet tired of the burden?"

"I shall only be effectually tired of it," replied Raphael firmly, "when all the sons of Poland, groaning beneath their intolerable load, shall arise in their might, even as one man, determined to die or to cast it off. My lord that day is not yet come—suffer me to say so, and pardon me if I seek to dispel the illusion which will assuredly terminate in your own destruction and that of your country. Think, I implore you, of what you are about to do! You are about to make a trial of strength with three formidable powers, who can easily bring against you an hundred bayonets to one. In such an extremity your sole chance of success is that the entire nation, the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the noble, the artisan, and the serf may rise with one accord and take arms to free their country. Then, and not till then, can you expect success. Has your lordship any such hope? Have you ever had reason to believe that at your call the people will simultaneously come forth and strike for liberty and Poland? Unfortunately, we can not conceal from ourselves that the vast bulk of the common people keep doggedly aloof from us, because our cause and theirs are not yet identified. Even in those provinces where feudal serfdom has ceased to exist, the people see, ay! feel that they are despised by the nobles, and where that galling chain still binds them, have we not reason to fear that they regard us as their bitterest enemies? You will, therefore, be inevitably defeated—more excruciating torments will be inflicted on this already exhausted country, and worse than all, the prospect of her deliverance will be put off to an indefinite period. Ah! Count! there are, and must be, safer and surer means to attain our end, and would to God that I could impress my convictions on your mind!"

The force and justice of these observations could not fail to produce an impression on an upright man and a disinterested patriot, such as Count Bialewski really was, and when he replied, it was in a grave and melancholy mood: "Perhaps you are right, Ubinski; nor is this the first time, when, after our warmest discussions, I inclined to think so. Alas, yes! it is too true that our means are sadly disproportionate, as well to the great end we have in view, as to the difficulties which must be encountered. But, then, what can we do? Events are urging us forward—our brethren of Warsaw call on us to follow them, and follow them we must, were it to certain death."

"And wherefore should we despair of success?" cried Stanislaus, throwing a contemptuous glance on Raphael, "must men of birth and courage stoop to rely on the gratuitous assistance of their hereditary foes?—does not history furnish us an hundred instances of a few brave men confronting with success a mighty army? You say that the people, if not against us, are but little likely to lead us their aid!—bah! what are the people to me—to us? Let the nobility only stand fast together (that same body which, in our better days, sent forth more than an hundred thousand gentlemen to one battle-field) and I promise you we shall make short work of the Russian hordes. At the present moment everything conspires to favor our enterprise, and such an opportunity may never again return for us. France, by her glorious three days, has given the signal of enfranchisement to the nations who groan in bondage. Belgium has followed her example.—All the North of Europe is in motion, and despotism totters on its throne. One effort, then—one vigorous effort—seconded, as we doubtless shall be, by that gallant France whose bright example beckons us on to freedom, and, my life for it, Poland secures for ever her ancient independence!"

"Place no reliance on France, Stanislaus!" returned the Count, briskly. "She has never done anything for us. In the eighteenth century she stood coldly by, while Poland was cut up and divided like a slaughtered ox, her great philosophers at the feet of Catherine and of Frederick, applauding all the while the work of robbery and spoliation. The republic made fine speeches—very fine speeches indeed—on our behalf, and Napoleon kindly permitted our countrymen to fill the vacancies in his ranks, and now, yes now, that selfish, egotistical nation would make us the sacrifice for peace. Let us then rely on ourselves alone. It is, unhappily, too true that we are disunited, and that, when the day of peril comes, many of Poland's brave and warlike sons will keep stercorally aloof from the struggle. But what then, Ubinski!—how else can we meet

these mighty obstacles than by the desperate courage of despair?"

"Not so," answered Raphael. "Let us consecrate our energies to form a national coalition. Let us at once apply ourselves to prove to the people that we have only in view the prosperity and the independence of our country; let us convince them that we are disinterested enough to give up in their favor our own exclusive privileges, and that we shall henceforward regard them in very truth as our brethren, owing homage and subjection only to the laws, to virtue, and to God. Then should Providence afford us one of those favorable opportunities which it holds in reserve, oh! believe me, Count! that the Poles will be all ready, all resolved, all devoted to the cause of freedom!"

"I cannot but approve of a conception so high and noble, Ubinski; but how are we to realise it?"

Raphael was silent for a moment; he was still at that age when the mind, influenced by the imagination, conceives and pours forth her ideas, without pausing to render them applicable, or even possible. He was, however, about to reply, when another individual, older and far more experienced, and who had hitherto remained an attentive listener, manifested a wish to give his opinion. This was the vicar of the parish, Count Bialewski's most confidential friend. He was a man of forty years, or thereabouts, most unassuming in his manners, and exhibiting on his placid features, at once the beaming hope of the true Christian, and the simple benevolence which marked his character.

"I should be unfaithful to my conscience and to the duty of my ministry, my dear Count," he began, in a tone of calm decision, "were I to hesitate in placing before your consideration the infallible means of working out the glorious end at which you aim. Weak as ye are in point of numbers when compared with the power and the might of your oppressors, ye have further to deplore those unhappy dissensions which paralyze all your efforts, and ye begin to feel that it is absolutely necessary to unite the entire nation in the bonds of fraternal affection. So far this is well. But remember, that to induce the haughty noble to resign the privileges of his order, the rich to share their wealth with the poor, or the fastidious citizen to look without contempt on the unlettered artisan, there must be some fundamental principle common to all, superior to all opinions and to all systems—a principle which, while it imposes certain duties on all, holds out to each an unfailing security. You will readily admit that such can never be the result of any political system, or of any set of philosophical notions. All that originates with man is tainted with error, and subject to contradiction.—Let us, then, go higher in our search for this governing principle, and we must acknowledge that the divine laws alone can wield universal dominion. They alone, in the name of an interest superior to all earthly concerns, will teach you to love, to aid, and to raise to your own level those whom you have so long trampled upon as vassals and slaves, and to make of them friends and brothers, that ye may all arrive together at the goal of national freedom. After all the progress of modern enlightenment, and in despite of all charters, there will be still amongst ye rich and poor, high and low, strong and feeble, and consequently the leaven of discord and of hatred, which religion only can extinguish by the inexhaustible streams of divine charity. Great nations have ever been religious! Go, therefore, and seek from that celestial source that strength of which ye stand in need, that ye may indeed become a free people! Ah, my lord! it is not without reason that I thus address you.—Where now shall we look for the fervent faith, and for the lofty virtue of ancient Poland? Even in our own days—within the last twenty years—have ye not outraged the divine morality of the gospel, in that pure and admirable precept on which is founded the union and the love of the domestic circle? 'Whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder!' These are the words of Christ, and yet ye have basely accepted the law of divorce, a law which outrages nature, and nature's God. Yes! and even when the conscientious cry of the people besought you to repeal that odious enactment, ye disdainfully refused, and your legislators were obstinate in maintaining that legal proof of your degradation and corruption. Alas! alas! it is not by bidding defiance to the mandates of God, that a nation can obtain his assistance, and we should never forget that he has punishment reserved for public, as well as individual crimes."

This lively effusion of apostolic zeal made no slight impression on the hearers, who were, for the most part, religious men—at least of religious principles (as the Poles generally are) and well acquainted, moreover, with the saintly piety of the speaker. Stanislaus alone suffered a satirical smile to wreath his lip, which was, however, promptly repressed by a reproving look from Rosa.

"May God pardon us our faults, or rather our crimes?" ejaculated the Count solemnly, "and may we be permitted to cancel them by our blood. That is the only amends we can now make, for it is too late to follow your wise admonitions. A fixed resolution has been taken, perhaps rashly, (the future will tell)—by many thousands of our countrymen in every corner of the kingdom. It is not for us to fail them in their need, and we have only to conquer or die."

"So be it!" responded a young man who entered the parlor at that moment by a private door, used only by members of the family. At the sound of his voice each one started up, and turned towards him in surprise, not knowing what was to be expected from this sudden interruption.

"It is Casimir—my brother!" cried Rosa joyfully, as she ran towards the stranger.

"What! can it be my son?" exclaimed the Count, as he received the young man in his arms, and returned his warm embrace.

"Oh heavens! he is wounded!" cried Rosa, pale and trembling, as she perceived spots of blood on her brother's garments. "Sit down, Casimir, and rest your wearied limbs. I myself will wash your wound while they go in quest of the doctor."

"It is nothing, Rosa—nothing, father, I assure you, so pray do not trouble yourselves about a mere scratch. But the cause of it is glorious, and concerns you all. Poland is free! Two days since the insurrection broke out in Warsaw: the Russians have evacuated the city, and I have penetrated the enemy's line to bring you these joyous tidings, which must necessarily be the signal for a general rising throughout all the provinces of the kingdom."

On hearing this announcement, a cry of joy was caught from mouth to mouth, and all gathered eagerly around the young Bialewski, each endeavoring to obtain an answer for his own inquiry, and all questioning and cross-questioning without order or consideration.

"My good friends," said Casimir, "before I proceed to satisfy your very natural and very laudable curiosity, I think it better to tell you that having been pursued by a detachment of cavalry from whom I very narrowly escaped, by taking to the woods, I have some precautions to take so as to prevent a recognition. I must, therefore, beg leave to retire in order to make the necessary alterations on my outward man, and also to seek some repose, which you will acknowledge that I stand in need of, when you consider that for two days I have been scampering through woods and ravines like a frightened hare. Good bye for a while."

Rosa took her brother's arm with tender affection, and they withdrew together.

CHAPTER III. "Well, said the Count, addressing his friends, 'I hope you are now convinced that my foresight was not at fault. The truth is, that notwithstanding our weakness, we have no other rule than that of despair. Nothing could be worse than the grievous yoke by which we are now weighed down, and even though we fail in our attempt to shake it off, we have the prospect of escaping it by a glorious death. For the rest, we have now only to concert the most prompt and vigorous measures—all other and more abstract discourse would be both profuse and unseasonable.'"

"Oh! as to me," cried Stanislaus, joyously rubbing his hands together, "I care just as much for the eloquence of Cicero or Demosthenes as I do for the ukases of his Imperial Majesty.—No! the only sound I wish to hear is the roar of musketry and cannon, and all I ask is to find myself sword in hand before our mighty lords, the Russians, though they numbered twenty to our one!"

"There is every probability that our patriotic wish will be speedily realised," returned the Count, warmly shaking the young man's hand, "and I think I may safely say that each of our friends here present will stand by your side on that trying day with all the force he can command."

As the Count spoke, he fixed his eyes on Raphael, as though the remark were meant to elicit his final answer, and Ubinski, without a minute's hesitation, replied in a tone at once firm and mournful:

"For the last time, Count, let me warn you that the liberation of Poland can never be accomplished by a mere effort of despair, be it ever so energetic, but it must be the result of a long, and ceaseless, and devoted application. Since I have unfortunately failed to impress your mind with my convictions, I must only treasure them in silence, for they may one day become available to us should we survive the coming time. And now my life and fortune are at my country's service."

"Oh, friends! my worthy friends!" cried the Count, raising to Heaven his eyes now filled with tears, and radiant with the fire of patriotism, "so much courage and self-devotion will not, I firmly hope, go without their reward. Souls so

noble are not made for slavery. Ah! the old are wont to sigh for the past, and to attribute the dreadful calamities which have fallen upon us, to the degeneracy of the rising generation. But for my part, I am proud and happy to bear witness that you are right worthy of your noble fathers, and your presence, your words, and your example, have power to dissolve the ice from the soul of age, and restore it to its pristine vigor. As a soldier of Kosciusko and of Napoleon, I have shared in many a brilliant victory, but never have I faced the foe with a firmer confidence than I shall as your leader, my young and gallant friends!"

Casimir and Rosa just then entered the room, and though the Count glanced with legitimate pride over the noble face and form of his son, yet his gaze rested with melancholy fondness, on the mild features of his daughter. Should he fall in the approaching struggle who would, or could, protect that dear girl. With the rapidity of lightning that thought impressed itself on his mind, saddening the enthusiastic devotion of the patriot by the keen sense of sacrifice and of separation.

"Who would be worthy to receive such a trust?" he repeated to himself in anguish, and he looked alternately at Stanislaus and Raphael. Whatever might have been his reflections, he could not long pursue them amid the noisy congratulations which followed the appearance of Casimir. The latter was completely metamorphosed: having divested himself of all that might indicate his profession as an officer in the Russo-Polish army, he appeared now in the costume of a civilian, so that with his mustachios closely shaven, and his hair cut short around his fresh and smiling countenance, he might well have passed for an inoffensive student.

"I crave your pardon, friends all," said Casimir to his father's guests, who were well known to him, "for having left you so abruptly, but, truth to tell, I was sulking with fatigue, and had, moreover, no ambition to die like the Greek soldier while announcing my glad tidings. If the Russians had caught me as I then was, the chapter would be instantly ended for me, whereas we are just now at the opening of a great drama in which I have a part to act before I die."

"I trust you will be safe here, my son," said the Count, with some anxiety in his tone; "nevertheless, until such times as we have hoisted the national flag (which we shall soon do) you must pass for a stranger here; in fact, it would be unsafe to be recognised, seeing that we are surrounded by spies. Oh! is it not joy to think that we shall soon breathe more freely? How happy must you all be in your free Warsaw, my dear Casimir!"

Casimir does not choose to tell you, father," interposed Rosa, "that he has eaten nothing to-day yet but a few wild roots picked up in the woods, I must, therefore, insist that you will lay your commands on him to leave off talking until he has partaken of the supper which has already been announced."

"Let us then adjourn to the supper table, gentlemen," said the Count, rising, "around which we may discourse just as freely, for my faithful Valentine and his son will be the only attendants."

The company at once proceeded to an immense hall, decorated with full length portraits of the Count's ancestors, intermingled with ancient pieces of armor arranged in panoply. The Vicar having pronounced a blessing, they each drew closer around the magnificently spread table.—The meal itself was quietly dispatched, for all were anxious to hear the details of the late event, and supper once over the Count was the first to break silence.

"This is, perhaps, the last time that we shall meet in peaceful guise under my ancient roof-tree, and I would, my friends, that you may hold in pleasurable remembrance the exquisite enjoyment of these tranquil moments, when in peace and security we listen to the inspiring recital of what our brethren have accomplished for our suffering land. May we soon follow them to the arena, that together we may wrest from the grasp of our oppressors that divine liberty, without which man is deprived of his rightful dignity. Relate to us then, my son, those heroic deeds which you yourself have witnessed, and may the recital, like the songs of Tyrtæus, inspire us to combat and subdue."

"You all know," began Casimir, "the cruel perplexities under which we have labored for the last six months, that is to say, since the unexpected revolution of July, in France. If, on the one side, the public enthusiasm had increased, the Russian police on the other had fearfully increased its severity. Hence it was that the chiefs of the national party incessantly watched, constantly menaced, and often surprised, knew not how to communicate with each other, or to arrange with any degree of certainty, the execution of their projects. Nevertheless, after displaying the most unprejudiced address, candour and devotion, they succeeded in determining the mode of attack, and making out for each of their ad-