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BY CELIA'S ARBOUR.

A NOVEL.

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"THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY," &c.

CHAPTER IX.

In the year 1854 began the Russian war. To me, because in those days I read few papers and took small interest in politics, the first signs of the impending struggle came from the Polish Barrack. Here, from the autumn of 1853, there reigned an unwonted animation. Letters and foreign newspapers were received daily; secret information was whispered about; strangers came down from London; the men gathered themselves into little knots and whispered. The most eager of them all was Wassielewski. He was transformed; he bore himself erect, with head thrown back; those deep-set eyes of his lost their look of expectant melancholy, and were bright with hope; he even seemed to have lost his limp. It was easy for me to understand that all this preliminary joy meant another rising in Poland. The weakness of Russia was to be the opportunity of my compatriots. In this quiet retreat they were plotting and conspiring. I came and went among them as I pleased, known to every one. They did not tell me their plans, but I observed that, as they talked, their eyes from time to time turned to me, and I discerned that they were discussing whether I should be made a conspirator with the rest and a sharer in their visions. I understood it was only part of the general humiliation of a hunchback—that they were undecided whether or not so useless physically could not be of use in the way of his name; whether, in fact, it was worth while to sacrifice my life, as well as their own, because I was Ladislas Pulaski. For the first time I felt a Pole indeed, in the strange thought that perhaps, after all, I, too, might be called upon to strike my blow, such as it was, for Polish freedom.

I had been kept strangely ignorant up to this time and even later, of my own family history and of the circumstances under which I was brought to England. I knew that I was the son of a Polish noble; that my father perished in one of the obscure and hopeless village risings which took place some years after the great insurrection of 1831, and were too local to be recorded in contemporary history; also, that it was old Wassielewski who brought me, a mere infant, in his own arms, safely to England. When I asked the Captain for further information, he put off the question. When, as a boy, I asked Wassielewski, he patted my head kindly, and bade me wait. I understood, therefore, very early, that there was more to be told in some day's good time.

I believe that it was by the Captain's wish that I was kept from the knowledge of things which might have maddened my boyish brain; because I can hardly give Wassielewski credit for an act of forbearance towards the credit of the Romanoff name which lasted twenty years. In the spring of 1854, when it became quite certain that Russia would have to face the strongest combination of allies ever formed, the day of deliverance seemed to be dawning for Poland. It was a delusive hope, as we know, because Prussia and Austria, *participes criminis*, could not look on in silence while the Russian part of the divided land freed itself and set a bad example to their own Poles. I have sometimes dreamed an impossible thing—that Germany, which pretends to be the most advanced outpost of civilization, and Austria, which boasts of her easy rule, might some day join together and restore their share in the unholy partition to liberty. What madness possessed them ever to dismember that ancient kingdom of independent Slavs, which could never threaten Germany and stood as a bulwark against the barbaric Muscovite? But it was a foolish dream. Nations never voluntarily make reparation. Unto the fourth and even the fifth generation they pay for crimes in their children's blood; but they do not make atonement for the sin.

While the hopes of the exiles were highest Wassielewski began to tell me tales of Polish daring and Russian cruelty. "You are a Pole," he used to finish his narrative, "remember always that you are a Pole. You owe yourself to your country. It may be your duty, as well as mine, to die in her cause. The day is coming when you will have to act." But, as yet, nothing of my father.

In those days, too, Herr Raumer first began to talk to me. I met him at Mr. Tyrrell's office, and he invited me to visit him at his lodgings, which were, as I have explained, the first floor of Augustus Brambler's house.

Here he received me with great cordiality. Indoors he removed the blue spectacles, which he habitually wore in the streets, and showed a pair of keen bright eyes which certainly did not look as if they required any shelter from the light. His room was furnished with great simplicity, like the quarters of an officer on active service—a table, a sideboard, one or two chairs—his own being a wooden armchair—a slip of carpet before the fire—a pianoforte—constituted all that his simple wants required. On the wall hung one or two weapons, a pair of rapiers crossed, a rifle, and a brace of pistols. On the mantle shelf were two or three pipes and a cigar case. In the open sideboard I observed a goodly

row of bottles, which I rightly judged from their shape and colour of the glass to contain German wine. Herr Raumer drank every day a bottle of this for dinner and another bottle before going to bed. He had one of those heads which are never the worse for wine, however much they swallow.

I felt very small sitting opposite this big man with the keen eyes which looked straight through me, his great head crowned with a mass of grey hair, his face, which looked like the face of one who commanded men habitually, adorned with the heavy white moustache and the long white eyebrows, the strong and resolute chin, the upright pose, the very strength in the man's figure as they rested on the table—all this impressed me.

He saw that I was impressed, and I think it pleased him.

He began at once to talk about Poland. He had long, he said, felt deeply for the sorrows and sufferings of my unfortunate country. Unhappily, as I knew, he was a German, and in Germany there were some sympathies which were not to be openly expressed. If a German gentleman, he said, desired liberty of the Press, freedom of discussion, elevation of the masses, liberal institutions, the restoration of Poland, or any kindred thing, it behoved him to be silent and possess his soul in patience. Here in England, and the doors closed, alone with a Polish gentleman, he could speak his mind. The fact was, the condition of things not only in Russia, but also in Austria and Prussia, was deplorable. He saw before him one who had suffered in the cause—I thought afterwards that my own exertions in the cause as a year-old baby hardly entitled me to speak as a martyr—he could tell me cases of Russian cruelty which would make my blood boil.

"There is," he said, "thank Heaven, left to mankind the sacred duty of rebellion. The Czar knows of this, and trembles on his throne. From generation to generation the duty is handed down. Even now," his voice sank to a whisper, "even at this very moment, it is whispered that the Poles are meditating another insurrection. Russia's weakness is Poland's opportunity. While her energies are all bent upon the war the Poles will rise again, and proclaim the Republic of Warsaw. But of course your friends in the Polish Barrack tell you all that is going on."

"Indeed they do not," I replied, with a jealous feeling that if they did I should hardly be justified in retailing their information to one who, however much he might sympathise with the cause, was certainly not a Pole.

"I imagine," he said, "but, of course I know nothing, that an attempt will be made this very year. It seems a favourable moment. The Polish exiles will return to join in the movement. It is devoutly to be hoped that they might succeed. And so Wassielewski tells you nothing. It seems hardly fair."

"Nothing." It did not strike me till afterwards that it was strange that Herr Raumer should know anything of Wassielewski.

"Ah! he thinks the time has not yet come. And yet you are seventeen, you are strong, and can handle a gun. It is not well of Wassielewski. Courage, my boy. I prophesy that many a Russian shall fall by your hand yet."

He always spoke on the assumption that another outbreak was to come, that I was to take part in it, and that the Poles were keeping the knowledge of my own past back from me. The prospect had its charm, even to me, the peaceful musician. I do believe that, hunchback as I was, I should have played the part of a man had Fate willed that I was to revisit my native country.

He changed the subject and presently began talking about music. Then he sat at the piano-forte and began to run his fingers up and down the keys. He could not play, but he possessed—many men do—an almost instinctive power of picking out melodies and filling them with simple chords. He asked me if I knew the German national airs, and then he began to sing them. We all know them now, those simple lullabies with the tears in every bar—but twenty years ago they were not so well known. He sang them sentimentally, and if it had not been for that strange rasp in the voice, musically. The tears came into his eyes as he sang.

"The sorrows," he said, "of other people are so very sad—at a distance. Seen close, they annoy."

But the weeks passed on, and nothing was done. As hope changed to doubt the faces of the Poles grew despondent. Wassielewski left off telling his stories of Polish valour; he lost his look of eager expectation, and he hung his head, as before, with dejected air and mournful deep-set eyes.

"It is all over," said Herr Raumer one evening. "Your life is safe, friend Ladislas. For so much you ought to be thankful. And the Russians need not fear your rifle for another year or two. No doubt," he added, with a gentle sneer, "they are thankful, too."

"Why is it all over?"

"Because Austria and Prussia will not permit revolt. Have they not got Poles of their own?" I began to declaim about the wickedness of Governments and statesmen.

Herr Raumer heard me politely. Then he filled another pipe, leaving the old one to cool, drank two glasses of hock, and replied slowly.

"Quite true, Ladislas Pulaski. No doubt at your age I should have thought, and perhaps said, the same thing. The wickedness of diplomatists is a reproach to modern civilisation. Yet, if you consider the matter, you will acknowledge that without their wickedness, there would be really very little in life worth having. No indignation, no sermons, no speakers at meetings, no societies. What a loss to Great Britain!"

"We could do without societies," I said. "A great deal more would go if political and other wickedness were to go. There would be no armies, no officers, no lawyers, no doctors, no clergymen. The newspapers would have nothing to say, because the course of the world could be safely predicted by any one. All your learned professions would be gone at a blow."

I laughed.

"Music and painting would remain." "But what would the painters do for subjects? You can't create any interest in the picture of a fat and happy family. There would be no materials for pathos. No one would die under a hundred; and as he would be a good man there would be no doubt about his after fate. No one would be ill. All alike would be virtuous, contented, happy—and dull."

"Why dull?"

"Why dull? Because there would be nothing left to fight, to fear, to guard against. Dull!" he took his pipe from his mouth, and yawned. "Dull! The human brain cannot conceive of a more appalling, of a more sleepy dullness than that of the world gone good."

"At least the rulers of the world are supposed to be always trying to bring that end about."

"Supposed, my young friend? Yes, by you, and enthusiastic young gentlemen like yourselves. Dull! Why, if you think of it, you would not even have your virtues left, because there would be no need for them. Bravery, self-denial, patience, resignation, patriotism, thrift,—these would all vanish, because there would be no need for them. No, Ladislas Pulaski, the wickedness of diplomatists keeps the world alive. There are always plenty of fools to shout, fling up their caps, believe everything they are told, and go away to get killed. The world goes good! Much as I deplore the wickedness of wicked men, I trust that general goodness may not happen in my time."

Herr Raumer was right. There was no Polish rising. But our little colony was broken up and thinned by the departure of many of the exiles. Some went out on secret service; some fought in the Turkish lines; a few volunteered in the English and French armies; some joined the German Legion. But Wassielewski stayed on, sadder, more hollow-eyed than ever.

One day about the beginning of the war, I was saluted in the street—it was on the Hard—by a tall and good-looking young sailor, in his naval rig, the handsiest ever invented.

"Hope you're well, sir."

It was Jim Hex.

I shook hands with him. He told me he was going aboard the *Imperieuse* for the Baltic Sea fleet, and they hoped to have a lively time.

The Baltic Fleet! The war was a real thing, then. And good-natured Jim was going to have the honour of fighting for his country.

He seemed to take it very easily; and he had all the old sea-dog's confidence in thrashing the enemy.

I asked him after Moses.

"Moses," he replied, in a hesitating way. "Moses—well—Mr. Pulaski, if I were you, sir,—I don't think I'd ask about Moses. He hasn't turned out—not what you might call a credit."

One figure I missed among others, from the row of wooden-veterans on the beach.

It was that of Mrs. Jeram's erring husband. The old man fell off his stool one night, outside his wife's house, in a fit. She took him in and nursed him till he died. So they were reconciled. And then Mrs. Jeram came to be house-keeper to the captain.

CHAPTER X.

WAR.

War! I was eighteen at the close of the "long, long, canker of Peace," as Tennyson called it—why does every poet try to be a Tyrtæus? And why should holy peace be called cancerous? The country put on its rusty armour, sharpened its swords, and sent out aged generals brought up in old traditions of Peninsular times. When news came of the first Turkish successes at Oltenitz, and we read of the gallant defence of Silistria, one began to realise that we were actually in the piping times of war. For my own part, I was pleased and excited, independently of my private, and Polish, reasons for excitement.

It seemed to my foolish understanding that the forty years since Waterloo, those years in which the world had done so much in a quiet and peaceful way to make wars more bloody, had been wasted and thrown away. The making of railways, the construction of steamers, the growth of great armaments, were things done slowly and without dramatic tableaux. Now what the world likes, in contemplating the never-ending human comedy, is that, from time to time,

the curtain should fall for a few moments on a thrilling and novel situation. This we were going to have.

"It is splendid, Cis," I cried, with the latest war news in my hand. "Splendid. Now we are going to live in history. We too shall hear hymns to the God of battles; we shall understand the meaning of the war fever; we shall know how men feel who live in a time of battles, sieges, and victories."

Celia did not respond as I expected to this newly born martial enthusiasm.

"And the soldiers will be killed," she said, sadly. "The poor soldiers. What does war mean to them but death and wounds?"

"And glory, Cis. They die for their country."

"I would rather they lived for their country. Laddy, if the new history that we are going to live in is like the old, I wish it was over and done with. For the old is nothing but the murdering of soldiers. I am sick of reading how the world can get no justice without fighting for it."

Looked at from Celia's point of view, I have sometimes thought there is something in her statement. So many kings; so many battles; so many soldiers fallen on the field of honour. Blow the trumpets; beat the drums; bring along the car of Victory; have a solemn *Te Deum*; and then sit down and make all things ready for the next campaign.

"What good," this foolish young person went on, "does the glory of a nameless soldier shot in a field, buried in a trench, do to his mourning people? I know, Laddy, it needs must that war come, but let him who appeals to the sword die by the sword."

When General F  vrier laid low the author of the world's disturbance, and the Poles lamented, because their enemy was gone before they had had time to throw one more defiance in his teeth, I thought of Celia's words, and they seemed prophetic.

"Why do the Russians fight the Turks?" she went on. "What harm have Turks done to Russians, or Russians to Turks?"

I suggested outraged and oppressed Christians.

"Then let the Christians rise and free themselves," she went on, "and let us help them. But not in the Czar's way. And as for the soldiers, would they not all be far happier at home?"

Nor could any argument of mine alter her opinion on this point: a heresy which strikes at the very root of all wars.

To be sure, if we read history all through, say the history of Gibbon, the most blood-thirsty historian I know—it would be difficult to find a single one out of his wars that was chosen by the people. "Now then, you drilled men," says King or Kaiser, "get up and kill each other." The *Official Gazette* proclaims the popular enthusiasm, shouting of war cries, and tossing of caps—the value of which we know in this critical age. But the people do not get up of their own accord. There is a good deal of fighting in the chronicles of old Froissart, but I remember no mention anywhere of popular joy over it. The historian is too honest to pretend such nonsense. In fact it never occurred to him that people could like it. They were told to put on their iron hats, grasp their pikes, and make the best of things. They obeyed with resignation; their fathers had done the same thing; they had been taught that war was one of the sad necessities of life,—that, and pestilence, and the tyranny of priests, and the uncertainty of justice; you had to fight just as you had to work, or to be born or to die; the pike was the emblem of fate. For wise and mysterious purposes it was ordained by Providence that you were to be cut off and beaten by your officers before being poked through the body by the iron point of the enemy's pike. It has been, hitherto, impossible for mankind to get out of this medieval way of thinking: some Continental nations, who believe they are quite the advance guard of civilization, even go so far as to preserve the cutting to this day as part of their Heaven-sent institutions. It is taught in the schools as belonging to the Divine Order, and therefore to be taken with resignation. At the same time, we need not go so far as to expect actual love for cutting—with desire for more cutting—from modern Prussians, any more than from medieval French or English.

Not one single common soldier, among all the millions who make up the rank and file of modern armies, wants to go fighting. And yet what a lot of fighting there is!

Suppose, some day, when the glorious army on either side was ordered to advance, the brave fellows were to sit down instead with a cheerful grin, leaving the kings to fight out the quarrel in a duel.

Now and then, things getting really intolerable, the people wake up, and have a Jacquerie, a Revolution, or a reformation. But that is civil war, the only kind of war which the unpatriotic mob really cares about.

"All the world," said foolish Cis, "praying daily for peace. And praying for peace since ever they began to pray at all. And what has come of it?"

"I do not see much good," said the Captain, who took the medieval view about war, "in praying for what you must help yourself to. If all the world agreed on peace, there would be peace. And then it would be no good having a bigger fleet than our neighbour."

I try to put my obvious point in a new and striking light: that nations who will not sit still but get up quarrels with other nations, ought to have all their arms taken from them. Fancy