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A TALE OF POLAND.

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

CHAPTER XV.

It is needless to follow the exiles on their journey; suffice it to say that these unfortunates had in or about nine hundred and fifty leagues to cross ere they could reach the dreary place of their destination. The journey took three months, and as it was commenced towards the middle of October, just when the frost sets in with severity, they had to undergo during the entire route the daily increasing rigor of a northern winter. At one time they were carried on wretched carts; and then dragged along on a species of sledge or train without the slightest covering; then again walking on foot through frost and snow. Sometimes obliged to stop in some inhospitable desert, on account of the illness of some of their number—being never served but with the very coarsest food, and often harshly treated by the guard, it was truly miraculous that the poor exiles were able to bear up against such accumulated misery and privation, or that any of them lived to reach the term of their unnatural journey. During all that dreary time the Count watched over the comfort of his daughter with the fondest and most unwearied solicitude—sustaining as best he might, her tottering steps, for notwithstanding all her high-souled courage, her frame was weak and enfeebled by suffering. His tender care was well seconded by his brethren in misfortune, who, forgetful of their own sufferings, contrived to obtain secretly from the charity of the people as they went along, many a little gift for their young fellow-traveller. Many a time, too, did one or other of them, although exhausted, and with torn and bleeding feet, help the Count to carry his daughter over some dangerous and toilsome path. But they deemed themselves well repaid when they heard the broken, yet still sweet voice of Rosa raised to heaven for them in grateful supplication, and they listened with swelling hearts as she spoke of that God who never forsakes the afflicted when they call on Him for aid, and whose mercy was with them there where human pity was dead and cold. "Our sufferings," would she say, "may perchance wash away the sins of our people and avert from them the avenging hand; and then, think of the heavenly country where we shall all, if it be not our own fault, find rest and joy everlasting—where we shall be compensated an hundred-fold—ay, a thousand fold for the miseries we now endure!" But Rosa did not content herself with kind and hopeful words, but laid hold on every opportunity to minister to the comfort of her companions, many of whom owed their lives to her gentle and ceaseless attentions. Thus supported and encouraged by mutual charity, the band of prisoners reached Tobolsk, the capital of Siberia, where we shall leave them for the present.

We left Raphael a refugee on the Prussian territory, at the moment when, after months and months of weary anxiety, he had resolved on going in search of Rosa and her father. After the dispersion of the Polish army, and when many of his companions in arms had sought and found in France a safe and honorable refuge, Raphael had been retained by his wounds and their effects, in the little village of Culm, about ten leagues from the frontier, where he lodged in the house of a worthy Burgess, to whom he paid about fifty florins per month. There he was kindly and carefully nursed during his long and tedious illness, for he had fallen into the hands of good and compassionate people. But nothing could soothe his mind in its harrowing suspense, and as all communication with Poland was at an end, her population being as closely confined to their own soil as though locked in a vast tomb, so Raphael determined to make his way back into that desolate country, and make an attempt to set the Count and Rosa free, if happily he could find them. Having maturely considered his project, he made up his mind to speak to his host on the subject, as he relied much on his friendship to favor his escape into Poland. As a refugee, he was an object of suspicion to the Prussian authorities, but latterly he had not been so closely watched, owing to his long illness and tedious recovery.

One evening, then, towards the middle of December, Master Albrecht, being seated near the fire smoking his long pipe with an air of luxurious meditation, while his comely wife sat at a little distance sewing, Raphael took occasion to broach the subject which ever filled his mind. "I have news for you, my good sir," said he, "which will, I know, give pain to your kind heart! I am about to leave you." "What! are you, too, bound for France?" cried Master Albrecht, laying his pipe beside his pot of beer so suddenly, and with such a force, that it broke in three pieces: seeing which the good Burgess coolly added: "Ay! sure enough, the best of friends must part!" "You are much nearer to your country while with us," observed Madame Albrecht, as, letting

her work fall on her knee, she looked up with a saddened air—"and besides, I do not know that you are well enough yet to undertake so long a journey at this inclement season."

"My worthy friends!" said Raphael, "I am not going to France, for that would but remove me farther still from those ties which alone bind me to this world, but I mean to return to Poland, to ascertain whether those I love are living or dead, and if I find them, I shall live or die with them."

"To Poland, did you say?" exclaimed Master Albrecht, with a significant glance at his wife, as though urging her to be silent; "surely you could not be mad enough to think of such a step, which could only end in your own destruction."

"Only listen, Master Albrecht, to what I have to say, and your generous heart will acknowledge that I am right. I have left behind in that unhappy land a lovely and a noble bride—one who, from the innumerable virtues and graces of her mind would adorn the throne of a monarch. Yet I left her at the very moment when she had become mine by every sacred tie—when I had sworn to love and cherish her forever. Her father, my best friend, is pursued by the sleepless vigilance of the Russians, and must be racked with apprehension for the desolate condition of his only child. Then I have in Lithuania a grand-mother who has been to me all that the fondest parent could have been, and whom I regard with even more than filial affection. I assure you, my kind friends, that I say but little when I assert that the safety of these three persons is dearer to me than my own existence, and you will allow that if there be even one poor chance of saving any of them, I am imperatively bound to try it. Consider that, even while I speak to you, they may be wandering about without a shelter from the frozen air, incessantly menaced by a punishment awarded to the vilest criminals!—and can I, then, remain here in peace and comfort?—oh no!—no. Were I not urged on by the strongest affections of my heart, even shame itself would compel me to seek them in their danger and in their misery!"

"But whither will you go then?" demanded Albrecht, visibly affected by Raphael's agitation—have you formed any plan—or have you any particular place in view?" And as he spoke this he ever and anon exchanged a meaning glance with his wife.

"I shall go first to Warsaw," returned Raphael. "The deuce you will!—and in a coach, I suppose, provided with a passport setting forth in due form your name, rank, age and profession! Just Heaven! my young friend, you speak like anything but a man of sense. To Warsaw, forsooth!—why that would be leaping into the very jaws of the wolf. And what if you should not find in Warsaw the friends for whom you are so venturesome, eh?"

"Why, then, I shall journey on, wherever hope will lead me." "And suppose you were told that your friends are in a place where no effort of yours can obtain access—a place, in short, where you cannot find them?"

"The wide world contains no such spot!" cried Raphael with unwonted vehemence. "But is it possible that you know anything of them?—Speak—speak, I implore you!"

"Yes, my good young friend," replied Master Albrecht with solemn gravity and again throwing a glance on his wife which seemed to say: "Since he will have it, why needs must." Yes, I have long known the retreat of your friends, and it is such that I hesitate in making it known to you."

"In mercy, tell me at once!" "Well, then—it is Siberia!" "Siberia! oh righteous God! what a destiny!" cried Raphael, and a sudden chillness benumbed his mind and body, so that for some time he could not even speak.

Without appearing to notice his overwhelming grief, Master Albrecht went on: "It is now almost three months since we learned from the public journals that Count Bialewski and his daughter, with several other noble Poles, had been banished to Siberia, I believe to the neighborhood of Tobolsk. You must acknowledge, then, my young friend, that no human power can draw them thence—God alone can do that, and let us beg of Him that He may soften the heart of the Czar in their favor!"

"There, then, will I go," said Raphael, suddenly breaking silence, "and if I cannot snatch them from their wretched fate, I can at least share it with them."

"As far as sharing their fate goes," observed Albrecht phlegmatically, "why the thing is easy enough if you can only make up your mind to venture into those dreary deserts."

"But might you not serve those you love much more effectually," said Madame Albrecht, "by remaining here, and engaging some of those who have influence at Court to intercede with the Emperor for their pardon?"

"No, no," replied Raphael, almost impatiently, "it would take years and years to soften that proud, stony heart, and in the meantime they might have sunk under their misery. The matter is just this—I have made up my mind to set out without delay, and I rely on your friendly aid, Master Albrecht, in facilitating my escape."

"I will do all I can for you, but I would rather serve you in some other way."

Raphael passed two weeks more in preparations for his journey, and above all in studying the regions through which he had to pass: he consulted all the best maps, and marked out his line of travel almost day by day. He hoped that in the disguise of a peasant he could make his way without attracting any attention, from stage to stage and from village to village to the confines of Russia in Europe. The excessive temerity of this project was its only chance of success, for no one could have supposed that an outlaw once escaped, would voluntarily throw himself again into danger, by venturing back into the country where discovery hung over him at every step.

"Well, so let it e'en be," said Master Albrecht, "and I trust your exceeding audacity will be your safeguard, for you judge well in taking it for granted that no one would suspect you of going with open eyes into the clutches of the enemy. You will probably reach Siberia—that I admit—but how will you get out of it with your companions?"

"Oh! I do not pretend to foresee so far into the future," replied Raphael with a smile; "when once we are together, we can arrange our plans and act as opportunity will permit."

Raphael then made arrangements with Albrecht touchings the jewels and bank bills confided to him by Count Bialewski, in anticipation of what had since been too fully realised.—Three-fourths of the whole he left in the hands of his host until such times as himself or some one for him could come to reclaim it. For himself he barely took what he could secrete about his person, being no more than he deemed absolutely necessary for his own wants and the execution of his projects. The question now was how to get over the frontier, and that was no slight difficulty: there was no chance of passing into Poland unnoticed, so watchful were the Russians all along the line, albeit that they kept a closer eye to those who went out, having little suspicion that any of those who once got safe out, would covet going in again. Some other plan, then, must be tried, and only two suggested themselves. One of these was to procure a passport for Raphael under a fictitious name: but here would be found so many difficulties that the idea was given up in despair; and Raphael was fairly at a loss when worthy Master Albrecht came out with his expedient. Having remarked that Raphael spoke German with the utmost fluency, he proposed to him to enter Poland as a travelling agent of a commercial house in Culm, belonging to the fur trade, by which means he could traverse all Russia without let or hindrance, and Siberia as well. Raphael willingly accepted this proposal, and was furnished with letters of instruction from the worthy fur-merchant, who was an intimate friend of Master Albrecht. He then passed some days in making himself acquainted with the details of that business (so as to act his part as well as possible) and in this he found but little difficulty, owing to his previous knowledge of natural history.

Having all his preliminaries satisfactorily arranged, Raphael took leave of Master Albrecht and his worthy help-mate, not without giving them the most substantial marks of his gratitude, and set out with all possible despatch for the frontier. Thanks to his good German, and his pacific guise, he was permitted to pass without molestation. How, indeed, could any one have imagined that one whose very life was at stake could wear so calm an aspect, and demean himself so quietly when standing in the presence of his mortal foe? He traversed, almost without stopping, the ancient kingdom of Poland (kingdom alas! no more!) and bent his course to Lithuania. There, more than ever, it behoved him to make no delay, for there he was peculiarly exposed to the danger of being recognised. Moreover, he gathered from the conversation in an inn that the Russian commander had received full power to institute military commissions anywhere within the Lithuanian districts, to take summary cognizance of all who might be suspected of having been engaged in the late insurrection, and to give sentence of banishment, confiscation, the labor of the mines, or even of death. Terror and dismay were seen on every face, for a hand of iron smote every heart. None could deem themselves secure, and there was not a single family that did not tremble for a father, a son, or a husband. Wealthy families and individuals were suddenly stripped of everything they possessed, by confiscation, and saw themselves reduced to abject poverty. A prince was condemned by the remorseless conqueror, to travel on foot to his Siberian exile. Neither were the lower ranks

spared, for all the Lithuanian soldiers and non-commissioned officers were transported to the farthest provinces of the vast Russian empire, with no hope of ever again beholding the heart-wrung mourners whom they left behind. Religion itself, the divine solace of the wretched and the sorrowful was persecuted with renewed violence, and treated with the most insulting contempt. Yet the catalogue of horrors ended not ever there, for something yet remained for that most wretched people—something before unheard of in the annals of oppression. Very soon there came from St. Petersburg the following order, bearing date the 21st November, 1831:—

"His Imperial Majesty has graciously vouchsafed to publish a supreme order for the removal of five thousand Polish gentlemen with their families from the province of Podolia, to the steppes of the Tzessor, said families to be stationed immediately within the line or in the district of Caucasus, so that they may be afterwards enrolled in our military service. In making this selection, the following conditions must be observed: firstly, those are to be taken who, having been banished for participating in the last rebellion, are returned from exile, their appointed time being expired; those also who have been included in the third class of criminals, and have consequently received His Majesty's gracious pardon. Secondly, all those whose manner of living renders them liable to be suspected by the local authorities. Furthermore, your Excellency will employ all necessary means (without publishing or making known the particular nature of this order) to register the names of all those families on whom you may have pitched, so that you can immediately put this decree into execution, according to the particular instructions hereafter to be transmitted to you."

Another despatch added: "His Majesty, in confirming the rules to be observed, has graciously written with his own hand what follows:—These rules and regulations apply not only to Podolia, but to all the western governments: Wilna, Grodno, Vitepsk, Bialistok, Minsk, Volhynia and Lyov, which will make in all forty-five thousand families. Those of gentle birth, who have no landed property, no revenues, nor fixed occupation, who live idly and often change their places of abode, shall be removed to the line of Caucasus, and shall be enrolled in the Cossack regiments, and as henceforward they shall be regarded as Cossacks they are to have no sort of communication with the other colonies of Polish gentlemen. To conclude, if these Poles show any reluctance to emigrate as we have ordered, we hereby give your Excellency full power to coerce them to compliance."

This truly savage system of wholesale banishment was already commenced, twelve hundred families having been torn from their ancestral homes in Podolia alone. So deep and universal, however, was the detestation with which the people beheld this new atrocity, that the Russian authorities were obliged to suspend its further execution for a time, keeping it always in view, and laying hold of every pretext to carry on by stealth and by indirect means that which they feared to do openly. Such was the aspect of affairs when Raphael once more entered his native province. At every step his ears were assailed by the recital of these horrors, mingled with groans, and sighs, and lamentations which pierced his very heart. Yet, not all the danger of the undertaking could prevent him from going in person to his own home to see how it fared with his beloved and revered parent. He was, nevertheless, obliged by a violent snow-storm to stop a few days in the first Lithuanian village. As he entered the little town he was struck by even an unusual display of military strength; strong parties of soldiers being stationed at the gates and all the openings. Yet, regardless of all this, and defying the orders of the police, the people were gathered together in the streets, and appeared under the influence of one of those fits of passion where all sense of fear is extinguished. Raphael hastened to inquire of the landlady the cause of this violent outburst of popular feeling. "Oh, sir!" she replied, with a sort of fierceness, borrowed from the occasion, and throwing away, as if in disdain, all that reserve which recent events had forced the people to observe towards strangers—"Oh, sir! it is a thing which outrages both heaven and earth—they want to rob us of our children—that they do!"

CHAPTER XVI.

"To rob ye of your children!" cried Raphael, "is it possible?"

"It is no wonder, sir, that you can scarcely believe it; but what I tell you is true for that, for they are now trying so execute an order sent by the Emperor to that effect: Oh! surely these Russians have no heart!"

As she spoke thus, the poor woman, who was, still young and pretty, kept looking around with a wild and restless glance; then advancing to the door she looked out with a haggard stare on the increasing tumult in the street.

"Have you reason to fear for your own family?" inquired Raphael.

"Alas! I am the most unfortunate of human beings!" cried the poor woman, bursting into tears. "Only think, sir, at the close of our last troubles they tore away my husband, because he had done his duty, and fought for poor Poland.—These eyes saw him dragged away in chains like a vile criminal, without a hope of seeing him again in this life, while I was left, in a state bordering on ruin, with one poor child of about five years old. Well! all that, it seems, is not enough, for the emperor now decrees that all our children, who are thus left orphans, are to be gathered up by his agents and sent off to the depth of that hateful Russia, there to be brought up as his subjects. Yet this man—this emperor—has the assurance to give himself airs of kindness and humanity! Just think of that—and he taking from us our poor little helpless children, whom he has already deprived of their fathers! As they have no fathers, he has the impudence to say, that he will be a father to them! But, oh God! sir, what will become of their poor mothers!—oh! would that my eyes were closed in death before they look on such a sight!"

"Take courage, madam! for things may not be as bad as you seem to apprehend. Surely the Imperial order must be exaggerated in report, for though I know very well that the Russians will eagerly snap up all such children as are really orphans, and send them to people their vast deserts, yet they must respect the rights of families."

"They will respect nothing, sir—nothing!" replied the landlady, with increasing agitation, "that I know full well, for I have seen them at work all yesterday and to-day."

And she hastened away from Raphael, as though his having expressed a doubt of the barbarity of the Russians had made him suspicious in her eyes. For some minutes longer she remained gazing out with a terrified countenance on the stormy scene without, but suddenly running back into the house, she cried out in accents of horror.

"Here they come—unhappy I!—here they are!" and so saying, she darted up the stairs to the chamber where her boy lay sleeping in his little bed. Raphael and some of the servants of the hotel hastened to the door to see what was going on without. They were soon obliged to retreat, however, for a party of police, and another of soldiers, quickly entered the house.

"Where is the mistress of the house?" demanded the officer in command. The servants pointed to the staircase, whereupon the agents ascended without another word of inquiry, as though ashamed of their odious employment, and anxious to get through with it as soon as possible. Soon after the most piercing screams were heard from above, and in an instant the young woman was seen dragged down the stairs by the police, with her child clasped convulsively in her arms.

"No! no!" she cried, "you may kill me if you will, but you shall not deprive me of my child! I am his mother—he is mine, and your emperor has nothing to do with him. It is for me, who has given him birth and fed him from my breast, to bring him up as I wish and as I best can. You will not leave your mother, my child, will you? Leave his mother!—why, he would die, poor innocent, without a mother's care! Oh! sirs—good gentlemen! have mercy on me, and leave me my only child—see, I kneel to you—oh! do not take him from me!"

And the wretched suppliant knelt on the snowy ground, with the tears streaming from her eyes, and her face bowed almost to the earth. Her boy terrified, though he knew not why, nestled close in her arms.

"Come, come, Madame! we must put an end to this! give me the child at once!" said the officer quickly, evidently desirous of terminating a scene of which he was heartily ashamed. Approaching the poor mother, he tried to force the child from her arms: at first she struggled with unconceivable energy, but seeing that several others of his people came forward to assist him, and being herself almost exhausted:

"Wait—wait a moment," she cried, with a pbenzied air, "just wait till I bid him farewell!" And with wild, delicious gestures, she strained him in her arms—closer and closer still, till the child became livid and motionless, then she threw him towards those who waited for him—while they, in their turn, stood aghast and horrified.

"Butchers!" cried the unhappy woman, with maniac fury, "there he is! you may now take him if you will; there he is!"

A cry of horror escaped from every mouth, and each spectator stood motionless before that hideous sight. But the unfortunate woman speedily regained her senses, and as though seeing for the first time, the inanimate form of her child, she caught it in her arms, and pressed it tenderly to her heart with the vain hope of restoring it to life and warmth, crying out "My child—my poor, poor child! they have killed my son!"

When recovered from their first stupor of horror and surprise, the police drew away the ill-