

KOSCIUSKO.

Reminiscences of the Revolutionary Hero.

HISTORICAL ERRORS CORRECTED.

The Story of Colonel Zeltner, a Friend and Companion of the Polish Patriot.

The Polish Society of California was very agreeably surprised at its regular meeting on Saturday, May 13th, by receiving a valuable paper forwarded through the medium of Julius Morain, one of its members, written by Colonel Zeltner, of Hoboken, N. J., an octogenarian, and a personal friend and companion of Thaddeus Kosciusko, the brave, who fought so nobly for the liberties of this country at the side of Washington, and afterward the well-known hero of Poland. Inasmuch as that paper relates some interesting reminiscences and mementoes by one who is perhaps the sole surviving eye-witness of the last moments of that chieftain's career, and develops some facts regarding his private life not contained in the encyclopedias, it will have general interest. While being read before the Society a solemn silence and awe was produced, and deep emotion pervaded all present. Indeed it runs something like a voice from another world. Colonel Zeltner's relation is as follows:

COLONEL ZELTNER'S PAPER.

I was an intimate friend of Kosciusko, although I was only a youth when he lived in my father's house in Solothurn, Switzerland. He had the front room on the second floor and I occupied a rear room. I was born in 1795, in Lugano, in the district afterward known as the Canton Tessin, of which my father was Governor, and afterward was promoted to the Governorship of the more extensive canton of Solothurn, whose capital city has the same name. Soon after my father's installment in Solothurn he was sent to Paris as Envoy Extraordinary of the Swiss Confederation. In the house of his brother, the Swiss Minister Plenipotentiary, my father met Kosciusko, who had been living several years with my uncle. My father and Kosciusko were soon strongly attached to each other. Kosciusko was then in frail health and desirous of seeking a retired, peaceful home, wherein he might pass the remainder of his life. Often he expressed a desire to live in my father's house, and as frequently my father gave him a cordial invitation. My father was anxious to obtain a likeness of Kosciusko, but the latter declined to permit one to be made, saying that he was averse to it and had always been resolved that none should ever exist. Hearing that Eggenschwiller, the celebrated sculptor of his time, a native of Switzerland, was in Paris, my father visited him. They arranged that my father should take Kosciusko to the theater, and that Eggenschwiller, seated in the adjoining box, should make

A DRAWING OF KOSCIUSKO

In the course of the performance. In this way a very good portrait was obtained. Soon it happened that Kosciusko, in company with my father, visited the studio of the sculptor. There Kosciusko's eye fell upon three marble busts of himself. Very excited he wielded his heavy cane and shivered two of them. Before the third the imploring sculptor threw himself, promising solemnly not to duplicate it. Turning to my father, Kosciusko said: "Accept this bust, dear friend, as a proof of my unlimited esteem. To you alone I make an exception to a rule that I have never before been induced to depart from." That bust, the only faithful one of Kosciusko that exists, is presently in possession of Colonel Zeltner at Hoboken; besides, he possesses some other relics of the Polish patriot, as for instance some wearing apparel, two Damascus razors and a campaigning mirror. With those razors, and before that time, Kosciusko shaved during Poland's terrible struggle under his leadership with Russia. * * *

KOSCIUSKO A PRISONER.

In the battle of Miciejowicz, fought on the 10th of October, 1793, Kosciusko was severely wounded and captured by the Russians, and the Poles were unfortunately defeated. Kosciusko and his aid-de-camp, the well-known poet Niemcewicz, were hurried to St. Petersburg and thrown in prison. When Paul I ascended the throne, made vacant by the Empress Catherine's death, he liberated Kosciusko and Niemcewicz, and generously restored their swords. An offer of a considerable sum of money was declined by both. Kosciusko was conveyed in an imperial Russian ship to England and there was informed by the Emperor Paul's financial agent that the money tendered to him by the Emperor in Russia was at his disposal. Kosciusko again declined it politely. But twenty years later, some years after Kosciusko's intimacy with the Governor of Solothurn, the Emperor Alexander I, the uncle of the now reigning Emperor of Russia, Paul I, son and successor, visiting Paris at the time of Napoleon I's downfall, called on Kosciusko and said: "General, do not insult my father's memory by longer refusing his gift. In return for your acceptance of it I will grant any favor that you may ask." Kosciusko, having accepted the money, amounting to nearly 200,000 francs, asked that the family of Zeltner might be rewarded for its hospitality to him while a poverty-stricken exile. The Emperor summoned his private Secretary and commanded him to have an estate in Poland, yielding 10,000 francs per annum, conveyed to the Zeltner family. * * *

IN PRIVATE LIFE.

As soon as Kosciusko was thus enriched, continues Colonel Zeltner, he communicated to my father his desire to pass the remaining part of his existence in Solothurn, our residence. My father prepared our best two rooms for him. Kosciusko suffered much from old wounds, and every day he was obliged to anoint his body with an Oriental preparation, and apply artificial heat to his extremities. Yet he contrived to instruct his god-daughter, my sister Thaddea, then about fourteen years of age, in the languages and mathematics. In the latter department of education he was particularly efficient. He lived quietly and regularly, rising about 6 o'clock in the morning and retiring at 10 o'clock; received few visitors other than those in need of pecuniary assistance. The greater part of his income was spent in charity, and in 1817, when the crops failed, the principal on deposit in London was heavily drawn upon. He was accustomed to ride out on a gentle horse that stopped whenever a poor person approached, and would not move on until the alms had been bestowed. One day I carried some wine sent to Kosciusko for his own use by the King of Piedmont, to a sick and needy minister of the gospel. On the return way the horse was recognized from afar by those that habitually received money from his master, and they ran to receive it. The horse came to a stand and would not move further until I had taken some money out of my purse and satisfied the needy. * * *

TWO HISTORICAL ERRORS.

I frequently read aloud to Kosciusko. Reading the "Conversations-Lexicon" one day I encountered the assertion that when Kosciusko fell from his horse, desperately wounded, on the field of Miciejowicz, he exclaimed "Finis Polonie!" (This is the end of Poland.) Throwing his hands up to his forehead, Kosciusko burst out, "This is infamous, infamous! I said nothing of the kind, or I knew well that when I was dead there would be patriots to fight for Poland." Again, in another volume of the same work, I met this passage, "When Napoleon I was in Poland, on his expedition against Russia in 1812, Kosciusko published a proclamation to the Polish people, appealing to them to rise in alliance with the emperor." "That is false, terribly false!" Kosciusko exclaimed, springing out of his chair, "Ah, how hard it is to be thus misrepresented to those that I led for. Napoleon sent Fouche to me at Berville, your uncle's country seat near Paris, while he was preparing for the campaign against Russia, to ask that I should accompany him. It was intimated that my influence over the Poles was needed by Napoleon. I asked Fouche what Napoleon would do for Poland if I should advise them to aid him. Fouche replied that his sovereign was unaccustomed to making concessions, and especially to one on his own territory. I said then that if Napoleon would do nothing for Poland I would do nothing for him. Saying, 'General, I hope that you may never repent your refusal,' Fouche withdrew. I have contradicted on every occasion the generally current belief regarding the authenticity of the exclamation, 'Finis Polonie!' and the spurious proclamation to the Polish people; but they have become historical. At about this period Count Zamolski, the wealthiest landholder of Poland, came to visit Kosciusko. The latter obtained a promise of a cadetship for me in the Russo-Polish army from the Count, and in three months I went to Cracow. Two months after my departure Kosciusko, having fallen from his horse in ascending a mountain near the lake of Geneva, contracted a fever, of which he died on the 15th of October, 1817. His body was embalmed. The intestines were deposited by my father beneath a lofty monument, inscribed, 'Vicere Thaddei Kosciusko,' in a village twenty minutes ride from Solothurn. This is a Mecca of Poles. The Emperor Alexander I appointed Prince Anton Jablonowski to escort Kosciusko's remains to the tomb of the kings of Poland in Cracow. They were conveyed in a splendid carriage, especially constructed in Paris and deposited between the sarcophagi of John Sobieski and Prince Poniatowski. Kosciusko willed one half of his possessions, 98,000 francs,

* It was he, who, while in this country, conceived the idea, and by his untired exertions put into existence the famous "Polytechnical school" at West Point. The monument erected to his memory in the adjoining grounds of that establishment is the best witness of it.

† This exclamation put in the mouth of Kosciusko, was evidently manufactured by the enemies of Poland for political reasons—as it proved subsequently.

to my sister Thaddea, married to the Count Morozini, and the other to the poor of Solothurn. Near the beginning of the first Polish Revolution Kosciusko freed the serfs on his patrimonial estate and transferred the lands to his sister, Mme. Estko.

WHO THE NARRATOR IS.

Colonel Zeltner, at present residing at Hoboken, New Jersey, the venerable relic of those bygone times, notwithstanding his age (he is now over 81 years old), enjoys good health and is always in good spirits, only his sight has become of late a little slighted. His face is full and fresh colored, and his bearing soldierly. He became a Major of Guards in the Russo-Polish army before the memorable revolution of 1831. Then he joined the struggling Poles, having distinguished himself in all the principal battles, he was on one occasion elevated on the field to the rank of Colonel, and adorned with the military golden cross—"Virtuti-Militari"—of Poland, the most exalted Polish decoration. After the reverse of the Polish army he took refuge with the remnants of patriots, on Prussian territory. Soon after, having determined to seek his fortune in America, he came directly to New York and settled permanently in Hoboken, where, having lost his money by some vicissitudes, he began to teach music and languages, succeeding tolerably well, until six years ago, when his eyesight became impaired.