

# A POLISH PATRIOT.

## Experiences of an Exile of 1831.

### DIPLOMACY OF IGNATIEFF.

#### A Remarkable Colony of Russian Christians Located at Peking.

Fifty-five years have passed away since the struggle for independence broke out in Poland, and of that heroic band who fought so nobly "for their altars and their fires," in '31, only sixty-two survivors are left, some of them palsied veterans, others still hale and hearty, notwithstanding their three-score years, but all exiles from their native land, scattered in every quarter of the inhabitable globe. There is at present in this city one of these brave veterans, who, though a septuagenarian, is still healthy and strong and perhaps more vigorous and active than many of more youthful years. And yet the faded luster of his eyes, the deep lines and wrinkles of his face, and the corpse-like pallor of his withered skin, tell, without further comment, the story of the many sufferings and trials of his chequered career. Alexander Bednowski, the Secretary of the Polish Society, the brave veteran referred to, narrated to a CHRONICLE reporter a few days ago the singularly interesting story of his life.

"Yes," said the old gentleman, "it is true, I was once a Siberian exile, but the recollections of those times," he added, sighing deeply, "and of all the trials which I passed through are so sad that I do not care for recalling them, and there are so few here who would feel interest in my story—"

The reporter, however, having reassured him that many would feel an intense interest in reading the curious incidents of his life, the veteran reluctantly consented to give some particulars of the terrible sufferings he endured while traveling to Siberia and the curious incidents of his subsequent career as an exile.

#### ON THE ROAD TO EXILE.

"After the disastrous termination of our brave but unfortunate struggle," he began, "I escaped into Austria, but was thence extradited back into Russia, and, after a short term of imprisonment, I was sent to Moscow, and thence drafted with a number of other political exiles to Siberia. The entire journey from our point of departure to Irkutsk, our destination, was about 1200 versts—a verst is about a mile and a quarter—and this entire distance had to be traversed on foot. We were in the custody of an armed guard, with orders to shoot down all who attempted to escape, and chained to each other in groups of twos and fours. You can entertain a faint conception of our horrible condition when I tell you that in that hard and cruel winter, with the road almost impassable and the stations averaging fifty versts apart, that the officer was actually prevented from releasing and unchaining us until we reached the next stage. The chains which bound us in compulsory companionship terminated in a bracelet or wristlet shut with a spring lock; and the key which opened all these hideous manacles was contained in a sealed package handed by the Governor of Moscow to the commanding officer, and which the latter was allowed on no account to unseal until the next station was reached. The commander of each fort, as we passed along, then broke open the package, unlocked the clasp and we were allowed to rest in temporary freedom in straw-littered sheds for two or three days. But if one of our number happened to drop dead on the road from fatigue and privation, as the officer was not allowed to use the key, all that could be done was to cut off the arm from the fallen corpse, leave the body on the snow-buried road and compel the wretched companion of the dead man to carry the patriot and feeble arm of his companion pendant from his wrist to the next station.

#### KINDNESS OF THE PEASANTS.

"As for food, we were each allowed 10 kopecks a day by the Russian Government. You can imagine what a luxurious repast this would furnish when I tell you a kopeck is only a quarter of a cent. However, we did not depend on that meager allowance for nourishment; in fact we only spent it for whisky, but our principal support and our only solace amid all our troubles was the kindness and generosity of peasants in the villages and hamlets through which we passed. The moment they saw us approaching from afar they used to suspend their various occupations in the fields and elsewhere, and loading themselves with food and provisions and clothing of all kinds, would run towards us and thrust these generous offerings upon us. This was termed a peace-offering, for fanatically religious though these poor peasants are, they are wonderfully hospitable, generous and open-handed. Well, I don't want to linger over the unpleasant episodes of our journey, and luckily I need not do so, for I managed by singular good luck to escape some of the worst hardships of our terrible journey experienced by many of my less lucky comrades."

#### A GOOD SAMARITAN.

"How did I do it? Well, you must know, in every town of any importance en route, there is a military hospital, and if any of the prisoners was so ill as to be absolutely unable to proceed he was allowed to stop over at the hospital. Well, somehow or other, the head surgeon at one of those hospitals took quite a fancy to me. I was a young fellow, about 18 years of age at the time, and I looked too delicate, I suppose, to stand the hardships of that unpleasant season. It was the depth of the winter. After examining all the members of our gang, when he came to me he whispered, 'You stay over.' But I said, in my simple way, 'Why, doctor, there's nothing the matter with me.' 'Never mind, you go and report yourself as sick. I'll manage the rest.' Well, I did so, and I was accepted, and stopped there three months. I knew Latin, you know, and as all the inscriptions, describing the various maladies of the patients, above the cots in the wards of a Russian hospital are written in Latin, I wrote up above mine, by the doctor's direction, 'Febris Intermitans' (intermittent fever), which, of course, none of the ignorant assistants could understand. However, this malady being contagious, I was removed to a separate room and supplied with as much wine, chicken and rich food as I could get away with."

The old gentleman then poured out a multitudinous volume of anecdotes, bewildering his listener by the extraordinary exuberance and fertility of interesting matter. Rejecting many incidents almost equally worthy of being preserved, the reporter selected two which seemed to him unusually interesting.

"After reaching my destination, Irkutsk," said the exile, "my troubles were nearly over. Irkutsk is a large town and there the political *détenus* were permitted to do pretty much as they pleased. There we were each allowed a quarter of a rouble a day—a rouble is about 65 cents—for our support. However, we could supplement that by engaging in any trade or pursuit for which we were adapted. Though the local authorities were ordered by the Czar to treat us with rigor and harshness, we occasionally met with unusual kindness and levity. I had the singular good fortune to make many friends among the high officials of Irkutsk, one of whom, having discovered my knowledge of languages, intrusted me with the education of his two little daughters. By him I was introduced to the civil Governor of Irkutsk, at whose house I frequently spent my evenings.

#### RUSSO-GREEK-CHINESE.

"Well, one evening I was invited to meet a number of military and civil dignitaries at a banquet at the Governor's house. Arrived there, I found among the invited guests General Muravieff, the Governor-General of Siberia. The latter, a petty king in his way, had the title of Count Atamurski conferred on him in recompense for his services in connection with the dispute between the Czar and the Emperor of China relative to the cession of the rich province east of the Amur, or Amoor, river. To me the only guest of special interest, however, was General Ignatieff, who was then proceeding to Peking, loaded with presents, as Special Envoy and Ambassador Extraordinary to finally settle the dispute by concluding a treaty with the Emperor of China. Of course, you will remember General Ignatieff, who subsequently became famous as Minister to Turkey and Minister of the Imperial Household. Well, I will anticipate my story a little by telling you that he was successful. For even then Ignatieff, though a young man, had shown signs of remarkable diplomatic ability in special missions to Khiva and Bokhara. Now, I must tell you why he succeeded. You must know that in the suburbs of Peking there is a peculiar people, semi-Chinese, semi-Russian, who call themselves 'Orthodox Chinese.' In the seventeenth century a number of Russians were captured by the Chinese and detained as prisoners of war, and this peculiar colony, which, though outwardly assimilated to the Chinese and conforming to their manners, customs, language and attire, has always adhered and clung fast to the orthodox Greek faith, is composed of their descendants. In course of time their numbers have grown to several thousands, perhaps 5000 in all, and they are all clustered together in one quarter in one of the suburbs outside Peking. Oh yes, some of them can converse in Russian, but generally speaking they have nothing in common with the Russians but their creed. Well, Peter the Great established an orthodox mission in Peking solely for the purpose of looking after the interests of this colony, the members of which, by special treaty with the Emperor of China, have ever since Peter's time been taken under the protection of the Czar. A Russian priest is sent down from time to time from St. Petersburg to attend to their religious interests and administer the orthodox church there, for they have in their quarter a regular Russo-Greek church, or 'Prawo Slavy' as the Russians term it. Now, at Irkutsk there is a special diplomatic department for administering the affairs of Central Asia. The old orthodox mission of Peter in Peking is under its immediate superintendence, being also controlled by a special Department of State in St. Petersburg. This by-

brid colony is, as you may imagine, of incalculable benefit to the wily Russians, who utilize its members as spies, and it is chiefly by their instrumentality that the Government of the Czar is enabled to obtain information about the internal affairs of the Celestial Empire, which it hopes some time to absorb and include in its all-embracing arms. Now, as the government of this religious mission is concentrated in Irkutsk it was necessary for Ignatieff to pass through there on his way to Peking, in order to inform himself of all the details previously gathered by means of this colony. You will now understand why I said that it was chiefly by their instrumentality that he was enabled to conclude the treaty.

#### A PIECE OF DIPLOMACY.

"Ignatieff proved a jovial companion and he entertained us with an unceasing flow of anecdote, dealing principally with the tricks, subtleties and expedients he had used to bring the Khivese, the Bokharese and the States of Central Asia under the diplomatic subjection of Russia. These States were on the high road to Hindostan, and it was absolutely necessary for Russian supremacy in Asia to enter into relations with them. For this purpose Ignatieff was sent into Asia. He set out furnished with unlimited powers, treasures and costly presents. None of these dazzled the sordid and corrupt Asiatics, who have almost superstitious horror of putting their signatures to any document. He discovered that the Khan of Khiva and some of his Ministers no longer enjoyed the harem as well as they did in their younger days. In vain had they sought for the elixir of life with the Muhammadan sages. Instead of referring to diplomatic affairs on the daily official visits Ignatieff chiefly confided his conversation to the civilization of Europe and the extraordinary progress made by science, and especially medical science. By the skillful services of the Russian physician attached to the Embassy, happiness and marital bliss were shed over the court and its Ministers, and the rest was easy for the wily diplomat. A month later he concluded a most advantageous commercial treaty."