

A STORY OF COLOGNE CATHEDRAL

E. M. POMEROY

MRS. KALBFLEISCH sat alone in her cosy sitting-room, and through the window watched her son get into the car and drive away. For the first time she had not gone with him to the door. She was too tired. She could see Harry's grief-stricken face, but he was young and strong—not quite fifty—so that he could bear up under the sorrow. She had lived through such sorrow before, when she was Harry's age. Now she was old and tired, oh so tired! She had promised Harry that she would go to bed as soon as he had left, but that required too much effort. For a long time she gazed at the two photographs on the table beside her, both smiling youths, one in khaki and the other, the more recent one, in airforce blue. Then her glance travelled to the large picture on the wall before her. A faint gasp broke the silence, and then she sobbed: "Cologne! Cologne Cathedral!"

* * * * *

She was again a happy child playing in the streets of her home in Cologne. Hand in hand with her mother she walked the streets of the ancient city, hurrying with the errands in order that they might take the long way home,—the way that led around the Cathedral. Once more she was the little girl who used to kneel at dark by the bedroom window and gaze at the outline of the great Cathedral shining clear in the moonlight. Then came the story, the story her mother told her over and over again, the story she loved more than any other,—the legend concerning the construction of the Cathedral. Although the memories of those early days were most confused, the Cathedral seemed real. Equally real and vivid was her mother's grief at leaving her home and friends. One remark of her father's stood out clear:—"I love my country but I hate this Prussian dominance." During the long years she had never forgotten that sentence. How well she understood him! He would hate *the Prussian dominance* now more than ever.

Quickly the years passed before her;—coming to Canada, going to school, making new friends, the death of her father and mother, and then marriage. That was after sixteen years in the new land, when she was twenty-two. She realized now that she had never been in love with John Kalbfleisch. But she had missed her home, and he had offered her a new anchor. And he

spoke the language she loved best. "May Fritz forgive me," she murmured apologetically.

She never lingered long over that first year of marriage. It was too great a disappointment. Hard practical John Kalbfleisch possessed no tender side for his family, as her father had. John was honest. He was industrious but, oh, so hard a taskmaster! Fritz was born at the end of the first year; Hans three years later. Her babies brought her the love and tenderness she craved. Not to herself had she admitted any feeling of unhappiness. The hard work of a farmer's wife left her little time for useless introspection. As the boys grew older, clouds began to gather. Fritz inherited the strong will of his father, although he was temperamentally the opposite. They could rarely agree. Neither would compromise. Hans was more diplomatic, and even as a child would accept things philosophically. He too had a strong will, but it required much more to rouse him. Fritz left home when he was only sixteen, and went to work in a factory in the nearest town. His father promptly demanded his wages:—the boy was not of age. The employer refused. She interceded with both Fritz and his father. After a few weeks Fritz came home for the week-ends and gave his father half of what he earned. She partially made it up to him. Fritz could not bear a permanent separation any more than she could.

Two years later came that memorable August 14. She had worked almost day and night to keep herself from thinking. Canada, the birthplace of her sons, was at war with the country of her ancestors. The father remained glum, and unusually silent. If he spoke at all, it was to denounce England as the cause of the war or to damn the Canadian schools ruining his sons. The breach between him and Fritz widened and deepened. Sometimes their enmity burst forth into loud and angry denunciations of Germany and Britain. By December Fritz was coming home on Sunday and for an hour only. He did not remain for a meal. At the beginning of the New Year his father ordered him to stay away altogether. Two weeks later, however, Fritz came again. Dinner was over and he came in by the kitchen door, expecting to find his mother alone. They had only greeted each other when the father entered the room. Again he ordered Fritz out of the house. Fritz turned to him and spoke in English: "I wanted to tell mother alone first, but now that you are here I must tell you together. I am going to fight the Prussians. I go to camp tomorrow." From the doorway

he added, "My name is Fred, not Fritz." Ah, those Prussian war lords whom her father hated!

A few months later Fritz went overseas. She saw him a few times. A neighbour helped her. His last leave he spent at home. Her entreaties with his father prevailed. When Fritz left, she realized for the first time that John possessed a human side. He *stumbled* down the kitchen steps on the way to the barn. That night Hans delivered his first and most unexpected blow. Supper over, a silent make-believe meal, the sixteen-year-old lad stood and said in a faltering voice, yet in clear English: "I'm just as loyal to Canada as Fritz, even if I am too young to fight. But I'm a Canadian. Never again will I speak in German!" "Hans, *mein Kind*," she cried and burst into tears. John's face grew deathly pale. That was a mortal blow. He had no words.

Fritz did not return. She looked long and lovingly at the smiling khaki figure. Then she thought of his lonely grave in France, only a short distance from Canada's War Memorial. Hans had been there to see it.

She still thought of him as Fritz. He had never been Fred to her. Hans was Harry to everybody, and even she often thought of him as Harry. How like her father he had become! Quiet and easy-going usually, but possessing all his grandfather's ruthlessness and determination once he was aroused. Ruthlessness! Yes, that was the correct word. If he had been born in Germany, he would have fought the power of the Nazis and, if possible, would have left the country just as his grandfather had. He had changed the name Kalbfleisch also before he was married. "No child of mine will bear a German name." He had become Harry Kable.

Harry's eldest son was Fred, called after Uncle Fred who died for freedom in 1918. Fred was just seventeen when this war began, two years younger than Fritz was when he went away. From the first she had been anxious about Fred. Uncle Fred had always been his hero. From the day war was declared she had fervently prayed that Fred might be spared. No doubt she had been selfish. Perhaps that was why . . . she shuddered.

Of all her grandchildren Fred had been her favourite. She had come very close to him. She had talked to him more than she had to her own children. There had been more time for talking. He never wearied hearing her tell about her childhood days in far-away Cologne. In his bedroom there hung a beauti-

ful picture of the Cathedral. The legend of its construction was to him—as it had been to her—the most fascinating fairy story. She could hear the childish voice asking, “Granny, why did the devil make the plans for the Cathedral?”

“Sonny dear” she would reply, “the devil was wicked, but he was smart. He wanted to buy the soul of the architect.”

“The architect was smart too, as smart as the devil, wasn’t he, Granny?” the childish voice would continue.

“Yes, little one. The architect grabbed the plans and made the sign of the Cross at the same time. Then the devil had to flee.”

“But the architect had the plan. Let’s play the game, Granny.”

They would play the game. Fred would get a sheet of paper and a pencil, and pretend to be in deep thought. At last he would draw a long sigh and say, “No! No! I can’t. It must be the most beautiful Cathedral in the world. I can’t make the plan.”

Then she would stand behind him and whisper, “Let me help you, sir.”

“If you help me, what must I pay you?”

“Your soul,” was the reply.

How Fred loved the closing part when, after making the sign of the Cross, he would rush away triumphantly with the plan.

* * * * *

Fred was only eighteen when he enlisted. She recalled so vividly his first visit after he was in uniform. “Oh, my boy,” she cried, “and now you are in khaki too!”

“Come, come, Granny,” he replied laughingly, as he hugged her. “Don’t insult me by saying I’m in khaki. I’m a ‘pigeon’ not a ‘groundhog.’ Look again. This is airforce blue.”

“It’s all the same to me,” she said brokenly. “You’re a soldier, and you’ll go away just like my poor Fritz. Oh, this wicked war! Father would call it Prussian dominance again.”

“I wonder if it is not now the whole German nation,” remarked Harry.

“Harry, you forget,” she replied. “I was born in Germany. Your grandfather loved his country. He only hated the power of Prussia. I remember hearing him say that many a time.”

“Yes, Mother, but he and others who felt as he did left Germany. I greatly fear that those who remained have become horribly Prussianized.”

"That I can never believe," she replied in great distress. "Remember your grandfather . . ."

"Ah, Dad," interrupted Fred, "I agree with grandmother. There must be lots of Germans like her and great-grandfather."

"But it's you that I'm thinking about, my boy," she cried.

"Now, Granny, don't you worry," he pleaded, "I'll come back to you all right." Then he added in a whisper, "I'll be thinking of you when I'm flying over the Cathedral. I'll save the bombs for a real target."

Fred wrote to her during his first period of training. His box of letters stood upon the sewing table by the window. Almost automatically she reached for the box and began to glance over the letters. She had found such comfort in his happiness.

"On my first flight I had control of the plane for forty-five minutes and it was really swell. I did right banks, left banks, turns, glides, and dives. All the boys love flying."

"Now I can take off, fly the circuit, and land the plane without any help from my instructor. He says that I should solo in another hour and thirty minutes."

He didn't write when that *great day* came. He 'phoned. He even 'phoned her, his grandmother. That evening she decided that in his few years he had crowded all the estasy of achievement that many mortals miss in a long span of life. She vividly recalled every word, and had treasured them ever since, telling herself that some day, perhaps, they would be her greatest comfort. The day had come, but she found no comfort, Not yet!

There were more written messages, equally enthusiastic.

"On Wednesday morning I was up in the air for four hours and forty minutes. It was really a big morning, and I had lots of fun doing loops over the country."

"I was up on Friday morning doing a height test by myself. I climbed to 13500 feet and did a spin off the top. By the time I pulled out of the spin at 4500 feet, my air speed was up to three hundred and ten miles per hour. Boy, the ground really comes up in a hurry when you are going at that speed."

He had come to see her on each furlough. On one visit he had brought all his flying suit and donned it specially for her to see. The next visit he had his "wings." Then he was gone.

His letters from England seemed to tell so little. Harry came to tell her he was on "ops." Soon came a letter with a note

for her. "Tell Granny that this morning when I was coming home I had reason to think of the *game* she played with me when I was just a little gaffer." Harry said, "Any idea what he means, Mother?"

She knew. He had seen the cathedral.

There were letters for her, of course, letters with messages which meant nothing to the censor. "The other night when I was flying home, the moon suddenly came from behind a thick cloud and I *imagined* I could see that picture in your sitting-room. Boy, it was swell. You remember my promise, don't you, Granny dear?"

The years dragged on. The second Christmas he spent in the hospital,—a touch of flu. It was two months before he was back on "ops." He wrote home frequently. There was one special letter for her.

"You'll smile, Granny, when I tell you that when I was really ill—the first few days, you know—I worried everybody around me by talking about Cologne. Now that I'm better, next to seeing you and Dad and Mom, I want to see the Cathedral more than anything else on earth. I think constantly of great-grandfather. What a man he must have been! It takes a lot of courage to leave your own country and everybody you know, and go to some foreign country. Boy, I don't think I could do it. But he did it for the same reason that a lot of guys are over here now. For the sake of the future, you know. But boy, oh boy, won't I be glad to see Canada again! Even before that day comes, and if the war is over, I hope to pay a visit to a certain beloved spot for your sake and for the memory of my *great great-grandfather*. One guess, Granny, one guess!"

* * * * *

He had visited the beloved spot. The official letter which followed the telegram reported that "Flight Lieutenant Fred Kable was on operational duty over Cologne"—or words to that effect. Harry had taken the letter home with him. Only today he had brought the final message. Fred was buried in a military cemetery not far distant from Cologne.

What sublime irony! The dust of her grandson, a Canadian pilot, would mingle with the dust of his ancestors, near the city of Cologne. Perhaps his spirit already knew the great Cathedral. It still stood amid the ruins.

"Now don't worry, Granny. I'll be thinking of you when I'm flying over the Cathedral. I'll save the bombs for a real target."