

The Polish Boy - song lyrics

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THE POLISH BOY.

A Recitation-By Ann S. Stephens.

Whence come those shrieks so wide and shrill,
That cut, like blades of steel, the air,
Causing the creeping blood to chill
With the sharp cadence of despair?

Again they come, as if a heart
Were cleft in twain by one quick blow,
And every string bad voice apart
To utter its peculiar woe.

Whence came they? from yon temple where
An altar, raised for private prayer,
Now forms the warrior's marble bed
Who Warsaw's gallant armies led.

The dim funeral tapers throw
A holy lustre o'er his brow,
And burnish with their rays of light
The mass of curls that gather bright
Above the haughty brow and eye
Of a young boy that's kneeling by.

What hand is that, whose icy press
Clings to the dead with death's own grasp,
But meets no answering caress?
No thrilling fingers seek its clasp?
It is the hand of her whose cry
Rang wildly, late, upon the air,
When the dead warrior met her eye
Outstretched upon the altar there.

With pallid lip and stony brow
She murmurs forth her anguish now,
But hark! the tramp of heavy feet
Is heard along the bloody street;
Nearer and nearer yet they come,
With clanking arms and noiseless drum.
Now whispered curses, low and deep,
Around the holy temple creep;
The gate is burst; a ruffian band
Rush in and savagely demand,
With brutal voice and oath profane,
The startled boy for exile's chain.

The mother sprang with gesture wild,
And to her bosom clasped her child;
Then with pale cheek and flashing eye
Shouted with fearful energy,
"Back, ruffians, back, nor dare to tread,
Too near the body of my dead;
Nor touch the living boy-I stand
Between him and your lawless baud.
Take me, and bind these arms, these hands.
With Russia's heaviest iron bands,
And drag me to Siberia's wild

To perish, if 'twill save my child!"

"Peace, woman, peace!" the leader cried,
Tearing the pale boy from her side,
And in his ruffian grasp he bore
His victim to the temple door.

"One moment! " shrieked the mother; "one!
Will land or gold redeem my sou?
Take heritage, take name, take all,
But leave him free from Russian thrall!
Take these!" and her white arms and hands
She stripped of rings and diamond bands,
And tore from braids of long black hair
The gems that gleamed like starlight there;
Her cross of blazing rubies last
Down at tho Russian's feet she cast.
He stooped to seize the glittering store-
Upspringing from the marble floor,
The mother, with a cry of joy,
Snatched to her leaping heart the boy.
But no! the Russiau's iron grasp
Again undid the mother's clasp.
Forward she fell, with one long cry
Of more than mortal agony.
But the brave child is roused at length,
And breaking from the Russian's hold,

He stands, a giant in the strength
Of his young spirit, fierce and bold.
Proudly he towers; his flashing eye,
So blue, and yet so bright,
Seems kindled from the eternal sky,
So brilliant is its light.
His curling lips and crimson cheeks
Foretell the thought before he speaks;
With a full voice of proud command
He turned upon the wondering band:
"Ye hold me not! no, no, nor can!
This hour has made the boy a man!
I knelt before my slaughtered sire,
Nor felt one throb of vengeful ire.
I wept upon marble brow,
Yes, wept! I was a child; but now-
My noble mother, on her knee,
Hath done the work of years for me!"

He drew aside his broidered vest,
And there, like slumbering serpent's crest,
The jeweled haft of poniard bright
Glittered a moment on the sight.
"Ha! start ye back! Fool! coward! knave I
Think ye my noble father's glaive
Would drink the life-blood of a slave?
The pearls that on the handle flame
Would blush to rubies in their shame;
The blade would quiver in thy breast,
Ashamed of such ignoble rest.
No! thus I rend the tyrant's chain,
And fling him back a boy's disdain!"

A moment, and the funeral light

Flashed on the jeweled weapon bright;
Another, and his young heart's blood
Leaped to the floor, a crimson flood.
Quick to his mother's side he sprang,
And on the air his clear voice rang:
"Up, mother, up! I'm free! I'm free!
The choice was death or slavery.
Up, mother, up! Look on thy son!
His freedom is forever won;
And now he waits one holy kiss
To bear his father home in bliss-
One last embrace, one blessing-one!
To prove thou knowest, approvest thy son.
What! silent yet? Canst thou not feel
My warm blood o'er my heart congeal?
Speak, mother, speak! lift up thy head!
What! silent still? Then art thou dead?
----Great God, I thank Thee! Mother, I
Rejoice with thee-and thus-to die!"
One long, deep breath, and his pale head
Lay on his mother's bosom-dead.