

TESTIS IN CÆLO FIDELIS

The Crime and Witness

CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

ANGELA;
AN HISTORICAL TALE.

CHAPTER IX.—THE MARTYRDOM CONSUMMATED.

"Sister, sister, hear my voice!
Sister, sister, come and rejoice!
Joy, joy!—my task is done, the prize is won!"
Souhey's Thalaba.

We left Monsignore Carga and his chaplain on the point of being led out for the second time before the Pasha. The hour had expired, spent, as we have attempted to describe by the two martyrs. Ali Pasha still sat upon the deck, surrounded by his guards, under an awning; a jewelled scimeter hung by his side, and the golden and jewelled mouthpiece of his pipe set forth the fragrant clouds of perfumed smoke that an Eastern loves to inhale. With a step almost youthful in its gladness, and a countenance still lit up with the fervor of his prayer, Monsignore Carga mounted the companion-ladder. He cast one glance at the open sea, upon which a white sail might be seen in the distance, bearing away towards the island of Tinos. It contained his friend Monsignore de Rigo, and he was satisfied; but the next look was upwards. There hung the two balsters dangling from the yard-arm; a rope-ladder was the means whereby they were to ascend. Dom Michele followed, with eyes bent on the ground; he dared not yet face the instruments of death, or he would have seen the smile, bright as a beam of Paradise, cross the face of the Bishop as he gazed upwards towards them. The Turks themselves, even, were affected, and throughout these last moments treated the venerable Bishop invariably with respect. Together they were led towards the divan where the Pasha sat, sternly awaiting his victims.

"Now, infidel dogs," were his first words, uttered in a tone of voice intended to strike terror into every heart, "what is your resolve?—I give you once more the alternative of an hour ago. Embrace the faith of Islam, or there are the balsters ready, which will serve to string you up to the mainmast."

"Do what you will with us," replied the Bishop. "We will suffer a thousand deaths sooner than abandon the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Then," replied Ali, turning to his guards, "instantly hang up both these miscreants to the yard-arm of the vessel."

The hour was come, and it will not be thought that the saintly heart of the martyr failed him at that moment of dread to poor human nature. A smile of joy and exaltation passed over his face; and spreading abroad his manacled hands, these words fell from his lips, in tones of such sweetness, the very Turks paused in awe to listen:—

"Lord Jesus, Thou hast given into my care and custody these souls bought with Thy Precious Blood. Till now, according to my weak means, I have guarded and saved them. They would have me deliver them into the hands of Thine enemies. But let it never be said that they perish by fault of mine. Now, death is awaiting me; I depart from them to come to Thee; and from this moment to Thee it appertains to guard and defend them. I therefore restore them to Thee, and I place them in Thy hands. Save them, O my God, and suffer not one of them to fall into the hands of these beasts of prey." (*Ne tradas bestiis animas conquirentes tibi.*)

"And for thee, Ali," he continued, turning towards the Pasha, "repent, or know that the day is coming fast in which God will avenge our blood."

Astonished and more struck than he chose to show, at his dauntless but gentle bearing, the Pasha merely motioned to the executioners to do their work.

They were led to the foot of the great mast, and their chains were struck off. The venerable martyr seemed not to notice what was going on; his eyes were closed, though he held out his hands to the tools of the executioners. Dom Michele, his eyes fixed on his Bishop, seemed waiting for the last token of his love. Who was it at that moment was whispering words of consolation to the entranced martyr; rendering him unconscious of the preparations around? Was it some vision, like that vouchsafed to the beloved Apostle whose name he bore, when in the island of Patmos he saw the various doors that awaited the seven Churches of the East? Mayhap it was so; for as the white shirt of the condemned was passed over his head, the priest heard him distinctly say these words:—

"Scio tribulationem tuam—et blasphemiam ab iis—qui sunt synagoga Satanae. Nihil horum timentis quia passurus es. Esto fidelis usque ad mortem, et dabo tibi coronam vitæ." ("I know thy tribulation—thou art blasphemed—who are of the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of these things that thou shalt suffer. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.")

In his turn Dom Michele allowed the badge of infamy to be placed over his sacerdotal dress, and now for the first time, as the word of command to mount the rope-ladder sounded in his ears, he raised his eyes to the yard-arm and beheld the instrument of death hanging above his head. The gentle morning wind was playing with it, kissing its long length, and seeming, as it sighed among the cordage of the vessel, to be forestalling the angels' voices that were to soothe their last agony and welcome them before the Throne of God. But not so it sounded in the timorous ears of the good priest. "The spirit indeed is willing; but the flesh is weak," said a God-man while, in His hour of Agony, all forsook Him and fled, or slept the sleep of weariness and sorrow. He gave one look to his native hills, and the peaceful white-walled town resting like a fall of snow on its conical mount; another look to the blue forms of the distant islands and bright blue sea, sparkling with a heaving motion in the life-giving breath of a slight northern breeze—and his face turned of an ashy paleness, his knees trembled beneath him, and he stood still in hesitation. It was a moment of dreadful import; heaven and hell were awaiting the result. Ah, Dom Michele, with thy hand on the crown, with the palm waving brightly in angel-hands above thee, on the very threshold of Paradise, with thy namesake, the glorious Archangel, standing ready to turn the scales triumphantly in thy favor, and lead thee to the Vision of the Eternal, wilt thou turn and falter, and in a moment of weakness deny thy Lord? But God would not suffer such a triumph to his foes.—A voice as of a reproaching angel sounded behind him:

"Dom Michele, Priest of the Lord, be firm. This is the ladder that leadeth us to Heaven.—Remember Jesus Christ, our Example, who, placing before Him the joy, faced death and bore the Cross, caring little for the suffering or the infamies of His End." (*Deglatiens mortem, proposito sibi gaudio, sustinuit crucem, confusionem contempta.*)

The good priest turned and met the eye of his Bishop bent on him in sorrowing gentleness, like the look of Jesus cast on the wandering Peter. All his courage returned in a moment; he threw himself on his knees before his beloved Pastor, received the last blessing, the last paternal embrace, and frankly and cheerfully climbed the ladder before him. The executioner, who was already standing on the rigging above, seized the rope, placed it round his neck, and then with a violent shock tossed him off the ladder. There was a few moments' struggle, and then all was still; the poor beated features, the staring eyes, the open mouth, all were there; but Dom Michele was awaiting the arrival of his Bishop to enter Paradise. He had ascended after him, and saw that it was all over—the poor trembling chaplain was safe; and then the good Pastor's last work was done. But how did he meet his doom? "As is a man's life, so is his death;—and we will quote again the author of his life: 'Not so joyously does a bridegroom walk to the marriage-feast, not so triumphantly does a young prince mount the steps of his expectant throne, as he went to death.' Almost at the same moment the executioner had done his work with the saintly Bishop, the halter was passed beneath his silvery beard, and, like his Master in death as in life, Monsignore Carga hung suspended between earth and heaven!

"The gaour is mad," were the first muttered words of Ali Pasha, as the Bishop stepped from beneath the awning on his way to the gibbet;—"but whatever is written in the Book of Destiny, that will be accomplished."

And replacing his pipe in his mouth, he continued calmly contemplating the execution of his iniquitous orders.

"Strange," said one of his followers around, "how joyful the infidel looked! You would have thought he was going to a bridal instead of the halter."

"The other is but a craven," said another;—"see, he falters. But no; he mounts the ladder bravely enough now."

"Has your Highness heard the tale that is circulating among the soldiers, of mysterious music heard last night?" whispered a third.

"Music! Where, and when, Mustapha?" inquired the Pasha.

"Within the hold where the Christians were confined," replied Mustapha; "they say they will swear to it, and were so frightened, they dared not stir from the spot till daylight. And just now, the men whom your Highness sent last night with the Greek, Francesco, after the girl he spoke of, have returned to the ship with another story of the apparition of St. George, just as they had come upon her track, with a drawn sword, and shining like the sun in its brightness."

"Pshaw!" returned the Pasha; "mere tales of frightened knaves. Did they secure the girl?"

"No, your Highness; they declared they could

not fight with supernatural beings, for Francesco, who was foremost, fell dead to the ground by a touch as if by magic, and they took to their heels, and returned to the galley, leaving him there."

"Cowards!" muttered the Pasha; "but the vile Greek well deserves his fate. But look you, Mustapha," he continued; "how passing strange is the face of yon infidel carrion!—Why, one would say he were still alive, though he has been hanging thus by the neck these five minutes."

"Verily, your Highness saith truly," replied Mustapha; "the other looks like a strangled gaur, but the face of the Bishop is like a houri's slumbering in the bowers of Paradise, were it not for the beard."

"Thy observation savoreth truly of thy knowledge of houris, Mustapha," replied the Pasha; "but, by the beard of the Prophet, it were magic in this, I will tire him out; for he shall hang there till he fall in pieces, or he be the food of crows. As to the other, he evidently is dead; and this evening let him be taken down, and cast, with a stone tied to his feet, into the sea. But the Bishop shall hang there till he give proof positive of his being a corpse, if it were a week.—And now, how fared you this morning, Mustapha?"

"The town is completely deserted," replied the confidant, "save by a few of the Greeks and the faithful on the island. We have hunted the Bishop's house through and through, out could find nothing of import. What there was, I have brought for your Highness's perusal."

"And what say the followers of Islam of you traitor?" returned the Pasha.

"To say the truth, my lord," replied Mustapha, "all speak of him as a quiet, unassuming man, and seem to think he was greatly calumniated."

"How can that be?" returned the Pasha, "when the letters addressed to Constantinople contained so many details. Whatever it is, these Christians have had a warning how they conceal treason again."

"Many of them are coming in person," returned Mustapha, "to wait on your Highness, and witness to the truth of what I say; and as to the Greeks, they all held him as one of the most wonder-working saints of his day."

The Pasha said no more, but looked thoughtfully up towards the body of the martyr. Round and round swung the corpses, slowly and silently in the cool north breeze; the silvery beard of the aged Bishop looking like threads of burnished gold as the sunbeams lingered round it, and the zephyrs stirred its waving length. The features were as calm as though no death-struggle had taken place, the eyes modestly closed, and the hands folded as if in prayer on his breast; but what was more remarkable was the whiteness of the complexion, bearing no trace of having died of strangulation, and marvellously contrasting with the poor, swollen, and distorted form that hung beside it. The sun traversed the heavens in his calm brilliancy, and then went down in a sheet of golden light behind the isle of the god of day, tinging the fair white clouds that lingered in the sky with the softest and most ethereal roseate hue, and even reflecting its beauty on the idle sails and rigging of the infidel galley, till it decked the very criminal's garb of the pendant bodies in a gorgeous kingly rattle of mingled crimson and gold, and shed o'er the pale, calm features of the martyr Bishop a pink glow, as of life and health. The evening and night came on, and one by one the pale stars came out in the sky and looked out on the scene; and more and more brilliantly they glowed, till the sky seemed one broad deep blue mantle studded with innumerable diamonds. Oh, the loveliness of that Eastern night! the wind seemed breathing odors from Paradise, the rippling waves singing the lullaby; the stars hung like precious lamps to light up the sanctuary; and swinging silently and gently to and fro hung the body of the martyr, which every thing in nature seemed conspiring to honor. According to the orders of the Pasha, the body of the priest had been flung into the sea; and far away in the middle of the harbor lay resting the earthly remains of the good and faithful Dom Michele. Faithful unto death, he had received the crown of life; but the relics of Giovanni Andrea Carga were reserved for other purposes and higher honors. Travelers on the ocean, fishermen in their boats, the timid wanderers on the mountain-heights, and even the rude Turks in their galleys, were gazing in silent wonder and awe on that inanimate corpse. A flood of marvellous light hung about it, making it distinctly visible for miles around; and there he seemed to rest in mid air, like a vision from Paradise, beside the tall form of the mast of the galley, tapering, with its yard-arm spread abroad like a cross, into the bespangled heavens above. On one side lay the island of Patmos, where the ecstatic and beloved Apostle saw those visions that foretold, to the end of time, the woes and persecutions that were to come upon

the Immaculate Spouse of Christ; on the other, far away to the west, rose the wooded and smiling shores of the Gulf of Lepanto, on which lies the spot where the great St. Andrew embraced the cross he had so longed for, and offered himself for a whole sacrifice to proclaim the name of Christ. And midway between that night, and for two successive nights after, he who had chosen their names and imitated their virtues so closely, hung also on his cross, which he had welcomed with a transport resembling that of St. Andrew, after a life of innocence and purity in imitation of the Virgin Apostle of the common Lord. The poor fugitives on the hills came peeping out of their caves and huts, and kneeling, in tears of devotion and sorrow, begged the intercession of their faithful and beloved Pastor. The fishermen in their boats drew stealthily nearer and nearer to contemplate the marvellous vision of beauty, and, sinking on their knees, forgot their fears of their persecutors, as they murmured prayers to the martyr of Christ. The very Turks, and Ali Pasha himself, sat silently on the deck of their galley, seemingly never tired of looking at their victim, and saying in surprised whispers one to another, "Surely this was a good man." Hour passed after hour; the supernatural light dimmed not, but seemed to gather in beauty and strength; while, stealthily stealing over the vessel, borne by the night wind, came odors like a spring morning, wafted from the beautiful corpse. And where was Angela?—She had been borne on board her brother's galley; and, knowing themselves unfit to attack the Turks in the disabled state they were in (for they had lost half their men and nearly all their rigging in an attack on a pirate vessel some days before), the Knight had determined on making sail at once for one of the neighboring islands still under the dominion of the Venetians, to refit his vessel, and give notice of what was occurring at Syra, taking Angela with him, out of the way of her persecutors. Slowly making their way round the island, towards midnight they lay in front of the port, waiting to catch the midnight breeze which was to waft them on their way. And leaning over the side stood Angela, her hands clasped, and with streaming eyes, gazing this time not on the beauty of earth and sky and ocean, but on the supernatural loveliness of her protector and her father. But yet how merciful had God been to her! she felt his prophetic spirit had been hovering over her, guiding her to the bosom of her brother (who stood beside her, whispering words of consolation to her disconsolate heart) and now bequeathing the child of his adoption to this her natural protector, at the moments the gates of heaven were opening wide to welcome him to his home. Around knelt all the occupants of that Christian galley, half-awe, half-joy, battling with the indignation that swelled their brave and faithful hearts against the murderers. Slowly and gently the vision receded from their eyes, as the galley made her way with the freshening breeze, till it faded in the distance, and Angela deemed she had had her last look at her Father, now her advocate in Heaven.

CHAPTER X.—ANNETTA BEFORE THE PASHA.

"Sign the Cross, and strike the breast!
Banish looks of lightsome cheer!"
Blind Agnes.

Early the next morning the Pasha landed again; a tent was pitched on the beach, and there he received the suits and homage of the few Turks on the island. A deputation of the schismatic Greeks waited too on his Highness, and all fully confirmed Mustapha's statement of the day before. The Bishop was "a quiet unassuming man," Francesco Commenos and his friends were actuated by motives of private jealousy, and no papers or letters relative to intrigues with the Viceroy of Naples could be found any where. The Pasha began to be greatly mollified, and dismissed his visitors, with directions to desire as many of the inhabitants as they could discover to return to their dwellings, for no harm would be done to them. The day, however, was not destined to pass without a new incident. Just as the Pasha was left alone, some Turkish soldiers came in, leading a prisoner whom they declared to be the girl mentioned by Francesco Commenos, as the adopted daughter of the Bishop; for they had found her on the chapel on the hill, weeping over dead body of a nun, and Francesco had told them they would discover the girl in company with a person of this description. The Pasha's face darkened again, and he ordered the prisoner to be brought before him. She was young, and very fair, her face hid in her hands, while her dishevelled and beautiful light hair hung about her tastefully-attired and slight form. She was weeping violently and trembling, so that she was obliged to be almost carried by the soldiers.

The Pasha looked at her for some moments in silence, and then bade the soldiers loose her; her beauty had caught the tyrant's attention.—She seemed to have understood it, for suddenly uncovering her face she burst away from her

guards and threw herself at the Pasha's feet.

"Mercy, mercy, your Highness," she exclaimed, "let them not ill-treat me!"

"They shall not hurt thee, damsel," said the Pasha; "that is to say, if thou art wise. Tell me thou not the adopted daughter of the Bishop of Syra?"

"No, no!" exclaimed the frantic girl, "I have nothing to do with the Bishop. I am the wife of Francesco Commenos. I have nothing to do with the Frank traitors."

"Francesco Commenos!" said the Pasha.—"What strange mistake is this? and what is become of thy husband, woman?"

"I know not, I know not," replied Annetta; "for he left me the day before yesterday, and I have not seen nor heard of him since. They told me he had taken the way to yonder hill, and I went to look after him, and there I found my aunt lying dead in the chapel; and while I was weeping over her, these soldiers came and took me away, saying I was the Bishop's daughter."

The Pasha gazed on her as she spoke, and she determined to lighten her.

"Thy husband was busy hunting after another maiden," said he, "and not thinking of thee.—Thou art too beautiful for him; and Allah has taken him away in the midst of his craftiness, as punishment for neglecting thee."

"I know he cared not for me," replied Annetta, beginning to weep again in a mingled paroxysm of girlish passion and wounded pride; "he told me so but a few days ago, and then struck me with his own hand."

"And God has given him his reward," repeated the Pasha. "He was killed yesterday morning, when he thought he had just got thy rival into his hands."

Annetta looked up in astonishment, half bewildered, and scarcely yet taking in the truth.

"You say not he is dead?" she exclaimed.

"I tell thee, girl; he was killed yesterday morning. By the Beard of the Prophet, I swear to thee that it is so. Nay, weep not for him," he continued, making a sign for all to retire, as Annetta again covered her face with her hands, and burst into another fit of weeping; "why weep for one who knew not how to appreciate thy charms? Fortune is bestowing thee, and by sending thee into my hands, preparing for thee a far higher destiny. Renounce thy faith which has given thee nothing but sorrow; and, as the bride of Ali Pasha, thou shalt not regret the miscreant who ill-treated thee."

Annetta slowly raised her eyes, looked into the Pasha's face, and met his look fixed upon her. Ah, Annetta, dally not; that look has done thee!—and she who was to have been the bride of the Most High will now descend to be an apostate.

"Renounce my faith!" said she faintly.

"Ay, embrace me," returned the Pasha, sure of his prize, "which will fill thee with joy and contentment."

"Nay," replied Annetta, her good angel speaking for a moment the upper hand, "that were impossible. Did I deny it in words, I could not do with my heart."

The Pasha took her hand, and led her persistently toward the door.

"See you," said he pointing to the vessel, "the fate of those who resist our will? The executioner is in a moment here; and thy head, that scorned the suit of Ali Pasha, will deck the yard-arm, close to you hoary traitor."

Annetta looked where he pointed, and, shuddering, beheld the corpse of the murdered Bishop hanging at the yard-arm. She sunk again at his feet.

"Do with me any thing you like, but ask me not to deny Christ."

The Pasha saw his advantage.

"Nay, maiden, think you that Ali Pasha would link himself with an infidel? Abjure thy false faith, and to-morrow sees thee glittering in pearls and gems, as my bride. Refuse, and this very instant I call the guard to strike thy head in dust."

"I cannot die! I cannot die!" ejaculated the sobbing girl; "they are in Paradise; but I, once plighted to God, since—better live on in this world some time longer, than go at once there, where my sins will some day surely lead me. I dare not die! I dare not die! Only have mercy on me, Pasha; I will be anything but do not kill me."

"Do you renounce the Nazariae?" demanded the Pasha.

Annetta could not reply—she dared not; she only shuddered. A sign from the tyrant brought a soldier with a drawn scimitar. Annetta knelt on, and did not perceive him.

"Hearest thou, girl?" he shouted. "Dost thou renounce the Nazariae, or shall I bid the soldiers do his work?"

Annetta looked up; she saw the scimitar shining over her head, and in her agony of terror exclaimed,