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THE MAHDI'S VICTIMS.

PERILS OF SOME MODERN MISSIONARIES.

STORY OF THE VICARIATE OF THE SOUDAN—UNPROFITABLE LABORS—CONDITION IN 1882—FATHER OHRWALDER'S NARRATIVE.

Continued.

[Written for the Providence Visitor.]

When the Mahdi rose in 1882 nobody dreamt that Egypt had not the power as she had the will to put down this fakir of the desert. The recent establishment of England's predominance in Egypt and the belief that England's interest in Uganda and even in South Africa demanded that the Soudan should be kept open gave security to the opinion that in the event of Egypt's failure to defend her territory England would then, as she does now, spare neither money nor men to hold in check the fanatics of the desert. Her supine policy, which culminated in the disasters that befel Hicks and Gordon and Baker, is one of the hard things to explain in recent British diplomacy.

One day the Mahdi fled from the hand of the Egyptian government. The next he declared himself Mahdi, God's prophet, and the patron of the slaves whom England was putting down with a strong hand. The next he had ten thousand men and the whole Soudan was rising. Before they had time to escape several of the priests in the distant Nuba hills and in El Obeid were caught in the flood of fanaticism and savagery which for thirteen years and more have retarded the progress of Central Africa.

Several of the priests at El Obeid died of starvation and scurvy during the dreadful siege of that abandoned desert town. One, Father Ohrwalder, for ten years a captive in the Mahdi's camp, has given us a thrilling and terribly realistic account of Mahdism as he saw it, often in the chains of a prisoner, always in the condition of a slave.

When first taken prisoner in the Nuba hills various attempts were made to convert the priests and nuns to the Koran. Needless to say the efforts of the proselytizers were unavailing, for the missionaries were not scared by death, but welcomed it. Again and again they had assurances that their desire for martyrdom would be complied with. The war drums rattled, spears clashed, and brawny blacks brandishing swords led them out to execution. They were bidden bend their necks for the swords, and at the last moment, to the terrible disappointment of the victims, the execution was delayed. Stripped of their clothes, fed with the camels, hicked and cuffed and whipped and starved, they spent the early days of their captivity in hourly expectation of death. As one or another, lay brother or sister, yielded to disease and died, their surviving

companions envied them the blessed relief of death. Nothing but the Providence of God kept the poor Sisters from being allotted to the harems of the Mahdi or his three Khalifas—a fate they constantly dreaded and feared worse than death.

Certainly they were subjected to no gentle treatment. Father Ohrwalder thus describes one journey these poor Sisters, now apportioned as slaves to Emirs, were forced to make.

"On the journey," he says, "they suffered greatly; they were obliged to walk the whole distance barefooted, over thorns and burning sands; they underwent the agonies of hunger and thirst and some had to carry loads; one of them for a whole day had not a drop of water to drink. These brutal savages were constantly beating, insulting and abusing them, and when tired and weary they sat down for a moment they were driven forward under the lash of the cruel whip. On their arrival at Rahad they scarcely looked like human beings with their faces scorched and peeled by the burning sun, and here new tortures awaited them. One of them was suspended from a tree and beaten on the soles of the feet until they became swollen and black, and soon afterwards the nails dropped off. In spite of all this suffering and notwithstanding the continued threats of even worse treatment these Sisters clung firmly to their faith.

After the fall of Khartum in 1885, and the firm establishment of Mahdism up to Korosko on the north and as far south as Uganda, the lot of the captives was somewhat better. They were never free from alarms, and as the years drew on with never a word from friends and never a release in view, they all but fainted under the sickness of hope deferred. Father Bonomi, one of the two priests, escaped and then Father Ohrwalder and the two surviving Sisters were removed to Omdurman, the town over against Khartum, which after the Mahdi's death became the capital of his successor. Father Ohrwalder, practically free from a slave master, supported himself by weaving ribbon.

During all the period of his captivity his bishop, Archbishop Sogaro, had never ceased planning and plotting for his escape. Direct treatment with the Derivishes was out of question and he wasted a great deal of money bribing the faithless Arabs. The peril of the journey can be appreciated when it is remembered that Omdurman was five hundred miles from the nearest outpost of Egypt, and that the journey even in times of peace is full of danger.

At last, after ten years, the opportune moment came. Father Ohrwalder would not think of escaping without the two Sisters,

and it was no easy matter for so large a party to evade the suspicious blacks.

An Arab, Ahmed Hassan, having received an offer of a thousand dollars if he should succeed in the attempt, furnished the means of escape. The Khalifa's camels were on a war expedition. There was mutiny against Abdullah in 1891, and on Sunday, the 29th of November, four camels mounting the guides and refugees, stole out of Omdurman in the darkness of night. The camels had been overfed, and swifter than any horse could run they sped away on their race for life. In three days they slept but four hours, and sleep was the worst enemy of them all. They fell off their beasts from sleep; they met with a hundred accidents and alarms, and on the very last day of their perilous ride they were nearly discovered. They knew well that a horrible death awaited them should ever Abdullah get them within his power; and, weak as they were, they were prepared to fight for their lives. Happily they were not called upon to do so, and on the 8th of December, after encountering untold hardships and perils, they gladly entered Korosko and heard the Khedive's band play as to their delighted imagination only the angels might play.

In the account of Kitchener's victory a Sister named Grigolini is mentioned as one of the white captives released. Ohrwalder makes no mention of her and, unless she apostatized or had practically abandoned her Sisters, he surely would not have left her behind. Whatever one thinks of England's aggressions; there will be few to criticize her conduct in recovering the Soudan. It was her duty to do so and better than any other Power she could do so and has done. None will rejoice more than the Catholic missionaries over this victory, for it will doubtless be followed up shortly by the extirpation of Mahdism and the opening up of Equatorial Africa from the North. Uganda, in the throes of a Soudanese revolt, will gladly hear the news and the Mill Hill Fathers who have been soldiers already for some months, will doubtless draw a breath of relief.

LETTER FROM ALASKA.

Extracts of a letter from Rev. Fr. Jette, S.J.

St. Michael, Alaska.
 Sept. 4th, 1898.

Autumn has fairly set in and we already begin to see the cold coming. I therefore take advantage of the last opportunities to have a little chat with you before the ice finally isolates us from the civilized world for eight or nine months. I think I am almost at the end of the first stage of my Alaskan travels. It has really been very easy.

I am so accustomed to life at St. Michaels that I scarcely meet with any hardship. The loneliness which I dreaded is greatly mitigated by my intercourse with a lot of honest folk to whom one can do much good.

About ten days ago Father Barnum spent a day with me, and this gave both of us a chance to go to confession. He is returning to his province (New York) and will certainly make a noise in the world before long, for he is cast in no ordinary mould. He was very kind to me, leaving me all his stock of furs, etc., so that I am already set up for the winter. I am awaiting the return of Rev. Father René to have definite news of my destination; however, I have every reason to believe, from a letter lately received, that his plans have not changed and that I shall spend the winter at Nulato. I will try to write to you, before the last boats, in order that you may always help me with your prayers. If things happen as I have just said, it will not be long before I start for my destination. Rev. Father René will be here, I think, in the course of the week; and if I am not to be frozen in here, I shall have to embark before the end of September.

My health is very good; since I left Montreal I have gained from 12 to 15 pounds, and I hope to persevere in this chosen Alaska Mission.

The steamboat I am getting put together will not be ready this year. There have been too many people here this summer; the companies were not prepared for so great a crowd, and the consequence is that things are somewhat out of joint. This may entail my spending the winter here, although I can already lay my hand on an engineer who would undertake to keep an eye on the safety of the steamboat while rigging up the machinery. But I cannot say if Rev. Father René will accept this man's services, as his wages will have to be higher than those of an unskilled workman.

I am getting used to the country and to the habits of the people. They are worthy folk who have hitherto lived on terms of intimacy with each other, the priest included. Much of this good feeling seems due to my predecessor, Father Barnum, who is a man of infinite resource and extremely amiable with everybody, without distinction of race or religion. I am beginning to catch the ways of the place and hope before long to get on swimmingly all round.

As to the Indians, as soon as I can pick up their language I shall be on the best of terms with them also. They are good-natured fellows, easily won by the slightest mark of kindness or affection. I may truly say that I have made friends with all those I have had

anything to do with so far. But cleanliness is not their dominant virtue; however, some of them are as careful on this score as many whites. I think they are more sweet-tempered and much easier to get on with than our Indians in Canada. Not one do I come across but bids me good day, saying "Ha! ha!" with a smile beaming all over his broadface. I answer back, to the best of my ability, in the same way; and if sometimes I forget the expected reply, my Eskimo friend keeps singing out his greeting until I have turned round and given him a hearty "Ha! ha!" I am very anxious to be able to work among them and I am full of hope that I shall find means of doing them good.

My life is pretty monotonous and yet it does not bore me. Besides the business I have to transact at the Alaska Commercial Company's office my house-keeping takes up considerable time, then I have some calls to make and quite a number to receive, many a good turn to do (and I try never to miss an opportunity of lending a helping hand), some friendly discussions with Protestants, some lessons to give here and there, etc.

I once took a long walk, a rare performance in this country, and painful enough not to tempt one to renew it often. I walked to the top of Mount St. Michael, a hill that bears some resemblance to the Montreal mountain, only smaller. It ends in an extinct crater, as do, so people say, all the numerous mountains in the neighborhood. On the way up, it was a three hours' trudge through the tundra, a swampy, peaty track and the return journey along a path, which, like all paths here, was a ditch full of water, took two more hours. Of course I had rubber boots. But, for my ordinary foot-gear, I have adopted MAKLAKS, which are the ordinary boots here, where they were first introduced from Siberia. These are sealskin boots, made pretty much like the 'souliers de bœuf' of our Canadian 'habitants' and greased with seal oil, which makes them waterproof. This seal oil has a peculiar odor, which one must smell to realize it exactly; cod liver oil, somewhat stale, is a close enough imitation. Only the uppers are greased; the soles are so fashioned that they do not leak water has no effect upon them. It is, more accurately, the waterproof leather that is called 'maklak'.

Since my arrival here I have received but one letter from Canada, from my mother, and one from a lay brother in San Francisco. As you see, there is not much news. But that doesn't matter. Divine Providence watches over everything and everybody, and I know that not one hair of your heads falls without His permission; hence I need not worry about those

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