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ANGELA; AN HISTORICAL TALE.

CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

'Ay!' wildly continued Annetta. 'I went up to see what had happened, for my heart reproached me for having maddened him into a desire of revenge, and there I found her weltering in blood before the altar. She was not quite dead, recognised me, and told me what had happened, bidding me tell Francesco she forgave him; and then, as I was weeping over her body, the bloodhounds came upon me, and carried me off before the Pasha, thinking it was you. They deceived me with a story of Francesco's death. I denied Him—I denied my Lord—I renounced my faith in an agony of terror; for I could not die; and then—then they carried me on board the Pasha's galley, and I saw no more till we were under weigh for Constantinople. O mother, mother! it has been a fire in my heart, and a fire in my brain, all day and all night, sleeping and waking, amid the luxuries of that accursed palace, till I could bear it no more, and God punished the infidel as he deserved.'

'Ali Pasha is then no more?' said Angela, who saw it was better that all should come out, and poor Annetta's mind was relieved from its burden.

'Yes, he met the doom he had given to the Bishop before the year was out,' returned his hapless victim; 'the bowstring cut short his days of blood. I then contrived means to escape, and get on board a Christian vessel, which brought me down to one of the islands to which it was bound—Lesbos, I think it was, for my poor brain reels—and there I fell again into the infidel's hands! And who was one of my fellow-slaves? O mother! it was Francesco!'

'Francesco?' murmured Angela; 'he did not, then, perish during the conflict?'

'No,' returned Annetta, 'he told me all; and yesterday, when I was sitting moaning by your side, I heard his tale confirmed in your conversation with your noble brother. He told me your name, Angela; he told me your lineage, and he was a concealed eye-witness of how you confessed the faith, and then was borne off by the retreating Turks on board their galleys as a slave. He told me how he owed you his life; then he cursed me,' she continued, 'wildly again; he told me it was my fault—I, who had given up soul and body for him; that if I had behaved as you did he might have embraced the faith.'

'He may yet, Annetta,' murmured Angela through her tears.

'No, Angela; I saw him die the death of the reprobate, beneath the whip of the slave-master, crying out amid his curses and despair that he deserved it, for he was the murderer of a saint.'

A deep groan burst from the lips of Giovannetta, who sat, like the picture of death, by the side of her child; but Annetta heeded it not.—Wildly she went on:

'His death will be visited on all who had a hand in it. I, too, have imbued my hands in his blood; I have been the real author of this ill.—The curses of Francesco in his death-agony lie heavy on my soul, and sink it to earth. Ah, verily he said true, that Francesco himself would be my punishment for my disobedience.'

'Annetta, Annetta,' said the maiden, through her flowing tears, for well she remembered the evening when Dom Michele had repeated these words to the then proud, youthful, but beautiful girl, now so changed by suffering and remorse that she was scarce to be recognised, 'talk not so wildly. You have had no part in his blood. Nay, the prayers and the blood of your martyred aunt are pleading for you, and were offered for your return to God. Atd do you not remember that Dom Michele told you that evening that he had said that it was better for you to be punished in this world than the next?—Surely this is a consolation, that your punishment has been given you, and you may indeed believe that time is granted you for repentance. Surely it is his intercession in heaven which has brought you back to your home, and guarded you through all the perils of land and water, till, on the very day of his triumph, you come to show to the world one more proof of his power with God.'

'Ay, indeed,' returned the softened Annetta; 'it is truly he who has brought me here. I vowed it when I lay ill at Lesbos of that fearful fever that followed Francesco's death, and somehow or other I got to Timos, and then you gave me a passage on board your boat yesterday;—and as I lay in agony all last night on my grave, I seemed inspired to think that all could yet be forgiven by the public acknowledgment of guilt I have made.'

The tears of the penitent girl now flowed more plentifully and calmly; she gazed threw herself into her mother's arms, and amid her sobs and tears could hear her oft-repeated assurances of

entire forgiveness and love poured over her repentant child, so long lost, and so unexpectedly found.

A knock was here heard at the door. It was the Lady Emilia who had sent to seek her daughter.

'My mother waits for me, Annetta,' said she; 'the ceremony is over at the cathedral, and I must go to her.'

'You have a mother too!' murmured the contrite Annetta. 'Ah, how different must have been her thoughts when she clasped you for the first time, to the misery I have given my poor mother. Ah, Angela, once I might have been what you may some day be; but I have thrown away my right to be the spouse of Christ. I have bartered Him, the Beautiful, the Immaculate, for the vile love of the infidel.' And the alien from the Church of Christ shuddered, and shrunk again from Angela's entwining arms.

'Annetta, Annetta,' murmured the sorrowing maiden, 'the place of the Magdalene was beside the Immaculate Mother of Jesus and the virgin disciple at the foot of the cross. Happy you, if you could stand there with her. The past is over; but the gift of God best loves on earth are the tears the penitent; and the first place at the banquet of rejoicing was the prodigal's—not the elder son's, who had never left his father's house. Pray for me, that I may be worthy to tread the footsteps of the great St. John, whom he told me was to be in other lands my guard, my refuge, and my rest. Farewell, Annetta! we meet again in Paradise.'

She pressed her to her heart, but could not prevent the humble action with which both mother and daughter bade her adieu, as they both raised her hand to their lips—as the Eastern salutation for any one of higher rank. Hastily she pressed Giovannetta's trembling hand, and hastened out of the house.

At the door stood her brother, with a servant of Monsignore Marengo's, who informed her respectfully that her lady mother and the other guests were at the palace, and requested her presence there. A crowd stood around to greet the fair girl who had passed so many years among them as a nameless orphan, and now returned the heiress of a noble house; and as she leant on the arm of the young knight, in her rich dress, smiling a welcome, as hearty as it was graceful, on those who came forward respectfully to greet her, they thought her the most enchanting vision of beauty they had ever seen.

'Ah, Sister Battista,' said she, as the troop of Sisters passed on their way from the cathedral, headed by their new Superioress, 'have you forgotten me?'

'No, indeed, Lady Angela,' said the good Sister, eyeing, however, with some shade of mistrust the confidential way in which she was walking with the handsome young stranger, 'I only wish you were come to remain among us.'

'What! as a daughter of St. Francis, Sister Battista?' said the merry girl. 'Nay, Ferdinand, what would you say to that?'

'I should not like it all,' replied the knight, entering fully into the jest; 'Angela must go back with me to Malta, Sister Battista! These silks and gems of hers would not suit your dirty streets and tortuous lanes—for he had remarked the look she had cast upon the richly-embroidered mantle that encircled the fair form of his sister.'

'Ferdinand,' said Angela, laughing, 'please to beg pardon for the fright you gave this good Sister this time last year, in the Church of St. John. Yes, Sister Battista,' she continued, 'look at him; this is really St. George in person.'

'I always thought there was something in that adventure,' said the good nun, shaking her head mournfully. 'Ah, Lady Angela, from that day you lost your first hopes and wishes. I thought once you would be the spouse of Jesus Christ.'

'And so I shall be still, if God will!' replied Angela; 'and not only that, but under the protection of the great St. John, like you are, and like this, my dear brother, Sir Ferdinand di Mendoza, has long been. Do you remember, Sister Battista, how you used to shake your head at me for loving the Knights of the Cross? Ah, I had good reason; for they were bound to me more nearly than by the ties of a girlish admiration.'

The good Sister looked relieved.

'And you are come here to see us again?'

'Not exactly for that only, Sister Battista; we are come to fulfill a vow made by my mother and myself, when we thought my brave mother had fought his last battle with the infidels, and our martyr and Father heard our prayer.'

'God bless you, then, Lady Angela,' replied the Sister; 'don't forget us entirely.'

'And you will all of you pray that I may become a real spouse of Jesus Christ,' said the maiden, 'though it is in another land?'

'Oh, yes, indeed we will,' was the exclamation of all the little band; and with a few more kind greetings Angela and her brother pursued their way to the Bishop's palace.

Here they found Emilia awaiting them; and now it was the turn of Angela to kneel down for the blessing of the venerable old Bishop, Angelo Calepus, who bestowed it with a father's tenderness when he recognised in her the adopted child of his brother in the faith and in religion. It was a bright spot in Angela's life the hour that followed, in which the virtues and prodigies that graced the childhood of her protector—the heroic actions that gilded his later years, and the miracles that crowned his glorious martyrdom—were one by one enumerated and brought forward. And she was led to see the chamber whence the mystical strains had proceeded before his death, and stood again gazing out of the window where he had made to her the prophecy which now was so completely fulfilled. She felt indeed that but one thing remained; all else was accomplished; and when before their departure she stole away to kneel once more on the spot in the choir which now covered the relics of the martyr, again and again did she offer her whole being to God, and beg for grace to love indeed only Him.

The sun was setting that evening as, before a light northern breeze, the bark we saw yesterday entering the harbor once more spread its pinions to the wind, and in two hours' time happily gained the low line of white that marks the harbor and seaport of St. Nicholas, in the island of Timos. Angela once more sat on its deck with her mother and uncle, and the brother who had rescued her so short a time before from slavery, or worse than slavery, telling the tale of Annetta's repentance; and wondering at the mercy and goodness of God to one who so little deserved it, as she thought in truth she did.

'Marvellous indeed are His ways,' said Emilia, as she pressed her pure and loving child to her bosom; 'one indulgence of passing curiosity, one dallying with temptation, one act of disobedience ruined Annetta. Little by little she grew weaker, till she had no more strength to resist, and she denied her Lord and fell.' But she did not speak the thought that swelled in the maternal heart as she looked down on the sweet child who rested on her bosom, on whose open brow innocence and heroic purity were painted—that the very contrary had made that child a confessor of Jesus Christ in her hour of danger and apparent death.

CHAPTER XVI.—CONCLUSION.

'Oh, I will be the happy bride Of Him the Saints adore! Rome and the Abbey.'

Merrily rang the bells of the monastery of Beauieu on the festival of that Patron of the Order, St. John the Baptist. The nuns were hastening in every direction and the church was brilliantly adorned and illuminated as for a high function. A clothing and profession (which, in this Order, took place at once, after a long probation of the postulant) was about to begin; and the candidate for reception had proved, as the statutes required, the noble blood that flowed in her veins for two hundred years. Small need, however, was there for such proofs; for a damsel who sprang from the united blood of Santa Croce and Mendoza could show a pedigree that few in either Spain or Italy could boast.

Gaily the admiring throng hastened to the sanctuary, ever intent on excitement, even of a religious kind; for fame spoke of the beauty of the youthful postulant, and rumor asserted that the nephew of the Grand-Master Adrien de Vignacourt had arrived the day before, in company with another young knight from foreign lands, to witness the clothing. Emilia di Mendoza had herself been admitted that morning within the cloister, to assist at the adorning of her child; she had surveyed that brilliant beauty, arrayed in all that art could lavish to enhance it, and watched the color come into her cheek and the light gather in her eye as she looked, carelessly enough, upon the innumerable gems that covered her bridal attire and decked her raven hair. She had done all this—imprinted her farewell kiss upon the fair brow of the child of her affection—and now knelt before the altar, calmly (nay, there was even a kind of joyous exultation in her smile, like that which had made her lean over the wounds of her son without a tear) to complete her sacrifice. The chaplains of the Order, in their rochets and purple capes with the white cross on the left breast, took their seats in the choir; and throngs of noble knights and ladies stood in the nave, half sorrowful, half envious of the being before them. Before the Mass began, the young postulant was led to her place in front of the altar; and her dazzling beauty was enhanced by the expression of modesty with which, neither looking to the right nor the left, but with her eyes bent on the ground, she took the post assigned her.

As the Offertory was being sung, the celebrant turned from the altar, blessed the habit, and, when the last joyous notes of the music had died away, addressed the first interrogatory to the young postulant.

'Sister, what seekest thou?' Her soft voice was distinctly heard through the church.

'I ask to be received into the Company of the Religious Sisters of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem.'

'You ask a great thing, my Sister,' returned the officiating priest; and, after a few more words of this kind, he delivered to her the rosary she was to wear, putting her in mud of the four cardinal virtues it signified—namely, prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. The lighted taper was placed in her hand, and she was bid to go and hear the rest of the Mass.

There she knelt, in her gorgeous attire; the diamonds on her vestments, that were mingled in the rich embroidery with the gold and pearls that interlaced them, and adorned the regal coronet round her brow, sparkling in the light of the hundreds of wax tapers that stood on the altar, and, ranged in tasteful Gothic lines on every side, were now beginning to be all light in preparation for the moment of elevation. Truly she looked like some Eastern queen, as the fitful light fell through the deeply-stained glass of the Gothic windows, in changeful colors, on the variegated marble of the floor and grained pillars and the clouds of incense, arising, filled the beautiful temple with their aromatic fragrance, throwing into shade the very starry illumination of the altar.

A storm was gathering without, and deeper and deeper grew the gloom, only rendering more solemn the moment when, between earth and heaven, was held up, mid the silvery clang of the solemn bells, and the hushed silence of the adoring multitude, that Living Host, which for eight-hundred centuries has daily been immolated by the Catholic Church. Sweetly like a rush of angels melody and their accompanying harps, rang forth a moment after the spouse's welcome to her Lord—'Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini. Hosanna in excelsis!' and then, as if it had waited for this moment to pour in its majestic welcome to its Master and Ruler, the storm burst forth in all its fury. Peal after peal of thunder shook the sacred building, flash after flash of lightning glanced through the storied windows; but the rich music and the swelling sounds of the organ, seemed to be but playing its accompaniment, and trying either to drown the interruption, or to take advantage of it to enhance its devotion. Ere the moment of Communion, however, there was a lull; and to many in that multitude it must have seemed nothing more than the echo of the peals of artillery to which they were accustomed.

The priest descended from the altar, and in a moment the Lord of Hosts had united Himself with His spouse. The mother's turn came next, and then the young knights, Ferdinand di Mendoza and his friend Adrien de Vignacourt, approached in their scarlet surcoats and white crosses, and knelt before the altar.

The Mass was over, and again the officiating priest asked of the now radiant and joyous Angela,

'Sister, what seekest thou?'

Again she replied as before; and, on the question being asked whether she was willing to obey in everything the superior placed over her, promptly replied in the affirmative. More questions follow—whether she were married, had contracted any previous vow or debts, or lastly, whether she had been guilty of homicide; such being the rubric of the ceremonies used in the reception of postulants, male or female, into the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. Lastly, the solemn declaration was made, that, in case of false speaking on these points, she would be ignominiously expelled from the order.

A slow soft chant of female voices now issued from the nuns' choir, waxing louder and louder and louder as the procession approached to lead away the accepted postulant. The soft notes of the organ accompanied the rich voices as they floated almost like aerial melody round the fretted cornices, and lost themselves in the gloom of the carved arches. 'Veni, sponsa Christi, accippe coronam quem Dominus preparavit te in eternam' ('Come, spouse of Christ, receive the crown which the Lord hath prepared for thee to all eternity'), sang the delicious strain in tones of beseeching invitation; and Angela di Mendoza lifted her head with a smile of rapture, as her saintly mother in religion, Mother de Vaillac (the reformer of the now strict monastery of Beauieu, and, since the age of fifteen years, prioress of the convent), approached, and placed in her hand the golden palm she was to bear in procession round the chapel. She was then scarcely thirty; her young fair face, full of an expression of the most beautiful recollection, seeming, mid the wrapping folds of the white gimp and headdress, scarce older than the young maiden she was receiving as her child. Two and two the nuns defiled off in their dark mantles, all now, since the fall of Rhodés, of a deep mourning color; instead of the rich crimson and ermine they had worn in common with the

knights ere the capture of the beautiful home of the order by the infidels. The golden eight-pointed crosses hung round their necks, and on one side the ribbon of the Order, to which were suspended all the instruments of the Passion.—Three times had the choir intoned the beautiful anthem ere they stood assembled again in the choir, and the despoiling of the bride commenced. He richly embroidered mantle was thrown off, the diamonds and pearls that decked her hands and hair laid in a basket before her, and, turning towards the assembled crowd, she said in a low but clear voice, 'Vanitas vanitatem!' A thrill seemed to run through the crowd, handkerchiefs were raised to bright eyes; again they heard repeated more distinctly the words of the King of Israel, 'Vanitas vanitatem!' But as the third time, in a louder and more musical tone, it was repeated, and the sentence finished, the emotion was irresistible.

'Vanitas vanitatem, et omnes vanitas' ('vanity of vanities, and all is vanity'). The next moment saw those radiant jewels—a very empress's dower—tossed over the rails of the choir, and lying scattered on the marble floor; and Angela stood for one moment in her plain underdress facing the crowd. Was it the reflection of his sister's face that made the young knight at that moment smile like a delighted child? or was it the look he cast at the expression of pure and heavenly bliss that crowned his mother's features?

The ceremony proceeded. The habit of the Order, already blessed, was placed upon her by the assistant nuns, and the prioress approached to clip the long glossy locks which had now been let down in brilliant confusion. Then, placing her hand on the crucifix that adorned the outside of the Missal which was in the hand of the officiating priest, she pronounced her vows in a loud, distinct voice—the severing vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity. It was now Adrien de Vignacourt's turn! and in the name, and as the representative, of the Grand Master, he approached and acknowledged her as forming part, and partaking in all the merits and good works of the Order.

'Such I consider myself,' she replied.

'In token of obedience, take, then, the Missal to the altar,' and the young girl gracefully and modestly did the required obedience, while knight retired to his place beside his friend.—The mantle was now displayed, and she was bid to remember that in wearing it she was putting on the habit of penitence worn by the great Baptist. The cross, worked into the left breast, was to be worn close to the heart, as a token of the love to be borne to it, and its white color was to teach her purity and chastity. The sleeves in which the arms were to be enveloped betokened the obedience that was to bind them against every motion of her own will; and as it was placed on her shoulders, it was told her that the cords with which it was tied betokened the cords that once bound her suffering Spouse.—The ribbon of the Order was next brought forward, and placed about her neck, as a sign of the yoke of Jesus she was to bear; and the emblems of the Passion that adorned it pointed out, one by one, the whips, the column, the sponge, the cross. Then came the gold cross, with its eight points, betokening the eight beatitudes she was to practise; and lastly, all was enveloped in the long black veil—the veil of virginity!

The ceremony was over, and Angela di Mendoza knelt before the altar as the vowed bride of Heaven; no longer Angela di Mendoza, but Angela of the Holy Cross.

Not the least affecting part of the ceremony was the embrace given by her mother in religion as the new religious knelt at her feet, and the murmured congratulations that greeted her from each one as she received in turn from all her sisters the kiss of peace and welcome. Tears fell from many eyes in that crowd as the procession defiled into their part of the convent, and the chaplains of the Order and the officiating priests left the church on the other.

Little remains now to be told. Angela of the Holy Cross lived many years in religion; but she did not bear her name in vain. A few days after her entrance saw the saintly Mother Anne de Vaillac succumb beneath the austerities of her life and the cares that surrounded her.—Many of her daughters were not worthy of her; and those who loved her strict reform appealed, in 1624, to Antoine de Paulo, then Grand Master and a Knight of Provence, to be allowed to maintain the rigid observance of the ancient rule of the Order of St. John introduced amongst them by Mother de Vaillac, and our heroine was of this number.

Persecutions did not fail to attend them; but Antoine de Paulo supported their cause, and even named Toulouse as the place whither he wished them to return.

Here we will leave Angela to live, in the pursuance of the duties of her vocation, till the hour came for her to receive her reward, and