

The Mountain Mass.

A LEGEND OF MUNSTER.

(The beautiful mountain called Corrin, from Carr Therna, the chief cairn, in the County of Cork, in the last and highest of the long chain of hills which runs along the southern side of the Blackwater.)

IN CAPTIVITY WITH THE MAHDI.

Frightful Sufferings of Priests and Nuns.

THRILLING NARRATIVE OF FATHER BONONI.

From the Daily News Military Correspondent.

Cairo, July 23.

When at Wady Halfa I received a telegram stating that Father Luigi Bononi, chief of the priests of the Italian Mission, who were prisoners at El-Obaid, had escaped.

He had several times been offered means of escaping, but refused to avail himself of them, replying to letters sent him that if he escaped alone the rest would be murdered.

I have received from Father Bononi the following narrative of his experiences in captivity with the Mahdi. It is especially interesting as being, I believe, the first account from an eye-witness of the actual doings prior to and after the taking of El-Obaid.

The sun had not risen when I, Luigi Bononi, chief of the Latin Mission to Central Africa, with a heart full of gratitude to God who had so far preserved me through peril, great and terrible, still to serve Him, fled from the foul city that had been so long my prison. Alas! I left behind—and my heart was sore at it—my three friends—Giuseppe Orwaldner (an Austrian subject), Paolo Rosignoli (an Italian), Regnato, and Giuseppe Regnato. Regnato was a layman who belonged to our mission. Perhaps I may as well state how it was that I came to be at Obaid. I was once first parish priest minister in the diocese of Verona, and in 1873 entered the mission of Central Africa, and went to Khartoum in 1874. I was first missionary in Khartoum, then at Gebel Nuba, and in 1876 superior at El Obaid, and from 1877-79 superior at Gebel Nuba, and from 1879 to 1881 General Vicar of Bishop Bamel Camboni at Khartoum. I was then Superior of the mission in the countries of Nuba. In May, 1882, I was at Gebel Nuba, central seat of mission, among the Nubians when surrounded by the rebels 17th September, and was made prisoner, as well as all the missionaries and 150 soldiers. I was present at the siege of El Obaid, which surrendered 17th January, 1883, when all the prisoners and nuns there were made prisoners. When the Mahdi marched upon Khartoum I was with twelve European surviving members of the mission.

THE PRIEST, THREE NUNS, AND ONE CATECHIST DIED OF STARVATION and had treatment. I, with a mission composed of Padre Yousef, Orwaldner, the layman called Giuseppe, Regnato, a mechanic, Gabriel Madia, also a mechanic, and three nuns, established a church at Gebel Deli, three days' journey from Obaid. We now established a mission at Obaid, a priest was at the head, and there were laymen and five sisters. About this time, it will be remembered, the army, under command of Yousef Pasha Shellali, marching to the relief of Obaid, was annihilated. The soldiers had found the wells on the previous day's march filled up. On arriving at the next wells their thirst was so great that they at once broke from the ranks and rubbed to them. The Arabs were in ambush and slaughtered them all. After this success the Mahdi proceeded to lay siege to Obaid. He first sent an Emir called Mek Omar to attack the mission. This man had orders to put us all to the sword, not one was to escape alive. He had, however, an insufficient force, so he simply sat down before the place, well knowing that thousands of Arabs were on their way to help him. Day after day their number increased. At this juncture, to our misfortune, the officer commanding the Egyptian troops, and all his men, who were there to protect us, declared for Mahomet Achmet. They seizing their rifles and ammunition they passed the zabs, and deliberately went over to the Arabs. Our situation was now desperate—hopeless. So we determined to offer to surrender on condition that our lives should be spared, and that we should be allowed to proceed to Egypt unmolested. These terms were granted, and we became prisoners. We were bound, and

marched off to Mahomet Achmet, who was then before Obaid. There were seven of us, and Mahomet Achmet informed us that it would be necessary for us immediately to embrace Islamism. We replied firmly, "WE CANNOT DO THIS THING NOR FOR SAKE OUR HOLY RELIGION."

God forbids it, and even were we to do this and become Moslems in gain and outward form, our hearts would remain unchanged." This bold reply greatly irritated Mahomet Achmet. He cried, "Hark ye, accursed infidels! To-morrow is Friday. I give you time to reflect. If you have not embraced Islamism by the rising of to-morrow's sun, behold you shall be led forth and executed as a punishment for your obstinacy and disobedience. So have a care and repent while yet there is time. I have spoken." We were during the day visited by several dervishes, who abjured us to embrace Islamism, but we replied, "We give you, O dervishes, the same answer as we did to your master—we cannot do this thing." They were very wrath, and spat at us, and brandished their long swords at us. But we trusted in God. The next morning we were led forth from the hut built of dhora stalks, and where we had been confined. We found the Arabs drawn up in line. Behind them was a vast assemblage of horsemen. Thousands of spears and bright swords gleamed and glistened in the rays of the morning sun; and we looked upon it as it rose and gilded the edges of the few minarets and rocks scattered about on that vast lonely sandy plain—we looked upon it, as we supposed, for the last time.

NEVER AGAIN WERE WE TO SEE A SUN—OUR RACE WAS RUN; and we, as thousands had done before us, were to die martyrs for the faith of our Lord. We had no fear. We rejoiced that we were thought worthy to die for His sake. As we were led along that long line, marching with firm step and heads upright, the Arabs brandished their long two-edged swords over our heads, cursing us as we passed; and now we reached the spot where Mahomet Achmet, the so-called Mahdi, was. He was mounted on a magnificent steed. He cried out to us, "O Christians, are you prepared to embrace Islamism, or to have your heads struck off from your shoulders?" Then, we, having our trust in God, made answer, "O Sheik Mahomet Achmet, you have vast power; you command this huge assemblage of warriors, stretching as far as the eye can see. You can order them to do whatsoever seems good in your eyes, and you are obeyed; and you also have power over us to slay us, for God for some purpose has delivered us into your hands, but you have not power, O Sheik, to make us embrace Islamism."

"WE PREFER DEATH TO DOING THIS THING." We one and all made this solemn avowal. There was silence all along those dusky ranks, and near us stood dervishes with long swords, waiting and looking on the bidding of their master and strike off our heads. But Mahomet Achmet gazed upwards and eastward for some time and spoke not. He then fixed his eagle eyes upon us with intensity, and, perceiving we were steadfast in the faith, he cried aloud, "O Nazarenes, may Allah, the most bountiful and merciful, put your hearts right and show you the right path," and when he had thus spoken he again cried aloud, "All ye who are here present, sheikhs and dervishes, and every man under you bearing arms, put up now your swords in their sheaths, for this is the order I give you—Let these Nazarenes be conducted to my hut in safety. I have said it!" So we were led off, praising God for having put it into the heart of this fierce man to spare us. We were conducted to a straw hut. He ordered us to sit down, and to partake of food with him; and he conversed freely and in an animated manner with us, asking us our ideas on many subjects, "Be assured," he said, "of my protection. There shall not be a hair of your head injured. I shall now give you in charge of a Syrian of the name of George Stambouli. This man, praise be to Allah, has seen the error of his ways, as no doubt you will shortly, and has embraced Islamism. He will instruct you in all needful doctrine." We were now handed over to him, and he took us to his hut. It was built of dhora stalks, and enclosed round about. We dwelt here two months, keeping inside always, for we knew that the dervishes sought occasion to slay us. Our situation became extremely wretched, for we lay squallid, dirty and naked. Our privations were great, for the Mahdi took no further care of us. We were in dirt, with hardly enough to eat. One layman sank under this treatment, died of low fever, and shortly afterwards two sisters sickened and died.

Poor creatures, they, too, sank gradually, the iron had entered into their soul. They succumbed under a horrible dread; they were famished and naked, and when it rained they were exposed to it. Poor weary souls, your troubles are over. You have died for the cause as much as any holy martyr of old. I performed the last rites of the Church over them, but even our religious exercises we had to perform in the greatest secrecy. It was hoped that by ill-treatment we should be forced to embrace Islamism, and we would probably have been slain had we been caught at Christian worship. I was horrified at the miserable deaths of these poor creatures, and I resolved to betake myself to the Mahdi, come what might. I entered his presence and demanded that the terms of our surrender should be honorably fulfilled, and that we should be allowed to set off on our journey to the land of Egypt. "I cannot, I regret, accede to your request," Mahomet Achmet replied. "God will not permit it; but take now these ten thalates, they will then whatsoever you may need." During the siege a priest named Giovanni Lodi died in Obaid, but two others were captured and compelled to embrace Islamism, and there were five sisters taken at the same time; these were now sent as companions to us, in the hopes that they should follow the example of the men.

THE SISTERS REFUSED IN THE MOST DETERMINED MANNER TO LEAVE THEIR RELIGION.

In what a fearful condition these poor women were—bags of bones. They never left the house. This was the state of things on the 28th March, 1883. Khalifa Abdala El Taihi now arrived at Obaid. The first thing he did was to have us brought up before him. He then enjoined

us to embrace Islamism. We replied to him as we had to Mahomet Achmet when the same demand was made. We were sent back to our house, but he sent us an order to deliver up to him the sisters. We replied, "By your own Moslem law, women are forbidden to visit the house of strangers." However, on the first of April, he sent and took the nuns by force, and a terrible life, if possible, was now to be their lot. They were distributed as slaves among the emirs. I and my two companion men, were treated in the same way. I was sent to the Bert El Wal, Giuseppe Orwaldner to the house of the Emir Abdala, Wad en Noor, and Giuseppe Regnato to the house of Sherif Mahmoud. From that day I never saw the sisters, but I know that the treatment they received was horrible, most horrible. They were afflicted and tormented in order that they might be induced to embrace Islamism, but they were steadfast to the faith, neither would they deny their Saviour. Some time after this these

NUNS WERE MADE TO GO ALONG ON FOOT ALMOST NUDE TO RAHAT.

The Mahdi was there, and they were brought before him. Alas, their frail nature could hold out no longer! Their strength of mind as well as body was gone. Driven to desperation, to avoid greater degradations and insults, they affected to embrace Islamism. They were then taken as wives by three Greeks who themselves had become Mohammedans. The names of their so-called husbands were Demetri, Cosmas, and Andreas, and Paragiolli. These men declare that they only did this to save the women from a worse fate, and that the marriage is really one in name only. I therefore consider them to be deserving of the highest honour, for by so doing they incurred great risk of life. On the 20th of April I was sent myself to Rahat with my two companions, Demetri, Cosmas, and Andreas, and Paragiolli. These men declare that they only did this to save the women from a worse fate, and that the marriage is really one in name only. 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