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LAURENTIA;

A Story of Japan in the Sixteenth Century.

By LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON.

CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

"I am going to my Father's Court in Heaven; I don't want to hear about any other."

"My little child," said Grace, looking upon the boy with a kind of respectful awe, "I have something to say to you from that lady I told you of."

"Ah!" said the child, "I have often thought of what you said about her; she was to send me a cross I think."

"She has offered up for you a more painful cross than the one you will find, my child, prepared for you at Nangazaqui,—she is your mother, and she is the wife of the King of Arima. She might have told him, and he would have sent armies of soldiers to get possession of his son; but, Augustine, he is a heathen, and she would not claim you from your Christian fathers, though her heart was yearning to save you."

"To save me, lady! Did you not say my mother was a Christian?"

"Thank God she is."

"Then she must be glad that I go to heaven; and she will come there soon herself—tell her I shall be looking out for her. Grace,—is not that your name?—I should like to send my mother something." The boy thought a moment, then he said, "Come to the high tower, where we are going first, and try to get as near as you can to the cart when it moves away! I think I shall then have something to give you for my mother."

"I will endeavor to do so," said Grace; and then, her heart being too full to converse any longer, she went into the chapel, which was decorated with flowers and brilliantly lit. Father Baptiste, that true religious, that "worthy captain of a glorious troop," as the Jesuit historian calls him, was saying a last prayer before the altar (lately raised to the seraphic saint of Assisi,) and asking his blessing on his children, and then turning towards the crowd within and without the church, he raised his hands, and pronounced a few parting words, which remained forever stamped in the hearts of his hearers.

The hour had come; the guards who were to conduct the prisoners first to the place of execution in the town and then to Nangazaqui, were arrived. The carts were waiting at the door of the convent; one by one the victims took their places. Father Baptiste was the last. He held the child Augustine in his arms.

One of the chief bonzes, who had come to feast his eyes with the sufferings of the Christians, cried out to the boy, "Come to me, Augustine; I can save thy life and make thy fortune."

"Will you let me be a Christian, and save the fathers also?"

"No, I speak to you alone. Do not you know what they are going to do with you?"

"Yes," cried the boy with intrepidity, "they are going to tie our hands behind our backs and to cut off our ears, and then they will take us to Nangazaqui and crucify us there. I had rather die with the Fathers than live a heathen."

The carts moved slowly along the streets, towards the place where the first part of the sentence was to be executed. Then it became apparent that it was not through ignorance of their approaching fate that the three little martyrs had been so bold in word and in action. They bore, without a groan, the cruel treatment which was inflicted upon them as well as on the other prisoners; and as they left Meaco, and even whilst the blood was streaming down their innocent faces, they were the first to intone the psalm "Laudate Pueri Dominum."

Grace, who with her father, and Andrew, and Agatha, and a great number of Christians, was pressing as near as possible to the cart to catch the accents of that glorious chant, found herself close to the little Augustine. He caught sight of her, and eagerly stretching out his hand, which he had disengaged from the cords, he put something into hers.

"Take this to my mother," he whispered, "and tell her that it hurt me very much when they cut off the tips of my ears; but I did not cry because I am a martyr, and I send her this bit of my flesh to put her in mind of the sufferings which her little son has endured for Christ's sake. Perhaps she will show it to my heathen father, and in heaven I will pray for them both."

This and other relics of the same kind were bedewed with tears, and, as in the days of the early Church, carried away by the Christians with tender and affectionate devotion. When Father Organtin, who with his priests had been commanded by the authorities to remain within the walls of the college, received those first tokens of his children's and his brethren's sufferings, he lifted up his voice like Hezekiah and wept aloud. "Behold," he exclaimed, "Behold, my Divine Saviour, the first-fruits of the present persecution! Grant that the blood which waters the earth may bring forth many saints to praise Thy holy name by their lives and by their deaths."

CHAPTER XIII.

MARTYRDOM.

The signal for departure had been given, and the long pilgrimage of suffering, the "Via dolorosa," of that heroic band was begun. The cart slowly passed through the towns, the villages, and the plains of the Ximo, through Ozaca and Saccai on to Nangazaqui, the Christian city.

Many Christians at Meaco implored to share the fate of the prisoners, but Fazambura, the brother of the Governor of Nangazaqui, who had been entrusted with the execution of the Emperor's orders, had given positive directions that this singular favor should be universally refused, and would not even allow the relations and friends to accompany them in the carts, or to ride by their side, so numbers followed them on foot, with tears, with prayers, and with hymns of praise. After a while the Christians of Meaco fell off from the cortege, and others took their places. From each town as they passed, men, women, and children joined that extraordinary procession, every day newly escorted by fresh gathering crowds. But there was one pilgrim who never wearied, who never retracted her steps, whose strength seemed supernatural; whose eyes were ever fixed on one of the carts, and the tones of whose melodious voice were heard pouring forth its thrilling notes of praise at morning dawn and at the sunset hour, leading the choir of that triumphant march, and marshalling the weeping crowds on the road of sorrow, whilst she never shed a tear herself. This was Laurentia, the bride and the sister of the two Matthiasses. She begged of the Christians, in each place through which they passed, clothes (for it was fearfully cold) and food for the prisoners. She ministered unceasingly to their wants. The heathens watched with amazement that pale delicate woman, who looked more like an attendant spirit than a being of flesh and blood, as she hovered around the carts and spoke words of encouragement to each of its occupants in turn, reminding them of their high hopes and of the blessed heaven in view. She had herself surrendered all thought, all cares but one—life had no longer any meaning for her, but in the reflected light of eternity.

At Ozaca a pilgrim joined the escort who never spoke to any one, who walked alone, apart from the rest, whose face was concealed, but who also rendered every possible service to the captives, and never handed anything to them but on his knees. His voice never was heard but when the psalm Miserere was sung; then it rose with a mournful and sweet power, like the wail of the wind at night in the halls of a deserted house.

At Saccai the Christians were deeply moved, and, at the sight of their mutilated and bleeding brethren, on the point of rising in insurrection. Then the proclamation which was carried at the head of the procession was changed, and the profession of Christianity, which in the first had not been denounced, was now declared to be high treason to the State.

Laurentia was arrested and accused of being a Christian. Then the pale cheek glowed with joy; the eye, sunken with fatigue, gleamed with a new brightness; the step, which was beginning to falter, grew more bold and more firm; and with an unspeakable expression of faith and of hope she spoke words like those of Esau when pleading for his birthright, "Bless me also, O my God! Hast thou not a cross for me also, O my Father?"

She was numbered with the prisoners: that blessing was granted to her. And then the companion of her labors, whose face she had never beheld, was also brought forward and charged likewise "with having been with these men from the beginning." She raised her eyes to see who was this new comrade in suffering and in glory. He was bound and standing by the side of Philip the Mexican. She thought for a moment that she was dreaming. No, it was him—it was her brother! But how changed! Not a trace of color on his marble cheek, but it was not the paleness of fear that had blanched them; not a black hair on his young head; a night had done the work of years, and he stood before her grey-headed in youth, and bent like a man bowed down with a heavy burden.

Did wild thoughts pass through her mind? Did she cast one passionate glance back at the past? Did the tide of earthly love and earthly yearnings turn once again in that hour? No; the sacrifice had been complete; the surrender entire. No other cry burst from her lips than a fervent "Deo gratias." She never feared, she never doubted; she trusted God and she trusted her brother. Their eyes had met. The reward had been given. The prayer of one about to die had been heard—onward they went, onward on their way to glory and to death.

When the holy band arrived at Omura an aged man was there, who after many efforts and struggles succeeded in approaching them. This was Father Rodriguez, the Emperor's interpreter.

The Rector of the College at Nangazaqui had received the following touching letter from Father Baptiste:

"We set out from Meaco four-and-twenty in company, all of us condemned to be crucified at Nangazaqui. Three religious of the Society of Jesus, six of the order of St. Francis, the rest Japanese and catechists. We are all content to die for the faith. I beg, in the name of all the prisoners, that your reverence will use your interest with the judges in order that we may have leave to receive the sacraments and the Bishop's blessing before we suffer; and we could wish to see all your Fathers there at the same time, to whose prayers we heartily commend ourselves."

No sooner had the Rector communicated this letter to the Provincial than they resolved to send Father Rodriguez and another Father with him to Omura, where the prisoners were to arrive the following day, and there, if possible, to say Mass and give them Communion on their way. But Fazambura, the only person with authority sufficient to have given permission for this departure from the usual order of proceedings, had gone on to Nangazaqui by a different road, and this consolation was not vouchsafed to them. It was with the greatest difficulty that Father Rodriguez obtained leave from the guards to speak with the prisoners. But at last, by dint of prayers and efforts, he succeeded, and with outstretched arms and streaming eyes he drew near to that holy company who were about to die, as he had so longed himself to die. No sooner did Father Baptiste see him than he fell on his knees and cried out, "Father Rodriguez, I and my brethren implore the pardon of the Fathers of your holy society for the trouble we have given you since our arrival in Japan. We are now about to yield up our lives for our common mother the Church, and we crave, as dying men, your pardon and your blessing."

Father Rodriguez had also fallen on his knees, and would not assume any other posture till he had compelled Father Baptiste to rise. Then from the fulness of his heart he poured forth the tenderest expressions of love and of admiration.

"There is nothing to forgive," he cried; "speak not of pardon, O blessed martyrs of Christ, or else, in the name of the Society, let me crave yours for what we may have done to grieve you. O venerable Father! O holy and blessed brethren! God be with you in this hour of suffering and of triumph. Pray for us whom you leave behind, unworthy to follow you, unworthy to share your glory and to walk by your side."

Then turning to Paul Michi, to James Kisai, and John Gotto, the three Jesuit brothers, and to the little child Augustine, who had grown up amongst them as a flower in a forest of pines, he fell on their necks, and wept over them in speechless emotion, even as the early Christians when parting with St. Paul.

The town of Nangazaqui was in an extraordinary state of agitation. The Christians from the whole of the neighboring country were crowding to the scene where the great tragedy was to take place, and Fazambura became alarmed at the excitement which was beginning to disturb the public mind. He had promised Paul Michi, for whom he had an ancient friendship, to lodge all the prisoners in the town for one night, previous to the execution, and to allow them the happiness of conferring with the priests at Nangazaqui, of hearing Mass and going to Communion; but he now retracted all these concessions. He was frightened at the power exercised by those chained, suffering and doomed men. The bonzes had gathered around him, and reproached him bitterly for the means the Emperor was taking of spreading, they said, rather than annihilating the Christian religion. "Strange method," they exclaimed, "of discrediting this foreign worship, to carry about the country those men who smile at sufferings, and glory in disgrace. The enchanted tongue of that Paul Michi, who never opens his mouth but he makes converts; the eloquence of that Father Baptiste of the Ascension (as they call him, and well they may, for he seems ever in a kind of ecstacy, half way between earth and heaven,) are seducing on the road as many persons, as can get to speak with them. Another such exhibition, a dozen more such martyrs, and we may as well shut up the temples, and call the King of Spain to reign over us. We will let the Emperor know that there is no one, however high in office or position, who can withstand the influence of Paul Michi's arguments." This was said in so pointed a manner that Fazambura grew deeply alarmed, and commanded that fifty crosses should be erected on a hill outside the walls of Nangazaqui, and hurried on the preparations for the execution as much as he could; but he sent a private message to Father Rodriguez, that at the hermitage of St Lazarus he might meet his brethren once more and administer to them spiritual consolation.

In that little wayside chapel, which Isafai with the aid of Mancia Ito had erected on his return from Europe, and which he had thought of enlarging one day and dedicating to Mary, Star of the Sea, the procession halted. Fair was the view of sea and land from that promontory. It was a bright cold day; bright as the martyrs' hopes, and cold as the grave that was preparing for them. Father Rodriguez confessed the Jesuit brothers, and received the vows of those who had not yet been finally admitted into the society. Every one of the band of martyrs approached the tribunal of penance in that solemn hour; and when they came out of the chapel, and the word was given, and the march was resumed, Fazambura marvelled at the joy and peace which was beaming in their faces. He expressed his surprise to Father Rodriguez, who eagerly embraced the opportunity of explaining to him the sublime truths of the Christian faith.

The man of the world listened to him with attention. "It is very fine," he said; "perhaps it may be true; but to die on the cross would not at all suit me."

The Father took occasion to entreat that the two prisoners who had been made on the road should be released. He pleaded that they were not included in the original list, and that it must be contrary to the Emperor's will that they should be executed with the rest. "I have taken His Majesty's pleasure on the subject," was the answer. "The case is a peculiar one. The man was appointed painter in Her Majesty's household, and left it to dwell amongst men who have proved traitors and foreign enemies. He needs must die. As to that pale, dark-eyed sister of his, who was nearly swallowed up by the earthquake at Fuximi, and who was also at one time in great favor with the Empress, she is not to die, but an order has been sent for her banishment to the Island of Cozuxima, where she may worship as she pleases with the sea fowl and the wild fishermen who alone dwell there."

And now the long pilgrimage was drawing to a close. The crosses had been erected on a height, which became afterwards so often the scene of the death of Christians that it received the name of Calvary, or the Mount of Martyrs. When the procession halted, and the prisoners had descended from the carts, the boldest of the spectators held their breath in silent awe, pity, and admiration. Augustine and his two young companions discovered instantly that there were three crosses smaller than the rest, and they ran up and took possession of them with a joy which deeply affected even the heathen Governor. Anthony's parents, who inhabited Nangazaqui, hastened to the boy's side, and though they were Christians, they pleaded with their child that he was too young to be a martyr. He would never reply but by asking if he was "too young to go to heaven—too young to save his soul?" Others were encouraged by their friends to bear bravely the sufferings of a moment, and so to win an eternal crown. One young man, when his father addressed him in this strain, kissed his rosary and held it out to him as the last token of his love and of his faith. The priests, the men, and the children were bound each to his cross, not nailed to it as their Lord—theirs was not to be the lingering torture of the three hours' agony; but the spear was to pierce their hearts even as His was pierced for their sake. There were some short and tender partings, hurried blessings, murmured prayers. Father Rodriguez and his companion, Father Passius, went from one to another of the martyrs, suggesting thoughts of heavenly comfort and divine consolation. Then a deep silence followed, only now and then broken by the words, "Jesus, Mary," uttered with intense feeling. The signal was about to be given, but ere it was made, Father Baptiste was heard intoning in a loud voice the canticle of Zacharias, "Benedictus dominus Deus Israel." The other martyrs joined in it. The shrill voices of the children swelled the triumphant chant, and a woman bore her part in that dying melody; but before the psalm was ended the ground was deluged with blood; and twenty-five martyrs had given up their souls to God.

A cry of anguish and of triumph burst from the crowd of Christians, who could no longer be restrained. They rushed to the crosses; they knelt at their feet; they gathered up the blood; they carried off the clothes of the martyrs. Many were praying aloud, weeping, or gazing in silence on those beautiful corpses hanging serenely between heaven and earth, some with the eyes modestly bent down, and others looking up to heaven as if fixed in some wonderful ecstasy. Father Rodriguez went up to Laurentia, who was sitting between two crosses like that blessed one, the thought of whom had supported her through her long martyrdom of the heart. She had stood till the end came; when all was over she sank down on the ground, and remained there as silent and as motionless as the bodies of the saints around her. It was an extraordinary scene, a wonderful subject of thought, that so many human souls, widely differing in all but their faith, should have arrived at the same glorious end. The Spanish Franciscan priest and his companions, medicant friars, born under other skies, come from the far-off realms of the Western continent to evangelize this remote island in the East; and amongst them, wearing the same dress, living now under the same rule, that poor prodigal from the shores of the New World, Philip the Mexican, driven from his native land by the contempt of his countrymen and the indignation of his parents, and drifted from shore to shore by the billows of a merciful ocean into the port where angels were in wait for him. Japanese youths, born amidst the idols of a false religion, and at last clad in the armour of the ascetic army of St. Ignatius; children on the threshold of life; men in the full strength of manhood; the aged on the verge of the grave. Those noble warriors of the Cross, those champions of Christ's army, those heroes of the Church. —"Let them rest in peace." We need not speak of them here; they do not need our idle praise, for they are raised on our altars, and every year we say from our hearts on the anniversary of their death, "Pray for us, O holy martyrs of Japan."

And now what was the fate of those who remained behind? Where is Laurentia, the widowed bride, the bereaved sister? What has become of her? She is banished to a wild island of the ocean, where she is henceforward to dwell, copying the example of her who languished fifteen years in this cold world after the light had set for her, not amidst the darkness of Calvary, or the sepulchre, but on the heights of Mount Olivet. The imperial guards have carried her thither, and left her there on the day which followed the execution of the martyrs. A great number of Christians accompanied her to the shore; her old friend, Matthew the comb-seller was there, and Anselm the apostolic stroller. Both had made their way to Nangazaqui in the hope of being included in the noble army of martyrs who had just won their crowns; but long as they had worked in the burthen and heat of the day, the hour of rest had not yet rung for them: yet a little while they had to tarry and carry the cross on which they had so longed to stretch their weary limbs. As the maiden passed them and heard their murmured blessings, she was seen to weep. "Dear friends," she said, as she entered the boat and they were bidding her farewell, "I weep not for my blessed ones, but for myself, because the hope of dying for Christ is now taken from me."

"Take courage, my child," replied Matthew; "the Church honors the confessorship of long and painful suffering equally with the triumphs of the martyrs." It was his own consolation.

Laurentia spent the remainder of her life in the Island of Cozuxima; the only companions of her solitude being seven or eight poor fishermen, who, out of their scanty provisions, gave her enough to sustain existence. It was but little she needed; and in the words of a letter to Father Organtin, "she felt richer upon that ocean rock than she had ever done in her days of youthful joy and hope, and could ill have brooked to live elsewhere." Cozuxima was to her what the cave near Marseilles was to St. Mary Magdalen: what her cell is to the true Carmelite nun. In its forlorn solitude God was pleased to pour into her soul an abundance of spiritual consolations. She heard in spirit every Mass that was offered in the wide world. In her eyes the barren rock was Mount Calvary. The only treasures she coveted—an abridgment of the Scriptures, "The Lives of the Saints," an hour-glass to regulate the time of her meditations, two lights, a little bell, and a picture of a priest saying Mass. Her life was one incessant contemplation. In the fissures of the cliff she saw the cave of Bethlehem; in the fisherman's boat the barque in which Jesus sat; in every tree a cross; and in the moanings of the wind at night, or the voice of the great deep, she heard the cry of the "Miserere" and the hymn "De Profundis."

Grace Ucondono came once to see her in that solitude. They sat on the wild sea-coast as they had once sat under the shade of the pink blossoming almon trees of the palace at Meaco. The scene was changed, so were their lives. The two brides of Japan had found their vocation—one, in the hour in which she had been the minister of a great spiritual gift to the soul of her friend; the other, when at the foot of the cross she had received a second baptism of blood. The one, had been called to active work in courts and in hovels; she had a restless love of souls, which found its vent in action; he whom she had once loved with a human affection was treading in the steps of the successors of St. Francis Xavier, and fighting the battle of the Cross with every weapon which intellect, and talent, and energy, as well as divine grace can furnish; and she rejoiced in the thought. The other, had been carried to the very gates of heaven, and seen her beloved ones pass through those bright portals before; and had remained transfixed in contemplation of that celestial vision. Her struggles were spiritual ones, her weapons were prayers; she pleaded; she suffered; she worshipped. St. Theresa was her model, and the little barren isle of the ocean her Mount Carmel. Both these Christian maidens were blessed, both lived wholly detached from earthly ties; and it was well for them that it was so. It was not a time to marry and to give in marriage, as Paul Sacondono had said. There were fierce breakers ahead, and dark were the storms that threatened the Church of Japan.

The children of the Christians who married in those days were doomed to see the downfall of that noble building their fathers had raised. But the blood that was then shed and the prayers that were offered up, cannot have been in vain. There are powerful intercessors in heaven for Japan—its little children, martyred for Christ—its princesses, who, like the gentle Queen whom Grace baptized, lived through a lifetime of confessorship and died for the faith; its heroic sons, its devoted pastors, plead for it even now. St. Francis Xavier in his dying moments prayed for it: "Vivamus in spe."

God's arm is not shortened that it cannot save; the blood of the martyrs has ever been the seed of the Church; and even as the grain buried centuries ago in the sepulchres of Egypt has borne fruit in our times when the earth has fostered it and the sun shone upon it, so that glorious seed, once sown in Japan, may yet produce on a future day a rich harvest of souls.

THE END.

THE SERMON OF LAY ACTION.

Notable Address by Archbishop Ireland Before the Catholic Union of Great Britain.

Philadelphia Catholic Standard and Times.

Through the kindness of His Grace the Duke of Norfolk, a sterling Catholic and one of England's leading men of affairs of the present day, the Catholic Standard and Times is able to place before its readers the full text of an interesting and important address delivered by Archbishop Ireland, of St. Pauls, at the annual meeting of the Catholic Union of Great Britain on June 27. The Duke of Norfolk presided and the assemblage included many of the leading Catholics of England. After the transaction of routine business the distinguished presiding officer read a letter from Cardinal Vaughan expressing deep regret at his inability to be present. Referring to Archbishop Ireland's presence, His Eminence said:

"To-day I trust another step forward is being taken towards an enduring spirit of co-operation between Catholics and the people of the two countries that are divided by the Atlantic. God grant, too, that the Catholics of the two countries may enter into a holy rivalry with one another in the foreign missionary fields of the Church, and that wherever our influence extends we may exert it to strengthen the hands of Peter in his evangelization of the world.

"Next year I hope that the Cardinal of Baltimore and the Archbishop of New York may honor us with a visit and take a foremost part in the ceremonies of the dedication of the Cathedral of Westminster, and thus more closely unite in friendship the Catholics of the United States and of England."

Archbishop Ireland was greeted with prolonged cheers. His address was as follows:

"Your Grace, the president of this memorable occasion, I am before the Catholic Union of Great Britain, a body of gentlemen worthily representing the Catholic Church in this great country. I see before me some of the most distinguished gentlemen of the British nation—men known to the Empire by the heriditary traditions of their family, by their own great public services to the country and to the Church, by their talents in literature and science. It is certainly a gathering before which any Catholic, I might say any man, would be pleased to stand. I can easily conjure up before me at this moment the history of the Catholic Church in England during many centuries, during its centuries of glory, its centuries of suffering, its centuries of defense. There are in this hall men whose families preserved the faith during long years of trial and suffering, and thus connect the Church in England to day with the Church of Anselm and Becket, and Thomas More and Fisher. (Cheers) A glorious Church it was the Church of England in those old days, a Church of saints, a Church of doctors, a Church of great men. And there are in the assembly gentlemen who represent the new spring in the Catholic Church of England, men converts to the holy faith, who remind us of a great providential revival of our holy faith in England and throughout the English-speaking world. The present and the past are here, and God permits us to look forward and to see in some part the future. May that future be all we wish it to be, that it be all that the great interests of Holy Church demand.

"O! the misfortune for the Catholic Church that on a fatal day England was led away from her fold. In the whole history of the two thousand years during which the Church Catholic has lived nothing ever happened so deplorable, nothing ever happened with such dire results to religion as the falling away of England. O England, Catholic England of olden days, how Catholics of all English-speaking countries, how Catholics of the entire world regret that ever there was a schism between thee and the Apostolic See of Peter! As the years go by, as the new age dawns upon the world, we understand more fully that it was possible heretofore to understand the great loss to the Church when England fell away.

A WORLD WIDE INFLUENCE.

"To day the influence of England is world-wide. To day across all oceans and throughout all continents the English language is spoken. The future of so many continents, of so many hundred millions of human beings depend upon the influence of England. O God of truth! O God, founder of the Catholic Church, if to day the full influence of England crossing the oceans and continents were Catholic! Oh the triumph in the world of the Church Catholic! Oh the glory of the Catholic Church in the great twentieth century that is now opening before us!

"God has willed it should be otherwise, and we must face the facts, but in a spirit of new courage and new determination, so that we co-operating with God's grace and power, that the great influence of the English race in the world may be still made tributary to the Catholic Church.

"But fortunately for the Church all ties were not broken between England, between the British Empire and the See of Peter. There remained here and there on English soil a holy leaven, the old English Catholic families who in darkest days had the courage of martyrs and who passed through those darkest days with soul-inspiring faith, and then, God permitting and God ordering, across the channel is the sister isle, Ireland (cheers), where the holy Catholic faith remains strong and intact. God had His supreme