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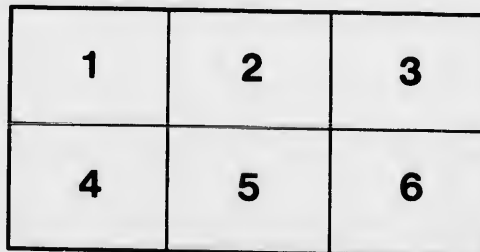
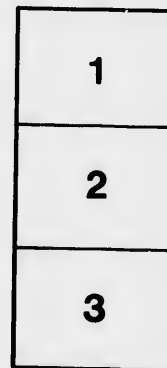
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Sallouha

The Soudanese

BY

L. DE KERVAL

DEDICATE TO

His Eminence, the Cardinal Vicar



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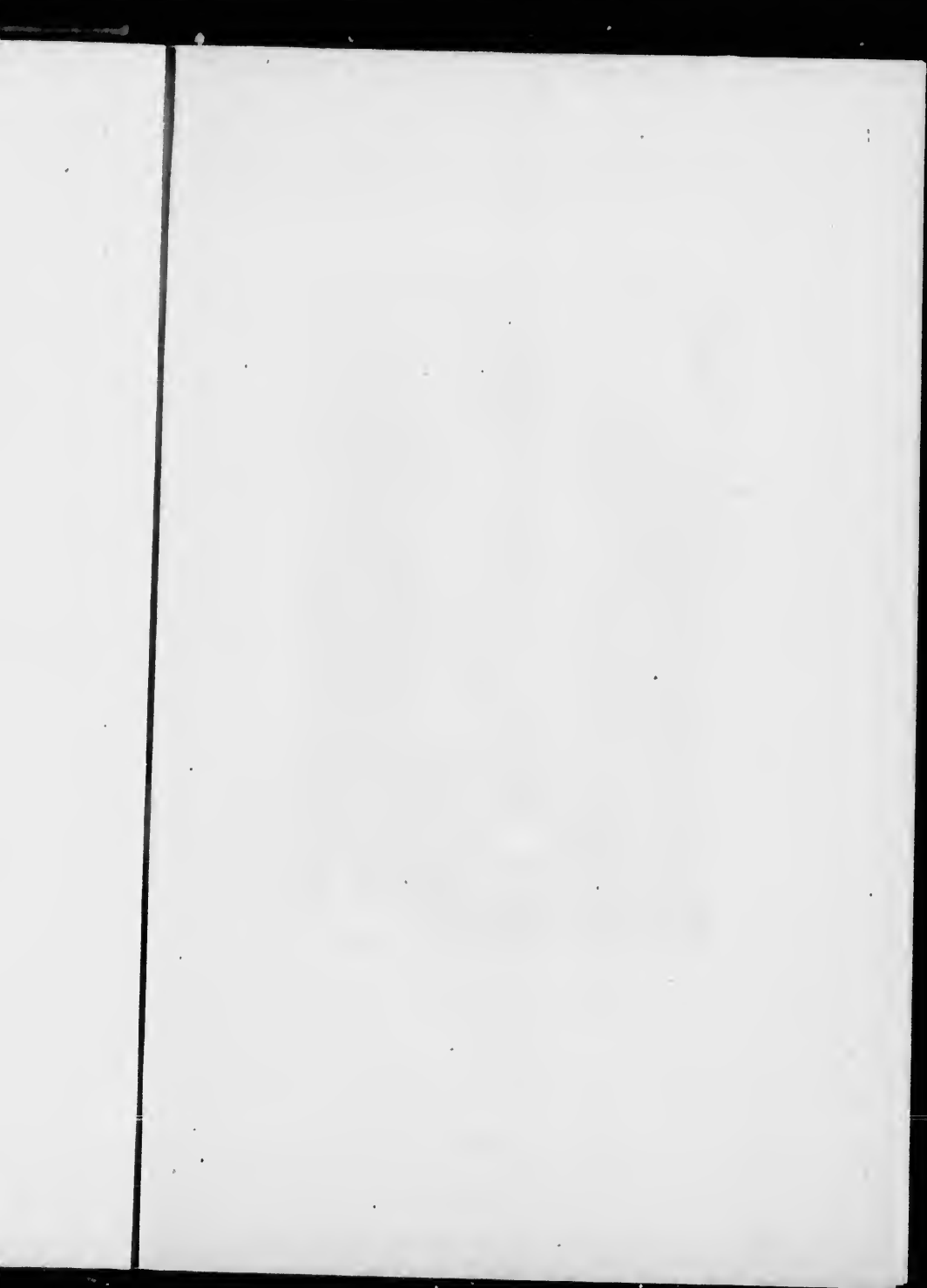
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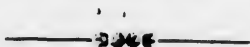




Sellouha was making her First Communion



SELLOUHA
THE SOUDANESE



BY

L. DE KERVAL

DEDICATED TO

HIS EMINENCE, THE CARDINAL VICAR.



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TO HIS EMINENCE
CARDINAL PAROCCHI

VICAR TO HIS HOLINESS LEO XIII

Your Eminence,

These few pages have been written with the sole purpose of making known the victories of God's grace and His merciful goodness toward a soul sought out, by His love, from the very bosom of paganism and the darkest shadows of infidelity, to lead it gradually to the brilliant light of truth.

To whom could I better dedicate my little work than to Your Eminence? You, who, by crowning the work of grace by baptism and fulfilling in all its sublimity, the role of the Good Shepherd, recently opened to this sheep of the African desert, the sheepfold of the heavenly Father, the radiant regions where, under the Sun of the Eucharist, flowers of christian virtues thrive and blossom.

No one manifests a deeper interest in all that concerns the conquests of the faith than Your Eminence; no one, by example, and under the direction of the August Vicar

of Jesus Christ exerts greater zeal to multiply the victories of the Gospel and the triumphs of the cross.

May Your Eminence deign to bless the humble sketch which gives an account of one of these victories. Your blessing, I am sure, will help to make it successful in producing fruits of salvation and a harvest of good thoughts and generous resolutions in the hearts of my readers.

The humble and devoted servant of

Your Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Eminence.

Rome, December 8, 1895.

SELLOUHA

THE SOUDANESE

A catholic writer has truthfully said : "The history of nations is grand ; their revolutions, their destinies, their glories, their punishments, their heroes, their dynasties, their battles — all are beautiful, great and rich... but how much greater and richer is the history of souls, their progress towards truth, their ascents towards light (1) !" The unseen sufferings endured alone; the hidden emotions of the very depths of the heart, the struggles and trials of thought, the victories of the will, the illuminations of faith, the flights toward divine love — in a word, all the immense restless world of a heart warned, illumined, and subjugated by grace, is the most beautiful and profound of histories.

(1) Montalembert : History of Saint Elizabeth.

We submit to our readers a touching episode of this "history of souls." It shows how God, in His merciful tenderness, even where the darkest shadows of paganism and barbarism cover the land, takes the ignorant, weak and little ones by the hand, so to speak, to lead these privileged souls of His love along the thorny paths of trial and suffering to the radiant summits enlightened by His Gospel and resplendent with His tabernacles.

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RECOLLECTIONS OF CHILDHOOD.

A BLOODY DRAMA.

I N the center of the African continent, so obstinately seated in the shadow of death for six thousand years, and on which slavery, corruption and error weigh like a curse ; within the immense regions the Mohammedans have subjected to their yoke but which, at the present day, Islamism is powerless to defend against the progressive invasions of European nations that are coveting the supremacy ; between Senegal and Abyssinia, lies Soudan, a strange and mysterious country where, amid degradations of an almost savage society we, nevertheless, find vestiges of a civilization now extinct.

In the central part of this region, if we may so conjecture from the accounts given by herself, Sellouha was born. Her native city was

called "*Bakarmi*" ; it was "large and populous."

Nothing is more unlike our cities than the towns of this country. Among the Blacks of the Soudan, the dwellings are merely *huts*, generally built round and low; they are covered with thatch and rarely have any other opening than the door. The rich alone indulge in the luxury of possessing several of these huts built side by side and communicating with one another; one serves as a kitchen, another as a store-house and the others as sleeping apartments. During the nights of the dry season, the people prefer to sleep out in the open air. The doors of the houses are made of several boards, and close by means of wooden locks often very ingeniously made.

The cities, or rather villages, consist of groups of huts erected without any regard to order; they are often surrounded by a wall of pise, a sufficiently strong fortification. These villages are governed by *chiefs*, but, generally, their power is merely nominal; in every case, no authority exists but that which is created and maintained by brute-force.

Near *Bakarmi* was a lake, "as large as the sea," the young girl relates. Fields and forests, the home of elephants, lions and other wild beasts, extended on one side; a few low hills bounded the other.

The men were engaged in the cultivation of cotton; the women spun.

The clothing usually consisted of a pair of loose trousers and a large garment descending to the knees. As head-gear they wore a small white cap, or *chechia*.

The food consisted almost exclusively of rice, very large sweet potatoes and a kind of soup made from a vegetable something like beans. Sellouha also remembers having often eaten pineapples, drunk palm wine, and seen olive, lemon, and pomegranate trees, and the climbing plant of the African deserts which, when the stem is cut, yields a sweet and refreshing liquid. Such was the young girl's country. It can not be very far from Bornou, for, as we shall soon see, she was taken there immediately after her abduction.

However the case may be, Mtalouelh, her father, was one of the richest inhabitants of

Bakarmi. He was tall, strong and very brave. According to the custom of his tribe which refused to follow the example of the Moham-medans on this point, he had but one wife, Maila. There were several children in the family. At home, Sellouha had been called Amina, the name given by the Soudanese to Eve. She was the youngest and her parents' favorite.

"Neither my father nor my mother ever scolded or punished me," she said.

And still Amina was a very wild child. She adds that her sisters were less patient than her parents and took it upon themselves to correct her.

One day, she relates, whilst her mother was away from home, she rummaged about the house and discovered a large jar in which oil made of pounded almonds was kept. She says this oil is much better than the purest olive oil. Being a greedy child, she wanted to dip her fingers into the oil, but she awkwardly hit the jar, knocking it over. It broke into pieces and all the oil ran out on the ground. Very much provoked by the accident, Rheddo-

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Abet, her brother, came on the scene, page 16.



uja, one of her sisters, seized little Amina and rubbed her lips with *fel-fel* (red peper) bark. The burning pain made her scream, and neither threats nor reproaches could quieten her ; attracted by the noise, Abet, her brother, came on the scene. He was devoted to his little sister and he bathed her lips and soothed her with caresses.

Such childish scenes would have been the only experiences of home-life, had it not been for the rapacity of the chief of the country whose visits were always a cause of apprehension and whose appearance in the neighborhood was always dreaded. In regions where the light of the Gospel has not been spread the chiefs are true despots. They boldly practise, amid their forests and under their thatched roofs, the pagan maxims of arbitrary and absolute power, as did the kings of Babylon and the emperors of Rome in their palaces of marble, in the heart of their capitals, enriched with all the treasures and all the luxuries ancient civilization afforded. In their opinion, all the possessions of their subjects belonged to them. True is it indeed that Christ alone

brings liberty to nations and a generous and efficacious hatred of tyranny, together with light and moral dignity.

The chief of Bakarmi took good care to follow the example set by his equals. From time to time, he came to the house of Mtalouelh with his retinue, and learning of the wealth and generosity of his subject, he profited by the information to rob him in the name of authority — that is, by virtue of might being right.

Not content with staying at his home he left all his horses with Mtalouelh to feed as though they were the latter's. Besides, he took largely of his money.

"We have need of it to pay such and such a debt. You must help us," he would say.

Not to obey promptly and without a single word of protest would have exposed himself to terrible vengeance and the gravest dangers; there was nothing for Mtalouelh to do but consent to the chief's every wish. "And so," the young girl relates, "my father gave up his provisions and even sacrificed part of his fortune."

He was a man of considerable wealth how-

ever and, despite the repeated exactions of the chief, his family was never reduced to misery and want.

Sellouha thus grew up amid peaceful surroundings and never knew aught but the tears and griefs that are readily forgotten, when a tragic event darkened the horizon of her life, and became the first step on the road of suffering, at the end of which God awaited her.

One day, according to his custom, Mtalouelh left on horseback to go hunting ; but, in the evening, he failed to return. During the night, Amina heard a great commotion in the street ; a large crowd had gathered and all the people were crying aloud and filling the air with their lamentations. When she asked what was the matter she was told that her father had been seriously wounded. Unobserved she slipped through the crowd and reached the door of her father's sleeping room, where a horrible sight met her eyes ; all covered with blood, her father was lying dead on his bed. He had been literally hacked to pieces with a sword ; his limbs were severed from his body and his

remains were nothing more than a mass of mutilated flesh.

He had been attacked by robbers in the forest, his horse had been killed and, though



Her father was lying dead on his bed.

he performed prodigies of valor, the unfortunate man could not hold out alone against a band of malefactors armed with gews and sword.

Amina loved her father dearly and her grief at his death was deep and inconsolable. Leaving home and her companions at play, she would spend whole days at Mtalouelh's tomb and her family would be obliged to go for her and coax her home in the evening.

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II

ABDUCTION AND CAPTIVITY.

TRAVELLERS relate that when the evening wind blows over the sands of the desert there is a sound as of a distant sob.

"Listen," the Arab says in his poetic language, "listen to the desert. Do you hear how it mourns?"

This land of Africa has indeed cause to weep; whilst Christianity has broken the fetters of the slave in the rest of the world, the infamous practice of slavery still prevails in the interior of the Dark Continent and the slave trade is still carried on. Gregory XVI, Leo XIII and Cardinal Lavigerie have, each in turn, denounced, in immortal letters, to the civilized world the attendant crimes and ignominies; they have requested Christian nations to organize an anti-slavery crusade by means of prayers, alms and effective intervention.

The continuation of our story will show the reader how opportune these appeals and efforts of the Church are.

In vain Maila, the widow of Mtalouelh, was advised to marry again after the tragic death of her husband. She would not listen to any such counsel. "We have enough to live on without working," she said. "The man I marry might not love my children and he might make them suffer. I shall stay with them to educate them and watch over their welfare."

Several years passed in this way. The children were growing up to womanhood at their mother's side when, all of a sudden, the incursions of *slave hunters* spread terror and anxiety throughout the country.

Almost periodically, the unfortunate inhabitants of Central Soudan suffer from the attacks of *slave-dealers*. We must hear the account of their doings from an eye witness to form any idea of the scenes of barbarity that are enacted.

When the inhabitants of a village are scattered through the country peacefully occupied in cultivating the land, a terrible cry is suddenly heard. It is answered by a thousand

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confused clamours; Arabs armed with guns, knives and clubs swarm in every direction; their whole manner breathes cruelty and their faces bear the impress of vice. Sometimes they make inroads among the huts and dwellings; sometimes, after having scoured the woods and the brush in silence. they suddenly rush across the cultivated fields. Men, women, and children are all the same to them. If any unfortunate victim tries to defend himself, there are ten assailants, armed to the teeth, against one defenceless negro to beat him unmercifully, overpower, and bind him. Often the entire population of a town is thus reduced to slavery in a few minutes. The aggressors then set to work to pillage and, very often, these expeditions, begun at day break and concluded before the sun has set, terminate with a fire.

It is hard to believe, but the gangs of these infamous merchants are not disturbed in their work. Fear paralyzes the natives, and they are incapable of making any kind of organized resistance. The trafficking Arabs or Moors take their captives without opposition, amid mourning and weeping, and that ends the matter.

New huts are built, on the site of the old ones, and all is over.

To escape these dangers, Maila thought it best to move away from her home, and so she took her children to a more sheltered house on the side of a hill. Alas! her precautions were vain. Amina was eight years old at the time; her two sisters were fifteen and seventeen years of age. The eldest particularly was very pretty, being tall and graceful, and her black hair fell in silken curls to her shoulders.

The garden of the new dwelling was enclosed by a low fence. One day, while Amina and her sister Rheddouja were playing together, without the least suspicion of danger, a horseman wearing the costume of the Bedouins, having the lower part of his face covered with a white cloth, suddenly appeared before the frightened children. He was mounted on a black horse. With a bound, he leaped over the fence, seized Amina and threw her on his saddle. At the same instant, a second rider made his appearance in the same way and carried off Rheddouja.

At the children's screams, Maila ran to their

assistance. With a stick in hand, she tried to bar the robbers' way. Clinging to their garments, she struggled desperately to liberate their victims.

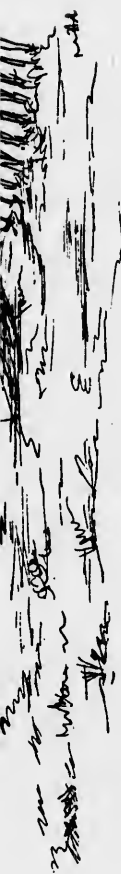
"Since you are carrying off my children," she cried "take me with them." One of the men brutally repulsed her and, shrugging his shoulders, replied :

"You are too old ; we do not encumber ourselves with useless rubbish. We want young children !" Again leaping over the fence, they galloped across the field and took the road to the desert.

Amina fought like a little wild animal, scratching, with her nails, the face and arms of the man who had stolen her. Several times, even at the risk of being killed, she threw herself on the ground, but the man picked her up again almost without stopping his horse. Rheddouja, overcome with grief and half unconscious, allowed herself to be carried off like one dead. During the whole journey, she was unable to utter a single word of protest or make the least sign of rebellion. This passive behaviour at least spared her the bad treatment and blows



Leaping over the fence they galloped across the field. 25



Leaping over the fence they galloped across the field. 25

which Amina received in plenty at the hands of the robbers.

At length they reached an enclosure surrounded by wretched huts. Slave hunters have a kind of pen at different places where they assemble their human cattle after their expeditions, and collect the living products of their *raids*. There, the captives are *sorted*; some, wounded or sick, are condemned to die of hunger; the far greater number, chained and bound, are separated into different groups destined to be driven to the slave markets.

"My companions in captivity," Amina relates, were bound six and seven together, foot to foot, so that they were hardly able to move. This is an intolerable torture and their groans were heartrending."

The children enjoyed a little more liberty. Their lot was so cruel, nevertheless, that for six days, Amina refused all food as she had resolved to put an end to so miserable an existence.

"They say that those who do not eat die at the end of four days," she said, "that is not true. I did not touch food for a week, and I did not die."

The slaves, however, were soon to set out again. It is the custom of slave-dealers to make them walk night and day, with blows if necessary. If one falls to the ground exhausted, he is left to die of hunger, or to be devoured by wild animals. With hardly enough food to keep body and soul together, for a journey which mounted drivers try their best to shorten as much as possible, they are obliged to walk without any rest whatever, their feet bleeding, their bodies streaming with sweat, whilst their masters keep a strict watch over them, insulting them without provocation and striking them at the least sign of complaint.

Amina was an eye witness to atrocious scenes during this march across the desert. An old negress, a grand mother, who carried a baby in her arms could no longer hold out. The merchant killed her with one blow of his assegai, and taking the child by the feet struck it against a rock with such violence that its brains spurted out on the sand.

Too young and weak to follow on foot, Amina was left behind, so with some few others she was put on a camel. Her sister, who

was one of the same band as herself as far as Bornou, was thus separated from her.

Amina was not led directly to the slave-market like the rest of the prisoners. The chief of the slave dealers either reserved her for his own service or, what is just as probable, kept her temporarily thinking that she would bring a higher price later on. However that may be the travels of the young girl in the desert lasted several years. She remembers nothing important of this period of her life. It was as monotonous as the sandy plains where she lived, and the weeks were marked by nothing more than successive encampments, incessant travel through forests and across deserts, or the arrival and departure of new bands of captives. The lot of the travellers in the midst of solitary plains, under a burning sun, was not one to be envied.

One day, in particular, Amina remembers that the water of the caravan gave out ; the beasts began to be exhausted ; the desert stretched in all directions ; there was not an oasis in sight. The Bedonnis, a prey to cruel suffering, had already prepared themselves,

with the spirit of fatalism familiar to Mohamedans, to lie down on the ground to await death. Suddenly, a spring of clear water whose existence was not dreamed of was perceived. God who had singled out Amina, to carry out His designs of mercy and love, did not will that she should perish in these desolate regions before having known and served Him.

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III

IN TUNIS. — A MOHAMMEDAN PALACE AND A CHRISTIAN HOME.

A MINA had attained her twelfth year when the slave merchant, who had taken her from her family and country, sold her to *Si-Mohammed Djellouli* the "minister of the pen" to His Highness the Bey of Tunis.

Si-Djellouli held one of the most important positions at court; "the minister of the pen" in Tunis is the one who receives the signature of the prince. His functions correspond to some extent with those of the keeper of the seal. He was universally respected and maintained excellent relations with Europeans. He is, they say a functionary of the highest integrity, and the most trusted dignitary of the regency.

Amina was kindly received in his home. The

mistress of the house called Amina Sellouha, and we shall henceforth speak of her by her new name. As she was a gentle and submissive child, her new owners treated her with great kindness.

Despite the imperious and despotic ways of the country, Madam Djellouli was very considerate to her and never gave her any hard work to do. Sellouha ran and played about at will around the place, under the porches, and the galleries supported by marble columns. Her principal duty was to bring her mistress, small cups of *khaouah* (Arabian coffee), flavored with rose or violet, on a finely beaten copper tray; and whilst the minister's wife, surrounded by her friends or servants, was reclining on a silken divan in a hall ornamented with faience, occupied with her embroidery, Sellouha, free to do as she pleased, roamed about all over the house.

She sometimes suffered however at the hands of the other slaves in the home of Madam Djellouli. With a charming and instinctive sense of delicacy, she always hesitates to give details on this subject. She answers any ques-

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Her principal duty was to bring her Mistress
small cups of *K'haouah*, page 32.

tions put to her by saying that the duties in the house were not congenial to her and that she had decided to enter the service of a European family, on that account. God made use of this cause, apparently so insignificant, to lead her gradually to the knowledge of the truth.

At this time of her life her ideas of religion were most incomplete and very confused.

It is hard to conjecture what instruction on the subject she had received at home. When she left her country she was but eight years old, and after her arrival in Tunis, the only lessons on religion she heard were a few passages from the old Testament, particularly the stories of Noë and Abraham, probably intermixed with the stories added by Mohammed and his disciples. She knew there is but one God, Who rewards the good and punishes the wicked in another life; she had some notions of the natural law implanted in the conscience, but that was all.

Exteriorly she followed the customs of the Mohammedans, said prayers and performed ablutions as she saw them do, and even prac-

tised the fast of *Ramadhan*, which is particularly severe on the Arab women, who, despite their hard work are not allowed to take more than one meal a day, and that after sun-down, whilst the men spend the night in feasting and sleep the greater part of the day.

It was during her stay in the home of Si-Mohammed Djellouli that she heard the last news of her sister. Rheddoujah had been sold to another Mohammedan, but had regained her liberty and married. The Bey of Tunis, yielding to the influence of France, set aside the barbarous Mohammedan law, and issued a decree, in pursuance of which all slaves of the regency were free, and permission granted them to leave their masters or stay with them in the capacity of hired servants.

As we have said, Sellouha had decided to get a situation in a European home, and she carried her resolution into effect after meeting a Maronite Sister who stood in high favor among the people of Tunis, and who sometimes visited the house where she was employed.

One day, whilst the porter, who was a veritable Cerberus and would have prevented her

flight, was absent, she changed her clothing, took off her bracelets, and, covering her face with a light silk veil, left the house accompanied by another Soudanese, Fatma. To get to the street, the two fugitives were obliged to crawl under a low heavy door ornamented with large nails. Inquiring the Sisters' address from a passer-by, they went direct to the convent, declaring they would never leave it but to enter the service of Europeans.

Having learned their place of refuge, the minister of Tunis tried, but in vain, to make them return to their former home. Promises and threats were futile. The Mohammedans who were sent to fetch them even went so far as to tell them that the Christians frequently killed young negro women and that they would fall a prey to their cruelty. Madam Djel-louli sent messages to Sellouha telling her that she would henceforth be loved and treated as her own daughters, and she was invited to go to the most magnificent feasts ; but nothing could make her change her mind.

In the meantime, Colonel Jeannerod, a Frenchman who had been for some time in-

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quiring for a servant, was advised to try Sellouha. His family were all good Catholics and, from the beginning she served them with filial affection. The general's eldest daughter who could speak a little Arabic and so was the only one who understood her at all, soon became her favorite. Sellouha always considered her as her mistress and the one who had the right to regulate her actions.

From the first, she proved industrious, prudent and obedient, possessing a charm and simplicity of manner that contrasted stongly with the habits of her compatriots. With the French visitors she behaved like a young French girl and never thought herself obliged to hide behind a door until they had gone. And yet whenever an Arab came into the house she at once veiled her face.

Her natural qualities were attractive. Her reserve and modesty were not those of a Mohammedan woman. Filled with an exquisite sense of loving-kindness toward her companions, she nursed another sick servant several months, and received no reward or gratitude but a heavier burden of work. The young girl

never uttered a single word of complaint about the treatment she had endured and it was only later, by accident, that her mistress heard of her patience and devotion.

She was, moreover, very courageous. One day, while she was lighting a lamp, her hair caught fire and her face was partially burned. Despite the great pain she felt, even after oil had been applied to the burn, she wanted to get up to attend to her work.

However, she never manifested the least desire to become a Christian, the thought does not seem to have occurred to her. She scrupulously performed all the rites of Mahomet, and always rose and prostrated herself whenever the *muezzin* called to prayer. No one ever interfered with her religious practices or even tried to influence her conscience. One day she was asked whether she would not like to pray with the family.

"No," she replied; "I pray all by myself." On another occasion, after she had accepted a medal of the Blessed Virgin, she returned it saying: "Mohammedan women do not wear these objects."

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THE ORPHANAGE OF SAINT-MONICA.

AN EXECUTION IN THE EAST.

ON THE SEA.

I N the month of November 1893, Colonel Jeannerod went to Rome with his family to be present at the reception of one of their daughters into the order of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, December 8. Sellouha could not go with them, so it was decided to place her in the orphanage of Saint-Monica in Carthage, under the direction of the Franciscan Sisters. The young negro girl was very much distressed. This new situation, an undiscovered country to her, inspired her with fear, nevertheless she submitted. To her great joy, she was clothed in European dress and was taken to the Superior, Mother Mary of the Incarnate Word.

Sellouha soon accustomed herself to convent

life, and loved the Sisters with all her heart. "They are my mothers and my sisters," she would say. She herself was the elder sister of the little ones, caring for them and watching over them with a deep sense of justice and kindness.

About this time she learned that another of the colonel's daughters, "her mistress Marie," would not come back, but would remain in Rome as her sister did. She supported this new trial with the spirit of Mohammedam fatalism, through which, however, a sentiment of Christian resignation began to gleam. "Morning and evening, I said my prayers," she related. "I prayed that my dear Marie whom I loved so much might be happy. And now my future is in the hands of God. If He wants me to stay here all my life, I shall do so. If He wants me to marry, well! I shall get married. I myself know nothing of what shall come to pass; but I shall always do the will of God!"

Though not compelled to do so, she frequently assisted at the religious exercises of the community. Still, sometimes, as though the spirit of error were trying to draw her away

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from the influence of grace, she felt a repugnance to going to the chapel and for several days at a time would refuse to set her foot inside: "I do not know what I could have been thinking of," she said after one of these fits, "I am going to the chapel from now on."

However, Colonel and Madam Jeannerod were going to Rome again to see their eldest daughter likewise receive the religious habit of the Franciscan Missionaries. Besides the colonel was about to leave Tunis for good, as he was soon to be promoted to the dignity of general and was thus obliged to return to France. From a religious as well as a worldly standpoint Sellouha's future caused these christian parents anxious thought.

In an Arab country, surrounded by co-religionists who were already beginning to treat her like a deserter, it seemed only too probable that she would yield to fear and stifle any inclination toward christianity. And even, if she ever thought of becoming a christian, she could not do so without exposing herself to the greatest dangers.

In spite of the French protectorate, the Bey retained the right of life and death over his subjects, and he frequently used this right as it pleased him, and that without opposition. All Mohammedans who abandon Islamism are guilty of an act deserving capital punishment. In oriental countries torture and execution are a common occurrence ; nothing receives less attention or excites public opinion less. The unbridled despotism and servile brutality of Islamism reign supreme. We shall cite a perfectly authentic instance as an illustration. A certain *Rachid* had commanded the troops of Tunis in the Crimea with some distinction ; a few years ago, on mere suspicion, the Bey sent soldiers to force the doors of his palace. Rachid was arrested and led, like a criminal to the *Bardo*, the residence of the Bey, situated a short distance from Tunis. In the interim, his home was given up to pillage.

Brought into the presence of his sovereign, he was accused of treason and, without being permitted to say a word in his own defence, was dragged into an adjoining room and strangled on the spot. His son, still a child,

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would have suffered the same fate had not the Bey's wife prevented the odious murder, by her unhopd for and courageous intervention.

To preserve Sellouha from similar perils and assure full liberty of conscience to her in case her heart should be touched by grace, Very Reverend Mother General of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary offered her a home in Rome. The matter was quickly settled, and the young negress accepted the offer with joy. She was to see again the colonel's daughters whom she loved so dearly.

On the boat when Italians and Frenchmen excited by curiosity would ask her where she was going, she would reply langhingly :

"To Rome to see Mademoiselle Marie. "

"And who is Mademoiselle Marie ? "

"A gentleman's daughter. "

"What gentleman ? "

Tired of being questioned, she would end the questioning with :

"I do not understand. "

It took her some little time to grow accustomed to the curious gaze of the passengers and their many questions, often ridiculous.

However she soon learned to take her own part and sometimes disconcerted those who talked to her by her witty answers. To the ladies who would stand aloof, as though they were afraid of her, she would say : " I do not



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Naples who made fun of her black skin and flat nose received the answer :

"Yes, you are white..... you are pretty now..... but, *in Heaven*, I shall be white and perhaps you will not..... God is good and He has given me my black skin..... I am satisfied with what God has done..... and I have a white heart. "

Notwithstanding the instruction she had received in Carthage, she could speak French but very brokenly, and she rejoiced at the prospect of being able to speak Arabic again with her former mistress.

She arrived in Rome in April 1894, and in the city of indulgences and grace, as it is called by the saints, she like so many other souls, found the light and received the gift of God.

V

ROME. — THE VOICE OF JESUS. —

THE PRICE OF A SOUL.

THE morning of her arrival, in fact before she entered the house, Reverend Mother General asked the young girl whether she would like to go to the chapel. Impressed with the novelty of her surroundings and, no doubt, inspired by her guardian angel who spoke to her heart, she accepted the invitation and prostrated herself before the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar. She behaved very piously and even seemed touched when Mother General offered her to Jesus saying : " Lord, Thou hast not brought her from so far, to the capital of the Catholic world, to refuse her the blessing of the faith ! "

At first, in the heart of the Eternal City, Sellouha did not seem to feel the lively and wholesome impression that had been hoped

for. She accompanied Colonel Jeannerod's family on a visit to St. Peter's and was delighted with the large fountains that ornament the plaza ; but she was cold and indifferent when she went inside of the marvellous building whose very marbles palpitate, so to say, with divine love.

Perhaps her heart was more touched, when on May 8, she was allowed to be present when "Sister Melie" as she tenderly called her, received the habit and took the name Mother Marie Jehanne. Every one in the convent had been forbidden to speak to Sellouha about religion. The little bird that had found its nest was to be allowed full liberty ; and prayers were offered that it might spread its wings at the first call of God.

In the month of May, some good pious workmen made a pilgrimage to the Madonna *del Divino Amore* and brought back with them one of the painted statues covered with little gold paper stars that the Italians are so particularly fond of. They had decided to offer it to Very Reverend Mother General as a token of their gratitude. As it happened, they brought

it to her during recreation and Sellouha looked at it with curiosity and admiration. Like all of her race, she was delighted with anything bright and shining.

Noticing how pleased she was, Mother General asked whether she would not like to have the statue to stand at the foot of her bed. Sellouha smiled and joyfully carried her beautiful present away with her. It was the first Christian object she accepted. Mary Immaculate whose blessed statue was henceforth to protect her slumbers did not delay in leading this child, whom she had taken under her protection, to her divine Son, and Jesus Himself was soon to speak gently and intimately to her soul.

She assisted in preparing and ornamenting the repositories for the feast of Corpus Christi. She did not follow the procession, it is true, but she looked at it from a distance in the garden. She even came to receive the last benediction ; and, whilst the ostensorium, preceded by the white line of Sisters, disappeared under the portico of the chapel amid a cloud of incense, she remained leaning against the

trunk of a tree, her eyes lowered, her face immovable, her mind and heart lost in deep thought. She fancied she was alone, but Reverend Mother who had been, confined to her room, seeing her from her window, prayed ardently for her.

As we have said, up to this time, she had received hardly any religious instruction. In Rome, she continued her lessons in reading and writing, which had been begun in Carthage. She was very anxious to learn and within a year could write fairly well and spell some few words. As in Carthage, her teaching had been confined to those lessons. Her regret at having left the Superioress and orphans of Saint Monica gradually lessened and she enjoyed the society of Mother General and that of her two former mistresses to whom she became more and more devoted. After the feast of *Corpus Christi* which had produced so lively an impression on her soul, it was thought best to show her the pictures in a large Bible and explain to her the principal events of Sacred History and, in particular, the life of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What she heard was

not absolutely new to her. Si-Djellouli, was accustomed to read the Coran and relate the different facts of the Old Testament to his family and servants. He had also taught them that the Jews had crucified an innocent man, Sidna Issa, eighteen hundred years ago; and the little Mohammédân, who remembered what she had learned, said with all the scorn the Arab feels for the 'accursed race guilty of deicide :

"The Arabs are good; they detest the Jews who wickedly killed Sidna Issa. "

Upon her request and in reply to her questions, the dogmas of the Christian religion were gradually explained to her. She made no objection to them; her truthful and upright mind grasped the moral beauty, the logical reasoning and the solidity and force of Catholic truths. Although she did not yet acknowledge the falsity of the Mohammedan religion she, nevertheless, understood the childishness and folly of the practices it imposes and openly laughed at them.

Grace, meanwhile, was making itself felt. One evening, she followed Mother Marie de

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Saint Sebastien to the chapel, kneeled down before the altar, as she did and, encouraged by the darkness of the hour, repeated this prayer with her : " Lord, make Sellouha love Thee, obey Thee and grow to be like her Sister Melie." She always called Mother Marie Jehanne by that name.

A short time afterwards, one morning the Sister in charge of her religious instruction told her the history of Saint Mary Magdalene as it is given in the Gospel. Sellouha listened at first with a distracted air, but when she was told how the humble penitent bathed the feet of Jesus with her tears and wiped them with her hair, she enthusiastically exclaimed : " Oh ! beautiful, beautiful ; once again, once again ! " As Sister continued, her face brightened more and more. Her soul seemed like one of those flowers whose petals slowly expand at sunrise under the dew of Heaven. It so happened, that she was taking her lesson in the garden where the roses were unfolding in all their morning freshness.

When Sister began to tell how Mary Magdalen met her Beloved Master whom she took to

be the gardener, Sellouha fell on her knees and tears streamed from her eyes.

"I believe," Sister said to her softly, "that the day will come when Jesus will incline to you also. He will say to your heart: "Sellouha!" and you will respond: "*Rabboni...* Beloved Master."

"Ah! yes, Mother, Saint Madeleine very good! The poor soul! To weep and not to offend God any more! I want to love God, like her, very much."

Leaving the garden, she went to the chapel and made a fervent act of adoration. The decisive hour was near at hand.

God, in the adorable secrets of his wisdom, however, accepted the generous and heroic offering of a voluntary victim as the price of this victory of grace and, at the same time, tried her, who was to be the special object of His mercy, in the crucible of sorrow and desolation. There is nothing surprising in this. Sacrifice, as a crowning act of prayer, is the invincible means which triumphs over God Himself; suffering completes the transformation of the heart. For a life to be fruitful and, especially fruitful for

Heaven, tears are needed, the tears which Saint Augustine calls the blood of the soul.

In the beginning of July, Mother Marie de Saint Sebastien left Rome for Grottaferrata. She had been there but a few weeks when the dreadful news of her death was received. Without agony, without even having shown any sign of illness, she was seized with an attack of paralysis. Her sudden death was not altogether a surprise to herself, however; for several months she had asked this grace of Our Lord, suffering as she did, though only eighteen years old, from the imperfection of human nature at variance with the ardent love that drew her to God. Tired of earth and homesick for Heaven, her soul took its flight to the eternal tabernacles, on the evening of July 23. As the bird bends the branch as it takes to flight, her soul had snapped the thread of life.

She had earnestly desired the conversion of Sellouha and prayed much for the favor; and we have the strongest proofs for believing that she offered her own life to Our Lord for the salvation of the poor negro girl. In the midst

of their grief at the unexpected blow, all the Sisters in Rome had but one thought: "Mother Marie de Saint Sebastien is going to obtain Sellouha's conversion."

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VI

THE TRIUMPH OF GRACE. —

HOW GOD TRAINS A SOUL. — A LAST TRIAL.

POOR Sellouha ! When she was told, the sad news, her sorrow knew no bounds. She wept and sobbed convulsively. But not a murmur of complaint escaped her lips ; nothing but tender and resigned regrets :

“ God took Mother Sebastian, ” she said, “ because she was very good ! He has placed her in Heaven among the angels. I am suffering very much, but I want what God wills. One day, I shall go to Heaven to see Mother Sebastian, Sellouha’s good angel. ”

The next evening there was not a cloud in the sky as Sellouha wandered about the convent grounds ; looking up into the deep blue heavens studded with brilliant stars she made this sad reflection :

"Ah ! Mother, the earth is not pretty ! Heaven, Heaven is very beautiful. "

Henceforth, her thoughts became more serious, and she meditated upon the means of gaining Paradise, of which the beautiful sky was but a pale reflection ; she lent a more willing ear to the gentle and irresistible voice of Jesus, who in His mercy was speaking to her soul more persuasively day by day. The second of August the feast of the great pardon of Assisi, she was seen with a rosary in her hand for the first time, and she continued holding it during the many visits she paid to the chapel in honour of Our Lady of the Angels. Without the least human respect, and more and more frequently now, she approached the sanctuary and kneeling close to the altar, tenderly kissed the feet of the statue of the Blessed Virgin. One day, she spoke to Mother Marie Jehanne as though she were telling her a secret :

"Melie, " she said, " Mother Sebastien put many thoughts in my head this night... I want that *something white*. I want Communion the way you receive. "

"Yes, but you know, " Mother replied,

deeply moved, "you must be baptized so that your soul may be washed clean and become whiter than snow. "

"Yes, I know and I want to be washed with the water. Mother Sebastien says in my heart : "Sellouha, be baptized. " Soon I will write to Mother General to ask for the water. "

Grace triumphed and her resolution was taken. August 10, she wrote a touching note to Very Reverend Mother asking her for permission to be baptized, (1) and all hearts in the house of the Franciscan Sisters in Rome chanted an *alleluia*. How beautiful was the following Feast of the Assumption.

Sellouha radiant with joy took part in the prayers and rejoicings of the community, more familiarly than ever before. She had made the greatest possible effort to learn a few lines written in honor of Very Reverend Mother

(1) Mother Mary of the Holy Ghost died just nine years before in Carthage. She was one of the foundresses of the Order and established the first house in Africa in the above city for the salvation of negroes and Mohammedans.

General. She also read her a short address in French, expressing her desire of becoming a Christian and the hope that God would make the light of faith shine before the eyes of her brethren, the negroes of Soudan :

“ We poor Blacks, under the hot sun
That makes our skin dark, and whitens our teeth,
We too shall know God in the Blessed Sacrament ! ”

She then sang an africain melapœia in her native dialect, sad and guttural, the poetry of which seemed inspired by tears, the tears of orphans and weeping mothers, tears of oppressed slaves. Concluding with a stanza referring to the flowers, she said :

“ I am a garden rose
All black, as others see.
If black on earth I am
With God, all white I'll be.

A few weeks later, Very Reverend Mother General left for France and General Jeanne-rod's daughter, Mother Marie Jehanne, accompanied her. It was hard for Sellouha to resign herself to their departure. She would look at the gold fish in the fountain, shake her head and, in her simplicity sadly say to them :

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" I would like to be you, gold fish. " Page 60

"Gold fish, very happy, do not feel departure of Mother and Melie !... I would like to be you gold fish. "

She could think of nothing but the day of their return. "Gold fish can not be happy like myself then, " she would say.

As she progressed with her study of Christian doctrine, she understood its salutary and powerful influence from a moral point of view better each day. A number of instances furnish proof of this.

Like all negroes, she was jealous by nature and wanted all the affection and all the care of those whom she loved lavished upon herself alone. One day when her teacher was attending to one of the Sisters she tried, at first, to divert her attention and when she found that no one was paying any heed to her, she took the piece of paper on which she was writing, angrily crumpled it, and walked sulkily out of the room.

She was not encouraged however in her bad temper, but severely reprimanded for her behavior. In the evening, the Sister who was the innocent cause of her outburst of

anger, was passing along the corridor when Sellouha fell on her knees before her, and sincerely implored her pardon. Moreover, the next day, she did a favor for the one who had excited her jealousy; and at the same time, whispered to Reverend Mother:

"To please God. I am going to help her."

On another occasion, she was naughty and very disobedient to the Sister who had special charge of her education, for which she was severely scolded. The next day Sellouha went up to her and asked her pardon with tears in her eyes. "For your penance," she was told, "you will make an act of contrition from the bottom of your heart before the Blessed Sacrament." Sellouha went to the chapel and never came back. An hour and a half afterwards, one of the Sisters found her there still absorbed in prayer making her act of contrition.

She never liked to meet strangers; their curiosity and the questions they asked annoyed her. Still it gave her pleasure to speak with those whom she was obliged to see respecting her baptism. Her replies to their questions were always firm and consistent. "I want very

much to be baptized," she constantly repeated. "And after you are baptized," Bishop Sallua's secretary asked her, "will you belong entirely to the Blessed Virgin?"

"Yes, Father, I love my mother, the Blessed Virgin very much."

The climate of Rome did not agree with her. She took cold and owing to her imprudence she suffered from it a long time. When she was exhausted from coughing, she would look up to the sky of Italy, not so beautiful as that of her own country, and sadly say. "Ah! wicked Italy, Italy is making me die." However, she was not afraid of death. On the contrary, since Mother Marie de Saint Sebastien entered into her eternal rest, Sellouha often asked her whom she called the "good angel Sebastien" to call her to Paradise too. At times, she would speak of her parents and say: "God left me no papa and mamma; then He gave me two other mammas, one in Carthage and one in Rome, and my sister Melie; but when I am in Heaven, I shall be happier."

The recollection of her parents often came to her mind. One day she said to her teacher:

"Mother, papa and mamma poor ! very good, very kind. But Soudan, far away. No missionaries; no one to speak to them of God. No one to teach them to go to Heaven... As soon as I am baptized, I am going to pray at once for papa and mamma. Ask God, if they not yet in Heaven, to take them there, and then pray that every body love me." When she was received into the Church by Bishop Sellua, who was most kind to her, the venerable Dominican prelate told her she must pray for her parents as soon as she was baptized. The coincidence made her very happy.

The poor child was still to suffer a final and very hard trial however.

She was first to be baptized on December 8; the day was then changed to the 25, and again unforeseen circumstances delayed the ceremony. These changes made her very anxious and she impatiently said : " I shall never be baptized ! God does not want me to be baptized. "

In the interim, news came that one of General Jeannerod's sons was very ill. Sellouha was most distressed to hear it and spent the whole night weeping and praying : " O my God ! cure

Michael and let me die instead of him, that his mother may not suffer. " The next day at recreation she was nowhere to be seen, and was, finally, found in the chapel where she had been a long time. She did not want to leave. "Oh ! let me stay here," she pleaded, "I am so happy with God. " The hours spent before the Blessed Sacrament always seemed too short to her.

God, however, did not answer her prayer ; a despatch announced the death of the young man for whom she was praying. On this occasion, she displayed all the energy of her will. On the death of Mother Marie de Saint Sebastien she could not suppress her sobs ; in this trial she was calm and strong. From this time forward she never complained about the delays of her baptism, but submitted with resignation. If anything was said to her on the subject, she would reply : " When God wills. I shall not be angry and impatient any longer, that Madam Jeannerod may not be so sad. "

Finally, the day of her baptism was definitely fixed for February 9. She prepared herself by a three day's retreat. " Pray for me, Sel-

louha," one of the Sisters said to her the night before.

"Yes, I will," she replied "and, Sister, you ask God that I may die right after being baptized, if I shall ever sin again."

VII

BAPTISM. — JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.
THE WAYS OF GOD.

Epilogue.

THE longed for day arrived at least. The convent chapel was decorated as on feast days ; the altar was brilliantly lighted and covered with flowers. A number of priests, religious and friends of the Franciscan Nuns were present to witness the touching sight that recalled the days of the primitive church. His Eminence Cardinal Lucido Parocchi, Vicar to His Holiness Leo XIII, who, a few days before, had examined Sellouha on Christian doctrine, himself conferred the sacrament of regeneration.

It was a solemn moment when the pontiff, vested in his cope of gold cloth, wearing the mitre and bearing his crozier walked to the

entrance of the chapel to begin the ceremonies. The neophyte was attended by Miss Mac Nair who took the place of her god-mother, Madam Jeannerod.

At first, the exorcisms and unctions which prepare man for his initiation into the Christian religion were performed. In vain had the devil tried to keep this creature of God in the darkness of infidelity ; now he was to lose his power over her. Then a public act of humility was required of her who was so long ignorant of Jesus and His doctrines, and whom the proud law of Mahomet had held in its chains since her infancy. " Kiss the ground, " the Cardinal said to her. Without the least hesitation, the catechumen kissed the ground to show those present that she really desired to be a Christian and knew that humility is the only door that leads to truth and salvation.

The usual ceremonies were then continued. As if in triumph, the cardinal led this child, snatched from Satan, to the baptismal font. What a sight ! A prince of the Church leading to the blessed font a poor African girl, one of a race believed to be accursed but whom,

as a slave and a captive, Jesus had drawn to Himself through many dangers and trials. Was it not a living picture of the Divine Shepherd who crosses deserts to seek the smallest of His sheep, who presses it to His heart and lays it on His shoulders to carry it back to the fold?

When the pontiff asked Sellouha: "What is your name?" and the happy young girl replied in a fervent tone: "Marie Sebastien," more than one heart was deeply moved. It seemed to us that Mother Mary de Saint Sebastien, "Sellouha's good angel," was really present at the scene, and in an ecstasy of gratitude added her joyful hymns of praise to the eternal harmony. With a firm voice, Sellouha repeated the apostles Creed, the immortal symbol of faith that was recited by the martyrs in the catacombs, and which the elect will sing at the last day at the destruction of the world; she solemnly renounced Satan, his pomps and his works and the sacramental waters flowed over her brow.

Confirmation followed baptism. In that impressive way, of which Cardinal Parocchi possesses the secret, he delivered an

eloquent and touching address filled with fatherly advice to Sellouha. Holy Mass was then celebrated.

During the whole ceremony, Sellouha was most recollected ; for her the outside world did not exist. When she was asked later which hymns she thought had been sung best during the Mass, she replied : " I do not know ; I did not hear, did not listen. I thought of nothing but my prayers. As soon as the water was poured on my head, I prayed for my father and my mother, for Reverend Mother and Madam Jeannerod and then for myself. " When some one asked her whether she had received any presents at her baptism, she said with a smile :

" Oh ! Cardinal gave me baptism and I did not want anything else. Now, I always want to be white and never sin again. "

Four days afterwards she made her first Communion. The evening before she went to see her confessor as she had been told.

" But what shall I do when I go to confession ? " she asked anxiously. " I have no sins to tell. " Happy child ! may she always preserve her innocence.

Most Reverend Father General of the Order of Saint Francis gave her the Bread of Angels for the first time. A most delicate attention and a happy thought ! He who gave Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to this child of the Soudan was the direct successor of the patriarch of Assissi who desired to shed his blood on African soil and dreamed of winning over the Mohammedans to the cause of Christ. The words which Very Reverend Louis de Parme, inspired by the true seraphic Franciscan spirit, spoke to Sellouha remained deeply graven in her heart. She wanted to go to Communion every day, so inexpressible to her were the joys of Our Lord's sacramental presence within her soul.

God continued to grant her the choicest graces and led her on in the way of piety. What are the designs of God regarding her ? what is her vocation ? This still remains a secret.

"What did you ask of the Infant Jesus when he came into your heart ?" the Sister who enjoyed her closest confidence, asked her one evening. The young girl replied :

"I asked Him that I might go to the missions with you. "

"Then," Sister continued, "you asked Him that you might become a Sister?"

Deeply affected, Sellouha answered:

"Yes, Jesus told me to do so in my heart."

"Now?" Sister asked in surprise, for no one had ever even hinted at such a possibility to the child.

"No, not right away; a little later when I shall be better."

Now, the thought of her unfortunate brethren, the poor negroes of Africa, who do not know and love Jesus, frequently comes to her mind and rends her heart. She desires to make them partakers of the gift of God and open Heaven to them at any cost.

The Church in her evening office sings a magnificent canticle. After having chanted the triumphs of Christ over His enemies, confounded for all eternity, after having recalled the indissoluble alliance between God and redeemed humanity, and after having proclaimed the glory and happiness of the just, she invites her children to exalt the mercies of Our Lord toward the little ones and the humble.

"The Lord is high above all nations," she

exclaims, "and His glory above the heavens... Who is as the Lord our God who dwelleth on high and looketh down on the low things in heaven and in earth? Raising up the needy from the earth and lifting up the poor out of the dunghill: That He may place him with the princes of his people (Ps. cxii.)"

Is not the true and touching history we have related a commentary on these immortal words? We have seen the God of tenderness and love crossing the deserts of Africa to lead a poor negro girl from the darkness of error, the degradation of Islamism, oppression and slavery, to the light of faith, the liberty of the Gospel, the regeneration of baptism and the regal joys of the Blessed Sacrament. Yes, this King of Kings, who overthrows the powerful and crushes empires to the earth, He is truly and forever a Saviour and a Father, rich in mercy; and the little ones, the oppressed and the abandoned are His privileged ones.

Let us who are the eldest children of His family thank Him then for these evidences of His wonders; and since the operations of His grace in behalf of souls will be manifested, in

the hour appointed by His wisdom, before all nations and all societies, let us ask Him to fulfill the prophecy of the Royal Prophet to the end and grant the gift of faith to lands which infidelity has made barren, and to multiply in savage countries the number of those who adore His holy name... *Habitare fecit sterilem in domo matrem filiorum letantem.*

Ah ! may we by our prayers hasten the advent of the day when the Church shall take sovereign possession of the regions still seated in the shadow of death, and banish slavery and error even from the depths of African forests, extending over mankind the penceful reign of justice and fraternal charity, and realizing, the divine ideal :

One fold and one shepherd.

L. DE KERVAIL.

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