

'Where is my mother?' I exclaimed again and again to the Sisters, whom, as I said before, I took for spirits.

'Stay still, dear child,' replied one of them; 'your mother will come by and by.'

They then gave me a delicious drink of some sort, which I thought the best thing I had ever tasted. I drank a great deal of it, and then slept profoundly.

Now I am going to relate what happened when I lost all consciousness, in my grave amidst the jackals, who were beginning to devour me. You will see the wonderful way in which Providence intervened to save my life.

Mr. N., a young Creole from the Island of Bourbon, not being able to sleep that night, took it into his head, luckily for me, to go out and hunt jackals. Loading his gun, he bent his steps towards the cemetery, in the direction where he heard the animals barking. Instead of taking to flight, like the other passers-by, when he came near me he courageously attacked the jackals, who were biting my feet, and made them take to flight. Seeing the bundle which they had been disinterring, and perceiving that it moved a little, as if it had some life in it, the young man was curious to know what it could contain. He therefore stooped down and cut the cords of the matting, when, to his surprise and horror, he perceived that it was a human body, which still breathed, and had evidently been buried alive. He took me up in his arms, and bore me to the mission-house of the Catholic Sisters, who received him with joyful eagerness. My young preserver was warmly congratulated on his act of charity, and every attention and care were bestowed upon me to recall me to life. It was you, my dear and tender mothers—you, true 'Children of Mary'—who then took charge of me; and from that moment I have been happy and at peace.

We cannot but pause for a moment here to marvel at the merciful designs of Providence on this child of the desert, preserved in the midst of so many mortal perils, and guided by so painful and circuitous a route to the haven of rest in the bosom of the Church of God.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Suéma had finished this narrative of her personal history, the Superior asked her to tell the children some farther details of the struggle which had preceded her conversion. She made this little confession with the simplicity and candour which were habitual to her.

I might have made my story end with the end of my misfortunes, dear little sisters (said Suéma calmly). But as our Superior wishes me to tell you something more, I am going to reveal to you a fact which is intimately connected with my past sad history, and which had the most important influence on my future life.

You know that we all are instructed here in the consoling truths of religion, and in the duties that it imposes upon us. Each of our Saviour's words puts things before us in a new light. As orphans, we have found tender mothers, who have taught us that we have a Father in heaven, even God. We have been despised, persecuted, and ill-treated in our childhood. Well, we have learnt how to accept all this ill-usage, and even to feel as if it were something of great price. We believe now that our bitter tears in past days brought upon us the blessing of our dear Lord Jesus Christ, and that He will reward us with great glory, if we will only love Him, and strive to be henceforth good and faithful Christians. Without homes or families, we have once more found both in this dear mission-house, which has filled up the aching void in our hearts by showing us the way to our true country, where there is no more suffering, or sorrow, or pain.

But to come back to myself. All the truths of Christianity were to me a source of ineffable consolation. My soul drank them in, as formerly I drank eagerly a glass of fresh water, when parched with thirst in crossing the burning desert. But when the Mother who was teaching me the Catechism came to explain our Lord's Prayer, and she repeated to me the fifth petition—'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that have trespassed against us'—I felt a sudden revolt in my heart. 'All the rest is well enough,' I said to myself; 'but this is impossible—unbearable.'

I could not conceal my inward feelings of rebellion, which were mingled with such bitterness and pain, at the thought of the past; and so, going to seek the Mother Superior, I exclaimed,

'What! I am to forgive the Arab who struck my dying mother? O no, never, never will I forgive her murderer!'

'My child,' replied our Mother very tenderly, 'our Lord, although He was God, suffered the worst of outrages, yet He forgave all. He even prayed for his executioners.'

'But, Mother,' I replied, 'such a thing is impossible to me. If I were to say "yes" with my lips, my heart would cry out, "Your forgiveness is not real."'

Our Mother kissed me, and said,

'I am very sorry for you, my poor little Suéma, on account of the long and cruel sufferings you have endured, and still more for the stumbling-block you put yourself in the way of your baptism, which would have crowned all your wishes. It is a great pity, my child. You have learned your Catechism so well and so diligently, and now you won't give up this dreadful hatred, which you must renounce with Satan and all his works. With this bitter hatred in your heart no baptism would be possible. But pray, my child, pray hard, and I will pray with you, and for you; and with the help of God your dispositions will change.'

Well, I began to pray as well as I could, and in the midst of my prayers I sometimes felt happy and sometimes miserable. During the day, I now and then felt as if I could say in all sincerity, 'Yes, I forgive from my heart that cruel monster.' But then the night came, and I used to dream over again that horrible scene, and the last sight of my poor mother in that burning plain.

One night I dreamt that I was changed into one of those dreadful black crows; that the Arab was lying bleeding in the middle of the desert, and that, fiercely flapping my wings, I was tearing him savagely with my beak. I told our Mother of my dream, which made the tears come into her eyes; but she merely said gently, 'Go on praying, dear child, and our good God will have pity upon you.'

In the mean time they fixed on a day for my baptism, which I earnestly desired. But when the morning came, they were obliged to put it off, and to defer the sacrament which was to make me one of Christ's fold; for I could not say that my feelings were changed, or that my hatred was much modified.

This refusal made me more miserable than ever; but that Providence which had watched over me in so many perils would not allow me to be shipwrecked at the very port of salvation.

In one wing of the mission-house, as you know, is a large ward, where the Sisters receive gratuitously the sick and wounded of every race and faith, and nurse them with the tenderest care. Well, one morning a Sister came to tell the Mother Superior that they had brought in a number of Arabs who had been very badly wounded in a fight with an English cruiser. It was my turn that day to help the Sisters in the dispensary. I hastened to prepare everything necessary for the occasion; warm water, basins, sponges, lint, and bandages, were all ready in a few moments. Carrying all these things, and pleased to be of use, I went into the ward, eagerly following the Mother and the Sister Infirmarian. What was my surprise and horror when the first person my eyes fell upon was the conductor of the caravan, the cruel monster who had struck my dying mother! I nearly dropped all I had in my hands with terror.

The poor wretch was in a horrible state; his head was nearly severed from his body by a sabre cut, his chest was all bleeding and pierced with bayonet wounds, and the whole scene made such an impression upon me that I very nearly fainted away. In a stifled voice I gasped out: 'O, my God, it is that Arab!'

The Mother Superior turned round to me, and said in a voice in which authority and tenderness were mingled: 'Suéma, my child, your sorrows deserve a reward. And now our Lord, in His tender mercy and loving-kindness, has given you the occasion to do Him a service of inestimable price. Happy are those who have the generosity to render good for evil; God will reward them for it sevenfold. Take courage, my child, and this victory will be yours. Be it your care to dress the wounds of this man.'

I looked our Mother full in the face, and her eyes met mine. There was something in them which I could not resist. Although trembling all over, I obeyed the order she had given me; and taking the sponge and the lint, I began to dress his wound. At the first moment I cannot tell you what it cost me. Besides the loathing with which he inspired me, my heart felt inclined to curse my enemy as he lay, and I could scarcely help rejoicing in his sufferings. But by degrees, with the help of God, I conquered my repugnance; and as I went on, these bad and bitter feelings were changed into a sentiment of deep pity. I was myself quite surprised at the change which had been wrought in me, and for the first time I tasted the sweetness of true Christian charity. At last my task was done; and being free, I ran secretly to the Sisters' oratory; and there, kneeling before the altar of the Blessed Virgin, I cried out loud in the midst of my sobs and tears: 'O, Mary! O, my Mother! take pity on this poor unhappy wretch, whom I now feel I can pardon with all my heart. Yes, I feel now I can forgive him completely.'

As I uttered these words, I felt some warm drops falling on my forehead. It was the good Mother who had taught me my Catechism, and who had just heard me pronounce those words of forgiveness. She wept for joy and tenderness while thanking and blessing God and His Blessed Mother for the grace of my conversion.

That day was Sunday. Towards evening they dressed me in a beautiful white robe, and half an hour before Benediction the flock of the Great Shepherd had a new little lamb, and the Church a fresh child. At my baptism they gave me the name of Magdalen, which is infinitely dearer to me than that of Suéma.

I spent the rest of the day in thanking God, who by such inscrutable but admirable ways had brought me to the light of His glorious Gospel. I said to myself every moment, 'What have I done to be chosen like this above so many millions of pagans who will never have the same happiness?' Full of this thought, I wished to show my gratitude to our Divine Master in some special manner, and I was very much puzzled to know what I could do which would be most agreeable to His Sacred Heart. I then seemed to hear a voice which said to me: 'Magdalen, live as a good Christian should do, and devote all your efforts to bring about the conversion of your poor fellow country-women.'

'Yes, yes, my God!' I exclaimed, 'I take this solemn resolve before Thee. All my life shall be devoted to this object. I will pray every day with my whole heart to obtain, through Thine infinite mercy, the salvation of the pagans in the east of Africa; and that missionaries may be sent to them who will show them the way to heaven.'

Magdalen kept her promise.

Such is the short but authentic history of little Suéma. Taken down word by word from her own mouth and translated into French, this account was recently sent home from Zanzibar by the Rev. P. Horner, Vicar Apostolic of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and of the Sacred Heart of Mary, and Superior of the mission at Zanzibar.

CHAPTER VI.

At the end of this touching history the venerable Superior writes:

'Would that it were permitted to you, Monsigneur, to see with your own eyes the poor children who have been rescued by your charity, and that of others whom you have inspired with a like Christian spirit! You would indeed be touched with the gratitude of these little things, who cannot yet speak much French, but who do not fail every day to say their Rosary in the Souahili tongue (known to our good God, if not to men), on behalf of the benefactors who have redeemed them from so horrible a slavery. They pray for them on earth, and will be their crown in eternity.'

Then he goes on to say:

'You cannot think how heart-breaking it is to the missioner not to be able to help so many other souls, for whom, only by paying a trifling sum, the doors of heaven would be opened. Is it not a sad thought that for fifty francs one can redeem a child of six or seven