

Poet's Courage.

THE CHRISTIAN BROTHERS.

In the streets of the city, where laughter is loud,
Where Mammon smiles down on his worshipping crowd,
Where the footsteps fall fast as the falling of rain,
The sad and the sinful, the vile and the vain;
In the streets of the city what form do we meet,
With long sable robe flowing free at his feet,
Who is it that moves through the wandering mall?
'Tis our teacher—a son of the sainted La Salle.

He hath left his young home in the land of the vine,
For the vineyard of God—for those tendrils of thine;
He hath heard that dear voice which of old calm'd the sea,
As it whisper'd to him, "Bring the children to me,
For of such is the Kingdom of God," ere the soul
Hath a speck of the sin that defileth the whole.
'Tis for this that he liveth—upbraid him who shall,
Who walks in the way of the sainted La Salle.

Oh, city! that looking forth seaward for ever
To the fleet on the bay, through the fleet on the river;
Still laving thy limbs in the parallel tides,
And proud of the strength that disaster derides;
Would you win true renown—'tis a dutiful youth,
An heirloom of honour, devotion, and truth;
Would you have them to pillar the home and the hall,
Oh! teach them the love of the sainted La Salle!

T. D'ARCY M'GEE.

S U E M A,

OR

THE LITTLE AFRICAN SLAVE WHO WAS BURIED ALIVE.

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

After his terrible disappearance, the battue ceased; the sportsmen, grieved and distressed, returned home; the forest became once more solitary; and only our sobs broke the solemn silence around us.

Night found us in the same spot, when the roar of the hyena startled my poor mother, and reminded her of my little brother, who had remained alone at home. With an effort she rose; but before leaving the spot, she cut down some branches, and made a little hut over the place reddened by my father's blood, placing in it his lance and bow and arrows, while we put all the provisions we had with us on a banana leaf at the entrance of the funeral hut; and then, holding each other's hands, went slowly and sadly home, without looking behind us, as when one returns from a funeral.

From this fatal day I date all my subsequent misfortunes. This was the first night of my life when our hut had been without fire and without light. All was sad and silent as the grave. However, the next day it was necessary that we should begin to work again; but here was an end of all our joy and gaiety.

O, how unhappy I was then! I knew nothing of the consoling truths which I have since learned here. I had never heard that we were placed in this world to love God, to pray, to suffer, and so to gain heaven. Not knowing how to pray or what to do, my passionate love for my father and my despair at his death drove me to hate all creation. I reproached the sun for shining as before, and the birds for singing. I cursed the day of my birth; and the joyous voices of my neighbours, instead of cheering, irritated me beyond measure—they seemed to insult my sorrow. What suffering is to be compared to a hopeless desolation like this, when one knows not God or how to pray to Him?

Very soon a fresh trouble and an almost more overwhelming calamity came to ruin not only my own family, but all the country; the crops having been entirely destroyed by swarms of locusts.

In three days everything had disappeared. All vegetables, shrubs, and grain were eaten down to the very roots, and the trees to the bark—the whole country, in fact, became like an arid desert.

This fearful plague brought about a general famine. Those who had salt in their huts endeavoured to obtain some kind of food by pickling the locusts themselves; but since our dear father's death our provision of salt had entirely failed. For a short time we lived on the goats and chickens which were left to us; but these, poor things, for want of grain and pasture, died like all the rest. The famine was followed by a still more terrible calamity. The air, infected by the thousands of insects and dead beasts—which, in the universal panic, no one had thought of burying—produced a fearful epidemic among the people. Our village, once so gay and crowded, became every day more and more silent and deserted.

In our own home especially we had cried so much that it seemed as if a river of tears encircled our hut. Our misery was so great that we left off lamenting for those that died. Thus we bore into the forest, without shedding one tear, my two sisters, who were our first victims. My poor mother even said in a low voice: "I am thankful that they are happy and will have no more suffering." Then came the death of my little brother, which followed quickly that of my sisters. On that occasion my mother did not weep: we had exhausted our very tears. But, to my surprise, instead of carrying him, like the rest, to the forest, my mother laid him down in our own hut; after which, taking me by the hand, she started along the river banks, and left our home for ever, without once looking back. Poor widow and orphan! In striving to escape from one misfortune, we only fell into still worse trouble.

THE change of scene, at first, had the happiest effect on my mother. Her old courage came back; and after marching for three days from our former village, we found a pretty spot near a stream, where we built a hut and began to clear and cultivate the soil. A neighbour was kind enough to lend us two bags of mtama: one to sow, the other to live upon till the crop came up. I cannot say that we were very happy in our new home. But my poor mother had become calmer, and I was so pleased to see that she had left off crying. Alas, our comparative peace was not to last long!

This year was nearly as bad a one as that which had preceded it; and although we had no fresh locusts, the crops entirely failed. Our creditor, himself in danger of almost perishing from want, came to demand the two bags of mtama which he had lent to us the year before, as I have said. My mother, in despair at this demand, which she had no means of satisfying, threw herself at his feet, imploring him to give her a little more time. He granted it, but very reluctantly, and the delay allowed was short enough. But without losing courage, my good mother, whose energy and activity never forsook her, resolved to turn her skill to making pottery of earthenware, in which she had great taste. Day and night she laboured at this work, in which I helped her as far as my little strength would allow. But you know as well as I how little such manufactures pay in our country; so that, in spite of her extreme diligence, when the day of payment fixed by our creditor arrived, we were unable to give him more than a quarter of our debt. He came, as we feared; and when he found out the state of things, he was furious, and went away uttering menaces and threats, which made our position a most painful one.

To add to our misfortunes, an Arab caravan passed at that time in the neighbourhood. Who does not know the danger of these caravans to the poor and weak? There are always, at such times, bad and unscrupulous men to be found, who lie in wait to steal the children of the poor, whom they sell to the Arabs for salt, cotton, and glass beads. Creditors take advantage of this circumstance to exact payment of their debts; and when their debtors cannot pay, they seize their goods and their children. It has even sometimes happened that they themselves are reduced to slavery.

After all, there is nothing to be surprised at in such conduct; for the love of gain has neither limit nor bowels of compassion in the souls of those who do not love God.

One day we heard that the caravan had stopped near our dwelling, and from that moment a feeling of mortal anxiety and terror filled every heart. That night my poor mother's sobs woke me several times. I did not dare ask her the cause of her tears, for fear of increasing her grief. Besides, we were so used to mingling our tears together. But in the morning I saw directly that my poor mother was undergoing some new and extraordinary weight of sorrow; for what was my astonishment, on looking at her, to see that her hair in one night had become quite white! Poor loving mother! in her maternal anxiety she foresaw the terrible blow which was about to fall upon us, and of which I was, as yet, utterly unconscious.

That very morning our creditor came into our hut, accompanied by two elders of our tribe and by an Arab. Without knocking or asking leave, he walked straight in, and said to my mother in a hard dry voice:

"Mother of Suéma, you have not the means of paying for my two sacks of mtama; I therefore seize your child instead." Then turning to the two old men, he added: "Be you my witnesses." Afterwards, addressing the Arab, he continued: "Very well, it is a settled thing; six yards of American cloth for this little girl."

The Arab took me by the hand, made me stand up and walk; examined my arms and legs, opened my mouth, looked at my teeth, and, after some moments of thought, replied,

"It's all right; come and fetch the six yards of cloth."

I was sold.

During this time my poor mother remained as one struck dumb. When our cruel creditor told her that I was seized for debt, according to the legal usage of the country, she clasped her hands violently together, and then covered her face. But when the Arab prepared to carry me off and lead me away with him, her agony, till then partially contained, burst forth in wild irrepressible cries, which were enough to move a heart of stone. She threw herself at his feet, and in tones which no language can adequately represent, besought him to carry her off with me.

"I am still young," she exclaimed, "in spite of the colour of my hair, whitened by sorrow. I am still strong enough to carry an elephant's tusk. O, I beseech you do not separate me from my child, who is my only consolation after the terrible misfortunes which have overwhelmed me. My lord, my lord, I implore you do not refuse me this favour! I am sober, and contented with very little. I know how to make all kinds of earthenware pottery. I will be as useful to you as if I were your slave. I promise to work hard always. O, my lord! I entreat you graciously to hear me and to carry me off with you. Take pity on a poor broken-hearted mother, who only implores not to be separated from her child."

These moving words, which seemed to be torn from the very heart of my poor mother, touched the Arab in spite of himself. I think, however, that in consenting that we should together form part of his caravan, he had more an eye to my mother's skill in making pottery than to her tears. Be that as it may, his decision brought some kind of calm into our minds, and together we felt as if we could bear anything. The next day, very early in the morning, the caravan began its march. My mother was given an elephant's tusk to carry, which is a very heavy weight; as for me, I only carried a few clothes.

Now this is the way a caravan travels. Soon after midnight a certain number of the servants of the chief go on before, carrying hatchets and cords (to build the huts on the arrival at the next camping ground), several skins for water, cooking utensils for the evening meal, and a great drum to call the caravan together. They carry besides an antelope's horn, which is considered a talisman against the lions, and which is purchased generally from the most famous sorcerers in the country.

At daybreak the signal of departure is given. One man marches at the head of the caravan and carries a little flag, which is supposed