

THE BATTLE OF LEPANTO.

(From *The Knights of St. John*, by E.H.T.)

But there was little time for the settlement of mutual disputes; and the intelligence brought by the Spanish spies soon induced all parties to lay aside their rivalries, and prepare for the combat. The tidings of the fall of Famagosta were now fully confirmed; Cyprus was lost past recall; and the Turkish fleet, under the command of Ali Pasha, was drawn up in the bay of Lepanto, with orders from sultan to seek and fight the Christians wherever they might be. He, indeed, were found who, even at this juncture, advised defensive measures; but their votes were overpowered by the ardour of the Colonna and of Don John himself, who, we are assured, had such faith in the sanctity of Pius, and in the assurance of victory which he had received from his mouth, that he relied more on his words than even on the number and valour of his soldiers. But it seemed as though his purpose of giving battle must perforce be deferred. A sudden obstacle presented itself; an adverse wind arose, which rendered the advance of the armada all but impossible. For two days it had kept steadily blowing from the same quarter, and there seemed no indication of a change; nevertheless (to use the words of the Spanish historian, Rosell) "on the morning of the 7th of October, a little before daybreak, Don John, defying the opposition of the elements, and as though impelled by an irresistible power, to the astonishment of all gave the signal to weigh anchor." It was obeyed; and laboring against the contrary wind, the vessels began to make their slow and difficult way, tossed and beaten by the waves, as the morning light was breaking over the horizon. Just as the sun rose over the glorious coast of that island-group, anciently known as the Echinades, the watchman on board the prince's galley made signal of a sail. It was quickly repeated by the lookers-out in Doria's squadron, and many who eagerly ascended the rigging plainly discerned not one sail alone, but, like so many dark specks on the flashing surface of the western sea, the distant array of the whole Turkish fleet. A battle was therefore felt to be close at hand; and whilst the crimson folds of the consecrated banner, to which a blessed rosary was affixed, were displayed aloft on the royal vessel, and the signal gun gave notice for all to fall into position, loud acclamations burst from every part of the Christian host in token of their enthusiastic joy. The Turkish fleet consisted of upwards of 4000 vessels of all sizes,* manned by not fewer than 120,000 men; in strength, therefore, the Moslems far surpassed the Christians, and they had the prestige of their late conquests in their favor. As the fleets were still distant, the interval was spent by the leaders of both parties in encouraging their followers and preparing for hostilities. Some of the Spanish generals, who still doubted the prudence of provoking the contest, appeared on board the royal galley to learn the final decision of the prince. They received it in a few words: "Gentlemen," he replied, "you mistake; this is not the time for council, but for combat;" and turning from them, he continued issuing his orders. Then, taking a small and swift galley, he went the rounds of the fleet, animating their crews with a few of those brief and heroic phrases which fall with such powerful effect from the lips of a great commander. He had an appropriate word for all. The Venetians he reminded of their injuries, and of the slaughter of Famagosta. Sebastian Veniero, whose irritable and stubborn temper had, at the first departure from Messina, betrayed him into excesses which banished him from the prince's council, still bore himself morose and sullen under his disgrace; but the judicious and courteous kindness of Don John so won upon him, that he laid aside his angry feelings and distinguished himself in the subsequent battle among the most valiant and devoted of the combatants. His address to the Spaniards has been preserved: "My children," he said, "we have come here to die—to conquer, if Heaven so disposes. Give not occasion to the enemy to say with impious arrogance, 'Where is now your God?' Fight, then, in His holy name; fallen, a victorious immortality will be yours!" And now might be seen other galleys passing from vessel to vessel on a different mission. These conveyed the religious appointed to attend the armada by the Pope, who went through every squadron publishing the indulgence granted by his Holiness, hearing the confessions of the soldiers, and preparing all for death. Their labors were crowned with abundant fruit. So soon as the prince had returned to his vessel the signal throughout the squadrons was given for prayer; all the soldiers, fully armed for the combat, fell upon their knees, the crucifix was upraised on the deck of every vessel, and for some minutes, as the two hosts drew rapidly nearer to each other, every man on board the Christian fleet was engaged in humbly imploring the Divine blessing on its arms.

Gradually the whole battle-front of the enemy displayed itself to view; and the sun, now risen high above the horizon, shone over a spectacle as terrible as it was magnificent. Three hundred and thirty large Turkish vessels were to be seen disposed in the form of a vast crescent, and far outflanking their opponents' line; but the courage of the Christian leaders remained unmoved by the terrific sight. Although it became evident that the reports of the Spanish spies had greatly underrated the numbers and strength of their opponents, yet, as Rosell relates, the heart of Don John was unappalled: and placing his hopes in God, and fixing his eyes upon the crucifix he ever carried with him, he gave thanks aloud for his victory as already won. No sooner were the words uttered than a token seemed to be given him to assure him that his trust was not ill-founded. We have said that hitherto the wind had been all in favour of the Turks, whose enormous crescent was bearing rapidly down on the Christian host, like some fierce bird of prey with outstretched wings, when suddenly the breeze fell, and the sails

flapped idly on the masts; there was a dead and profound calm. The sea, but a moment before crested with foam, became motionless and smooth as a sheet of glass; it seemed as though they were going to fight on land rather than on water, so still and quiet lay the ships but just now tossed and beaten by the angry waves. Presently a soft rising breeze was heard sighing among the cordage; by and by it gathered strength; but this time it filled the Christian sails, blowing right against the prows of the Turkish ships, and the whole state of things was changed. The Turkish line, which but a minute previously had seemed to extend its wide arms as if to enfold its helpless foe in a deadly embrace, was thrown into some confusion by this sudden and extraordinary veering of the wind; while the Christian vessels, carried forward by a brisk and favourable breeze, bore down with impetuous gallantry on the foe, and thus gained all the advantage of attack. The Turks, however, fired the first shot, which was quickly answered by the Spaniards; then placing himself in full armour on the prow of his galley, Don John ordered the trumpets to sound the charge; while in every vessel the crews and soldiers knelt to receive the last general absolution, and this being given, every thought was turned to the approaching struggle.

It was noon before the fight began; the brilliant sun rode aloft in the clear azure of the Grecian sky, and flashed brightly on the casques and armour of the warriors. The Moslems received their assailants with loud and horrible cries, which were met on the part of the Christians by a profound silence. The flag-ship of Ali Pasha commenced the cannonade; but the fire of the Venetians opened on the Turks so suddenly, and with such overwhelming violence that at the first discharge their advancing vessels recoiled as though from the shock of a tremendous blow, and at the second broadside two of the galleys were sunk. In addition to the discouragement produced by this first incident in the fight, the adverse wind carried all the smoke of the Christian artillery right upon the decks of the Turks, who were thus blinded and embarrassed; whilst their enemies were able to direct every movement with facility, and fought in the clear light of day. After this first encounter the battle became general; Don John eagerly made his way towards the Pasha's galley, and Ali, on his part, did not decline the challenge. To form anything like a correct idea of a sea-fight in those days, we must remember the nature of the vessels then in use, propelled as they were by rowers seated on several tiers of benches, and defended less by artillery than by the armed combatants, who strove to grapple hand to hand with their opponents. The galleys of war were armed with long beaks, or pointed prows, with which they dashed against the enemy's vessels, and often sunk them at the first shock. Terrible was the meeting of the leaders of the two armaments; the long beak of Ali Pasha's galley was forced far among the benches of the Christian rowers: his own rowers, be it said, were Christians also,—slaves chained to their posts, and working under the threat of death if they shrank from their task, and the promise of liberty if the Turks should gain the day. Then there rose the clash of arms: the combatants met face to face, and their swords rang on the armour of their opponents, whilst the waters were lashed into fury by the strokes of a thousand oars. Wider and wider the conflict spread: the Bey of Alexandria, at the head of his galleys, made a furious attack on the Venetian squadron; but he was met by Barbarigo and his men with the most eager and determined courage; for the memory of the cruelties practised on their countrymen at Famagosta was fresh in their minds, and animated them to vengeance. A shower of darts rained around them, but they seemed regardless of all danger. One of these deadly weapons struck Barbarigo himself in the eye whilst in the very front of the battle; he was carried to his cabin, where, after lingering three days, he expired from his wound. The slaughter on both sides was terrible, though the Venetians were finally successful in repulsing their enemies; the galley of Contarini, the nephew of Barbarigo, narrowly escaped being taken, from the fact of almost every man on board of it being slain, Contarini himself among the number.

Whilst matters proceeded thus in the left wing, the right was engaged in an equally desperate struggle. To the Spanish commander, Doria, was opposed, on the side of the Turks, the famous renegade corsair Ouloudj Ali, who, from the rank of a poor Neapolitan fisherman, had risen, through his apostasy from the faith and his extraordinary and ferocious valour, to the sovereignty of Algiers, and had become one of the most distinguished admirals of the day. In the course of the preceding year he had surprised a large squadron of galleys belonging to the Knights of Malta, three of which he succeeded in capturing, whilst others, including the admiral's vessel were severely injured and run aground off the coast of Sicily. This circumstance had for the time so crippled the squadron of the Order, that it was able to contribute no more than three galleys to the Christian fleet. They were commanded by Peter Giustiniani, grand prior of Messina, one of that illustrious race which was ever foremost when the cause was that of the Church, and the enemy was the Mussulman, and whose boast it was, to reckon the names of fifty saints among its lineage. Giustiniani's own vessel, the Capitana di Malta, was posted in the very centre of the line of battle, the place of honour being granted without opposition to the banner of St. John; but the other galleys were attached to Doria's division, and received the first attack of Ouloudj Ali. In spite of their heroic defence, they were overpowered by numbers; the St. Stephen was assailed by three Turkish vessels at once, and was in the utmost danger of being taken, when Giustiniani, perceiving the danger of the knights, hastened to their assistance, and forced two of the enemy's vessels to strike. The third was on the point of doing the same, when Ouloudj Ali brought up four other galleys, and then ensued one of the most desperate and bloody combats that was witnessed throughout the day.

(To be continued.)

* Von Hammer makes the Turkish fleet consist of 240 galleys and 60 vessels of smaller size, just 300 in all. His account of the Christian fleet is as follows:—70 Spanish galleys, 6 Maltese, 3 Savoy, 12 Papal, 108 Venetian; in all 199 galleys, to which he adds 6 huge galleasses contributed by Venice; making the sum-total 205 vessels.

† Vertot. Von Hammer, as has been said, mentions six.