

THE BATTLE OF LEPANTO.

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

EVERY man on the prior's vessel was slain, with the exception of himself and two knights, who were all, however, severely wounded. One of the knights fought till he could no longer stand, and fell, as was supposed, dead; yet he afterwards recovered, and lived for several years, with the loss of an arm, a leg, and an eye, and was looked on in the order as one of their trophies of Lepanto. Giustiniani himself was wounded in fourteen places; and his galley, now without defenders, fell into the hands of the Turks, who immediately brought up their seven shattered vessels, and towed her off in triumph.

It was with inexpressible grief that the Christian fleet beheld the fall of the Maltese standard and the capture of its chief galley; but the success of the infidels was of short duration. The knights inspired with fresh courage by the spectacle of their admiral's misfortune, attacked the vessel of the corsair-chief with redoubled fury. He defended himself with extraordinary obstinacy; but at length, after the loss of all his bravest men, the banner of the Hospitallers was once more seen to float over the *Capitana di Malta*, and Giustiniani and his two wounded comrades were rescued from the enemy's hands.* No less than seventy-three knights fell in this struggle. Among those who most distinguished themselves was the Gascon hero, Maturin de Lescat, better known as "the brave Romegas." In his own day he enjoyed a kind of romantic celebrity; for it was said that in all his combats with the Moslems they had never been known to gain a single advantage over him. In the course of five years he is said to have destroyed more than fifty Turkish vessels, and to have delivered one thousand Christians from slavery. Many of his most daring exploits had been performed on the coasts of Sicily, where he was so great a favorite, that, as Goussancourt informs us, whenever he entered any city of that island, the people would flock out of their houses only to behold him; not knowing which to admire most, so much courage adorned with such rare graces of person, or those graces sustained by so undaunted a valour. Much of the old chivalrous spirit was to be found in his character, defaced, indeed, by an ambition which afterwards obscured his fame; but at Lepanto that fame had as yet lost nothing of its brilliancy, and Romegas was never higher in estimation than when he led on the galleys of his Order to the rescue of the admiral. Before the battle began he made a solemn vow that the first Turkish captain who might fall into his hands should be offered to God: it chanced that his first prisoner was a most ferocious Turk, who had lost the use of his right arm, as was said, in consequence of the violence he had used in inflicting the torture on his Christian slaves. This man was given by Romegas, in fulfilment of his vow, to the church of St. John at Malta, and had good reason to thank the brave Gascon for his happy fortune: for his heart changed in his captivity, and he learned to weep over the actions wherein he had formerly placed his glory; so that, embracing Christianity, he solicited baptism from his masters, and died happily in the true faith. The gallantry displayed by the Hospitallers in the engagement forced the Venetian Contarini to acknowledge that, in spite of their insignificant numbers, their part in the victory almost surpassed that of Venice herself; and in fact, when we remember that Don John of Austria was himself a member of the Order,* we are bound to admit that their share in the honour of the day has not been sufficiently acknowledged by historians.

Among the combatants in Doria's division, whose courage equalled any of those engaged in the battle, was one whose celebrity, great as ever in our own day, rests, strange to say, rather on the wit, whose ridicule gave the last blow to the chivalry of the middle ages, than on the valour which made its owner himself worthy of the highest chivalrous renown: it was Miguel Cervantes, "brave as the bravest." He lay sick of fever in the cabin of his ship when the tumult of the battle began; but he could no longer endure to remain inactive. In spite of the entreaties of his friends, he arose, and rushed into the hottest of the fight. Being covered with wounds, his companions again urged him to retire; but he replied, "Better for the soldier to remain dead in battle than to seek safety in flight. Wounds on the face and breast are like stars to guide others to the heaven of honour." Besides other less important wounds, Cervantes lost in this battle his left arm;† his right hand was destined to gain him another kind of immortality.

The combat soon became too general for the different divisions of the two armaments to preserve their respective positions. Every portion of the hostile fleets was engaged; but the most desperate fight was that between the galleys of the rival generals, Ali Pasha and Don John of Austria. Both commanders fought in the thickest of the fray, regardless of their rank, and with the bold temerity of simple men-at-arms. By the side of the Prince's galley were those of Colonna and Sebastian Veniero; and in them, and in the other vessels that surrounded them, were assembled the very flower of the Christian host. Here for the most part were the noble French and Roman volunteers; hardly a great house of Italy but had its representative among the combatants: two of the Colonnas; Paul Orsini, the chief of his name, with his brothers, Horace and Virginus; Antonio Carrara, Michel Bonelli, and Paul Ghislieri, nephews of the Pope; and Farnese, prince of Parma, who played a very hero's part in the flag-ship of the Genoese republic. The battle in the centre, led on by such men, and met with equal valour and determination on the part of their adversaries, lasted more

than two hours. Already had the Christians made two gallant attempts to board the vessel of the Pasha, and each time they were driven back with loss so soon as they reached his decks. The burning midday-sun added to the heat of the engagement, and the thirst of the soldiers was almost intolerable. The decks were heaped with dead, and those still living were covered with wounds, and well-nigh exhausted from loss of blood, and still they maintained the conflict with unabated courage. At length the signal was given for a third charge. It was obeyed with an impetuosity nothing could resist; and whilst Ali Pasha vainly strove, as before, to drive back his desperate assailants, a shot from an arquebuse struck him in the forehead. Staggering from his wound, he fell, and his head was instantly cut off by a blow from one of the galley-slaves, and thrown into the sea. The event of the battle after this was no longer doubtful; Don John with his own hands pulled down the Turkish flag, and shouted, "Victory!" whilst Santa Cruz, profiting by the confusion, pushed forward with the reserve, and completed the discomfiture of the foe. At this critical moment the corsair Ouloudj Ali, seeing that the whole Turkish centre was broken, and the day irretrievably lost, hoisted all sail, and with forty galleys, the only vessels that escaped out of that bloody battle, passed safely through the midst of the Christian fleet.

The Turks struggled long and desperately before they finally gave way. It was four in the afternoon ere the fight was over; and the lowering sky betokened the gathering of a tempest. The remains of the Turkish fleet fled in all directions, pursued, though with difficulty, by the allies, whose wearied rowers could scarcely hold the oars; whilst their numbers were so thinned by the slaughter, that it was as much as the commanders could do to find crews for their vessels. Crippled as the Christians were, however, the infidels were seized with panic, and ran their vessels madly against the shore of Lepanto. In their terrified efforts to land, many were drowned; whilst the galleys were broken by the waves, or fell an easy prey to the conquerors. The whole sea for miles presented most terrible tokens of the battle; those clear waters, on which the morning sun had shone so brightly, were now dark and discoloured by human blood. Headless corpses and the fragments of many a wreck floated about in strange confusion; while the storm, which every moment raged in wilder fury, added to the horror of the scene, lit up as the night advanced by the burning galleys, many of which were found too much disabled to be of any use to their captors. Twelve of those belonging to the allies were destroyed; but the extent of their victory may be estimated by the fact that eighty vessels belonging to the Turks were sunk, whilst 130 remained in the hands of the Christians. The Pasha's galley, which was among those taken, was a vessel of surpassing beauty. The deck, says Knolles, was of walnut wood, dark as ebony, "checkered and wrought marvellously fine with divers lively colours and variety of histories;" and her cabin glittered with ornaments of gold, rich hangings, and precious gems.‡ The enemy's slain amounted to 30,000 men; and 15,000 of the Christian slaves who had been compelled to work the Ottoman galleys were liberated. Yet the victory, complete as it was, was dearly bought; the loss of the allies was reckoned at about 8000 men; and their ships, riddled with balls, and many of them dismantled, presented a striking contrast to the gay and gallant trim in which but a few days previously they had left the harbour of Messina.

The conduct of Don John of Austria after the battle justifies us in ranking him among the true heroes of chivalry. He had been foremost in the day's conflict, where he had been seen, sword in hand, wherever the danger was greatest and the blows hardest. He was now equally conspicuous for his care of the wounded, his generosity towards his prisoners, and his frank and noble recognition of the services of a rival. Sebastian Veniero, the disgraced leader of the Venetian forces, had distinguished himself in the fight by a valour that had made his gray hairs the centre round which the most gallant of the young volunteers of France and Italy had rallied during that eventful day. The Prince sent for him as soon as the confusion of the victory had subsided, and (adds Rosell in his history of the battle), "to show him that he harboured no resentment for past offences, he advanced to meet him as far as the ladder of his galley, embraced him affectionately, and, calling him *his father*, extolled, as was just, his great valour, and could not finish what he would have said for the sobs and tears that choked his utterance. The poor old man, who did not expect such a reception, wept also, and so did all who witnessed the scene." Whilst this interview was taking place, the two sons of Ali Pasha were brought prisoners into the Prince's presence. "It was a piteous sight," says the same historian, "to see the tears they shed on finding themselves at once prisoners and orphans." But they met with a friend and comforter in their generous captor; he embraced them, and expressed the tenderest sympathy for their misfortunes. The delicacy of his kindness showed itself in more than words; he treated them rather as his guests than as captives, lodging them in one of his own cabins, and even ordering Turkish clothes to be provided for them at his own expense, that they might not be pained by being obliged to adopt the European costume. Neither was he less forward in returning thanks to God for the victory granted to his arms than he had been in commending to Him the event of the day's conflict. Thus the night closed: the vessels cast anchor amid the wreck of battle, and the wearied combatants took a short and necessary repose. Soon as day again broke, the sails were hoisted, and, securing their prizes, they proceeded to the port of Petala, to repair their damages and provide for the necessities of the wounded.

(To be continued.)

* Von Hammer says that Ouloudj Ali struck off Giustiniani's head with his own hand. Contarini, on the contrary, writes that he was "so badly wounded that he was all but killed."

† All the members of the Order did not live in community; some were scattered about, and were liable to be called in, in case of emergencies—e.g. we find several Knights of St. John among the early governors and settlers of Canada.

‡ "A trifling price to pay (he says in the preface to the second part of *Don Quixote*) for the honour of partaking in the first great action in which the naval supremacy of the Ottoman was successfully disputed by Christian arms."

§ Von Hammer says fifteen; and that the Turks lost 224 vessels, of which 94 were burnt or shattered on the coast; the rest were divided among the allies. But this calculation leaves 36 vessels unaccounted for, after reckoning the 43 which Ouloudj Ali succeeded in saving. The number of prisoners he estimates at 3443. || Sutherland, vol. ii. p. 244.