

Chapter 10

This mixture of arrogance and submission only merited indignation, but it suited Kursheed to dissemble. He replied that, assenting to such propositions being beyond his powers, he would transmit them to Constantinople, and that hostilities might be suspended, if Ali wished, until the courier could return.

Being quite as cunning as Ali himself, Kursheed profited by the truce to carry on intrigues against him. He corrupted one of the chiefs of the garrison, Metzo-Abbas by name, who obtained pardon for himself and fifty followers, with permission to return to their homes. But this clemency appeared to have seduced also four hundred Skipetars who made use of the amnesty and the money with which Ali provided them, to raise Toxis and the Tapygetae in the latter's favour. Thus the Seraskier's scheme turned against himself, and he perceived he had been deceived by Ali's seeming apathy, which certainly did not mean dread of defection. In fact, no man worth anything could have abandoned him, supported as he seemed to be by almost supernatural courage. Suffering from a violent attack of gout, a malady he had never before experienced, the pacha, at the age of eighty-one, was daily carried to the most exposed place on the ramparts of his castle. There, facing the hostile batteries, he gave audience to whoever wished to see him. On this exposed platform he held his councils, despatched orders, and indicated to what points his guns should be directed. Illumined by the flashes of fire, his figure assumed fantastic and weird shapes. The balls sung in the air, the bullets hailed around him, the noise drew blood from the ears of those with him. Calm and immovable, he gave signals to the soldiers who were still occupying part of the ruins of Janina, and encouraged them by voice and gesture. Observing the enemy's movements by the help of a telescope, he improvised means of counteracting them. Sometimes he amused himself by greeting curious persons and new-comers after a fashion of his own. Thus the chancellor of the French Consul at Prevesa, sent as an envoy to Kursheed Pacha, had scarcely entered the lodging assigned to him, when he was visited by a bomb which caused him to leave it again with all haste. This greeting was due to Ali's chief engineer, Caretto, who next day sent a whole shower of balls and shells into the midst of a group of Frenchmen, whose curiosity had brought them to Tika, where Kursheed was forming a battery. "It is time," said Ali, "that these contemptible gossip-mongers should find listening at doors may become uncomfortable. I have furnished matter enough for them to talk about.

Frangistan (Christendom) shall henceforth hear only of my triumph or my fall, which will leave it considerable trouble to pacify." Then, after a moment's silence, he ordered the public criers to inform his soldiers of the insurrections in Wallachia and the Morea, which news, proclaimed from the ramparts, and spreading immediately in the Imperial camp, caused there much dejection.

The Greeks were now everywhere proclaiming their independence, and Kursheed found himself unexpectedly surrounded by enemies. His position threatened to become worse if the siege of Janina dragged on much longer. He seized the island in the middle of the lake, and threw up redoubts upon it, whence he kept up an incessant fire on the southern front of the castle of Litharitzza, and, a practicable trench of nearly forty feet having been made, an assault was decided on. The troops marched out boldly, and performed prodigies of valour; but at the end of an hour, Ali, carried on a litter because of his gout, having led a sortie, the besiegers were compelled to give way and retire to their intrenchments, leaving three hundred dead at the foot of the rampart. "The Pindian bear is yet alive," said Ali in a message to Kursheed; "thou mayest take thy dead and bury them; I give them up without ransom, and as I shall always do when thou attackest me as a brave man ought." Then, having entered his fortress amid the acclamations of his soldiers, he remarked on hearing of the general rising of Greece and the Archipelago, "It is enough! two men have ruined Turkey!" He then remained silent, and vouchsafed no explanation of this prophetic sentence.

Ali did not on this occasion manifest his usual delight on having gained a success. As soon as he was alone with Basilissa, he informed her with tears of the death of Chainitzza. A sudden apoplexy had stricken this beloved sister, the life of his councils, in her palace of Libokovo, where she remained undisturbed until her death. She owed this special favour to her riches and to the intercession of her nephew, Djiladin Pacha of Ochrida, who was reserved by fate to perform the funeral obsequies of the guilty race of Tepelen.

A few months afterwards, Ibrahim Pacha of Berat died of poison, being the last victim whom Chainitzza had demanded from her brother.

Ali's position was becoming daily more difficult, when the time of Ramadan arrived, during which the Turks relax hostilities, and a species of truce ensued. Ali himself appeared to respect the old popular customs, and allowed his Mohammedan soldiers to visit the enemy's outposts and confer on the subject of various religious ceremonies. Discipline was relaxed in Kursheed's camp, and Ali profited thereby to ascertain the smallest details of all that passed.

He learned from his spies that the general's staff, counting on the "Truce of God," a tacit suspension of all hostilities during the feast of Bairam, the Mohammedan Easter, intended to repair to the chief mosque, in the quarter of Loutcha. This building, spared by the bombs, had until now been respected by both sides. Ali, according to reports spread by himself, was supposed to be ill, weakened by fasting, and terrified into a renewal of devotion, and not likely to give trouble on so sacred a day. Nevertheless he ordered Caretto to turn thirty guns against the mosque, cannon, mortars and howitzers, intending, he said, to solemnise Bairam by discharges of artillery. As soon as he was sure that the whole of the staff had entered the mosque, he gave the signal.

Instantly, from the assembled thirty pieces, there issued a storm of shells, grenades and cannon-balls. With a terrific noise, the mosque crumbled together, amid the cries of pain and rage of the crowd inside crushed in the ruins. At the end of a quarter of an hour the wind dispersed the smoke, and disclosed a burning crater, with the large cypresses which surrounded the building blazing as if they had been torches lighted for the funeral ceremonies of sixty captains and two hundred soldiers.

"Ali Pacha is yet alive!" cried the old Homeric hero of Janina, leaping with joy; and his words, passing from mouth to mouth, spread yet more terror amid Kursheed's soldiers, already overwhelmed by the horrible spectacle passing before their eyes.

Almost on the same day, Ali from the height of his keep beheld the standard of the Cross waving in the distance. The rebellious Greeks were bent on attacking Kursheed. The insurrection promoted by the Vizier of Janina had passed far beyond the point he intended, and the rising had become a revolution. The delight which Ali first evinced cooled rapidly before this

consideration, and was extinguished in grief when he found that a conflagration, caused by the besiegers' fire, had consumed part of his store in the castle by the lake. Kursheed, thinking that this event must have shaken the old lion's resolution, recommenced negotiations, choosing the Kiaia of Moustai Pacha: as an envoy, who gave Ali a remarkable warning. "Reflect," said he, "that these rebels bear the sign of the Cross on their standards. You are now only an instrument in their hands. Beware lest you become the victim of their policy." Ali understood the danger, and had the sultan been better advised, he would have pardoned Ali on condition of again bringing Hellas under his iron yoke. It is possible that the Greeks might not have prevailed against an enemy so formidable and a brain so fertile in intrigue. But so simple an idea was far beyond the united intellect of the Divan, which never rose above idle display. As soon as these negotiations had commenced, Kursheed filled the roads with his couriers, sending often two in a day to Constantinople, from whence as many were sent to him. This state of things lasted more than three weeks, when it became known that Ali, who had made good use of his time in replacing the stores lost in the conflagration, buying actually from the Kiaia himself a part of the provisions brought by him for the Imperial camp, refused to accept the Ottoman ultimatum. Troubles which broke out at the moment of the rupture of the negotiations proved that he foresaw the probable result.

Kursheed was recompensed for the deception by which he had been duped by the reduction of the fortress of Litharitzza. The Guegue Skipetars, who composed the garrison, badly paid, wearied out by the long siege, and won by the Seraskier's bribes, took advantage of the fact that the time of their engagement with Ali had elapsed some months previously, and, delivering up the fortress they defended, passed over to the enemy. Henceforth Ali's force consisted of only six hundred men.

It was to be feared that this handful of men might also become a prey to discouragement, and might surrender their chief to an enemy who had received all fugitives with kindness. The Greek insurgents dreaded such an event, which would have turned all Kursheed's army, hitherto detained before the castle, of Janina loose upon themselves. Therefore they hastened to send to their former enemy, now their ally, assistance which he declined to accept. Ali saw himself surrounded by enemies thirsting for his wealth, and his avarice increasing with the danger, he had for some months past refused to pay his defenders. He contented himself with informing his captains of the insurgents' offer, and telling them that he was confident that

bravery such as theirs required no reinforcement. And when some of them besought him to at least receive two or three hundred Palikars into the castle, "No," said he; "old serpents always remain old serpents: I distrust the Suliots and their friendship."

Ignorant of Ali's decision, the Greeks of the Selleid were advancing, as well as the Toxidae, towards Janina, when they received the following letter from Ali Pacha:

"My well-beloved children, I have just learned that you are preparing to despatch a party of your Palikars against our common enemy, Kursheed. I desire to inform you that this my fortress is impregnable, and that I can hold out against him for several years. The only service I require of your courage is that you should reduce Arta, and take alive Ismail Pacho Bey, my former servant, the mortal enemy of my family, and the author of the evils and frightful calamities which have so long oppressed our unhappy country, which he has laid waste before our eyes. Use your best efforts to accomplish this; it will strike at the root of the evil, and my treasures shall reward your Palikars, whose courage every day gains a higher value in my eyes."

Furious at this mystification, the Suliots retired to their mountains, and Kursheed profited by the discontent Ali's conduct had caused, to win over the Toxide Skipetars, with their commanders Tahir Abbas and Hagi Bessiaris, who only made two conditions: one, that Ismail Pacho Bey, their personal enemy, should be deposed; the other, that the life of their old vizier should be respected.

The first condition was faithfully adhered to by Kursheed, actuated by private motives different from those which he gave publicly, and Ismail Pacho Bey was solemnly deposed. The tails, emblems of his authority, were removed; he resigned the plumes of office; his soldiers forsook him, his servants followed suit. Fallen to the lowest rank, he was soon thrown into prison, where he only blamed Fate for his misfortunes. All the Skipetar Agas hastened to place themselves under Kursheed's standard, and enormous forces now threatened Janina. All Epirus awaited the denouement with anxiety.

Had he been less avaricious, Ali might have enlisted all the adventurers with whom the East was swarming, and made the sultan tremble in his capital. But the aged pacha clung passionately to his treasures. He feared also, perhaps not unreasonably, that those by whose aid he might triumph would some day become his master. He long deceived himself with the idea that the English, who had sold Parga to him, would never allow a Turkish fleet to enter the Ionian Sea. Mistaken on this point, his foresight was equally at fault with regard to the cowardice of his sons. The defection of his troops was not less fatal, and he only understood the bearing of the Greek insurrection which he himself had provoked, so far as to see that in this struggle he was merely an instrument in procuring the freedom of a country which he had too cruelly oppressed to be able to hold even an inferior rank in it. His last letter to the Suliots opened the eyes of his followers, but under the influence of a sort of polite modesty these were at least anxious to stipulate for the life of their vizier. Kursheed was obliged to produce firmans from the Porte, declaring that if Ali Tepelen submitted, the royal promise given to his sons should be kept, and that he should, with them, be transferred to Asia Minor, as also his harem, his servants; and his treasures, and allowed to finish his days in peace. Letters from Ali's sons were shown to the Agas, testifying to the good treatment they had experienced in their exile; and whether the latter believed all this, or whether they merely sought to satisfy their own consciences, they henceforth thought only of inducing their rebellious chief to submit. Finally, eight months' pay, given them in advance, proved decisive, and they frankly embraced the cause of the sultan.

The garrison of the castle on the lake, whom Ali seemed anxious to offend as much as possible, by refusing their pay, he thinking them so compromised that they would not venture even to accept an amnesty guaranteed by the mufti, began to desert as soon as they knew the Toxidae had arrived at the Imperial camp. Every night these Skipetars who could cross the moat betook themselves to Kursheed's quarters. One single man yet baffled all the efforts of the besiegers. The chief engineer, Caretto, like another Archimedes, still carried terror into the midst of their camp.

Although reduced to the direst misery, Caretto could not forget that he owed his life to the master who now only repaid his services with the most sordid ingratitude. When he had first come to Epirus, Ali, recognising his ability, became anxious to retain him, but without incurring any expense. He ascertained that the Neapolitan was passionately in love with a

Mohammedan girl named Nekibi, who returned his affection. Acting under Ali's orders, Tahir Abbas accused the woman before the cadí of sacrilegious intercourse with an infidel. She could only escape death by the apostasy of her lover; if he refused to deny his God, he shared her fate, and both would perish at the stake. Caretto refused to renounce his religion, but only Nekibi suffered death. Caretto was withdrawn from execution, and Ali kept him concealed in a place of safety, whence he produced him in the time of need. No one had served him with greater zeal; it is even possible that a man of this type would have died at his post, had his cup not been filled with mortification and insult.

Eluding the vigilance of Athanasius Vaya, whose charge it was to keep guard over him, Caretto let himself down by a cord fastened to the end of a cannon: He fell at the foot of the rampart, and thence dragged himself, with a broken arm, to the opposite camp. He had become nearly blind through the explosion of a cartridge which had burnt his face. He was received as well as a Christian from whom there was now nothing to fear, could expect. He received the bread of charity, and as a refugee is only valued in proportion to the use which can be made of him, he was despised and forgotten.

The desertion of Caretto was soon followed by a defection which annihilated Ali's last hopes. The garrison which had given him so many proofs of devotion, discouraged by his avarice, suffering from a disastrous epidemic, and no longer equal to the necessary labour in defence of the place, opened all the gates simultaneously to the enemy. But the besiegers, fearing a trap, advanced very slowly; so that Ali, who had long prepared against every sort of surprise, had time to gain a place which he called his "refuge."

It was a sort of fortified enclosure, of solid masonry, bristling with cannon, which surrounded the private apartments of his seraglio, called the "Women's Tower." He had taken care to demolish everything which could be set on fire, reserving only a mosque and the tomb of his wife Emineh, whose phantom, after announcing an eternal repose, had ceased to haunt him. Beneath was an immense natural cave, in which he had stored ammunition, precious articles, provisions, and the treasures which had not been sunk in the lake. In this cave an apartment had been made for Basilissa and his harem, also a shelter in which he retired to sleep when exhausted with fatigue. This place was his last resort, a kind of mausoleum; and he did not

seem distressed at beholding the castle in the hands of his enemies. He calmly allowed them to occupy the entrance, deliver their hostages, overrun the ramparts, count the cannon which were on the platforms, crumbling from the hostile shells; but when they came within hearing, he demanded by one of his servants that Kursheed should send him an envoy of distinction; meanwhile he forbade anyone to pass beyond a certain place which he pointed out.

Kursheed, imagining that, being in the last extremity, he would capitulate, sent out Tahir Abbas and Hagi Bessiaris. Ali listened without reproaching them for their treachery, but simply observed that he wished to meet some of the chief officers.

The Seraskier then deputed his keeper of the wardrobe, accompanied by his keeper of the seals and other persons of quality. Ali received them with all ceremony, and, after the usual compliments had been exchanged, invited them to descend with him into the cavern. There he showed them more than two thousand barrels of powder carefully arranged beneath his treasures, his remaining provisions, and a number of valuable objects which adorned this slumbering volcano. He showed them also his bedroom, a sort of cell richly furnished, and close to the powder. It could be reached only by means of three doors, the secret of which was known to no one but himself. Alongside of this was the harem, and in the neighbouring mosque was quartered his garrison, consisting of fifty men, all ready to bury themselves under the ruins of this fortification, the only spot remaining to him of all Greece, which had formerly bent beneath his authority.

After this exhibition, Ali presented one of his most devoted followers to the envoys. Selim, who watched over the fire, was a youth in appearance as gentle as his heart was intrepid, and his special duty was to be in readiness to blow up the whole place at any moment. The pacha gave him his hand to kiss, inquiring if he were ready to die, to which he only responded by pressing his master's hand fervently to his lips. He never took his eyes off Ali, and the lantern, near which a match was constantly smoking, was entrusted only to him and to Ali, who took turns with him in watching it. Ali drew a pistol from his belt, making as if to turn it towards the powder magazine, and the envoys fell at his feet, uttering involuntary cries of terror. He smiled at their fears, and assured them that, being wearied of the weight of his weapons, he had only intended to relieve himself of some of them. He

then begged them to seat themselves, and added that he should like even a more terrible funeral than that which they had just ascribed to him. "I do not wish to drag down with me," he exclaimed, "those who have come to visit me as friends; it is Kursheed, whom I have long regarded as my brother, his chiefs, those who have betrayed me, his whole army in short, whom I desire to follow me to the tomb--a sacrifice which will be worthy of my renown, and of the brilliant end to which I aspire."

The envoys gazed at him with stupefaction, which did not diminish when Ali further informed them that they were not only sitting over the arch of a casemate filled with two hundred thousand pounds of powder, but that the whole castle, which they had so rashly occupied, was undermined. "The rest you have seen," he said, "but of this you could not be aware. My riches are the sole cause of the war which has been made against me, and in one moment I can destroy them. Life is nothing to me, I might have ended it among the Greeks, but could I, a powerless old man, resolve to live on terms of equality among those whose absolute master I have been? Thus, whichever way I look, my career is ended. However, I am attached to those who still surround me, so hear my last resolve. Let a pardon, sealed by the sultan's hands, be given me, and I will submit. I will go to Constantinople, to Asia Minor, or wherever I am sent. The things I should see here would no longer be fitting for me to behold."

To this Kursheed's envoys made answer that without doubt these terms would be conceded. Ali then touched his breast and forehead, and, drawing forth his watch, presented it to the keeper of the wardrobe. "I mean what I say, my friend," he observed; "my word will be kept. If within an hour thy soldiers are not withdrawn from this castle which has been treacherously yielded to them, I will blow it up. Return to the Seraskier, warn him that if he allows one minute more to elapse than the time specified, his army, his garrison, I myself and my family, will all perish together: two hundred thousand pounds of powder can destroy all that surrounds us. Take this watch, I give it thee, and forget not that I am a man of my word." Then, dismissing the messengers, he saluted them graciously, observing that he did not expect an answer until the soldiers should have evacuated the castle.

The envoys had barely returned to the camp when Kursheed sent orders to abandon the fortress. As the reason for this step could not be concealed,

everyone, exaggerating the danger, imagined deadly mines ready to be fired everywhere, and the whole army clamoured to break up the camp. Thus Ali and his fifty followers cast terror into the hearts of nearly thirty thousand men, crowded together on the slopes of Janina. Every sound, every whiff of smoke, ascending from near the castle, became a subject of alarm for the besiegers. And as the besieged had provisions for a long time, Kursheed saw little chance of successfully ending his enterprise; when Ali's demand for pardon occurred to him. Without stating his real plans, he proposed to his Council to unite in signing a petition to the Divan for Ali's pardon.

This deed, formally executed, and bearing more than sixty signatures, was then shown to Ali, who was greatly delighted. He was described in it as Vizier, as Aulic Councillor, and also as the most distinguished veteran among His Highness the Sultan's slaves. He sent rich presents to Kursheed and the principal officers, whom he hoped to corrupt, and breathed as though the storm had passed away. The following night, however, he heard the voice of Emineh, calling him several times, and concluded that his end drew nigh.

During the two next nights he again thought he heard Emineh's voice, and sleep forsook his pillow, his countenance altered, and his endurance appeared to be giving way. Leaning on a long Malacca cane, he repaired at early dawn to Emineh's tomb, on which he offered a sacrifice of two spotted lambs, sent him by Tahir Abbas, whom in return he consented to pardon, and the letters he received appeared to mitigate his trouble. Some days later, he saw the keeper of the wardrobe, who encouraged him, saying that before long there would be good news from Constantinople. Ali learned from him the disgrace of Pacho Bey, and of Ismail Pliaga, whom he detested equally, and this exercise of authority, which was made to appear as a beginning of satisfaction offered him, completely reassured him, and he made fresh presents to this officer, who had succeeded in inspiring him with confidence.

Whilst awaiting the arrival of the firman of pardon which Ali was reassured must arrive from Constantinople without fail, the keeper of the wardrobe advised him to seek an interview with Kursheed. It was clear that such a meeting could not take place in the undermined castle, and Ali was therefore invited to repair to the island in the lake. The magnificent pavilion, which he had constructed there in happier days, had been entirely

refurnished, and it was proposed that the conference should take place in this kiosk.

Ali appeared to hesitate at this proposal, and the keeper of the wardrobe, wishing to anticipate his objections, added that the object of this arrangement was to prove to the army, already aware of it, that there was no longer any quarrel between himself and the commander-in-chief. He added that Kursheed would go to the conference attended only by members of his Divan, but that as it was natural an outlawed man should be on his guard, Ali might, if he liked, send to examine the place, might take with him such guards as he thought necessary, and might even arrange things on the same footing as in his citadel, even to his guardian with the lighted match, as the surest guarantee which could be given him.

The proposition was accepted, and when Ali, having crossed over with a score of soldiers, found himself more at large than he did in his casemate, he congratulated himself on having come. He had Basilissa brought over, also his diamonds; and several chests of money. Two days passed without his thinking of anything but procuring various necessaries, and he then began to inquire what caused the Seraskier to delay his visit. The latter excused himself on the plea of illness, and offered meanwhile to send anyone Ali might wish to see, to visit him: The pacha immediately mentioned several of his former followers, now employed in the Imperial army, and as no difficulty was made in allowing them to go, he profited by the permission to interview a large number of his old acquaintances, who united in reassuring him and in giving him great hopes of success.

Nevertheless, time passed on, and neither the Seraskier nor the firman appeared. Ali, at first uneasy, ended by rarely mentioning either the one or the other, and never was deceiver more completely deceived. His security was so great that he loudly congratulated himself on having come to the island. He had begun to form a net of intrigue to cause himself to be intercepted on the road when he should be sent to Constantinople, and he did not despair of soon finding numerous partisans in the Imperial army.