

Sedgwick, Catharine Maria [[by the author of "The Linwoods," "Poor Rich Man," "Love Token," "Live & Let Live," &c]. "Marietza," in *Stories for Young Persons*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1840, pp. 52-66.

Marietza.

Some of you, my dear girls, remember that, in November, 1837, our secluded home was visited by a stranger whom all the civilized world delight to honour, and that you soon found the honour, reverence, and observance due to the celebrated writer merged in your love for the woman.

You remember the story of the Greek girl Marietza which she told us one happy evening when you were permitted to gather round her in the little parlour. We can recall her sweet voice, the graces of her language, and the varying expression of her face while she related the startling incidents of the young girl's life, and recalled the vivid interest that a personal knowledge of her had excited.

These pleasant recollections will invest the story with a charm to you, which it cannot possess for my other readers, for whom the picture must be transferred from a painter's to a common light. But, as there are some pictures worth looking at in any light, I trust to my true and unadorned story to fix attention for a few moments.

You do not remember, my young readers, but you may have heard of the bloody war which the oppressed Greeks waged for their independence against their cruel masters the Turks. It was a long time before the Grecian island of

[53]

Scio took any part in the contest. The Turkish dominion was less felt there than in Greece. The island, as you will perceive if you look at your maps, lies almost under the shadow of the Asiatic coast. It has a rich soil, and in its happy days was so highly cultivated, so loaded with the fruits and flowers of that fortunate clime, that it is described as filled with gardens. There was a higher cultivation there, too, than that of the earth. There were schools and colleges, richly endowed, where the people of both sexes were instructed in the sciences, and in the accomplishments of the most civilized parts of Europe. The Sciots had an extensive commerce. They had resident merchants in the great commercial cities of Europe. They carried on nearly all the trade between Greece and the Turkish cities of Smyrna and Constantinople. Their wealth was deposited in these cities, as we may say, in the very coffers of the Turks; they had, therefore, much more to hazard by a war than their compatriots. Their civil government was in the hands of elders, who administered it mildly and prudently. *Prudence* is the virtue (*par excellence*) of elders. They do not rashly risk the security, prosperity, and ease of peace, for the present glory, and distant and doubtful advantages of war. But if a war can ever be approved by Heaven, it was the war waged by the Greeks for religion and liberty. The patriot Sciots could not very long remain passive spectators of the struggles of their countrymen; nor did they long wait before the aggressions of their masters gave them occasion and impulse.

In May, 1821, a small squadron of Ipsariots (pa-

[54]

triot Greeks) appeared off their coast. The aga, or military governor, immediately resorted to measures that had already been taken at other Greek islands of the Archipelago. He seized forty elders and bishops, and shut them up in the castle as hostages for the good conduct of the people.

A large number of troops was brought from the neighbouring coast of Asia Minor, and garrisoned in the island, and the inhabitants were subjected to their excesses and lawless depredations. Assassinations were frequent; the wealthy inhabitants were plundered on every side, till, stung to madness, there was an attempt made to rouse the people to resistance. But hard it was themselves to light the fire that was to consume their pleasant homes and sweep over their garden-lands, and they were still hesitating, when two adventurers, Burnia and Logotheti, from Samos landed on Scio with a small band of followers. The prudent elders made every effort to prevent the peasantry joining them. The aga took his measures—tyrants never hesitate—and, selecting his victims from the best families, he doubled the number of hostages. The aga expected aid from the Continent. The Sciots hoped the Greek fleet would come to their aid, but they hoped in vain. On the 22d of April a Turkish fleet of fifty sail anchored in the bay, and immediately began to bombard the town. The Sciots were deserted by their Samian friends, who seemed to have come among them, as the falcon returns to his species, to lure them into the hands of their enemies.

Scio became the scene of indescribable horrors. Its inhabitants, men, women, and children, were all

[55]

massacred. The houses were plundered and then burned, not one left standing excepting those belonging to the foreign consuls.

Three days passed before the Turks left the city to penetrate into the recesses of the island. The following passage is from an eyewitness who escaped. He wrote to his friend, "Oh God! what a spectacle did Scio present on this memorable occasion! On whatever side I cast my eyes, nothing but pillage, murder, and conflagration appeared. While some were occupied in plundering the villas of rich merchants, and others in setting fire to the villages, the air was rent with the mingled groans of men, women, and children who were falling under the swords and daggers of the infidels. The only exception made during the massacre was in *favour of young women and boys*, who were preserved to be afterward sold as slaves. Many of these young women, whose husbands had been butchered, were running to and fro frantic, with torn garments and dishevelled hair, pressing their trembling infants to their breasts, and seeking death as a relief from the fate that awaited them."

My dear girls, when you read such details, horrible but not exaggerated, of the miseries that have been suffered in our days, do you realize them? I believe not. The people are thousands of miles removed from you. They speak a foreign language. Their religion is not your religion;

their customs and manners differ from yours. But all human beings are essentially alike; they have the same passions, affections, and wants, and their resemblance increases as they approach the same grade in civilization. The Sciots were an in-

[56]

structed and accomplished people. They were Christians. And if in imagination you will transfer the scenes above described to your own town and villages—to your own happy homes, and, if you can, picture to yourselves your fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, the subjects of these cruelties, your sympathies, I think, will no longer sleep!

But I am aware that the picture of a famishing Jewish mother, wandering with her child away from her fallen city, would affect you more than a crowded canvass, which should represent all the multitude of the Jews realizing the curses that had been denounced upon them, so I fancy that the story of Marietza will interest you more than the most minute history of the massacre at Scio.

Perhaps you consider yourselves already taken in by being compelled to read this prefatory bit of history, as the customers of the Yankee pedlar were, who, if they purchased one of his cheeses, were compelled to take also one of his grindstones. Pardon me—I will go to my story without farther delay. Ten days were given to slaughter. Gardeners and others, who had been seized and carried on board the Turkish ships, on the supposition that they could reveal hidden treasures, were, to the number of 500, hung! This was the signal for the execution of the hostages in the citadel. Many young women, with their children, had fled to the mountains and hidden themselves in caves, where numbers died of terror and hunger, and others lived on fearing a worse destiny. Among these was a noble Grecian lady, the mother of Marietza. Her husband and three sons had been massacred

[57]

before her eyes; and with the two remaining children, Marietza and a boy, she had, almost by miracle, escaped, and hid herself and them in a cave in the mountains. There they were discovered and dragged forth by the hair of their head. They hoped and prayed for death, but death was no longer the order of the day. They were reserved for market, put on board a Turkish ship, and conveyed to Alexandria.*^[1] They were exhorted and commanded by the man who called himself their owner to renounce their religion. They endured all sorts of petty persecution; but, wretched, wearied, weak, and young as they were, they remained steadfast.

The Greek religion is a modification of the

[58]

Roman Catholic, and does not essentially vary from it. It is difficult for you, my dear girls, to conceive the detestation that an oppressed people feel for the religion of their oppressors; but, 1

hope, not equally difficult to imagine the clinging you would feel to the religion that had made you patient in such tribulations as our poor Greek mother and her children had endured. They were still very young; Marietza, I think, about twelve, her brother a year older: and their mother, fearing they might yield to the threats or persuasions of their Turkish master, continually exhorted them to steadfastness. She soon had the saddest proof that her fears were groundless. She was standing with her children in the balcony of a house near the river, and overlooking it. Their Turkish tyrant was insisting that her boy should give some sign of faith in the Prophet. The boy refused; and, with all the fervour of his Greek nature, expressed his hatred of Mohammed, his faith, and his followers. The Turk struck him. The boy was maddened; and, springing to the ground, he ran to the river. Whether he intended to drown himself, or whether he merely obeyed an impulse to escape anywhere from the presence of the Turk, no one could tell; for, while his head was still above water, the Turk drew a pistol from his belt and shot him through the brain. The mother and sister saw this, and lived; and I have no doubt that, after the first horror was past, they blessed God the boy had escaped from the evils that still impended over them.

The sister of the Pacha of Egypt was then at Alexandria. She was a Mohammedan fanatic, so

[59]

sincerely devoted to her religion that she bought captives to convert them to the Mohammedan faith. The master of Marietza, hoping the zealous lady would set a due value on the possibility of offering to the Prophet two such beautiful converts (for the mother was still handsome, and Marietza lovely as an Houri), took them to the princess's apartments. They had entered the court, but there was some delay in getting admission. While they stood on the steps, the shrinking, frightened girl leaning on her mother, who could have recognised in her drooping figure the same being who, but a few weeks before, was gayest among the gay girls of Scio, dancing on the sea-beach, by the moonlight and by the music of rustic pipes, the Romaika, their classic national dance? Who could imagine this figure, that looked now pale and fixed as if it were cut in stone, linked with other young and graceful forms, chasing in the evolutions of this poetic dance the retreating wave, boldly following it till it turned, then, as it chased her back, dashing off the foam from her winged feet? Yet this had been, and, in spite of Marietza's present despair, something very like it was again to be.

After a tedious waiting they were led to a small antechamber, where persons having business with the princess were passing and repassing. Some Greeks, who had been that morning bastinadoed for refusing to abjure their religion, were stretched on the floor writhing with pain. A very old man beckoned to Marietza. She threw aside her veil, and leaned respectfully towards him. "Do not think, my poor child," said he, "that you can suffer stripes as well as bonds. I am old, and death is

[60]

better for me than life ; and yet, when I felt the bastinado to-day, I bit my tongue through to save myself from saying, as they bade me, that their cursed Mohammed was the prophet of God.

Confess him now, my poor child, and retract when you can. You are young—you will have time for repentance —time to hope for God's forgiveness."

"No, father, no," replied Marietza; "my mother has told me there is double guilt in sinning because you know God forgives sin! No; mother says we must be baptized with Christ's baptism—"

"Poor child, you are so young—you *cannot* endure it."

"I can, if it be God's will. See here; I have been trying what I can endure;" and she pushed up her muslin sleeve, and showed the old man where, while she had been standing there, she had, to prove her fortitude, and without shrinking, pinched her arm black. The old man uttered an exclamation of mingled pity and admiration. "Besides, it would be a double shame for me to turn infidel," she added, "for my name is *Marietza*."*[2]

"A curse upon ye, then !" said a brutal old Turk, spitting in her face in token of the hatred he bore her name. Another Turk, an old man too (there are good Samaritans in all nations), extended to her an embroidered handkerchief drenched in a delicious perfume. She wiped away the defilement, and the blood gushed from her heart to her cheek, and she raised her eyes, glowing with a silent prayer, as she remembered that her Saviour was spit upon.

[61]

At this moment,, when she looked as beautiful as one of Raphael's saints, two young Englishmen came from the audience-room. They stopped, riveted to the spot by Marietza's beauty. Her mother advanced and drew down her veil, and directly after their master signed to them to follow him to the presence of the princess. She was evidently so much struck with the extreme beauty of Marietza, that the cupidity of the Turk was excited, and he asked for her double the price he had intended. The princess refused it. He abated, but still insisted on extravagant terms; and at last, the princess, quite disgusted, told him that she would have nothing more to say to him; and, like many a grasping trader, bitterly repenting his avarice, he withdrew. The hearts of our poor captives sunk as they turned away. They had hoped to escape from the hateful presence of the murderer of their son and brother, and there had seemed something like escape from despair—something bordering on protection, in passing into the hands of one of their own sex.

The two young Englishmen were awaiting their return, and followed them at a respectful distance. Soon after they sought an interview with their Turkish master, and eagerly inquired of him the names, rank, and former condition of his captives. They ascertained that he had failed in his treaty with the princess; and also that, in consequence of this disappointment, he was prepared to lower his terms. The young friends were filled with pity for the captives, no doubt augmented by Marietza's beauty; for it must be confessed that beauty is a wonderful

[62]

inciter of a young man's compassion. One of the young men, Reginald Butler,*^[3] was the son, as those who heard the story will remember, of a friend of the lady who told it to us. He was an only son, most beloved, and most worthy of love. His mother, a widow in easy circumstances, was residing with her daughters in England, while he was seeking (and finding, too) his fortune abroad. He was not, however, rich enough to pay the money demanded for the redemption of the captives; but he would not leave them in the Turk's hands, and he and his friend agreed to pay equal portions of the purchase-money. They did so, and Marietza and her mother were transferred to them. My dear young friends, you know so little of the evil in the world, that I trust you will hardly understand me when I say that Butler's associate looked on Marietza with too bold an eye; and Butler, fearing that some undue advantage might be taken of her helpless and dependant position, paid to his partner his portion of the purchase-money, and removed the mother and daughter to a little country-house in the neighbourhood of Alexandria, where he provided them with every comfort and indulgence within his power to procure for them.

They had no common language in which they could hold communication; and these poor females, believing that they had only changed owners, were apprehending every possible, and even impossible evil. The terrors they had suffered, the starvation they had endured, and, more than all, the unnatu-

[63]

ral disruption of their dearest ties, had impaired their health and affected their imaginations, so that they were on the brink of insanity, and looking on every side for new dangers and miseries. Butler said that Marietza was so emaciated, that he sometimes thought, when he looked at her, she might disappear from his sight like the White Lady of Avenel. He bought a horse for her to ride, in the hope that the exercise and the fresh air would give new impulse to her young life; but she afterward said that, whenever he took her out, she thought he was going to conduct her to some wild place to murder her! He provided every delicacy the market afforded, and bought her the most delicious fruits; but poor Marietza for a long while rejected everything, tormented with the imagination that he was *fattening her to kill her!*

By degrees, both mother and daughter truly interpreted the language of his generosity and most assiduous kindness, and then there was no limit to their gratitude. The mother, content and grateful for the present, became in some good degree resigned to her calamities; and Marietza, with the elasticity of girlhood, returned to health, and all the brightness of health and hope as soon as she was relieved from the pressure of her fears. Then she rode and ate, and became as fat and as blooming as her benefactor desired. You perhaps know that in warm climates the person is earlier developed and the physical system sooner matured than in our cold land. At twelve Marietta had the attractive graces of a girl of sixteen. Her benefactor's benevolence was transmuted to love. He wrote to his mother in

[64]

England all the particulars of Marietza's story, confessed the state of his heart, and proposed to her to receive Marietza under her protection, and to give her an education fitting the wife of her son.

The project might have struck some elderly ladies as romantic, but Mrs. Butler sympathized perfectly with her son. She had entire confidence in the truth and steadfastness of his affections. She would have preferred, she said, that he would have married one of his own countrywomen; but, for the world, she would not thwart the wishes of one who had fulfilled all her wishes. Thrice blessed, my dear girls, is the mutual confidence of parents and children!

I do not know how Butler reconciled Marietza's mother to parting with her child; but you all know that mothers will make any personal sacrifice for the advantage of their children; and probably the hearts of both mother and child were so overflowing with gratitude to their benefactor, that they would have acquiesced in whatever he proposed, even their parting. Parted they were.

Marietza went to England, where she was received into Butler's family as if she had a natural claim to their love. She was at once daughter and sister. Her exquisite beauty, set off by her Greek costume and Oriental grace, riveted every eye; her enthusiasm, affectionateness, buoyancy of spirit, and the free and animated manner natural to her people—which no misfortunes could long depress, or conventionalism restrain, or even an English atmosphere damp—made her a perpetual spring of delight to every circle she entered. She was courted and flattered on every side. Men

[65]

richer, handsomer, and of higher rank than Reginald Butler were devoted to her; but her affections never for a moment wavered from him.

Fashion robbed her of some of her outward graces, for they took her to Paris, and submitted her to the levelling processes of dressmakers, milliners, and hairdressers; but the world did not invade her heart.

At the expiration of four or five years Butler came to England to claim his bride. His friends dreaded the meeting. He had suffered from a protracted illness. His face was sallow and furrowed, and he had become, not absolutely bald, but so near it as to look a score of years older than when Marietza parted from him.

"Do I not look to you shockingly changed, Marietza?" he asked, as soon as the first emotions of meeting were over. "Shockingly! No, not shockingly changed, Reginald. Your heart is not changed—nor is mine."

These words, uttered with all her characteristic fervour, satisfied her lover; and he was not in the least disturbed when she said, with a mischievous curl of her beautiful lips, "I have danced in London with prettier men than you, Reginald!"

Marietza betrayed an Oriental love of magnificence when the arrangements for the wedding were making. The Butlers were a quiet people, who disliked display and notoriety; but they yielded in this, as in everything, to Marietza. She would have the church bells rung, and a

procession of carriages, as in her own country. Her lover lavished the most costly bridal gifts upon her, and she showed her trousseau to my friend with the sort

[66]

of ecstatic pleasure that a child has with its holyday gifts. She clapped her hands, and skipped over chairs and sofas. Immediately after their marriage they returned to reside in Alexandria.

And here, if I had invented the story, I should leave it; for the wedding is the legitimate stopping- place in a tale, though in life but the beginning of its deepest interests.

Eighteen months after the departure of Butler with his beautiful young bride, his mother received a letter from him, informing her that Marietza had died in his arms with the plague!

This seems to you, my dear girls, a sad conclusion; and sad is always the disruption of happy domestic ties; but remember, it is but a passing sadness. Death is to the *good* the last of pain, and trial, and disappointment; and to the good, death opens the gates of immortality and felicity.

[Sedgwick's notes]

* [1] The prisoners were for the most part sold in Smyrna and Constantinople. "On June 19th, an order came to the slave- market for the cessation of the sale; and the circumstances which are believed to have occasioned that order are singular, and purely Oriental. The island of Scio had been granted many years before to one of the sultanas as an appropriation, from which she derived a fixed revenue, and a title of interference in all matters relating to police and internal administration. The present patroness was Asma Sultana, sister of the sultan; and that amiable princess received about 200,000 piastres a year, besides casual presents, from her flourishing little province. When she was informed of its destruction, her indignation was natural and excessive; and it was directed, of course, against Valid, the pacha who had commanded the fort, and the capudan pacha, to whose misconduct she chiefly attributed her misfortune. It was in vain that that officer selected from his captives sixty young and beautiful maidens, whom he presented to the service of her highness. She rejected the sacrifice with disdain, and continued her energetic remonstrances against the injustice and illegality of reducing *rajahs* to slavery, and exposing them for sale in the public markets. The sultan at length yielded to her eloquence or importunity. A license, the occasion of hourly brutalities, was suppressed; and we have reason to believe that this act of care and unprecedented humanity may be attributed to the influence of a woman."— *Waddington's Visit to Greece*.

* [2] Marietza is the Greek for Mary, and the name is given in honour of the Virgin.

* [3] We have not given the true name, as that might not be agreeable to him if, by any strange accident, he should ever hear of the publication of his story