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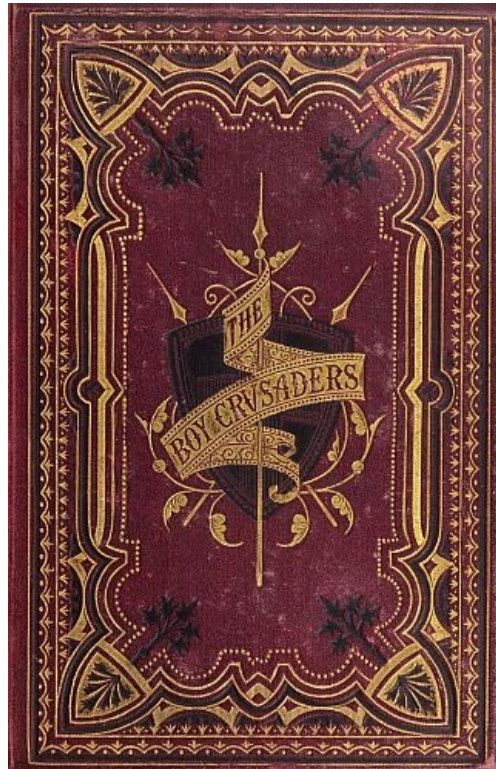
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOY CRUSADERS: A STORY OF THE DAYS OF LOUIS IX ***



*Presented to Master
Thomas St. Lawrence
Stephenson as a Birthday
Present from the Crew
of the Yacht "Columbia"
Sept. 12th 1871*

[1]

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In vain were all attempts to drag him from his steed; before his mighty battle-axe the Saracens seemed to fall as corn before the reaper.—p. 169.

THE
BOY CRUSADERS:
A Story of the Days of Louis IX.

BY

J. G. EDGAR,

AUTHOR OF 'THE BOY PRINCES,' ETC.

Eight Full Page Illustrations.

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PREFACE.

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AMONG the many adventurous enterprises which rendered the age of feudalism and chain-
armour memorable in history, none were more remarkable or important than the 'armed
pilgrimages' popularly known as the Crusades; and, among the expeditions which the warriors of
mediæval Europe undertook with the view of rescuing the Holy Sepulchre from the Saracens,
hardly one is so interesting as that which had Louis IX. for its chief and Joinville for its chronicler.

In this volume I have related the adventures of two striplings, who, after serving their
apprenticeship to chivalry in a feudal castle in the north of England, assumed the cross,
embarked for the East, took part in the crusade headed by the saint-King of France, and

participated in the glory and disaster which attended the Christian army, after landing at Damietta—including the carnage of Mansourah, and the massacre of Minieh.

In writing the 'Boy Crusaders' for juvenile readers, my object has been—while endeavouring to give those, for whose perusal the work is intended, as faithful a picture as possible of the events which Joinville has recorded—to convey, at the same time, as clear an idea as my limits would permit, of the career and character of the renowned French monarch who, in peril and perplexity, in captivity and chains, so eminently signalised his valour and his piety.

J. G. E.

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THE BOY CRUSADERS.

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CHAPTER I.

A FEUDAL CASTLE.

IT was the age of chain armour and tournaments—of iron barons and barons' wars—of pilgrims and armed pilgrimages—of forests and forest outlaws—when Henry III. reigned as King of England, and the feudal system, though no longer rampant, was still full of life and energy; when Louis King of France, afterwards canonised as St. Louis, undertook one of the last and most celebrated of those expeditions known as the Crusades, and described as 'feudalism's great adventure, and popular glory.'

At the time when Henry was King of England and when Louis of France was about to embark for the East, with the object of rescuing the Holy Sepulchre from the Saracens, there stood on the very verge of Northumberland a strong baronial edifice, known as the Castle of Wark, occupying a circular eminence, visible from a great distance, and commanding such an extensive view to the north as seemed to ensure the garrison against any sudden inroad on the part of the restless and refractory Scots. On the north the foundations were washed by the waters of the Tweed, here broad and deep; and on the south were a little town, which had risen under the protection of the castle, and,—stretching away towards the hills of Cheviot,—an extensive park or chase, abounding with wild cattle and deer and beasts of game. At an earlier period this castle had been a possession of the famous house of Espec; and, when in after days it came into the hands of the Montacute Earls of Salisbury, Edward III. was inspired within its walls with that romantic admiration of the Countess of Salisbury which resulted in the institution of the Order of the Garter. During the fifth decade of the thirteenth century, however, it was the chief seat of Robert, Lord de Roos, a powerful Anglo-Norman noble, whose father had been one of the barons of Runnymede and one of the conservators of the Great Charter.

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Like most of the fortresses built by the Norman conquerors of England, Wark consisted of a base-court, a keep, and a barbican in front of the base-court. The sides of the walls were fortified with innumerable angles, towers, and buttresses, and surmounted with strong battlements and hornworks. For greater security the castle was encompassed, save towards the Tweed, with a moat or deep ditch, filled with water, and fortified with strong palisades, and sharp stakes set thick all around the walls. Over the moat, at the principal gate, was the drawbridge, which was almost always raised, and the gate-house, a square building, having strong towers at each corner. Over the entrance and within the square of the gate-house was an arched vault, and over it was a chamber with apertures, through which, on occasion of an assault, the garrison, unseen the whilst, could watch the operations of the foe, and pour boiling water or melted lead on the foremost assailants. On the west side were the outworks, consisting of a platform with a trench half a mile in length, and breastworks, and covered ways, and mounds. The roofs of the building were bordered with parapets, guard walks, and sentry boxes.

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But the whole space was not appropriated to works intended to ensure the stronghold against the assault of foes. Near the mound was the chapel dedicated to St. Giles. Under the outer wall was a military walk, five yards wide, and forty-eight yards in length. Underneath the walls, on the brink of the river, was a beautiful terrace, called the Maiden's Walk, where the lady of the castle and her damsels, after their labours at the loom, were wont to take air and exercise on a summer evening, ere the vesper bell rang, and the bat began to hunt the moth. Within the precincts of the building was the tiltyard, a broad space enclosed with rails, and covered with sawdust, where young men of gentle blood, in the capacity of pages and squires, acquired the chivalrous accomplishments which the age prized so highly.

In fact, the castle of Wark, like most feudal castles of that century, was a school of chivalry, whither the sons of nobles and knights were sent to serve their apprenticeship as warriors, taught their duty to God and the ladies, and trained to the skill in arms which enabled them to compel the respect of one sex and influence the hearts of the other.

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First, on foot, they were taught to attack the pel, an imaginary adversary, which was simply the stump of a tree six feet in height; then, on horseback, they were made to charge the quintain, a wooden figure in the form of a Saracen, armed in mail and holding a sabre in one hand and a shield in the other, and so constructed to move on a pivot that, unless the youth was dexterous enough to strike the face or breast, it revolved rapidly, and dealt him a heavy blow on the back as he was retiring. As the lads became more expert they tilted at each other with blunt lances, practised riding at the ring, and learned to excel as equestrians by riding in a circle, vaulting from their steeds in the course of their career, and mounting again while they galloped.

At the same time they were trained to acquit themselves with credit in those encounters celebrated as combats at the barriers. At the sieges of cities, during the middle ages, knights of the besieging army were in the habit of going to the barriers, or grated palisades of the fortress, and defying the garrison to break a lance for the honour of their ladies. Indeed, this was so fashionable, that an army could hardly appear before a town without the siege giving rise to a variety of such combats, which were generally conducted with fairness on both sides. This mode of attack was early taught to the apprentice to chivalry, and assiduously practised by all who were ambitious of knightly honour.

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Nor did the exercises of the tiltyard end at this stage. At the time of which I write, the name of Richard Cœur de Lion was famous in Europe and Asia; and his feats in arms were on every

tongue. One of his great exploits at the battle of Joppa was especially the admiration of the brave. It seems that, when the Crusaders were surrounded and almost overwhelmed by the swarming host of Saladin, Richard, who, up to that moment, had neither given nor received a wound, suddenly sprang on his charger, drew his sword, laid his lance in rest, and with his sword in one hand, and his lance in the other, spurred against the Saracens, striking sparks from their helmets and armour, and inspiring such terror that his foes were completely routed. Naturally such an exploit made a strong impression on the imagination of aspirants to warlike fame, and the youth who had the dexterity and the equestrian skill to imitate it in mimic fray was regarded with admiration and envy.

Now our concern with Wark, and its tiltyard, is simply this—that, within the castle, there were trained in the exercises of chivalry, and qualified for its honours, two striplings, who, when St. Louis took the Cross, and undertook a holy war, embarked for the East, and figured, during a memorable expedition, as the Boy Crusaders.

CHAPTER II.

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THE BROTHERS-IN-ARMS.

ON the last Wednesday of the month of July, in the year 1248, the castle of Wark reposed in the sunshine and warmth of a bright merry summer's day; and, the exercises in the tiltyard being over for the morning, two of the apprentices to chivalry, whose dress indicated that they had attained the rank of squires, strolled slowly along the green border of the Tweed. Neither of them had passed the age of seventeen, but both were tall and strong and handsome for their years; and both had the fair hair, blue eyes, aquiline features, and air of authority which distinguished the descendants of the valiant Northmen who accompanied Rollo when he left Norway, sailed up the Seine, and seized on Neustria. But in one rather important respect there was a remarkable difference. One had a countenance which expressed gaiety of heart; the other had a countenance which expressed sadness of spirit. One bore the name of Guy Muschamp; the other the still greater name of Walter Espec.

'And so, good Walter, we are actually soldiers of the Cross, and vowed to combat the Saracens,' said Guy, as they walked along the grassy margin of the river, which flowed tranquilly on, while the salmon leaped in its silver tide, and the trouts glided like silver darts through the clear stream, and the white and brindled cows cooled their hoofs in the water; 'and yet I know not how it comes to pass, good Walter; but beshrew me if, at times, I do not fancy that it is a dream of the night.'

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'In truth, brave Guy,' replied the other, 'I comprehend not how you can have any doubts on the subject, when you see the sacred badge on our shoulders, and when we have, even within the hour, learned that the ships of the great Saxon earl, in which we are to embark for the Holy Land, are now riding at anchor before the town of Berwick.'

'You are right, good Walter,' said Guy, quickly; 'and marry! worse than an infidel am I to have a doubt; and yet when I think of all the marvels we are likely to behold, I can scarce credit my good fortune. Just imagine, Walter Espec, the picturesque scenery—the palm-trees, the fig-trees, the gardens with flowers, and vines, and citrons, and pomegranates; the Saracenic castles, the long caravans of camels, and the Eastern women veiled in white, standing at fountains, and all the wonders that palmers and pilgrims tell of! Oh! the adventure appears so grand, that I now begin to dread lest some mischance should come to prevent us going.'



'And I,' observed Walter, calmly, 'have no dread of the kind; and I am, heart and soul, bent on the holy enterprise; albeit, I reckon little of caravans of camels, or veiled women. But my heart yearns for that far land; for there it is that I am like to hear tidings of him I have lost. Ah! credit me, brave Guy, that you, and such as you, little know what it is to be alone in this world, without kith or kindred, or home, and how saddening is the thought, ever crossing my mind, that one, near and dear, does live; and—and—'

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He paused, bent his brow, clenched his hand, and cast his eyes on the ground, as tears streamed down his cheek.

'Good Walter, dear Walter,' said Guy, yielding to sympathy till he was almost equally affected; 'droop not, but be of good cheer. Forget not that we are brothers-in-arms, that I am your friend, your true and sworn friend; and I will aid your search. Nay, I know what you are going to say; but you do me wrong. I will not waste time in looking at the camels and the veiled women, of whom palmer and pilgrim tell; but I will go straightway with you to the palace of the caliph; and, if he refuse to render you justice, I will challenge him to mortal combat on the spot. So again I say, be of good cheer.'

"I will go straightway with you, Walter," said Guy, "to the palace of the Caliph; and if he refuses to render you justice, I will challenge him to mortal combat on the spot."—p. 16.

Walter Espec smiled mournfully. His enthusiasm was not, in reality, less than that of his companion. But he had none of the gaiety, and little of the buoyant spirit, which enabled Guy Muschamp to make himself, at all times and seasons, a favourite in castle hall and lady's bower. 'I fear me, brave Guy,' said Walter, after a brief silence, 'that the caliph is too great a potentate to be dealt with as you would wish. But,

come what may, I am sworn to laugh at danger in the performance of a duty. My dreams, awake and asleep, are of him who is lost; and I fantasied last night,' added he, lowering his voice, 'that my mother stood before me, as I last saw her when living, and implored me, in the name of St. Katherine, the patron saint of the Especs, to fulfil my vow of rescuing her lost son from captivity and from the enemies of Christ.'

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'Oh, fear not, doubt not, good Walter,' cried Guy, with enthusiasm; 'it must, it shall, be done; and then we can go and conquer a principality, like Tancred, or Bohemund of Tarentum, or Count Raymond of St. Giles, and other old heroes.'

'Even the crown of Jerusalem may not be beyond our grasp, if fortune favour us,' said Walter, with a calm smile.

'Oh, fortune ever favours the brave,' exclaimed Guy; 'and I hold that nothing is impossible to men who are brave and ambitious; and no squire of your years is braver or more ambitious than you, Walter, or more expert in arms; albeit you never utter a boast as to your own feats, while no one is more ready to praise the actions of others.'

'Even if I had anything to boast of,' replied Walter, 'I should refrain from so doing; and therein I should only be acting according to the maxims of chivalry; for you know we are admonished to be dumb as to our own deeds, and eloquent in praise of others; and, moreover, that if the squire is vainglorious, he is not worthy to become a knight, and that he who is silent as to the valour of others is a thief and a robber.'

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And thus conversing, the brothers-in-arms returned to the castle, and entered the great hall, which was so spacious and so high in the roof that a man on horseback might have turned a spear in it with all the ease imaginable. It was, indeed, a stately apartment; the ceiling consisting of a smooth vault of ashlar-work, the stones being curiously joined and fitted together; and the walls and roof decorated by some of those great painters who flourished in England under the patronage of King Henry and his fair and accomplished queen, Eleanor of Provence. Here was represented the battle of Hastings; there the siege of Jerusalem by the Crusaders under Godfrey of Bouillon and Robert Curthose; here the battle of the Standard; there the signing of the Great Charter by King John, under the oak of Runnymede. Around the hall might be traced the armorial bearings of the lord of the castle and the chief families with whom the lord of the castle was allied by blood—the three water-buckets of De Roos; the three Katherine-wheels of Espec; the engrailed cross of De Vescei; the seven blackbirds of Merley; the lion argent of Dunbar in its field of gules; and the ruddy lion of Scotland, ramping in gold; while on the roof was depicted the castle itself, with gates, and battlements, and pinnacles, and towers; and there also, very conspicuous, was the form of a rose, and around it was inscribed in Gothic letters the legend—

He who doth secrets reveal,
Beneath my roof shall never live.

It was ten o'clock—in that age the hour of dinner—when Walter Espec and Guy Muschamp entered the great hall of the castle, and, the household having assembled for that important meal, a huge oaken table, which in shape resembled the letter T, groaned under massive sirloins. Attended by his jesters, the lord of the castle took his seat on the dais, which was reserved for his family and his guests of high rank; while the knights, squires, pages, and retainers ranged themselves above and below the salt, according to their claims to precedence; and hawks stood around on perches, and hounds lay stretched on the rushy floor, waiting their turn to be fed.

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Much ceremony was of course observed. The sirloins were succeeded by fish and fowl, and dishes curiously compounded; and, as was the fashion of that feudal age, the dinner lasted three hours. But, notwithstanding the pride and pomp exhibited, the meal was by no means dull. The jesters and minstrels did their work. During the intervals the jesters exercised all their wit to divert the lord and his friends; and the minstrels, in the gallery set apart for their accommodation, discoursed flourishes of music, borrowed from the Saracens and brought from the East, for the gratification of the company, or roused the aspirations of the youthful warriors by some such spirit-stirring strain as the battle-hymn of Rollo.

'I marvel much, good Walter,' said Guy Muschamp to his brother-in-arms, 'I marvel much where we are destined to dine this day next year.'

'Beshrew me if I can even form a guess,' replied Walter Espec, thoughtfully; 'methinks no seer less potent than the Knight of Ercildoune, whom the vulgar call "True Thomas," could on such a point do aught to satisfy your curiosity.'

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'Mayhap at Acre or Jerusalem,' suggested Guy, after a pause.

'By Holy Katherine,' exclaimed Walter, 'ere you named Acre and Jerusalem, my imagination had carried me to the palace of the caliph at Bagdad.'

CHAPTER III.

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THE HEIRS OF THE ESPECS.

IN the days when the Norman kings reigned in England, the Especs were of high account among the Anglo-Norman barons. Many were the brave and pious men who bore the name; but the bravest and most pious of them all was that Walter Espec, a great noble of the north, who maintained high feudal state at the castles of Wark, Helmsley, and Kirkham, and who figured so conspicuously as chief of the English at the battle of the Standard, and harangued the soldiers before the battle from the chariot from which the standard was displayed.

But not only as a warrior was Walter Espec known to fame. As a benefactor to religion, his name was held in honour and his memory regarded with veneration.

It seems that Walter Espec had, by his wife Adeline, an only son, who was a youth of great promise, and much beloved by his parents. Nothing, however, pleased him more than a swift horse; and he was so bold a rider that he would not have feared to mount Bucephalus, in spite of heels and horns. Leaping into the saddle one day, at the castle of Kirkham, and scorning the thought of danger, he spurred his charger beyond its strength, and, while galloping towards Frithby, had a fall at the stone cross, and was killed on the spot. Much afflicted at his son's death, Walter Espec sent for his brother, who was a priest and a rector.

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'My son being, alas! dead,' said he, 'I know not who should be my heir.'

'Brother mine,' replied the priest, 'your duty is clear. Make Christ your heir.'

Now Walter Espec relished the advice, and proceeded to act on it forthwith. He founded three religious houses, one at Warden, a second at Kirkham, a third at Rievallé; and, having been a disciple of Harding, and much attached to the Cistercian order, he planted at each place a colony of monks, sent him from beyond the sea by the great St. Bernard; and, having further signalled his piety by becoming a monk in the abbey of Rievallé, he died, full of years and honours, and was buried in that religious house; while his territorial possessions passed to the Lord de Roos, as husband of his sister.

Nevertheless, the family of Espec was not yet extinct. A branch still survived and flourished in the north; and, as time passed over, a kinsman of the great Walter won distinction in war, and, though a knight of small estate, wedded a daughter of that Anglo-Saxon race the Icinglas, once so great in England, but of whom now almost everything is forgotten but the name. And this Espec, who had lived as a soldier, died a soldier's death; falling bravely with his feet to the foe, on that day in 1242 when the English under King Henry fought against such fearful odds, at the village of Saintonge. But even now the Especs were not without representatives; for, by his Anglo-Saxon spouse Algitha, the Anglo-Norman warrior who fell in Gascony left two sons, and of the two one was named Walter, the other Osbert.

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While Dame Algitha Espec lived, the young Especs scarcely felt the loss they had sustained in the death of their father. Nothing, indeed, could have been more exemplary than the care which the Anglo-Saxon dame bestowed on her sons. In a conversation which Walter Espec held on the battlements of the castle of Wark, with his brother-in-arms Guy Muschamp, the heir of an Anglo-Norman baron of Northumberland, he lauded her excellence as a woman, and her tenderness as a mother.

'I was in my tenth year,' said Walter, 'when my father, after having served King Henry as a knight in Gascony, fell in battle; and, albeit my mother, when she became a widow, was still fair and of fresh age, a widow she resolved to remain; and she adhered firmly to her purpose. In truth, her mouth was so accustomed to repeat the name of her dead husband that it seemed as if his memory had possession of her whole heart and soul; for whether in praying or giving alms, and even in the most ordinary acts of life, she continually pronounced his name.'

'My mother brought up my brother and myself with the most tender care. Living at our castellated house of Heckspeth, in the Wansbeck, and hard by the abbey of Newminster, she lived in great fear of the Lord, and with an equal love for her neighbours, especially such as were poor; and she prudently managed us and our property. Scarcely had we learned the first elements of letters, which she herself, being convent-bred, taught us, when, eager to have us instructed, she confided us to a master of grammar, who incited us to work, and taught us to recite verses and compose them according to rule.'

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It was while the brothers Espec were studying under this master of grammar, and indulging with spirit and energy in the sports and recreations fashionable among the boys of the thirteenth century—such as playing with whirligigs and paper windmills, and mimic engines of war, and trundling hoops, and shooting with bows and arrows, and learning to swim on bladders, that Dame Algitha followed her husband to a better world, and they found themselves orphans and unprotected. For both, however, Providence raised up friends in the day of need. Remembering what he owed to his connection with the Especs, the Lord de Roos received Walter into his castle of Wark, to be trained to arms; and another kinsman, who was a prior in France, received Osbert into his convent, to be reared as a monk. The orphans, who had never before been separated, and who were fondly attached, parted after many embraces, and many tears; and, with as little

knowledge of the world into which they were entering as fishes have of the sea in which they swim, each went where destiny seemed to point the way.

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On reaching the castle of Wark, Walter Espec felt delighted with the novelty of the scene, and entered with enthusiasm upon his duties as an aspirant to the honours of chivalry. Besides learning to carve, to sing, and to take part in that exciting sport which has been described as 'the image of war'—such as hawking, and hunting the hare, the deer, the boar, and the wolf—he ere long signalled himself in the tiltyard by the facility which he displayed in acquiring skill in arms, and in chivalrous exercises. Indeed, whether in assailing the pel, or charging the quintain on horseback, or riding at the ring, or in the combat at the barriers, Walter had hardly a rival among the youths of his own age; and, after being advanced to the rank of squire, he crowned his triumphs in the tiltyard by successfully charging on horseback, *à la Cœur de Lion*, with a sword in one hand and a lance in the other.

But still Walter Espec was unhappy; and, even when his dexterity and prowess in arms moved the envy or admiration of his youthful compeers, his heart was sad and his smile mournful.

And why was the brave boy so sad?

At the time when Walter was winning such reputation at the castle of Wark, Jerusalem was sacked by the Karismians. A cry of distress came from the Christians in the East; and the warriors of the West were implored to undertake a new crusade, to rescue the Holy Sepulchre and save the kingdom founded by Godfrey and the Baldwins. The warriors of the West, however, showed no inclination to leave their homes; and the pope was lamenting the absence of Christian zeal, when a boy went about France, singing in his native tongue—

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Jesus, Lord, repair our loss,
Restore to us thy blessed cross;

and met with much sympathy from those of his own age. Multitudes of children crowded round him as their leader, and followed his footsteps wherever he went. Nothing could restrain their enthusiasm; and, assembling in crowds in the environs of Paris, they prepared to cross Burgundy and make for Marseilles.

'And whither are you going, children?' people asked.

'We are going to Jerusalem, to deliver the Holy Sepulchre,' answered they.

'But how are you to get there?' was the next question.

'Oh,' replied they, 'you seem not to know how it has been prophesied that this year the drought will be very great, that the sun will dissipate all the waters, and that the abysses of the sea will be dry; and that an easy road will lie open to us across the bed of the Mediterranean.'

On reaching Marseilles, however, the young pilgrims discovered that they had been deluded. Some of them returned to their homes; but the majority were not so fortunate. Many lost themselves in the forests which then covered the country, and died of hunger and fatigue; and the others became objects of speculation to two merchants of Marseilles, who carried on trade with the Saracens. Affecting to act from motives of piety, the two merchants tempted the boy-pilgrims by offering to convey them, without charge, to the Holy Land; and, the offer having been joyfully accepted, seven vessels, with children on board, sailed from Marseilles. But the voyage was not prosperous. At the end of two days, when the ships were off the isle of St. Peter, near the rock of the Recluse, a tempest arose, and the wind blew so violently that two of them went down with all on board. The five others, however, weathered the storm, and reached Bugia and Alexandria. And now the young Crusaders discovered to their consternation how they had been deceived and betrayed. Without delay they were sold by the merchants to the slave-dealers, and by the slave-dealers to the Saracens. Forty of them were purchased for the caliph and carried to Bagdad, where they were forced to abjure Christianity, and brought up as slaves.

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Now, among the boys who had yielded to the prevailing excitement, and repaired to Marseilles to embark for Syria, was Osbert Espec; and ever since Walter received from his kinsman, the prior, intelligence of his brother's disappearance, and heard the rumours of what had befallen the young pilgrims on their arrival in the East, his memory had brooded over the misfortune, and his imagination, which was constantly at work, pictured Osbert in the caliph's prison, laden with chains, and forced to forswear the God of his fathers; and the thought of his lost brother was ever present to his mind. And therefore was Walter Espec's heart sad, and therefore was his smile mournful.

CHAPTER IV.

[28]

ST. LOUIS.

AMONG the names of the European princes associated with the history of the Holy War, that of St. Louis is one of the most renowned. Although flourishing in a century which produced personages like Frederick, Emperor of Germany, and our first great Edward, who far excelled him in genius and prowess—as wise rulers in peace and mighty chiefs in war—his saintliness, his

patience in affliction, his respect for justice and the rights of his neighbours, entitle him to a high place among the men of the age which could boast of so many royal heroes. In order to comprehend the crusade, of which he was leader, it is necessary to refer briefly to the character and career of the good and pious king, who, in the midst of disaster and danger, exhibited the courage of a hero and the resignation of a martyr.

It was on the day of the Festival of St. Mark, in the year 1215, that Blanche of Castille, wife of the eighth Louis of France, gave birth, at Poissy, to an heir to the crown, which Hugh Capet had, three centuries earlier, taken from the feeble heir of Charlemagne. On the death of his father, Louis, then in his twelfth year, became King of France, at a time when it required a man with a strong hand to maintain the privileges of the crown against the great nobles of the kingdom. Fortunately for the young monarch Providence had blessed him with a mother, who, whatever her faults and failings—and chroniclers have not spared her reputation—brought to the terrible task of governing in a feudal age a high spirit and a strong will, and applied herself earnestly to the duty of bringing up her son in the way in which he should walk, and educating him in such a manner as to prepare him for executing the high functions which he was destined to fulfil. While, with the aid of her chivalrous admirer, the Count of Champagne, and the counsel of a cardinal-legate—with whom, by-the-by, she was accused of being somewhat too familiar—Blanche of Castille maintained the rights of the French monarchy against the great vassals of France, she reared her son with the utmost care. She entrusted his education to excellent masters, appointed persons eminent for piety to attend to his religious instruction, and evinced profound anxiety that he should lead a virtuous and holy life.

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'Rather,' she once said, 'would I see my son in his grave, than learn that he had committed a mortal sin.'

As time passed on, Blanche of Castille had the gratification of finding that her toil and her anxiety were not in vain. Louis, indeed, was a model whom other princes, in their teens, would have done well to copy. His piety, and his eagerness to do what was right and to avoid what was wrong, raised the wonder of his contemporaries. He passed much of his time in devotional exercises, and, when not occupied with religious duties, ever conducted himself as if with a consciousness that the eye of his Maker was upon him, and that he would one day have to give a strict account of all his actions. Every morning he went to hear prayers chanted, and mass and the service of the day sung; every afternoon he reclined on his couch, and listened while one of his chaplains repeated prayers for the dead; and every evening he heard complines.

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Nevertheless, Louis did not, like such royal personages as our Henry VI., allow his religious exercises so wholly to monopolise his time or attention as to neglect the duties which devolved upon him as king. The reverse was the case. After arriving at manhood he convinced the world that he was well qualified to lead men in war, and to govern them in peace.

It happened that, in the year 1242, Henry King of England, who was several years older than Louis, became ambitious of regaining the continental territory wrested from his father, John, by Philip Augustus; and the Count de la Marche, growing malecontent with the government of France, formed a confederacy against the throne, and invited Henry to conduct an army to the Continent. Everything seemed so promising, and the confederacy so formidable, that Henry, unable to resist the temptation of recovering Normandy and Anjou, crossed the sea, landed at Bordeaux, and prepared for hostilities. At first, the confederates were confident of succeeding in their objects; but, ere long, they discovered that they had mistaken their position, and the character of the prince whom they were defying.

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In fact, Louis soon proved that he was no 'carpet knight.' Assembling an army, he buckled on his mail, mounted his charger; and placing himself at the head of his forces, marched to encounter his enemies. Reaching the banks of the Charente, he offered the confederates battle, near the bridge of Taillebourg; but his challenge was not accepted. By this time the confederates had lost faith in their enterprise; and while De la Marche was meditating a reconciliation with Louis, Henry, accusing the count of having deceived, and being about to betray, him, retreated precipitately, and never drew rein till he reached the village of Saintonge.

But Louis was unwilling to allow his royal foe to escape so easily. Nor, indeed, could Henry without reluctance fly from the peril he had provoked. At all events, on reaching Saintonge, the English turned to bay, and a battle began. But the odds were overwhelming; and, though the Anglo-Norman barons fought with characteristic courage, they were speedily worsted, and under the necessity of making for Bordeaux.

From the day on which this battle was fought, it was no longer doubtful that Louis was quite able to hold his own; and neither foreign kings nor continental counts cared to disturb his government or defy his power. In fact, the fame of the King of France became great throughout Christendom, and inspired the hopes of the Christians of the East.

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Nor was it merely as a warrior that Louis signalised himself among his contemporaries. At the time when he was attending, with exemplary regularity, to his religious devotions, and keeping watch over the security of his dominions, he was devoting himself assiduously to his duties as sovereign and to the administration of justice.

One day, when Louis was at the castle of Hieros, in Provence, a Cordelier friar approached.

'Sire,' said the friar, 'I have read of unbelieving princes in the Bible and other good books; yet I have never read of a kingdom of believers or unbelievers being ruined, but from want of justice

being duly administered. Now,' continued the friar, 'I perceive the king is going to France; let him administer justice with care, that our Lord may suffer him to enjoy his kingdom, and that it may remain in peace and tranquillity all the days of his life, and that God may not deprive him of it with shame and dishonour.'

Louis listened attentively to the Cordelier, and the friar's words sank deep into his mind. From that date he gave much attention to the administration of justice, and took especial care to prevent the poor being wronged by their more powerful neighbours. On summer days, after hearing mass, he was in the habit of repairing to the gardens of his palace, seating himself on a carpet, and listening to such as wished to appeal to him; at other times he went to the wood of Vincennes, and there, sitting under an oak, listened to their statements with attention and patience. No ceremony was allowed to keep the poor man from the king's justice-seat. [33]

'Whoever has a complaint to make,' Louis was wont to say, 'let him now make it;' and when there were several who wished to be heard, he would add, 'My friends, be silent for awhile, and your causes shall be despatched one after another.'

When Louis was in his nineteenth year, Blanche of Castille recognised the expediency of uniting him to a princess worthy of sharing the French throne, and bethought her of the family of Raymond Berenger, Count of Provence, one of the most accomplished men in Europe, and whose countess, Beatrice of Savoy, was even more accomplished than her husband; Raymond and Beatrice had four daughters, all remarkable for their wit and beauty, and all destined to be queens. Of these four daughters, the eldest, Margaret of Provence, who was then thirteen, was selected as the bride of Louis; and, about two years before her younger sister, Eleanor, was conducted to England to be espoused by King Henry, Margaret arrived in Paris, and began to figure as Queen of France.

The two princesses of Provence who had the fortune to form such high alliances found themselves in very different positions. Eleanor did just as she pleased, ruled her husband, and acted as if everything in England had been created for her gratification. Margaret's situation, though more safe, was much less pleasant. In her husband's palace she could not boast of being in the enjoyment even of personal liberty. In fact, Queen Blanche was too fond of power to allow that which she had acquired to be needlessly imperilled; and, apprehensive that the young queen should gain too much influence with the king, she deliberately kept the royal pair separate. Nothing, indeed, could exceed the domestic tyranny under which they suffered. When Louis and Margaret made royal progresses, Blanche of Castille took care that her son and daughter-in-law were lodged in separate houses. Even in cases of sickness the queen-mother did not relent. On one occasion, when Margaret was ill and in the utmost danger, Louis stole to her chamber. While he was there, Blanche entered, and he endeavoured to conceal himself. Blanche, however, detected him, shook her head, and forcibly pushed him out of the door. [34]

'Be off, sir,' said she, sternly; 'you have no right here.'

'Madam, madam,' exclaimed Margaret, in despair, 'will you not allow me to see my husband, either when I am living, or when I am dying?' and the poor queen fainted away.

It was while the young saint-king and his fair Provençal spouse were enduring this treatment at the hands of the old queen-mother that events occurred which fired Louis with the idea of undertaking a crusade, and gave Margaret an excellent excuse for escaping from the society of the despotic dowager who had embittered her life, and almost broken her heart.

One day, when Louis was recovering from the effects of a fever, which had so thoroughly prostrated him, that at times his attendants believed he was dead, he ordered a Cross to be stitched to his garments. [35]

'How is this,' asked Blanche of Castille, when she came to visit her son on his sick bed.

'Madam,' whispered the attendants, 'the king has, out of gratitude for his recovery, taken the Cross, and vowed to combat the infidel.'

'Alas! alas!' exclaimed Blanche, terrified, 'I am struck as fearfully as if I had seen him dead.'

CHAPTER V.

[36]

TAKING THE CROSS.

A CENTURY and a half had elapsed since Peter the Hermit roused Christendom to rescue the Holy Sepulchre, and since Godfrey and the Baldwins established the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem; and in the interval, many valiant warriors—including Richard Cœur de Lion, and Philip Augustus, and Frederick Barbarossa—had gone forth to light in its defence; and the orders of military monks—the Knights of the Temple, the Knights of St. John, the Knights of St. Katherine of Sinai, and the Teutonic Knights, had risen to keep watch over the safety of the Holy Sepulchre. But the kingdom of Jerusalem, constantly exposed to rude shocks, far from prospering, was always in danger of ruin; and in 1244 the Holy City, its capital, was taken and sacked by a wild race, without a country, known as the Karismians, who, at the sultan's instance,

slaughtered the inhabitants, opened the tombs, burnt the bodies of heroes, scattered the relics of saints and martyrs to the wind, and perpetrated such enormities as Jerusalem, in her varying fortunes, had never before witnessed.

When this event occurred, the Christians of the East, more loudly than ever, implored the warriors of Europe to come to their rescue. But, as it happened, most of the princes of Christendom were in too much trouble at home to attend to the affairs of Jerusalem. Baldwin Courtenay, Emperor of Constantinople, was constantly threatened with expulsion by the Greeks; Frederick, Emperor of Germany, was at war with the Pope; the King of Castille was fighting with the Moors; the King of Poland was fully occupied with the Tartars; the King of Denmark had to defend his throne against his own brother; the King of Sweden had to defend his throne against the Tolekungers. As for Henry King of England, he was already involved in those disputes with the Anglo-Norman barons which ultimately led to the Barons' War. One kingdom alone was at peace; and it was France, then ruled by Louis IX., since celebrated as St. Louis, that listened to the cry of distress.

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At that time Louis King of France, then not more than thirty, but already, as we have seen, noted for piety and valour, was stretched on a bed of sickness, and so utterly prostrate that, at times, as has been related, he was thought to be dead. Nevertheless, he did recover; and, snatched as if by miracle from the gates of death, he evinced his gratitude to Heaven by ordering the Cross to be fixed to his vestments, and vowing to undertake an expedition for the rescue of the Holy Sepulchre.

The resolution of the saintly monarch was not quite agreeable to his family or his subjects, any more than to his mother, Blanche of Castille; and many of his lords made earnest efforts to divert him from his purpose. But remonstrance proved unavailing. Clinging steadfastly to his resolution, Louis summoned a Parliament at Paris, induced the assembled magnates to take the Cross, occupied three years with preparations on a great scale, and ultimately, having repaired to St. Denis, and received from the hands of the papal legate the famous standard known as the oriflamme of France, embarked at Aigues Mortes, and sailed for Cyprus, with his queen, Margaret of Provence, his brothers, the Counts of Artois, Poictiers, and Anjou, and many of the greatest lords of his kingdom.

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Meanwhile, the barons of England were not indifferent to what was passing on the Continent. Many of them, indeed, were desirous to take part in the expedition. But King Henry not only forbade them to assume the Cross, but would not allow a crusade to be preached in his dominions. No general movement was therefore made in England. Nevertheless, William Longsword, Earl of Salisbury, grandson of the second Henry and Rosamond Clifford, determined on an 'armed pilgrimage,' and, in company with Lord Robert de Vere and others, vowed to join the French Crusaders and combat the Saracens. Henry, enraged at his mandate being disregarded, seized Salisbury's manors and castles; but the earl, faithful to his vow, embarked, with De Vere as his standard-bearer, and with two hundred English knights of noble name and dauntless courage, sworn to bring the standard back with glory, or dye it with their hearts' blood.

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At the same time Patrick, Earl of March, the most illustrious noble who sprang from the Anglo-Saxon race, announced his intention of accompanying King Louis to the East. Earl Patrick had seen more than threescore years, and his hair was white, and his limbs stiff; but his head was still as clear, and his heart was still as courageous, as in the days when he had dyed his lance in Celtic blood, vanquished the great Somerled, and carried the Bastard of Galloway in chains to Edinburgh; and, with an earnest desire to couch against the enemies of Christianity the lance which he had often couched against the enemies of civilisation, he took the Cross, sold his stud on the Leader Haughs to pay his expenses, bade a last farewell to Euphemia Stewart, his aged countess, received the pilgrim's staff and scrip from the Abbot of Melrose, and left his castle to embark with his knights and kinsmen.

'I was young, and now I am old,' said Earl Patrick, with enthusiasm. 'In my youth I fought with the foes of my race. In my old age I will fare forth and combat the foes of my religion.'

It was under the banner of this aged hero that Guy Muschamp and Walter Espec were about to embark for the East; and, on the evening of the day preceding that on which they were to set out, they were conducted to the presence of the mother of the lord of the castle, who was the daughter of a Scottish king, that they might receive her blessing.

'My children,' said she, as they knelt before her, and she laid her hands on their heads, 'do not forget, when among strangers and exposed to temptation, the lessons of piety and chivalry which you have learned within these walls. Fear God, and He will support you in all dangers. Be frank and courteous, but not servile, to the rich and powerful; kind and helpful to the poor and afflicted. Beware of meriting the reproaches of the brave; and ever bear in mind that evil befalls him who proves false to his promises to his God, his country, and his lady. Be brave in war; in peace, loyal and true in thought and word; and Heaven will bless you, and men will hold your names in honour, and you will be dreaded in battle and loved in hall.'

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Next morning the brothers-in-arms rose betimes; and, all preparations for their departure having been previously made, they mounted at daybreak, and leaving the castle of Wark, and riding through the great park that lay around it, startling the deer and the wild cattle as they went, took their way towards Berwick, before which rode the ships destined to convey them from their native shores.

EMBARKING FOR THE EAST.

IT was Saturday; and the sun shone brightly on pool and stream, and even lighted up the dingy corners of walled cities, as the Earl of March proceeded on foot from the castle to the port of Berwick, and embarked with his knights and kinsmen.

The event created much excitement in the town. In fact, though the princes and nobles of Europe were weary of enterprises that had ruined so many great houses, the people still thought of the crusades with interest, and talked of them with enthusiasm. The very name of Palestine exercised a magical influence on the European Christians of that generation. At the mention of the Holy Land, their imagination conjured up the most picturesque scenery; Saracenic castles stored with gold and jewels; cities the names of which were recorded in the sacred book which the poorest knew by picture; and they listened earnestly as palmer or pilgrim told of Sharon with its roses without thorns; Lebanon with its cedars and vines; and Carmel with its solitary convent, and its summit covered with thyme, and haunted by the eagle and the boar, till their fancy pictured 'a land flowing with milk and honey,' by repairing to which sinners could secure pardon without penance in this world, and happiness without purgatory in the next.

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It is not wonderful that, when such sentiments prevailed, the embarkation of a great noble for the Holy Land should have excited much interest; and, as Guy Muschamp and Walter Espec took their way from the castle to the port, crowded with ships, and passed warehouses stored with merchandise, the Red Hall of the Flemings resounding with the noise of artificers, the wealthy religious houses which kept alive the flame of ancient learning, and dispensed befitting charities, the streets presented a motley assemblage of seafaring men, monks, warriors, and soldiers; the wives and daughters of the burghers, all in holiday attire, crowded the housetops or gazed from the windows and balconies; and the burghers themselves, leaving their booths and warehouses, flocked to the port to gossip with each other, and to witness the departure of the armed pilgrims.

'Oh, good Walter,' exclaimed Guy Muschamp, whose spirit rose with the excitement, 'is not this a stirring scene? By St. John of Beverley, what rich armour! what gallant ships! what stately churches! And yet I would wager my basinet to a prentice's flat cap that it is not, for a moment, to be compared to Acre.'

'I deem that it can hardly be,' replied Walter, calmly; 'and, in truth, I am in no mood to look upon life with joyous emotions. But, brave Guy, I am pleased to see you pleased; albeit, I own frankly that I should be more than human did I not somewhat envy you your gaiety.'

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'Be gay, good Walter.'

Walter shook his head.

'Vain would be the effort,' he replied, sadly; 'I can only pray to God and Holy Katherine to grant that I may return with a lighter heart.'

'As for me,' continued Guy, 'I am ever gay—gay as the lark; gay in the morning, gay at eve. It is my nature so to be. My mother is a Frenchwoman—a kinswoman of the Lord of Joinville—and scarce knows what sadness is. I inherit her spirit; and I doubt not that, if I am slain by the Saracens, I shall die laughing.'

With this conversation they reached the quay, just as Earl Patrick was stepping on board his ship, the 'Hilda,' which, if less graceful and elegant than the vessels of modern times, was imposing to look upon. Adorned with painting and gilding, it had armorial bearings and badges embroidered on various parts; banners of gay and brilliant colours floated from the masts; and the sails of azure and purple shone with work of gold. Armour glittered on deck; and martial music was not wanting to give variety to the display.

Meanwhile, amidst the bustle and shouts of the crew, the ports of the vessel were opened to allow the horses of the armed pilgrims to enter; and, as the ports were under water when the vessel was at sea, they were caulked and stopped up as close as a tun of wine. This operation over, and all the adventurers embarked, the skipper raised his hand for silence.

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'My men, is your work done?' cried he to his people in the prow; 'are you ready?'

'Yes, in truth, we are ready,' answered the seamen.

And now, the priests who accompanied Earl Patrick having embarked, the captain made them mount to the castle of the ship, and chant psalms in praise of God, and to pray that He might be pleased to grant a prosperous voyage; and they, having ascended, sang the beautiful hymn of 'Veni, Creator' from beginning to end. While the priests sang, the mariners set their sails, and the skipper ordered them to haul up the anchor; and instantly a breeze filled the sails, and the ships moved slowly but proudly away from the shore.

THE ARMED PILGRIMS AT CYPRUS.

NOT with the very best grace did the King of France come to the resolution of sailing for Cyprus. Indeed, the safety of his army depended, in some degree, on the route selected; and the safest way to the Holy Land was understood to be by Sicily. Unluckily, however, Sicily was subject to the Emperor Frederick; and Frederick and his dominions had been excommunicated by the Pope; and Louis, with his peculiar notions, feared to set foot on a soil that was under the ban of the Church. At Lyons, where he received the papal blessing, he endeavoured to reconcile the Emperor and the Pope; but his Holiness declined to listen to mediation; and the saint-king, yielding to conscientious scruples, determined, without further hesitation, to sacrifice his plan of passing through Sicily to Syria, and announced his intention of proceeding by way of Cyprus to Egypt.

At that time the King of Cyprus was Henry de Lusignan, to whose family Richard Cœur de Lion had, in the twelfth century, given the throne, from which he dragged the Emperor Isaac; and no sooner did Louis reach the port of Limisso, than Henry, accompanied by nobles and clergy, appeared to bid him welcome. Nothing, indeed, could have exceeded the enthusiasm with which the French Crusaders were received; and when Louis was conducted with much ceremony to Nicosia, and entered that city, the capital of the island, the populace cheered loudly, and the clergy met him, singing 'Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord.'

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The glory of Nicosia has long since departed. Situated in the centre of Cyprus, on the river Pedia, in a low fertile plain, near the base of a range of mountains that intersects the island, and surrounded by walls, in the form of a hexagon, flanked with bastions, the capital has many fine houses; but these are mostly in ruins, and the inhabitants occupy tenements reared of mud and brick, and rather repulsive in appearance. At that time, however, the state of Nicosia was very different. As the capital of the Lusignans, the city exhibited the pomp and pride of feudal chivalry, with much of the splendour of oriental courts, and boasted of its palaces, castles, churches, and convents, and chapelries, and gardens, and vineyards, and pleasant places, and all the luxuries likely to render mediæval life enviable.

Now, when Louis landed at Limisso, and entered Nicosia, he had no intention of wintering in Cyprus. In fact, the saint-king was all eagerness to push forward and combat the Saracens. But circumstances proved stronger than his will. The Crusaders were highly captivated with all that they saw and heard. The aspect of the island was enchanting; the wine, which even Solomon has deigned to celebrate, was to their taste: the dark-eyed Greek women, who perhaps knew that the island had anciently been the favourite seat, of Venus, and who, in any case, enjoyed the reputation of being devoted to the worship of the goddess, were doubtless fascinating; and almost every one of the days that succeeded Louis's arrival was devoted to rejoicings and feastings. Not unnaturally, but most unfortunately, the Crusaders yielded to the fascinations of an existence which at first they all enjoyed, heart and soul; and with one accord they cried out, 'We must tarry here till spring. Let us eat, drink, and be merry.'

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Accordingly the Crusaders did winter in Cyprus; and the consequences were most disastrous. Enervated by luxury, they soon forgot their vows, and rushed into every kind of extravagance and dissipation. Of course, their recklessness soon brought its own punishment. As time passed on, and winter set in, rain fell daily, and the intemperance, the strange climate, and the weather soon did their work. By-and-by, a pestilential disease made its appearance in the camp of the pilgrims, and carried off thousands of victims, including two hundred and fifty knights. Moreover, there was much discord and dissension. The Greek clergy and the Latin clergy began to quarrel; the Templars and the Knights of St. John began to fight; and the saint-king found his position the very reverse of satisfactory or agreeable.

By the time that the little fleet, on board of which were Guy Muschamp and Walter Espec, reached Cyprus, matters were not what they should have been; and the wise and prudent shook their heads, and predicted that an expedition conducted in such a fashion was too likely to end in disaster and ruin.

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CHAPTER VIII.

[49]

EASTWARD.

IT was July, as I have intimated, when the ship 'Hilda,' which carried Walter Espec and Guy Muschamp, left the shores of England; and, soon after having lost sight of land, both began to experience a little of that vague fear of 'the blue above and the blue below,' which, in the thirteenth century, made some of the boldest feudal warriors, when they embarked, invoke the protection of the saints in Paradise.

'On my faith, good Walter,' remarked Guy, with less than his wonted gaiety, for the ship was beginning to toss, and he was beginning to feel rather sea sick, 'I cannot but think that the man is a great fool, who, having wronged any of his neighbours, or having any mortal sin on his

conscience, puts himself in such peril as this; for, when he goes to sleep at night, he knows not if in the morning he may not find himself under the waves.'

'May the saints preserve us from such a fate,' replied Walter, thoughtfully; 'yet I own I feel so uneasy that I can hardly believe myself a descendant of the kings of the north who made the ocean their home, and called the tempest their servant, and never felt so joyous as when they were treading the pine plank, and giving the reins to their great sea horses.'

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'On my faith,' said Guy, who was every moment becoming more uncomfortable, 'I cannot but marvel much at the eccentricity of their tastes, and could almost wish myself back to the castle of Wark.'

'Nevertheless,' replied Walter, 'we must bear in mind that, having taken the Cross and vowed to combat the Saracens, it beseems us not, as Christians and gentlemen, to look backward.'

At the time when this conversation took place, the sea was comparatively calm, and the weather most favourable; and the skipper, naturally overjoyed with his good fortune in both respects, predicted a speedy voyage. In this, however, he was in some measure disappointed. Many circumstances occurred to retard the progress of the Saxon Earl and his companions towards Cyprus; and, what with prolonged calms, and contrary winds, and foul weather, it was late in autumn ere they neared the island where the King of France and his chivalry had, for their misfortune, resolved on passing the winter.

So far all was well, and the Boy Crusaders, now recovered from their sickness, rejoiced in the anticipation of soon reaching Cyprus. But the dangers of the voyage were not yet over, and one evening, about vespers, while Walter and Guy were regaling their imaginations with the prospect of being speedily in the company of the warriors of France, the mariners found that they were unpleasantly close to a great mountain of Barbary. Not relishing their position—for they had the fear of the Saracens of Barbary before their eyes—the mariners pressed on, and during the night made all the sail they could, and flattered themselves that they had run at least fifty leagues. But what was their surprise when day broke, to find that they were still off the mountain which they fancied they must have left behind. Great, moreover, was their alarm as they thought of the piratical natives; and, albeit they laboured hard all that day and all that night to make sail, when the sun rose next morning—it was Saturday—the mountain, from which they were so anxious to escape, was still near at hand. All on board expressed their alarm on discovering that the mariners deemed their position perilous; and the Earl, on learning how matters stood, appeared on deck, and summoned the master of the ship.

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'In wonder's name, skipper,' said he, sternly, 'how happens this?'

'In truth, my lord earl,' replied the skipper, much perplexed, 'I cannot tell how it happens; but this I know, that we all run great risk of our lives.'

'In what way?'

'From the Saracens of Barbary, who are cruel and savage, and who are as likely as not to come down in swarms and attack us.'

The idea of captivity and chains occurred to every one who listened, and even the Earl changed countenance. At that moment, however, one of the chaplains stepped forward. He was a discreet churchman, and his words were ever treated with high respect.

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'My lord earl and gentlemen,' said the chaplain; 'I never remember any distress in our parish, either from too much abundance or from want of rain, or from any other plague, but that God delivered us from it, and caused everything to happen as well as could have been wished, when a procession had been made three times with devotion on a Saturday.'

'Wherefore,' suggested the Earl, 'you would have us do likewise, as deeming the ceremony likely to deliver us from our peril?'

'Even so,' continued the churchman. 'I recommend, noble Earl, that, as this day is Saturday, we instantly commence walking in procession round the masts of the ship.'

'By all means,' replied the Earl, 'let us forthwith walk in procession as you recommend. Worse than foolish would it be on our parts to neglect such a ceremony. A simple remedy, on my faith, for such an evil.'

Accordingly, the skipper issued orders through the ship; and all on board were assembled on deck, and, headed by the priests, solemnly walked in procession round the masts, singing as they walked; and, however it came to pass, the ceremony seemed to have the effect which the chaplain had prognosticated. From that moment everything went smoothly. Almost immediately afterwards they lost sight of the mountain, and cast all fear of the Saracens of Barbary to the winds; and ere long they had the gratification of hearing the cry of 'Land,' and of seeing before their eyes the far-famed island of Cyprus.

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It was latest autumn, however; and Cyprus did not look by any means so bright and beautiful as the Boy Crusaders had, during the voyage, anticipated. Indeed, clouds rested over the range of mountains that intersects the island lengthways. The rain had fallen somewhat heavily, and the aspect of the place was so decidedly dismal and disheartening, that, as the two squires landed, their countenances expressed much disappointment.

'Now, by St. John of Beverley,' exclaimed Guy, giving expression to his feelings, 'I marvel much that this lovely queen, Venus, of whom minstrels have sung so much, should, when she doubtless had her free choice as to a residence, have so highly favoured this place.

'Tastes differ,' replied Walter, rather gloomily. 'Certainly, had I my choice of a residence, I should fix my abode elsewhere.'

'But what have we here?' cried Guy, as he pointed to countless casks of wine piled high, one on the other, and to huge heaps of wheat, barley, and other grains, which the purveyors of King Louis had some time before prepared for his grand enterprise. 'Beshrew me, if, at a distance, I did not imagine the casks of wine to be houses, and the heaps of corn mountains.'

'Anyhow,' observed Walter, 'the sight of the wine and the corn should give us comfort; for it is clear that the King of France, however saintly, does not forget that men have mouths, nor mean his army to die of hunger or thirst.'

'On my faith,' said Guy, 'I have a strong desire to catch a glance of this miracle of saintliness. I marvel if he rides about Cyprus on a Spanish steed, magnificently harnessed, as chronicles tell of Richard Cœur de Lion doing, dressed in a tunic of rose-coloured satin, and a mantle of striped and silver tissue, brocaded with half moons, and a scarlet bonnet brocaded with gold, and wearing a Damascus blade with a golden hilt in a silver sheath—oh, what a fine figure the English king must have cut!' [54]

'However,' said Walter, 'I fancy King Louis is not quite so splendid in his appearance as Cœur de Lion was. But we shall see him ere long.'

'Ay,' cried Guy; 'we must have a peep at the royal saint. Meanwhile, good Walter, one thing is certain—that we are in Cyprus.'

CHAPTER IX.

[55]

AN ADVENTURE.

IT was not the good fortune of all the warriors who had taken the Cross to escape the perils of the deep, and reach Cyprus in safety.

About a month after Guy Muschamp and Walter Espec had reached Limisso, a tall ship bearing a Crusader of noble name, who had left Constantinople to combat the Saracens under the banner of St. Denis, was sailing gallantly towards Cyprus, when a violent storm arose, and threatened her with destruction. The wind blew fiercely; the sea ran mountains high; and, though the ship for a time struggled sturdily with the elements, she could not resist her fate. Her cordage creaked, and her timbers groaned dismally; and, as she was by turns borne aloft on the waves crested with foam and precipitated headlong into the gulphs that yawned between, great was the terror, loud the wailing, and frightful the turmoil. In vain the mariners exerted their strength and skill. No efforts on their part could enable the vessel to resist the fury of the tempest.

Every minute matters became more desperate. The sea, recently calm, seemed to boil from its very depths; and the ship, incessantly tossed to and fro by the roaring billows, appeared, every moment, on the point of being engulfed. The skipper was lost in consternation; the Crusaders gave way to despair; and with death staring them in the face they ceased to hope for safety, and, kneeling, confessed to each other, and prayed aloud that their sins might be forgiven. At length, in spite of the efforts made by the mariners to resist the winds and waves, the ship, driven on the rocks near the island, filled with water, went to pieces, leaving those on board to struggle as they best might to escape a watery grave. The struggle was vain. Many, indeed, caught hold of the vessel's timbers with a vague hope of reaching the shore; but, unable to contend with the elements, they, one after another, disappeared and sank to rise no more. [56]

Now this terrible shipwreck was not without witnesses. On that part of the coast of Cyprus where it occurred was a rude hamlet chiefly tenanted by fishermen; and men, women, and children crowded the beach, uttering loud cries, and highly excited, but unable to render any assistance. It seemed that no boat could live in such a sea; and the fishermen could only gaze mournfully on the heartrending scene, as the waves sprang up and rapaciously claimed their prey.

It was while the sea, agitated by the gale, was still running high; while the waves were leaping, and tearing, and dashing against the rocks; and while flocks of sea birds wheeled and screamed over the troubled waters, that a knight and two squires, who, having been caught in the storm, while riding towards Limisso, reined up, and not without difficulty learned from the natives, whose language they scarcely comprehended, the nature and extent of the disaster. The knight was an English Crusader, named Bisset, who had taken service with King Louis; the squires were Walter Espec and Guy Muschamp. All three, as they became aware of what had happened, crossed themselves and breathed a prayer for the souls of those who had gone to their account. [57]

'We may as well ride on,' said Guy Muschamp, who, like his companions, was very much affected; 'all of them have perished, and are now beyond the reach of human aid.'

'Not all of them,' exclaimed Walter Espec, suddenly, as he sprang from his horse, and, with out-stretched arm, pointed to a white object which was carried hither and thither by the waves.

'By the might of Henry, sir squire, you are right,' cried the English knight, highly excited; 'it is a woman, as I live, and she is clinging to one of the ship's timbers.'

'And she may yet be saved,' said Walter, calmly; 'and by the Holy Cross the attempt must be made, if we are to escape the reproach of inhumanity and cowardice.'

And now the men, women, and children on the beach became much excited, and shouted loudly. No one, however, volunteered to go to the rescue. In fact, the aspect of the sea was so menacing and terrible, that the boldest and hardiest of the seafaring men felt that an attempt could only end in the destruction of those making it, and shook their heads with a significance there was no misunderstanding. [58]

'It seems,' said the knight, mournfully, 'that the business is desperate; and yet——'

'And yet,' said Walter, taking up the word as the knight hesitated and paused, 'it shall never be told that a woman perished before my eyes, and that I stood looking on, without making an effort to save her.'

'He is mad,' muttered the fishermen, as they first eyed the English squire, and then exchanged glances with each other, and shrugged their shoulders.

But Walter Espec did not ponder or pause. Throwing his bridle-rein to Guy Muschamp, whose countenance expressed grave alarm, he quickly divested himself of his mantle and the belt bearing his sword, committed himself to the protection of Holy Katherine, the patron saint of his house, plunged into the water, and next moment was battling manfully with the waves. But everything was against him, even the tide; and, in spite of his skill as a swimmer, his efforts were at first abortive. But it was not his nature to yield easily; and, as he put forth all his strength, and made a desperate struggle, the affair began to wear another face.

'Good Walter,' murmured Guy, who stood, pale as death, watching the swimmer. 'Brave Walter!'

'Now, may our lady, the Virgin, aid and prosper him,' exclaimed the knight. 'Never have I witnessed a bolder attempt.' [59]

As the knight spoke, a loud cheer burst from the crowd; and then there was silence. Walter drew nearer and nearer to the woman, for whose life he was freely venturing his own. In another minute he clutched her with one hand, turned towards the shore, and, favoured by the tide, came sailing towards the spot which the crowd occupied.

A dozen of the men dashed knee-deep into the water to relieve Walter of his burden; and as they did so, a dozen of the women stretched out their hands, and received the still unconscious form of her who had been rescued; meanwhile the knight and Guy Muschamp caught hold of Walter, who, fatigued and overcome with his almost superhuman exertions, would otherwise have fallen to the ground. However they laid him down carefully to rest; and, while Guy stood watching over him, Bisset went to look to the safety of the damsel who had been rescued.

'Sir squire,' said he, with enthusiasm, as he returned, 'you have done as noble a deed as it has ever been my fate to witness, and the King of France shall hear of it, as I am a living man; and,' continued he, in a whisper, 'hearken! you may at the same time congratulate yourself on having had the good luck to save a woman well worth saving.'

'What mean you, sir knight,' asked Walter, faintly.

'Simply this—that she is young, fair to behold, and evidently of high lineage.'

CHAPTER X.

ON THE LADDER OF LIFE.

FOUR days passed over, and Walter Espec, quite recovered from the effects of his struggle with the waves, and of the salt water he had involuntarily imbibed during his perilous adventure on the coast of Cyprus, was at Nicosia, and engaged in chivalrous exercises, in the courtyard of the house occupied by the Earl of March; when he was accosted by Bisset, the English knight, who had been a witness of his daring exploit, and requested to repair to the presence of the King of France.

Walter was somewhat taken by surprise and startled by the summons. Recovering his serenity, however, as well as he could, he intimated his readiness; and with the air befitting a Norman gentleman who had existed from childhood in the consciousness that his name was known to fame, and who did not forget that he had noble blood of Icinglas in his veins, he accompanied the knight to the palace in which the saint-king was lodged.

At that time, Louis, not much satisfied with himself for having consented to winter in Cyprus,

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though little dreaming of the terrible misfortunes that awaited his army in the land for which he was bound, was seated at table and endeavouring to forget his cares, while conversing familiarly with a young and noble-looking personage of great strength and stature, with a head of immense size, and a countenance beaming with sagacity. In truth this was a very remarkable personage. He was then known as John, Lord of Joinville, and seneschal of Champagne; and he has since been famous as the chronicler of the triumphs and disasters of the Crusade in which he acted a conspicuous part.

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'Seneschal,' said Louis, addressing Joinville, 'I marvel much that you do not mix water with your wine.'

'In truth, sire,' replied Joinville, half jocularly, 'I fear so to do; for physicians have told me I have so large a head, and so cold a stomach, that water might prove most injurious.'

'Nevertheless,' said Louis, earnestly, 'be advised by me, and do not allow yourself to be deceived. If you do not drink water till you are in the decline of life, you will then increase any disorders you may have.'

'But, sire,' asked Joinville, innocently, 'why should I drink water then more than now?'

'Ah,' answered Louis, 'simply because if you take pure wine in your old age, you will be frequently intoxicated; and verily it is a beastly thing for an honourable man to make himself drunk.'

'I acknowledge that it is very wrong, sire,' said Joinville; 'but I am one of those who endeavour to practise moderation in the use of the wine-cup.'

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'And pray, seneschal,' asked Louis, after a pause, 'may I ask if you ever wash the feet of the poor?'

'Oh, sire, no,' answered Joinville, not without evincing surprise. 'I hardly deem that it would become such a person as I am.'

'In truth, seneschal,' exclaimed Louis, 'this is very ill said. You ought not to think that unbecoming which He, who was their Lord and Master, did for our example when He washed the feet of His apostles. I doubt not you would very unwillingly perform what the King of England does; for on Holy Thursday he washes the feet of lepers.'

'Oh, sire,' cried Joinville, in a conclusive tone, 'never will I wash the feet of such fellows.'

'Now, seneschal,' resumed Louis, still more seriously, 'let me ask you another question. Whether would you be a leper, or have committed a deadly sin?'

'Sire,' answered Joinville, frankly, 'rather than be a leper, I would have committed thirty deadly sins.'

'How could you make such an answer?' said Louis, reproachfully.

'Sire,' exclaimed Joinville, with decision, 'if I were to answer again, I should repeat the same thing.'

'Nevertheless,' urged Louis, with earnestness, 'you deceive yourself on the subject; for no leprosy can be so awful as deadly sin, and the soul that is guilty of such is like the devil in hell.'

It was when the conversation between the King of France and the Lord of Joinville had reached this stage, that Walter Espec, guided by the English knight, made his appearance, not without exhibiting symptoms of agitation when he found himself face to face with the monarch, who, of all the princes of Christendom, enjoyed, at that period, the highest reputation in Europe and the East.

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But the appearance and aspect of Louis were not such as to daunt or dismay.

Nothing could have been more plain and simple than the dress worn by the royal chief of the crusaders. Indeed it was plain and simple to affectation; and the coat of camlet, the surcoat of tyretaine, the mantle of black sandal, contrasted remarkably with the splendid garments of princes who were his contemporaries, especially Henry, King of England, who, like most of the Plantagenets, was given to magnificence of attire, and generally regarded as by far the greatest dandy in his dominions. Nor had Louis been endowed by nature with the qualities which please the eye and impress the imagination. His figure, it is true, was tall and well proportioned; but his face and features were not calculated to dazzle. When compared with men of such noble presence and regal air as our English Edwards and Henrys, he was decidedly plain. He had the peculiar face and slanting features which distinguished so many of the descendants of Hugh Capet, and that large long straight nose, which, instead of keeping the Greek facial line, inclined forward, and hung slightly over the short upper lip. Not even flattery could have described the saint-king as a model of manly beauty.

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Now it happened that Walter Espec had never before seen a king, and was prepared to behold something very grand, like Cœur de Lion, with his scarlet bonnet, his rose-coloured tunic, and his mantle of striped silver tissue, and his Damascus blade with a golden hilt in a silver sheath. Naturally, therefore, he was at the first glance somewhat disappointed with the appearance of the monarch in whose presence he stood. But as Louis turned upon him a countenance which, albeit not beautiful, denoted energy and decision of

character, and expressed at once goodness and good-nature, and high moral and intellectual superiority, the youth, whose instincts were strong, felt that he was in the presence of a man who was worthy of reigning.

'Young gentleman,' said Louis, mildly, as Walter bent his knee, 'it has come to my knowledge that you have performed an action noble in itself, and worthy of the praises of the valiant.'

'Sire,' replied Walter, colouring, and speaking with less than his wonted confidence, 'I scarce know to what your highness is pleased to refer.'

'Ah,' said Louis, glancing towards the Lord of Joinville, 'I can hardly credit your words. But such modesty is becoming in youth. However, I mean that, four days since, as I learn, you saved a noble demoiselle from the sea, at the most manifest peril to your own life.'

Walter bowed in acknowledgement of the compliment, but did not speak.

'Not,' continued Louis hastily, 'not that you should therefore be vainglorious, or puffed up with vanity, or think more highly of yourself than you ought to think on account of your achievement, however honourable; for I trust you know and feel that, before our Maker, we are all but as potter's clay.'

'My lord,' replied Walter, pausing in some perplexity, 'I would fain hope my ideas on the subject will ever be such as befit a Christian and a gentleman.'

'Well, well,' said Louis, hastily, 'on that point I meant not to express a doubt, and,' added he, 'seeing that you give promise of being a preuhomme, I pray God, out of His goodness, that you may prove a preudhomme as well as a preuhomme.'

'Sire,' said Walter, looking puzzled, 'you must pardon me when I confess that I comprehend not clearly the distinction.'

'Ah,' replied Louis, smiling, and shaking his head gravely, 'the distinction is of much consequence; for know that by preuhomme I mean a man who is valiant and bold in person, whereas by preudhomme I signify one who is prudent, discreet, and who fears God, and has a good conscience.'

Walter bowed again; and, being at a loss for words to answer, took refuge in silence. In fact, he began to feel so awkward that he wished nothing so fervently as that the interview would come to an end; and Louis, after condescending to ask some more questions, and inculcate some more lessons, dismissed him with words of encouragement, and gifted him with an amulet in the form of a ring, which bore on it this inscription—

Who wears me shall perform exploits,
And with great joy return.

As Walter left the king's presence to depart from the palace, he turned to the knight who had been his conductor.

'On my faith, sir knight,' said he laughing, but rather nervously, 'this reminds me more of the adventures which in childhood I have heard related by pilgrims and pedlars at the chimney-corner, than aught I ever expected to meet with in the real breathing busy world.'

'Indeed,' said Bisset, quietly; 'methinks there is nothing so very wondrous about the business. It only seems to me that you have been born with luck on your side—not my own case—and that you have, without hazarding more than you are likely to do in the first battle with the Saracens, gained the privilege of climbing some steps up the ladder that leads to fortune and fame.'

'And yet,' observed Walter, as he laughed and looked at the ring which Louis had bestowed on him, 'beshrew me if I have had the courage to ask either the rank or name of the demoiselle to whom I had the fortune to render the service that has made my existence known to this good and pious king.'

'By the might of Mary,' exclaimed the knight, 'there is no reason why you should remain in ignorance who the demoiselle is, or what is her name. She is kinswoman of John de Brienne, who, in his day, figured as King of Jerusalem, and kinswoman also of Baldwin de Courtenay, who now reigns at Constantinople as Emperor of the East; and her name is Adeline de Brienne.'

'Holy Katherine,' muttered Walter, again looking closely at the inscription on the ring, as if for evidence that the whole was not a dream, 'I begin to think that I must assuredly have been born with luck on my side, as you say; and, with such luck on my side, I need not even despair of finding the brother I have lost.'



"Young gentleman," said King Louis, "it has come to my knowledge that you have performed an action noble in itself, and worthy of the praises of the valiant."—p. 64.

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'Credit me, at all events,' said Bisset, looking wise, 'when I tell you that you have got upon the ladder of life.'

CHAPTER XI.

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THE VOYAGE.

IT was the Saturday before Pentecost, in the year 1249, when the fleet of King Louis and the armed pilgrims, consisting of no fewer than eighteen hundred vessels, great and small, issued gallantly from the port of Limisso, and steered towards Egypt.

At first nothing could have been more gay and pleasant than the voyage of the Crusaders. It seemed as if the whole sea, so far as the eye could reach, was covered with cloth and with banners of bright colours. Everything appeared promising. The voyage, however, was not destined to prove prosperous. Suddenly the wind, which had been favourable, changed, and blew violently from the coast of Egypt. Great confusion was the consequence; and, though the Genoese mariners exerted all their skill, the fleet was utterly dispersed. Indeed, when King Louis, having put back, reached Limisso, he found, to his horror, that not more than two-thirds of the armed pilgrims remained in his company. Concluding that his companions had been drowned, the saintly monarch was grieved beyond measure, and on the point of giving way to despair.

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It happened, however, that while Louis was mourning over the mishap, William Longsword, Earl of Salisbury, arrived at Cyprus with the English Crusaders, and administered some degree of consolation. In truth, Longsword was just the man to explain all in the most satisfactory manner. Having been accustomed from his youth to cross the narrow seas, he felt none of that vague terror of the ocean which made the French knights, when they embarked, invoke the protection of the saints; and he expressed his opinion that, in all probability, the missing vessels were safe on the Syrian coast. But the indifference which the earl showed for dangers at which the French trembled had the effect of making him many enemies, and arousing the natural jealousies which afterwards proved so baneful to the expedition.

It ought to be borne in mind, that at the period of St. Louis's crusade there existed no love between the nobles of France and the nobles of England; and it appears that the French were in the habit of treating the English with some degree of scorn. Nor was it unnatural that such should have been the case; for, during half a century, in almost every struggle between the kingdoms, the French had been victorious. Philip Augustus, after holding his own against Richard Cœur de Lion, had succeeded in driving John from the continent; and Louis, when forced to take the field against Henry, had pursued his royal brother-in-law from the bridge of Taillebourg to the gates of Bordeaux. Remembering such triumphs, the French, who have in all ages been vain and boastful, were continually vaunting about their prowess, and repeating the story of some Englishman having cut off the tail of Thomas à Becket's horse, and of Englishmen having ever after that outrage been born with tails like horses.

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Such being the state of affairs, the Earl of Salisbury did not inspire the French nobles with any particular affection for him and his countrymen who had arrived at Cyprus, when they heard him speaking lightly of the dangers of the sea. In fact, the French lords, who a few hours earlier had been sinking under sea-sickness, trembling at the sound of raging billows, and wishing themselves safely in their own castles, cursed 'Longsword,' as the worst of 'English tails.'

But the King of France did not share the malice of his countrymen; and, much comforted by the words of the English earl, he resolved on again tempting the sea. Accordingly, on Monday morning, he ordered the mariners to spread their sails to the wind. The weather proving favourable, the fleet made gallantly for the shores of Egypt; and on the morning of Thursday, about sunrise, the watch on deck of the vessel that led the van, shouted 'Land!'

'Surely, not yet,' exclaimed several voices; but the pilot to make certain ascended to the round-top of the vessel.

'Gentlemen,' cried the pilot, 'it is all right. We are before Damietta, so you have nothing to do but to recommend yourselves to God.'

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'Hurrah!' shouted the mariners; and from ship to ship the tidings passed; and, as the words of the pilot flew from deck to deck, a cry of joy burst from thousands of lips. Great was the excitement that prevailed; and the chiefs of the expedition hastily arrayed themselves to go on board the king's ship and hold a council of war.

And now all eyes were turned towards the shore; and it seemed that the Crusaders were likely to encounter a desperate resistance in any attempt to land. A fleet and formidable engines of war defended the mouth of the Nile. A numerous army of horse and foot appeared on the beach, as if bent on contesting every inch of ground. At the head of this mighty host, wearing armour of burnished gold, figured the Emir Fakreddin, one of the foremost of Saracen warriors. From the midst trumpets and drums sounded a stern defiance to the armament of the Christians. But, undaunted by the aspect of affairs, the armed pilgrims steadily pursued their course; and ship after ship, moving calmly forward, anchored within a mile of the shore.

Meanwhile, the pilgrims, princes, and nobles, had reached the king's ship; and Louis, leaning on his sword, received them with satisfaction on his countenance.

'Gentlemen,' said he, 'our voyage has not been without its perils, but let us be thankful that we are at length face to face with the enemies of Christ.'

'Yes, sire,' said the chiefs, 'and it is therefore expedient to form some plan of action.'

'And, under the circumstances,' added several, 'it will be prudent to await our comrades who have been separated from us by the tempest.'

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It soon appeared that among the chiefs there was a general wish to await the coming of their missing comrades; but the king was young, and the drums and horns of the Saracens had so chafed his pride that he would not hear of delay.

'We have not come hither,' said he, excitedly, 'to listen to the insults of our enemies; nor have we any port in which to shelter from the wind. A second tempest may disperse what remains of our fleet. To-day God offers us a victory; another day He may punish us for having neglected to conquer.'

'Sire, be it as you will,' replied the assembled chiefs, not caring to debate the point with their king.

And so, with much less deliberation than was necessary under the circumstances, and without duly considering the resources of the enemy whom they had to combat, King Louis and the chief Crusaders resolved to disembark on the morrow and give battle. Meantime a strict watch was maintained, and several swift vessels were despatched towards the mouth of the Nile to observe the motions of the Saracens.

It happened that the Saracens, in spite of their dauntless show, were by no means in the best mood to make an obstinate resistance, nor were they in any sanguine mood as to the result of their preparations. At such a crisis, the presence of the sultan was necessary to sustain their spirits, and stimulate their fanaticism.

Now at that time Melikul Salih was Sultan of Egypt; but he was not at Damietta, and his absence caused much uncertainty and dismay among the warriors assembled to defend his dominions. Melikul Salih was then at Cairo; and almost every man in Fakreddin's army knew that Melikul Salih was dying.

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CHAPTER XII.

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AT DAMIETTA.

ABOUT a mile from the sea, on the northern bank of the second mouth of the Nile, stood the city of Damietta, with its mosques, and palaces, and towers, and warehouses, defended on the river side by a double rampart, and on the land side by a triple wall. Fair and enchanting to the eye was the locality in which it was situated; and as the Crusaders directed their gaze towards the groves of oranges and citrons, loaded with flowers and fruit, the woods of palms and sycamores, the thickets of jasmines and odoriferous shrubs, the vast plains, with pools and lakes well stocked with fish, the thousand canals intersecting the land, and crowned with papyrus and reeds, they, feeling the influence of a rich climate and a beautiful sky, could not find words sufficiently strong to express their admiration and delight.

'Now, good Walter,' said Guy Muschamp, as the brothers-in-arms, having ascended to the castle of the 'Hilda,' looked earnestly towards the shore, 'who can deny that such a land is worth fighting to conquer?'

'On my faith,' exclaimed Walter Espec, with enthusiasm, 'it is so pleasant to the eye, that I could almost persuade myself I am looking upon that terrestrial paradise in which the father and mother of mankind lived so happily before eating the fatal apple.'

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No wonder, when such was the aspect of the country around Damietta, that the armed pilgrims were impatient to land.

And no time was lost; for, of all the armed pilgrims, King Louis was perhaps the most eager to encounter the enemies of his religion; and, soon after daybreak, on the morning of Friday, a signal was given for the fleet to weigh anchor and draw near to the shore.

Meanwhile the Saracens, under the Emir Fakreddin, were on the alert; and while a bell, that had remained in the great mosque of Damietta ever since John de Brienne seized the city in 1217, tolled loudly to warn the inhabitants of the danger, the Moslem warriors got under arms, and with cavalry and infantry occupied the whole of that part of the strand at which the Crusaders had resolved to disembark.

But the armed pilgrims were nothing daunted by the sight of the formidable preparations made to oppose their landing. Getting into barques which had been provided for the purpose, they prepared to fight their way ashore, in defiance of all dangers. Ranging themselves in two lines,

with their lances in their hands, and their horses by their sides, the knights and nobles stood erect in their boats, while in front, and on the wings of the armament, were placed crossbowmen to harass and keep off the foe. Nor did Louis in that hour appear in any way unworthy to be the leader of brave men. Attended by his brothers and his knights, the King of France, arrayed in chain-mail, with his helmet on his brow, his shield on his neck, and his lance in his hand, figured prominently on the right of his array. By his side stood the cardinal legate; and in front of him was a boat in which the oriflamme, brought from the abbey of St. Denis, was proudly displayed.

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It was an exciting occasion, and the hearts of the saint-king and his mailed comrades beat high as the barques moved onward to the Egyptian strand. The warriors, standing steady and silent as graven images, gazed earnestly on their multitudinous foes. For a time no attempt was made to oppose their progress. No sooner, however, were they within bowshot, than a shower of arrows and javelins rattled against the mail of the Crusaders. For a moment the ranks of the Christian warriors were shaken. But the crossbowmen, without the delay of an instant, retaliated with damaging effect; and while their shafts carried death into the Saracen host, the rowers redoubled their efforts to reach the shore, and bring Christian and Moslem hand to hand and foot to foot.

Again the silence was unbroken, save by the plashing of oars and the tumultuous shock of the barques pressing on in disorder. Ere long, however, there was a loud shout. The Lord of Joinville, closely followed by Baldwin de Rheims, had reached the shore; and they were setting their men in battle order, and covering themselves with their shields, and presenting the points of their lances to check the impetuosity of the enemy.

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And now King Louis lost all patience; and deeming it no time to stand on his regal dignity, he leaped from his barge, and plunging up to his shoulders in the water, struggled towards the shore. Inspired by his example, the Crusaders threw themselves into the sea in a body, and pressed eagerly onward, with cries of 'Montjoie! St. Denis!' Again the silence was unbroken, save by the clash of mail, the noise of a dense crowd of armed men struggling with the waves, which were so elevated by the rush, that they fell and broke at the feet of the Saracens. In a few moments, however, the oriflamme was landed, and the saint-king, with the salt water running off his armour, was on his knees giving thanks to God for having preserved him and his companions from the perils of the deep.

'And now, gentlemen,' said Louis, as he rose and looked excitedly around him, 'let us forthwith charge our enemies in the name of God.'

'Be patient, sire,' replied the knights, interfering; 'it is better to await the landing of our comrades, that we may fight with advantage.'

Louis allowed himself to be persuaded; and it speedily appeared that caution was necessary; for, while the Crusaders were still struggling ashore in disorder, the Saracen cavalry came down upon them with an impetuosity which convinced the French that their adversaries were not to be despised. But Joinville and Baldwin of Rheims rendered their comrades good service. Hastily closing their ranks, they contrived not only to stay the rush, but to present so impenetrable a front, that the Saracens retired baffled to prepare for a fresh spring.

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And again, with an enthusiastic energy which would have struck terror into antagonists less bold, the Saracens under Fakreddin charged down upon the Crusaders; and then began, all along the coast, a confused conflict which raged for hours—Christian and Moslem fighting hand to hand; while the two fleets engaged at the mouth of the Nile; and the Queen of France and the Countess of Anjou, and other ladies of high rank, who remained on board at a distance, awaited the issue of the contest with terrible anxiety, and, with priests around them, sang psalms and prayed fervently for the aid and protection of the God of battles. At length the conflict came to an end. Both on the water and on the land the Crusaders were victorious. The Saracen fleet, after getting decidedly the worst of the combat, escaped up the Nile; and the Saracen soldiers, beaten and dispersed, retired precipitately, and flying in confusion towards Damietta, abandoned their camp, and left several of their emirs dead on the field.

After witnessing the flight of the Saracens, Louis ordered his pavilion, which was of bright scarlet, to be pitched on the ground where he had conquered, and caused the clergy to sing the Te Deum. The Crusaders then set up their tents around that of the king, and passed the night in rejoicing over the victory they had won.

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Next day the Crusaders had still stronger reason to congratulate themselves on the good fortune which had attended their arms. At daybreak, looking towards Damietta, they observed that columns of smoke were rising from the bosom of the city, and that the whole horizon was on fire. Without delay the King of France sent one of his knights and a body of cavalry to ascertain the cause; and, on reaching Damietta, the knight found the gates open, and learned on entering that the Saracens, after setting fire to that part called the Fonde, which was a row of shops and warehouses, had abandoned the city. Returning to the camp at a gallop, while his men remained to extinguish the fire, the knight announced the glad tidings to the saint-king.

'Sire,' said he, 'I bring good news; Damietta may be taken possession of without striking a blow.'

It was not very easy, even after hearing all, to credit this knight's report; and Louis was somewhat suspicious of a stratagem. However, he gave orders for marching towards the gates, and moving slowly, and with much caution, took possession. It was clear that the city had been abandoned by its defenders; and the king, the cardinal legate, and the clergy, having formed in

procession, walked to the grand mosque, which was speedily converted into a Christian church, and sang psalms of praise and thanksgiving.

And now the Crusaders, with Damietta in their possession, were indeed elate, and rather inclined to magnify their successes; and the Queen of France and the Countess of Anjou, and the other ladies were brought ashore and lodged in the palaces of the city; and five hundred knights were charged with the duty of guarding the ramparts and towers; and the warriors of the Cross, encamping in the plain outside the gates, gave themselves up to dissipation, and deluded themselves with the idea that no enterprise was too difficult for them to accomplish.

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'Now,' said the French, as they quaffed the red wine and rattled the dice-box, 'we have only to await the coming of our companions from the coast of Syria, and of the Count of Poitiers, with the *arrière ban* of France, to undertake the conquest of Egypt.'

'Ay,' said others, 'and then let the Saracens and their sultan tremble.'

'Nothing,' echoed a third party, 'can withstand the warriors of France, when animated by the presence and example of their king.'

'I dislike all this boasting,' remarked Bisset, the English knight, to Walter Espec and Guy Muschamp, 'and, albeit I wish not to be thought a prophet of evil, I predict that it will end in mischief and disaster.'

'The saints forbid,' exclaimed Guy, gaily. 'For my part I dread nothing but the thought of being devoured by some of the crocodiles which, men say, are hatched in the waters of the Nile.'

'Nevertheless, mark my words,' said Bisset, more gravely than it was his wont to speak. 'At present the Frenchmen believe that, because they have plied their swords with some effect, that henceforth the Saracens will fly before their scabbards. Now they are all singing songs of triumph; ere long, if you and I live, we'll hear them singing to a very different tune.'

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'Ah, sir knight,' said Walter, smiling, 'you say this from national jealousy, and because they call us "English tails."'

"English tails!" repeated Bisset, scornfully; 'I tell you, for your comfort, that when the hour of real danger arrives, we "English tails" are likely to find our way so deep into the Saracens' ranks, that not a bragging Frenchman will venture to come nigh the tails of our war-steeds.'

'By St. John of Beverley,' exclaimed Guy, laughing merrily, 'I cannot but think that the French and English Crusaders are already inclined to hate each other much more than either French or English hate the Saracens.'

CHAPTER XIII.

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INCURSIONS.

AND what were the sultan and the Saracens saying and doing while the Crusaders were establishing themselves at Damietta, and delighting their souls with visions of the conquest of Egypt?

In order to ascertain we must, in imagination, pass from the camp at Damietta to the palace of Cairo.

Melikul Salih was under the influence of a malady which his physicians pronounced to be incurable. On that point there was no mistake. Nevertheless, when pigeons carried to Cairo intelligence of the French king's victory and Fakreddin's defeat, the sultan roused himself to energy, and, after having sentenced fifty of the principal fugitives to execution, and taken Fakreddin severely to task for allowing his men to be vanquished, he caused himself to be removed to Mansourah. On reaching that city, Melikul Salih expended his remaining strength in rallying his army and strengthening the fortifications, and at the same time sent men to attack the Crusaders in their camp, to kill the Franks and cut off their heads,—promising a golden besant for every head brought to him.

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The Arab cavalry of the Desert, and bands of horsemen belonging to that wild nation known as the Karismians, were employed on this service; and the Crusaders found themselves exposed to dangers against which it seemed impossible to guard. As wild animals prowl around the habitations of men on the watch for prey, so around the Christian camp prowled the Arabs and Karismians by day and by night. If even at noon a soldier wandered from the camp he was lost; and, in hours of darkness, sentinel after sentinel disappeared, and knight after knight was struck dead, as if by invisible hands. Every morning the Crusaders had to listen to some new tale of horror which made their blood run cold.

Ere the Arabs and Karismians had carried alarm into the camp of the Crusaders, many of the warriors of the West had begun to suffer from the climate of Egypt; and among others who were prostrated, was the old Earl of March. For a time he seemed likely to fall a victim to the malady; but the natural vigour of his constitution at length prevailed; and he had almost recovered, when

a sudden inroad of the enemy exposed him to a new peril.

It was the afternoon of an August day; and Earl Patrick was arraying himself to ride into Damietta to attend a council of war. His white charger stood at the entrance of his pavilion, and there sat Walter Espec, looking somewhat gloomy, as many of the armed pilgrims were already doing, when Guy Muschamp approached with a countenance from which much of the habitual gaiety had vanished.

'What tidings?' asked Walter, eagerly.

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'On my faith, good Walter,' answered Guy, shaking his head, 'I now know of a truth that this Damietta is not quite such a paradise as we fancied when gazing at it from the sea.'

'Serpents often lurk where flowers grow,' said Walter; 'but what new tidings of mishap have clouded your brow?'

'Nothing less,' replied Guy, 'than that these foul Saracens have been marvellously near us. No later than last night they entered the camp, surprised the watch of Lord Courtenay, and this morning his body was found on the table; his head was gone.'

'By the saints!' exclaimed Walter, 'such warfare, waged by invisible foes, may well daunt the bravest; and albeit I trust much from the protection of the Holy Katherine, yet I at times feel a vague dread of being the next victim.'

At that moment, and almost ere Walter had spoken, there arose loud and shrill cries, and then loud shouts of alarm.

'By good St. George!' shouted Hugh Bisset, rushing in, 'the Saracens are upon us; they are carrying off the Lord Perron, and his brother the Lord Duval. Arm, arm, brave squires. To the rescue! to the rescue!'

As Bisset gave the alarm, the Earl of March came forth. He was arrayed in chain-mail, and his helmet was on his brow.

'What, ho!' cried the earl, with lofty indignation; 'do the sons of darkness, who worship Mahound and Termagaunt, venture where my white lion ramps in his field of red? Out upon them! My axe and shield.'

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Mounting his white steed, the earl caused one of the sides of his pavilion to be raised, and issuing forth, spurred against the foe with shouts of 'Let him who loves me follow me! Holy Cross! Holy Cross!' Nor did the aged warrior confine his hostility to words. Encountering the leader of the Saracens face to face, he bravely commenced the attack, and, after a brief conflict, with his heavy axe cleft the infidel from the crown almost to the chest.

'Pagan dog!' exclaimed the earl, as the Saracen fell lifeless to the ground; 'I devote thine impure soul to the powers of hell.'

But this achievement was the last which Earl Patrick was destined to perform. As he spurred forward to pursue his success, his steed became refractory, and he was flung violently to the ground. Ere his friends could come to his aid, the Saracens gave him several blows with their clubs, and he would have been killed on the spot but for the arrival of Bisset, with Guy Muschamp and Walter Espec, who, having mounted, now came with a rush to the rescue. A sharp conflict then took place. Guy, advancing as gaily as if he had been in the tiltyard at Wark, gallantly unhorsed one Saracen with the point of his lance. Walter, going more gravely into the combat, killed another with his falchion, at the use of which he was expert. After much trouble the French lords were rescued; and such of the Saracens as had not fallen, fled, and galloped along the banks of the Nile.

Meanwhile the squires and grooms of the Earl of March raised him from the ground; and, supported by them, he contrived to reach his tent; but he was much bruised, and so exhausted that he could not muster voice to speak. When, however, surgeons and physicians were called, they expressed themselves hopefully, and, not comprehending his dangerous state, bled him freely in the arm, and then administering a composing draught, left him under the charge of the squires.

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As evening was falling, the Earl of Salisbury, after a long conference with King Louis, during which the unfortunate quarrel of the English and French Crusaders were discussed with a view of averting fatal consequences, left the royal quarters, in company with the Lord of Joinville.

'Seneschal,' said Salisbury, 'I would fain visit the Earl of March; and I pray you to bear me company.'

'Right willingly,' replied Joinville; 'for he is a man of great valour and renown, and wise in council; and it were ill for our expedition if his wounds should prove fatal.'

'And how fares the earl?' asked Salisbury, as they reached the tent over which ramped that ancient lion argent, so terrible on many a foughten field.

'My lord,' said Walter Espec, in a hushed voice, as they came to the entrance, 'the earl sleeps; so pray tread softly, lest you should disturb his repose.'

They did so, and entering, found the earl lying on his mantle of minever, which covered him.

'He sleeps soundly,' whispered Walter, looking up.

'Boy,' said Salisbury, solemnly, 'he sleeps the sleep that knows no waking.'

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Walter stooped down, and perceived that Salisbury was right. The earl was dead.

'May paradise be open to him,' said Salisbury, crossing himself with pious fervour.

'Amen,' said Joinville. 'May his soul repose in holy flowers.'

CHAPTER XIV.

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A RENEGADE.

IT was a sad day for Guy Muschamp and Walter Espec, when they suddenly found themselves deprived of the protection of the aged war-chief under whose banner they had embarked for the East. However, they were not long without patrons. Guy attached himself to the Lord of Joinville, who was his mother's kinsman. Walter became squire to the Earl of Salisbury, and in that capacity joined the English Crusaders. In fact, Longsword, having heard from Joinville of Walter's adventure at Cyprus, took a decided liking to the young northern man, examined him as to his lineage, his parentage, and his education, heard the sad story of his brother's disappearance, and spoke words of such kind encouragement, that the tears started to Walter's eyes, and his brave heart was quite won.

One day, soon after entering Longsword's service, Walter was standing at the entrance of the tent occupied by the chief of the English Crusaders, now thinking somewhat sadly of the green fields and oak forests of his native land, now longing to behold some of the wonders of the Nile, when a man of forty or thereabouts, handsome and well-dressed as a Frank, presented himself, and bowed low.

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'You are of the English nation?' said he, in French.

'Yes,' replied Walter, examining him with curiosity.

'And you serve the great English lord, who is called Longsword?'

'It is my pride to serve that famous warrior,' replied Walter, quietly.

'And I would fain speak with him if you could obtain me a hearing.'

Walter shook his head significantly.

'Before I can make such an attempt,' said he, 'I must learn who you are, and what you want.'

'My name is Beltran. I am a Frank by birth, but for nine years I have been an inhabitant of Egypt.'

'Nine years!' exclaimed Walter. 'By the Holy Cross, you must know the country well-nigh as intimately as the Egyptians themselves.'

'Much knowledge I do possess of the country, and of the wonders it contains.'

'Well,' said Walter, 'I will put your knowledge to the test. Whence comes this river, the Nile, of which so many stories are told? Is it true that it takes its rise in the terrestrial paradise?'

'In truth,' replied Beltran, 'I would I could answer your question to your satisfaction. It is the report of the country that the Nile does come from the terrestrial paradise. But nothing certain is known on the subject. I have heard that the sultan has attempted to learn whence it came, by sending experienced persons to follow the course of it.'

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'Yes,' said Walter, eagerly.

'These persons, on their return,' continued Beltran, 'reported that they had followed the river till they came to a large mountain of perpendicular rocks, which it was impossible to climb, and over these rocks fell the water. And it seemed to them that on the top of this mountain were many trees; and they saw strange wild beasts, such as lions, elephants, and other sorts, which came to gaze at them. And, not daring to advance further, they returned to the sultan.'

'And this is all that is known?' said Walter.

'Yes,' replied Beltran. 'Where the Nile enters Egypt, it spreads in branches over the plain. One of them flows to Damietta; a second to Alexandria; a third to Tunis; and a fourth to Rexi. About St. Remy's Day it expands itself into seven branches, and thence flows over the plains. When the waters retire, the labourers appear and till the ground with ploughs without wheels, and then sow wheat, barley, rice, and cumin, which succeed so well that nowhere are finer crops.'

'And whence,' asked Walter, 'comes this yearly increase of water?'

'I cannot tell, except that it comes from God's mercy. Some say that this overflowing is caused by heavy rains in Abyssinia; but many Arabs believe that a drop of dew falls into the river, and

causes the inundation; and some declare they have seen it fall, like a star. The night when it falls is called the "drop-night." But certain it is that, were it not to happen, Egypt, from the great heat, would produce nothing; for, being near the rising sun, it scarcely ever rains, save at very long intervals.'

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'Of a truth,' observed Walter, 'all this sounds strange to English ears.'

'Where the river enters Egypt,' continued Beltran, 'there are expert persons, who may be called the fishermen of this stream, and who, in the evening, cast their nets into the water, and in the morning frequently find many spices in them, such as ginger, cinnamon, rhubarb, cloves, lignum-aloës, and other good things, which they sell by weight.'

'But how come the spices into the water?' enquired Walter.

'Well, it is the belief of the country that they come from the terrestrial paradise, and that the wind blows them down from these fine trees, as, in your forests, the wind blows down the old dry wood. But such is mere surmise, albeit widely credited.'

'And the water of the Nile is deemed sweet to the taste?' said Walter.

'None in the world more sweet. The Arabs hold that, if Mahomet had once tasted it, he would have prayed that he might live for ever, so as unceasingly to enjoy its sweetness.'

'And yet it seems so turbid to the eye?'

'True; but, when the natives drink of it, it is clear as crystal. Towards evening, crowds come down to get water, and especially women, who, on such occasions, are decorated with all the ornaments they possess. You must understand that they come in companies, because it is not deemed decorous for a woman to go alone. And marvellous it is to see how they balance the water-pots on their head, and walk gracefully up steep banks which even you—agile as you may be—might have some difficulty in clambering up without any burden. Then they put into their vessels almonds or beans, which they shake well; and on the morrow the water is wondrous clear, and more refreshing than the daintiest wine.'

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'On my faith!' said Walter, 'all this is so curious that, were it a time of truce, I should be tempted to adventure up this river and behold some of the strange things of which you tell. But here comes my lord.' And, as he spoke, the Earl of Salisbury rode up, and, while Walter held the stirrup, dismounted.

Immediately the stranger stepped forward, and, humbling himself, with respect offered Salisbury some lard in pots, and a variety of sweet-smelling flowers.

'I bring them to you, noble earl,' said the man, in French, 'because you are cousin of Prince Richard, who is called Earl of Cornwall, and because you are nephew of the Crusader whose memory is held in most respect and dread by the Saracens.'

'Of whom speak you?' asked Salisbury, a little surprised.

'I speak of King Richard of England,' was the reply; 'for he performed such deeds when he was in the Holy Land that the Saracens, when their horses are frightened at a bush or a shadow, cry out, "What! dost think King Richard is there?" In like manner, when their children cry, their mothers say to them, "Hush, hush! or I will bring King Richard of England to you."''

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'On my faith!' said the earl, looking more and more surprised, 'I cannot comprehend you; for, albeit speaking French, and wearing the dress of a Frank, you seem from your words to be an inhabitant of this country.'

'It is true,' replied the man, slowly. 'You must know that I am a Christian renegade.'

'A Christian renegade!' exclaimed Salisbury, with pious horror. And then asked, 'But who are you, and why became you a renegade?'

'Well, it came to pass in this wise,' answered the man, frankly. 'I was born in Poitiers, whence I followed Richard, Earl of Cornwall, to the East, and found my way to Egypt, where I have acquired some wealth.'

'But,' demanded the earl, indignantly, 'know you not that if you were to die while leading your present life, you would descend straight to hell, and be for ever damned?'

'In truth,' replied the man, 'I know full well that there is not a better religion than that of the Christians. But what can I do? Suppose I returned to it and had to go back to France, I should assuredly suffer great poverty, and be continually reproached all my days, and be called "Renegado! renegado!"'

'Even with that prospect you ought not to hesitate,' said the earl; 'for surely it would be much better to suffer the scorn of the world than await your sentence in the day of judgment, when your evil deeds will be made manifest, and damnation will follow.'

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'Nevertheless,' protested the renegade, 'I had rather live at my ease, as I am, like a rich man, than become an object of contempt.'

'I cannot brook your presence,' said the earl, growing very indignant: 'therefore begone; I can have no more to say to you.'

'Be not over-hasty,' said the renegade; 'for be it known to you, noble Earl, that I have that to tell which it will profit you much to know.'

'Speak, then,' said the earl, hesitating, 'but be brief; for my patience is not so long as was my father's sword.'

'It is of a rich caravan I would speak,' said the renegade, with a glance and a gesture of peculiar significance.

'Ah!' exclaimed the earl, pricking up his ears, and listening with evident interest.

'It is on its way to Alexandria, and will pass within six leagues of Damietta within four days,' said the renegade. 'And whoever can capture that caravan may gain an immense booty.'

'And how does this concern me?' asked the earl.

'My lord,' replied the renegade, 'I see not wherefore you should not seize the prize as well as another.'

'But how am I to trust your report? How am I to know that your intent is not to betray me?'

'My lord,' answered the renegade, 'I am in your power. I will answer for the truth of my story with my head; and, I promise you, I am as yet neither so old nor so weary of life as to hazard it needlessly.'

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'One question further,' said the earl, who was by this time much excited with the prospect of a rich booty. 'How am I, being in a strange country, to find this caravan of which you speak?'

'I myself will be your guide,' replied the renegade.

'And wherefore do you hazard so much to put me in possession of this prize, when, by doing so, you expose yourself to the enmity of the Egyptians, among whom you have cast your lot?'

'Well, my lord,' said the renegade, after a pause, 'I will be frank. I expect my share of the spoil; and, besides, I see very clearly that this army of pilgrims is likely to conquer Egypt, in spite of all the resistance sultans and emirs may make; and, at such a time, I would fain have some powerful lord among the conquerors to befriend me.'

'Ha!' exclaimed Longsword, smiling grimly, 'I am now convinced.'

'Of what, noble earl?'

'Either that I must have the caravan or your head.'

CHAPTER XV.

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CAPTURE OF A CARAVAN.

WHILE King Louis lay at Damietta, awaiting the arrival of Crusaders from France and Syria, ere venturing to march into Egypt, the utmost disorder began to prevail in the camp. The armed pilgrims, left to inactivity in a delightful climate, under a bright sky, and surrounded by beautiful scenery, appeared once more to forget the oaths they had taken, and indulged in still worse riot and debauchery than when they wintered in Cyprus. Gambling was their daily occupation; and the rattle of the dice-box was constantly heard through the camp. And men with the Cross of Christ upon their shoulders had the name of the devil continually on their tongues. Nor was this the worst. Vice reigned all around in its grossest form; and the saint-king complained mournfully to the Lord of Joinville, that, within a stone's-throw of his own pavilion, houses of infamous repute were kept by his personal attendants.

At the same time, the jealousy between the French and English grew more and more intense, and threatened disastrous consequences. In vain did Louis exert his influence to restrain the insolence of his countrymen. The English were constantly reminded of their inferiority as a nation, and exposed to such insults as it was difficult to brook. Bitter taunts and insinuations of cowardice were unhesitatingly used to mortify the island warriors; and men who had disobeyed their king's mandate, and forfeited lands and living to combat the Saracens, were, day by day, driven nearer the conclusion that they would ere long be under the necessity of drawing their swords against their fellow-soldiers of the Cross.

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Of all the French Crusaders, however, none were so foolishly insolent as Robert, Count of Artois, brother of King Louis. From a boy the French prince had been remarkable for the ferocity of his temper, and had early signalled himself by throwing a cheese at the face of his mother's chivalrous admirer, Thibault of Champagne. For some reason or other, the Count of Artois conceived a strong aversion to the Earl of Salisbury, and treated Longsword with the utmost insolence. And, though the Earl only retaliated by glances of cold contempt, it was known that his patience was wearing away, and it was feared that there would yet be bloodshed.

'By my father's sword!' said he, speaking partly to himself, partly to Walter Espec, one day after returning to his tent, 'I fear me that my spirit will not much longer brook the reproaches of

that vain prince. Even this day, as he spoke, my hand stole to the hilt of my sword; and I panted to defy him to mortal combat on the spot.'

'My lord,' replied Walter, gravely and cautiously, 'I perceived that, albeit striving to be calm, you felt your ancestral blood boiling in your veins. And, in truth, I marvel not that such should have been the case; and yet—'

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'And yet—Well, speak freely. I listen.'

'Well, my lord,' continued Walter, 'I was about to say that it seemed to me the part of a wise man, and one so renowned in arms, not to deign to answer a fool according to his folly.'

'Doubtless you are right,' replied the earl. 'And sinful, I feel, and calculated to provoke God's vengeance, would it be to draw the sword against one marked with the Cross, and engaged, like ourselves, in this holy war. Nevertheless, my patience may come to an end, as the patience of better men has done in such cases. However, a truce to such talk for the present; and see that, at daybreak, this renegade is ready to guide us on our expedition after the caravan; for I am weary of inactivity, and eager for change of scene.'

Accordingly, preparations for the expedition were made; and, next morning, Salisbury and his knights dashed away from Damietta to intercept the caravan that was reported to be on its way to Alexandria. For a time they waited patiently at a place where it was expected to pass. But this mode of spending time was not much to the taste of men whose spirits were raised by the novelty of everything around. Panting for action, Longsword left Walter Espec with a band of horse and Beltran the renegade to keep watch, and, at the head of his knights, went off in quest of adventure.



"I cannot but think," said Walter, "our post is one of danger, if the guards of this caravan are so numerous as reported. Nevertheless, it shall never be told that, for fear of odds, I retreated from a post which I had been entrusted to maintain."—p. 99.

Hours passed; evening fell and deepened into night; and still neither the caravan nor the warriors who had determined to capture it made their appearance; and Walter and the renegade, for different reasons, began to entertain considerable alarm. As morning approached, however, one point was explained. In fact, a spy employed by Beltran reached the rendezvous, with intelligence that the Earl's intention to attack the caravan having been suspected, had caused the delay; but that, being aware that he was out of the way, its guards were preparing to hasten forward at dawn of day, confidently hoping to pass without being assailed, or to beat down any opposition that might be offered to its progress.

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'On my faith,' said Walter, as he learned how matters were, 'I cannot but think our post is one of danger, if the guards of this caravan are so numerous as reported. Nevertheless, it shall never be told that, for fear of odds, I retreated from a post which I had been entrusted to maintain.' And he proceeded to place his men in such a position that they might elude the observation of the Saracens till close at hand, and then rush out and take the guards of the caravan by surprise.

Meanwhile, day was breaking; and, in the distance, Walter and his companions could descry the caravan, apparently guarded by a strong force: and gradually the white turbans and green caftans and long spears became more and more distinct. It was clear that, in the event of Salisbury not returning in time, Walter would have to fight against great odds; and the return of the earl in time to aid him now appeared so improbable that the squire ceased

even to hope for his banners, and resolved to take what fortune might be sent him. Suddenly, however, a sound—a whisper on the breeze, and the heavy tread of horses—reached his ears; and, gazing round, he descried a body of horsemen approaching in the opposite direction from which the caravan came.

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'Now, may the saints be praised, and may we be for ever grateful! exclaimed Walter, with a joyful heart, as he closely examined the banner that approached; 'for here come my Lord of Salisbury and his men of might.'

In a few minutes the Earl reached the spot, and, rapidly comprehending the situation of affairs, prepared for action. But there was hardly occasion to strike a blow. No sooner did the English move towards the caravan, and no sooner had the Saracens an opportunity of judging what manner of men their assailants were, than they halted in surprise, and gave way to terror; and when the Earl, on his bay charger, spurred forward, shouting his battle-cry, they only waited long enough to discharge a shower of arrows, and then fled like hares before the hounds. Routed in every direction, they left the caravan to its fate; and the English, pausing from the fray, found themselves in possession of oxen, buffaloes, camels, mules, and asses, laden with gold and silver, and silks and paintings.

'And now for Damietta!' said Longsword; 'for this is in truth a rich prize; and let us not risk the

loss of it by loitering on the way.'

And without waste of time—for a rescue was not impossible—they secured their booty, and marched with what speed they could towards Damietta. [101]

'Sir squire,' said Lord Robert de Vere, riding up to Walter Espec, whose conduct Longsword had commended, 'your position in the earl's absence was not quite so pleasant as a bed of roses.'

'In truth, my lord,' replied Walter, thoughtfully, 'now that the danger is over, I cannot but deem that you came just in time to save us from death or captivity.'

'And you marvelled that we tarried so long?'

'Much,' replied Walter; 'and had given up all hope of your return. However,' added he, 'I perceive that your time was by no means wasted.'

'You speak truly,' said De Vere. 'Never were men more successful in an adventure. By accident, we found ourselves hard by the castle of some wealthy Saracen, and determined to seize it; so, overcoming all resistance, we took it by storm, and found therein much booty, and a bevy of Saracen ladies; and, having given them to understand that they were captives of our swords and lances, we are carrying them to Damietta.'

'On my faith!' said Walter, laughing, 'Fortune seems to bestow her favours liberally on the pilgrims from England. No saying what great exploits my Lord of Salisbury and his knights may yet perform! One day we seize a castle and a caravan; another day it may be a kingdom.'

'And yet,' observed De Vere, the tone of his voice suddenly changing as he spoke, 'I am seldom in solitude without experiencing a vague feeling that calamity is impending.'

Now this adventure, successful as it appeared, involved the English Crusaders in serious troubles. When Salisbury, on his bay charger, rode into Damietta, with the captive Saracen ladies and the captured caravan, the French were moved with envy, and did not fail to express their sentiments in strong language. Perhaps the English did not bear their good fortune so meekly as they might have done. In any case, the French grew more and more exasperated; and at length the quarrel reached such a stage that the French, availing themselves of superior numbers, had recourse to violence, and forcibly carried off part of the booty which, at great peril and with some labour, Longsword and his men had won. [102]

CHAPTER XVI.

 [103]

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

ON the morning after the return of the Earl of Salisbury to Damietta, and the violent proceedings of the French Crusaders against the English companions of their expedition, King Louis summoned a council of war to deliberate on the measures most likely to lead to the conquest of Egypt—the grand object of the saintly monarch's ambition.

By this time arrivals from various quarters had swelled the army that, under the banner of St. Denis, lay encamped at Damietta. Thither, under the grand masters of their orders, had come the Templars and the Hospitallers, whose discipline and knowledge of the East rendered them such potent allies. Thither had come the Duke of Burgundy, who had passed the winter in the Morea; and the Prince of Achaia, who forgot the perils surrounding the Latin empire of Constantinople, in his eagerness to combat the Moslem on the banks of the Nile; thither, recovered from their fright, had come the Crusaders whose vessels the storm had driven on the Syrian coast; and thither, with the *arrière ban* of France, Alphonse, Count of Poitiers—one of that princely quaternion of brothers which came hither at this voyage, and exceeded each other in some quality—Louis the holiest, Alphonse the subtlest, Charles the stoutest, and Robert the proudest.' No fewer than sixty thousand men—twenty thousand of whom were cavalry—were now encamped around the oriflamme; and with such an army, led by such chiefs, the saint-king would have been more than mortal if he had not flattered himself with the hope of accomplishing something great, to be recorded by chroniclers and celebrated by minstrels. [104]

And the princes and nobles assembled to hold a council of war; and Louis, with his crown on his brow, took his place to preside, with that serene dignity which distinguished him. But, ere the proceedings began, the Earl of Salisbury rose, and intimated his desire to address the king on a subject of great importance. Louis immediately signified consent; and the earl, raising his hand to ensure silence, proceeded with a calm but resolute air:—

'Sire,' said he, 'I crave your pardon, and that of the princes and noble warriors here assembled, for trespassing upon their time. But I have that to state which demands your attention and interference, inasmuch as it nearly concerns the safety and welfare and honour of the army of pilgrims, of which you are the recognised chief. Sire,' continued the earl, 'however others may plead ignorance of the circumstances, you, at least, are fully informed and well aware that, in taking the Cross, and coming from a distant land to aid you in the recovery of the Holy Sepulchre, I made sacrifices of no ordinary kind. My doing so exposed me to the wrath of King Henry, my kinsman and liege lord, who took from me my earldom and all my substance. This, [105]

however, he did judicially, not in his anger, or any violence of self-will; and I do not blame him. But I came hither with my countrymen, and we have fought as faithfully for God's cause as any man in your army. Nevertheless we have been exposed to insults and injuries which brave men cannot long tolerate. The chief offender is your brother, the Count of Artois. I lay my complaint before you, and I ask you to judge between us. I promise to abide by your decision, and, if I am found to be in the wrong, to render every satisfaction for my fault. So help me God, and good St. George!

Louis listened with attention to the earl's speech. Indeed, the grandeur of Longsword's aspect, and his eloquence, so frank and so manly, produced a strong impression both on the king and the assemblage, and many of the French, notwithstanding their prejudices, murmured approbation.

'This English earl,' said they, 'speaks words of truth and soberness, and he asks nothing more than the justice that ought not to be denied to the meanest man in the army of pilgrims.'

Louis, however, paused, and appeared to be in extreme perplexity.

'William Longsword,' he said, at length, 'you have spoken boldly; and I do not deny that you have spoken the truth. The Lord, who is ignorant of nothing, is aware of the injuries you have suffered. But what can I do? You know how serious an affair it would be for me to offend any of my nobles in the position in which I now am, and it therefore becomes you to exercise the patience becoming a soldier of the Cross.'

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And now the Count of Artois started up, his face flushed and his limbs trembling with rage:

'King,' exclaimed he, in accents of menace, 'what mean you by the words you have spoken? Do you defend this Englishman and take part with him against Frenchmen, who are of your own country and kindred?'

The countenance of Louis expressed more annoyance than he was in the habit of exhibiting.

'Now, Longsword,' said he, turning with an imploring look to the earl, 'you see the position of affairs, and how easily a quarrel might arise; and God forbid it should occur in an army of Christians. At such a crisis it is necessary to endure much for the sake of Christendom.'

'Sire,' exclaimed Longsword, giving way to his indignation, 'if this is the only answer you can give to my complaint, I advise you to call yourself no longer a king; since you have no longer the privilege of being obeyed, or of administering justice, or punishing offenders.' And rising with a dignity which awed most of those present, he left the council.

'Frenchmen,' said Louis, reproachfully, 'why do you persecute this man? What madness excites you?'

'I do it,' cried the Count of Artois, 'because I dislike the tailed English, and because I think the army of Crusaders would be well purged of them.'

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But none present ventured to give the count the support he seemed to expect; and the wise and prudent bent their brows, and intimated their disapprobation.

'The matter is too serious to be lightly spoken of,' said they, significantly; 'and this dispute is a sad presage of future events; and well will it be if the anger of the Most High is not provoked by such offences.'

'And now,' said Louis, anxious to drop the subject, 'let us to the business on which we assembled to deliberate. Let us consult on the line of march, and on the measures to be taken for completing the conquest of Egypt.'

'Sire,' said John de Valery, a baron, whose probity and courage were the admiration of the army, 'it seems to me that the best and safest policy is to undertake the siege of Alexandria. That city has a commodious port, where the fleet could find shelter, and where munitions and provisions could be procured with facility. My voice, therefore, is for marching to Alexandria.'

Many of those whose experience in war was greatest—among whom were the Master of the Temple and the Master of the Hospital—echoed John de Valery's opinion.

'For my part,' said the Count of Artois, with his characteristic rashness, 'I dislike timid counsels. Why not at once attack Cairo, which is the capital of Egypt? When you wish to kill the serpent,' added he, 'you ought always to endeavour to crush his head. Then, I say, let us on to Cairo.'

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A warm and somewhat angry discussion ensued; and Louis, having given his opinion in favour of marching to Cairo, the project was adopted: and it was resolved to leave Queen Margaret, with the Countesses of Artois, Poitiers, and Anjou, at Damietta, to send the fleet with provisions and engines of war up the Nile, and then to march with banners displayed along the banks of the river.

'Gentlemen,' said Louis, as he dismissed the council, 'I feel assured that we shall have no reason to repent adopting the bolder of the projects discussed this day; for, with an army of sixty thousand men, and the blessing of God on our endeavours, I see no reason to despair of accomplishing something great against the enemies of Christ.'

'Sire,' replied John de Valery, 'may God grant that your hopes be realised.'

And the nobles and princes separated to make the necessary preparations for marching to Cairo.

Little did they foresee the terrible circumstances under which many of them were to reach that city.

CHAPTER XVII.

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FACE TO FACE.

WHILE the Crusaders were preparing to leave Damietta, march up the Nile, and attack Cairo, Melikul Salih, after struggling desperately with the great destroyer, yielded to his fate, and breathed his last at Mansourah. The death of the sultan was regarded by the emirs as most untimely; for his son, Touran Chah, was then in Mesopotamia, and they were apprehensive of the most serious troubles. At this crisis, however, a woman, whose great ability enabled her to comprehend the emergency and to deal with it, suggested measures for averting the ruin with which the empire of Egypt was menaced.

Her name was Chegger Eddour, and she is said to have been an Armenian. She had originally been brought to Cairo as merchandise, and purchased by Melikul Salih as a slave. But her wit and beauty won the sultan's heart, and he became so enamoured that he elevated her to the position of favourite sultana, and carried her about with him wherever he went. One son whom she had by the sultan died young. Nevertheless her influence daily increased; and the Arabian historians, while eloquent in praise of her courage, agree in saying, that 'no woman surpassed her in beauty, and no man excelled her in genius.'

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No sooner did Melikul Salih depart this life, than Chegger Eddour assembled the principal emirs at Mansourah, and made them acknowledge Touran Chah as sultan. Moreover, she impressed upon them the necessity of concealing the death of her husband till the arrival of his successor. The policy she recommended was adopted. Orders were still issued in Melikul Salih's name; the Mamelukes still guarded the gates of the palace as if he had been living; and prayers for his recovery were still offered up in the mosques, where the Moslems worshipped. All these precautions, which were the work of the sultana, were skilfully taken, and for a time the Saracens hoped that Melikul Salih might yet recover from his malady, and save them from the foe by whom they were threatened.

Ere long, however, suspicion was aroused, and it became more and more difficult to conceal the truth. Of itself this was sufficient to create consternation; but, at the same time, rumour brought to Mansourah intelligence that the French, having left Damietta, and marched in hostile array along the banks of the Nile, had reached Pharescour; and the approach of the Crusaders converted the consternation into panic, which rapidly extended its influence to Cairo. Every cheek grew pale; and the Egyptians exhibited such anxiety and terror as had never before been felt in their cities.

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At this crisis, Fakreddin, to whom the sultana had entrusted the command of the Egyptian army, took measures to reanimate his countrymen with courage and confidence, and called upon them to hazard their lives freely for their religion.

'In the name of God, and Mahomet his prophet,' said the emir, 'hasten, great and small—the cause of God has need of your arms and of your wealth; the Franks—Heaven curse them!—are arrived in our country, with their standards and their swords. They wish to obtain possession of our cities, and to ravage our provinces. What Mussulman can refuse to march against them, and avenge the glory of Islamism?'

But, at Cairo and Mansourah, the Egyptians only answered with sighs and groans; and, at first, Fakreddin's appeal failed to produce the effect he intended. The emir, however, was not dismayed. Indeed, he showed a courage worthy of the fame he had won by his military exploits, and gradually rallied the more courageous of his countrymen around him. Marching from Mansourah, he encamped at Djedilé, on the side of the canal known as the Achmoun, which has a deep bed and steep banks; and halted with the Nile on his left and the city in his rear.

'Here,' said he, addressing his men, 'I await the invaders. Be brave; we will yet avenge Islamism; and on Sebastian's-day I will dine in the scarlet tent of the French king.'

Meanwhile, the Crusaders continued their march, and they soon approached Mansourah. At this point, however, their progress was arrested by two obstacles—the canal of Achmoun, and the army of Fakreddin.

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'Who is the leader of that army?' asked King Louis, as he looked earnestly across the canal to where the Saracens were encamped.

'Sire,' answered one of his knights, 'it is Fakreddin, the emir, who fled from Damietta; but who, nevertheless, as I learn, does not hesitate to boast that it is his intention to dine in your red tent on St. Sebastian's-day.'

'Does the emir intend to dine in my tent on St. Sebastian's-day?' said Louis, mildly; 'however, I

will take good care to prevent him.'

'In truth, sire,' said the knight, smiling, 'I hold that you are much more likely to dine in the sultan's palace.'

'Be that as it may,' replied the king, 'one thing is certain. We and our foes are now face to face.'

And so they were. Face to face, separated only by the canal Achmoun, Christian and Moslem, headed by the King of France and the Emir Fakreddin, lay encamped and awaiting a favourable opportunity to fight, and to conquer or die for their countries and religions.

And it speedily appeared that face to face they were for some time likely to remain.

CHAPTER XVIII.

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DELAY AND DANGER.

IT was January 1250, and King Louis, at the head of the Crusaders, was still on the banks of the Achmoun. But it was not from reluctance to prosecute their enterprise that the armed pilgrims submitted to delay. The aspect of the country through which they had passed on their way from Damietta had not been such as to diminish their ambition to be conquerors. It cannot be doubted that the fertility of the land of the Pharaohs must have made them more and more eager to become its masters.

In truth, there cannot be a more delightful sight than Egypt at either of two seasons of the year. Ascend some mountain in the month of July or August, when the Nile has risen, and you behold a vast sea, in which appear numerous towns and villages, with causeways leading from place to place, the whole interspersed with groves and fruit-trees, of which the tops are only visible, and bounded by woods and mountains. But it is the peculiarity of the Nile, unlike other rivers, which, in overflowing lands, wash away and exhaust their vivific moisture, that its waters serve to fatten and enrich the soil. Accordingly, ascend the same mountain in January or February, when the waters have subsided and the husbandman has done his work, and the country is like one beautiful meadow, dotted with flocks and herds, covered with crops of corn, enamelled with flowers, and perfumed with the blossoms of oranges and lemons.

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Nor, considering the marvellous history of Egypt, could the imaginations of the Crusaders be otherwise than fascinated by the prospect of looking with their own eyes on its cities, its pyramids, its obelisks, its mummy pits, and all the relics of its ancient and mysterious civilisation. Persians, Macedonians, Romans, and Saracens, had come hither before them as conquerors. But it may be doubted whether the warriors of Cambyses, or Alexander, or the Cæsars, or Omar, felt a more thorough confidence in their own prowess and destiny, than did the warriors who marched from Damietta under the banner of St. Denis.

It was certainly mortifying to men in so elate a mood to have their progress arrested by a canal; and, in fact, the French warriors seem to have been startled out of their senses by its steep banks and deep bed. At all events, they, instead of looking for a ford, which was certainly the most natural way of getting over their difficulty, commenced the construction of a causeway.

Now, Fakreddin no sooner observed that the Crusaders were at work, than he perceived his advantage, and vowed that the causeway should never be completed; and, while workmen, protected by machines of war and wooden castles, were occupied with its construction, the Saracens spared no pains to retard the operations. As fast as the Crusaders heaped up the sand and stones, the Saracens dug away the earth in front, thus removing the opposite bank to a greater distance; and, moreover, they incessantly showered arrows and javelins at the workmen. Every day brought fresh annoyances; and every day the Saracens became more audacious in their attacks. Every night brought fresh surprises; and, in the conflicts which took place, the Crusaders had not always the best of the struggle.

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'A large body of Turks,' says Joinville, 'made an attack on the Count of Poitiers and me. But be assured they were very well received. It was well for them that they found their way back as they came; but they left behind them great numbers of slain.'

'One night the Turks brought an engine, called by them *la perriere*, a terrible engine to do mischief, and placed it opposite the chas-chateils, which Sir Walter Curel and I were guarding. From this engine they flung such quantities of Greek fire, that it was the most horrible sight I ever witnessed. When my companion, the good Sir Walter, saw this shower of fire, he cried out, "Gentlemen, we are all lost without remedy; for should they set fire to our chas-chateils we must be burnt, and if we quit our post we are for ever dishonoured; from which, therefore, I conclude that no one can possibly save us from this peril but God, our benignant creator. I therefore advise all of you, whenever they throw any of this Greek fire, to cast yourselves on your hands and knees and cry for mercy to our Lord, in whom alone resides all power."

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'As soon, therefore, as the Turks threw their fires, we flung ourselves on our hands and knees as the wise man had advised; and, this time, they fell between our two cats, into a hole in front,

which our people had made to extinguish them; and they were instantly put out by a man appointed for that purpose.

'Each time that our good king, St. Louis, heard them make these discharges of fire, he cast himself on the ground, and with extended arms, and eyes turned to the heavens, cried with a loud voice to our Lord, and shedding heavy tears, said—"Good Lord God, preserve thou me, and all thy people:" and, believe me, his sincere prayers were of great service to us. Every time the fire fell near us he sent one of his knights to know how we were, and if the fire had hurt us. One of the discharges from the Turks fell beside a chas-chateil, guarded by the men of the Lord of Courtenay, struck the bank of the river in front and ran on the ground toward them, burning with flames. One of the knights of his guard instantly came to me, crying out, "Help us, my lord, or we are burnt; for there is a long train of Greek fire, which the Saracens have discharged, that is running straight for our castle."

'We immediately hastened thither, and good need was there, for as the knight had said, so it was. We extinguished the fire with much labour and difficulty; for the Saracens, in the meantime, kept up so brisk a shooting from the opposite bank, that we were covered with arrows and bolts.'

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All this time Fakreddin was diligent in procuring what intelligence he could as to the position and plans of the Crusaders. This, however, was not an easy business. Indeed, no intelligence on such subjects could be obtained, save from captives, and the emir, therefore, offered a high reward for every Frank brought to his tent. But the Crusaders, taught by experience, had become marvellously vigilant, and showed a decided aversion to be captured. A Saracen, however, who was an expert swimmer, vowed not to be baffled, and performed an exploit, which Arabian chroniclers, while omitting much more important events, have carefully recorded.

It seems that this Saracen, having determined to carry a Christian as captive to Fakreddin's tent, and claim the reward, fell upon a somewhat whimsical plan for accomplishing his object. Having scooped out a melon, and thrust his head into the cavity, he threw himself into the canal, and swam down the stream in such a way that the melon appeared to float in the water. The trick succeeded in attracting the attention of the Crusaders, and as the melon was passing that part of the bank where the Lord of Joinville was encamped, there was much excitement among his men.

'Let us catch the melon,' cried one.

'Who is bold enough to make the attempt?' asked another.

'On my faith,' said a squire, laughing, 'I see no danger to daunt the most timid.'

As he spoke, the squire, doffing his upper garments, rushed into the water, and, striking out, grasped at the melon. But the adventure did not end so pleasantly as he had anticipated. Scarcely, indeed, had he stretched forward his hand, when he found himself seized by the Saracen, and dragged forcibly away in the direction of the camp on the opposite bank.

At first the Crusaders could hardly believe their eyes. But there was no mistake about it. Their comrade was gone, and a prisoner in the hands of the Saracens; and, as they considered what might be his fate, they raised such shouts of alarm, that their lord was attracted to the spot.

'In St. Denis' name,' said Joinville, after hearing sufficient to be aware of what had occurred, 'tell me, I pray you, who among my fellows has met with this mishap?'

'In truth, my lord,' replied one of the knights, 'it is the English squire who took service with you at Damietta.'

'May the God of his fathers protect him!' exclaimed Joinville, somewhat sadly; 'as matters are, we can do nothing in his behalf.'

And who was the squire, who had entered the service of Joinville at Damietta, and afterwards been taken prisoner by the Saracens?

It was one of the brothers-in-arms. It was Guy Muschamp.



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Scarcely, indeed, had he stretched forward his hand, when he found himself seized by the Saracen, and dragged forcibly away in the direction of the camp on the opposite bank.—p. 118.

CHAPTER XIX.

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THE CAPTIVE.

AT the time when Guy Muschamp was dragged away as a captive to the camp of the Saracens at Djedilé, the emir Fakreddin sat in his pavilion. It was a marvellous tent, in the

centre of the camp, and formed so as to resemble a fortified city, being divided into streets, flanked with towers, and furnished with everything likely to contribute to the luxury of an oriental. In an apartment, ornamented with gold and gems, the emir sat, face to face with a dark-browed Saracen chief, and playing at chess. But the game did not by any means monopolise the attention of the persons engaged in it; for the companion of the emir was no less celebrated a person than Bibars Bendocdar, the chief of the Mamelukes; and between him and Fakreddin there was much discussion as to the best mode of dealing with the enemies who menaced the empire with ruin.

And who was Bibars Bendocdar? It is necessary that we should learn, in order to comprehend the events that were ere long to startle and terrify the nations of Christendom.

At the time when Louis, King of France, undertook his Crusade, it was the custom, when two eastern potentates went to war, for the conqueror to sell the subjects of the vanquished enemy as slaves; and many of these, bought by merchants, were carried to Egypt, and sold to the sultan, who had them trained from boyhood to serve him as soldiers. Carefully were these young captives reared; and, when their beards began to grow, they were taught to draw the bow and wield the sword. After becoming expert in military exercises, they were admitted into that famous body, which Saladin the Great had instituted, and known as Mamelukes. Their privileges were many. They were highly favoured by the sultan, wearing his emblazonments of pure gold, only adding bars of vermilion, with birds or roses or griffins for difference, and acting as his body-guard in time of war, and watching over his safety while he slept.

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It seems that Bibars Bendocdar was originally brought to Egypt as a slave, and, in course of time, enrolled as one of the Mamelukes. As such he rose rapidly. His ambition was intense; and, being both able and unscrupulous, he had no reason to despair of his ambition being one day gratified. No position, indeed, could be more favourable to a man eager to emerge from obscurity to eminence, than that which he occupied; and he not only succeeded in winning the confidence of the sultan, but contrived to insinuate himself into the good graces of the soldiers. In truth, this with him was no difficult matter. He had profoundly studied human nature as it was exhibited around him; and he comprehended, above all things, the arts by which the hearts of fighting men are gained and retained, and the arts also by which military adventurers elevate themselves to supremacy in a state.

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Besides, Bibars Bendocdar had other qualities likely to render him a formidable foe or a dangerous rival. He was skillful as a leader in war, courageous in conflict, cruel in the hour of victory, and remarkable for his penetration, sagacity, and activity. Moreover, he professed great faith in the Mahometan religion, and had great faith also in his own destiny. Such was the man who now watched events with the eagerness of a gambler, and who recognised, not without satisfaction, the danger and disorder, from the bosom of which a leader of courage and audacity might, by rekindling enthusiasm and restoring order, elevate himself to power. He was about to prove himself one of the most formidable foes whom the soldiers of the Cross had ever been under the necessity of encountering.

Into the presence of the Emir Fakreddin and Bibars Bendocdar young Guy Muschamp, drenched and agitated, was carried. Alarmed as he well might be, the squire exhibited a dauntless air and presented a bold front. In fact, his demeanour was such that the Saracen chiefs exchanged glances of surprise.

'Who are you?' asked Fakreddin.

'My name is Muschamp, and I am a subject of the King of England.'

'And what brought you to Egypt?'

'I came to fight for the Holy Sepulchre.'

'And,' asked Bibars Bendocdar, sternly, 'know you not that passage in the Koran which says that they who make war unjustly shall perish?'

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'Saracen,' replied Guy, proudly, 'an Anglo-Norman gentleman does not regulate his conduct by the Koran.'

'However,' said Fakreddin, waving his hand, 'it is needful that you answer some questions as to the army of Franks, and that you answer truly.'

'Saracen,' replied Guy, resolutely, 'I will not answer a question on the subject.'

'Fool!' exclaimed Bibars Bendocdar, impatiently; 'know you not your danger? Know you not that we can instantly order your head to be struck off?'

'Doubtless,' replied Guy. 'And, in that case, I die the death of a martyr, and go straight to paradise.'

'Infidel!' cried Bibars, loudly; 'you know not of what you speak. You will have to account for your faith to the angels Munkir and Nakir.'

'Munkir and Nakir!' exclaimed Guy, with an air of perplexity; 'beshrew me if I ever before heard of their names.'

'You will know them soon enough, if you act not more discreetly,' said Bibars; 'for they are the

two angels who interrogate the dead the moment they are in the grave, saying, "Who is thy lord?" and, "Who is thy prophet?"

'On my faith, Saracen,' said Guy, compassionately, 'I marvel much that a man of your years can credit such pagan fables.'

'Dog!' exclaimed Bibars. 'This to my beard! Ho! there, guards! Strike off this Christian's head, and cast his carcase to the fishes!'

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'No,' said Fakreddin, mildly, 'it is well that he should have time to reflect. Let him be kept as a prisoner till the morrow. He will then be more likely to answer the questions asked of him.'

Accordingly Guy Muschamp was led from the presence of the Saracen chiefs and shut up in a small apartment in the centre of Fakreddin's tent. The position was the reverse of pleasant; and he almost gave himself up for lost. Next morning, however, after he had eaten some food brought him by the jailer, he was startled, first by a commotion in the camp, and then by such a noise and tumult as if all the fiends had come thither from the infernal regions to fight their battles. Gradually, through the din, the ear of Guy recognised the clash of weapons and the rushing of steeds, and his suspense was agonising. For a time he endeavoured to make out what was occurring; but this was in vain. At length the noise ceased; and Guy moved to the door with the intention of making a desperate effort to break it open. Somewhat to his surprise, he found that it did not resist. In fact, the jailer was gone and the camp deserted.

CHAPTER XX.

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PASSING THE ACHMOUN.

MORE than six weeks had passed since the Crusaders found their progress arrested by the Achmoun; and still the causeway by which they had hoped to pass the canal was not constructed. Indeed, the workmen had made very little progress since the first week; and Louis was despairing of seeing the work brought to a completion, when, much to his gratification, he learned that there was a prospect of crossing the canal by the simplest of all processes.

On the day when Guy Muschamp was carried off as a captive, the Constable of France was surprised by a visit from a Bedouin, and demanded his business. The Bedouin thereupon offered, for five hundred golden bezants, to point out a ford by which the Crusaders might, without danger or difficulty, cross in safety to the opposite bank. The constable at once promised the required reward, in the event of the information proving satisfactory; but it was not till the money was told down that the Bedouin conducted him to the spot, and convinced him that the ford was there. Gladly hastening to Louis, the constable revealed the means of extricating the armed pilgrims from their embarrassment; and the king, assembling the princes and nobles, decided on leaving the Duke of Burgundy on the Damietta side with a sufficient force to guard the camp; and then, mastering their men and mounting their horses, they at midnight marched along the bank of the canal to the ford pointed out by the Bedouin, and awaited the break of day to dash through the water and move towards Mansourah.

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It was the morning of Tuesday, the 8th of February, 1250—Shrove Tuesday—when the armed pilgrims, under the auspices of King Louis, halted on the Damietta side of the Achmoun, and awaited the signal to pass to that on which Mansourah was situated. Everything so far had gone quite as smoothly as could reasonably have been expected. Some horsemen, indeed, rode too near the margin of the canal, and, getting on soft and slippery ground, they and their horses fell in and were drowned. Among them was Sir John of Orleans, a valiant knight, who bore the French banner. But this was a slight misfortune compared with that which the folly and presumption of one man was preparing for that ill-starred host.

At all times, and under all circumstances, the Count of Artois was one of the most unreasonable of human beings; and at this moment, so important to Louis, to France, to the Crusaders, and to the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem, nothing would satisfy his ambition but being the first to cross. Not unaware of his brother's failings, Louis protested; but the count persisted; and, promising to wait with patience on the opposite bank for the main army, he placed himself at the head of the van, which was formed of the Templars, the Hospitallers, and the English Crusaders, and dashed into the canal.

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Now, at this moment the opposite bank was occupied by several hundred Saracen horsemen, who seemed prepared to oppose the landing of the Crusaders. No sooner, however, did the Saracens perceive that the Crusaders were fording the canal safely than they gave way, and fled towards the camp of the Emir Fakreddin at Djedilé.

It was then that, in spite of all the warnings he had received and all the promises he had made, the Count of Artois gave way to the impetuosity that was destined to lead to the ruin of the pilgrim army. At the sight of the flying Saracens, he threw all discretion to the winds, and, attended by his governor, an old deaf knight, who held his rein, pursued the fugitives towards the camp. In vain the Grand Masters of the Temple and the Hospital shouted out remonstrances. The count paid no attention whatever; and the aged knight, who was too deaf to hear a word, urged on the pursuit, crying loudly, 'Hurrah! hurrah! Upon them! upon them!'

The Saracens who occupied the camp at Djedilé were panic-stricken; and, supposing that the whole French army was upon them, fled in confusion towards Mansourah. But there was one man who did not fly; and that man was Fakreddin. When the camp was invaded, the emir was in his bath, and having his beard coloured, after the custom of the Orientals; but he immediately roused himself, dressed himself hastily, and, springing on horseback, endeavoured to rally his troops, and attempted to resist. Inspired by Fakreddin's example, the Saracens who had not fled offered a feeble resistance. But it was unavailing, and they followed the fugitives streaming towards Mansourah. Fakreddin, however, disdainful either to fly or yield, continued to struggle bravely; until, left almost alone, he fell in the midst of his foes, covered with wounds, and consoling himself, as his breath went, that his end was glorious, that he died a martyr for Islamism, and that he would be conveyed to the banks of the celestial river.

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'By the head of St. Anthony!' exclaimed the Count of Artois, looking fiercely on Fakreddin's mangled corpse, 'it was this emir who boasted that he would dine in the red tent of my lord the king; but now he will not grumble at a humbler resting-place.'

'My lord count,' said Salisbury, gravely, 'the emir, had he been ten times a Saracen, was a brave man; and let us merit the praises of the valiant by showing that we know how to honour the memory of our enemies as well as of our friends.'

'Amen,' said both the grand masters, in significant accents.

CHAPTER XXI

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THE CARNAGE OF MANSOURAH.

IT was still early morning, and King Louis was still on the Damietta side of the Achmoun, when the Count of Artois, the Earl of Salisbury, and the Grand Masters of the Temple and the Hospital, found themselves victors in the camp.

'Now, gentlemen,' said the Count of Artois, 'let us forward, and complete the rout of our foes while affairs prosper in our hands and they are in dismay. Speed will now avail more than strength; and the fewer we are the greater will be the honour of a victory. Forward then, and crush them at a blow!'

'Forward!' shouted the old deaf knight, who held the count's rein. 'Hurrah! hurrah! Upon them! upon them!'

But the count's companions hesitated, and exchanged glances of alarm.

'Noble prince,' said the Master of the Temple, after a pause, 'I give all praise to your valour; but I entreat you to be advised, and not to act rashly. Our men are weary; our horses are wounded; we are few in number; and we must not overvalue our victory, or suppose our enemies are vanquished because they have lost a handful of men. Let us, therefore, return to the king, that we may be strengthened by his counsel and aid.'

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'In truth,' said the Grand Master of the Hospital, 'we should be foolhardy to attempt aught rashly. We are in a strange country; and our best instructors are behind. Let us stay for our lantern and not go forward in the dark.'

'Ah!' exclaimed the Count of Artois, swelling with pride and anger, 'this is ever the way with military monks. But for the treachery of the Templars, and the sedition of the Hospitallers, the Holy Land would long since have been won.'

'Noble count,' said the Grand Master of the Temple, reproachfully, 'you do us grievous wrong. Why should we take the habit of religion, and pass our lives in a foreign land amid perils and fatigues? Is it, think you, to overthrow the Church and betray the cause of Christ, that we abandon our homes and kindred? However,' added the Grand Master, waxing wrath, 'let us forward, in God's name, and try all together the fortunes of battle. Standard-bearer, unfurl the banner of the Temple. Ha! Beau-séant! Beau-séant!'

At this moment the Earl of Salisbury made an effort to save his comrades from the destruction on which they were about to rush.

'My lord,' said he, addressing the Count of Artois, 'I implore you to listen to the wholesome counsel of the grand masters. They have been long in this country, and learned by experience the craft as well as the strength of our foes. We, being strangers, are ignorant of the perils; but we know that, as far as the east is from the west, so far are my ways different from the ways of the Orientals.'

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'Hearken to this Englishman!' exclaimed the count, scornfully. 'What cowardice there is in these English! But their timid counsel suits not us. Happy should I be if the Christian army were purged of the English tails!'

A flush of rage crimsoned the earl's bronzed cheek, and his eye flashed fire.

'Now, by my father's sword!' cried he, striving to be calm, though he literally quivered with

indignation, 'this passes human patience! Ho! there, Lord Robert de Vere, raise my banner; and you, Count of Artois, lead on, and see if the danger of death hinders us from following. The touchstone must try which is gold and which is brass; and I swear, by good St. George, as I put on my helmet, that the English knights whom you have taunted with cowardice will this day penetrate farther in the ranks of our foes than any warrior of France—be he prince or paladin—will venture to do.'

And the dispute having there been terminated, the Count of Artois and his Crusaders put on their helmets and mounted their horses. At that moment the eye of Salisbury alighted on Walter Espec; and his countenance, which had expressed the most scornful indignation, suddenly changed, and expressed something like pity.

'Boy,' said he, in a low, kindly tone, 'fall back and wait for the French king. We are rushing on certain death; and you are too young to die.'

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'Nay, my good lord,' replied Walter, calmly. 'A man, whether young or old, can die but once: I would rather fall fighting in the cause of our Redeemer, and under your banner, than in a less holy cause and in meaner company.'

'As you will,' said the earl. 'It shall never be told that I prevented knight or squire from dying the death of a martyr.'

'By the might of Mary! Master Espec,' whispered Bisset; the English knight, 'were I your age, and had my choice, certes, I should think twice ere hazarding life against such odds. Wherefore should you fall a victim to the madness of my Lord of Artois, or the pride of my Lord of Salisbury?'

'On my faith, I know not,' answered Walter, smiling. 'But this I do know, that a man can die but once, and that a Christian warrior who falls with the Cross on his shoulder is understood to win the crown of martyrdom.'

'Nevertheless, were I you, and of your years,' argued Bisset; 'I should little relish the notion of being killed; for, as the Saracens say, when man dies there is no hope of his living again; because, as they add truly, man is not a water-melon; when once in the ground he cannot grow again.'

By this time French and Templars and Hospitallers and English were mounted; and, without further argument, they dashed towards Mansourah. At first they encountered no obstacle; and, while the inhabitants fled in terror along the road to Cairo, the Count of Artois and his companions, after destroying one of the gates, so as to secure egress if necessary, penetrated into the city, carrying all before them; and, reaching the palace of the sultan, they commenced the work of pillage. But during this process they were rudely interrupted; for Bibars Bendocdar perceived the imprudence of which the Crusaders had been guilty, and suddenly, at the head of a Saracen army, appeared to give them battle.

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And now the Crusaders were in a fearful predicament. Ere they had time to rally, they were fiercely attacked. From the roofs and windows of the houses around, the Saracens hurled stones, and poured heated sand and boiling water. Before them were the Mamelukes, headed by Bibars Bendocdar, fiery with fanaticism, and panting for blood. It was a terrible situation even for brave men; and the very bravest there felt a thrill of awe and terror.

'All is lost!' said Salisbury, in a whisper.

'The King of France may hear of our peril, and come to our rescue,' suggested Lord Robert de Vere.

'No hope of succour,' said Bisset, in a conclusive tone. 'But let us not droop. We can at least sell our lives dearly.'

A brief and painful silence succeeded, while still upon the Crusaders the Saracens hurled stones and poured boiling water.

'Englishmen and friends,' at length said Salisbury, raising his voice so as to be heard at a distance, 'it were vain at this moment to deny our peril. But take courage, my brave companions; and let us not faint in the hour of adversity. Everything, save dishonour, may be borne by valiant men; and adversity sheds a light upon the virtues of mankind, as surely as prosperity casts over them a shade. Here there is no room for retreat; for our enemies encompass us about; and to attempt to fly would be certain death. Be of good cheer, then, and let the urgency of the case sharpen your valour and nerve your arms. Brave men should either conquer nobly, or die with glory; and martyrdom is a boon which we should accept without reluctance. But, before we fall, let us, while we live, do what may avenge our deaths; and, while giving thanks to God that it is our lot to die as martyrs, let us, in our last efforts of valour and despair, prove ourselves worthy soldiers of the Cross.'

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'Earl William,' said the Count of Artois, riding up, and now conscious of his folly, 'God fights against us. Resistance is vain, but escape is possible. Let us consult our safety, and fly while yet our horses can carry us.'

'Fly if you will!' answered the earl, scornfully; 'but God forbid that any but liars should ever have it in their power to tell that my father's son fled from the face of a Saracen.'

And now the heavens and the earth seemed to resound with the noise of horns and enormous kettle-drums; and, urged on by Bibars Bendocdar, the Saracens rushed upon their enemies. The plight of the Crusaders was desperate. But, few as they were in comparison with the swarming foe, they fought gallantly and well; and, though wounded and exhausted, maintained the conflict for hours after the flight of the Count of Artois. But fearful in the meantime was the carnage. Full fifteen hundred knights had fallen; and of these, three hundred were of the order of the Temple. Gradually the numbers diminished, till there remained not a dozen of the men who had that morning invaded Fakreddin's camp; and among these were the Earl of Salisbury, Lord Robert de Vere, the Grand Masters of the Temple and the Hospital, Bisset the English knight, and Walter Espec, still unwounded, and fighting as if he bore a charmed life, and felt invulnerable to javelins or arrows.

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But all possibility of continuing to resist was now at an end, and every hope of succour had vanished. Salisbury, resolved to sell his life dearly, faced the Saracens with desperate valour, and used his battle-axe with such effect that a hundred Saracens are said to have fallen that day by his hand. At length his horse was killed under him; and, after rising to his feet, and fighting for awhile with disdain, he fell covered with wounds. Robert de Vere, already bleeding and exhausted, no sooner saw Salisbury sink than he wrapped the English standard round his body, and lay down to die by the great earl's side. Bisset, Walter Espec, and the two grand masters, found themselves surrounded by a host of foes, and defending themselves desperately against every species of assailant.

'Alas!' exclaimed the grand masters of the Temple, 'we are clearly doomed.'

'I would fain hope not,' answered Bisset, resolutely. 'Our weapons are not willow-wands; we can cut our way through the pagan rabble.'

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'Shame upon us if we hesitate!' said Walter Espec.

And drawing close together, with a rush which for a time bore down opposition, the four survivors made a stern endeavour to reach the gate,—the axe of Bisset and the swords of the military monks doing terrible execution. Twice the Saracens formed in a mass to prevent their reaching the only gate which was not closed; as often Bisset, penetrating singly into the Saracen ranks, dealt death and destruction to his foes, and opened the way for his friends; till gradually, having by force of arm overthrown every obstacle in his path, he reached the gate, and, followed by the Grand Master of the Temple, dashed through the opening, with a shout of defiance at his assailants.

But the Grand Master of the Hospital and Walter Espec had not such good fortune as the Templar and the English knight. Bibars Bendocdar, enraged at the rumour that some Christians were escaping from the carnage, hastened to the open gate, and, with his arrival, every chance vanished. Dragged from his steed, the grand master was fain to surrender himself prisoner. Wounded by an arrow and a javelin, but still struggling to fight his way out, Walter Espec cut down a Saracen soldier, and, rising in his stirrups and shouting, 'St. Katherine for Espec!' made a fierce thrust at Bendocdar. But next moment he was felled to the ground; he felt that his blood was flowing fast, and that horsemen were riding over him; and then he lost all consciousness, and lay prostrate and insensible among the dead and the dying.

CHAPTER XXII.

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THE BATTLE.

NO sooner did Guy Muschamp find the door of his prison opened, than he rushed out to ascertain the cause of the tumult to which he was indebted for liberty, and he discovered that the camp was deserted and abandoned, save by the wounded and the slain. However, he hastily donned his steel cap, possessed himself of a short sword; and having with little difficulty caught a stray horse, saddled and bridled, he mounted, and rode forth with the idea of following the Crusaders, who by this time were disappearing within the gates of Mansourah.

Fortunately, however, for Guy, he was not destined to share the fate of his gallant countrymen who fell victims to the vain folly of the Count of Artois. Nevertheless, his danger was great. By this time the Count of Brittany and a multitude of warriors were riding towards Mansourah to aid the Count of Artois; and, as the Saracens who came out to oppose their progress rapidly spread over the plain, Guy began to find his position somewhat perilous, and to give himself up for lost. At that moment, however, his eye and his ear were attracted by the gleaming of spears and the ringing of mail to a ruined house; and, cantering thither, he found to his joyful surprise, that the Lord of Joinville and his knights had taken shelter there, to await the arrival of the king, who was still engaged in passing the main body of his army over the Achmoun.

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Nor had they long to wait. As with breathless anxiety they watched the Saracens, swarming like bees from their hives, and covering the plain, Louis, having at length crossed the canal, with sound of trumpets and clarions, rode up at the head of his cavalry, and, with a German sword in his hand, halted on an eminence to survey the field. And neither in air nor appearance did Louis, at that moment, look unworthy of the part he was acting as chief of the pilgrim army. His

magnificent armour, his gilded helmet, and his noble bearing, gave him the appearance of being taller by the shoulders than any of his companions. As he reined up his white charger—the symbol of sovereignty—and, with the oriflamme displayed before him, endeavoured calmly to estimate the chances of the conflict, the Lord of Joinville and his knights, surrounded as they were with danger, could not but utter exclamations expressive of admiration.

'By St. James,' exclaimed Joinville, 'I never in my life saw a more handsome man under arms.'

'Certes,' replied one of the knights, 'I could almost believe that the angel of battles had come to our aid.'

While the king was still surveying the combat, that every moment became more fierce and sanguinary, the Constable of France rode up to inform him of the peril of the Count of Artois. [138]

'Sire,' said the constable, 'your noble brother is shut up in Mansourah; and, albeit he and his comrades hold out gallantly, they must perish if not aided forthwith.'

'Well, constable,' answered Louis, 'on to the rescue, in God's name, and I will speedily follow.'

The constable, without more words, gave his horse the spur, and dashed towards Mansourah, whither the king and his knights also attempted to make their way. But this was no easy matter. Every moment the Saracens seemed to increase in numbers; and the Crusaders, while struggling bravely not to be overwhelmed by odds, were exposed to terrible hazard. Louis soon found himself in the thick of the fight and environed by foes. Nothing seemed to remain to him but to sell his life dearly; and six Saracens, rushing forward simultaneously, attempted to seize his bridle, and take him captive. But, at that moment, Louis—gentle and saintly as was his nature—used his German sword with a vigour and effect, scarcely excelled by Richard Cœur de Lion at Joppa, when he charged among the Mamelukes of Saladin, or by Edward Longshanks at Kakhow, when the sweep of his sword, and the rush of his grey steed, struck terror into the heart of the host of Bibars Bendocdar. Down before that short German sword went turban and caftan; till the French knights, aware of their king's danger, spurred in to his rescue, and, with a mighty effort, saved him from captivity. [139]

And now another attempt was made to reach Mansourah. But it was too late. All was over with the brave band who had followed the Count of Artois into the city; and every moment the aspect of affairs became more menacing; for Bibars Bendocdar, elate with his victory within the walls, issued from the gate, animating his soldiers with the words—'God is powerful,' and hoping to deal with the French king, as he had dealt with the French king's brother. Nor, at first, did it appear that the Crusaders could escape utter defeat. Not aware what was occurring, and suddenly attacked by a mighty force led by a dauntless chief, they were pressed and whirled about and separated from each other, and forced to encounter countless odds at every disadvantage. Yet even in such circumstances the warriors of France maintained their high reputation for valour; and, as the combat proceeded and became keener and keener, many a strong Saracen went to his account.

On both sides, indeed, great was the display of personal prowess and courage; but there was no generalship. Amidst clouds of dust, and under a glowing sun, Christian and Moslem fought hand to hand, and steel to steel. Helmet and turban mingled confusedly in the struggle; while banners rose and fell, and knights were unhorsed, and saddles emptied. From Mansourah to Achmoun, and from the Nile to the ford pointed out by the Bedouin, the ground, literally covered with combatants, shook with the rush of their horses, and the sky was rent by the opposing war-cries of 'Islam! Islam!' and 'Montjoie, St. Denis!' What with the shouts of the living, the shrieks of the dying, and the yells of the Saracens, as they bore down on their adversaries like hawks on their prey, all was bloodshed, confusion, and clamour, and the carnage was such as few men, who fought on that field and survived it, ever remembered without a thrill of awe. [140]

And as the day sped on and the battle continued to rage all over the plain, and warriors fell in heaps before and around him, Louis became painfully aware that Mansourah could not be reached, and that the Crusaders were no longer fighting to conquer the Saracens but to save themselves. And there was considerable danger of Bibars Bendocdar drawing near to the Achmoun, and cutting off all communication between the camp of the Duke of Burgundy, and the Christian army struggling for existence on the plains of Mansourah. On becoming aware of the danger, the king decided on falling back towards the canal, and, with the oriflamme displayed, moved in that direction.

Unfortunate were the consequences. A report immediately spread that the king was retreating because the Saracens were everywhere victorious, and immediately there was a panic, and several squadrons disbanded and rushed towards the canal. A terrible scene followed, and men and horses were drowned while struggling in the water. Nothing could have exceeded the disorder and dismay. Louis, indeed, made strenuous efforts to restore confidence, but his voice was scarcely heard in the tumult; and he must have rejoiced when night put an end to the conflict, and when Bibars Bendocdar retired to Mansourah, with the determination to attack the Crusaders on another day, as the tiger draws back to make a more terrible spring. [141]

Repairing to Djédilé, Louis dismounted, and took possession of the camp which, at daybreak, had been occupied by the Emir Fakreddin; and when his red tent was pitched there, the Prior of Rosnay presented himself, and kissed the king's hand.

'Sire,' said he, wishing to break the news gently, 'I know not if you have heard tidings of your

noble brother, the Count of Artois?'

'I know all,' answered Louis, mournfully.

'Sire,' said the prior, endeavouring to administer consolation, 'no King of France has ever reaped such honour as you have done this day. You have crossed a dangerous river; you have gained a victory; you have put your enemies to flight; you have captured their engines of war; and now you are taking possession of their camp.'

'May God be praised for all that I have, with His aid, been able to do in His cause,' said Louis, with a faltering voice, and tears rolling down his cheeks, as he entered his pavilion.

'On my faith, sir prior,' said John de Valery, with the tone of a man who has a presentiment of coming calamity, 'I marvel how you can speak of this day's work as a triumph of our arms. Often have I fought for victory; but this day I have felt too surely that I was fighting not for victory but for life.'

'In truth,' said the Lord of Joinville, who had joined them, 'I would fain hope for better fortune in the future; for, call this a victory if you will, such another victory would be worse than a defeat.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

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HOW JOINVILLE KEPT THE BRIDGE.

WHEN the Constable of France informed King Louis that the Count of Artois was in extreme peril, and when Louis made an effort to go to the rescue of his brother—the Lord of Joinville, having previously left the ruined house, and joined the king, endeavoured to keep in the royal warrior's company. But all efforts with this object proved vain. The Saracens, raising clouds of dust and uttering ferocious yells as they advanced, came down upon the Crusaders with a force that was irresistible. The French were scattered in all directions; and Joinville was separated from Louis some minutes before the person of the saintly monarch was in such imminent danger. But in the meantime the seneschal's band had been reduced to six persons, including Guy Muschamp, who adhered with determination to Joinville's side; and between them and the king, then struggling to save his liberty, intervened thousands of Saracens.

'Impossible for us to make our way through such a crowd,' said Joinville; 'much better, therefore, will it be to wheel round and get on the other side of them.'

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Accordingly they wheeled round, and gained the bank of the river, and began to descend. But at this moment the aspect of the field became most alarming to the armed pilgrims. The Crusaders and Saracens met on the banks, and many of the French, attempting to cross and form a junction with the Duke of Burgundy, were drowned; and the river was covered with lances, pikes, shields, and horses and men struggling in vain to save themselves.

By this time the Lord of Joinville, heading his knights, had reached a bridge on one of the roads to Mansourah; and on perceiving the miserable state of the army he halted.

'It is better,' said he, after looking round, 'to remain where we are, and guard this bridge; for, if we leave it, the Saracens may come and attack the king on this side, and, if he is assaulted from two quarters, he will surely be discomfited.'

Accordingly they posted themselves on the bridge which was between the canal Achmoun and the gates of Mansourah, and prepared to defend it against the Saracens. But such was the danger, that Joinville's heart, brave as it was, beat with terror, and he cried aloud for the protection of St. James.

'Good Lord St. James,' exclaimed he; 'succour me, I beseech thee, and come to my aid in this hour of need.'

It seemed to him and his companions that his prayer was answered. Almost as he uttered it, the Count of Soissons, who was his kinsman, appeared riding past the bridge; and Joinville hastened to secure his company.

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'Sir count,' said he; 'I beg you to remain with us and guard this bridge; for, should it be lost, the king will have his enemies upon him both in front and rear.'

'Willingly, seneschal,' replied the count; and he placed himself on Joinville's right hand, while a French knight who was with him took his station on the left.

While Joinville and his companions were seated on their horses, prepared to keep the bridge at all hazards against all comers, the Saracens made repeated efforts to drive them from their post. But they remained firm as rocks. Trusting to accomplish by stratagem what they could not do by force, the Saracens attempted to lure them from the spot; and one stalwart horseman, galloping suddenly forward, felled one of the French knights with his battle-axe, and then retreated to his own people, hoping that he would be followed. But Joinville, who comprehended the purpose, would not be decoyed, and resolutely kept his ground, though annoyed and wounded by a rabble

of half-armed Saracens, who incessantly threw darts, and large stones, and hard clods.

At length, however, the Saracens began to make themselves much more formidable, and to discharge Greek fire, which threatened to do much mischief, and pressed forward with savage yells.

'On my faith, we must take order with this rabble,' said the Count of Soissons, growing angry.

'As you will,' replied Joinville; and, without further hesitation, they charged the crowd, put them to flight, and resumed their post.

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But no sooner did the Saracens perceive that the immediate danger was over, than they turned round, and, keeping at a safe distance, yelled out defiance.

'Heed them not, seneschal,' said the Count of Soissons, who, in the midst of peril, retained all the gaiety of soul which distinguished the French chevaliers from the thoughtful Saxon, and the haughty and somewhat grim Norman. 'Heed them not. Let this rascal canaille bawl and bray as they please. By St. Denis, you and I will live to talk of this day's exploits in the chambers of our ladies.'

'May God and good St. James grant it,' said Joinville, gravely.

'But who comes hither, and in such a plight?' asked the Count of Soissons, suddenly, as a Crusader, mounted on a strong horse, came galloping from the direction of Mansourah—his face wounded, blood gushing from his mouth, the reins of his bridle cut, and his hands resting, as if for support, on his charger's neck.

'In truth,' replied Joinville, after examining the horseman, 'it is the Count of Brittany;' as, closely pursued by Saracens, the wounded warrior gained the bridge, and ever and anon turned round and shouted mockingly to his pursuers.

'By St. Denis,' exclaimed the count, 'one thing is certain: he is not afraid of his pursuers.'

And almost as the Count of Soissons spoke, the Count of Brittany was followed by two warriors, who made their way through the Saracens, literally smiting to the earth all who came in their way. Nothing, it seemed, could resist their progress; and their path was tracked with blood. On they came, scornfully scattering their foes till they reached the bridge, when reining up where the Lord of Joinville was posted, they stopped to take breath, after their almost superhuman exertions. One had in his hand a battle-axe; the other a sword. The battle-axe was stained red with gore; the sword was hacked till it looked 'like a saw of dark and purple tint.' One was Bisset, the English knight, the other was the Grand Master of the Temple. The horses of both were wounded all over; the helmets of both were deeply dented. Bisset's mail was almost hacked to pieces; the Templar's vestments were torn to rags, his cuirass pierced, and his eye and face wounded and bleeding.

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'You bring tidings of woe?' said the Count of Soissons.

'Woe, in truth,' answered Bisset; for the grand master could not even muster voice to speak; 'of all who rode into Mansourah this morning, not a man, save ourselves, lives to tell the tale.'

'And what of the Count of Artois, sir knight?' asked Joinville.

'I know not,' replied Bisset, briefly; 'the count disappeared early, and doubtless died with the comrades of his jeopardy.'

'No,' interrupted the Count of Brittany, faintly, 'he was drowned while attempting to save himself by flight. At least,' added he, 'so I have been told.'

And in truth, to this day it is somewhat uncertain what became of Robert, Count of Artois, though the most probable account is that, seeing all was lost, he turned his horse's head, with a vague hope of reaching the main body of the Crusaders, and, while attempting to cross one of the branches of the Nile, sank never more to rise.

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It was about this time that King Louis had moved towards the Achmoun; and the Constable of France, with the king's crossbowmen under his command, just as the sun was setting came to the bridge which had been so bravely defended.

'Seneschal,' said he, addressing Joinville, 'you and your comrades have behaved well in guarding this bridge; and now, all danger being over in this quarter, I pray you to accompany the Lord John de Valery to the king, who is about to go to his pavilion.'

And Joinville went as the constable requested; and while his companions were pursuing their way towards the king's red pavilion—that pavilion in which the Emir Fakreddin had boasted he would dine on the day of St. Sebastian—Guy Muschamp approached Bisset, the English knight, and entreated his attention.

'Sir knight,' said he, 'I would fain enquire if you know what has befallen the English squire, by name Walter Espec?'

'Boy,' replied Bisset, 'I know not what may have befallen him; but, if I were to hazard a guess, I should say that he died, and died bravely. I remember me that he fought to the last; and I hoped that he was destined to escape, as I did; but I grieve to say that he failed so to do.'

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'Alas! alas!' said Guy sadly, and he clasped his hands, as if muttering a prayer for his comrade's soul; 'woe is me, that I should live to hear that my brother-in-arms, the good Walter, has fallen.'

'My brave youth,' urged Bisset, kindly, as he observed that the boy's face was suffused with tears, 'death has this day been the portion of many thousands of valiant men; and, for your brother-in-arms, I can testify for your comfort that he fought to the last with the courage of a hero, and I doubt not, that he faced death with the courage of a martyr.'

'And if we are to give the faith which our fathers did to the words of holy men,' added Guy, solemnly, 'the souls of all such as fall, fighting for the Cross, are purified from sin, and admitted straight to Paradise.'

'By the mass, I have heard priests say so,' replied Bisset, after a pause, during which he eyed the boy with evident surprise; 'and mayhap,' continued he, 'in the days of Peter the Hermit, and Godfrey of Bouillon, such was the case. But, credit me, in our day, armed pilgrims are guilty of such flagrant sins during their pilgrimage, and while decked with the Cross, that I hardly deem them likely to get access to Paradise on such easy terms.'

'By St. John of Beverley,' exclaimed the squire, in great astonishment, 'deem you that matters are so much changed, sir knight?'

'So much so,' answered Bisset, shaking his head, 'that seeing, save myself, you are almost the only Englishman left in this army of pilgrims, I am free to confess to you my opinion, that for aught we are likely to do for the Holy Sepulchre, we might as well have stayed at home, and hunted, and hawked, and held our neighbours at feud. On my life, I have seen enough of this army to feel sure that Blacas, the troubadour knight, is a wise man, when on being asked whether he will go to the Holy Land, answers, that he loves and is beloved, and that he will remain at home with his ladye love.'

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And already, forgetting his wounds, and his bruises, his hair-breadth escape, and the terrible scenes in which he had that day acted a part, the knight, as he reached the tent of King Louis, and prepared to dismount, half chanted, half sung, the lines with which Blacas concludes his simple song:—

Je ferai ma pénitence,
Entre mer et Durance,
Auprès de son manoir.

CHAPTER XXIV.

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THE FIRST FRIDAY IN LENT.

ON the day when the city of Mansourah witnessed the carnage of the Crusaders under the Count of Artois, and a great battle shook the plain outside the walls, the Egyptians experienced by turns fear and hope, joy and sadness.

On the morning when the camp at Djédilé was taken, and the Emir Fakreddin slain, a pigeon carried intelligence of the disaster to Cairo; and the Egyptian capital was immediately in consternation. Believing that the days of Islamism were numbered, and the empire of the sultan on the verge of ruin, the inhabitants thought of nothing but escape from the danger that impended. Many departed for Upper Egypt, and sorrow reigned in the city—the inhabitants bewailing their misfortunes, and crying that the world was coming to an end. A second pigeon, however, carried thither tidings that the Count of Artois was defeated and slain; and Cairo became the scene of joy and rejoicing. Fear vanished from every face; and the Saracens gratefully extolled the courage of the Mamelukes, and of their chief, Bibars Bendocdar.

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At the same time, an arrival of great importance took place at Mansourah. While the battle was raging on the plain, Touran Chah, the new sultan, reached the city, and was received with acclamations by the populace. The emirs, however, regarded the sultan with some suspicion. Unfortunately, Touran Chah did not come alone; and the jealousy of the emirs was aroused by the presence of the favourites who accompanied him from Mesopotamia. If the heir of Saladin could have foreseen what a price he was to pay for the happiness of having his favourites with him, he would doubtless have been discreet enough to leave them behind.

But, in the meantime, it was necessary for the safety and interests both of the sultan and the emirs, that the Crusaders should be destroyed; and Bibars Bendocdar was bent on pursuing his success. In the first place, he made several attempts to recapture the engines of war, and the French were repeatedly roused to defend them at the point of the sword. But these attacks led to a feeling of insecurity, and King Louis deemed it prudent to construct a bridge of wood over the Achmoun, so as to have the means of communicating readily with the Duke of Burgundy's camp. Who at that time could have imagined the mischief of which this bridge was subsequently to be the cause?

Meanwhile Bibars Bendocdar was doing his best to inflame the enthusiasm of the Mamelukes

and soldiers. Nor, with that object, was he above practising a little deception. A cuirass covered with fleur-de-lis was publicly exhibited, and declared to be that of the French king. Heralds proclaimed that the Christian army, deprived of its chief, was like a trunk without a head; and the enthusiasm of the Saracens reached a high pitch. At length, the soldiers began to clamour to be led against the enemy, and Bibars Bendocdar fixed Friday, the 11th of February, as the day on which he would lead them to triumph.

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It was the first Friday in Lent; and King Louis, having received warning that an attack was meditated, gave orders for fortifying the camp, and preparing for a conflict. At daybreak, accordingly, the Crusaders were under arms; and, in good time, Bibars Bendocdar appeared on the plain, setting his men in battle order. Placing his cavalry in the van, the infantry behind, and a strong reserve in the rear, the Mameluke chief extended his lines till his forces seemed to cover the plain. Nor was he sorry to observe that there was a prospect of a stern resistance; for the difficulties of his situation increased his importance in the eyes of his soldiers, and every step he took in overcoming perils, from which others shrank, brought him nearer to the object on which his heart was set—that object being neither more nor less than the throne of the sultans.

And now, noon having come, with horns and kettle-drums sounding an onset, Bibars Bendocdar advanced on the Crusaders, and attacked the Count of Anjou, who was at the head of the camp on the side towards the Nile. At first, the French cavalry calmly abided the assault; but they soon found themselves exposed to a kind of attack which they had not anticipated. In fact, the Saracen infantry, moving forward, overwhelmed the knights with Greek fire, and threw them into confusion. Surcoats and caparisons blazed, and the horses plunged, broke from the control of their riders, and galloped to and fro. While they were in disorder, Bibars Bendocdar, at the head of the Mamelukes, penetrated within the entrenchments, and the Count of Anjou found himself surrounded by foes.

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Ere this, King Louis, aware of his brother's peril, despatched Bisset, the English knight, with a message assuring the count of speedy aid; but, ere the Englishman reached the Count of Anjou, he met the French cavalry flying in disarray. Bisset reined up, and addressed the fugitives.

'Christian warriors,' said he, 'I come from your king to ask whither are you flying? See you not that the horses of the unbelievers are swifter than yours?'

'It is too true,' replied the fugitives.

'Come then,' said Bisset, 'follow me, and I will show you what your king deems a safer road than flight;' and charging among the Mamelukes, in front of the French cavalry, the English knight succeeded in maintaining the conflict, which had commenced so inauspiciously for the French.

And aid was at hand; for Louis did not forget his promise of succour. Shouting his battle-cry, he spurred, lance in rest, to his brother's rescue, and, precipitating himself with his knights on the Moslem warriors, soon redeemed the disaster which had marked the opening of the battle. Nor did the saint-king exhibit the slightest dread of exposing his royal person. With a shout of 'Montjoie, St. Denis!' he charged into the midst of the foe—his banner flying, and his sword flashing—and by his example inspired the Crusaders with such courage that, after a sanguinary combat, they succeeded in expelling the Mamelukes from the camp, and driving back the infantry that threw the Greek fire.

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By this time the battle had become general, and everywhere the Crusaders fought valiantly and well, though they had not always the advantage. In fact, Bibars Bendocdar, as a war chief, possessed such a degree of skill in handling masses of fighting men as neither Louis nor any of the Crusaders could boast of; and the discipline of the Mamelukes was such as to make them terrible foes to encounter.

Nevertheless the Crusaders held their ground, and performed prodigies of valour. At one point the warriors of Syria and Cyprus maintained their ground against fearful odds; at a second, the knights of Champagne and Flanders fought stoutly and well; at a third, such of the Templars as had not fallen at Mansourah, headed by their grand master who had so narrowly escaped the carnage, exhibited the fine spectacle of a handful of men baffling a multitude, and, despite the showers of Greek fire and missiles which fell so thick that the ground was literally covered with arrows and javelins, kept the enemy at bay. Even when the grand master fell mortally wounded, the Knights of the Temple continued to struggle; and when their entrenchments failed, and the Saracens rushed into the camp, the military monks closed their ranks and presented a front against which the assailants continued for hours to charge violently, but in vain.

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But meanwhile the peril of the Count of Poitiers had been great and alarming. Composed of infantry, his division gave way before the rush of the Saracen cavalry, and dispersed in consternation. Nor was this the worst. The count himself, while endeavouring to rally his forces, was seized, and experienced the mortification of finding himself dragged off as a prisoner. But there was succour at hand.

The Lord of Joinville and his knights were luckily posted near the Count of Poitiers; but having all been so severely wounded in the battle of Shrove Tuesday as to be unable to bear their armour, they could take no prominent part in the conflict raging around them. No sooner, however, did they observe the count's predicament than they deemed themselves bound to interfere at all hazards; and Guy Muschamp, riding to the place where the sutlers and workmen and women of the army were posted, urged them to rouse themselves.

'Good people,' cried the squire, 'the brave Count of Poitiers is being carried into captivity. For our Leader's sake, succour the Count of Poitiers. To the rescue! to the rescue!'

Now the count was highly popular with the persons to whom this appeal was addressed; and no sooner did they learn the prince's danger than they displayed the utmost alacrity to aid him. Arming themselves with axes, and clubs, and sticks, and anything that came in their way, they rushed furiously forward, and, led on by the English squire, made so successful an attack that the Saracens were dispersed, and the count was rescued and carried back in triumph. [156]

'Young gentleman,' said the count, gratefully, 'I owe you my liberty. I pray you, tell me to whom I am so deeply indebted.'

'Noble count,' replied Guy, after telling his name, 'I am a squire of England; and, for the present, I serve the Lord of Joinville.'

'Ah,' said the count, smiling, 'the seneschal must give you to me; for I would fain have an opportunity of proving how I can requite such good service.'

By this time Bibars Bendocdar perceived that he was wasting his strength in vain, and sounded a retreat. But the Mameluke chief was not without his consolation. He knew that he had ruined the enterprise of the Crusaders; that they were no longer in a condition to attempt a march to Cairo; and that they knew not on which side to turn.

But when the Saracens retreated towards Damietta, and the danger was over for the time being, the Crusaders were inclined to talk of their successful resistance as a victory; and the knights and barons when summoned that evening to the king's pavilion, went thither with the airs of conquerors.

'My lords and friends,' said Louis, kindly; 'we have much cause to be grateful to God our Creator. On Tuesday, aided by Him, we dislodged our enemies from their quarters, of which we gained possession. This day we have defended ourselves against them, though taken at advantage; many of us being left without arms or horses, while they were completely armed and on horseback, and on their own ground. And since you have all witnessed the grace which God our Creator has of late shown to us, and continues to do daily, I commend you all, as you are bounden to do, to return Him due thanksgiving.' [157]

CHAPTER XXV.

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MORTIFICATIONS AND MISERIES.

NO longer could the armed pilgrims, so recently buoyed up with the hope of making themselves famous as the conquerors of Egypt, delude their imaginations with the project of advancing to Cairo.

'It is necessary to retreat to Damietta,' said the wise and prudent.

'A retreat to Damietta in the face of the foe is more than our pride can brook,' exclaimed the haughty and obstinate.

'Let us remain at Djédilé, and trust to the course of events,' suggested the reckless and the irresolute.

At Djédilé, accordingly, the Crusaders remained; and ere long, their calamities began in earnest, and daily increased in magnitude. First came disease; then came famine; and death and despair soon did more than the Saracens could with the utmost efforts have hoped to accomplish.

It appears that, after the two battles fought on the plains of Mansourah, the Crusaders had neglected to bury the slain; and the bodies thrown confusedly into the Achmoun, and floating on the water, stopped before the wooden bridge, and infected the atmosphere. A contagious disease was the consequence; and this, being increased by the abstinence during Lent, wrought such havoc, that nothing was heard in the camp but mourning and lamentation. Louis, sad, but still not in despair, exerted himself to mitigate the sufferings of his army. At length he also fell sick, and, every day, affairs wore a gloomier aspect. [159]

'It seems,' said Guy Muschamp, who lay prostrate with sickness in the tent of the Lord of Joinville, 'it seems that Heaven has abandoned the soldiers of the Cross.'

'Hem,' replied Bisset, to whom this was addressed, 'I see not why Heaven should be blamed for the evils which men bring on themselves by their own folly. I warned you at Damietta what would be the end of all the boastings which were uttered hourly. A haughty spirit goes before a fall. Trust me, we have not yet seen the worst. By the might of Mary, we armed pilgrims may yet find ourselves under a necessity similar to that which made cannibals of the soldiers of King Cambyses when he made war in Egypt!'

'King Cambyses?' repeated Guy, enquiringly.

'Ay,' replied Bisset, 'he was King of Persia, and almost as great a monarch as King Louis; and

when he was in this country his provisions ran short. At first his soldiers lived on herbs, roots, and leaves; when they could not get even these, they ate their horses and beasts of burden; and, when the horses and beasts of burden were finished, they began to devour one another; and every tenth man, on whom the lot fell, was doomed to serve as a meal for his companions. Marry, we are like to be in a similar plight; for famine begins to stare us in the face!

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Guy groaned aloud, and wondered why he had left England; and, at that time, indeed, the new and terrible danger daunted every heart. Resolved to cut off all communication between Damietta and the camp of the Crusaders, the sultan ordered a number of galleys to be transported overland, to form an ambuscade; and many French vessels were intercepted. For a time, Louis could not comprehend how no arrivals took place, and felt the gravest alarm. Ere long, however, one vessel, belonging to the Count of Flanders, escaped the vigilance of the galleys, and brought tidings that the sultan's flag was displayed all along the Nile. The Crusaders received this intelligence with horror; and, in a few days, the evil of famine was added to that of pestilence.

'What is to be done now?' asked they, giving way to despondency.

'It is quite clear,' said Louis, 'that, in order to save ourselves, we must treat with our enemies.'

No time was lost. Philip de Montfort, a knight of renown, was despatched as ambassador to the sultan, and was led to cherish hopes of success. The sultan not only expressed his readiness to treat, but actually nominated commissioners. At first everything went smoothly, and the Saracens appeared reasonable in their demands. But when the question of hostages came to be discussed, a difficulty arose.

'I am empowered to offer the Counts of Poitiers and Anjou as hostages,' said De Montfort.

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'No,' replied the Saracens, 'the sultan requires the King of France.'

'You ought to know Frenchmen better,' exclaimed Geoffrey de Segrines, one of the commissioners; 'they would rather die than leave their king in pledge.'

After this, the negotiation was broken off; and the French prepared to cross the Achmoun by the bridge, and deliberate on the propriety of marching back to Damietta. But even the passage of the bridge was not effected without terrible danger and heavy loss. No sooner did the Crusaders begin to move, than the Saracens came down upon them, and made a furious attack; but Walter de Chatillon, a French baron of great fame, led on his companions to the encounter, and after being seconded by the Count of Anjou, succeeded in repulsing the foe. The Crusaders, however, after remaining some days in their old camp, found that they were a prey to the worst calamities, and, no longer hesitating, decided on a day for returning to Damietta.

Unfortunately for the armed pilgrims, their resolution was no secret to the Saracens, and when Touran Chah became aware of their intended movement down the Nile, he devised measures to intercept them. He himself harangued his soldiers, distributed money and provisions, reinforced them with Arabs attracted to his standard by the prospect of booty, and ordered boats with troops on board to descend the river, and join the fleet already there; while bodies of light horse were placed on all the roads by which the Crusaders were likely to make good their retreat.

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Nevertheless, the Crusaders, finding their present position desperate, persevered in their resolution, and Tuesday, the 5th of April, was appointed for the perilous enterprise. On the arrival of that day, the sick, the wounded, the women, and the children, were embarked on the Nile, and, at the same time, several French nobles, and the papal legate, got on board a vessel. No doubt seems to have existed that Louis might have saved himself. Even the Arabian historians admit that the French king might have escaped, either in a boat or on horseback, if he would have abandoned his army. But, with characteristic generosity, he distinctly refused to separate his fate from theirs. Anxious about his safety, the soldiers ran along the bank, shouting to the boatmen not to set sail till the king embarked.

'Wait for the king—wait for the king!' cried they.

'No,' said Louis, his heart touched, but his resolution firm; 'go on. I will share weal or woe with my soldiers. I am not such a niggard of life, that I grudge to risk it in such company, and in such a cause.'

And now the boats began to descend the Nile; and at the same time the Duke of Burgundy, having broken up his camp, about nightfall commenced a retreat towards Damietta. But at this stage, the French were guilty of a piece of negligence that was destined to cost them dear. The king had ordered the wooden bridge over the Achmoun to be destroyed. In their agitation and haste, the French paid no attention to the order. In vain Bisset, the English knight, protested against such insane indifference to a manifest peril.

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'My masters,' said he, bluntly, 'we can hardly be deemed otherwise than madmen, if we leave that bridge standing as it is, to afford the Saracens a safe passage over the canal, to attack us in the rear.'

'Sir knight,' replied the French drily, for they did not relish an Englishman's interference, 'it is not from that quarter that danger is most to be apprehended.'

'Nevertheless,' urged Bisset.

'We are wasting time to no purpose,' said the French; 'and this day, time is more precious than your counsel.'

'As you will, my masters,' replied Bisset; 'only credit me, that if you leave that bridge behind you to facilitate the operations of your enemies, you will place your army in such a predicament, that neither the craft of Alexander of Macedon, nor William the Norman—could either come from their graves to lead—would avail to save it from destruction ere reaching Damietta.'

And having administered this warning, Bisset withdrew, with the consolation of a man who has done at least his duty, and with the air also of a man much too reckless as to his personal safety to fear much on his own account from the consequences of the blunders and incapacity of others; then, arming himself, he saddled his steed, girded on his sword, hung his battle-axe at his saddle-bow, and went to attend King Louis during the perilous enterprise of marching through a country, with armed foes posted at the turn of every road.

'Hearken to that English tail,' said the French one to another, as Bisset withdrew; 'these islanders are so timid, that they will next be afraid of their own shadows.' [164]

'By the head of St. Anthony,' said a knight, who had been attached to the Count of Artois, 'I hate the tailed English so, that I would leave the bridge as it is, if only to mortify one of them.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

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THE MASSACRE OF MINIEH.

IT was already dark when the pilgrim army commenced a perilous retreat to Damietta, and when the King of France, surrounded by a band of brave knights, undertook the duty of bringing up the rear—on that occasion the post of honour.

But Louis was in no condition to occupy such a position with advantage. He was not fully recovered from his sickness, and so weak, that he could hardly bear the weight of his armour, or support himself on his white charger. Neither helmet nor cuirass wore he; nor had he any weapon save his sword; nor had he sufficient strength to wield his sword to any purpose in the event of a close encounter.

And, as it happened, the post of honour speedily became the post of danger. As Bisset had predicted, the Saracens lost not a minute in availing themselves of the bridge that had been left standing. In an incredibly brief space of time, they contrived to cross the canal in such numbers, that the plain on the Damietta side was covered with turbaned warriors, bent on the destruction of their foes; and, in the darkness of the night, their cavalry charged constantly, and with deadly effect, on the retiring and dispirited rear of the Crusaders. [166]

Of course, the plight of Louis and his comrades every hour became more deplorable. They fell into disorder; they ran against and impeded each other; and cries of anger and despair were mingled with the neighing of horses, and the clash of arms. Earnestly they prayed for day, that they might, at least, ascertain their real position; but, when day came, it brought no comfort. In fact, when the rising sun revealed their diminished and diminishing numbers, and the formidable force of enemies who surrounded them—here a handful of men—there a host—the very boldest of the Crusaders gave themselves up for lost, and a simultaneous cry of terror and dismay broke from their scanty ranks.

'Gentlemen,' said Louis, calm in the midst of peril, 'droop not. At the great battle of Antioch, Godfrey of Bouillon, and his companions, had worse odds than we.'

'And they conquered,' said Walter de Chatillon, striving to banish apprehension, 'and we may conquer.'

'Yes,' replied Louis, 'they had faith in God's protection, and confidence in the holiness of their cause; and it seemed to them that while the struggle was well-nigh hopeless, the blessed martyrs—George, Demetrius, and Theodore, came to aid them, and assure them of victory.'

'Ha,' said Bisset, the English knight, as if speaking to himself, 'I have heard that some saw St. George in the air, with an army of white horses; but these did no doubt look through the spectacles of fancy.' [167]

Louis turned, bent his brow, and darted upon the speaker a glance of keen reproach, which might have found fuller expression in words. But there was no time for argument or admonition; for at that moment the Saracens made one of their fiery charges, and though the French warriors defended themselves and their king with heroism, they could not hope that valour would ultimately save them. While Chatillon and Bisset, now charging singly, now side by side, did wonders in keeping a space clear around the king and the royal standard, Geoffrey de Segrines, adhering to the side of Louis, wielded his sword with such effect that he drove off, one by one, the horsemen who darted forth from the Saracen ranks.

'In truth,' said the brave Frenchman, when complimented by Bisset on his exploits, 'I know not how it is; but to me, it seems that the danger of this day has doubled my strength.'

'On my faith,' replied Bisset, 'I am at a loss whether more to admire your valour or your vigilance. Your care of your good king reminds me of the watchful servant who carefully drives away the flies from his master's cup.'

But brief were the intervals allowed even for such an exchange of sentiments. Now secure of victory, and stimulated by enthusiasm and fanaticism, the Saracens grew bolder and more audacious in their attacks. Urged on by their dervishes and imaums, who had flocked to the host of Saracens to remind them that they were fighting in the cause of the prophet, they became more and more eager for carnage and blood, and the Crusaders less and less capable of a stubborn resistance. At length, on reaching the little town of Minieh, the Crusaders acknowledged that they could no longer continue the retreat; and, halting, they drew up in a body outside the town, with the simple resolution of fighting till they fell. [168]

But by this time Louis was utterly exhausted; and Segrines, conducting him into the court, lifted him from his steed, and carried him, 'weak as a child in its mother's lap,' into a house, expecting every moment to be his last. Nor did the prospects of the Crusaders outside improve in the king's absence. Alarming rumours, vaguely flying about the town, reached their ears and depressed their hearts; and, while they were still in panic and incertitude, the Saracens made an onset with more than their former ferocity. Soon all was confusion and carnage. It seemed, indeed, that nothing but the hearts' blood of the Crusaders would satisfy the vindictive cravings of their foes; and so utterly dispirited by adversity and defeat, and pestilence, were knights formerly renowned as brave among the bravest that they allowed themselves, almost without resisting, to be slaughtered in heaps.

Naturally, however, there were striking exceptions; and none were more remarkable than Chatillon and Bisset; who, when Louis was conducted into Minieh, took up their post hard by an orange grove, and close to a wall at the entrance of the narrow street leading to the house into which Segrines had carried the king. [169]

Nothing could have exceeded Chatillon's fiery valour. At one moment he rushed like lightning among the Saracens, scattered them, and cut them down. Then after reining back to the wall to draw out the arrows and darts that adhered to his cuirass, he returned to the charge, rising in his stirrups, and shouting—'Chatillon, knights—Chatillon to the rescue.'

Meanwhile Bisset exerted himself with no less courage and prowess. Scorning his danger, and scorning his foes, he charged among the Saracens, with shouts of—'Holy Cross, Holy Cross! Down with the pagan dogs! Down with the slaves of Mahound and Termagaunt!' Nothing could resist the vehemence of his attack. In vain were all attempts to drag him from his steed. Before his mighty battle-axe the Saracens seemed to shake and fall as corn before the reaper.

At length Chatillon, mortally wounded, dropt from his horse, and the Saracen who had wounded him springing forward seized the French knight's steed, which was one sheet of blood and foam. Bisset cleft the Saracen's skull to the teeth, and laughed defiantly as he avenged the fall of his comrade-in-arms.

But Bisset was now alone; and his situation was so utterly desperate, that any ordinary man, even in that feudal and fighting age, would have relinquished all hope and yielded to fate. The English knight had no inclination to do anything of the kind. Rapidly his eye measured the ground; as rapidly his brain calculated the chances of reaching the orange grove; and as rapidly he arrived at the conclusion that he could cut his way through the crowd. No sooner had he settled this than he wasted not a moment in hesitation. Drawing back towards the wall, and halting for a moment, with his face to his foes, to breathe his panting steed, he once more, with battle-axe in hand, charged forward upon his now recoiling foes, but this time not to return. Nothing daunted by the darts and arrows that flew around him, he deliberately pursued the course which his eye had marked out, literally felling to the earth all who attempted to stop his progress, but skillfully avoiding foes whom it was not necessary to encounter. Only a man of the highest courage would have made such an attempt: only a man of the strongest will would have persevered. [170]

Now Bisset had both courage and strength of will, and in spite of all the chances against him, he did reach the orange grove, and making his way through it as well as he could, found himself in the verge of a wood of palms and sycamores. But he himself was wounded; his horse was bleeding in a dozen places; and close behind him were three Saracens, well mounted, and thirsting for his blood. It may seem to the reader, that such being the circumstances, Bisset might as well have fallen at Mansourah or with Walter de Chatillon at the entrance to the narrow street leading to the house to which the king had been carried. But, certainly, that was by no means his view of the case; for he was one of those warriors who never despair; and he turned on his pursuers like a lion at bay.

'Surely,' said he, speaking to himself, 'wounded and weary as I am, I should be but a poor Christian knight if I could not deal with three pagan dogs.' [171]

And terrible, even to brave foes, was the ferocity and fury with which Bisset turned upon the Saracens. Mighty was the force with which he swung a battle-axe, ponderous enough to have served as a weapon to Cœur de Lion. Crushed by one swoop of the axe fell the first of the pursuers—down, as it again swung on high, fell the second, who a moment earlier was uttering threats of vengeance. But the English knight had no inclination to encounter the third antagonist. His horse, as he felt, was sinking; he himself was weakened by loss of blood; and, quick as

thought, he turned towards the wood of palms and sycamores.

But a new difficulty presented itself. Between Bisset and the wood was a very deep ditch which at another time would have made him pause. Now, however, he did not hesitate, even for an instant. He touched his steed with the spur; he spoke as if imploring the noble animal to make a last effort; and the result was a gallant bound. But the effort was too much. In exerting itself to scramble up the opposite bank, the good steed broke its back; and the knight, freeing his limbs from its corse, quickly drew his dagger and relieved it from suffering.

The delay, however, had proved dangerous. Even as he gained one bank of the ditch the Saracen was at the other, and preparing to launch a javelin. One moment only intervened between the Crusader and death; but that moment was not neglected. With his remaining strength Bisset raised his battle-axe, whirled it with irresistible force, and, as the weapon whizzed through the air, the Saracen dropped from his horse and rolled into the ditch, the water of which immediately became red with his blood. [172]

Not a moment did Bisset now waste in getting under cover of the wood. For full five minutes he neither halted nor looked behind. At length he stopped under a palm tree; and taking out one of those little crosses which the Crusaders carried with them for purposes of prayer, and which are now symbolised by figures on the shield of many a Crusader's descendant, he knelt before it, and invoked the protection and aid of God and the saints to shield him from danger and restore him to the land of his fathers.

But almost ere the prayer was uttered, Bisset started at the sound of footsteps; and as he turned his head his brain reeled; and, after grasping at the tree for support, he sank motionless on the ground.

CHAPTER XXVII.

JOINVILLE IN PERIL.

WHILE King Louis and the brave companions of his ill-starred retreat were seized as captives, or mercilessly massacred by the Saracens at Minieh, the sick and wounded Crusaders who embarked on the Nile were not more fortunate. In order to understand the extent of their dangers and sufferings, it is necessary to refer to the chronicle of the good Lord of Joinville—who, still suffering from disease, embarked with his knights and followers, including Guy Muschamp, not yet recovered from the sickness by which he had been prostrated.

Nor is it possible to peruse the seneschal's simple narrative without profound interest. In reading his account of this disastrous expedition, we are transported, in imagination, to the thirteenth century, and witness, with the mind's eye, the scenes in which he was an actor, and gradually come to feel as if we were not reading a chronicle penned centuries ago, but listening to a Crusader who, just returned from the East, and seated on the dais of the castle hall, tells his story over the wine-cup to his kinsmen and neighbours assembled at the festive board. [174]

It was evening; and Joinville, who was suffering fearfully from the prevailing malady, perceiving that everyone was preparing to depart towards Damietta, withdrew to his galley, with his chaplain, and such of his company, including Guy Muschamp, as had escaped the pestilence, and the swords of the Saracens; and no sooner did darkness descend over the hill, than he commanded his captain to raise the anchor, and float down the stream.

'My lord,' replied the man, 'I dare not; for between us and Damietta are the large galleys of the Saracens, who would infallibly capture us.'

And at this moment a terrible spectacle arrested Joinville's attention. It happened that the king's seamen were waiting to take the sick and wounded on board; but many of the sick and wounded were still in the camp on the banks of the river. Suddenly, by the light of fires which the sailors had lighted for the comfort of the sick, Joinville saw the Saracens enter the camp, and gratify their thirst for blood by a general massacre. In great alarm, the king's seamen cut their cables; and while Joinville's men were raising their anchor, the huge galleys came down upon them with such force, that he expected every moment to be sunk. However he escaped this danger, and made some way down the Nile. But it speedily appeared that the Crusaders who had embarked on the river were not to be more fortunate in their attempt to reach Damietta than were those who remained on shore.

Joinville very soon discovered that he had scarcely a chance of escape. During the night, a tempest arose; and the wind blowing with great force towards Damietta drove the vessels of the Crusaders straight in the way of the sultan's fleet, and about break of day they found themselves close to the galleys of the Saracens. Immediately on observing the Crusaders approaching, the Saracens raised loud shouts, and shot large bolts, and threw Greek fire in such quantities, that it seemed as if the stars were falling from the heavens. [175]

Great, of course, was the alarm of the Crusaders. Joinville and his company, however, gained the current, and endeavoured to push forward; but the wind becoming more and more violent drove them against the banks, and close to the Saracens, who, having already taken several

vessels, were murdering the crews, and throwing the dead bodies into the river.

On seeing what was taking place, and finding that the Saracens began to shoot bolts at his galley, Joinville, to protect himself, put on his armour. He had hardly done so, when some of his people began to shout in great consternation.

'My lord, my lord,' cried they, 'because the Saracens menace us, our steersman is going to run us ashore, where we shall all be murdered.'

At that moment Joinville was so faint that he had seated himself, but instantly rising he drew his sword and advanced.

'Beware what you do,' said he; 'for I vow to slay the first person who attempts to run us ashore.'

'My lord,' said the captain in a resolute tone, 'it is impossible to proceed; so you must make up your mind whether you will be landed on shore, or stranded in the mud of the banks.'

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'Well,' replied Joinville, 'I choose rather to be run on a mud bank than to be carried ashore, where even now I see our people being slaughtered.'

But escape proved impossible. Almost as he spoke, Joinville perceived four of the sultan's galleys making towards his barge; and, giving himself up for lost, he took a little casket containing his jewels, and threw it into the Nile. However, it turned out that, though he could not save his liberty, there was still a chance of saving his life.

'My lord,' said the mariner, 'you must permit me to say you are the king's cousin; if not, we are as good as murdered.'

'Say what you please,' replied Joinville.

And now Joinville met with a protector, whose coming he attributed to the direct interposition of heaven. 'It was God,' says he, 'who then, as I verily believe, sent to my aid a Saracen, who was a subject of the Emperor of Germany. He wore a pair of coarse trowsers, and, swimming straight to me, he came into my vessel and embraced my knees. "My lord," he said, "if you do not what I shall advise, you are lost. In order to save yourself, you must leap into the river, without being observed." He had a cord thrown to me, and I leaped into the river, followed by the Saracen, who saved me, and conducted me to a galley, wherein were fourteen score of men, besides those who had boarded my vessel. But this good Saracen held me fast in his arms.'

Shortly after, Joinville with the good Saracen's aid was landed, and the other Saracens rushed on him to cut his throat, and he expected no better fate. But the Saracen who had saved him would not quit his hold.

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'He is the king's cousin,' shouted he; 'the king's cousin.'

'I had already,' says Joinville, 'felt the knife at my throat, and cast myself on my knees; but, by the hands of this good Saracen, God delivered me from this peril; and I was led to the castle where the Saracen chiefs had assembled.'

When Joinville was conducted with some of his company, along with the spoils of his barge, into the presence of the emirs, they took off his coat of mail; and perceiving that he was very ill, they, from pity, threw one of his scarlet coverlids lined with minever over him, and gave him a white leathern girdle, with which he girded the coverlid round him, and placed a small cap on his head. Nevertheless, what with his fright and his malady, he soon began to shake so that his teeth chattered, and he complained of thirst.

On this the Saracens gave him some water in a cup; but he no sooner put it to his lips, than the water began to run back through his nostrils. 'Having an imposthume in my throat,' says he, 'imagine what a wretched state I was in; and I looked more to death than life.'

When Joinville's attendants saw the water running through his nostrils, they began to weep; and the good Saracen who had saved him asked them why they were so sorrowful.

'Because,' they replied, 'our lord is nearly dead.'

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And thereupon the good Saracen, taking pity on their distress, ran to tell the emirs; and one of them coming, told Joinville to be of good cheer, for he would bring a drink that should cure him in two days. Under the influence of this beverage, the seneschal ere long recovered; and when he was well, he was sent for by the admiral, who commanded the sultan's galleys.

'Are you,' asked the admiral, 'the king's cousin, as was reported?'

'No,' answered Joinville, 'I am not;' and he informed the admiral why it had been stated.

'You were well advised,' said the admiral; 'for otherwise you would have been all murdered, and cast into the river. Have you any acquaintance with the Emperor Frederic, or are you of his lineage?'

'Truly,' replied Joinville, 'I have heard my mother say that I am the emperor's second cousin.'

'Ah,' said the admiral, 'I rejoice to hear it; and I love you all the better on that account.'

It appears that Joinville became quite friendly with the admiral, and was treated by him with kindness; and, on Sunday, when it was ordered that all the Crusaders who had been taken prisoners on the Nile should be brought to a castle on the banks, Joinville was invited to go thither in the admiral's company. On that occasion, the seneschal had to endure the horror of seeing his chaplain dragged from the hold of his galley and instantly killed and flung into the water; and scarcely was this over when the chaplain's clerk was dragged out of the hold, so weak that he could hardly stand, felled on the head with a mortar, and cast after his master. In this manner the Saracens dealt with all the captives who were suffering from sickness.

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Horrorstruck at such a destruction of human life, Joinville, by means of the good Saracen who had saved his life, informed them that they were doing very wrong; but they treated the matter lightly.

'We are only destroying men who are of no use,' said they; 'for they are much too ill with their disorders to be of any service.'

Soon after witnessing this harrowing spectacle, Joinville was requested by the Saracen admiral to mount a palfrey; and they rode together, over a bridge, to the place where the Crusaders were imprisoned. At the entrance of a large pavilion the good Saracen, who had been Joinville's preserver, and had always followed him about, stopped, and requested his attention.

'Sir,' said he, 'you must excuse me, but I cannot come further. I entreat you not to quit the hand of this boy, otherwise the Saracens will kill him.'

'Who is he?' asked Joinville.

'The boy's name,' replied the good Saracen, 'is Bartholomew de Bar, and he is son of the Lord Montfaucon de Bar.'

And now conducted by the admiral, and leading the little boy by the hand, Joinville entered the pavilion, where the nobles and knights of France, with more than ten thousand persons of inferior rank, were confined in a court, large in extent, and surrounded by walls of mud. From this court the captive Christians were led forth, one at a time, and asked if they would become renegades, yes or no. He who answered 'Yes,' was put aside; but he who answered 'No,' was instantly beheaded.

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Such was the plight of the Christian warriors who so recently had boasted of being about to conquer Egypt. Already thirty thousand of the Crusaders had perished; and the survivors were so wretched, that they almost envied their comrades who had gone where the weary are at rest.

Now in the midst of all this suffering and anxiety, what had become of Guy Muschamp? Had the gay young squire, who boasted that if killed by the Saracens he would die laughing, been drowned in the Nile, or was he a captive in that large court surrounded by walls of mud? Neither. But as our narrative proceeds, the reader will see that Guy Muschamp's fate was hardly less sad than the fate of those who had found a watery grave, or of those who were offered the simple choice of denying their God or losing their lives.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

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NEWS OF DISASTER.

WHILE Louis of France and his nobles and knights were exposed to such danger at the hands of their enemies, from whom they had no reason to expect forbearance, Queen Margaret remained at Damietta, with her ladies, expecting to hear of battles won and fortresses taken. At length, one morning about sunrise, a strange and heart-rending cry resounded through the city, and reached the ears of the queen in her palace. What was it? was it fire? No. Another and another wail of agony. What could it be? The approach of an enemy? No. It was merely tidings of the massacre of Minieh!

Margaret of Provence summoned to her presence Oliver de Thermes, whom King Louis had left at Damietta in command of the garrison.

'Sir knight,' said the queen, 'what is all that noise I hear?'

The warrior hesitated.

'Speak, sir,' said Margaret, losing patience; 'I command you to tell me what has happened.'

'Madam,' replied the knight, 'the news as yet is but vague and uncertain.'

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'Answer me, directly,' said the queen, speaking in a tone of authority. 'What of the King of France? What of the warriors who marched from Damietta under the banner of St. Denis?'

'Alas, madam,' replied Sir Oliver, 'I would fain hope that the news is not true; but it certainly is bruited about that the king is a captive, and that the warriors of the Cross have fallen almost to a man.'

Margaret did not answer; she did not even attempt to speak. Her colour went, she shuddered,

tottered, and would have fallen to the floor had not her ladies rushed to her support. It was indeed a terrible situation for that youthful matron, and—what made matters more melancholy—she was about to become a mother.

And now Damietta was the scene of consternation somewhat similar to that which pervaded Cairo, when a pigeon carried thither intelligence of the victory of the Count of Artois at Djédilé. The ladies of the Crusaders, the Countesses of Poitiers and Provence, and the widowed Countess of Artois, among the number, bewailed the fate of their lords; the queen was afflicted to a terrible degree as she thought of the king's peril; and many people only felt concerned about their own extreme peril. Of course much selfishness was exhibited under the circumstances; and the Pisans and Genoese set a bad example by preparing to save themselves, and leave the city to its fate. But, on hearing of their intention, the queen ordered that the chief persons among them should be brought to her presence, and addressed them in a way likely to convince them of the selfishness of their conduct.

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'Gentlemen,' said Margaret, rousing herself from her prostration and raising her head; 'as you love God, do not leave this city; for if you do you will utterly ruin the king and his army, who are captives, and expose all within the walls to the vengeance of the Saracens.'

'Madam,' replied the Pisans and Genoese, utterly unmoved by the loyal lady's distress, 'we have no provisions left, and we cannot consent to remain at the risk of dying of hunger.'

'Be under no such apprehension,' said the queen quickly; 'you shall not die of hunger; I will cause all the provisions in Damietta to be bought in the king's name, and distributed forthwith.'

The Pisans and Genoese on hearing this assurance consented to remain in Damietta; and, after an expenditure of three hundred and sixty thousand livres, Margaret provided for their subsistence. But the men who were thus bribed to remain as a garrison were not likely to make any very formidable resistance in the event of an attack taking place; and such an event was no longer improbable. Indeed rumours, vague but most alarming, reached Damietta that a Saracenic host was already on its way to capture the city.

The rumour that the Moslems were actually coming made the bravest men in Damietta quake, and inspired the ladies who were in the city with absolute terror. Even the courage of the queen, who had just given birth to her son John, failed; and her faculties well-nigh deserted her. One moment her imagination conjured up visions of Saracens butchering her husband; at another she shrieked with terror at the idea that the Saracens had taken the city and were entering her chamber. Ever and anon she sank into feverish sleep, and then, wakened by some fearful dream, sprang up, shouting, 'Help! help! they are at hand. I hear their lelies.'

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It was while Margaret of Provence was in this unhappy state of mind, that a French knight, who was eighty years of age, but whose heart, in spite of his four score of years, still overflowed with chivalry, undertook the duty of guarding the door of her chamber night and day.

'Madam,' said he, 'be not alarmed. I am with you. Banish your fears.'

'Sir knight,' exclaimed the unhappy queen, throwing herself on her knees before him, 'I have a favour to ask. Promise that you will grant my request.'

'I swear, madam, that I will comply with your wishes,' replied the aged knight.

'Well, then,' said the queen; 'what I have to request is this, that if the Saracens should take the city, you, by the faith you have pledged, will rather cut off my head than suffer me to fall into their hands.'

'Madam,' replied the veteran chevalier, 'I had already resolved on doing what you have asked, in case the worst should befall.'

CHAPTER XXIX.

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A WOUNDED PILGRIM.

IT was long ere Walter Espec, struck down wounded and bleeding at Mansourah, recovered possession of his faculties sufficiently to recall the scenes through which he had passed or even to understand what was taking place around him. As time passed over, however, consciousness returned; and he one day became aware that he was stretched on a bed in a chamber somewhat luxuriously furnished, and tended by a woman advanced in years, who wore a gown of russet, and a wimple which gave her a conventual appearance.

Walter raised his head, and was about to speak, when she suddenly left the room, and the squire was left to guess, as he best might, where and under whose care he was. He attempted to rise; but the effort was in vain. He put his hand to his head; but he found that his long locks of fair hair were gone. He tried to remember how he had got there; but, try as he might, his memory would not bring him farther down the stream of time, than the hour in which he fell at Mansourah. All the rest was a blank or a feverish dream of being rowed on a river by Saracen boatmen, and left at the portal of a house which he had never seen before. Gradually recalling all

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his adventures since he left the castle of Wark, he remembered and felt his hand for the amulet with which he had been gifted by King Louis when at Cyprus. The ring was there, and as Walter thought of the inscription he felt something like hope.

But Walter was still weak from loss of blood and the fever which had been the consequence of wounds and exposure, and he soon sank into a slumber. When he again awoke to consciousness the woman in russet was standing near him, and conversing with a damsel whom Walter did not at first see, but whose tones, sweet and soft, manifested a strong interest in his recovery.

'He will yet live,' said the woman in russet, 'and rejoice we in it; for he is a young man; and to such life must needs be dear.'

'He will live,' repeated the girl, 'and our lady be praised therefor; for it is sweet to live.'

'In truth, noble demoiselle,' said the woman in russet, 'the youth owes much to your solicitude; but for your anxiety on his behalf, I hardly think he would have struggled through the fever. However, if you will remain and watch him for a brief space, I will attend to the commands of my lady the queen, and hasten to relieve you. Nay, it misbeseems not noble maiden to tend a wounded warrior, especially a soldier of the Cross; and, credit me, he will give you little trouble. He lies as quiet and calm as if he were in his shroud.'

With these words the woman in russet departed; and the damsel, treading so softly that her footstep made not the slightest noise, moved about the room in silent thought, now turning to gaze on the wounded squire, now looking from the casement. Walter, now fully awake, began to experience a strong feeling of curiosity; and turning his head directed his gaze, not without interest, towards his youthful nurse. She was not more than sixteen, and still more beautiful than young. She had features exquisitely lovely in their delicacy and expression, deep blue eyes with long dark fringes, and dark brown hair which, according to the fashion of the period, was turned up behind and enclosed in a caul of network. Her form was already elegant in its proportions; but it inclined to be taller, and gave promise of great perfection. Her charms were set off by the mourning dress which she wore, and by the robe called the quintise, which was an upper tunic without sleeves, with bordered vandyking and scalloping worked and notched in various patterns, worn so long behind that it swept the floor, but in front held up gracefully with one hand so as not to impede the step.

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Walter was charmed, and a little astonished as his eye alighted on a face and form so fascinating; and, in spite of his prostration and utter weakness, he gazed on her with lively interest and some wonder.

'Holy Katherine!' exclaimed he to himself; 'what a lovely vision. I marvel who she is, and where I am; and, as he thus soliloquised, the girl turned round, and not without flutter and alarm perceived that he was awake and watching her.'

'Noble demoiselle, heed me not;' said Walter earnestly, 'but rather tell me, since, if I understand aright, I owe my life to you—how am I ever sufficiently to prove my gratitude?'

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'Ah, sir squire,' replied she, 'you err in supposing the debt to be on your side. It is I who owe you a life, and not you who owe a life to me; and,' added she, struggling to repress tears, 'my heart fills when I remember how you did for me, albeit a stranger, what, under the circumstances, no other being on earth would have ventured to do.'

'By Holy Katherine, noble demoiselle,' said Walter, wondering at her words; 'I should in truth deem it a high honour to have rendered such as you any service. But that is a merit which I cannot claim; for, until this hour, unless my memory deceives me, I never saw your face.'

The countenance of the girl evinced disappointment, and the tears started to her eyes.

'Ah, sir, sir,' said she, with agitation; 'I am she whom, on the coast of Cyprus, you saved from the waves of the sea.'

Walter's heart beat rather quick as he learned that it was Adeline de Brienne who stood before him; for, though her very face was unknown to him, her name had strangely mixed up with many of his day-dreams; and it was not without confusion that, after a pause, he continued the conversation.

'Pardon my ignorance, noble demoiselle,' said he, 'and vouchsafe, I pray you, to inform me where I now am; for I own to you that I am somewhat perplexed.'

'You are in Damietta.'

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'In Damietta!' exclaimed Walter, astonished; 'and how came I to Damietta? My latest recollection is having been struck from my steed at Mansourah, after my lord, the Earl of Salisbury, and all the English warriors, had fallen before the weapons of the Saracens; and how I come to be in Damietta is more than I can guess.'

'Mayhap; but I can tell you,' said a frank hearty voice; and, as Walter started at the sound, Bisset, the English knight, stood before him; and Adeline de Brienne, not without casting a kindly look behind, vanished from the chamber.

'Wonder upon wonders,' cried Walter, as the knight took his hand; 'I am now more bewildered than before. Am I in Damietta, and do I see you, and in the body?'

'Even so,' replied Bisset; 'and for both circumstances we are wholly indebted to Beltran, the Christian renegade. He saved you from perishing at Mansourah, and conveyed you down the Nile, and brought you to the portal of this palace; and he came to me when I was at Minieh under a tree, sinking with fatigue, and in danger of bleeding to death; and he found the means of conveying me hither also; so I say that, were he ten times a renegade, he merits our gratitude.'

'Certes,' said Walter, 'and, methinks, also our prayers that his heart may be turned from the error of his ways, and that he may return to the faith which Christians hold.'

'Amen,' replied Bisset.

'But tell me, sir knight,' continued Walter, eagerly, what has happened, since that dreadful day, to the pilgrim army? and if you know aught of my brother-in-arms, Guy Muschamp?' [190]

'Sir squire,' answered Bisset, sadly; 'for your first question, I grieve to say, that has come to pass which I too shrewdly predicted—all the boasting of the French has ended in disaster—the king and his nobles being prisoners, and most of the other pilgrims slain or drowned; and, for your second, as to Guy Muschamp, the English squire, who was a brave and gallant youth, I own I entertain hardly a doubt that, ere this, he is food for worms or fishes.'

Walter Espec uttered an exclamation of horror, and, without another word, sank back on his pillow.

CHAPTER XXX.

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ST. LOUIS IN CHAINS.

WHEN King Louis was led away by the faithful Segrines, and when he was so exhausted that he had to be lifted from his steed and carried into a house, and when the Crusaders outside were in dismay and despair, Philip de Montfort entered the chamber where the saintly monarch was, and proposed to renew negotiations with the Saracens.

'Sire,' said De Montfort, 'I have just seen the emir with whom I formerly treated; and, so it be your good pleasure, I will seek him out, and demand a cessation of hostilities.'

'Go,' replied Louis; 'and, since it can no better be, promise to submit to the conditions on which the sultan formerly insisted.'

Accordingly De Montfort went; and the Saracens, still fearing their foes, and remembering that the French held Damietta, agreed to treat. A truce was, indeed, on the point of being concluded. Montfort had given the emir a ring; the emir had taken off his turban, and their hands were about to meet; when a Frenchman, named Marcel, rushed in and spoiled all. [192]

'Seigneurs,' said he, interrupting the conference, 'noble knights of France, surrender yourselves all! The king commands you by me. Do not cause him to be put to death.'

On hearing this message, the emir withdrew his hand, returned De Montfort's ring, put on his turban, and intimated that the negotiation was at an end.

'God is powerful,' said he, 'and it is not customary to treat with beaten enemies.'

And now it was that there ensued such a scene as Minieh had never witnessed. Almost as the negotiation ended, Louis was seized, violently handled and put in chains. Both the Count of Poitiers and the Count of Anjou were at the same time made prisoners; and the bulk of the warriors accompanying the king had scarcely the choice between surrender and death; for nothing, as has been said, but their hearts' blood would satisfy the vindictive cravings of their foes; and, when the king's captivity became known, many of those who had formerly been most intrepid, remained motionless and incapable of the slightest resistance.

About the time when King Louis was put in chains, and when Bisset, the English knight, was endeavouring to escape death or rather captivity, the sultan arrived at Minieh, and, without any display of generosity for the vanquished, took measures for improving his victory to the utmost. The king and his brothers who, like himself, were bound hand and foot, were conducted in triumph to a boat of war. The oriflamme—that banner so long the pride of France—was now carried in mockery; the crosses and images, which the Crusaders had with them as symbols of their religious faith, were trampled scornfully under foot; and, with trumpets sounding and kettle-drums clashing, the royal captives were marched into Mansourah. [193]

It was to the house of Fakreddin Ben Lokman, the secretary of the sultan, that Louis was escorted; and, on arriving there, he was given into the custody of the Eunuch Sahil. But, abandoned by fortune, and in the power of his enemies, Louis was still himself. In chains and captivity he exhibited the dignity of a king and the resignation of a Christian, and his jailers could not refrain from expressing their astonishment at the serene patience with which he bore adversity. Of all his property, he had only saved his book of psalms; and daily, while consoling himself with reciting from its pages, he was inspired with strength and resolution to bear his misfortunes, and to raise his thoughts far above the malice of his foes.

Meanwhile, at the court of the sultan, everything was not going smoothly. From the beginning, the emirs and Mamelukes had looked with envy and suspicion on the favourites brought by Touran Chah from Mesopotamia; and such feelings had not died away. Many of the favourites ere long were substituted for the ministers of the late sultan; and the emirs and Mamelukes not only complained loudly of this to Touran Chah, but reproached him bitterly for the way in which he disposed of the spoil of the Crusaders.

'How is this?' asked they; 'you are bestowing the spoils of the vanquished Franks, not on the men who have borne the burden of the war, but on men whose sole merit consists in having come from the banks of the Euphrates to the Nile.'

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Now, the sultan's favourites were not unaware of the unfriendly feeling with which they were regarded by the Mameluke chiefs. Indeed, they saw all the dangers of their position, and considered it politic, under the circumstances, to reduce the influence of the emirs and Mamelukes by bringing about a treaty with the Crusaders.

'In these people,' said they to the sultan, 'you have enemies far more dangerous than the Christians. Nothing will content them but reigning in your stead. They never cease to boast of their victories, as if they alone had conquered the Franks, and as if the God of Mahomet had not sent pestilence and famine to aid you in triumphing. But hasten to terminate the war, that you may strengthen your power within; and then you will be able to reign in reality.'

As soon as Touran Chah was convinced that the emirs and Mamelukes entertained projects of ambition dangerous to his power, and that war was favourable to their designs, he resolved to show the chiefs how little he regarded their opinions; and, without even consulting them, he sent some of his favourites to the house of Lokman, and empowered them to treat with Louis.

'King,' said the ambassador, 'I come from the sultan, to inform you that he will restore you to liberty, on condition that you surrender to him the cities of Palestine now held by the Franks.'

'The cities of Palestine are not mine to give,' replied Louis, calmly; 'and I cannot pretend to dispose of them.'

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'But beware of rashly refusing to submit to the sultan's terms,' said the ambassador; 'for you know not what may happen. He will send you to the caliph at Bagdad, who will imprison you for life; or he will cause you to be led throughout the East, to exhibit to all Asia a Christian king reduced to slavery.'

'I am the sultan's prisoner,' replied Louis, unmoved, 'and he can do with me what he pleases.'

On hearing this answer, the ambassadors intimated their intention of employing personal violence; and, one of them having stamped three times with his foot, the Eunuch Sahil entered, followed by the jailers, bearing that frightful instrument of torture, known as 'the bernicles.'

Now this terrible engine was made of pieces of wood pierced with holes, into which the legs of the criminal were put; and the holes were at so great a distance from each other, and could be forced to so great an extension, that the pain was about the most horrible that could be produced. Moreover, the holes being at various distances, the legs of the victim could be inserted into those that extended them to the greatest distance, and while the pain inflicted was more than flesh and blood could bear, means were, at the same time, used to break or dislocate all his small bones. It was an instrument of punishment reserved for the worst of criminals; and no torture was deemed so awful as that which it was capable of inflicting.

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'What do you say to be put in this engine of punishment?' asked the ambassador, pointing significantly to the bernicles.

'I have already told you,' replied Louis, unmoved, 'that I am the sultan's prisoner, and that he can do with me as he pleases.'

In fact, the courage of Louis was proof against any danger to his own person; and he held all the menaces of his captors so cheap, that they scarcely knew how to deal with him. At length, the sultan determined to propose terms more likely to be acceptable to the saint-king, and again sent ambassadors to his prison, with the object of bringing about a treaty.

'King,' said the ambassador, 'the sultan has sent to ask how much money you will give for your ransom, besides restoring Damietta?'

'In truth,' replied Louis, 'I scarcely know what answer to make; but, if the sultan will be contented with a reasonable sum, I will write to the queen to pay it for myself and my army.'

'But wherefore write to the queen, who is but a woman?' asked the ambassador somewhat surprised.

'She is my lady and companion,' answered Louis, even at that moment mindful of the principles of chivalry; 'and it is only reasonable that her consent should be obtained.'

'Well,' said the ambassador, 'if the queen will pay a million golden bezants, the sultan will set you free.'

'However,' said Louis, with dignity, 'I must tell you that, as King of France, I cannot be redeemed by money; but a million of bezants will be paid as the ransom of my army, and Damietta given up in exchange for my own freedom.'

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After some negotiations the terms were agreed to; and the sultan not only concluded the treaty joyfully, but expressed his admiration of the nobility of spirit which Louis had displayed.

'By my faith!' said Touran Chah to the ambassador, 'this Frenchman is generous and noble, seeing that he does not condescend to bargain about so large a sum of money, but instantly complies with the first demand. Go,' added the sultan, 'and tell him, from me, that I make him a present of a fifth of the sum, so that he will only have to pay four-fifths; and that I will command all the principal nobles and his great officers to be embarked in four of my largest galleys, and conducted safely to Damietta.'

It was Thursday before the Feast of Ascension; and, while the King of France, and the Crusaders were conveyed down the Nile in galleys, Touran Chah travelled by land from Mansourah, in order to receive Damietta, and perform the conditions of peace. On reaching Pharescour, however, the sultan halted to dine with his chiefs; and, while the other Crusaders lay in their galleys on the river, the king and his brethren were invited to land, and received into a pavilion, where they had an interview with the sultan, when Saturday was appointed for the payment of the golden bezants and the surrender of Damietta. But long ere Saturday a terrible tragedy was to occur, and render Pharescour memorable as the scene of a deed of violence, startling both to Asia and Europe. Already, while the sultan held his interview with the King of France and the Counts of Poitiers and Anjou, everything was prepared; and soon after Touran Chah had left Louis and his brothers shut up in the pavilion, they were roused by loud shouts of distress and a mighty tumult; and, while they breathlessly asked each other whether the French captives were being massacred or Damietta taken by storm, in rushed twenty Saracens, their swords red and reeking with blood, and spots of blood on their vestments and their faces, stamping, threatening furiously, and uttering fierce cries.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

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THE TRAGEDY OF PHARESCOUR.

AT Pharescour, on the margin of the Nile, the Sultan of Egypt had a remarkable palace. It appears to have been constructed of wood, and covered with cloth of brilliant colours. At the entrance was a pavilion, where the emirs and chiefs were in the habit of leaving their swords, when they had audience of the sultan; and beyond this pavilion was a handsome gateway which led to the great hall where the sultan feasted; and adjoining the great hall was a tower, by which the sultan ascended to his private apartments.

Between the palace and the river was a spacious lawn, in which there was a tower, to which the sultan was wont to ascend when he wished to make observations on the surrounding country; and hard by was an alley which led towards the margin of the hill, and a summer-house formed of trellis-work and covered with Indian linen, where he frequently repaired for the purpose of bathing.

The chroniclers of the period who write of the crusade of St. Louis fully describe this palace. Indeed, the appearance of the place was strongly impressed on the memory of the Crusaders. It was there that Touran Chah, when on his way from Mansourah to Damietta, halted to receive the congratulations of the Moslem chiefs on the victory that had been achieved over the Franks; there, in their company, he celebrated his triumph by a grand banquet; and there was enacted the terrible tragedy that exposed the surviving pilgrims to new dangers and fresh trials.

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By this time, indeed, the emirs and Mamelukes had become so exasperated at the elevation of the sultan's favourite courtiers that they vowed vengeance; and, in order to justify their project, they ascribed to him the most sinister designs. It was asserted that many of the emirs were doomed to die on a certain day; and that, in the midst of a nocturnal orgy, Touran Chah had cut off the tops of the flambeaux in his chamber, crying—"Thus shall fly the heads of all the Mamelukes." In order to avenge herself for the neglect to which she was exposed under the new reign, Chegger Edour, the sultana who had played so important a part in the last days of Melikul Salih, exerted her eloquence to stimulate the discontent; and the emirs and Mamelukes, having formed a conspiracy, only awaited a convenient opportunity to complete their projects of vengeance at a blow.

It was the day after his arrival at Pharescour, on which Touran Chah gave a banquet to the chiefs of his army; and, as it happened, the company comprised the Mamelukes and the emirs who were, or who deemed themselves, in danger. It would seem that everything went forward quietly and ceremoniously till the feast was ended, and the sultan rose to ascend to his chamber. Not a moment, however, was then lost. As soon as Touran Chah moved from table, Bibars Bendocdar, who carried the sultan's sword, struck the first blow, and instantly the others rushed furiously upon their destined victim. Touran Chah parried the blow of the Mameluke chief with his hand; but the weapon penetrated between two of his fingers and cut up his arm.

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'My lords,' said he, taken by surprise; 'I make my complaint against this man, who has endeavoured to kill me.'

'Better that you should be slain than live to murder us, as you intend to do,' cried all present,

with the exception of an envoy of the caliph, who had arrived from Bagdad, and appeared much terrified at the scene so suddenly presented.

Touran Chah looked round him in amazement; and, as he did so, he was seized with terror. However, the instinct of self-preservation did not desert him. With a spring he bounded between the motionless guards, escaped into the lawn, took refuge in the tower, and looking from a window demanded of the conspirators what they really wanted; but they were not in a humour to spend time in talk.

'Come down,' cried they; 'you cannot escape us.'

'Assure me of safety, and I will willingly descend,' said the sultan.

At this stage the envoy of the caliph, having mounted his horse, came forward as if to interfere; but the conspirators menaced him with instant death if he did not return to his tent, and, still keenly bent on completing their work of murder, ordered the sultan to come down. [202]

Touran Chah shook his head, as if declining the invitation.

'Fool,' cried the conspirators, scornfully, 'we have the means of compelling you to descend, or to meet a worse fate;' and without further parley they commenced assailing the tower with Greek fire.

The Greek fire caught the cloth and timber, and immediately the whole was in a blaze. Touran Chah could no longer hesitate. One hope remained to him, namely to rush towards the Nile, to throw himself into the water, and to take refuge on board one of the vessels that he saw anchored near the shore. Accordingly he leaped from the blazing tower, with the intention of rushing across the lawn. But the toils were upon him. A nail having caught his mantle, he, after remaining for a moment suspended, fell to the ground. Instantly sabres and swords waved over him; and he clung in a supplicating posture to Octai, one of the captains of his guard; but Octai repulsed him with contempt. Nevertheless, the conspirators hesitated; and they were still hesitating, when Bibars Bendocdar, who was never troubled either with fears or scruples, and who, indeed, had struck the first blow, made a thrust so stern that the sword remained sticking fast between the ribs of the victim. Still resisting, however, the sultan contrived to drag himself to the Nile, with a hope of reaching the galleys from which the captive Crusaders witnessed the outrage; but some of the Mamelukes followed him into the water; and close to the galley in which the Lord of Joinville was, the heir of Saladin—the last of the Eioubites—died miserably. [203]

It was now that the Mamelukes rushed into the tent where Louis and his brothers were.

'King,' cried Octai, pointing to his bloody sword, 'Touran Chah is no more. What will you give me for having freed you from an enemy who meditated your destruction as well as ours?'

Louis vouchsafed no reply.

'What!' cried the emir, furiously presenting the point of his sword; 'know you not that I am master of your person? Make me a knight, or thou art a dead man.'

'Make thyself a Christian, and I will make thee a knight,' said Louis, calmly.

Rather cowed than otherwise with his reception, and with the demeanour of the royal captive, Octai retired; and the French king and his brothers once more breathed with as much freedom as men could under the circumstances. But they were not long left undisturbed. Scarcely had the Mameluke aspirant for knighthood disappeared when the tent was crowded with Saracens, who brandished their sabres and threatened Louis with destruction.

'Frenchman!' cried they, addressing the king, wildly and fiercely; 'art thou ignorant of thy danger, or what may be the fate that awaits thee? Pharescour is not Mansourah, as events may convince thee yet. Here thou mayest find a tomb instead of the house of Lokman, and the two terrible angels, Munkir and Nakir, instead of the Eunuch Sahil.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

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PERILS AND SUSPENSE.

THE Saracen chiefs, after having dyed their sabres in the blood of the sultan, did not confine their menaces and violent demonstrations to the tent in which the captive King of France was lodged. With swords drawn and battle-axes on their shoulders, thirty of them boarded the galley where Joinville was with the Count of Brittany, Sir Baldwin d'Ebelin, and the Constable of Cyprus, and menaced them with gestures and furious imprecations.

'I asked Sir Baldwin d'Ebelin,' writes Joinville, 'what they were saying; and he, understanding Saracenic, replied that they were come to cut off our heads, and shortly after I saw a large body of our men on board confessing themselves to a monk of La Trinité, who had accompanied the Count of Flanders. I no longer thought of any sin or evil I had done, but that I was about to receive my death. In consequence, I fell on my knees at the feet of one of them, and making the sign of the cross, said "Thus died St. Agnes." The Constable of Cyprus knelt beside me, and

confessed himself to me, and I gave him such absolution as god was pleased to grant me the power of bestowing. But of all the things he had said to me, when I rose up I could not remember one of them.'

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'We were confined in the hold of the galleys,' continues the chronicler, 'and laid heads and heels together. We thought it had been so ordered because they were afraid of attacking us in a body, and that they would destroy us one at a time. This danger lasted the whole night. I had my feet right on the face of the Count of Brittany, whose feet, in return, were beside my face. On the morrow we were taken out of the hold, and the emirs sent to inform us that we might renew the treaties we had made with the sultan.'

'So far, all seemed well. But the danger was not yet over, as the Crusaders were destined to feel. At first the form of the oaths to be taken by the king and the emirs presented much difficulty; and, even when it was settled, the emirs in council gravely discussed the propriety of putting the French king and his barons to death. Only one of them pleaded for keeping faith; and his voice would have been drowned in the clamour, but fortunately he used an argument which appealed irresistibly to their cupidity.'

'You may put these Franks to death if you will,' said he; 'but reflect ere doing so that dead men pay no ransom.'

Nevertheless, it really seemed that after all the Crusaders were doomed; and while they were on board the galleys, and this discussion was proceeding, an incident occurred which caused them to give themselves up for lost.

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'One of the emirs that were against us,' says Joinville, 'threatening we were to be slain, came to the bank of the river, and shouted out in Saracen to those who were on board our galley, and, taking off his turban, made signs, and told them they were to carry us back to Babylon. The anchors were instantly raised, and we were carried a good league up the river. This caused great grief to all of us, and many tears fell from our eyes, for we now expected nothing but death.'

And what in the meantime was taking place in Damietta?

Nothing in truth could have exceeded the anxiety which prevailed within the walls of that city, when thither were carried tidings of the assassination of the Sultan of Egypt, and of the new danger to which the King of France and the captive Crusaders were exposed.

The aspect of affairs was indeed menacing; and it was not till messengers from King Louis came to announce that the treaty was to be maintained and the city evacuated, that something like confidence was restored. On the evening of Friday, Queen Margaret, with the Countesses of Anjou, Poitiers, and Artois, and the other ladies, went on board a Genoese vessel. As night advanced, Oliver de Thermes and all the Crusaders who had garrisoned Damietta embarked on the Nile, and Geoffrey de Segrines, having brought the keys to the emirs, the Saracens took possession. Next morning at daybreak the Moslem standards were floating over tower and turret. But still King Louis was in the hands of his enemies, and still the emirs were debating whether or not they ought to put him and the companions of his captivity to death.

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At the mouth of the Nile, a Genoese galley awaited the king; and, while every eye was strained towards the shore with an anxiety which was not without cause, Walter Espec and Bisset, the English knight, stood on deck in no enviable frame of mind.

'I mislike all this delay,' said Walter, more agitated than he was wont to appear. 'What if, after all, these emirs should prove false to their covenant?'

'In truth,' replied Bisset, 'it would not amaze me so much as many things that have come to pass of late; and both the king and his nobles may yet find to their cost that their hopes of freedom are dashed; for we all know the truth of the proverb as to there being so much between the cup and the lip.'

At this moment they observed the galleys, on board of which Joinville and other captive Crusaders were, move up the Nile, and each uttered an exclamation of horror.

'Now may Holy Katherine be our aid,' cried Walter, 'for our worst anticipations are like to be realised.'

'The saints forbid,' replied Bisset; 'and yet I am not so hopeful as I might be, for I have long since learned not to holloa till out of the wood.'

It was indeed a critical moment for Louis and his nobles; but in the council of the emirs the milder views ultimately prevailed, and Bisset and Walter Espec observed with delight that the galleys which had moved up the Nile were brought back towards Damietta, and that Louis, attended by a multitude of Saracens who watched his movements in silence, was approaching. Immediately the Genoese galley moved towards the shore, and Louis, having been joined by the Count of Anjou and the Lord of Joinville, stepped on board, while the other knights and nobles hastened to embark in the vessels that lay in wait for them. As soon as the king was on board, Bisset made a signal; and, as he did so, eighty archers with their crossbows strung appeared on deck so suddenly that the crowd of Saracens who had been pressing forward immediately dispersed in alarm, and the galley moved from the shore. Ere long, the Count of Poitiers, who had remained as a hostage in Damietta till the ransom of the Crusaders was paid, came on board; and, all being now in readiness for leaving the place where he had experienced so many

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misfortunes and so much misery, the saint-king made a sign to the mariners, the sails were given to the wind, and the fleet of the armed pilgrims—the wreck of a brilliant army—glided away towards Syria. But thousands of the survivors still remained in captivity, and, albeit Louis was conscientiously bent on ransoming them, their prospect was gloomy, and the thought of their unhappy plight clouded the saint-king's brow.

And sad was the heart of Walter Espec, as he recalled the day when he landed at Damietta side by side with Guy Muschamp; and for the hundredth time asked himself mournfully whether his brother-in-arms had died for his faith, or whether a worse fate had befallen him. [209]

But why linger on the Egyptian shore amid scenes suggestive of reminiscences so melancholy and so dismal—reminiscences of misfortunes and calamities and losses not to be repaired? Let us on to the Syrian coast, and gladden our eyes with a sight of the white walls of Acre, washed by the blue waters of the Mediterranean.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

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ACRE.

AT the time when King Louis, sad but unsubdued, left Damietta and steered for the Syrian coast, Acre, situated on a promontory at the foot of Mount Carmel and washed by the blue waters of the Mediterranean, was a place of great strength, and renowned throughout Christendom for riches and splendour. For a long period previous to its destruction by the Mameluke Sultan—indeed, from the time of the seizure of Jerusalem by Saladin the Great—Acre was regarded as of higher importance than any city in the Christian kingdom of which Jerusalem had been the metropolis; and thither, when driven from other towns which they had called their own in the days of Godfrey and the Baldwins, most of the Christians carried such wealth as they could save from the grasp of sultans and emirs. Acre had, in fact, come to be regarded as the capital of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and by far the finest of the cities in Syria.

Naturally enough, a capital so wealthy was rather tempting to men bent on conquest. But Acre had the advantage of being strongly fortified. On the land side it was surrounded by a double wall, with towers and battlements, and a broad and deep ditch, which prevented access to its ramparts, and towards the sea by a fortress at the entrance of the harbour, by the castle of the Templars, and by a stronghold known as 'The King's Tower;' and on the whole, the fortifications were such that no foe, not even such as Bibars Bendocdar, could have calculated on finding the place an easy prey. [211]

Nor could the aspect of the city seem otherwise than strange and picturesque to such of the armed pilgrims as landed with the saint-king beneath its white walls, washed by the blue waters of the Mediterranean. The interior was chiefly occupied by the houses of traders and artisans; but, between the two ramparts that defended the city on the east, stood the castles and palaces of the King of Cyprus, the Prince of Antioch, the representatives of France and Germany, and other men of high rank. The houses were built of square stones, all rising to an equal height; and most of them were surrounded with a terrace; and inside they were luxurious and resplendent, and lighted with windows of painted glass, which modified the glare of the oriental sun. Even the greatest kings in Europe could boast of nothing to compare with the pictures and marbles and rich furniture which the mansions of the magnates of Acre presented to the eyes of the weary and desponding Crusaders.

And Acre was not without busy life and striking ceremonies to give variety to the scene. The port was crowded with ships from Europe and Asia; the warehouses were stored with merchandise; the market-place was lively with bustle and excitement; monks, sailors, pirates, pilgrims, merchants, and warriors appeared in the streets; the squares and public places were screened from the heat by silken coverings; and there on certain days the magnates of the city, wearing golden crowns and vestments glittering with precious stones, walked to show themselves to the people, attended by splendid trains composed of men varying in language and manners, but unfortunately separated by jealousies and rivalries that frequently led to riot and bloodshed. [212]

Around Acre, the country was fertile and fair to the eye of the gazer. Outside the walls were beautiful gardens where the citizens were wont to repair for recreation; and farther away groves and pleasure houses, and scattered villages and orchards, gave variety to the landscape.

Such was Acre when King Louis landed there with his queen and the remains of his once brilliant army; and when Walter Espec, penniless and pensive, but still hoping to hear tidings of his lost brother, leapt ashore with Bisset the English knight, and returned thanks to heaven for having escaped from the power of the Saracens and the perils of the sea.

'Sir knight,' said Walter, who was in a desponding mood, 'we have now, thanks be to God reached a place of safety; and yet, beshrew me if my heart does not fail me; for we are in a strange land, without money, without horses, almost without raiment befitting our rank.'

'In truth,' replied the knight, 'I own that our plight is not enviable. But it is not desperate. Still I am in the service of King Louis, and have claims which he cannot disregard; and, credit me, a [213]

king's name is a tower of strength. As for you, for lack of a more potent protector, attach yourself to me as squire, and we can struggle together against adverse fortune. So droop not, but take courage, my brave Englishman; and we will, with the aid of God and our lady, so contrive to make the best of our circumstances as to turn matters to our advantage.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

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A RESCUE.

WALTER Espec, albeit since leaving England he had enacted the part of squire to two of the foremost earls in Christendom, was too much in need of a protector not to accept Bisset's offer with gratitude; and the English knight exercised his influence with such effect that both of them were soon provided with horses and raiment befitting their rank, and made a creditable figure among the Crusaders who thronged Acre. Indeed Walter, having now quite recovered from his illness, attracted much notice, and won the reputation of being one of the handsomest Englishmen who had ever appeared in the Syrian city.

Nevertheless, Walter was gloomy and despondent. All his enquiries after Osbert, his lost brother, resulted in disappointment. Guy Muschamp he regarded as one to be numbered with the dead; and Adeline de Brienne, who since their unexpected meeting at Damietta, where in days of dismay and danger they had conversed on equal terms, was now, as the grand-daughter of a King of Jerusalem, treated as a princess, and moved in too high a sphere to be approached by a simple squire. At first he was astonished to find that they were separated by so wide a gulf, and the Espec pride made him almost disdainful. Still, the fair demoiselle was present in all his visions by day and his dreams by night; and while consoling himself with building castles in the air when he was to reside in baronial state with her as his 'lady and companion,' he was under the necessity of contenting himself in the meantime with worshipping at a distance, as an Indian pays homage to his star. Ere long, however, fortune, which had ever been friendly to Walter, gave him an opportunity of acquiring a new claim on Adeline's gratitude.

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It was about St. John the Baptist's day, in the year 1251, and the King of France, having undertaken an expedition against the Saracens, was at Joppa, while the queen and the ladies of the Crusade remained at Acre, which was garrisoned by a large body of infantry under the command of the Constable of Jerusalem, and a small party of cavalry under Bisset, whose courage and prowess still, in spite of his recklessness, made him a favourite with the royal saint. No danger, however, appeared to threaten the city. The citizens were occupying themselves as usual; and some of the ladies had gone to walk in the gardens outside the gate, when suddenly a body of Saracens, who had marched from Joppa, presented themselves before the walls, and sent to inform the constable that if he did not give them fifty thousand bezants by way of tribute, they would destroy the gardens. The threat was alarming, but the constable replied that he would give them nothing; and having sent a young knight of Genoa to order them off, he left the city and marched to the mount, where was the churchyard of St. Nicholas, to defend the gardens; while bowmen posted between them and the town kept up a brisk discharge of arrows, and Bisset at the head of a band of horsemen, attended by Walter Espec, charged forward and skirmished with the Saracens so as to retard their approach. Nevertheless, the Saracens continued to advance, and the Christian magnates who had been walking in the squares came to the battlements, and with anxiety on their faces watched the feats of arms that were performed, and especially those wrought by the young knight of Genoa.

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Meanwhile Bisset and Walter Espec, while skirmishing with the Saracens, skirted their lines and made a circuit of the garden with the object of defending a gate by which it was feared an entrance might be effected. And in truth they found they had come too late to prevent the evil that was apprehended. Just as they approached their ears were hailed with loud cries of 'Help! help!' and to their horror they perceived that ten or twelve Saracens, well mounted, were issuing from the garden, one of whom was forcibly carrying off a lady without regard to her screams or her struggles.

'In the name of wonder!' said Bisset, staring in amaze, 'what is this I see?'

'By Holy Katherine!' exclaimed Walter wildly, 'the pagan dogs are carrying off a lady, and she is no other than Adeline de Brienne. To the rescue, sir knight! to the rescue!'

'Hold,' cried Bisset, 'or you will ruin all. See you not that their horses are swifter than ours, and we must go cunningly to work? Patience, Walter, patience. We must make a circuit and intercept them, without their being aware that we are in pursuit.'

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Walter's blood boiled; his head seemed about to turn; and, in spite of the knight's admonition, he could hardly restrain his impetuosity as he saw the Saracens making off with their prize. Bisset, however, was calm, but, as usual, resolute; and it was not till he had posted part of his cavalry at the gate to prevent further intrusions that, at the head of half-a-dozen horsemen, he deliberately went in pursuit, and in such a direction that the Saracens had no suspicions that they were pursued. Indeed, they deemed themselves so secure that they gradually slackened their pace, and at length halted while two of their number rode back to ascertain the result of the combat that was taking place before Acre.

And what was the state of affairs before the city?

'As the Genoese knight was retiring with his body of infantry,' says Joinville, 'a Saracen suddenly moved by his courage came boldly up to him, and said in his Saracenic tongue that if he pleased he would tilt with him. The knight answered with pride that he would receive him; but, when he was on the point of beginning his course, he perceived on his left hand eight or nine Saracens, who had halted there to see the event of the tournament. The knight, therefore, instead of directing his course towards the Saracen who had offered to tilt with him, made for this troop, and, striking one of them with his lance, pierced his body through and killed him on the spot. He then retreated to our men, pursued by the other Saracens, one of whom gave him a heavy blow on his helmet with a battle-axe. In return, the knight struck the Saracen so severely on the head that he made his turban fly off. Another Saracen thought to give the knight a mortal blow with his Turkish blade, but he twisted his body in such wise that it missed him, and the knight, by a back-hand blow on the Saracen's arm, made his sword fall to the ground, and then made a good retreat with the infantry. These three famous actions did the Genoese knight perform in the presence of the constable, and before all the principal persons of the town who were assembled on the battlements.'

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Nevertheless, the Saracens advanced with 'fierce faces threatening war,' when suddenly a band of those military monks who at the cry of battle armed 'with faith within and steel without,' and long white mantles over their chain mail, spurred with lances erect from the Castle of St. Katherine near the gate of St. Anthony, and, interposing between the Saracens and the city, formed a barrier that seemed impenetrable. They were the knights of the Order of St. Katherine of Mount Sinai, an Order instituted in honour of that saint in 1063, and bearing on their snowy mantles the instruments by which she suffered martyrdom—the half were armed with spikes and traversed by a sword stained with blood.

The Saracens halted in surprise at the sight of the Knights of St. Katherine, who were supposed at the time to be at the Castle of Kakhov; and, as if to provoke a conflict that they might have the satisfaction of conquering, one of the warrior monks, who seemed very young, at a signal from the marshal of the Order left his companions, and spurring gallantly forward, with marvellous skill unhorsed two of the Saracens without breaking his lance. On this, the leader of the Saracens, perceiving that the knight was alone, rode forward to meet him; but the youth charged him so fiercely that he was fain to retreat desperately wounded, and then returned leisurely to his comrades.

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After some hesitation the Saracens withdrew, and the Knights of St. Katherine rode calmly back to their castle.

And now let us follow Bisset and Walter Espec.

About the distance of a league from Acre is a place which was then known as Passe-Poulain, where, shaded by foliage, were many beautiful springs of water, with which the sugar-canes were irrigated. It was at Passe-Poulain that the Saracens who carried off Adeline de Brienne halted to await the report of their comrades, and, little thinking of their danger, dismounted to quench their thirst and rest their steeds; the Saracen who had charge of the damsel alone remaining on horseback, and tenaciously keeping hold of his prize.

Suddenly all of them started in surprise; for one of the horses raised his head and neighed; and the Saracens had scarcely ceased their conversation and begun to listen, when, with loud shouts of 'Holy cross!' Bisset and his riders emerged from the foliage and dashed in amongst them. Resistance was vain, but the Saracens turned to bay, and a bloody fray, in which Bisset's axe did terrible execution, was the consequence. Only one attempted to escape,—he who had before him on his saddle the almost lifeless form of Adeline de Brienne; and after him Walter Espec, his sword drawn and his spur in his horse's flank, rode with furious shouts.

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It was a keen chase, both flyer and pursuer urging their steeds to the utmost; and under ordinary circumstances the Saracen would have escaped; but, hampered with his burden, and unable to exert his equestrian skill, he soon found that his pursuer was gaining on him rapidly, and turned to take the chance of an encounter. Fearful of hurting the damsel, but perceiving that even this must be hazarded, Walter met him in full course; and, exercising all his art in arms to elude a blow fiercely aimed at him, he dealt one on the Saracen's turban, which stretched the eastern warrior lifeless on the ground, and then leaping from his steed, quick as thought caught the form of the half-fainting maiden just as she was falling.

'Be of good cheer, noble demoiselle,' said Walter. 'You are saved.'

But Adeline de Brienne did not reply. She had fainted; and Walter, taking her in his strong arms, bore her tenderly to one of the springs of water, and was gradually bringing her back to consciousness when Bisset and his riders, having routed the other Saracens, came up in doubt as to the issue of the chase. Having succeeded in restoring the damsel, they placed her on Walter's steed, and, the squire leading her rein, conducted her to Acre.

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'On my faith, sir squire,' said Bisset with a smile of peculiar significance, as Walter unbuckled his armour, 'I marvel at your good fortune in regard to the noble demoiselle, and perceive that I was right in saying that you had been born with luck on your side. A few more such exploits, and you will be known to fame.'

'At all events, sir knight,' replied Walter, trying not to



"Be of good cheer, noble Demoiselle," said Walter, "you are saved."—p. 220.

appear too much elated, 'we can lay ourselves down to rest to-night with all the better conscience that we have this day performed an action worthy of minstrels' praise.'

'Marry,' exclaimed Bisset seriously, 'I look to deriving from this adventure some benefit more substantial than a sound sleep or minstrels' flattery; and, to speak truth, I am somewhat weary of this saint-king and this purposeless Crusade, and would fain go to aid the Emperor of Constantinople against the Greeks and the Turks; and Baldwin de Courtenay could not but accord a favourable reception to warriors who had saved his kinswoman from the Saracens. What thinkest thou of a movement to Constantinople?'

Walter mused, but did not answer.

CHAPTER XXXV.

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MISSION TO BAGDAD.

AFTER the assassination of Touran Chah at Pharescour, the Mamelukes were very much at a loss on whom to bestow the crown so long worn by the chiefs of this family of Saladin. In their perplexity they elevated Chegger Edour to the throne, and proclaimed her 'Queen of the Mussulmen.' But the affairs of the sultana did not go smoothly. Moslems were aroused at the elevation of a woman to sovereignty; and the Caliph of Bagdad, when asked to send the rich robe which the caliphs were in the habit of sending by way of investiture to the Sultans of Egypt, demanded with indignation if a man capable of reigning could no longer be found. Every day the confusion increased and the troubles multiplied.

In order to make matters more pleasant, the sultana associated a Mameluke named Turcoman with her in the government, and even condescended so far as to unite herself with him in marriage. But the aspect of affairs became gradually more alarming, and Chegger Edour, yielding to the prevailing discontent, abdicated in favour of her husband. Turcoman, however, found that his crown was somewhat thorny; and at a critical period he aroused the jealousy of his wife by aspiring to wed an oriental princess.

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The sultana vowed vengeance, and hastened to execute it by causing Turcoman to be assassinated in his bath. One night an emir, hastily summoned to the palace, found Chegger Edour seated on a couch with her feet resting on the dead body of her husband. The emir uttered an exclamation of horror; but she calmly stated that she had sent for him to offer her hand and her crown. The emir fled in terror, and next day the mother of the murdered man had the sultana put to death by her slaves, and caused her corpse to be thrown into a ditch.

A Mameluke named Koutouz was now elevated to the throne, and signalled himself by a victory over the Moguls or Tartars, hordes of wandering warriors who were now making themselves terrible both to Europe and Asia. Unfortunately for Koutouz, however, he at that time renewed a truce with the Christians of Syria, and raised the anger of his soldiers to such a height that his death was decreed. Accordingly, one day, when he had ridden out from Sallhie to hunt, a Mameluke chief suddenly spurred into the camp, his garments stained with blood.

'I have slain the sultan,' said he.

'Well, then, reign in his stead,' replied the bystanders.

The Mameluke chief was Bibars Bendocdar; and, having been proclaimed as successor to the man he had murdered, he ascended the throne, and, as sultan of Egypt and Syria, began to govern with despotic power.

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Meanwhile, Louis was anxious to redeem from captivity the Crusaders who had been left in Egypt, and sent ambassadors to Cairo with the money that had been agreed on as their ransom. But the ambassadors could hardly get a hearing. At length they did obtain the release of four hundred of the Christian prisoners, most of whom had paid their own ransom; but when they pressed for the liberation of the others, they were plainly told that the King of France might deem himself fortunate that he had regained his own liberty; and that if he gave more trouble, he might expect the Mamelukes to besiege him at Acre. On hearing this Louis was much perplexed,

and consulted his nobles, especially the Lord of Joinville.

'Sire,' said Joinville, after some consideration, 'this is a serious question, and one not to be hastily disposed of; for I remember that when I was on the eve of leaving home, my cousin, the Seigneur de Bollaincourt, said to me, "Now you are going beyond the seas, but take care how you return; no knight, either rich or poor, can come back without shame, if he leaves behind him, in the hands of the Saracens, any of the common people who leave home in his company." Now,' added the seneschal, 'these unhappy captives were in the service of the king, as well as the service of God, and never can they escape from captivity if the king should abandon them.'

On hearing this Louis was more perplexed than ever. In his anxiety, however, he bethought him of the caliph, and resolved, great as was the distance, to send ambassadors to Bagdad, where reigned Musteazem the Miser, the thirty-seventh of his dynasty. [225]

Now, albeit Moslems were in the habit of paying great reverence to the caliph as the successor of Mahomet, he exercised very little substantial power over the fierce warriors who fought for Islamism. Nor, indeed, had the history of the caliphate been such as to add to the sacredness of the office, or to increase the superstitious veneration with which it was regarded. For several centuries, the East witnessed the spectacle of rival caliphs, both professing to be the representatives of the prophet, and each claiming all the privileges attaching to the character. The rivals were known as the Fatimites and the Abassides. The Fatimites claimed the caliphate as being the heirs of Ali, Mahomet's son-in-law, and established their throne at Cairo. The Abassides, who were Mahomet's male heirs, maintained their state at Bagdad. At length, in 1170, the struggle for supremacy was terminated by Saladin the Great, who killed the Caliph of Cairo with his mace, and rendered the Caliph of Bagdad undisputed chief of all Moslems; and, from that time, the Abassides, though sunk in effeminacy, and much given to sensual indulgences, continued to exercise their vague privileges and their shadowy authority.

Nevertheless, King Louis, bent on obtaining the relief of the captive Crusaders, despatched ambassadors to Bagdad to treat with the caliph. The ambassadors were a Templar, and Bisset the English knight; and with them, in their train, went Walter Espec, now, at length, hopeful of ascertaining something about his brother's fate. [226]

It was not without encountering considerable danger, and having to endure much fatigue, that the Templar and the English knight, under the guidance of Beltran the renegade, who had opportunely appeared at Acre, and whom Bisset had pressed into the service, traversed the country; and, after many days' travel, drew nigh to the capital of the caliphate, which had been built, in the eighth century, by Al Mansour, one of the Abasside caliphs, out of the ruins of Ctesiphon, and afterwards enlarged and adorned by Haroun Alraschid, the great caliph of his dynasty.

But the journey had not been without its novelty and excitement; and Walter Espec was riding by the side of Beltran the renegade, towards whom, in spite of his prejudices as a Crusader, he felt the gratitude due to a man who had saved his life, when he was cut down at Mansourah. At present he was much interested with the account given by the renegade of the ostriches or camel-birds, and eager to learn how they were hunted.

'And so, good Beltran,' said he, 'you have actually hunted this bird, whose height is gigantic, whose cry at a distance resembles the lion's, and which is to be found in parched and desolate tracts, deserted even by antelopes and beasts of prey.'

'In truth have I,' replied Beltran.

'I envy you,' said Walter; 'nothing would please me more than such an enterprise.'

'Nevertheless,' rejoined the renegade, 'it is somewhat irksome, and requires much patience. But the Arabs have a proverb, that patience is the price that must be paid for all success, and act accordingly. They have horses trained for the purpose; and, when they first start the ostrich, they go off at an easy gallop, so as to keep the bird in view, without going so near as to alarm it. On discovering that it is pursued, the ostrich begins to move away, gently at first, but gradually increasing its speed, running with wings extended, as if flying, and keeps doubling. It generally takes two days to run one down; but the hunter gets the best of the race at last; and, when the ostrich finds itself exhausted and beaten, it buries its head in the sand; and the hunters, coming up, kill it with their clubs, taking care not to spoil the feathers.' [227]

'On my faith,' said Walter, 'I do own that such a pursuit would be irksome; and I hardly think that my patience would brook so much delay.'

'However,' said Beltran, suddenly raising his hand and pointing forward, 'there lies before you the city of the caliph.'

Bagdad, as the reader may be aware, is situated on the Tigris, at the distance of two hundred miles above the junction of that river with the Euphrates, and the Tigris is here about six hundred feet in breadth. The city, which is of an oblong shape, and of which the streets are so narrow that not more than two horsemen can ride abreast, is surrounded with a high wall, flanked with towers, some of an immense size, built by the early caliphs; and several old buildings remain to attest its ancient magnificence—such as the Gate of the Talisman, a lofty minaret, built in 785; the tomb of Zobeida, the most beloved of the wives of Haroun Alraschid; and the famous Madressa College, founded in 1233 by the Caliph Mustenatser. [228]

No traces, however, are left of the palace so long inhabited by the caliphs; nor does anything mark the place where, though its glory was about to depart, it still stood in all its pride, with the black banner of the Abassides floating over its portals, when the ambassadors of St. Louis reached Bagdad, and craved an audience of the heir of the prophet. It was a sight to impress even men accustomed to the wealth and splendour of Acre; and they thanked God for having conducted them in safety to a place where there was a prospect of food and rest.

But Walter Espec was not thinking of such things; his whole mind was occupied with the question, whether or not his lost brother was a captive within these walls.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

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THE LAST OF THE CALIPHS.

ASTONISHED as the Caliph Musteazem might be at the audacity which prompted a Frankish king to send ambassadors to the heir of the prophet, he did not venture to decline receiving the message of a prince who so recently had threatened the empire of Egypt with destruction, and might have the power of doing so again. Besides, Musteazem was not in the most celestial humour with the Mamelukes, who seemed inclined to defy his and every other person's authority; and, on hearing that the result of all the disorders and revolutions had been the elevation of Bibars Bendocdar to the throne of Saladin, he remarked, in homely oriental phrase, 'when the pot boils, the scum rises to the top.' Above all, Musteazem was a miser, and covetous to the last degree; and when it was explained to him by his grand vizier, whom the Templar had already bribed with a purse of gold, that the King of France was liberal in money matters, and was ready to pay handsomely for the ransom of his captive countrymen, the caliph's ruling passion prevailed—his avarice got the better of his dignity; and, without farther words, he consented to grant an audience to the Franks.

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Meanwhile, the ambassadors and their attendants were admitted within the gates of the palace, and conducted into an immense garden, there to wait till suitable apartments were assigned them. And this garden made them stare with wonder; its regal magnificence was so surprising as to make them start and stop simultaneously, and to make Bisset exclaim—

'Of a truth, the lines of this pope of the infidels have fallen in pleasant places. None of King Henry's palaces can boast of anything like this. Surely it must be the terrestrial paradise.'

Now, this garden might well surprise the ambassadors. In the centre was a kiosk of the richest architecture, constructed entirely of marble and alabaster, with an arcade composed of countless marble pillars. In the court was a marble reservoir, surrounded with marble balustrades, which at each angle opened on a flight of stairs, guarded by lions and crocodiles sculptured of white marble; and alabaster baths with taps of gold. On one side of the garden was a large aviary; on the other a huge elephant, chained to a tree. The walks were set in mosaic of coloured pebbles, in all kinds of fanciful patterns; and around were groves, bowers, arbours, and trellis-covered paths, with streams, fountains, hedges of box and myrtle, flowers, cypresses, odoriferous plants, and trees groaning under the weight of lemons, oranges, citrons, and fruit in great variety. It was more like such a scene as magicians are supposed to conjure up, than reality; and the Crusaders gazed for a while with silent admiration.

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'On my faith,' said Bisset, at length breaking the silence, 'this is marvellous to behold; and yet, had I the ear of the pope of the infidels, I should recommend an addition which would be to the purpose. I mean such a statue of the goddess Minerva as once stood in the great square of Constantinople.'

'And wherefore?'

'Because Minerva is the goddess who presides over prudence and valour; and my eyes have deceived me if, in this city, there is not a lack of both. Marked you not, as we rode along, that the place is well nigh without defences and fighting men; and think you that, with such spoil in prospect, the Mamelukes, not to mention the Moguls, would hesitate about seizing it?'

'You err,' replied the Templar: 'the caliph, as you say, is the pope of the infidels, and the Mamelukes hold everything he possesses as sacred.'

'So did they last century,' remarked Bisset, elevating his shoulders; 'and yet Saladin killed a caliph with his mace; and as for the Moguls, you know they are almost Christians, and Father Rubruquis is now in Tartary, completing their conversion. Beshrew me, sir Templar, if I deem not this caliph foolhardy to run the risk of being attacked, without fighting men to defend him.'

As the English knight spoke, an officer of the caliph appeared to conduct the ambassadors to their lodgings; and they, having refreshed themselves with the bath, and with food, were invited by the grand vizier to repair to the presence of the caliph.

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It was not, however, without much ceremony, and some mystery, that the Templar and the English knight were admitted into the interior of a palace within whose precincts no Christian, save as a captive, had ever before set foot. First, they were guided through dark passages,

guarded by armed Ethiopians, and then into open courts so richly and beautifully adorned, that they could not refrain from expressing their admiration.

'Certes,' exclaimed Bisset, halting, 'the caliph must, of all princes, be the richest; and I should not much marvel to hear that he had discovered the philosopher's stone, which turns everything into gold, and of which my countryman, Roger Bacon, is said to be in search. Nevertheless, he does not seem to have studied the Roman poet, who tells us that treasure is hardly worth having, unless it is properly used.'

'In truth, sir knight,' said the Templar, 'the farther we go, the greater is the splendour and state.'

At length the ambassadors reached a magnificent chamber, where the caliph awaited them. At first, however, he was concealed from them by a curtain wrought with pearls. But the grand vizier thrice prostrated himself to the ground; and, as he did so, the traverse was drawn aside, and the caliph appeared arrayed in gorgeous robes, seated on a throne of gold, and surrounded by his eunuchs, who seemed both surprised and grieved to see Christians in that place and presence.

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And now the grand vizier kissed the caliph's hand, and, presenting the ambassadors, explained their errand. A long conversation, which was carried on chiefly by the Templar and the grand vizier, followed; and the caliph having expressed his willingness to treat, the grand vizier desired him, in token of his good faith, to give the ambassadors his hand. Musteazem, however, shook his head, to indicate that he was not prepared to derogate so far from his dignity. At length, after some persuasion, he consented to give them his hand, gloved.

'That will do,' said the grand vizier.

'I fear not,' replied the Templar, hesitating.

'Sir,' said Bisset, addressing the caliph—for by this time the English knight had recovered all his reckless audacity, and felt quite as much at home as if he had been in the palace of Westminster, and speaking to the good King Henry—'truth makes no holes to hide herself in; and princes, if they will covenant, must deal fairly and openly. Give us, therefore, your hand, if you mean to treat; we will make no bargains with your glove.'

But the caliph, still unsatisfied, stood upon his dignity, and refused to be persuaded. However, at the instance of the grand vizier, he consented to consider the subject, and promise the ambassadors another audience on the morrow. But who can tell what a day may bring forth? Ere the morrow, an event occurred which raised more important questions than whether he could, without degradation, give his ungloved hand to a Templar and an English knight.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

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A RECOGNITION.

WHEN the Templar and the English knight left the lodgings that had been assigned to them in the palace of Bagdad to enter the presence of the caliph, and were honoured with the audience described, Walter Espec, excited by the novelty of his situation, thinking of his lost brother, and bearing in mind that he had a mission to accomplish, strolled, heedless of rules or regulations, into the garden of the palace, and took his way along one of the walks, set in mosaic-coloured pebbles, towards the kiosk. He had not proceeded far, however, when he perceived, coming from the opposite direction, six youths, apparently about his own age. All were so fettered as to be impeded in their walking, and seemed to be under the charge of an aged Saracen, who, in his turban and flowing robes, looked a most venerable personage.

'Christian captives, as I live,' muttered Walter, compassionately.

Of the six youths, five paced moodily along, with their eyes bent sadly on the ground; the sixth neither seemed sad, nor had his eyes bent on the ground, but held his head aloft with the air of one whom circumstances could not depress; and Walter felt his heart beat and his brain whirl, and stopped suddenly, with an exclamation of surprise, as in this youth he recognised an old acquaintance.

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Immediately it appeared that the recognition was mutual. Indeed, the captive no sooner observed Walter than, disregarding the remonstrances of the old Saracen, and forgetful for the moment of his chains, he broke away from his companions, and hobbling, not without danger of a fall, fairly flung himself into the Boy Crusader's arms.

'Oh, good Walter,' exclaimed he, 'what a surprise! The idea of your being here, and at a time when they are threatening to put me to death because I will not embrace the filthy religion of their false prophet. But, thanks to our lady the Virgin, I now feel that I am saved.'

'In truth, brave Guy,' replied Walter, much affected, 'you are saved, if my efforts can save you. I have mourned for you as for one dead; and I swear by holy Katherine, who hath preserved me miraculously through manifold dangers, that if I fail I remain to share your fate, for weal or for

woe. But how came you hither?'

'By St. John of Beverley,' answered Guy, 'not with my own goodwill, as you may swear on the Evangelists. I was dragged out of the galley of the Lord of Joinville, and, with my hands chained behind my back, I was, in that base, unworthy plight, led captive to Cairo; and, when the Mamelukes killed their sultan, and the sultana, that dark-eyed woman, who outdoes Jezebel in wickedness, wished to propitiate the caliph, she sent me and five other Christian prisoners whom you see as a peace-offering. And so,' added Guy, looking down at his fetters, 'here you see me, an Anglo-Norman gentleman, of great name, in captivity and chains, and threatened with a cruel death; which, however, I would fain escape; for, tempting as may be the prospect of the crown of martyrdom, beshrew me, good Walter, if at my age I deem not life too sweet to part with willingly.'

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And in spite of his fetters and his perilous plight, Guy looked as blithe and gay as he was wont to do in the tiltyard of the castle of Wark.

'By the Holy Cross,' said Walter, gravely, 'I cannot pretend to make light of the business; and yet I am not without hope; for a Templar, and Bisset, the stout knight whom I now serve, have come from the good King Louis as ambassadors to the caliph, and they will not fail you. But credit this, at least, that if the worst comes to the worst I will remain in this place, and not leave it—save in your company—tide what may.'

Guy was about to protest against Walter sacrificing himself to friendship; but further conversation was prevented by the approach of the aged Saracen; and Guy, however reluctant, was fain to rejoin the companions of his captivity. Walter, however, followed their steps, and watched their movements, till they disappeared in a door contiguous to that part of the palace in which the ambassadors were lodged with their train. But, warned by Beltran, the renegade, that it would be prudent to confine himself to the quarters assigned, he returned to his lodgings, and there, musing over this unexpected meeting with his brother-in-arms, awaited Bisset's return.

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At length the English knight appeared. But he did not seem quite himself. The frank and joyous expression which characterised him had deserted his countenance, and he looked a changed man. Haughty sternness sat on his brow; his eye-brows were elevated; his eye glanced flame; his nostrils breathed fire; and he clenched and opened his hand excitedly, as if contemplating some ruthless deed, as he strode into the apartment and seized Walter's arm.

'Sir knight,' said Walter, amazed, and almost terrified, 'what aileth thee?'

'By the might of Mary!' exclaimed the knight hurriedly and sternly, 'I have seen a sight that has roused all the Norman within me, and made me thirst for gold and pant for conquest.'

'And what of the caliph?' asked Walter.

'Tush,' answered the knight, contemptuously. 'This caliph is nobody, save as master of this palace and city, and the treasure they contain. By my father's soul! the caitiff wretch is rolling in wealth. May the saints grant me patience to think of it calmly! The very throne of gold on which he sits would, if coined into money, furnish forth an army, capable, under a skilful and daring leader, of conquering kingdoms. Oh, for five hundred brave men in mail, and the cross on their shoulders! By the bones of Becket, I should, ere morning, be lord of all;' and, torturing himself with the idea of such a prize escaping his grasp, Bisset sunk into silence, and indulged in reflection.

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'Sir knight,' said Walter, after a long pause, 'I have made a strange discovery. Guy Muschamp, the English squire, my brother-in-arms, is a captive in this palace, and in danger of death, because he will not abandon his faith as a Christian. I have seen him; I have spoken with him; I implore you to obtain his release; for,' added Walter, with tears in his eyes, 'I must tell you frankly, that otherwise I must remain to share his fate.'

'Fear not, boy,' said Bisset, touched with the squire's emotion; 'I will see to his being ransomed. In truth, I hardly think there will be much difficulty; for this caliph is a miser—a mean, detestable miser—and would sell anything for bezants—even his soul, if he had not already pawned it to Satan, through his brokers Mahound and Termagaunt.' And, too much occupied with his dream of seizing Bagdad, and carving out a kingdom with his sword, the knight relapsed into silence, and scarcely moved till evening fell.

It was just after sunset, and Bisset was rapt in thought, and Walter Espec perplexing his soul about Guy Muschamp, when suddenly they were aroused by the voice of the Muezzin, who, according to the custom of the Saracens, standing on the minaret of a mosque hard by, solemnly proclaimed three times—'There is but one God, and Mahomet is his prophet.'

Walter sprang up, quivering with pious horror, and hastily crossed himself.

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'Sir knight,' said he, earnestly, 'I feel that this place is unholy.'

'Mayhap, boy,' replied the knight. 'But patter your prayers, and no evil will come nigh you. For the rest, Bagdad would be holy enough were the walls and towers manned by Christian warriors, and the mosques converted into churches, and I king, with the caliph's treasures to go forth against the Moslem, conquering and to conquer. Oh, credit me, it is a glorious vision. But it cannot be realised. Marry, I spoke too truly when I said that I was born without luck on my side.'

Night fell; the moon rose; and the Crusaders, after for a time looking out upon innumerable stars, glorious in the blue depths of an Asian sky, saw to the comfort and security of their attendants, and then stretched themselves to rest—Walter laying himself down at the door of the chamber which Bisset occupied. In spite of the knight's agitation and the squire's anxiety, both soon sank into sleep. But their repose was destined to be broken. About daybreak they were awakened by cries and tumult, that filled the palace of the caliph. Gradually, the noise increased, and was blended with strange cries, as of warriors storming the city. Bisset and Walter listened with breathless attention, as yell after yell, and whoop after whoop, intimated that some terrible catastrophe had occurred; and as they hearkened, the Templar, who had occupied an adjoining apartment, rushed in, calm, but pale as a ghost.

'Gentlemen,' said he, 'we are dead men.'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

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WOE TO THE CALIPH.

I HAVE mentioned that, in the middle of the thirteenth century, the Moguls, or Tartars, were the terror of Asia and Europe. In considering their energy and cruelty as warriors, is it wonderful that their movements should have been regarded with lively alarm? From the Yellow River to the banks of the Danube they had marched, conquering and slaughtering; marking their way with devastation, and making the two continents resound with the tumult of war and the crash of empires.

Originally a number of hordes, inhabiting the waste regions that lie between ancient Emaüs, Siberia, and China, and the sea of Kamschatka, the Tartars formed several nations of hunters and shepherds, living under tents, with their families subsisting on the produce of the chase and the flesh of their flocks, and acknowledging one God, the sovereign of heaven, but reserving their worship for the genii, who, as they believed, followed their steps, and watched over the safety of their families. They moved from place to place, despising agriculture, and not deigning to build. Even as late as the twelfth century, they had only one city—Karrakoroum—situated on the Organ, in the country subsequently the residence of the Grand Lama. In short, they looked upon all the world as their own, and, disliking all neighbours and rivals, were frequently engaged in war, which they deemed the sole occupation worthy of their attention.

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As warriors, the Tartars early proved themselves most formidable. Their valour and discipline were remarkable; and they had neither baggage nor provisions to encumber their marches. While the skins of sheep or bears served them for clothing, they made a little hardened milk, diluted with water, suffice them for food. On horseback, they were as much at home as a sea king on the deck of his war-ship, and their seat was so easy and firm, that they were in the habit of eating, and even sleeping, without taking the trouble to dismount. They fought with lance and bow, reared machines of terrible power; and all the stratagems of war were familiar to them. They excelled in the art of fighting while flying; and, with them, retreat was often the signal for victory.

It was in the twelfth century that Gheniskhan was elected by the Tartars as their ruler, and that, under his leadership, they struck terror into the surrounding nations. Under Gheniskhan, the Tartars made themselves masters of China, and the empire of Karismia; and, during the reign of his son Octai, they added Turkistan and India and Persia to their conquests. Moreover, at that time, they turned their eyes westward; and, having crossed the Volga, they overran Russia, ravaged Poland, desolated Hungary, devastated the frontiers of Germany, and caused such dread, that even England was agitated with the danger that threatened all Christendom.

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About the year 1245, however, Mango, the grandson of Gheniskhan, professed a desire to embrace Christianity; and Oulagon, the brother of Mango, espoused a Christian woman; and, when King Louis was wintering in Cyprus, ambassadors from Tartary reached the island, with messages to the effect that the great khan had been baptised, and that he would readily aid the Crusaders in rescuing Jerusalem from the Moslems. The saint-king received the ambassadors with joy, entertained them hospitably, conducted them to church, and, when they departed, sent two monks with magnificent presents to the great khan, and exhortations to hold fast the profession of his faith without wavering. Even when the Tartars menaced Bagdad, an ambassador, despatched by King Louis from Acre, was at the court of the great khan, with the object of converting the Tartars; and it appears clear that, however little they might care for either faith, the Tartars, in the struggle of Christian and Moslem in the East, were ever ready to take the side of the Christian against the Moslem.

Such being the state of affairs, Mango sent his brother with an army to besiege Bagdad; and Oulagon, raising his banner, marched towards the city of the caliph. Now it happened that Musteazem, being at once under the influence of the most egregious vanity and of the most sordid avarice, neither believed in his danger, nor had the heart to expend money to provide the means of defence, but devoted to the hoarding of the jewels, gold, and treasures with which his palace abounded, the whole time that should have been employed in mustering armies and preparing for war.

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However, when the caliph learned that Oulagon was approaching to attack Bagdad, he partially awoke from his dream, and sent offers to treat. Oulagon, who either suspected, or pretended to suspect, a snare, thereupon proposed that a marriage should take place between the children of the caliph and the great khan, as the best way of preserving peace; and Musteazem expressed his entire satisfaction with the proposal.

The Tartar then requested the caliph to send sixty of his chief men to treat of the marriage; and, when this was complied with, he demanded sixty more, that he might have full security for the fulfilment of the treaty. Not doubting Oulagon's good faith, Musteazem did as he was asked to do; and the royal Mogul smiled grimly.

'Now,' said Oulagon to his Tartars, 'seeing that we have in our hands six score of the caliph's chief counsellors and most wealthy subjects, I cannot doubt that the remainder are very common sort of people, and not likely to offer much resistance. My plans have been laid with such secrecy and caution, that nothing is suspected. I have only to appear before Bagdad, and take possession.'

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And no time was wasted. In fact, Oulagon had no motive for sparing the seat of the caliphate; and no sooner did he get the six score of Musteazem's chief men into his hands, than he ordered them to be beheaded, and prepared for an attack. Nor, as he rightly anticipated, was there much danger of an obstinate resistance. In fact, not only was the city undefended by any regular force: it was divided against itself. The citizens were formed into various sects, all at daggers drawn, and much more earnest in their conflicts with each other than in resolution to repulse assailants.

It was early morning when the inhabitants of Bagdad were aroused from their slumbers with loud shouts of alarm, and cries that the Tartars were upon them. Resistance was vain; and equally vain was any hope of mercy. Having set up his machines of war, Oulagon gave the word of command, and the Tartars rushed to the assault with all the ferocity of their nature. Entering the city sword in hand, Oulagon gave it up to the fury of his soldiers. Carnage, and all the horrors of war, followed; the gutters ran with blood; and the caliph who, a few hours earlier, deemed his person so sacred that he would not even consent to touch the hand of a Frank, experienced such rough treatment that he shrunk and shuddered and sickened.

Oulagon, however, was in no mood to respect the person of the head of the Moslem religion. No allegiance did the grim Tartar owe to the heir of Mahomet. Having seized Musteazem in his palace, Oulagon, after severely reproaching him with meditating treachery, caused him to be confined in an iron cage; and, after keeping him in durance for some time, came to add insult to injury.

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But, ere relating what passed, it is necessary to return to the Christian ambassadors.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

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IN THE LION'S MOUTH.

IT must be admitted that the position of the ambassadors was not enviable; and, when the Templar hastily stated that the Tartars were storming Bagdad, even Bisset's bold countenance fell, and his tongue faltered.

'I will not hide,' said he, recovering himself, 'that our doom looks dark; our heads are in the lion's mouth. But, as Christian warriors, we must trust in God and the saints; and, as brave men, we must do what we can to extricate ourselves.'

Without wasting more time in words, Bisset proceeded to buckle on his chain mail, while Walter Espec also arrayed himself; and, while the knight armed himself with his ponderous battle-axe, the squire unsheathed his falchion; and both, resuming their wonted air of dauntless courage, prepared, in case of the worst, to sell their lives dearly. Meanwhile, the attendants of the ambassadors filled the chamber, with alarm on their faces; and thither also Guy Muschamp and his fellow captives found their way, closely followed by the aged Saracen, who bowed himself before Bisset and exclaimed—

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'In the name of God, save me!'

'Save you, Saracen!' said Bisset. 'On my faith, I cannot but think that the man will do well this day who saves himself.'

'But,' asked the Saracen, 'do you not believe in a God, born of a woman, who was crucified for the salvation of the human race, and rose again the third day?'

'Assuredly, Saracen,' replied Bisset, regarding his questioner with a curious eye: 'as certainly as I believe that I am now in the palace of the caliph, and in greater danger than I pretend to relish.'

'In that case,' said the Saracen, 'place your hopes in your God; for, if he was able to recall himself to life, he will not want the power to deliver you from the evils that now threaten you.'

'On my faith,' replied Bisset, a little surprised, 'I must say that you speak the words of wisdom were you twenty times an infidel; and, for my own part, I would fain hope that God and the saints, especially good St. George, will befriend us in our jeopardy.'

Meanwhile the noise and tumult caused by the Tartars, as they forced their way into Bagdad, drew nearer, and shouts and shrieks were heard, which left no doubt that they had entered the palace. Bisset thereupon, grasping his battle-axe, took his post on one side of the door: the Templar, sword in hand, stationed himself on the other. Neither spoke, and such was the silence of those who were likely to share their fate, that a pin might have been heard to drop. But though the carnage was going on around them, they were left undisturbed; and they passed a full hour in breathless suspense. [248]

At length a loud shout intimated that the Tartars had penetrated to the garden; and Bisset, wishing to bring matters to a crisis, stepped forward so as to make himself visible, and then retreated to his post. Immediately twenty of the fierce Mogul warriors rushed towards the place, and with loud shouts prepared for fresh carnage. But, when they perceived the Templar and the English knight guarding the door with the air of men who could not fail to prove terrible antagonists, they hesitated, paused, and seemed to think that it was necessary to exercise caution.

Now, this delay was not without an important result. In the leader of the Tartars, Bisset to his astonishment saw a man whom he had met under other circumstances, and instantly turned his discovery to account.

'Hold, hold, brave warrior!' cried he, in a conciliating tone. 'With us you have no quarrel. We are ambassadors who were sent hither by the King of France to obtain the release of some captives, and in you I recognise one of the barons of Tartary who came to the court of the island of Cyprus, and to whom I myself, as a knight in the Christian king's service, rendered what service I could. With us, therefore, I repeat, you have no quarrel. Wherefore should we dye our weapons in each other's blood?'

The Tartar remained motionless, and eyed the knight keenly, and not without suspicion.

'It may be as you say,' replied he after some consideration; 'and yet I know not how I am to credit your words. Knowest thou that the Moslems have a proverb which says, "Hearken to a Frank, and hear a fable?"' [249]

'You do me wrong by your suspicions,' exclaimed Bisset. 'On my honour as a Christian knight, I tell you naught but the truth.'

'Give me a token by which I may prove the truth of what you say,' suggested the Tartar. And Bisset forthwith related several incidents that had occurred during the residence of the Tartars at Nicosia.

'Enough,' said the Tartar. 'I now give credit to the words you have spoken; therefore let there be peace between thee and me, and between thy people and my people. For the present I leave to take measures for your security; and I will conduct you to the presence of Oulagon the brave, brother of the great khan, and grandson of him who received the title of "King of Kings" from a prophet who came down from heaven on a white horse.'

The ambassadors now breathed freely; and the attendants looked upon Bisset as almost more than mortal; and the knight congratulated himself on the prospect of getting his head out of the lion's den. It was not, however, till the morrow that the Templar and the English knight were led to the presence of Oulagon; a semi-savage warrior, with those Tartar features which naturally looked harsh to the eyes of men accustomed to the features of Norman and Saxon, and short of stature, but thickset, compact of body, and of prodigious strength. Bisset was at first by no means satisfied with Oulagon's look, but the Tartar manifested every disposition to treat the ambassadors as friends. [250]

'The wrath of the King of Kings,' said he, 'is like the fire of a conflagration, which the slightest wind may light up, but which nothing but blood can quench. But between the King of Kings and the King of France there is peace and amity and goodwill. Wherefore, friend, say what you desire of me, and your will shall be granted.'

'Simply,' replied Bisset, 'permission to depart with my comrade and our train, and six Christian captives who have thrown themselves on our protection.'

'Be it as you will, Frank,' said Oulagon. 'But not till you have had fitting gifts; for this is the storehouse of the treasure of the world, and I would fain send gifts to the King of France; nor would I like his ambassadors to depart empty-handed.'

The knight and the Templar bowed.

'But,' said Oulagon with a cunning leer, 'ere departing you must visit the caliph in my company, that you may relate to the King of the Franks how the King of Kings punishes men who are the enemies of both.'

And without delay the Tartar led the ambassadors to the prison where he had on the previous day shut up Musteazem in an iron cage, and where he had since kept his captive without food.

'Caliph,' asked Oulagon approaching, 'dost thou hunger?'

'Yes,' answered Musteazem indignantly. 'I do hunger, and not without cause.'

'Then,' said Oulagon, 'thou shalt have that to eat which above all things thy heart loveth.' And the Tartar ordered a large golden platter, filled with jewels and precious stones, to be brought and set before the captive.

'Knowest thou these treasures, caliph?' asked he with an affectation of carelessness.

'Yes,' answered Musteazem sharply, 'I know them, for they are mine own.'

'And dost thou dearly love thy treasures?' asked Oulagon.

'Yes,' replied Musteazem, simply and frankly.

'Well, then,' said Oulagon, 'since thou lovest thy treasures so well, take of these jewels as many as thou wilt, and appease thy hunger.'

'They are not food to eat,' replied Musteazem, shaking his head with an air of great dejection.

'Ah, caliph,' said Oulagon with bitter scorn, 'thou mayest now see thy great fault; for if thou hadst given part of thy treasures, which thou lovest so dearly, to subsidise soldiers for thy defence, thou mightest have held out against me. But that which thou didst prize most highly has failed thee in the hour of need.'

And Oulagon withdrew with the Templar and the English knight; and soon after this interview Musteazem drew his last breath. But whether he perished of hunger, or of indignant despair, or by the violence of his conquerors, is not clearly ascertained. In the midst of the tumult and disorder which followed the sack of Bagdad, and the extinction of the caliphate, chroniclers neglected to record under what circumstances, and how, died the last of the caliphs.

But, however that may have been, the ambassadors next morning took their departure from Bagdad.

'Now God and all the saints be praised!' exclaimed Bisset: 'our heads are out of the lion's mouth.'



"Ah, Caliph," said Oulagon with bitter scorn, "thou mayest now see thy great fault; for if thou hadst given part of thy treasures, which thou lovest so dearly, thou mightest have held out against me."—p. 251.

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CHAPTER XL.

END OF THE ARMED PILGRIMAGE.

THE Templar and the English knight after a variety of adventures reached Acre, having on their way fallen in with Father Yves, whom King Louis had sent on a mission to 'the Old Man of the Mountains'—that remarkable personage to whose behests kings bowed, and at whose name princes trembled—and a knight of the noble House of Coucy, who had come from Constantinople, and whose accounts of the state of the Latin empire of the East much increased Bisset's desire to go and offer his sword to the Emperor Baldwin de Courtenay, then struggling desperately to maintain his throne against Greeks and Turks.

On reaching Acre, however, the ambassadors found that King Louis and the court were at Sajecte, and without delay repaired thither to present the gifts sent by Oulagon, and inform him of the unexpected event which had frustrated the object of their mission. Louis was deeply grieved at the failure of his attempt to open the prison doors of the unfortunate captives, and with tears bewailed their unhappy fate.

But soon after this, the saint-king found that the case was not desperate. The Sultan of Damascus went to war with the Mamelukes, and both parties craved the alliance of the French monarch. Louis, therefore, sent John de Valence to Cairo once more to demand the release of the captives, and this time he obtained something like satisfaction. Two hundred knights were immediately set at liberty, and allowed to depart for Acre, which they reached in safety.

At length, however, news came to King Louis, while he was at Sajecte, which compelled him to turn his thoughts towards France, where he was much wanted, and to deliberate on the expediency of returning to his own kingdom.

When it was known in France that the king was a prisoner in the hands of the Saracens, the utmost excitement prevailed throughout the land; and suddenly among the pastoral population appeared a man bearing a letter, to which he pretended to attach a mysterious importance.

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'This,' said he, solemnly, 'I have received from the mother of God; and it commands me to assemble all the Christian shepherds and herdsmen, and to march at their head to deliver the king. Follow me then, and fear not, for the battle is not to the strong, but reserved for the weak and humble.'

It appears that this man's eloquence, and the mystery which he affected, fascinated the shepherds and herdsmen of France, and they flocked to him in multitudes; and his followers, having been joined by outlaws and exiles, ere long formed a formidable force, and caused much alarm.

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At first, indeed, the queen-mother, Blanche of Castille, naturally anxious for her son's release, favoured the enterprise. But the priests, aware it might be that the leaders of the movement had ulterior objects in view, set their faces decidedly against it, and the leaders of the shepherds retaliated by stirring up the populace against the priests, and by the massacre of several ecclesiastics. On hearing this, Queen Blanche changed her policy, took part against the shepherds, caused their leader to be beheaded, and their army to be dispersed. Moreover, the populace, who had at first held the shepherds in high honour, began to suspect them of imposture, and slaughtered them without mercy; and all was still doubt and dismay and confusion, when messengers brought to Sajecte news that Queen Blanche had breathed her last.

Louis was profoundly affected when he heard of his mother's death, and mourned sadly for two or three days, without speaking with any one. However, at the end of that time, he was visited by the papal legate, and sent for the Lord of Joinville; and Joinville, who was on the point of going into a meadow to amuse himself with martial exercises, entered into conversation.

'Ah, seneschal,' began the king, mournfully, 'I have lost my mother.'

'Well, sire,' said Joinville, calmly, 'I am not surprised at such an event, seeing that she was no longer young, and that to all of us death must come some time; but, sire, I am surprised that so great a prince should grieve so outrageously; for you know that the wise man says, "Whatever grief the valiant man may suffer in his mind, he ought not to show it on his countenance; for he that does so causes pain to his friends and pleasure to his enemies."'

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'However, seneschal,' said the legate, 'the king is much satisfied with the good and agreeable services you have rendered him, and earnestly wishes for your honour and advancement. He commands me to tell you, as he knows it will give you pleasure at heart, that he intends to embark for France on this side of Easter.'

'In truth, it does give me pleasure,' said Joinville. 'And I pray that the Lord may ever induce the king to act in accordance with his will.'

And soon after Louis, with his queen and his knights and nobles, returned to Acre, and made preparations for his departure.

It happened that when John de Valence and his associates went to Cairo, to treat for the release of the French captives, and also for the remains of some of the French warriors who fell at Mansourah, the Saracens suddenly reminded him of the Earl of Salisbury.

'I wonder,' said an emir, 'that you Christians, who venerate the ashes of the dead, make no inquiry for the bones of that most illustrious and noble-born William, to whom you give the name of Longsword; whereas we, seeing that he was slain in battle and on account of his illustrious qualities, have treated his remains with all respect.'

On hearing this, the ambassadors were somewhat confused.

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'How,' asked they, one of another, 'can we disparage this man, because he was an Englishman, when even the Saracens accord the honour due to his nobility of soul?'

Accordingly, the Crusaders requested that Salisbury's bones might be given to them; they carried them to Acre, where they were laid, with much respect, in the church of the Holy Cross.

It was on the afternoon of the day when the burial took place that Bisset, who had been maturing his project of repairing to Constantinople, entered his lodgings, and took Walter Espec by one hand and Guy Muschamp by the other.

'Boys,' said he, 'this crusade, as I foresaw, has resulted in naught save disaster, and, as fighting men, it behoves us to consider whither we are now to carry our swords. For my part, I am resolved to turn the gifts of the Tartar warrior into money, and make without delay for Constantinople, and fight for the Latin Emperor. Are you willing to accompany me and share my fortunes, or must we part?'

'In truth, sir knight,' replied Walter, frankly, 'I sigh for the green fields and the oak forests of my native land; and, therefore, I would fain embark with the army of King Louis, and return to Europe.'

'As you will, sir squire,' said Bisset, a little mortified: 'albeit, I cannot but deem that you are not moved so much by the desire to visit your native land, as to be near to a certain noble demoiselle, on whose gratitude you have some claims. Well, on my life, I blame you not; for at your age I might have felt as you do, and, mayhap, lived to repent my delusion. But, be it known to you that, as matters stand, the Sultan of Damascus has intimated that he will permit any of the pilgrims to visit Jerusalem. Now, have you the courage—for courage will be needed—to enter the Holy City,

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held as it is by fierce Saracens, and kneel at the Holy Sepulchre?'

'By Holy Katherine, sir knight!' exclaimed Walter, bluntly, 'you must hold me excused. Happy, indeed, should I deem myself in the privilege of kneeling at the Holy Sepulchre, even at the cost of much labour and fatigue. But these are not the days of Godfrey and the Baldwins; and I care not to trust to the tender mercies of Bibars Bendocdar and his Mameluke myrmidons. I will not needlessly put my head again into the lion's mouth.'

'And what say you on the point, my gay and puissant warrior?' asked Bisset, turning to Guy Muschamp.

'Oh,' answered Guy, merrily, 'as says the good Walter, so say I, neither to Jerusalem nor to Constantinople do I go. I have a father and mother and kindred at home, whose faces I long to see. Wherefore, I go to England, and to no other place.'

Walter Espec sighed, as he was in the habit of doing, at the mention of kindred, and gave himself up to painful reminiscences.

'Sir knight,' said he, addressing Bisset, after a long silence, 'deem you that my lost brother can be in the hands of him who is known as the Old Man of the Mountains?'

'What!' exclaimed Bisset, 'rearing as an assassin? The saints forefend!'

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'It is strange,' said Walter, after a pause, 'that I have begun to hope better things; for, as I lay asleep last night, methought I saw him in the flesh, and that he looked high and brave, and that he told me how the blessed Katherine had preserved him from evil.'

'May your dream be realised ere we depart from this holy land, good Walter!' said Guy, with sympathy.

'Amen,' added Bisset, earnestly. 'More unlikely things have come to pass.'

And, in truth, such a result was not altogether impossible; for at that moment Walter Espec and Osbert Espec were both within the walls of Acre. But Walter was preparing to embark for Europe; and Osbert was on the eve of setting out for the castle of Kakhow, not to return for many days. But the stars had decreed that they were to meet.

CHAPTER XLI.

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A SUDDEN DISCOVERY.

IT was evening, and shadows were closing over Acre. But the scene thus presented was fair to behold. The sky was richly coloured, the setting sun painted the landscape in brilliant hues, the wind sighed among the palms and lofty sycamores, and the waves of the Mediterranean murmured against the white walls and on the Syrian shore.

Walter Espec sat in the lodgings of Bisset, hard by the palace occupied by the King of France, and he was alone. Bisset had been summoned to attend the king; Guy Muschamp had gone to visit his kinsman, the Lord of Joinville; and Walter, left with his own thoughts, was reclining on a couch, and resting his head against a window, with his eyes fixed on the citizens who passed before him, on their way to breathe the air in the gardens outside the walls, when he was aroused by the tramp of cavalry, and the approach of a body of warriors, whose white mantles over their armour, and whole appearance, indicated that they were military monks. Walter's curiosity was aroused, and he shouted to make inquiries of a portly citizen who was passing at the moment, and who, as Walter knew, as a confirmed gossip.

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'Good citizen,' said he, 'these are warrior monks, and yet they neither wear the habit of the Templars nor the Hospitallers. Canst tell me what knights they be who come along so proudly?'

'In faith can I, sir squire,' answered the citizen; 'and blithely will I do so. These be the knights of St. Katherine, of Mount Sinai; and they are brave men in hours of danger; albeit, like other Orders, overmuch given to amassing wealth, and more intent on keeping it than keeping the vows of their Order.'

'Thanks, good citizen,' said Walter, laughing heartily, as Crusaders generally did when reminded of the faults of the military monks. 'And, to requite your courtesy, I admonish you to speak in a whisper when you say aught in dispraise of Templars or Hospitallers; for you must be a bolder man than I pretend to be, if you fear not to provoke their enmity.'

'Gramercy for your warning, young squire,' replied the citizen, as, apparently much amused, and chuckling to himself, he proceeded on his way; while Walter, standing up, watched the warrior monks as they passed the window.

Now, Walter Espec had of course heard of the monks of St. Katherine, and especially what a stern front they had presented on the day when the Saracens threatened Acre, and carried off Adeline de Brienne. Moreover, he was naturally somewhat interested in an Order instituted in honour of the tutelar saint of his House: but he had never before seen them; and he looked out

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with no inconsiderable curiosity as, mounted on choice steeds, they came on and swept along, with bronzed visages, athletic forms, muscular limbs, and the air of men who believed implicitly in their own superiority over their compeers, and desired nothing so much as foes to conquer.



Suddenly Walter started in amazement, and uttered a cry; then remained for a moment silent, and quivered with agitation; then seized his cap, and, rushing from the house, hastened, with excitement on his countenance and wildness in his manner, after the warrior monk.—p. 262.

hunger in the forests, or listening, like them, to the temptations of the two rascal merchants by whom they were ensnared, he embarked on board the "Christopher," which was on the point of sailing for Acre; and the skipper, having brought him ashore, carried him to the house of a Northern knight, who had long been fighting for the Cross. And this noble warrior, being about to return to England, placed him under the protection of the Grand Master of the Order of St. Katherine; and, when he was of a fitting age, the grand master, to whom the name of Espec was honourably known, made him take the vows of the Order. And now, thanks to God and Holy Katherine, he is in safety and honour, and rides bravely as the bravest among his brethren, with his white mantle over his chain mail.'

'By St. John of Beverley!' exclaimed Guy, in surprise, 'I much rejoice to hear that he was so graciously protected by the saints in the hour of danger, and that his fortune has been such as is worthy of a Norman gentleman.'

'And what is more,' said Walter, proudly, 'it was he who unhorsed the two Saracens with his lance without breaking it, and who wounded their leader on that day when they came hither to demand tribute.'

'A most worthy exploit, as it has been related to me,' replied Guy; 'and one that does credit to his strength and courage. But tell me, good Walter, how rejoiced he was to see you after so long a separation, and all your suffering on his account.'

A shade of disappointment appeared on Walter Espec's handsome countenance. After a pause, however, he replied—

'In faith, brave Guy, to be frank with you, I must own that my brother, for whom I had so long mourned, manifested less enthusiasm than I expected; and when I talked to him of our castellated house of Heckspeth, on the Wansbeck, and of the tombs of our ancestors in the Abbey of Newminster, and even of my great namesake, the glory of our line, I perceived right well that he cared for none of these things. His heart and soul are in his Order, its renown and influence; and all his hopes are for the restoration of its glory. And nothing would serve him but attempting to induce me to take the vows of poverty and celibacy and obedience. But I answered readily, that such vows were not to my liking—that I despise not riches; that I rather love noble demoiselles; and that I am by nature more inclined to command than to obey; in short, that I will neither be a warrior monk nor a monk in minster. And so the great bell of the castle of St. Katherine tolled, and we parted; and at daybreak he mounts to ride to the castle of Kakhov, which the knights of his Order hold.'

'And now, good Walter,' said Guy, 'having fulfilled your mission, for such you deemed it, you will return to England with a light heart.'

But suddenly Walter started in amazement, and uttered a cry; then remained for a moment silent, and quivered with agitation; then seized his cap, and, rushing from the house, hastened, with excitement on his countenance and wildness in his manner, after the warrior monks, not losing sight of them till they disappeared within the gates of the castle of St. Katherine, which they possessed in Acre, near the gate of St. Anthony. Into this building he demanded to be admitted.

Two hours later, Walter Espec returned to his lodgings, and found Guy Muschamp awaiting his return, and impatient to tell him that everything was arranged for embarking for France in the king's ship in company with the Lord of Joinville. But observing that his friend's countenance wore a look of extraordinary elation, he, for the time being, quite forgot the communication he had intended to make, and eyed him with an expression of keen curiosity.

'Good Walter,' said he, quickly, and with interest, 'you appear so excited that I cannot but presume that something wonderful has befallen you since we parted?'

'In truth, brave Guy, you guess aright,' replied Walter, taking his friend's hand. 'Rejoice with me, my brother-in-arms, for I have found him who was lost.'

'Found your brother!—found Osbert Espec!' exclaimed Guy, in surprise.

'It is true as that I am a living man,' replied Walter, joyfully. 'When he reached Marseilles with the companions of his pilgrimage, instead, like them, of going back to die of

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But Walter Espec only sighed, as his thoughts reverted to Adeline de Brienne and to the great gulf that seemed to interpose between them.

CHAPTER XLII.

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HOMeward BOUND.

ON the vigil of St. Mark, after Easter, the Crusaders having mustered at Acre, flocked on board their ships and prepared to set sail for Europe. On that day also the King of France, leaving Geoffrey de Segrines with a hundred knights to aid in the defence of what remained of the once grand kingdom of Godfrey and the Baldwins, left the palace which he had occupied, and, attended by the papal legate, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and the Christian nobles and knights of Palestine, walked on foot to the port, amid an immense crowd assembled to witness his departure, who all, while lamenting his departure, applauded him as the Father of the Christians, and implored Heaven to shower blessings on his head.

'This is the day of St. Mark, seneschal,' said Louis to Joinville, as they went on board; 'and on St. Mark's-day was I born at Poissy.'

'Sire,' replied Joinville, 'you may well say that you have been born again on St. Mark's-day; for you are escaping from a pestilent land, where you have remained so long.'

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Bisset, the English knight, resolute to his purpose, had taken farewell of his companions, and embarked for Constantinople, to wield his ponderous battle-axe in the cause of Baldwin de Courtenay, whose empire was falling to ruins. But Walter Espec and Guy Muschamp were on board the king's vessel, through the influence of the Lord of Joinville; and there also was Beltran the renegade, who, touched with remorse, had abandoned his wealth in Egypt, and was doing penance by labouring as a seaman.

At length the fleet weighed anchor and set sail, with every prospect of a prosperous voyage. But, ere long, a somewhat alarming accident occurred. On Saturday, as the French approached Cyprus, about vespers, the vessels were suddenly enveloped in a thick fog, and the ship in which were the king and queen struck on a sandbank, and was so damaged that Louis was recommended to leave it without loss of time.

'Sire,' said the skipper, 'if you will believe me, you must remove from this ship to another. We well know that, since the keel has suffered so much damage, all the ribs must be started, and should there be a high wind, we fear she will be unable to bear the sea without sinking.'

'Now,' said the king, 'I put it to you on your faith and loyalty, to tell me truly, if the ship were your own, and full of merchandise, would you quit it?'

'No!' said the skipper; 'for we would rather risk our lives than lose a vessel worth forty or fifty thousand livres.'

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'Why, then, do you advise me to quit it?' asked the king.

'Oh, sire,' answered the skipper, 'we are different sort of beings; for there is no sum, however great, that could compensate for the loss of yourself and the queen and your children; and we cannot advise you to run such a risk.'

'Ah,' replied the king, 'now that you have answered, I will tell you what I think of the matter. Suppose I quit this vessel, there are five hundred persons on board, who will remain in Cyprus for fear of the danger that may befall them should they stay on board. Now,' continued Louis, 'there is not one among them who is attached to his own person more than I am myself; and, if we land, they will lose all hope of returning to their own country. Therefore, I declare I will rather expose myself, the queen, and my children to some danger, under the providence of God, than make such numbers of people suffer as are now with me.'

The example which Louis set inspired the companions of his voyage with courage; and the fleet having resumed its course, encountered, but survived, a violent storm, took in water at Cyprus, and soon after came in sight of Lampedosa, an island which was then uninhabited. And here a strange incident occurred.

It happened that King Louis and his company, including Walter Espec and Guy Muschamp, landed, and, while climbing among the rocks, discovered a hermitage, with a handsome garden, planted with olives, figs, vines, and many other fruit trees, and watered by a beautiful spring. On going to the upper end of the garden, the king and his company found an oratory, the roof of which was painted white, with a red cross in the centre, and, in a chamber more retired, two bodies laid toward the East, with their hands on their breasts. Soon after the king and his company, conversing about what they had seen, returned on board their ship, and the skipper was about to weigh anchor, when it was discovered that one of the warriors who had gone ashore was missing; and this caused much excitement.

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'I think I can account for this,' said the skipper. 'One of the sailors was desirous of turning hermit, and I doubt not he has seized so fair an opportunity.'

Walter Espec and Guy Muschamp exchanged glances. It was Beltran the renegade, who had thus devoted himself to solitude.

'Well,' said the king, on hearing this, 'let three sacks of biscuit be left on the shore; the man may find them, and, if so, they will serve for sustenance.'

Soon after this an accident happened to one of the squires on board the ship of one of the barons of Provence, which, at the time, was about half a league from that of the king. One morning, finding, as he lay in bed, that the sea dashed into his eyes and much annoyed him, he ordered the squire to stop it up. Having in vain attempted to do so from the inside, the squire went outside, and was endeavouring to stop the hole, when his foot dipped and he fell into the sea. The ship kept on her way without the mariners being aware of what had happened, and as the squire did not attempt to move, those on board the king's ship thought some piece of furniture had tumbled overboard. On coming nearer, however, they perceived that it was a human being, and Walter and Guy, with some mariners, lowered a boat, rowed to the rescue, and succeeded in saving him.

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On being brought on board the king's ship, the squire related how he met with the accident, and was asked why he did not endeavour to save himself by swimming.

'In faith,' answered the squire, 'I had no occasion so to do; for, as I fell into the sea, I cried, "Our Lady of Valbert!" and she supported me by the shoulders till I was rescued.'

'In good sooth,' remarked the Lord of Joinville, on hearing this, 'it is truly marvellous; and, to perpetuate the memory of this miracle, I vow to have it painted on the windows of my chapel at Joinville, and also on the windows of the church at Blecourt;' and, on reaching home, the noble seneschal kept his word.

And now the ships tilted over the waters; and, after a voyage of ten weeks, they reached the Port of Hieros, in front of a castle which, in right of his spouse, belonged to the king's brother, the Count of Anjou. Louis, however, was not inclined to land. In vain the queen and his council advised him to disembark.

'No,' said he, 'I will not land till I can do so on my own territory; I will not disembark till I arrive at Aigues Mortes.'

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Everybody looked extremely disappointed.

'Seneschal,' said Louis, turning to Joinville, 'what is your opinion?'

'Sire,' replied Joinville, 'it seems to me that you ought to land; for Madame de Bourbon, being once in this very port, put again to sea to land at Aigues Mortes, and she was tossed about for seven long weeks before she could make that harbour.'

'Seneschal,' said the king, 'you have persuaded me.' And soon after, to the joy of the queen and all on board, Louis landed at Hieros, and with Margaret and his children took up his residence in the castle, to rest from his fatigues ere setting out for his own dominions. Indeed, the saint-king was so weak, that Joinville had to carry him in his arms; and for some time he could hardly support the weight of his armour, or remain on horseback.

But Louis had yet many years of life before him; and after repairing for a time to recruit his health at Montpellier, where then, as in after ages, the medical science eminently flourished, he in the autumn arrived at Vincennes, and after prostrating himself before the altar of St. Denis and restoring the oriflamme to the abbot, he proceeded to Paris, where he was received with profound respect. But the saint-king bore on his brow traces of the sorrow caused by the multiplied disasters of his expedition, and still wore the symbol of salvation on his shoulder, as if to intimate that he was not yet done with the Holy Land.

CHAPTER XLIII.

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A ROYAL VISIT.

THE countenance of the King of France did not belie his heart. He was sad, and much more dejected than when he was in captivity and chains at Mansourah, bullied by the Saracens, and threatened with the bernicles. Nor was there any affectation in his continuing to wear the cross on his shoulder; as he proved, sixteen years later, when he undertook his ill-fated expedition to Tunis, and died, on a bed of ashes, amid the ruins of Carthage, looking up to heaven, and exclaiming with his latest breath, 'I will enter into Thy house; I will worship in Thy holy tabernacle!'

Meanwhile the saint-king appeared inconsolable, and refused to be comforted. Even the affectionate welcome accorded him by his people failed to dispel his gloom or cheer his soul. Day and night he brooded over his defeats and disasters, and sighed dolefully as his memory recalled the humiliation to which, in his person, the cause of Christianity had been exposed at the hands of the Moslem.

Fortunately, at that time, Henry, King of England, being at Bordeaux, offered Louis a visit; and the saintly monarch, rousing himself to welcome his royal brother-in-law, made preparations for his reception. Moreover, when Henry's approach was announced, Louis mounted and went forth to meet his guest; and, ere long, the King of England with a magnificent train appeared in sight.

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Henry was considerably older than Louis. Indeed, he had now attained the age of forty-seven. But his frame was vigorous; he had always enjoyed robust health; and, as he had taken life easily, time and trouble had not wrought so much havoc on him as on the French monarch. He was of the middle height, and compactly built, and would have been accounted handsome, but that one of his eyelids hung down in such a way as to conceal part of the eyeball, and rather spoiled a face which otherwise would have been pleasant to look upon. But, such as his person was, Henry did not neglect its adornment. He had all a Plantagenet's love of splendour, and the gorgeousness of his dress was such as to excite the wonder of his contemporaries. By his right hand rode his spouse, Eleanor of Provence, sister of the Queen of France, no longer young, but still preserving, in face and form, much of the beauty and grace which, twenty years earlier, made the name of the second daughter of Raymond Berenger celebrated at the courts of Europe.

Behind the King and Queen of England, on a black steed, which he bestrode with remarkable grace, rode their son, Edward, taller by the head and shoulders than other tall men, and already, though not out of his teens, renowned as one of the bravest and handsomest princes in Christendom. With him was his very juvenile wife, Eleanor of Castille, whom he had recently espoused at Burgos, and brought over the Pyrenees to Bordeaux, on his way to England.

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But the procession did not stop here; for, as the chronicler tells us, 'the King of England had in his own retinue a thousand handsome horses, ridden by men of dignity and rank, besides waggons and sumpter cattle, as well as a large number of choice horses, so that the unusual novelty of the array caused great astonishment to the French.'

The meeting of the two kings was all that could have been desired by the most enthusiastic advocate of the French alliance who could have been found in England; and, 'at sight of one another, they rushed into each other's arms, and after mutual greeting, entered into conversation.' Naturally enough, the first subject on which they touched was the crusade from which Louis had just returned; and the saint-king seemed relieved to meet with a man to whom he could, without derogating from his dignity, unbosom his griefs.

'My friend,' said Louis, mournfully, 'you cannot imagine how pleasant your voice is to my ears; let us enjoy ourselves in talking together, for never, perhaps, shall we have such an opportunity. In truth,' added he, as they rode on side by side towards Paris, 'it is no easy matter to tell how much bitterness of spirit I endured while on my pilgrimage through love of Christ.'

'I believe it, Louis, my cousin,' said Henry quickly.

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'And yet,' continued Louis, 'albeit everything turned against me, I return thanks to the Most High; for, on reflection, I rejoice more in the patience which God granted me, than if the whole world were to be made subject to my rule. And yet, my friend, when I think of all my mishaps, my heart saddens and my soul is heavy.'

'Cousin,' said Henry, kindly, 'beware of casting yourself into a life-weariness sorrow; for holy men will tell you that it is the stepmother of souls, and that it absorbs spiritual joy, and generates prejudice to the Holy Spirit. Recall to your mind the patience of Job, the endurance of Eustace.' And Henry proceeded to relate much that he knew, and much that he did not comprehend, of the history of both, and how, in the end, God rewarded them.

'My friend,' said Louis, 'if I were the only one to suffer the trouble and disgrace, and if my sins did not fall on the church universal, I could bear all with equanimity; but, woe is me, through me the whole of Christendom is enveloped in confusion and shame.'

'And, cousin,' said Henry, 'I perceive that you still wear the symbol of the cross on your raiment.'

'I do,' replied Louis, 'because I have not concluded my pilgrimage; I have only suspended it; therefore bear I the sacred symbol. And you also, Henry, you have taken the cross, and vowed to fight for the Holy Sepulchre.'

'Cousin,' answered Henry, gravely, but frankly, 'when I heard that you were a prisoner in the hands of the Saracens, I did take the cross and vow to go to the rescue; but now that, by God's grace, you are at liberty, I cannot but think that it is my duty to remain at home and minister to the welfare of my subjects.'

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'And yet,' urged Louis, 'we are told that he who will not take up his cross and come with me, is not worthy of me; and I know you, Henry, to be a man who, albeit you are negligent in punishing Jews and heretics, are distinguished for attention to the things that belong to your eternal peace, and by your devotion to the Lord.'

'In truth, cousin,' replied Henry, not sorry perhaps, to leave the subject of the crusade, 'I am regular, at least, in my religious exercises; for it is my custom, every day, to hear three masses, with the notes, and, as I wish to hear more, I assiduously assist at the celebration of private masses; and when the priest elevates the Host, I usually hold the hand of the priest and kiss it.'

'Nevertheless, my friend,' remarked Louis, 'I cannot but deem that the attention ought not

always to be devoted to the hearing of masses, but that we ought to hear sermons as often as possible.'

'Mayhap,' said Henry. 'And yet, by God's help, I would rather see a friend often than hear of him, even although I should hear nothing spoken of him but good.'

As the two kings conversed they entered Paris side by side, and the sight which met the eyes of the English might well, indeed, raise their admiration. The city, with its squares and bridges and churches and houses built of gypsum, was splendidly decorated with bowers of leaves and flowers; many of the mansions were three and four storeys in height, and the windows were crowded with people of both sexes, gaily dressed, and excited with the spectacle. Everything wore a holiday guise; and the citizens and the scholars of the University, especially those of English birth, suspending their readings and disputations, came forth in crowds, carrying branches of trees, and attended by bands of music. Everybody appeared eager to accord the royal guests a hearty welcome; and Louis, after thanking the scholars for showing his friends so much honour, turned to Henry. [277]

'My friend,' said he, 'I place Paris at your disposal. Where will you be pleased to take up your abode? There is my palace in the middle of the city; or, if you prefer taking up your residence at the Old Temple, which is more roomy, it shall be so arranged.'

'Verily,' answered Henry, 'I think I must choose the Old Temple; for I hear it is roomy enough to lodge an army, and my company, as you see, is somewhat numerous; and there it is my purpose to give a banquet on the morrow, and I trust that you and your princes and nobles will honour it with your presence.'

'After which,' said Louis, 'you must come as my guest to my palace. Nay, nay,' continued he, as Henry sought to excuse himself, 'let it be so: for it is proper for me to perform all the duties of courtesy and hospitality. In my own kingdom I am lord,' he added, with a smile; 'and I will be master in my own house.' [278]

'On my faith,' said Walter Espec to Guy Muschamp, as gallantly the brothers-in-arms rode in the train of the saint-king, 'this is a great day for England!'

'In truth it is,' replied Guy, gaily. 'Methinks there are Englishmen enough in Paris to take the city.'

CHAPTER XLIV.

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THE FEAST OF KINGS.

ON the day after the arrival of Henry and his queen in Paris, that marvellous banquet, described as 'the feast of kings,' was given in the great hall of the Old Temple; and a mighty entertainment it appears to have been, if we are to judge from the description of the chronicler, who tells us that 'never in times past was there given such a rich and splendid banquet, even in the time of Esther, or of Arthur, or of Charles.' Besides three kings—those of Navarre, and France, and England, with their queens—there were present eighteen countesses, and twenty-five counts, and twelve bishops; not to mention a host of noble knights and ladies—knights illustrious for their valour, and ladies celebrated for their beauty.

As the guests were ranged according to their rank, some difficulty arose as to who was to preside. Henry requested Louis to assume the post of honour; but Louis protested.

'It is more fitting,' said he, 'that the master of the feast should occupy the chief seat.'

'Not so, my lord king,' urged Henry. 'It is more becoming and proper for you to sit in the middle; seeing that you are my sovereign and will be so, for the reason is plain.' [280]

'Henry,' replied Louis, in a low voice, 'would that every one could obtain his right without injury. But in your case,' added he, alluding to Henry's claims on Normandy and Anjou, 'the pride of the French would never permit it. But enough of this.'

Now it happened that the great hall was, according to the continental custom, hung around with as many bucklers as the four walls would hold, and among them was the shield of Cœur de Lion; and when the feast was drawing to a close, the company began to look around and examine them.

'My lord,' said the Count of Anjou, jocularly addressing Henry, 'why have you invited the French to dine with you in this house of all others? See, there is the shield of the lion-hearted King Richard. I marvel that your guests have been able to eat without fear and trembling.'

Now this remark, uttered as it was in a tone of irony, was calculated to excite unpleasant sensations, and to recall disagreeable reminiscences; and Henry looked mortified, and Prince Edward threw his magnificent head disdainfully backward. But Louis, ever on the watch, hastened to soothe their rising ire.

'Would to God, Henry!' said he, earnestly, 'that the twelve peers of France and the barons

would agree to my wishes. We should then be inseparable friends.'

'I believe it, Louis, my cousin,' exclaimed Henry, quickly.

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'I grieve, my Lord knows,' continued Louis, 'that our feelings of affection cannot be cemented on all points; but I cannot bend the obstinacy of my barons; and therefore I perceive plainly that you will never recover your rights.'

'Nay, the future is with God and his saints,' said Henry; who, pacific as he was, by no means relished the idea of the Plantagenets being perpetually excluded from their inheritance. 'Meanwhile, cousin, there is peace between us, and let not the feast flag.'

'Henry,' said Louis, pausing, as he approached a painful subject, 'it grieves me sore to think that, of all the English who landed with me at Damietta, few, indeed, escaped the carnage of Mansourah. Nevertheless, I have brought home with me two English squires, who are anxious to return to their own country, and whom I would fain recommend to your gracious protection.'

'Cousin,' said Henry, responding with readiness and sympathy, 'for your sake I will both protect and honour them.'

Walter Espec and Guy Muschamp were immediately summoned, and, marching up the great hall between the tables, approached the two kings and bent their knees.

'Both of them,' explained Louis, mildly, 'have rendered good services, and encountered great perils, and undergone great sufferings for the cross. One saved my brother, the Count of Poitiers, from captivity; and the other saved my kinswoman, Adeline de Brienne, from still worse evils.' And the king looked towards the noble demoiselle, who, princess as she was, felt her heart beat rapidly, and was under the necessity of making a strong effort not to betray the interest which she felt in the fortunes of the young warrior, with whose fate, she had convinced herself, since the rescue at Passe-Poulain, her own was strangely intermingled.

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'Wherefore,' continued Louis, 'I would fain, ere parting with them, give them a token of my appreciation of their piety, and the courage they have shown in hours of danger and disaster, as I have already admonished them how to act towards their God and their neighbour. Kneel.'

And as they obeyed, Louis gave each of them three blows on the shoulder with the flat of his weapon, mentioning the name of each, and repeating the formula—'In the name of God, of St. Michael, and St. George, I dub thee knight. Rise up, Sir Walter Espec, and Sir Guy Muschamp.'

And as Walter and Guy rose to their feet, blushing with this new and unexpected honour, Louis added—

'And now you will accompany your king to England, and lose no time in winning your spurs, so as to justify me, in the eyes of men, for having thus distinguished you.'

'By St. George, cousin,' said Henry, laughing, 'I fear me that their patience will be put to the test; for at present I have not an enemy against whom to lead such redoubted warriors.'

'My lord and father,' said Prince Edward, interposing, 'if the young knights will enter my service, I will undertake to find them enough of work to keep their swords from rusting.'

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'I doubt it not, Edward,' replied Henry, seriously, 'I doubt it not;' and, turning to Louis, he added by way of explanation, 'I have gifted my son with the principality of Wales, and recommended him to employ his youth in bringing the natives to obedience; and I know enough of the Welsh to be aware that he has before him an arduous duty. Now, young gentlemen,' said he, addressing Guy and Walter, 'will you take service with the prince, and go to war under his banner?'

'In truth, my lord,' answered Walter, 'nothing could be more to my mind than so to do.'

'And what say you, most doughty warrior?' said Henry, looking towards the heir of the Muschamps.

'My lord,' replied Guy, cheerfully, 'we are brothers in arms; and, as says Walter, so say I.'

And when Henry and Queen Eleanor left Paris, and took leave of Louis and his court at Chartres to return to Bordeaux, Walter Espec and Guy Muschamp rode off in Prince Edward's train; Guy, laughing as he thought how much his new dignity would add to his importance when he reached his father's castle, and Walter, casting many a look behind to catch a last glance of Adeline de Brienne.

And so ended the adventures of the Boy Crusaders.

FOOTNOTE:

[1] Transcriber's note: Although, generally, handwritten notes are not preserved in the final text, my proofreaders so enjoyed this edition's inscription that it was retained.

Transcriber's Notes:

Obvious punctuation errors repaired.

Both Djédilé and Djedilé were used in this text.

The remaining corrections made are indicated by dotted lines under the corrections. Scroll the mouse over the word and the original text will appear.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BOY CRUSADERS: A STORY OF THE DAYS OF LOUIS IX ***

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