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THE GREEN FLAG OF THE PROPHET

Since the commencement of the war between Russia and Turkey, the world has several times been startled by the announcement that the 'Flag of the Prophet' was about to be unfurled in the streets of Stamboul. Such an event, if it should happen (which may heaven avert), would proclaim a crusade in which all true Mussulmans would be bound to take an active part, and to fight against Christianity in every part of the world. They may be in India, Arabia, Egypt, or wherever else their scattered race has found a home; the raising of the green standard is a call which none may disobey without, as the Koran lays it down, sacrificing all his hopes of Paradise.

This fearful appeal to all the worst passions of the Eastern races hangs like a menace over the Mohammedan world; and if the word was once uttered and the dread flag unfurled, there is no telling to what sanguinary excesses it might lead an enthusiastic and half-savage people. It may be of interest to our readers if, under these circumstances, we endeavour to make them acquainted with the origin and history of a banner which has not seen the light of day since the Empress Catharine of Russia attempted to reinstate Christianity in the City of the Sultans, and which once unfurled, would set a whole world ablaze.

There have been many flags or signals used by various nations at different crises in their history to incite the peoples to battle on behalf of religions, dynasties, and ideas; but none has attained to the fearful notoriety which appertains to the terrible Flag of the Prophet, which is really a banner of blood, for it dispels the idea of mercy from the minds and hearts of its followers, and gives no quarter to man, woman, or child.

The Red Cross banner of the Christian Crusaders was an emblem of chivalry, mercy, gentleness, and love; but under its folds many a dark deed and many a shameless act were committed; and it was understood by the members of the Mohammedan faith to mean nothing less than the utter extermination of their race. This feeling, with its consequent hatred of Christianity, shews itself even at this advanced period in the world's history, by the recent refusal of the Turkish government to allow its ambulance corps and hospitals to bear the red cross of the Geneva Convention (a sign which is entirely neutral, and is designed to protect its wearers while they are engaged on their errands of mercy to the sick and wounded of both sides), adopting instead thereof their own emblem of the crescent. Thus we see these rival emblems once more waving over the field of battle, though, happily, to mitigate rather than increase the horrors of war.

In France the 'oriflamme' or golden sun upon a field of crimson signified 'no quarter;' but this celebrated Flag of the Prophet means infinitely more than this. It is a summons to an anti-Christian crusade, a challenge of every believer in the Prophet to arms; a war-signal in fact, which, like the Fiery Cross of Scotland, would flash its dread command through the domain of Islam. In the interests of humanity, however, we may hope that the 'Commander of the Faithful' will never utter the dreadful word; for then indeed would the whole soul and strength of Christendom turn against the enemy of all civilised laws, human and divine.

The Prophet himself predicted that one day when his followers should number a hundred millions – which they do now, with twenty millions more added to it – his flag should fly against the advancing power of the northern races; and the Koran or Mohammedan Bible says that when its silken folds are flung forth 'the earth will shake, the mountains melt into dust, the seas blaze up

in fire, and the children's hair grow white with anguish.' This language is of course metaphorical; but it is easy to conceive, by the light of very recent history, that some such catastrophe might take place, as the displaying of this terrible symbol would raise a frenzy of fanaticism in the breasts of the Mohammedan race all over the globe.

The origin of the insignia is a curious one. Mohammed gazing out upon a vast prospect of fields, said: 'Nature is green, and green shall be my emblem, for it is everlasting and universal.' In course of time, however, it lost that innocent significance; and amid his visions, the great dreamer saw the Green Flag floating as a sign that all true believers should take up their arms and march against the Infidel; in fact the green turban was the sacred head-dress of the pilgrim or perfected Islamite who had gone to Mecca; and hence the sanctity of this formidable standard.

When once unfurled, it summons all Islam by an adjuration from the Koran that the sword is the solitary emblem and instrument of faith, independence, and patriotism; that armies, not priests, make converts; and that sharpened steel is the 'true key to heaven or hell.' Upon that fearful ensign are inserted the words which are supposed to have been written at Mecca itself – namely, 'All who draw it [the sword] will be rewarded with temporal advantages; every drop shed of their blood, every peril and hardship endured by them, will be registered on high as more meritorious than either fasting or praying. If they fall in battle, their sins will be at once blotted out, and they will be transported to Paradise, there to revel in eternal pleasures in the arms of black-eyed houris. But for the first heaven are reserved those of the Faithful who die within sight of the Green Flag of the Prophet.' Then follow the terrible and all-significant words, the fearful war-cry against God and man: 'Then may no man give or expect mercy!'

This is the outburst of barbarism with which the world is threatened in this year of grace 1877; and the reader cannot do otherwise than mark the cunning nature of the portentous words inscribed on the Prophet's banner. What would not most men do, civilised or savage, for 'temporal advantages?' While to the Eastern peoples fasting and praying are looked upon as of so meritorious a nature, that to find something else which, in the eyes of Allah, would be deemed of greater value still, would be a desideratum which none would fail to grasp, by any means whatever, if it came within their reach. But Mohammed's wonderful knowledge of human nature, and more especially of Eastern human nature, is shewn in his picture of Paradise as prepared for the Faithful who fall in battle; while his declaration that the highest heaven in this so-called Paradise will be reserved for those who die within sight of the Green Flag, is a masterpiece of devilish policy unequalled in the annals of mankind.

It scarcely needed the fearful words which follow to add emphasis to this dreadful appeal to the passions of a semi-barbarous race. Another motto on this sacred flag is not without significance at the present time: 'The gates of Paradise are under the shade of swords;' and this alone would, if the flag were unfurled in the holy mosque of Constantinople, give to the Turk a moral power over his subordinates the effect of which it would be vain to calculate. Civilised though he partially is, he still firmly believes in the old doctrine of *kismet* or fatality, and in angels fighting on his behalf; not less implicitly than did his ancestors at the battle of Beder, where this formidable green standard was first unfurled. 'There,' says the historian, 'they elevated the standard, which Mohammed from his height in heaven blessed.'

Thus arose the great tradition of this sacred war-emblem, which it is a Turkish boast was never yet captured in battle, though it was once in extreme peril in a fight between hill and plain; when Mohammed himself had it snatched out of his hands. Ali, his kinsman, however, thrust himself in front of a hundred spears, and won the victory with the immaculate flag flying over his head.

It is scarcely to be wondered at that a race so superstitious as the Turks should attach an almost miraculous value to such a symbol of their past history and their present power. It is a spell wherever their race or religion flourishes, and its invocation in the serious form now menaced cannot be regarded without anxiety. The day of the military apostles of Mohammed may be past, it is true;

but the tradition survives; and the unfurling of this flag might be the spark which would set fire to the latent enthusiasm of the Mohammedan race and involve the world in a religious war.

We have referred to the great French banner, the oriflamme; and it was that which led the French Crusaders through the Holy Land and headed the royal armies of France in the campaigns of the sixteenth century, while it also divided the Blue from the White in the Burgundian civil wars; but this Flag of the Prophet to-day exercises a magical influence over one hundred and twenty millions of the human race, scattered about in Arabia, Syria, Asia Minor, Persia, and Egypt, over the Nile and the Ganges, and from Jerusalem to the Red Sea.

The desire of Mohammed, however, was, that while all pilgrims whose task had been duly fulfilled should wear the green turban, no sovereign in his succession should unfurl the Green Flag of the Faith unless Islam were in imminent peril. The unfurling of the banner would be performed with great religious ceremony, and in the presence of the Commander of the Faithful, who is himself supposed to carry it at the head of his army; while a fearful curse would be called down upon the head of every Mohammedan who, capable of bearing arms, failed to rally round it.

The standard itself is not a very handsome one, and is surpassed both in value and appearance by many of the banners which belong to the various benefit societies and other mutual associations of men in this country. It is of green silk, with a large crescent on the top of the staff, from which is suspended a long plume of horse-hair (said to have been the tail of the Prophet's favourite Arab steed), while the broad folds of the flag exhibit the crescent and the quotations from the Koran already mentioned.

The state colour of one of our regiments of the Guards is a much prettier and more expensive standard than the great banner of Islam; but (to such small things is man's enthusiasm attached) if the latter was the veriest 'rag' in existence, nothing could mar the beauty which the prestige of more than a thousand years has given to it in the eyes of a Mussulman.

The Flag of the Prophet is kept in the mosque of St Sophia at Constantinople, and is in the custody of the Sheik-ul-Islam, or Mohammedan chief-priest, where all well-wishers of humanity may sincerely trust it will ever remain.

FROM DAWN TO SUNSET PART II

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

Deborah and Mistress Dinnage were walking in the old garden, in the moonlight, on the mossed green walk along which they had played hound and hare in 'madder merrier days.' They walked slowly, arm in arm, talking plentifully and earnestly, and still the old difference shewed between them. Deborah, so cold with most of her own sex, and so wont to accept passively their enthusiastic tokens of affection and admiration, dealt only the most caressing tenderness to Margaret Dinnage; which Mistress Dinnage, on her part, returned with brusqueness and no outward show of affection whatever.

'I made him take it,' said Deborah. 'I know not what sore trouble had got hold of him. I think it was worse than need of money, or a greater debt than he has ever had before.'

'And he has gone to Master Sinclair? O Lady Deb, you should have made him see Sir Vincent first; though, good sooth, it is easier to preach than to practise, and it is no light task for ye to lead Master Fleming. But I, like you, abominate that old man. Whenever he rides up the chase, I say to father: "Father, the old fox comes! He wishes no good to Enderby."'

'I know it well; more strongly my heart tells me so each time. He comes for poor Deb Fleming; but time and coldness will soon unearth his cunning, and turn his hateful love to cruel hate.'

'Ay, and he will urge your brother on to ruin, in hopes of winning you.'

'O Mistress Dinnage, good Mistress Dinnage, say not so, so coldly! Sweet heart, how could this thing be? Marry the man who compassed my brother's ruin? You speak wisely!'

'Ah,' said Mistress Dinnage scornfully, 'you are blind; but I, shut out from all great folk's doings, can see and know them well. I can see how Master Sinclair, that old fox, would bring you and yours to *beggary*— ay, to shame — that he may say to ye: "Wed me; I will save your father and brother." *He* knows your love for them. *He* knows o' what stuff you're made. And indeed you'd be sore pressed between your love for them and your hate for Master Sinclair.'

'O Meg, say no more. You wrong me. I had rather see them *dead*. But what can I do? The swiftest horse would not catch Charlie now. O Mistress Dinnage, you have scared me, and I am not wont to be scared. What if Adam Sinclair drives him mad? gives him some great sum, and then has him up to pay it! No; stay! Charlie is not of age. But worse, if he refuses aid, and my poor boy flies the country. O merciful heaven!' Deborah stood with her hands clasped upon her head, and her eyes regarding Mistress Dinnage wildly.

'No,' said Mistress Dinnage thoughtfully; 'this will not be. If Master Fleming is in debt, old Adam Sinclair will give him the money needful, and draw him on and on; for the time's not come yet. Lady Deb, you must talk to him — to Master Fleming. You alone can save him, an' it's a down road he's goin'. If father hadn't spared the rod so oft, an' we hadn't screened him so oft from blame, this thing might not be. But that is past. If ye will save Master Fleming from utter ruin, *now* is the time.'

'Ay, you talk,' said Deborah scornfully; 'you had better turn a wild Arab horse afield, and bid me catch him. Don't I pray? Don't I plead to him — ay, till my very soul dissolves in words, to keep him at home from mad companions? What can I do? A sister cannot tether him. *Love* alone would save him.'

'Love? Ah, you speak to me o' what I know nothing; my heart, you know, is' —

'True as steel.'

'Ay, but as cold. But if a maiden's love indeed would save him, ask some one whom Master Fleming could love; ask Mistress Warriston; and he may come to love her.'

'Well; indeed he might. And May is an heiress too, and lovely. When Charlie cared not for her, he was a boy; and now he is grown a man, older than his years. Do you truly advise me to ask May here, who had indeed, we both thought long ago, some secret liking for my poor Charlie?'

'I don't advise,' quoth Mistress Dinnage. 'But, ask her.' Then again: 'Well, do as it pleases you. I won't advise. I know not if it would be for good or ill.'

'How could it be for ill?'

'It might break Mistress Warriston's heart, which is so tender!'

'How know you it is so tender?'

'Because it is worn upon her sleeve, and ever melts in tears.'

'I love her for that womanliness.'

The proud lip of Mistress Dinnage curled. 'Yes, it is well. Tears ease the heart, and ladies have time to weep.'

'*You* would never weep, whatever ailed ye. Oh, thou'rt a proud incomprehensible little maid. I would like to see thee well in love.'

'That ye never will.'

'Never boast. It is a sign of weakness, Mistress mine. But is there a doubt that Charlie Fleming would *not* love one so charming as May? Were I a man, I would worship her; and it is such bold spirits as his that love the soft and tender. Charlie *will not* woo; he looks askance to *be* wooed, and would love the maiden wooer! *I* know Charlie Fleming.'

'Then if he loves to be wooed,' said Mistress Dinnage, with a fierce scorn, 'let him seek it in the streets of Granta; fair enough women there, and ready too. I thought not that Master Fleming would love such kind!'

Deborah withdrew her arm from her companion's, and answered coldly: 'You offend me. You wilfully misunderstand me. But how can I look to be understood by one who knows no softness, no weakness of her sex! You have a hard, hard heart, Mistress Dinnage, if it be a noble one. The good *you* do is never done for love.'

'True enow, good sooth. But such poor love as ye describe, defend me from! It is water and milk at best. If God made me love, my love would lie so deep that the man who would win it must dig and dig to find it. Ay, hard!'

'Proud Mistress mine, do you value yourself thus highly?'

'Ay, I am a poor girl; but I have an honest heart, Mistress Fleming, and value it as highly as any lady in the land. He who loves, but thinks it not worth the winning, let him go; he who sets not such store by my love, let him go; and if the right man never comes, let the others go! If Margaret Dinnage could have loved, it would have been thus with her; and the hidden unvalued love would live and die within one heart.'

'I know it, I know it!' cried Deborah impulsively. 'O noble heart! *this* is the kind of love I can feel for, for I have it beating here;' and Deborah laid her hand upon her own breast. 'One thing you lack, Meg – that would make you perfect. *Love!*' Pleading, earnest, sweet, significant, tender, emphatic, was the utterance of the last imperative word, and Deborah's arms were round her friend, and her upturned face upon Margaret's breast. So in the moonlight the girls stood: a fair picture, for the head of Mistress Dinnage was turned aside, and her grave dark eyes averted; and in that moment each proud heart was revealed to each. '*Let* thyself love,' continued Deborah, in her sweetest softest tones. 'Ye can be *too* proud, Mistress Dinnage. The day will come when ye will rue it bitterly. I would not urge ye, if I divined not the secret of another heart. Are you so blind that ye cannot see it too? The restlessness when you're not by; the wistful eye – that *I* dare not answer! O Mistress Dinnage, if Kingston Fleming had had *one* such look for me, in those old days, child as I was, I would have loved him before all the world, truly and unchangeably. Know ye not that I speak the truth? Would I urge ye to your ruin? When once a Fleming loves, he never loves but honourably. Then, his fate is not in *my* hands – but in thine.' There was silence. The last three words, though whispered, rang

again and again in the listener's ears like music. What Mistress Dinnage thought then, was not told, but Deborah felt the wild heaving of her breast.

So a few moments passed, and Margaret put Deborah from her with firm but gentle hands. 'Talk no more of this,' she said, while they walked on. 'I will not be so stubborn as to seem ignorant of your meaning. But I do not think with you. No; do not speak, my sweet Mistress Deborah; no words will make us think alike. What! was it not so in the old days, that your heart would ever outrun your head, and ye *would* believe what ye longed for? Noble it is of ye to long for this; but Deborah Fleming, ye are like no other woman living, rich or poor. Ye are *yourself*; and I know you to be above all the littlenesses of woman-kind.'

Deborah blushed with pleasure. 'Hush, hush!' she said. 'This from you is too high praise; and dangerous, because you mean it all, and no flattery. But if it *is* noble to plead for one's dearest wish, and to choose above all rank and riches one's best and dearest friend, then I must be a very noble maid! But it seems to me simple nature, and no nobility. God has given me no ambition for great things; on the other hand, He has given me the power of loving faithfully; so that through all, with all her faults, never think but that Deborah Fleming will be true to her nature – true to those dearer than her own life!'

And then, Mistress Dinnage beginning, they talked of Kingston Fleming. A very frequent subject of conversation was he. It would not be fair to write all the nonsense that maidens will talk, even a Mistress Fleming and a Mistress Dinnage, for diamonds are found in dust. And they talked with great earnestness and gravity of the lace cap and discussed every minute point of dress; and what should be done if King Fleming came, and there was no host to receive him. Would he stay? Would it be seemly? Surely, with Dame Marjory – and much laughter even; for laughter and tears are near akin; and in April, sun follows showers.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

The next morning, Deborah, in her great saloon, was tending her flowers and thinking of Charlie, when she heard her father's step. With a rush she was out, and the sun streamed out with her through the open door.

'My Rose of Enderby, art smartening up! The lad Kingston will be here to-morrow.'

Deborah's treacherous heart gave a great leap. 'Who told you so?' she asked calmly.

'This scrawl. Why, Deb, ye must look gladder than that; he is your cousin, ye know: or have ye forgot him?'

Deborah read the note in silence, and then her busy bewildered thoughts flew off. Oh, she must be calm; this would never do; she must be 'Mistress Deborah Fleming,' receiving in all cousinly courtesy the affianced lover of Mistress Beatrix Blancheflower, her rival beauty in a rival county.

'Father,' said Deborah, with sudden laughing joy, 'I must have some guests to meet him. Why, I have seldom had a party here; a very little money will go a long long way to make this bright and gay, and you have a store of good old wine still left. Wine and flowers and *women*, father! What more do mortals want? And it will be returning Master Sinclair's generosity, which necessity weighs heavily on us, till it be paid. Oh, leave it to me, father, and you will think me a rare Mistress of Enderby!'

Sir Vincent looked round somewhat ruefully. '*Must* it be, sweet heart, and even to-morrow? It cannot be.'

'It can. Trust in me. Why, father, you will be the gayest of the gay, as ye always are at such times. Dost give consent?'

'Why yes, tyrant. But ask Adam Sinclair.'

'Trust me.' And Deborah was out and away to Dame Marjory and Mistress Dinnage. The lord of Lincoln for once would be welcomed!

It pleased Deborah to have a banquet in the hall and music in the saloon. Why, she had twenty pounds a year; and good lack! One could not *always* contemplate ruin. A Fleming was coming home; they would 'kill the fatted calf.' Such pleasures were far between.

It was short notice, but willing messengers were soon afoot, and Granta was laid under requisition for guests. Deborah, happy and proud, sent the word to all invited guests that short notice was involuntary on her part; her cousin Kingston Fleming was coming home suddenly, and who could, must come and dance at Enderby. So what with Granta men and young belles of Deborah's age, and a few old dowagers and a few Adam Sinclairs, the party was made up. Deborah was lucky. She, in her sheeny lovely dress, was well-nigh worshipped by the men, she looked so full of life, so brilliant. But no Charlie! That was the one drawback; nor did Adam Sinclair know where he was, save that he had left Lincoln the day before in good spirits. Deborah knew in her heart what that meant. As she conversed, she looked full at Adam Sinclair, and felt to love all man and woman kind. The aged wooer trembled before the gracious girl; time only heightened his passion and hardened his determination to win Deborah Fleming at all hazards. The county had already begun to whisper about his infatuation and her coldness.

Eyes enough were upon them though, and the dowagers decided that so far from being 'cold,' Deborah Fleming encouraged him by every means in her power.

'Mistress Fleming,' he whispered ardently, 'give me some token to-night – some slight token of favour. Your eyes look kind to-night. Give me that rose.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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