EDGAR JOHN GEORGE

THE BOY CRUSADERS: A STORY OF THE DAYS OF LOUIS IX.

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Содержание

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PREFACE

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.
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.'

'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 reck 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 – '

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.'

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.'

'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.'

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-budgets of De Roos; the three Katherine-wheels of Espec; the engrailed cross of De Vesci; 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.

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.'

'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.
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.

'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 signalised 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.

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.'

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.

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 signalised 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 —

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.

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.
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-bye, 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.

'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. Lotus, 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.

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.

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.

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.

'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.

'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 Provencal 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.

'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.
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.

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.

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.

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.'

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.

CHAPTER VI.
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.

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.'

'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.

'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.

CHAPTER VII.
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.'

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.'

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.

CHAPTER VIII.
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.'

'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.

'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.

'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.

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!'

'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.
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 engulphed. 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.

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.

'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.

'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.'

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, 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.

'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.'

'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.

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.

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.'

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

CHAPTER XI.
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.

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.

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.'

'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.'

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.

CHAPTER XII.
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.'

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.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.