HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

A KNIGHT OF THE WHITE CROSS: A TALE OF THE SIEGE OF RHODES

George Henty

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Содержание

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PREFACE

MY DEAR LADS,

The order of the Knights of St. John, which for some centuries played a very important part in the great struggle between Christianity and Mahomedanism, was, at its origin, a semi-religious body, its members being, like other monks, bound by vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty, and pledged to minister to the wants of the pilgrims who flocked to the Holy Places, to receive them at their great Hospital—or guest house—at Jerusalem, dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and to defend them on their passage to and from the sea, against attack by Moslems. In a comparatively short time the constitution of the order was changed, and the Knights Hospitallers became, like the Templars, a great military Order pledged to defend the Holy Sepulchre, and to war everywhere against the Moslems. The Hospitallers bore a leading share in the struggle which terminated in the triumph of the Moslems, and the capture by them of Jerusalem. The Knights of St. John then established themselves at Acre, but after a valiant defence of that fortress, removed to Crete, and shortly afterwards to Rhodes. There they fortified the town, and withstood two terrible sieges by the Turks. At the end of the second they obtained honourable terms from Sultan Solyman, and retiring to Malta established themselves there in an even stronger fortress than that of Rhodes, and repulsed all the efforts of the Turks to dispossess them. The Order was the great bulwark of Christendom against the invasion of the Turks, and the tale of their long struggle is one of absorbing interest, and of the many eventful episodes none is more full of incident and excitement than the first siege of Rhodes, which I have chosen for the subject of my story.

Yours truly, G. A. Henty

CHAPTER I The King Maker

A stately lady was looking out of the window of an apartment in the Royal Chateau of Amboise, in the month of June, 1470. She was still handsome, though many years of anxiety, misfortune, and trouble, had left their traces on her face. In the room behind her, a knight was talking to a lady sitting at a tambour frame; a lad of seventeen was standing at another window stroking a hawk that sat on his wrist, while a boy of nine was seated at a table examining the pages of an illuminated missal.

"What will come of it, Eleanor?" the lady at the window said, turning suddenly and impatiently from it. "It seems past belief that I am to meet as a friend this haughty earl, who has for fifteen years been the bitterest enemy of my House. It appears almost impossible."

"'Tis strange indeed, my Queen; but so many strange things have befallen your Majesty that you should be the last to wonder at this. At any rate, as you said but yesterday, naught but good can come of it. He has done his worst against you, and one can scarce doubt that if he chooses he has power to do as much good for you, as in past times he has done you evil. 'Tis certain that his coming here shows he is in earnest, for his presence,—which is sure sooner or later to come to the ears of the Usurper,—will cause him to fall into the deepest disgrace."

"And yet it seemed," the queen said, "that by marrying his daughter to Clarence he had bound himself more firmly than ever to the side of York."

"Ay, madam," the knight said. "But Clarence himself is said to be alike unprincipled and ambitious, and it may well be that Warwick intended to set him up against Edward; had he not done so, such an alliance would not necessarily strengthen his position at Court."

"Methinks your supposition is the true one, Sir Thomas," the queen said. "Edward cares not sufficiently for his brother to bestow much favour upon the father of the prince's wife. Thus, he would gain but little by the marriage unless he were to place Clarence on the throne. Then he would again become the real ruler of England, as he was until Edward married Elizabeth Woodville, and the House of Rivers rose to the first place in the royal favour, and eclipsed the Star of Warwick. It is no wonder the proud Earl chafes under the ingratitude of the man who owes his throne to him, and that he is ready to dare everything so that he can but prove to him that he is not to be slighted with impunity. But why come to me, when he has Clarence as his puppet?"

"He may have convinced himself, madam, that Clarence is even less to be trusted than Edward, or he may perceive that but few of the Yorkists would follow him were he to declare against the Usurper, while assuredly your adherents would stand aloof altogether from such a struggle. Powerful as he is, Warwick could not alone withstand the united forces of all the nobles pledged to the support of the House of York. Thence, as I take it, does it happen that he has resolved to throw in his lot with Lancaster, if your Majesty will but forgive the evil he has done your House and accept him as your ally. No doubt he will have terms to make and conditions to lay down."

"He may make what conditions he chooses," Queen Margaret said passionately, "so that he does but aid me to take vengeance on that false traitor; to place my husband again on the throne; and to obtain for my son his rightful heritage."

As she spoke a trumpet sounded in the courtyard below.

"He has come," she exclaimed. "Once again, after years of misery and humiliation, I can hope."

"We had best retire, madam," Sir Thomas Tresham said. "He will speak more freely to your Majesty if there are no witnesses. Come, Gervaise, it is time that you practised your exercises." And Sir Thomas, with his wife and child, quitted the room, leaving Queen Margaret with her son to meet the man who had been the bitterest foe of her House, the author of her direst misfortunes.

For two hours the Earl of Warwick was closeted with the queen; then he took horse and rode away. As soon as he did so, a servant informed Sir Thomas and his wife that the queen desired their presence. Margaret was standing radiant when they entered.

"Congratulate me, my friends," she said. "The Star of Lancaster has risen again. Warwick has placed all his power and influence at our disposal. We have both forgiven all the past: I the countless injuries he has inflicted on my House, he the execution of his father and so many of his friends. We have both laid aside all our grievances, and we stand united by our hate for Edward. There is but one condition, and this I accepted gladly—namely, that my son should marry his daughter Anne. This will be another bond between us; and by all reports Anne is a charming young lady. Edward has gladly agreed to the match; he could make no alliance, even with the proudest princess in Europe, which would so aid him, and so strengthen his throne."

"God grant that your hopes may be fulfilled, madam," the knight said earnestly, "and that peace may be given to our distracted country! The Usurper has rendered himself unpopular by his extravagance and by the exactions of his tax collectors, and I believe that England will gladly welcome the return of its lawful king to power. When does Warwick propose to begin?"

"He will at once get a fleet together. Louis, who has privately brought about this meeting, will of course throw no impediment in his way; but, on the other hand, the Duke of Burgundy will do all in his power to thwart the enterprise, and will, as soon as he learns of it, warn Edward. I feel new life in me, Eleanor. After fretting powerless for years, I seem to be a different woman now that there is a prospect of action. I am rejoiced at the thought that at last I shall be able to reward those who have ventured and suffered so much in the cause of Lancaster."

"My hope is, madam, that this enterprise will be the final one,—that, once successful, our dear land will be no longer deluged with blood, and that never again shall I be forced to draw my sword against my countrymen."

"'Tis a good and pious wish, Sir Thomas, and heartily do I join in it. My married life has been one long round of trouble, and none more than I have cause to wish for peace."

"There is the more hope for it, madam, that these wars have greatly diminished the number of powerful barons. It is they who are the authors of this struggle; their rivalries and their ambitions are the ruin of England. Save for their retainers there would be no armies to place in the field; the mass of people stand aloof altogether, desiring only to live in peace and quiet. 'Tis the same here in France; 'tis the powerful vassals of the king that are ever causing trouble."

"'Tis so indeed, Sir Thomas. But without his feudal lords how could a king place an army in the field, when his dominions were threatened by a powerful neighbour?"

"Then it would be the people's business to fight, madam, and I doubt not that they would do so in defence of their hearths and homes. Besides, the neighbour would no longer have the power of invasion were he also without great vassals. These great barons stand between the king and his subjects; and a monarch would be a king indeed were he able to rule without their constant dictation, and undisturbed by their rivalry and ambitions."

"That would be a good time indeed, Sir Thomas," the queen said, with a smile; "but methinks there is but little chance of its coming about, for at present it seems to me that the vassals are better able to make or unmake kings, than kings are able to deprive the great vassals of power; and never since Norman William set foot in England were they more powerful than they are at present. What does my chance of recovering our throne rest upon? Not upon our right, but on the quarrel between Warwick and the House of Rivers. We are but puppets that the great lords play against each other. Did it depend upon my will, it should be as you say; I would crush them all at a blow. Then only should I feel really a queen. But that is but a dream that can never be carried out."

"Not in our time, madam. But perhaps it may come sooner than we expect; and this long war, which has destroyed many great families and weakened others, may greatly hasten its arrival. I presume until Warwick is ready to move naught will be done, your Majesty?"

"That is not settled yet. Warwick spoke somewhat of causing a rising in the north before he set sail, so that a portion at least of Edward's power may be up there when we make our landing."

"It would be a prudent step, madam. If we can but gain possession of London, the matter would be half finished. The citizens are ever ready to take sides with those whom they regard as likely to win, and just as they shout at present 'Long live King Edward!' so would they shout 'Long live King Henry!' did you enter the town."

"This may perhaps change the thought that you have entertained, Sir Thomas, of making your son a Knight of St. John."

"I have not thought the matter over, madam. If there were quiet in the land I should, were it not for my vow, be well content that he should settle down in peace at my old hall; but if I see that there is still trouble and bloodshed ahead, I would in any case far rather that he should enter the Order, and spend his life in fighting the infidel than in strife with Englishmen. My good friend, the Grand Prior of the Order in England, has promised that he will take him as his page, and at any rate in the House of St. John's he will pass his youth in security whatsoever fate may befall me. The child himself already bids fair to do honour to our name, and to become a worthy member of the Order. He is fond of study, and under my daily tuition is making good progress in the use of his weapons."

"That is he," the prince said, speaking for the first time, "It was but yesterday in the great hall downstairs he stood up with blunted swords against young Victor de Paulliac, who is nigh three years his senior. It was amusing to see how the little knaves fought against each other; and by my faith Gervaise held his own staunchly, in spite of Victor's superior height and weight. If he join the Order, Sir Thomas, I warrant me he will cleave many an infidel's skull, and will do honour to the langue of England."

"I hope so, prince," the knight said gravely. "The Moslems ever gain in power, and it may well be that the Knights of St. John will be hardly pressed to hold their own. If the boy joins them it will be my wish that he shall as early as possible repair to Rhodes. I do not wish him to become one of the drones who live in sloth at their commanderies in England, and take no part in the noble struggle of the Order with the Moslem host, who have captured Constantinople and now threaten all Europe. We were childless some years after our marriage, and Eleanor and I vowed that were a son born to us he should join the Order of the White Cross, and dedicate his life to the defence of Christian Europe against the infidel. Our prayers for a son were granted, and Gervaise will enter the Order as soon as his age will permit him. That is why I rejoice at the grand prior's offer to take him as his page, for he will dwell in the hospital safely until old enough to take the first steps towards becoming a knight of the Order."

"I would that I had been born the son of a baron like yourself," the prince said earnestly, "and that I were free to choose my own career. Assuredly in that case I too would have joined the noble Order and have spent my life in fighting in so grand a cause, free from all the quarrels and disputes and enmities that rend England. Even should I some day gain a throne, surely my lot is not to be envied. Yet, as I have been born to the rank, I must try for it, and I trust to do so worthily and bravely. But who can say what the end will be? Warwick has ever been our foe, and though my royal mother may use him in order to free my father, and place him on the throne, she must know well enough that he but uses us for his own ends alone, and that he will ever stand beside the throne and be the real ruler of England."

"For a time, Edward," the queen broke in. "We have shown that we can wait, and now it seems that our great hope is likely to be fulfilled. After that, the rest will be easy. There are other nobles, well nigh as powerful as he, who look with jealousy upon the way in which he lords it, and be assured that they will look with a still less friendly eye upon him when he stands, as you say, beside the throne, once your father is again seated there. We can afford to bide our time, and assuredly it will not be long before a party is formed against Warwick. Until then we must bear everything. Our interests are the same. If he is content to remain a prop to the throne, and not to eclipse it, the memory of the past will not stand between us, and I shall regard him as the weapon that has beaten down the House of York and restored us to our own, and shall give him my confidence and friendship. If, on

the other hand, he assumes too much, and tries to lord it over us, I shall seek other support and gather a party which even he will be unable successfully to withstand. I should have thought, Edward, that you would be even more glad than I that this long time of weary waiting for action is over, and that once again the banner of Lancaster will be spread to the winds."

"I shall be that, mother. Rather would I meet death in the field than live cooped up here, a pensioner of France. But I own that I should feel more joy at the prospect if the people of England had declared in our favour, instead of its being Warwick—whom you have always taught me to fear and hate—who thus comes to offer to place my father again on the throne, and whose goodwill towards us is simply the result of pique and displeasure because he is no longer first in the favour of Edward. It does not seem to me that a throne won by the aid of a traitor can be a stable one."

"You are a foolish boy," the queen said angrily. "Do you not see that by marrying Warwick's daughter you will attach him firmly to us?"

"Marriages do not count for much, mother. Another of Warwick's daughters married Clarence, Edward's brother, and yet he purposes to dethrone Edward."

The queen gave an angry gesture and said, "You have my permission to retire, Edward. I am in no mood to listen to auguries of evil at the present moment."

The prince hesitated for a moment as if about to speak, but with an effort controlled himself, and bowing deeply to his mother, left the room.

"Edward is in a perverse humour," the queen said in a tone of much vexation to Sir Thomas Tresham, when Gervaise had left the room. "However, I know he will bear himself well when the hour of trial comes."

"That I can warrant he will, madam; he has a noble character, frank and fearless, and yet thoughtful beyond his years. He will make, I believe, a noble king, and may well gather round him all parties in the state. But your Majesty must make excuses for his humour. Young people are strong in their likes and dislikes. He has never heard you speak aught but ill of Warwick, and he knows how much harm the Earl has done to your House. The question of expediency does not weigh with the young as with their elders. While you see how great are the benefits that will accrue from an alliance with Warwick, and are ready to lay aside the hatred of years and to forget the wrongs you have suffered, the young prince is unable so quickly to forget that enmity against the Earl that he has learnt from you."

"You are right, Sir Thomas, and I cannot blame Edward that he is unable, as I am, to forget the past. What steps would you advise that I myself should take? Shall I remain passive here, or shall I do what I can to rouse our partisans in England?"

"I should say the latter, madam. Of course it will not do to trust to letters, for were one of these to fall into the wrong hands it might cause the ruin of Warwick's expedition; but I should say that a cautious message sent by word of mouth to some of our old adherents would be of great use. I myself will, if your Majesty chooses to entrust me with the mission, undertake to carry it out. I should take ship and land in the west, and would travel in the guise of a simple country gentleman, and call upon your adherents in all the western counties. It would be needful first to make out a list of the nobles who have shown themselves devoted to your cause, and I should bid these hold themselves and their retainers in readiness to take the field suddenly. I should say no word of Warwick, but merely hint that you will not land alone, but with a powerful array, and that all the chances are in your favour."

"But it would be a dangerous mission, Sir Thomas."

"Not greatly so, madam. My own estates lie in Sussex, and there would be but little chance of my recognition, save by your own adherents, who may have seen me among the leaders of your troops in battle; and even that is improbable. At present Edward deems himself so securely seated on the throne that men can travel hither and thither through the country without being questioned, and the Lancastrians live quietly with the Yorkists. Unless I were so unfortunate as to meet a Yorkist

noble who knew that I was a banished man and one who had the honour of being in your Majesty's confidence, I do not think that any danger could possibly arise. What say you, wife?"

"I cannot think that there is no danger," Lady Tresham said; "but even so I would not say a word to hinder you from doing service to the cause. I know of no one else who could perform the mission. You have left my side to go into battle before now, and I cannot think that the danger of such an expedition can be as great as that which you would undergo in the field. Therefore, my dear lord, I would say no word now to stay you."

She spoke bravely and unfalteringly, but her face had paled when Sir Thomas first made the proposal, and the colour had not yet come back to her cheeks.

"Bravely spoken, dame," the queen said warmly. "Well, Sir Thomas, I accept your offer, and trust that you will not be long separated from your wife and son, who will of course journey with me when I go to England, where doubtless you will be able to rejoin us a few days after we land. Now let us talk over the noblemen and gentlemen in the west, upon whom we can rely, if not to join our banner as soon as it is spread, at least to say no word that will betray you."

Two days later Sir Thomas Tresham started on his journey, while the queen remained at Amboise eagerly awaiting the news that Warwick had collected a fleet, and was ready to set sail. Up to this point the Duke of Clarence had sided with Warwick against his brother, and had passed over with him to France, believing, no doubt, that if the Earl should succeed in dethroning Edward, he intended to place him, his son-in-law, upon the throne. He was rudely awakened from this delusion by Charles of Burgundy, who, being in all but open rebellion against his suzerain, the King of France, kept himself intimately acquainted with all that was going on. He despatched a female emissary to Clarence to inform him of the league Warwick had made with the Lancastrians, and the intended marriage between his daughter Anne and the young prince; imploring him to be reconciled with his brother and to break off his alliance with the Earl, who was on the point of waging war against the House of York.

Clarence took the advice, and went over to England, where he made his peace with Edward, the more easily because the king, who was entirely given up to pleasure, treated with contempt the warnings the Duke of Burgundy sent him of the intended invasion by Warwick. And yet a moment's serious reflection should have shown him that his position was precarious. The crushing exactions of the tax gatherers, in order to provide the means for Edward's lavish expenditure, had already caused very serious insurrections in various parts of the country, and his unpopularity was deep and general. In one of these risings the royal troops had suffered a crushing defeat. The Earl Rivers, the father, and Sir John Woodville, one of the brothers, of the queen had, with the Earl of Devon, been captured by the rebels, and the three had been beheaded, and the throne had only been saved by the intervention of Warwick.

Thus, then, Edward had every reason for fearing the result should the Earl appear in arms against him. He took, however, no measures whatever to prepare for the coming storm, and although the Duke of Burgundy despatched a fleet to blockade Harfleur, where Warwick was fitting out his expedition, and actually sent the name of the port at which the Earl intended to land if his fleet managed to escape from Harfleur, Edward continued carelessly to spend his time in pleasure and dissipation, bestowing his full confidence upon the Archbishop of York and the Marquis of Montague, both brothers of the Earl of Warwick.

The elements favoured his enemies, for early in September the Duke of Burgundy's Fleet, off Harfleur, was dispersed by a storm, and Warwick, as soon as the gale abated, set sail, and on the 13th landed on the Devonshire coast. His force was a considerable one, for the French king had furnished him both with money and men; on effecting his landing he found no army assembled to oppose him. A few hours after his disembarkation, he was joined by Sir Thomas Tresham, who gave him the good news that the whole of the west was ready to rise, and that in a few days all the great landowners would join him with their retainers. This turned out to be the case, and Warwick, with a great array,

marched eastward. Kent had already risen, and London declared for King Henry. Warwick, therefore, instead of marching thither, moved towards Lincolnshire, where Edward was with his army, having gone north to repress an insurrection that had broken out there at the instigation of Warwick.

Lord Montague now threw off the mask, and declared for King Henry. Most of the soldiers followed him, and Edward, finding it hopeless to oppose Warwick's force, which was now within a short march of him, took ship with a few friends who remained faithful, and sailed for Holland. Warwick returned to London, where he took King Henry from the dungeon in the Tower, into which he himself had, five years before, thrown him, and proclaimed him king.

On the day that this took place Dame Tresham arrived in London with her son. The queen had found that she could not for the present cross, as she was waiting for a large French force which was to accompany her. As it was uncertain how long the delay might last, she counselled her friend to join her husband. The revolution had been accomplished without the loss of a single life, with the exception of that of the Earl of Worcester, who was hated for his cruelty by the people. Edward's principal friends took refuge in various religious houses. The queen, her three daughters, and her mother, fled to the sanctuary at Westminster. All these were left unmolested, nor was any step taken against the other adherents of the House of York. Warwick was now virtually King of England. The king, whose intellect had always been weak, was now almost an imbecile, and Margaret of Anjou was still detained in France. Sir Thomas Tresham went down to his estates in Kent, and there lived quietly for some months. The Duke of Clarence had joined Warwick as soon as he saw that his brother's cause was lost; and as the Duke had no knowledge of his changed feelings towards him, he was heartily welcomed. An act of settlement was passed by Parliament entailing the Crown on Henry's son Edward, Prince of Wales, and in case of that prince's death without issue, on the Duke of Clarence. On the 12th of March following (1471) Edward suddenly appeared with a fleet with which he had been secretly supplied by the Duke of Burgundy, and, sailing north, landed in the Humber. He found the northern population by no means disposed to aid him, but upon his taking a solemn oath that he had no designs whatever upon the throne, but simply claimed to be restored to his rights and dignities as Duke of York, he was joined by a sufficient force to enable him to cross the Trent. As he marched south his army speedily swelled, and he was joined by many great lords.

Warwick had summoned Henry's adherents to the field, and marched north to meet him. When the armies approached each other, the Duke of Clarence, who commanded a portion of Henry's army, went over with his whole force to Edward, and Warwick, being no longer in a position to give battle, was obliged to draw off and allow Edward to march unopposed towards London. The citizens, with their usual fickleness, received him with the same outburst of enthusiasm with which, five months before, they had greeted the entry of Warwick. The unfortunate King Henry was again thrown into his dungeon in the Tower, and Edward found himself once more King of England.

Sir Thomas Tresham, as soon as he heard of the landing of Edward, had hastened up to London. In his uncertainty how matters would go, he brought his wife and son up with him, and left them in lodgings, while he marched north with Warwick. As soon as the defection of Clarence opened the road to London, he left the Earl, promising to return in a few days, and rode to town, arriving there two days before Edward's entry, and, purchasing another horse, took his wife and son down to St. Albans, where leaving them, he rejoined Warwick. In a few days the latter had gathered sufficient forces to enable him to risk the fortunes of a battle, and, marching south, he encamped with his army on the common north of Barnet. Edward had come out to meet him, and the two armies slept on Easter Eve within two miles of each other.

Late in the evening Clarence sent a messenger to the Earl, offering to mediate, but the offer was indignantly refused by Warwick.

In the darkness, neither party was aware of the other's precise position. Warwick was much stronger than the king in artillery, and had placed it on his right wing. The king, in his ignorance of the enemy's position, had placed his troops considerably more to the right than those of Warwick's

army. The latter, believing that Edward's line was facing his, kept up a heavy cannonade all night upon where he supposed Edward's left to be—a cannonade which was thus entirely futile.

In the morning (April 14th) a heavy mist covered the country and prevented either force from seeing the other's dispositions. Warwick took the command of his left wing, having with him the Duke of Exeter. Somerset was in command of his centre, and Montague and Oxford of his right.

Edward placed himself in the centre of his array, the Duke of Gloucester commanded on his right, and Lord Hastings on his left.

Desirous, from his inferiority in artillery, to fight out the battle hand to hand, Edward, at six o'clock in the morning, ordered his trumpets to blow, and, after firing a few shots, advanced through the mist to attack the enemy. His misconception as to Warwick's position, which had saved his troops from the effects of the cannonade during the night, was now disadvantageous to him, for the Earl's right so greatly outflanked his left that when they came into contact Hastings found himself nearly surrounded by a vastly superior force. His wing fought valiantly, but was at length broken by Oxford's superior numbers, and driven out of the field. The mist prevented the rest of the armies from knowing what had happened on the king's left. Edward himself led the charge on Warwick's centre, and having his best troops under his command, pressed forward with such force and vehemence that he pierced Somerset's lines and threw them into confusion.

Just as Warwick's right had outflanked the king's left, so his own left was outflanked by Gloucester. Warwick's troops fought with great bravery, and, in spite of the disaster to his centre, were holding their ground until Oxford, returning from his pursuit of the king's left, came back through the mist. The king's emblem was a sun, that of Oxford a star with streaming rays. In the dim light this was mistaken by Warwick's men for the king's device, and believing that Oxford was far away on the right, they received him with a discharge of arrows. This was at once returned, and a conflict took place. At last the mistake was discovered, but the confusion caused was irreparable. Warwick and Oxford each suspected the other of treachery, and the king's right still pressing on, the confusion increased, and the battle, which had been so nearly won by the Earl, soon became a complete defeat, and by ten in the morning Warwick's army was in full flight.

Accounts differ as to the strength of the forces engaged, but it is probable that there was no great inequality, and that each party brought some fifteen thousand men into the field. The number of slain is also very uncertain, some historians placing the total at ten thousand, others as low as one thousand; but from the number of nobles who fell, the former computation is probably nearest to the truth. Warwick, his brother Montague, and many other nobles and gentlemen, were killed, the only great nobles on his side who escaped being the Earls of Somerset and Oxford; many were also killed on Edward's side, and the slaughter among the ordinary fighting men was greater than usual.

Hitherto in the battles that had been fought during the civil war; while the leaders taken on the field were frequently executed, the common soldiers were permitted to return to their homes, as they had only been acting under the orders of their feudal superiors, and were not considered responsible for their acts. At Barnet, however, Edward, smarting from the humiliation he had suffered by his enforced flight from England, owing to the whole country declaring for his rival, gave orders that no quarter was to be granted. It was an anxious day at St. Albans, where many ladies whose husbands were with Warwick's army had, like Dame Tresham, taken up their quarters. It was but a few miles from the field of battle. In the event of victory they could at once join their husbands, while in case of defeat they could take refuge in the sanctuary of the abbey. Messengers the night before had brought the news that the battle would begin at the dawn of day, and with intense anxiety they waited for the news.

Dame Tresham and her son attended early mass at the abbey, and had returned to their lodgings, when Sir Thomas rode up at full speed. His armour was dinted and his plume shorn away from his helmet. As he entered the house he was met by his wife, who had run downstairs as she heard his horse stop at the door. A glance at his face was sufficient to tell the news.

"We have lost the day," he said. "Warwick and Montague are both killed. All is lost here for the present. Which will you do, my love, ride with me to the West, where Queen Margaret will speedily land, if indeed she has not landed already, or take sanctuary here with the boy?"

"I will go with you," she said. "I would vastly rather do so."

"I will tell you more on the road," he said. "There is no time to be lost now."

The woman of the house was called, and at once set her son to saddle the other horse and to give a feed to that of the knight. Dame Tresham busied herself with packing the saddlebags while her husband partook of a hasty meal; and ten minutes after his arrival they set off, Gervaise riding behind his father, while the latter led the horse on which his wife was mounted. A thick mist hung over the country.

"This mist told against us in the battle, wife, for as we advanced our forces fell into confusion, and more than once friend attacked friend, believing that he was an enemy. However, it has proved an advantage to us now, for it has enabled great numbers to escape who might otherwise have been followed and cut down. I was very fortunate. I had left my horse at a little farmhouse two miles in the rear of our camp, and in the fog had but small hope of finding it; but soon after leaving the battlefield, I came upon a rustic hurrying in the same direction as myself, and upon questioning him it turned out that he was a hand on the very farm at which I had left the horse. He had, with two or three others, stolen out after midnight to see the battle, and was now making his way home again, having seen indeed but little, but having learned from fugitives that we had been defeated. He guided me to the farmhouse, which otherwise I should assuredly never have reached. His master was favourable to our party, and let the man take one of the cart horses, on which he rode as my guide until he had placed me upon the high road to St. Albans, and I was then able to gallop on at full speed."

"And Warwick and his brother Montague are both killed?"

"Both. The great Earl will make and unmake no more kings. He has been a curse to England, with his boundless ambition, his vast possessions, and his readiness to change sides and to embroil the country in civil war for purely personal ends. The great nobles are a curse to the country, wife. They are, it is true, a check upon kingly ill doing and oppression; but were they, with their great arrays of retainers and feudal followers, out of the way, methinks that the citizens and yeomen would be able to hold their own against any king."

"Was the battle a hard fought one?"

"I know but little of what passed, except near the standard of Warwick himself. There the fighting was fierce indeed, for it was against the Earl that the king finally directed his chief onslaught. Doubtless he was actuated both by a deep personal resentment against the Earl for the part he had played and the humiliation he had inflicted upon him, and also by the knowledge that a defeat of Warwick personally would be the heaviest blow that he could inflict upon the cause of Lancaster."

"Then do you think the cause is lost?"

"I say not that. Pembroke has a strong force in Wales, and if the West rises, and Queen Margaret on landing can join him, we may yet prevail; but I fear that the news of the field of Barnet will deter many from joining us. Men may risk lands and lives for a cause which seems to offer a fair prospect of success, but they can hardly be blamed for holding back when they see that the chances are all against them. Moreover, as a Frenchwoman, it cannot be denied that Margaret has never been popular in England, and her arrival here, aided by French gold and surrounded by Frenchmen, will tell against her with the country people. I went as far as I could on the day before I left Amboise, urging her on no account to come hither until matters were settled. It would have been infinitely better had the young prince come alone, and landed in the West without a single follower. The people would have admired his trust in them, and would, I am sure, have gathered strongly round his banner. However, we must still hope for the best. Fortune was against us today: it may be with us next time we give battle. And with parties so equally divided throughout the country a signal victory would bring such vast numbers to our banners that Edward would again find it necessary to cross the seas."

CHAPTER II THE BATTLE OF TEWKESBURY

Riding fast, Sir Thomas Tresham crossed the Thames at Reading before any news of the battle of Barnet had arrived there. On the third day after leaving St. Albans he reached Westbury, and there heard that the news had been received of the queen's landing at Plymouth on the very day on which her friends had been defeated at Barnet, and that she had already been joined by the Duke of Somerset, the Earl of Devon, and others, and that Exeter had been named as the point of rendezvous for her friends. As the Lancastrians were in the majority in Wiltshire and Somerset, there was no longer any fear of arrest by partisans of York, and after resting for a day Sir Thomas Tresham rode quietly on to Exeter, where the queen had already arrived.

The battle of Barnet had not, in reality, greatly weakened the Lancastrian cause. The Earl of Warwick was so detested by the adherents of the Red Rose that comparatively few of them had joined him, and the fight was rather between the two sections of Yorkists than between York and Lancaster. The Earl's death had broken up his party, and York and Lancaster were now face to face with each other, without his disturbing influence on either side. Among those who had joined the queen was Tresham's great friend, the Grand Prior of St. John's. Sir Thomas took up his lodgings in the house where he had established himself. The queen was greatly pleased at the arrival of Dame Tresham, and at her earnest request the latter shared her apartments, while Gervaise remained with his father.

"So this is the young Knight of St. John," the prior said, on the evening of the arrival of Sir Thomas. "I would, Tresham, that I were at present at Rhodes, doing battle with the infidels, rather than engaged in this warfare against Englishmen and fellow Christians."

"I can well understand that," Sir Thomas said.

"I could not hold aloof here, Tresham. The vows of our Order by no means hinder us from taking part in the affairs of our own country. The rule of the Order is indeed against it, but the rule is constantly broken. Were it otherwise there could be no commanderies in this or any other country; we should have, on entering the Order, to abandon our nationality, and to form part of one community in the East. The Order is true to its oaths. We cannot defend the Holy Sepulchre, for that, for the present, is hopelessly lost; but we can and do wage war with the infidel. For this funds are necessary as well as swords, and our commanderies throughout Europe supply the funds by which the struggle is maintained, and, when it is needed, send out contingents to help those fighting in the East. It was from the neglect of this cardinal point that the Templars fell. Their commanderies amassed wealth and wide possessions, but unlike us the knights abstained altogether from fulfilling their vows, and ceased to resist the infidel. Therefore they were suppressed, and, with the general approval of Europe, a portion of their possessions was handed over to the knights of St. John. However, as I understand, it is your wish that as soon as the boy comes of age to wield arms he shall go to Rhodes and become an active member of the Order. This is indeed the rule with all neophytes, but having served a certain time they are then permitted to return and join one of the commanderies in their native countries."

"I do not wish that for Gervaise," his father said; "at least, I wish him to remain at Rhodes until all the civil troubles are absolutely at an end here. My life has been ruined by them. Loving retirement and quiet, and longing for nothing so much as a life among my tenantry, I have almost from a boy been actively engaged in warfare or have been away as an exile. Here every one of gentle blood has been more or less mixed up in these civil broils. To few of us does it personally matter whether a member of the House of York or Lancaster sits on the throne, and yet we have been almost compelled to take sides with one or the other; and now, in my middle age I am on the eve of another battle in which I risk my life and fortune. If we win I gain naught but the satisfaction of seeing young Edward made King of England. If we lose I am going into exile again, or I may leave my wife a widow, and my child penniless."

"It is too true, Tresham; and as I am as likely to fall as you are, the child might be left without a protector as well as fatherless. However, against that I will provide. I will write a letter to Peter D'Aubusson, who is the real governor of Rhodes, for the Grand Master Orsini is so old that his rule is little more than nominal. At his death D'Aubusson is certain to be elected Grand Master. He is a dear friend of mine. We entered the Order the same year, and were comrades in many a fight with the Moslems, and I am quite sure that when I tell him that it is my last request of him, he will, in memory of our long friendship, appoint your son as one of the Grand Master's pages. As you know, no one, however high his rank, is accepted as a novice before the age of sixteen. After a year's probation he is received into the body of the Order as a professed knight, and must go out and serve for a time in Rhodes. After three years of active service he must reside two more at the convent, and can then be made a commander. There is but one exception to the rule—namely, that the pages of the grand master are entitled to the privilege of admission at the age of twelve, so that they become professed knights at thirteen. Your son is now but nine, you say, and we must remember that D'Aubusson is not yet Grand Master, and Orsini may live for some years yet. D'Aubusson, however, can doubtless get him to appoint the boy as one of his pages. But, in any case, there are three years yet to be passed before he can go out. Doubtless these he will spend under his mother's care; but as it is as well to provide against everything, I will furnish your dame with a letter to the knight who will probably succeed me as Grand Prior of the English langue, asking him to see to the care and education of the boy up to the time when he can proceed to Rhodes. We may hope, my dear Tresham, that there will be no occasion to use such documents, and that you and I may both be able personally to watch over his career. Still, it is as well to take every precaution. I shall, of course, give D'Aubusson full particulars about you, your vow, and your wishes."

"I thank you greatly, old friend," Sir Thomas said. "It has taken a load off my mind. I shall leave him here with his mother when we march forward, and bid her, if ill befalls me, cross again to France, and then to keep Gervaise with her until she can bring herself to part with him. She has her jewels and a considerable sum of money which I accepted from the man who has been enjoying my estates for the last five years, in lieu of the monies that he had received during that time. Therefore, she will not lack means for some years to come. Besides, Queen Margaret has a real affection for her, and will, doubtless, be glad to have her with her again in exile."

"When I am old enough," Gervaise said, suddenly looking up from a missal of the Grand Prior's which he had been examining, "I will chop off the head of the Duke of York, and bring mother back to England."

"You will be a valiant champion no doubt, my boy," the prior said, laughing. "But that is just what your father does not want. Chop off the heads of as many infidels as you will, but leave Englishmen alone, be they dukes or commoners. It is a far more glorious career to be aiding to defend Europe against the Moslem than to be engaged in wars with your own countrymen. If the great lords will fight, let them fight it out themselves without our aid; but I hope that long before you become a man even they will be tired of these perpetual broils, and that some agreement may be arrived at, and peace reign in this unhappy land."

"Besides, Gervaise," his father added, "you must bear in mind always that my earnest wish and hope is that you will become a champion of the Cross. I took a solemn vow before you were born that if a son were granted to me I would dedicate him to the service of the Cross, and if I am taken from you, you must still try to carry that oath into effect. I trust that, at any rate for some years after you attain manhood, you will expend your whole strength and powers in the defence of Christianity, and as a worthy knight of the Order of St. John. Too many of the knights, after serving for three years against the infidels, return to their native countries and pass the rest of their lives in slothful ease at their commanderies, save perhaps when at any great crisis they go out for a while and join in the struggle. Such is not the life I should wish you to lead. At the death of your mother and myself, you will have no family ties in England—nothing to recall you here. If the House of York succeeds in

establishing itself firmly on the throne, my estates will be forfeited. Therefore, regard Rhodes as your permanent home, and devote your life to the Order. Beginning so young, you may hope to distinguish yourself—to gain high rank in it; but remember that though these are my wishes, they are not my orders, and that your career must be in your own hands."

"I will be a brave knight, father," the boy said firmly.

"That is right, my boy. Now go upstairs to your bed; it is already late. I do not regret my vow," he went on, after Gervaise had left the room, "though I regret that he is my only son. It is singular that men should care about what comes after them, but I suppose it is human nature. I should have liked to think that my descendants would sit in the old house, and that men of my race and name would long own the estates. But doubtless it is all for the best; for at least I can view the permanent loss of my estates, in case the Yorkists triumph, without any poignant regret."

"Doubtless it is for the best, Tresham, and you must remember that things may not, even now, turn out as you think. A knight who has done a brave service does not find much difficulty in obtaining from the Pope a dispensation from his vows. Numbers of knights have so left the Order and have married and perpetuated their name. It is almost a necessity that it should be so, for otherwise many princes and barons would object to their sons entering the Order. Its object is to keep back the irruption of the Moslems, and when men have done their share of hard work no regret need be felt if they desire to leave the Order. Our founder had no thought of covering Europe with monasteries, and beyond the fact that it is necessary there should be men to administer our manors and estates, I see no reason why any should not freely leave when they reach the age of thirty or thirty-five, and indeed believe that it would strengthen rather than weaken us were the vows, taken at the age of seventeen, to be for fifteen years only."

"There is something in that," the knight said thoughtfully. "However, that is far in the distance, and concerns me but little; still, I agree with you, for I see no advantage in men, after their time of usefulness to the Order is past, being bound to settle down to a monastic life if by nature and habit unsuited for it. There are some spirits who, after long years of warfare, are well content so to do, but there are assuredly others to whom a life of forced inactivity, after a youth and manhood spent in action, must be well nigh unendurable. And now tell me frankly what you think of our chances here."

"Everything depends upon time. Promises of aid have come in from all quarters, and if Edward delays we shall soon be at the head of an overwhelming force. But Edward, with all his faults and vices, is an able and energetic leader, and must be well aware that if he is to strike successfully he must strike soon. We must hope that he will not be able to do this. He cannot tell whether we intend to march direct to London, or to join Pembroke in Wales, or to march north, and until he divines our purpose, he will hardly dare to move lest we should, by some rapid movement, interpose between himself and London. If he gives us a month, our success is certain. If he can give battle in a fortnight, no one can say how the matter will end."

Edward, indeed, was losing no time. He stayed but a few days in London after his victory at Barnet, and on the 19th of April left for Windsor, ordering all his forces to join him there. The Lancastrians had endeavoured to puzzle him as to their intended movements by sending parties out in various directions; but as soon as he had gathered a force, numerically small, but composed of veteran soldiers, he hurried west, determined to bring on a battle at the earliest opportunity. The queen's advisers determined to move first to Wells, as from that point they could either go north or march upon London. Edward entered Abingdon on the 27th, and then, finding the Lancastrians still at Wells, marched to the northwest, by which means he hoped to intercept them if they moved north, while he would be able to fall back and bar their road to London if they advanced in that direction. He therefore moved to Cirencester, and waited there for news until he learned that they had visited Bristol and there obtained reinforcements of men and supplies of money and cannon, and had then started on the high road to Gloucester.

He at once sent off messengers to the son of Lord Beauchamp, who held the Castle of Gloucester for him, assuring him that he was following at full speed, and would come to his aid forthwith. The messengers arrived in time, and when the queen, after a long march, arrived before Gloucester, she found the gates shut in her face. The governor had taken steps to prevent her numerous adherents in the town from rising on her behalf, and, manning the walls, refused to surrender. Knowing that Edward was coming up rapidly, it was evident that there was no time to spare in an attempt to take the town, and the queen's army therefore pressed on, without waiting, to Tewkesbury. Once across the river they would speedily be joined by the Earl of Pembroke, and Edward would be forced to fall back at once.

By the time they reached the river, however, they were thoroughly exhausted. They had marched thirty-six miles without rest, along bad roads and through woods, and were unable to go farther. The queen urged that the river should be crossed, but the leaders of the force were of opinion that it was better to halt. Edward would be able to follow them across the river, and were he to attack them when in disorder, and still further wearied by the operation of making the passage, he would certainly crush them. Moreover, a further retreat would discourage the soldiers, and as a battle must now be fought, it was better to fight where they were, especially as they could choose a strong position. The queen gave way, and the army encamped on a large field in front of the town. The position was well calculated for defence, for the country around was so broken and intercepted with lanes and deep hedges and ditches, that it was extremely difficult of approach.

In the evening Edward came up, his men having also marched some six-and-thirty miles, and encamped for the night within three miles of the Lancastrian position. The queen's troops felt confident of victory. In point of numbers they were superior to their antagonists, and had the advantage of a strong position. Sir Thomas Tresham had, as he proposed, left his wife and son at Exeter when the force marched away.

"Do not be despondent, love," he said to his weeping wife, as he bade her goodbye. "Everything is in our favour, and there is a good hope of a happy termination to this long struggle. But, win or lose, be assured it is the last time I will draw my sword. I have proved my fidelity to the House of Lancaster; I have risked life and fortune in their cause; but I feel that I have done my share and more, and whichever way Providence may now decide the issue of the struggle, I will accept it. If we lose, and I come scatheless through the fight, I will ride hither, and we will embark at Plymouth for France, and there live quietly until the time comes when Edward may feel himself seated with sufficient firmness on the throne to forgive past offences and to grant an amnesty to all who have fought against him. In any other case, dear, you know my wishes, and I bid you carry them out within twenty-four hours of your receiving news of a defeat, without waiting longer for my appearance."

As soon as it was light, Edward advanced to the attack. The Duke of Gloucester was in command of the vanguard. He himself led the centre, while the rear was commanded by the Marquis of Dorset and Lord Hastings. The most advanced division of Lancastrians was commanded by the Duke of Somerset and his brother. The Grand Prior of the Order of St. John and Lord Wenlock were stationed in the centre, the Earl of Devon with the reserve. Refreshed by their rest, the queen's troops were in good spirits. While awaiting the attack, she and the prince rode among the ranks, encouraging the men with fiery speeches, and promising large rewards to all in case of victory.

Gloucester made his advance with great difficulty. The obstacles to his progress were so many and serious that his division was brought to a halt before it came into contact with the defenders. He therefore brought up his artillery and opened a heavy cannonade upon Somerset's position, supporting his guns with flights of arrows, and inflicting such heavy loss upon him that the duke felt compelled to take the offensive.

Having foreseen that he might be obliged to do so, he had, early in the morning, carefully examined the ground in front of him, and had found some lanes by which he could make a flank attack on the enemy. Moving his force down these lanes, where the trees and hedges completely

hid his advance from the Yorkists, he fell suddenly upon Edward's centre, which, taken by surprise at the unexpected attack, was driven in confusion up the hill behind it. Somerset was quick to take advantage of his success, and wheeling his men round fell upon the Duke of Gloucester's division, and was equally successful in his attack upon it. Had the centre, under Lord Wenlock, moved forward at once to his support, the victory would have been assured; but Wenlock lay inactive, and Somerset was now engaged in conflict with the whole of Edward's force. But even under these circumstances he still gained ground, when suddenly the whole aspect of the battle was changed.

Before it began Edward had sent two hundred spearmen to watch a wood near the defenders' lines, as he thought that the Lancastrians might place a force there to take him in flank as he attacked their front. He ordered them, if they found the wood unoccupied, to join in the fight as opportunity might offer. The wood was unoccupied, and the spearmen, seeing the two divisions of their army driven backwards, and being thereby cut off from their friends, issued from the wood and, charging down in a body, fell suddenly upon Somerset's rear.

Astounded and confused by an attack from such a quarter, and believing that it was an act of treachery by one of their own commanders, Somerset's men, who had hitherto been fighting with the greatest bravery, fell into confusion. Edward's quick eye soon grasped the opportunity, and rallying his troops he charged impetuously down upon the Lancastrians, seconded hotly by Gloucester and his division.

The disorder in Somerset's lines speedily grew into a panic, and the division broke up and fled through the lanes to the right and left. Somerset, after in vain trying to stop the panic, rode furiously back into the camp, followed by his principal officers, and riding up to Lord Wenlock he cleft his head in two with a battleaxe. His resentment, although justified by the inactivity of this nobleman at such a crisis, was yet disastrous, as it left the centre without a leader, and threw it into a state of disorganization, as many must have supposed that Somerset had turned traitor and gone over to the enemy. Before any disposition could be made, Edward and Gloucester poured their forces into the camp, and the Lancastrians at once broke and fled. Many of their leaders took refuge in the church, an asylum which they deemed inviolable, and which the Lancastrians had honourably respected in their hour of triumph.

Among them were the Duke of Somerset, the Grand Prior of the Order of St. John, Sir Humphrey Audely, Sir Gervis of Clifton, Sir William Gainsby, Sir William Cary, Sir Henry Rose, Sir Thomas Tresham, and seven esquires. Margaret of Anjou fell into the hands of the victors. As to the fate of the young prince, accounts differ. Some authorities say that he was overtaken and slain on the field, but the majority related that he was captured and taken before Edward, who asked him, "What brought you to England?" On his replying boldly, "My father's crown and mine own inheritance," Edward struck him in the mouth with his gauntlet, and his attendants, or some say his brothers, at once despatched the youth with their swords.

The king, with Gloucester and Clarence, then went to the church at Tewkesbury, where the knights had taken refuge, burst open the doors, and entered it. A priest, bearing the holy vessels, threw himself before the king, and would not move until he promised to pardon all who had taken sanctuary there. The king then retired, and trusting in the royal word, the gentlemen made no attempt to escape, although it is said that they could easily have done so. Two days later a party of soldiers by the king's orders broke into the church, dragged them from the foot of the altar, and beheaded them outside.

The news of the issue of the fatal battle of Tewkesbury, the capture of the queen, and the death of the prince, was borne to Exeter by fugitives on the following day. Beyond the fact that the Earl of Devon and other nobles were known to have been killed, and Somerset with a party of knights had taken sanctuary, they could give no details as to the fate of individuals. In the deepest distress at the utter ruin of the cause, and in ignorance of the fate of her husband, who she could only hope was one of those who had gained sanctuary, Dame Tresham prepared for flight. This accomplished, she had only to wait, and sit in tearless anguish at the window, listening intently whenever a horseman rode

past. All night her watch continued. Gervaise, who had cried himself to sleep, lay on a couch beside her. Morning dawned, and she then knew that her husband would not come, for had he escaped from the field he would long ere this have been with her. The messenger with the news had arrived at eight the previous morning, and, faithful to her husband's wishes, at that hour she ordered the horses to be brought round, and, joining a party of gentlemen who were also making for the coast, rode with them to Plymouth. Arrangements were at once made with the captain of a small ship in the port, and two days later they landed at Honfleur, where Sir Thomas had enjoined his wife to wait until she heard from him or obtained sure news of his fate.

A week after her arrival the news was brought by other fugitives of the violation of the sanctuary by the king, and the murder of Somerset and the gentlemen with him, of whom Sir Thomas Tresham was known to have been one.

The blow proved fatal to Dame Tresham. She had gone through many trials and misfortunes, and had ever borne them bravely, but the loss of her husband completely broke her down. Save to see his wishes concerning their son carried out, she had no longer any interest in life or any wish to live. But until the future of Gervaise was assured, her mission was unfulfilled. His education was her sole care; his mornings were spent at a monastery, where the monks instructed the sons of such of the nobles and gentry of the neighbourhood as cared that they should be able to read and write. In the afternoon he had the best masters in the town in military exercises. His evenings he spent with his mother, who strove to instill in him the virtues of patience, mercy to the vanquished, and valour, by stories of the great characters of history. She herself spent her days in pious exercises, in attending the services of the Church, and in acts of charity and kindness to her poorer neighbours. But her strength failed rapidly, and she was but a shadow of her former self when, two years and a half after her arrival at Honfleur, she felt that if she was herself to hand Gervaise over to the Order of St. John, she must no longer delay. Accordingly she took ship to London, and landing there made her way with him to the dwelling of the Order at Clerkenwell. It was in process of rebuilding, for in 1381 it had been first plundered and then burned by the insurgents under Wat Tyler. During the ninety years that had elapsed since that event the work of rebuilding had proceeded steadily, each grand prior making additions to the pile which, although not yet fully completed, was already one of the grandest and stateliest abodes in England.

On inquiring for the grand prior, and stating that she had a letter of importance for him, Dame Tresham and her son were shown up to his apartment, and on entering were kindly and courteously received by him when informed that she was the widow of the late Sir Thomas Tresham.

"I am the bearer of a letter for you, given into my hand by my husband's dear friend your predecessor," she said, "a few days before his murder at Tewkesbury. It relates to my son here."

The grand prior opened the letter and read it.

"Assuredly, madam, I will carry out the wishes here expressed," he said. "They are, that I should forward at once the letter he has given you to Sir Peter D'Aubusson, and that until an answer is received from him, I should take care of the boy here, and see that he is instructed in all that is needful for a future knight of our Order. I grieve to see that you yourself are looking so ill."

"My course is well nigh run," she said. "I have, methinks, but a few days to live. I am thankful that it has been permitted to me to carry out my husband's wishes, and to place my boy in your hands. That done, my work on earth is finished, and glad indeed am I that the time is at hand when I can rejoin my dear husband."

"We have a building here where we can lodge ladies in distress or need, Dame Tresham, and trust that you will take up your abode there."

"I shall indeed be thankful to do so," she replied. "I know no one in London, and few would care to lodge a dying woman."

"We are Hospitallers," the grand prior said. "That was our sole mission when we were first founded, and before we became a military order, and it is still a part of our sworn duty to aid the distressed."

A few minutes later Dame Tresham was conducted to a comfortable apartment, and was given into the charge of a female attendant. The next day she had another interview with the grand prior, to whom she handed over her jewels and remaining money. This she prayed him to devote to the furnishing of the necessary outfit for Gervaise. She spent the rest of the day in the church of the hospital, had a long talk with her son in the evening, giving him her last charges as to his future life and conduct, and that night, as if she had now fulfilled her last duty on earth, she passed away, and was found by her attendant lying with a look of joy and peacefulness on her dead face.

Gervaise's grief was for a time excessive. He was nearly twelve years old, and had never until now been separated from her even for a day. She had often spoken to him of her end being near, but until the blow came he had never quite understood that it could be so. She had, on the night before her death, told him that he must not grieve overmuch for her, for that in any case they must have soon been sundered, and that it was far better that he should think of her as at rest, and happy, than as leading a lonely and sorrowful life.

The grand prior, however, wisely gave him but little time to dwell upon his loss, but as soon as her funeral had taken place, handed him over to the knights who had the charge of the novices on probation, and instructed them in their military exercises, and of the chaplain who taught them such learning as was considered requisite for a knight of the Order.

The knights were surprised at the proficiency the lad had already attained in the use of his weapons.

"By St. Agatha," one of them exclaimed, after the conclusion of his first lesson, "you have had good teachers, lad, and have availed yourself rarely of them. If you go on like this you will become a distinguished knight of our Order. With a few more years to strengthen your arms I warrant me you will bear your part well in your first tussle with the Moslem corsairs."

It fortunately happened that a party of knights were starting for Rhodes a few days after the admission of Gervaise to the Hospital, and the letter to Sir Peter D'Aubusson was committed to their charge. They were to proceed to Bordeaux by ship, then to journey by land to Marseilles, and thence, being joined by some French knights, to sail direct to Rhodes. Two months later an answer was received. D'Aubusson wrote to the grand prior saying that he would gladly carry out the last wishes of his dead friend, and that he had already obtained from the grand master the appointment of Gervaise Tresham as one of his pages, and begged that he might be sent out with the next party of knights leaving England. It was three months before such an opportunity occurred. During that time Gervaise remained at the house of St. John's studying diligently, and continuing his military exercises. These were severe; for the scions of noble houses, who hoped some day to distinguish themselves as knights, were put through many gymnastic exercises—were taught to spring on to a horse when clad in full armour, to wield heavy battleaxes, to run and climb, and to prepare themselves for all the possibilities of the mode of fighting of the day.

Gervaise gained the encomiums, not only of his special preceptor, but of the various knights in the house, and of the grand prior himself, both for his strength and activity, and for the earnestness with which he worked. When the time approached for his leaving England, the grand prior ordered for him the outfit which would be necessary in his position as a page of the grand master. The dresses were numerous and rich, for although the knights of St. John wore over their armour the simple mantle of their order, which was a sleeveless garment of black relieved only by a white cross on the chest, they indulged in the finest and most costly armour, and in rich garments beneath their black mantles when not in armour.

"I am well pleased with you, Gervaise," the grand prior said, on the evening before he was to leave, "and I see in you the making of a valiant knight of the Order. Maintain the same spirit you have

shown here; be obedient and reverent to your superiors; give your whole mind to your duties; strive earnestly during the three or four years that your pagedom will last, to perfect yourself in military exercises, that when the time comes for you to buckle on armour you will be able to bear yourself worthily. Remember that you will have to win your knighthood, for the Order does not bestow this honour, and you must remain a professed knight until you receive it at the hands of some distinguished warrior. Ever bear in mind that you are a soldier of the Cross. Avoid luxury, live simply and modestly; be not led away by others, upon whom their vows may sit but lightly; keep ever in your mind that you have joined the Order neither to gain fame nor personal advantage, but simply that you may devote the strength and the intelligence that God has given you to protect Christendom from the advance of the infidel. I shall hear of you from time to time from D'Aubusson, and feel sure that the expectations I have formed of you will be fulfilled."

CHAPTER III THE GRAND MASTER'S PAGE

The grand prior had, in accordance with Dame Tresham's request, sent the steward of the house to one of the principal jewellers of the city who, as the Order were excellent customers, paid a good price for her jewels. After the payment for the numerous dresses required for the service as a page to the grand master, the grand prior handed the balance of the money Dame Tresham had brought with her, and that obtained by the sale of her jewels, to one of the knights under whose charge Gervaise was to travel, to be given by him to D'Aubusson for the necessities of Gervaise as a page. During their term of service the pages received no remuneration, all their expenses being paid by their families. Nevertheless, the post was considered so honourable, and of such great advantage to those entering the Order, that the appointments were eagerly sought after.

The head of the party was Sir Guy Redcar, who had been a commander in England, but who was now relinquishing that post in order to take a high office in the convent at the Island. With him were four lads between seventeen and twenty who were going out as professed knights, having served their year of probation as novices at the grand priory. With these Gervaise was already acquainted, as they had lived, studied, and performed their military exercises together. The three eldest of these Gervaise liked much, but the youngest of the party, Robert Rivers, a relation of the queen, had always shown a very different spirit from the others. He was jealous that a member of one of the defeated and disinherited Lancastrian families should obtain a post of such honour and advantage as that of page to the grand master, and that thus, although five years younger, Gervaise should enter the Order on an equality with him.

In point of strength and stature he was, of course, greatly superior to Gervaise; but he had been spoilt from his childhood, was averse to exercise, and dull at learning, and while Gervaise was frequently commended by his instructors, he himself was constantly reproved, and it had been more than once a question whether he should be received as a professed knight at the termination of his year of novitiate. Thus, while the other lads treated Gervaise kindly, and indeed made rather a pet of him, Robert Rivers ignored him as much as possible, and if obliged to speak to him did so with a pointed rudeness that more than once brought upon him a sharp reproof from his companions. Gervaise himself was but little affected by Robert's manner. He was of an exceptionally good tempered nature, and, indeed, was so occupied with his work and so anxious to satisfy his teachers, that Robert's ill humour passed almost unnoticed.

The journey was performed without incident. During their passage across the south of France, Gervaise's perfect knowledge of the language gained for him a great advantage over his companions, and enabled him to be of much use to Sir Guy. They had fine weather during their passage up the Mediterranean, and in the day their leader gave them their first lessons in the management and discipline of a ship.

"You will be nearly as much at sea as you are on land for the five years you must stay at the convent," he said; "and it is essential to the education of a knight of our Order to know all things connected with the management of a ship, even to its building. We construct our own galleys at Rhodes, using, of course, the labour of slaves, but under our own superintendence; and it is even more essential to us to know how to fight on sea than on land. There is, too, you see, a rivalry among ourselves, for each langue has its duties, and each strives to perform more gallant deeds and to bring in more rich prizes than the others. We of England are among the smallest of the langues, and yet methinks we do a fair portion of the work, and gain fully our share of honour. There is no fear of your having much time on your hands, for it is quite certain that there will soon be open war between Mahomet and the Order. In spite of the nominal truce, constant skirmishes are taking place, so that, in addition to our fights with pirates, we have sometimes encounters with the sultan's galleys.

"Seven years ago, a number of our Order took part in the defence of Lesbos, and lost their lives at its capture, and we have sure information that Mahomet is preparing for an attack on the Island. No doubt he thinks it will be an easy conquest, for in '57 he succeeded in landing eighteen thousand men on the Island, and in ravaging a large district, carrying off much booty. Since then, however, the defences of Rhodes have been greatly strengthened. Zacosta, our last grand master, laboured diligently to increase the fortifications, and, specially, built on one side of the entrance to the harbour a strong tower, called Fort St. Nicholas. Orsini has carried on the works, which have been directed by D'Aubusson, who is captain general of the forces of the Island, and who has deepened the ditches and built a wall on the sea front of the town six hundred feet in length and twenty feet in height, money being found by the grand master from his private purse.

"At present we are not sure whether the great armament that Mahomet is preparing is intended for the capture of Negropont, which belongs to Venice, or of Rhodes. Unfortunately Venice and Rhodes are not good friends. In the course of our war with Egypt in '58 we captured from some Venetian vessels, in which they were travelling, several Egyptian merchants with a great store of goods. The Venetians protested that as the ships were theirs we had no right to interfere with our enemies who were travelling in them, and, without giving time for the question to be discussed, at once attacked our galleys, and sent a fleet against Rhodes. They landed on the Island, and not only pillaged the district of Halki, but, a number of natives having sought shelter in a cave, the Venetians blocked up the entrance with brushwood, set it on fire, and suffocated them all.

"Shortly afterwards, another and larger fleet appeared off Rhodes, and demanded the restitution of the Egyptians and their merchandise. There was a great division of opinion in the council; but, seeing the great danger that threatened us both from the Turks at Constantinople and the Venetians, and that it was madness at such a time to engage in war with a Christian power, the grand master persuaded the council to accede to their request. There has never been any friendly feeling between Venice and ourselves since that time. Still, I trust that our common danger will reunite us, and that whether Negropont or Rhodes is attacked by the Moslems, we shall render loyal aid to each other."

There was great excitement among Gervaise and his companions when it was announced that Rhodes was in sight, and as they approached the town they gazed with admiration at the castle with its stately buildings, the palace of the grand master and the Hospital of St. John, rising above the lower town, the massive walls strengthened by projecting bastions, and the fortifications of the ports. Of these there were two, with separate entrances, divided from each other by a narrow tongue of land. At its extremity stood Fort St. Nicholas, which was connected by a strong wall running along the promontory to the town. The inner port, as it was called, was of greater importance, as it adjoined the town itself. It was defended in the first place by Fort St. Nicholas, and at the inner entrance stood the towers of St. John and St. Michael, one on either side. Into this the vessel was steered. There were many craft lying there, among them eight or ten of the galleys of the Order.

"We will go first to the house of our langue," Sir Guy said, "and tell them to send down slaves to fetch up our baggage; then I will take you, Gervaise, to Sir Peter D'Aubusson, and hand you over to his care."

On landing, Gervaise was surprised at the number of slaves who were labouring at the public works, and who formed no small proportion of the population in the streets. Their condition was pitiable. They were, of course, enemies of Christianity, and numbers of them had been pirates; but he could not help pitying their condition as they worked in the full heat of the sun under the vigilant eyes of numbers of overseers, who carried heavy whips, in addition to their arms. Their progress to the upper city was slow, for on their way they met many knights, of whom several were acquainted with Sir Guy; and each, after greeting him, demanded the latest news from England, and in return gave him particulars of the state of things at Rhodes.

At last they arrived at the house of the English langue. The Order was divided into langues or nationalities. Of these there were eight—Provence, Auvergne, France, Italy, Germany, England,

Aragon, and Castile and Portugal. The French element was by far the strongest. The Order had been founded in that country, and as it possessed no less than three langues, and held the greater part of the high official positions in the Order, it was only kept in check by the other langues acting together to demand their fair share of dignities. The grand master's authority was considerable, but it was checked by the council, which was composed of the bailiffs and knights of the highest order, known as Grand Crosses. Each langue had its bailiff elected by itself: these resided constantly at Rhodes. Each of these bailiffs held a high office; thus the Bailiff of Provence was always the grand commander of the Order. He controlled the expenditure, superintended the stores, and was governor of the arsenal. The Bailiff of Auvergne was the commander-in-chief of all the forces, army and navy. The Bailiff of France was the grand hospitaller, with the supreme direction of the hospitals and infirmaries of the Order, a hospital in those days signifying a guest house. The Bailiff of Italy was the grand admiral, and the Bailiff of England was chief of the light cavalry. Thus the difficulties and jealousies that would have arisen at every vacancy were avoided.

In the early days of the Order, when Jerusalem was in the hands of the Christians, the care of the hospitals was its chief and most important function. Innumerable pilgrims visited Jerusalem, and these were entertained at the immense guest house of the Order. But with the loss of Jerusalem and the expulsion of the Christians from Palestine, that function had become of very secondary importance although there was still a guest house and infirmary at Rhodes, where strangers and the sick were carefully attended by the knights. No longer did these ride out to battle on their war horses. It was on the sea that the foe was to be met, and the knights were now sailors rather than soldiers. They dwelt at the houses of their respective langues; here they ate at a common table, which was supplied by the bailiff, who drew rations for each knight, and received, in addition, a yearly sum for the supply of such luxuries as were not included in the rations. The average number of knights residing in each of these langues averaged from a hundred to a hundred and fifty.

It was not until some hours after his arrival that Sir Guy could find time to take Gervaise across to the house of the langue of Auvergne, to which D'Aubusson belonged. It was a larger and more stately pile than that of the English langue, but the arrangements were similar in all these buildings. In the English house Gervaise had not felt strange, as he had the companionship of his fellow voyagers; but as he followed Sir Guy through the spacious halls of the langue of Auvergne, where no familiar face met his, he felt more lonely than he had done since he entered the house at Clerkenwell.

On sending in his name Sir Guy was at once conducted to the chamber occupied by D'Aubusson. The knight was seated at his table, examining some plans. The room was furnished with monastic simplicity, save that the walls were hung with rich silks and curtains captured from Turkish galleys.

"Welcome back to us, Sir Guy," D'Aubusson said, rising, and warmly shaking his visitor's hand. "I have been looking for your coming, for we need men with clear heads. Of strong arms and valiant spirits we have no lack; but men of judgment and discretion, who can be trusted to look at matters calmly and not to be carried away by passion, are welcome indeed to us. I was expecting you about this time, and when I heard that a ship had arrived from Marseilles I made inquiries, and was glad to find that you were on board."

"I am heartily glad to be back, D'Aubusson; I am sick of the dull life of a commandery, and rejoice at the prospect of stirring times again. This lad is young Tresham, who has come out in my charge, and for whom you have been good enough to obtain the post of page to the grand master."

"And no slight business was it to do so," D'Aubusson said with a smile. "It happened there was a vacancy when the letter concerning him arrived, and had it been one of the highest offices in the Order there could not have been a keener contention for it. Every bailiff had his candidate ready; but I seldom ask for anything for members of my langue, and when I told the other bailiffs that it was to me a matter of honour to carry out the last request of my dead friend, they all gave way. You see, I am placed in a position of some little difficulty. The grand master is so enfeebled and crippled that he

leaves matters almost entirely in my hands, and it would be an abuse of my position, and would excite no little jealousy, were I to use the power I possess to nominate friends of my own to appointments. It is only by the most rigid impartiality, and by dividing as fairly as possible all offices between the eight langues, that all continue to give me their support. As you know, we have had great difficulties and heartburnings here; but happily they have to a great extent been set at rest by forming a new langue of Castile and Portugal out of that of Aragon. This has given one more vote to the smaller langues, and has so balanced the power that of late the jealousies between us have greatly subsided, and all are working well together in face of the common danger. Well, young sir, and how like you the prospect of your pageship?"

"I like it greatly, sir, but shall like still more the time when I can buckle on armour and take a share of the fighting with the infidels. I would fain, sir, offer to you my deep and humble thanks for the great kindness you have shown me in procuring me the appointment of page to the grand master."

The knight smiled kindly. "There are the less thanks due, lad, inasmuch as I did it not for you, but for the dear friend who wrote to me on your behalf. However, I trust that you will do credit to my nomination by your conduct here."

"There is a letter from our grand prior which I have brought to you," Sir Guy said. "He commended the lad to me warmly, and seems to be greatly pleased with his conduct."

D'Aubusson cut the silken string that bound the missive together, and read the letter.

"He does indeed speak warmly," he said, as he laid it down on the table.

"He tells me that the lad, young as he was, had been well trained when he came, and that he worked with great diligence during the five months he was in the House, and displayed such skill and strength for his age, as to surprise his preceptors, who prophesied that he would turn out a stout swordsman, and would be a credit to the Order."

"He is well furnished with garments both for ordinary and state occasions," Sir Guy said; "and in this packet are some sixty gold crowns, which are the last remains of his patrimony, and which I was to hand to you in order to pay the necessary expenses during his pageship."

"He could have done without that," D'Aubusson said. "Recommended to me as he is, I would have seen that he lacked nothing, but was provided with all necessaries for his position. I will in the future take care that in all things he is on a par with his companions." He touched a bell on the table, and a servitor entered.

"Tell Richard de Deauville to come here," he said.

A minute later the hangings at the door were pushed aside, and a lad about a year older than Gervaise appeared, and, bowing deeply to the knight, stood in a respectful attitude, awaiting his orders.

"Deauville, take this youth, Gervaise Tresham to your room. He is appointed one of the pages of the grand master. He is English, but he speaks French as well as you do, having lived in France for some years. Take him to your apartment and treat him kindly and well, seeing that he is a stranger and new to all here. Tomorrow he will go to the palace."

Gervaise bowed deeply to the two knights, and then followed the page.

"I suppose you arrived in that ship which came in today," the latter said, as soon as they had left the room. "You are in luck indeed to have obtained a pageship at the grand master's. You begin to count your time at once, while we do not begin to count ours until we are seventeen. Still, good luck may befall us yet, for if the grand master dies, Sir Peter is sure to be chosen to succeed him. Then, you see, we too shall be pages of the grand master."

"How many are there of you?"

"Only De Lille and myself. Of course D'Aubusson will take on the grand master's present pages; but as there are five vacancies on an average every year, he will be able to find room for us among the number."

"Why, how many pages has the grand master?" Gervaise asked, in surprise.

"Sixteen of them, so you may guess the duties are easy enough, as only two are generally employed, except, of course on solemn occasions."

"Are there any other English besides myself?"

The boy shook his head. "There are eight belonging to the French langues; the others are Spaniards, Italians, or Germans. There, this is our room and this is De Lille. De Lille, this is the grand master's new page, Master Gervaise Tresham, and our lord says we are to treat him kindly and entertain him well until tomorrow, when he will go to the palace. He speaks our language, and has been some years in France."

"How came you to be there?" De Lille asked Gervaise.

"My father was a Lancastrian, and my mother a great friend of our Queen Margaret of Anjou, and they were with her all the time she was in exile."

"How quarrelsome you English are!" De Lille said. "You seem to be always fighting among yourselves."

"I don't think," Gervaise said, with a smile, "there is any love lost between Louis of France and the Duke of Burgundy, to say nothing of other great lords."

"No; you are right there. But though we talk a great deal about fighting, it is only occasionally that we engage in it."

The pages' room was a small one. It contained two pallets, which served as seats by day, and two wooden chests, in which they kept their clothes.

Their conversation was interrupted by the ringing of a bell.

"That is supper," De Lille said, jumping up. "We will leave you here while we go down to stand behind our lord's chair. When the meal is over we will bring a pasty or something else good, and a measure of wine, and have our supper together up here; and we will tell the servitors to bring up another pallet for you. Of course, you can go down with us if you like."

"Thank you, I would much rather stay here. Every one would be strange to me, and having nothing to do I should feel in the way."

The boys nodded, and taking their caps ran off, while Gervaise, tired by the excitement of the day, lay down on the bed which a servant brought up a few minutes after they had left him, and slept soundly until their return.

"I think I have been asleep," he said, starting up when they entered the room again.

"You look as if you had, anyhow," De Lille laughed. "It was the best thing you could do. We have brought up supper. We generally sit down and eat after the knights have done, but this is much better, as you are here." They sat down on the beds, carved the pasty with their daggers, and after they had finished Gervaise gladly accepted the proposal of the others to take a walk round the walls.

They started from the corner of the castle looking down upon the spit of land dividing the two ports.

"You see," De Lille said, "there is a row of small islands across the mouth of the outer port, and the guns of St. Nicholas, and those on this wall, would prevent any hostile fleet from entering."

"I hardly see what use that port is, for it lies altogether outside the town, and vessels could not unload there."

"No. Still, it forms a useful place of refuge. In case a great fleet came to attack us, our galleys would lay up in the inner port, which would be cleared of all the merchant craft, as these would hamper the defence; they would, therefore, be sent round into the outer port, where they would be safe from any attack by sea, although they would doubtless be burnt did an army besiege the town."

Passing along the walls of the grand master's palace, which was a strongly fortified building, and formed a citadel that could be defended after the lower town and the rest of the castle had been taken, they came to the western angle of the fortifications.

"You must know that each langue has charge of a separate part of the wall. From the foot of the mole of St. Nicholas to the grand master's palace it is in charge of France. On the line where we

now are, between the palace and the gate of St. George, it is held by Germany. From that gate to the Spanish tower Auvergne is posted. England takes the wall between the Spanish tower and that of St. Mary. You defend only the lower storey of that tower, the upper part being held by Aragon, whose charge extends up to the gate of St. John. Thence to the tower of Italy—behind which lies the Jews' quarter—Provence is in charge, while the sea front thence to the mole of St. Nicholas, is held by Italy and Castile, each taking half. Not only have the langues the charge of defending each its portion of the wall, but of keeping it in order at all times; and I may say that nowhere is the wall better kept or more fairly decorated with carvings than where England holds."

"You have not told me who defends the palace itself."

"That is in charge of a force composed of equal numbers of picked knights from each langue."

Gervaise leant on the battlement and looked with admiration at the scene beyond. The land side was surrounded by hills, the ground rising very gradually from the foot of the walls. Every yard of ground was cultivated, and was covered with brilliant vegetation. Groves and orchards occurred thickly, while the slopes were dotted with chapels, summer houses—in which the natives of the city spent most of their time in the hot season—and other rustic buildings.

"What a rich and beautiful country!" he said.

"It is very pleasant to look at," De Lille agreed. "But all this would be a sore disadvantage to us if the Turks were besieging us, for the groves and orchards would conceal their approaches, the walls and buildings would give them shelter, and our cannon would be of little use until they reached the farther side of the ditch. If the Turks come, I hear it is decided to level all the buildings and walls, and to chop down every tree."

"If they were to plant their cannon on the hills they would do us much harm," Gervaise remarked.

"The Turks are clumsy gunners they say," Deauville replied, "and they would but waste their powder and ball at that distance, without making a breach in our walls."

"Even if they did, they could surely scarce pass that deep fosse," Gervaise said, looking down into the tremendous cutting in the solid rock that ran round the whole circuit of the walls; it was from forty to sixty feet deep, and from ninety to a hundred and forty feet wide. It was from this great cutting that the stones for the construction of the walls, towers, and buildings of the town had been taken, the work having been going on ever since the knights established themselves at Rhodes, and being performed by a host of captives taken in war, together with labour hired from neighboring islands. Upon this immense work the Order had expended no small proportion of their revenue since their capture of the island in 1310, and the result was a fortress that, under the conditions of warfare of that age, seemed almost impregnable; and this without any natural advantage of position.

In addition to the five great towers or bastions, the wall was strengthened by square towers at short intervals. On looking down from the wall upon which the three pages were standing, on to the lower town, the view was a singular one. The houses were all built of stone, with flat roofs, after the manner of most Eastern cities. The streets were very narrow, and were crossed at frequent intervals by broad stone arches. These had the effect, not only of giving shelter from an enemy's fire, but of affording means by which troops could march rapidly across the town upon the roofs of the houses to reinforce the defenders of the wall, wherever pressed by the enemy. Thus the town from above presented the appearance of a great pavement, broken only by dark and frequently interrupted lines.

"How different to the towns at home!" Gervaise exclaimed, as, after gazing long upon the beautiful country outside the walls, he turned and looked inward. "One would hardly know that it was a town at all."

"Yes, it is rather different to the view from the top of the tower of Notre Dame, which I ascended while I was staying in Paris. But this sort of building is best here; the thickness of the stone roofs keeps out the heat of the sun, and it is only when it is almost overhead that it shines down into the narrow streets. As you can see by the number of the people on the roofs, they use them as a resort

in the evening. Then carpets are spread, and they receive visitors, and can talk to their neighbours over the low walls that separate the roofs. You can trace the divisions. Some of the house roofs are larger than others, but all are upon the same level; this being the regulation, in order that there might be free passage everywhere for the troops."

By the time they had made the circuit of the walls darkness had fallen, and concealed the martial features of the scene. Lights twinkled everywhere upon the stone terraces; the sound of lutes and other musical instruments came up softly on the still air, with the hum of talk and laughter. The sea lay as smooth as a mirror, and reflected the light of the stars, and the black hulls of the galleys and ships in the harbour lay still and motionless.

Greatly pleased with his first experience of the city that was to be his future home, Gervaise returned, with his companions, to the auberge of Auvergne.

The next morning the bailiff D'Aubusson bade Gervaise accompany him to the palace of the grand master. Here he introduced him to Orsini, an old and feeble man, who, after a few kind words, handed him over to the chamberlain, who, in turn, led him to the official who was in charge of the pages. That officer took him down to the courtyard, where four young knights were engaged in superintending the military exercises of the pages. The scene was exactly the same as that to which Gervaise had been accustomed at the House in London. Some of the lads were fighting with blunted swords, others were swinging heavy bars of iron, climbing ropes, or vaulting on to the back of a wooden horse. All paused as the official entered with his charge.

"This is your new comrade, boys," he said—"Master Gervaise Tresham, a member of the English langue. Be good comrades to him. By the reports I hear I am sure that you will find him a worthy companion."

The pages had been prepared to like the newcomer, for it was well known that he owed his appointment to the bailiff of Auvergne, who was the most popular of the officials of the Order, and who was already regarded as the grand master. His appearance confirmed their anticipation. His fair complexion and nut brown hair tinged with gold, cut somewhat short, but with a natural wave, contrasted with their darker locks and faces bronzed by the sun. There was an honest and frank look in his grey eyes, and an expression of good temper on his face, though the square chin and firm lips spoke of earnestness and resolution of purpose. The official took him round the circle and presented him first to the knights and then to each of his comrades.

"You may as well join them in their exercises. In that way you will sooner become at home with them."

Gervaise at once laid down his mantle, removed his doublet, and then joined the others. There was but one half hour remaining before they broke off to go to dinner, which was at half past ten, but the time sufficed to show the young pages that this English lad was the equal of all—except two or three of the oldest—both in strength and in knowledge of arms. He could climb the rope with any of them, could vault on to the wooden horse with a heavy cuirass and backpiece on him, and held his own in a bout with swords against Conrad von Berghoff, who was considered the best swordplayer among them. As soon as the exercises were over all proceeded to the bath, and then to dinner. The meal was a simple one, but Gervaise enjoyed it thoroughly, for the table was loaded with an abundance of fruits of kinds altogether novel to him, and which he found delicious.

The official in charge of them sat at the head of the table, and the meal was eaten in silence. After it was over and they had retired to their own rooms discipline was at an end, and they were free to amuse themselves as they liked. There were many questions to be asked and answered, but his display of strength and skill in the courtyard saved Gervaise from a good deal of the teasing to which a newcomer among a party of boys is always exposed.

He, on his part, learnt that the duties of the pages were very light. Two only were on duty each day, being in constant attendance on the grand master, and accompanying him wherever he went. When he dined in public four of them waited on him at table, and one of them performed the

duties of taster. If he returned to the palace after dark, six others lined the staircase with torches. On occasions of state ceremony, and at the numerous religious festivals, all were in attendance. By this time Gervaise's trunks had been brought over from the English auberge, where they had been conveyed from the ship, and his garments were taken out and inspected by his comrades, who all admitted that they were, in point of beauty of colour and material, and in fashion, equal to their own.

"You will have to get one more suit, Gervaise," one of the lads said. "At one or two of the grand ceremonies every year we are all dressed alike; that is the rule. On other occasions we wear what we choose, so that our garments are handsome, and I think it looks a good deal better than when we are dressed alike; though no doubt in religious processions that is more appropriate. De Ribaumont, our governor, will give orders for the supply of your state costume. He is a good fellow. Of course, he has to be rather strict with us; but so long as there is nothing done that he considers discreditable to our position, he lets us do pretty nearly as we like.

"We have four hours a day at our military exercises, and two hours with the sub-chaplain, who teaches us our books and religious duties. The rest of our time we can use as we like, except that every day eight of us ride for two hours and practise with the lance; for although it is at sea we fight the Moslems, we are expected to become finished knights in all matters. These eight horses are kept for our service, and such as choose may at other times ride them. On Saturdays we are free from all our exercises; then some of us generally go on horseback for long excursions on the island, while others take boats and go out on the sea; one afternoon in the week we all make a trip in a galley, to learn our duties on board."

CHAPTER IV A PROFESSED KNIGHT

Gervaise was soon quite at home in the palace of the grand master, and his companions were, like other boys, of varying characters; but as all were of noble families, were strongly impressed with the importance of the Order and the honour of their own position, and were constantly in contact with stately knights and grave officials, their manners conformed to those of their elders; and even among themselves there was no rough fun, or loud disputes, but a certain courtesy of manner that was in accordance with their surroundings. This came naturally to Gervaise, brought up as he had been by his father and mother, and having at frequent intervals stayed with them for months at the various royal castles in which Margaret of Anjou and her son had been assigned apartments during their exile. Even at St. John's house the novices with whom he lived were all a good deal older than himself, and the discipline of the house was much more strict than that at Rhodes.

He enjoyed both his exercises with the knights and the time spent with the sub-chaplain, no small proportion of the hours of study being occupied in listening to stories of chivalry; it being considered one of the most important parts of a knight's education that he should have a thorough acquaintance, not only with the laws of chivalry, but with the brave deeds both of former and of living knights, with the relations of the noble houses of Europe to each other, especially of the many great families whose members were connected with the Order of St. John.

These matters formed, indeed, the main subject of their studies. All were taught to read and write, but this was considered sufficient in the way of actual instruction. The rules of the Order had to be committed to memory. Beyond this their reading consisted largely of the lives of saints, especially of those who distinguished themselves by their charity or their devotion to their vows of poverty, to both of which the members of the Order were pledged. Gervaise, however, could see around him no signs whatever of poverty on their part. It was true that they all lived and fed together in the auberges of their respective langues, and that they possessed no houses or establishments of their own; but the magnificence of their armour and attire, and the lavish expenditure of some upon their pleasures, contrasted strangely with the poverty to which they had vowed themselves. It was true that in many cases the means to support the expenditure was derived from the shares the knights received of the plunder acquired in their captures of Moslem ships; but undoubtedly many must have possessed large private means; the bailiffs, for example, although only required by the rules to place before the knights at their auberges the rations they received for them, with such luxuries as could be purchased by their yearly allowance for that purpose, expended annually very large sums in addition, and supplied their tables with every dainty, in order to gain popularity and goodwill among the members of the langue.

Not only did the post of bailiff confer upon its owner a very high position at Rhodes, but it was a stepping stone to the most lucrative offices in their langues. The bailiffs at Rhodes had the right of claiming any of the grand priories or bailiwicks at home that might fall vacant, and the grand master was frequently chosen from among their number, as, by being present at Rhodes, they had many advantages in the way of making themselves popular among the electors. The emoluments of some of these provincial bailiwicks were large; and as the bailiffs at Rhodes were generally elected by seniority —although younger knights who had greatly distinguished themselves were sometimes chosen—they were usually glad to resign the heavy work and responsibility of their position at Rhodes, and to retire to the far easier position of a provincial bailiff. In the majority of cases, doubtless, the fortunes of the high officials were obtained from the money amassed when in possession of rich commanderies at home; but even this was assuredly incompatible with their vows of poverty.

His hours of leisure Gervaise spent either on the water or in the saddle, and his love of exercise of all sorts excited the wonder and even the amusement of his companions, who for the most part preferred spending the time at their disposal in sleep, in idly looking out from a shaded room at what was going on outside, or in visits to friends and relations at the auberges of the langues to which

they belonged. The natural consequence was, that by the time he reached the end of his three years' pageship, Gervaise was indisputably superior in strength, activity, and skill in military exercises, to any of his companions. The majority of these, after completing their time, returned to the headquarters of their langue at home, to pass their time there, until of an age to be eligible for the charge of a commandery obtained for them by family influence, which had no small share in the granting of these appointments. As it was known, however, that Gervaise intended to remain permanently in the Island, his progress was watched with particular attention by his instructors; and, seeing his own earnestness in the matter, they took special pains with his training. The bailiff of Auvergne continued to take much interest in him, inquiring often from the officers in charge of the pages, and from his instructors, of his conduct and progress, and occasionally sending for him to his auberge and talking with him as to his life and progress. Just before his pageship terminated, he said to him, "I was rather puzzled at first, Gervaise, as to what we should do with you when your term of office concluded, but I am so no longer, for, although you are some two years younger than the professed knights who come out here, you are better fitted than the majority to take your place in the naval expeditions, and to fight the Moslem pirates. I will see that you have your share of these adventures. All young knights are, as you know, obliged to make three voyages, but beyond that many of them do not care to share in the rough life at sea, and prefer the bustle, and, I grieve to say, the gaiety and pleasures of this city. For one, then, really eager to distinguish himself, the opportunities are frequent. When danger threatens, or heavy engagements are expected, every knight is desirous of bearing his part in the fray; but this is not the case when the work to be done consists of scouring the sea for weeks, without perchance coming across a single pirate. Of course, as soon as your pageship is over you will go to the English auberge, but I shall still keep my eye upon you, and shall do my best to help you to achieve distinction; and I shall take upon myself the providing of your arms and armour as a knight."

Accordingly, on the day on which his duties as a page terminated, two servitors of the auberge of Auvergne brought across to the palace a suit of fine armour and a sword, a battleaxe, a lance, and a dagger; also three complete suits of clothes, two of them for ordinary wear, and one for state occasions. The next day Gervaise took the oaths of the Order in the Church of St. John. The aged master himself received the vows, and formally inducted him as a professed knight of the Order, Peter D'Aubusson and the bailiff of the English langue acting as his sponsors, vouching that he was of noble blood and in all ways fitted to become a knight of Justice, this being the official title of the professed knights of the Order. Ten newly arrived novices were inducted at the same time, and the ceremony was a stately one, attended by a number of the knights from each langue, all in full armour.

The ceremony over, Gervaise bore the title of Sir Gervaise Tresham; but this was an honorary rather than a real title, as the Order did not profess to bestow the honour of knighthood, and it was usual for its members to receive the accolade at the hands of secular knights. At the conclusion of the ceremony, he returned with the bailiff of the English langue to the auberge, and took up his quarters there. By his frequent visits he was well known to all the members, and in a day or two felt as much at home as he had done in the pages' room in the palace. A week was given to him before he was assigned to any special duty, and he was glad when he was told off as one of the knights who were to take their turn in superintending the work of the slaves employed in strengthening the fortifications, although he would rather that any other employment should have been assigned to him, because he felt deep pity for the unfortunate men who were engaged in the work.

He knew well enough that if he himself were ever made prisoner by the Turks, his lot would be as hard and as hopeless as that of the Moslem captives; but this, although he often repeated it to himself in order to abate his feeling of commiseration, was but a poor satisfaction. He saw one side of the picture, and the other was hidden from him; and although he told himself that after slaving in a Turkish galley he would feel a satisfaction at seeing those who had been his tyrants suffering the same fate, he was well aware that this would not be the case, and that his own sufferings would only make him sympathise more deeply with those of others. He had found, soon after his arrival on the

Island, that it was best to keep his feelings on this subject to himself. While the knights were bound, in accordance with their vows, to relieve sufferings of any kind among Christians, they seemed to regard their captives rather in the light of brute beasts than human beings. The slaves were struck on the smallest provocation, and even the killing of a slave was considered a very venial offence, and punished only because the slave was of value to the Order.

It was true that edicts were from time to time published by the council, enjoining fair treatment of slaves, and it was specially ordered that those employed as servants in the auberges were not to be struck. The lot of these servants was, indeed, very much easier than that of those engaged on the public works, and such occupation was therefore considered a privilege, the servants being for the most part selected from among the captives of superior rank.

For the next six months Gervaise worked at various duties in the town. He was employed for a fortnight in the infirmary, then for a while he was transferred to the galleys; but for the most part he was with the slaves working on the fortifications. At the end of that time he was, to his great delight, informed by the bailiff that he was one of the six knights of the langue told off to join a galley that was on the point of sailing. Among those going in her was Sir Ralph Harcourt, one of his companions on the journey from England.

"So you are to go with us, Gervaise," the young knight said, "to try your luck for the first time against the infidels. This is my third voyage, and I hope that it will be more fortunate than its predecessors, for, beyond picking up two or three small craft, which did not venture upon resistance, we gained neither honour nor booty. I regard you as having specially good fortune, and besides being glad that we shall be together, I expect that you will bring good luck to us, and that we shall meet with foes worth contending with. The corsairs have been very active of late, and have captured many prizes, while, on the other hand, our galleys have been unfortunate, and have but seldom come upon the miscreants."

"How many knights will there be on board?"

"Forty. Aragon, like us, furnishes five, Germany ten, Portugal five, Auvergne ten, and Provence five. We shall be commanded by Sir Louis Ricord, a knight of Auvergne, and we could wish no better, for he has proved himself a good seaman and a brave captain. Two other galleys are to start with us. We are to cruise separately unless one gets news of a force so superior that he will need aid to attack it, when he will meet the others at a rendezvous agreed upon, and we shall work together."

"Who are the other three Englishmen?"

"John Boswell, Marmaduke Lumley, and Adam Tedbond—all, as you know, brave knights and good companions."

That evening Gervaise received a message from D'Aubusson, requesting him to call at his auberge.

"So you are going to sea, Sir Gervaise? I hear from your bailiff that you have been working to his satisfaction in the town."

"Yes, sir. I shall indeed be glad to change it for a life at sea. In truth, it is grievous to me to witness the sufferings of the slaves, and I would rather do any other work."

"They are far better off than the Christians who fall into the hands of the Turks," the bailiff said; "and, moreover, it is because their countrymen are preparing to attack us that we are forced to use their labour in strengthening our fortifications. They have naught to complain of in the way of food. Still, I would myself gladly see their lot alleviated; but we could not afford to keep so great a number of captives in idleness; they must work for their living. Had it not been for their labour we could never have built and fortified the city. After all, they are little worse off than our serfs at home; they build our castles and till our land."

"It may be so, sir; but with us in England men are free, and it was, when I first came, strange to me to see them working under the fear of the whip. It is necessary, I know, that such work should

be done, but I own that I shall be glad to be away from the sight of the poor wretches, pirates and enemies of the faith though they be."

"I can understand your feelings, and I too felt somewhat the same when I first came here. Nevertheless, there is work that must be done if the Order is not to be crushed by the infidels. Here are captives, for the most part malefactors, who have to be fed; and there is no injustice in their having, like all men, to give work for food. I have learnt to see this and recognise the necessity, though I would that the work could be obtained without the use of harshness and severity. We ourselves are prepared at any moment to sacrifice our lives for the good of the Order and for the great cause, and it would be wrong, nay, sinful, not to use the means that have been placed ready to our hand. Now, Sir Gervaise, I wish you a pleasant voyage. You will find the life somewhat hard, after your three years' residence at the palace, but this I know you will not mind. I have specially commended you to Ricord as one in whom I am personally interested, and from whom I hope great things in the future. Be brave; be resolute. From what you have said I need not say—be merciful. Fulfill all orders promptly and without question; bear yourself courteously to all; above all things, remember that you are a soldier, not only of the Order, but of the Cross."

The next day Gervaise embarked with his companions on board the galley. It was a long, low boat, similar to those in use by the Venetians and Genoese. It was rowed by fifty slaves, who slept at night on or beneath the benches they sat on by day. The knights occupied the great cabins in the poop. There were two tiers of these; the upper one contained the little cabin of the commander, while the rest of the space on this deck, and that below it, was used by the knights in common. In the upper cabin they took their meals, and a third of their number slept there, the remainder in the cabin below. A fourth of their number were, however, always on guard, lest any attempt at a rising or escape should be made by the galley slaves.

On leaving the harbour the galley, with its two consorts, rowed north, and Gervaise learnt that they were to cruise between the mainland and the islands. Some of these were in the hands of the Turks, while others were still occupied by Greeks.

Except when there was a formal and actual state of war, the Moslem and Christian islands remained in a state of neutrality, trading with each other and avoiding all unfriendly proceedings that would lead to struggles which would be fatal to the prosperity of both. The Archipelago, and indeed the whole of the eastern portion of the Mediterranean, was infested by pirates, fitted out, for the most part, on the mainland. These, when in force, openly kept the sea, attacking the Christian merchant ships, but when cruising alone they hid in unfrequented bays, or behind uninhabited islets, until they could pounce upon a passing ship whose size promised an easy capture. The Order of St. John furnished a maritime police, earning thereby the deep gratitude of Spain, France, and Italy. They were aided occasionally by the Venetians, but these, being frequently engaged in quarrels with their neighbours, did but a small share of this work, only sending their fleets to sea when danger threatened some of their possessions in the Levant.

"This is delightful, Ralph," Gervaise said, as they stood together on the poop, looking back at the receding city.

"What a pleasant change it is from standing in the broiling sun watching those poor wretches toiling at the fortifications! There is only one drawback to my pleasure. I wish that we carried sails, and were moved along by the breeze, instead of by the exertions of the slaves."

"Much chance we should have of catching a pirate under such circumstances!" Ralph said, laughing. "You might as well set a tortoise to catch a hare."

"I don't say that we should not be obliged to carry rowers, Ralph; but all the prizes that have been brought in since I have been at Rhodes carry masts and sails, as well as oars, and, as I understand, for the most part cruise about under sail, and only use the oars when chasing or fleeing."

"That is so; because, you see, in most cases the crew themselves have to row, and I have no doubt if we had no slaves to do the work we should soon take to masts and sails also; but for speed the

rowing galleys are the best, for unless a brisk wind were blowing, the mast and sails would but check her progress when the oars were out, and at any rate constrain her to travel only before the wind. I know your weakness about the slaves, Gervaise; but as we could neither build our fortifications nor row our galleys without them, I cannot go as far as you do in the matter, though I own that I am sometimes sorry for them. But you must remember that it is the fault of their people, and not of ours, that they are here."

"All that is true enough, Ralph, and I cannot gainsay you. Still I would rather that we were gliding along with sails instead of being rowed by slaves."

"At any rate, Gervaise, you will not see them ill treated, for I myself heard Ricord, just before we were starting, tell the slave overseers that so long as the rowers did fair work they were not to use their whips, and that only if we were in chase of a pirate were they to be urged to their utmost exertions."

"I am right glad to hear it, Ralph, and shall be able to enjoy the voyage all the more, now you have told me that such orders have been issued."

For a fortnight they cruised about among the islands. Several times boats rowed out from the shore to the galley with complaints of outrages by pirates under a notorious corsair named Hassan Ali, who had landed, burnt villages, killed many of the inhabitants, and carried off the rest as slaves; but no one could give any clue to aid them in their search for the corsairs. The time passed very pleasantly. There was no occasion for speed; often they lay all day in some bay, where they could approach near enough to the shore to lie in the shade of trees, while two or three of the knights ascended a hill and kept watch there for the appearance of any vessels of a suspicious character. One morning, after passing the night at anchor, Harcourt and Gervaise were despatched just before sunrise to take a look round before the galley got under way. From the top of the hill they had an uninterrupted view of the sea, studded with islands on all sides of them. Beyond a few fishing boats, looking like black specks on the glassy surface, no craft were in sight. They were about to return to the galley when, taking a last look round, Gervaise suddenly exclaimed, "Look, Ralph! There is smoke ascending from that island to the southwest. There was none just now."

"You mean from that bay, Gervaise? Yes, I see it; it is not more than a light mist."

"It is growing thicker," Gervaise said, "and spreading. Maybe it is but a hut that has accidentally caught fire, but it seems to me that the smoke is rising from several points."

"I think you are right, Gervaise. Let us hurry down with the news. It may be that it is a village which has been attacked by pirates who have landed on the other side of the island during the night, for I can see no ships in the bay."

A few minutes' run and they stood on the shore.

"Quick, men!" Ralph said to the rowers of the boat that had brought them ashore. "Row your hardest."

The slaves bent to their oars, and they were soon alongside the galley, which lay two or three hundred yards from the shore. Those on board had noticed the young knights running down the hill, and, marking the speed at which the boat was rowing, concluded at once that they must have observed one of the pirate's ships.

"Do you see anything of them, Sir Ralph?" the commander shouted, as they came close.

"We have seen no ships, Sir Louis, but there is smoke coming up from a bay in an island four or five miles away to the southwest. It seems to us that it is far too extensive a fire to be the result of an accident, for there was no smoke until within two or three minutes of the time we left, and before we started it was rising from several points, and we both think that it must come from a village that has been attacked by pirates."

The commander rapidly issued his orders, and in two or three minutes the anchor was weighed, the boat hoisted on deck, and the oars in motion.

"Stretch to your oars!" Ricord shouted to the slaves. "Hitherto we have exacted no toil from you, but you have to work now, and woe be to him who does not put out his full strength."

Grateful for the unusual leniency with which they had been treated, the slaves bent to their oars, and the galley sped rapidly through the water. On rounding the end of the island there was an exclamation of satisfaction from the knights as they saw wreaths of white smoke rising from the distant island.

"There can be no doubt that it is a village in flames," Sir Louis said; "and from the suddenness with which it broke out, it is clear that it must have been fired at several points. You say you saw no craft near?" he asked, turning to Harcourt.

"There were none there, or from the top of the hill we should assuredly have made them out, Sir Louis."

"Then the pirates—if this be, as I hope, their work—must have landed at some other point on the island, and if they catch sight of us they may make for their ship and slip away, unobserved by us. Instead of rowing direct, therefore, we will make for that islet to the right, and row round behind it. There are two others almost adjoining it. Once past these, 'tis not more than half a mile to that island stretching away south. Once round that, we shall be beyond the one from which we see the smoke rising, and can come down on its southern side. The course will be double the distance that it would be if we took a straight line, but except when we cross from island to island we shall not be exposed to their view, and may fall upon their ships before the crews have returned from their work of plunder."

The knights fully agreed, and orders were given to the helmsman accordingly.

"We must not over fatigue the rowers," the commander said. "We may have a long chase if they have started before we get round."

He therefore gave orders to the slaves that, while they were to exert themselves to the utmost when crossing the open sea, they were to relax their efforts and to row within their strength while coasting along behind the islands. On board, everything was made in readiness for a fight: the knights buckled on their armour, the cooks set cauldrons of pitch over the fire, the cannoneers loaded her eight guns. It was an hour and a half after their start before they rounded the end of the last island. It extended a little farther to the south than did that to which they were making, and as they rounded the point, eager looks were cast in search of the pirate ships. No craft were, however, to be seen.

"They must be in some bay or inlet," the commander said; "they can hardly have left, for it would have taken them half an hour at least to cross the island with their booty and captives, and even if they made straight away after having fired the village, their ship could have gone no great distance, for we must have seen her if she put to sea—unless indeed they were anchored on the east of the island, and have sailed in that direction."

"Keep them rowing along steadily," he said to the overseers of the slaves; "but do not press them too hard. We may have a chase yet, and need all their strength, for most of these pirates are fast craft, and if they should get a start of three or four miles, it will be a long row before we catch them."

They made straight for the island, and on nearing it coasted along its southern side. It was some three miles long, the shore being for the most part steep, but here and there falling gradually to the water's edge. Two or three little clusters of houses could be seen as they rowed along; one of these was on fire.

"That is good," Sir Louis exclaimed, as, on turning a point, they saw the flames. "That cannot have been lighted long, and we are pretty certain to come upon the vessels before the marauders have set sail."

Several inlets and small bays were passed, but all were empty. A few fishing boats lay on the shore, but there were no signs of life, as no doubt the people would, long since, have taken alarm and sought shelter in the woods. There was a sharp point just before they reached the southeastern extremity of the island, and as the galley shot past this, a shout of exultation rose from the knights, for, near the mouth of an inlet that now opened to their view, there lay four long, low vessels, above

each of which floated the Moslem flag. A number of men were gathered on the shore near the ships, and heavily laden boats were passing to and fro.

A yell of rage and alarm rose from the ships as the galley came into view. There was a stir and movement on the shore, and numbers of men leapt into the boats there, and started for the ships. These were some quarter of a mile away when first seen, and half that distance had been traversed when a puff of smoke shot out from the side of one of them, followed almost immediately by a general discharge of their cannon. One ball tore along the waist of the galley, killing six of the rowers, and several oars on both sides were broken. Two balls passed through the cabins in the poop. But there was no pause in the advance of the galley. The whips of the slave masters cracked, and the rowers whose oars were intact strained at them. There was no reply from the guns, but the knights raised loud the war cry of the Order, a war cry that was never heard without striking a thrill of apprehension among their Moslem foes.

As they neared the pirate ships, the helm was put down, and the galley brought up alongside the largest of them and a broadside poured into her; then the knights, headed by their commander, leapt on to her deck.

Although a number of the crew had not yet come off from shore, the Moslems still outnumbered their assailants, and, knowing that their consorts would soon come to their aid, they threw themselves in a body on the Christians. But in a hand-to-hand conflict like this, the knights of the Hospital were irresistible. Protected by their armour and long shields from the blows of their enemies' scimitars and daggers, their long, cross handled swords fell with irresistible force on turbaned head and coat-of-mail, and, maintaining regular order and advancing like a wall of steel along the deck, they drove the Moslems before them, and the combat would soon have terminated had not a shout been raised by one of the overseers of the slaves. One of the other ships had rowed alongside the galley, and the crew were already leaping on board it. At the same moment another ship came up alongside that they had boarded, while the fourth was maneuvering to bring up under her stern.

"Sir John Boswell," Sir Louis shouted, "do you and your countrymen, with the knights of Spain, finish with these miscreants; knights of Germany and Provence keep back the boarders; knights of Auvergne follow me," and he leapt down into the galley.

The English and Spanish knights redoubled their exertions. The Moslems endeavoured to rally, seeing that help was at hand, and that but a small body were now opposed to them, but their numbers availed little. The ten knights kept their line, and, hewing their way forward, pressed them so hotly that the Turks broke and sprang over the bulwarks into the sea. Then the knights looked round. A fierce fight was going on between those of Germany and Provence and the enemy, who strove desperately to board from the ship alongside. The other vessel was now almost touching the stern, and her crew were swarming to her side in readiness to leap on board as soon as the vessels touched.

"We will keep them at bay there," Sir John Boswell shouted. "Do you, Don Pedro, and your comrades, aid Ricord. When his foes are finished with, you can come back to help us."

Then, with the four English knights, he ran along the deck, and reached the stern just in time to hurl backwards the Moslems, who had already obtained a footing. For a time the five knights kept back the surging mass of their foes. The deck was wide enough for each to have fair play for his sword, and in vain the pirates strove to obtain a footing.

At last Sir Marmaduke Lumley fell, severely wounded by an arrow from a Moslem marksman, and before the others could close the gap a score of pirates leapt on to the deck.

"Fall back, comrades, fall back; but keep together!" Sir John Boswell shouted, as he cleft the skull of one of the pirate officers who sprang at him. "Sir Louis will soon finish his work, and be here to our aid. Ah!" he exclaimed, looking over his shoulder, as he retired a step, "Provence and Germany are overmatched too."

This was indeed the case. Stoutly as they fought the knights were unable to guard the whole of the line of bulwark, and the Moslems had already obtained a footing on the deck. The discipline of

the knights stood them in good stead. Drawing closely together as they retreated, they made a stand on the opposite side of the deck, and were here joined by Sir John Boswell and his companions. They now formed a semicircle, each flank resting on the bulwark, and the pirates in vain endeavoured to break their line. Again and again they flung themselves upon the knights, only to be beaten off with heavy loss. At length a loud cheer arose from the galley, and Sir Louis Ricord, with the knights of Auvergne and Spain having cleared the galley of their foes, and carried the pirate that had grappled with her, sprang on to the deck of the ship, and fell upon the throng that were attacking the knights there, oblivious of what was going on elsewhere. At once the English knights and their comrades took the offensive, and fell upon their assailants who, at the sight of the reinforcement, for a moment stood irresolute. For a short time there was a fierce struggle; then the pirates sprang back to their two ships, and endeavoured to cast off the grapnels. But the knights followed hotly upon them, and, panic stricken now, the pirates sprang overboard. Many were drowned, but the greater part managed to swim to shore.

CHAPTER V SCOURGES OF THE SEA

Breathless and faint from their tremendous exertions, the knights removed their helmets.

"By St. Mary," Sir Louis said, "this has been as hard a fight as I have ever been engaged in, and well may we be content with our victory! Well fought, my brave comrades! Each of these vessels must have carried twice our number at least, and we have captured four of them; but I fear the cost has been heavy."

Seven knights had fallen, struck down by sword, arrow, or thrust of spear. Of the rest but few had escaped unwounded, for, strong as was their armour, the keen Damascus blades of the Moslems had in many cases cut clean through it, and their daggers had found entry at points where the armour joined; and, now that the fight was over, several of the knights sank exhausted on the deck from loss of blood.

But the dressing of wounds formed part of a knight of St. John's training. Those who were unwounded unbuckled the armour and bandaged the wounds. Others fetched wine and water from the galley. The chains of the galley slaves were removed, and these were set to clear the decks of the Moslem corpses. The anchors were dropped, for what little wind there was drifted them towards the shore. They had learned from a dying pirate that the vessels were part of the fleet of Hassan Ali, a fact that added to the satisfaction felt by the knights at their capture, as this man was one of the most dreaded pirates of the Levant. They learnt that he himself had not been present, the expedition being under the command of one of his lieutenants, who had fallen in the fight.

"Now, comrades, let us in the first place take food; we have not broken our fast this morning. Then let us consider what had best be done, for indeed we have got as much in our hands as we can manage; but let us leave that till we eat and drink, for we are faint from want of food and from our exertions. But we shall have to eat what comes to hand, and that without cooking, for our servants all joined the pirates when they boarded us, and are either dead or are ashore there."

A meal was made of bread and fruit, and this with wine sufficed to recruit their energies.

"It seems to me, comrades," Sir Louis said, when all had finished, "that the first thing is to search the holds of these vessels and see what valuables are stored there. These may be all carried on board one ship, and the others must be burnt, for it is clear that, as there are four of them, we cannot take them to Rhodes; and even with one and our galley we should fare but ill, if we fell in with two or three more of Hassan's ships."

"But how about the pirates on shore, Sir Louis?" a knight asked. "There were very many who could not get off to their ships during the fight, and scores must have swum ashore. I should say that there must be full two hundred, and it will be a grievous thing for the islanders if we leave them there."

"It is certain," the commander said, "that we are not strong enough to attack them, for were we to land, a party would have to be left on board, or the pirates might elude our search, seize some fishing boats, and regain possession. Certainly, we are in no position to divide our forces."

"Methinks," Sir John Boswell said, "that the best plan would be to send a boat, manned with ten galley slaves, taking two or three of us to the rendezvous, to fetch hither the other two galleys. With their aid we might take all the four ships safe into port, after first clearing the island of these pirates. It is but forty miles away, and eight hours' rowing would take us there."

There was a general murmur of assent, for all wished that the trophies of their bravery should, if possible, be carried to Rhodes.

"That will certainly be the best plan, Sir John, though it may detain us here for two or three days, or even more, for it is quite uncertain when the other two galleys may put in at the rendezvous. Will you yourself undertake the mission?"

"With pleasure."

"How many will you take with you?"

"Two will be sufficient, for we shall have no fighting to do, as we shall have to trust to our speed if we fall in with an enemy. I will take, with your permission, Sir Ralph Harcourt and Sir Gervaise Tresham, both of whom have today fought with distinguished bravery. Indeed, I owe my life to them, for more than once, when I was hotly pressed, they freed me from my assailants. Truly none bore themselves better in the fray than they did."

Three or four others joined in hearty commendations of the two young knights.

"Indeed," one said, "I was greatly surprised to see how Tresham bore himself. He is but a lad, with scarce, one would think, strength to hold his own in such a fray. It chanced that he was next to me in the circle, and for a time I kept my eye on him, thinking he might require my aid; but I soon saw that I need not trouble myself on his account, for he wielded his weapon as doughtily as the best knight of the Order could have done, and one of the proofs is that, while most of us bear marks of the conflict, he has escaped without scratch. I trust, Sir Louis, that when you give an account of the fighting you will specially mention that this, the youngest knight of the Order, bore himself as stoutly as any of them. I say this, Sir John, because, not being of your langue, I can speak more warmly than you can do of his skill and bravery."

"I thank you, De Boysey," Sir John Boswell said, "and I am proud that my young countryman should have so gained your approbation. And now," he went on, "while the galley slaves are getting a meal—which they have right well earned today—I should like to see what there is under the hatches of these ships, so that I can give our comrades in the other galleys some idea of the value of this booty we have taken."

They rose from the table, and, going on board the prizes, lifted the hatches.

"Beware!" De Boysey exclaimed, looking down into the hold, when the first hatch was taken off. "There are people below."

A chorus of cries followed his exclamation.

"They are the voices of women and children," Sir Louis exclaimed. "They must be captives."

This turned out to be so. In the holds of the four ships were found over a hundred and fifty women and children; these had been brought on board in the first boat loads by the pirates, and when the Christian galley had been seen coming round the point, had been thrust below, and the hatches thrown over them. They had heard the din of battle above, but knew not how the conflict had terminated, and, being afraid to cry out, had remained silent until, on the hatch being lifted, they had seen the figures of Christian knights standing in the bright sunshine. All had come from the village on the other side of the island. They related how the pirates had suddenly burst upon them, had slaughtered all the men, set fire to the village, and had driven them before them across the island to the ships. The poor creatures were delighted at their escape from slavery, but at the same time were full of grief at the loss of husbands, fathers, and sons.

Some laughed, others cried; while some thanked God for their rescue others heaped imprecations upon the authors of their misfortunes.

The knights explained to them that for a short time they must remain on board, as half the pirates were still on shore, but that aid would soon arrive that would enable them to clear the island.

Half an hour later Sir John Boswell, with the two young knights, started in a rowing boat, manned by ten of the galley slaves. The wind had sprung up since the fight ceased, and as it was nearly astern, they anticipated that they would make a good passage, and be at the little islet, named as the place of rendezvous, before nightfall.

Among the many bales of rich merchandise in the hold of the pirate vessels an abundance of wine had been discovered, and of this a tankard had been given to each of the slaves, by Sir Louis's orders, as a token of satisfaction at their work in the morning.

They had gone some two miles when, from one of the inlets in the island they had left a large fishing boat was seen to issue out.

"By St. George!" Sir John exclaimed, "that boat must be full of pirates. And if they see us, which they cannot help doing, and take it in their heads to chase us, we shall have a hard time of it."

The fishing boat for a few minutes kept along the coast, and then suddenly her course was altered, and her head directed towards their boat.

"Now stretch to your oars," Sir John, who spoke some Turkish, said to the slaves. "Keep ahead of that boat, and I promise you, on my honour as a Christian knight, that I will myself purchase your freedom as soon as we get to Rhodes."

With a shout of delight, the galley slaves bent to their oars, and the boat flew along at a greatly increased speed.

"There is but small chance of our getting away," Sir John said quietly. "At present we must be rowing as fast as they sail; but wind never tires, while there are limits to the powers of muscle and bone. If those fellows follow us—and I doubt not that they will, for they must be thirsting for vengeance—they will overtake us long before we get to the rendezvous; and even did we reach it, the chances are that we should not find either of the galleys there. We must hold on as long as we can, and as a last resource must run ashore. Unfortunately there are no large islands on our way. Nor have we any hope of assistance from our friends behind. The inlet looks east, and they will know nothing of our danger; nor, if they did, could they help us. The galley is short handed now, and there are the captured ships to look after, and the captives we rescued. We have only ourselves to depend on."

At the end of an hour's rowing the boat astern had gained little; but the exertions of the rowers were telling severely upon them. They were still doing their best, but their breath came in short gasps, the rowing was getting short and unsteady, and there was a sensible decrease in the speed of the boat. Three miles ahead of them was an islet about half a mile in diameter. In some parts it was covered with foliage, but elsewhere it was bare rock.

"That must be our goal," Sir John said. "They will be close to us by the time we get there." Then he said to the rowers, "Stop for a minute to get breath. We will land at that islet ahead, and I shall hold to my promise if we get there in time. Those of you who like can remain in the boat until your countrymen come up; those who choose can leave the boat and hide yourselves as best you may. I leave the choice to yourselves. If we are overtaken and fall, I cannot keep my promise, and it will be best then for you to remain in the boat."

For three or four minutes the slaves bent forward over their oars; but as soon as Sir John gave the word they straightened themselves up and began rowing again. The rest had done them good, and they again fell into a long, steady stroke.

"Shall we buckle on our armour again?" Sir Ralph Harcourt asked; for they had not put it on when they left the ship, as the heat was very great.

"I think we had better don our mail shirts only. In climbing about that rock ahead of us, the less weight we carry the better, and with this heat I would rather fight unprotected than in casque and armour. Besides, there can be little doubt that, if they come upon us, it will be our last battle. That craft behind is crowded with men, and, armour or no armour, it will come to the same in the end. If it were not that we have a mission to fulfil, and that it is of all things important to send the galleys to aid our friends, I would say let us choose a spot at the foot of the rocks there, where they cannot attack us in the rear, and there fight it out as becomes knights of the Cross; but as it is our duty above all things to carry this message, we must strive to preserve our lives, and must, if we can, conceal ourselves from these paynims."

"What are you going to do?" Sir John asked the slaves, when they were within a quarter of a mile of the islet. "I should think, after we have left the boat, it will be best for you to sit quietly on your benches till our pursuers arrive."

"They would cut our throats at once, Sir Knight; they will be furious at our having given them so long a chase. Hassan Ali's men care little whom they slay, and, irritated by their misfortune, it will be naught to them whether we are Moslem or Christian. I, for one, shall take to the woods, and hide."

There was a chorus of assent among the other rowers.

"I trust that you may escape," the knight said. "It is for us they will be hunting, and if they catch and slay us they will not trouble to search the island further."

"It seems to me, Sir John," Gervaise said, "that with the aid of these good fellows we may yet have a chance of escape."

"What is your plan, Sir Gervaise?"

"I think, Sir John, that if, when we land, we climb straight up that hill, in full sight of the shore, the pirates, when they see us, will follow at once. The slaves should, therefore, be safe for a time if they hide in that wood to the left of the spot we are making for. Will you tell them to keep down by the water's edge among the bushes, and that after crossing that crest, we will try to make a dash round, so as to join them there. 'Tis probable that most of the pirates will start in pursuit of us, and if we and the slaves make a rush for the shore we may seize our boat, push off, and capture their craft, if there are but a few left on board, knock out a plank and scuttle her, and then row away."

"By St. George, your plan is a good one, Tresham! A right good scheme, and we will try it."

He at once translated what Gervaise had said to the rowers, by whom it was received with short exclamations of approval, for they were too breathless and exhausted for talk. Already they could hear the yells of the pirates, who, as the boat ran up on the beach were but a quarter of a mile behind.

"Now, away for that wood!" Sir John cried, as he leapt ashore. "Now, comrades, for a climb up the hill!"

It was a steep ascent, and more than once one had to be helped up by the others, and then in turn to assist them to get up beside him. Louder and louder rose the shouts of the pirates, but the knights did not glance back until they reached the top of the hill; then they turned and looked round. A swarm of men were climbing after them, and were already halfway up the cliff.

"Heave them down!" Sir John exclaimed, pointing to some loose rocks, and set the example by lifting a great stone and hurling it over the edge. Harcourt and Gervaise at once did the same, and twenty or thirty rocks were speedily sent rolling down the steep ascent, and yells, shouts, and cries were heard below.

"That will check them a bit. Now let us be off," Sir John Boswell said, and they at once started. After crossing a hundred yards of bare rock they stood at the edge of another slope into a deep valley, beyond which rose the central hill of the island. The valley ran right across, and was filled with trees extending to the sea at either end. Running rapidly down, the knights were within the shelter of the wood before the Moslems had reached the brow behind them. A minute later they heard the shouts of their enemies. Once in the wood they turned to the left, and in a few minutes stood on the sea shore. It was a little bay some two hundred yards across, and at either point the cliffs rose abruptly from the water.

"We shall have to swim round the point," Sir John said.

"Take off your mail shirts. We will make our way along the rocks as far as we can, and then drop them into the sea, otherwise they will know that we have taken to the water."

They hurried along the rocks, and were able to make their way to within fifty yards of the point; then, throwing their mail shirts into the sea, they plunged in. All knew the importance of getting round before any of the pirates, who would be searching the valley, came down on the shore, and they swam their hardest until they rounded the corner. The wood rang with the shouts of their pursuers, but no yell had risen from the water's edge. A hundred yards farther, and they were able to land, and were in a short time in the shelter of the trees that fringed the water to the point where they had left the boat. There was no longer any occasion for speed, and they made their way through the thick bushes and undergrowth quietly, until they recovered breath after their exertions. They had gone a few hundreds yards when from the bushes the slaves suddenly rose up.

"All has gone well," Sir John said to them in their own language. "The pirates are searching for us on the other side of the hill. There are not likely to be many of them left here. We shall soon be in possession of our boat again."

Followed by the slaves, they made their way forward until they stood at the edge of the wood. Five or six pirates were standing on the shore.

"I expect they have been left there," Harcourt said, "to prevent the slaves from carrying off the boat. They must have seen them run into the wood. They won't reckon on our being with them."

Drawing their swords, the three knights rushed out, followed by the slaves. They had but a hundred yards to run. The pirates, on seeing them, raised a yell and drew their scimitars; but the sight of the knights rushing upon them, when they had expected but a few unarmed rowers, was too much for their courage, and when their assailants were still fifty yards away they turned and fled. The fishing craft had been run ashore but a few yards from their boat.

"Get her afloat, Harcourt, and bring her to the stern of the fisherman. Now, Tresham, follow me."

Sir John Boswell climbed up on to the fishing boat, which was a craft of some fifteen tons burden. She was entirely deserted, but the sail still hung from the yard, and a fire was burning on a stone hearth, raised on some logs of wood in the centre of the deck.

"Look for something to stave in a plank, Tresham."

Gervaise leapt down into the hold. There were some nets and spare sails lying there, but nothing that would answer the purpose. He examined the planks. The boat was very strongly and roughly built.

"There is nothing here, Sir John, that will do, and nothing short of a heavy sledge hammer would suffice to smash one of these planks."

"There are a lot of them coming down the hill, Tresham. We have not many minutes to spare, but we must disable the craft. They will soon be after us again; they have run her hard and fast here, but when they all come back they will soon get her off. Let us try one of these sweeps."

He lifted one of the heavy oars, and holding it upright he and Gervaise together tried to drive the handle through the bottom. Again and again they raised it and drove it down; but the plank was too strong, and too securely fastened to the timbers.

"We must give it up," the knight said, with a sigh. "Fortune has befriended us so far, Tresham, but she has deserted us at last. Another three minutes, and we shall have thirty or forty of them upon us."

At this moment the lad's eye fell upon the fire.

"We shall manage yet," he exclaimed, and, seizing a blazing brand, he jumped below and set fire to the sails stowed there; they were as dry as tinder, and the flame shot up at once.

"That is good, Tresham," the knight said; "but they will put it out before it has caught the boat."

"Not before it has burnt the sails," Gervaise replied. "Now for this one," and he applied the brand to the lower edge of the great sail. Without a word Sir John seized another brand, and fired the sail on the other side of the deck. The flames flashed up, and a wild yell of rage and alarm broke from the pirates, who were now rushing down towards the beach.

"Now to the boat, Tresham; we have no time to lose if we would avoid being pounded with stones."

They dropped over the stern into the boat. The galley slaves dipped their oars into the water, and she shot away just as the foremost of the pirates reached the edge of the water. A few stones were thrown; but the pirates were so anxious about the craft, by which alone they could escape from the island, that the majority at once climbed on board.

At a word from the knight, the slaves stopped rowing a hundred yards from the shore. The sail was already consumed, and the yard and the upper part of the mast were in flames. A dense smoke was rising from the hold, and the pirates were throwing buckets of water down into it. In a few minutes the smoke decreased.

"I thought that they would be able to put it out; but, as far as we are concerned, it matters little. They have lost their sails, and as I saw but four sweeps, we can travel five miles to their one. If we find the galleys we will look in here on our way back, and if they have not left we will fire that craft more effectually, and then the pirates will be trapped, and we can leave them till we have fetched off Sir Louis and his prizes, and then have a grand hunt here. We took no prisoners before, and a hundred slaves will be a useful addition to our wall builders. Now, Tresham, I have to thank you warmly, for Harcourt and I doubly owe our lives to you. It was thanks to your quickness of wit that we regained our boat, for I would not have given a ducat for our chances had you not thought of that scheme. In the second place, we should assuredly have been overtaken again had it not been for your happy thought of crippling them by burning their sails. By St. George, Harcourt, this young countryman of ours is as quick and as ready of wit as he has shown himself a brave and gallant fighter! We have no lack of sturdy fighters; but the wit to devise and to seize upon the right thing in the moment of danger is vastly more rare. As for myself, I have no shame that this lad, who is young enough to be my son, should have thus, twice in a single hour, pointed out the way to safety. With sword and battleaxe I can, I trust, hold my own with any man; but my brain is dull when it comes to hatching schemes. If we live, we shall see Sir Gervaise one of the most distinguished knights of the Order."

"While I feel gratified indeed, as I may well be by your commendation, Sir John, I must, under your favour, say that you have given me a far greater degree of credit than is my due. There was the fire, and there was the sail, and the thought that the one would destroy the other was simply a natural one, which might have occurred to a child. As to the plan about the boat, seeing that there was the hill and the wood, it flashed upon me at once that we might make a circuit and come back to her."

"Just so, lad; but those thoughts did not flash upon my mind, nor upon that of Harcourt. It is just because those sort of ideas do flash upon the minds of some men, and not of others, that the first rise to the rank of distinguished commanders, while the others remain simple knights who would play their part in a charge or in the defence of a breach, but would be of no account as leaders.

"Now row along steadily, men," he went on, speaking to the slaves. "We are still in good time, for it was not an hour from the moment we touched the island to our departure from it, and much of that time we have gained by the speed with which you rowed before. At any rate, we shall make out the island before sunset, and whether we arrive there a little sooner or later matters little. Harcourt, hand me that wineskin and a goblet. A draught will do us good after our climb and swim, and these good fellows will be none the worse for a cup also."

Inspired with the hope of freedom, the slaves rowed steadily, and the sun had just set when they entered a little inlet in the rocky isle that was their place of rendezvous.

"Thanks be to the saints!" Sir John exclaimed, as they reached the entrance. "There is Santoval's galley."

There was a stir on board the galley as the boat was seen approaching. The knights had put on their armour, which they had found still lying in the boat, the pirates, in their haste to pursue, having left her unexamined, while those who had remained on guard had abstained from touching anything until the return of their captain and comrades.

"Whence come you, Sir John, and what is the news? No misfortune has befallen Ricord's galley, I hope?" the Spanish knight in command shouted, as the boat came near enough for him to recognize the features of its occupants.

"All is well," Sir John shouted back; "but we have taken more prizes than we can manage, though not without hard fighting. Seven knights have fallen, and at least ten others will not be able to buckle their armour on again for some time to come, so I have been sent here to beg your assistance; and it is well that it should be given speedily, for if more pirate vessels come up before you join, Ricord and his companions will be in a sorry plight."

By this time the boat had reached the side of the galley, and as Sir John and his two companions stepped on board, the knights crowded round to hear the details of the news. Exclamations of approval

and satisfaction arose when Sir John related the incidents of the fight, and told them that the four vessels that had fallen into their hands formed part of Hassan Ali's fleet.

"That is good news indeed, Boswell," Don Santoval said; "and I would I had been there to take part in so gallant a fight. It is well you found us here, for with four prizes on hand, and with half his strength dead or disabled, Ricord must be in sore need of aid. We will start tomorrow morning at daybreak. As all the ships were taken, there is little fear of any of the other pirates hearing news of what has happened."

"I don't know," Sir John replied. "There were, as I told you, some two hundred pirates left on the island. About half those, we know, seized a fishing boat and escaped, for they chased us, and we have had as narrow an escape from death as has ever fallen to my lot, though I have been in over a score of hard fought battles. The rest may well have taken another fishing boat and made off also, for we saw several craft along the shores of the island. If so, they may have made for Hassan Ali's rendezvous, wherever that may be, just as I made here, and by this time some of his ships may be on the way there."

"By St. Anthony, this alters the situation gravely!" Don Santoval said. "Fellow knights, we must lose no time in going to Ricord's assistance. The slaves have had a long row today, but they must start on another. Let them have a good meal to strengthen them, and a cup of wine each. Whatever their scruples at other times, they never refuse wine when there is heavy work to be done, knowing full well that a draught of it helps them mightily in their labours. Your men must have rowed well, Sir John, to have brought you here so quickly?"

"I have promised them their freedom," Sir John said; "and they shall have it, even if I have to pay their value into the treasury. As I told you, we were hotly pursued, for the craft with her sail went faster than we with our oars; and, knowing the importance of bringing the news here, I encouraged them by promising them their freedom, should we get away. Not only did they row right manfully, but they proved faithful in our extremity, and, when all seemed lost, stuck to us instead of deserting and joining the pirates."

"But how did you get away, Sir John, if their craft outsailed you?"

"I owe my life entirely to the quick wit of my young countryman, Sir Gervaise Tresham here." And Sir John then related the incidents of their adventure on the island, his narrative eliciting warm expressions of approval from the knights.

"Of course, you will go with us, Boswell?" Don Santoval said, when the master of the slaves announced that these had eaten their meal, and were ready.

"I must do so," Sir John replied. "I want you, on your way, to look in at that island where we had so narrow an escape, and if we find their craft still there we can destroy it. The place is directly in our course; we shall, therefore, lose but little time in looking in. Of course, they may have gone as soon as they got their vessel afloat, but it is hardly likely. They would have no idea of my returning with a galley so soon, and will probably set to to make a dozen more oars before they start, for she had but four on board, which will scarce suffice to send her a mile an hour through the water. Therefore, I fancy they will not put off until tomorrow morning. If that is so, and we destroy their craft, they will be trapped in the islet, and on our return we can capture them all. I think of leaving Harcourt and Tresham in the boat, in order that when Piccolomini's galley comes in, they may direct him also to join us."

"He may be in at any moment; we met him three days since. He had captured a pirate, and sent her off under charge of ten of his knights. We agreed to meet him this evening; and as he is not here, he will probably be in the first thing in the morning."

Gervaise and Harcourt took their places in the boat again. The galley got up its anchor and started. Just as she reached the mouth of the inlet another galley rounded the point and nearly ran into her.

"I am going to Ricord's assistance, Piccolomini," Don Santoval shouted.

"Is it urgent?" the commander of the galley shouted back. "We have had a very long row, and can go no farther, unless his strait is a very sore one."

"No. Come on in the morning. You will hear all the news from a boat lying two hundred yards astern. Two young English knights are waiting in her to give you the news. Ricord has made a fine capture. Row on, men." And the galley proceeded on her way, while the newcomer proceeded up the harbour.

Harcourt and Gervaise at once went on board, and the former gave the Italian commander an account of the battle that had taken place, and the capture of the four pirate vessels. After the exclamations of satisfaction by the knights had ceased, he recounted their own adventures, which were heard with lively interest.

"I hope indeed that Santoval will burn that fishing boat, and that we shall capture the pirates," the commander said. "We have need of more slaves to carry out the works at Rhodes. Now, let us to supper, gentlemen, and then to sleep. In six hours we will be off again, for if some more of these villains have escaped and carried the news to Hassan Ali, our swords may be sorely needed by Ricord and Santoval tomorrow."

CHAPTER VI KNIGHTED

At three in the morning all on board the galley were astir. A ration of bread and meat was served out to the slaves, and the boat was soon afterwards under way. The rowers of the English knight's boat had been warmly commended by the commander and placed in charge of the overseer, with instructions that they were to be treated as free men. As soon as the galley slaves set to work, however, they seated themselves on the benches and double banked some of the oars, anxious to please the knights. With the exception of those whose turn it was to be on watch, most of the knights slept until daybreak.

"At the rate we are rowing, Gervaise," Harcourt said, as they went up on to the poop together, "it will not take us very long to join our friends. We are going through the water at fully six miles an hour; and as we have already been two hours under way, in another three we shall be there."

An hour and a half later they passed the island where they had landed. The two young knights pointed out to the others the valley into which they had descended, and the point round which they had swum. In a few minutes they caught sight of the landing place.

"Look, Gervaise, there is something black showing just above the water."

"I see it. I think it is a line of timbers. There were certainly no rocks there when we ran ashore."

"Then Santoval must have found the craft still there and burnt her," one of the knights standing by remarked, "and the pirates are caged up. It will take them some time to make a raft that will carry them to the next island, and before they can do that we shall be back again. I shall be sorry if they escape, for they are as ruthless a set of villains as sail the seas."

The galley had traversed half the remaining distance when the sound of a gun was faintly heard. For a moment there was an absolute hush on the poop; then three or four shots in rapid succession were heard.

"Some more pirate ships must have come up," the commander exclaimed. Then he shouted down to the slaves, "Row, men—row for your lives! Overseer, do not spare your lash if any hang back from their work."

The galley had been travelling fast before, but her speed greatly increased as the slaves rowed their hardest. Fast as she was travelling, the impatience of the knights was extreme. They walked up and down the deck, making vows of candles that should be burnt at the shrine of St. John if they arrived in time to take a share in the fight, stopping at times to listen to the sound of artillery, which was now so frequent as to show that a severe engagement was being fought. Many of the younger knights ran down to the waist and double banked the oars, and in a shorter time than it seemed possible the galley arrived at the mouth of the bay.

A desperate fight was going on. Ricord's ship lay, idle and deserted, at anchor. Five pirate crafts surrounded Santoval's galley. Two of them were alongside of her; the others were raking her fore and aft with their shot. The young knights left the oars, sprang up to the poop and joined in the shout of encouragement raised by the others, and then, resuming their helmets and armour, stood ready to leap on board an enemy as soon as they reached her. Piccolomini directed the helmsman to lay him alongside one of the ships grappling with Santoval. As they came up, their galley's cannon poured their fire into her, and a moment later the knights sprang on board.

In the din of battle their shout had been unheard. The pirates thronging the other side of their ship were intent only on overcoming the resistance of the knights, and even the discharge of cannon had not called their attention to their foe, until the latter, shouting the war cry of the Order, fell suddenly upon them. A panic at once seized them. Some were cut down almost unresistingly, but the great majority, running to the bow or stern, threw themselves overboard and swam to the other ships. The pirate ship on the other side of Santoval's galley instantly threw off the grapnels and thrust off

from her side, and, immediately hauling in the sheets of the big sail, began at once to draw away, while her three consorts made for the mouth of the bay.

"Back to your galley, comrades," Piccolomini shouted, "or with this brisk wind they will escape us."

The knights at once crossed on to their own craft, the oars were got out, and the chase began. A minute or two later Don Santoval followed them, but soon gave up, as so large a number of the oars had been broken when the two pirate ships ran alongside him, that it would have been hopeless to pursue. The wind was blowing freshly, and was rapidly increasing in strength, so that, in spite of the efforts of the galley slaves, the pirates gradually drew away, running straight before the wind, and aiding the effects of the sails with oars. Seeing the hopelessness of the chase, Piccolomini abandoned it, after rowing for two miles, and returned to the island. The other two galleys were lying beside each other, and Piccolomini had his craft steered alongside them.

"Thanks, Piccolomini, for arriving so opportunely," Santoval, who was seated on the deck leaning against the bulwarks, said, as his fellow commander leapt on board, and came towards him.

"Would that I had arrived sooner, Santoval, for I see that you have been grievously wounded!"

"Ay. One of the paynims' cannonballs has carried off both my legs below the knee. The leech has been searing the wounds with a hot iron, and says that he thinks I shall get over it; but if so I fear that my fighting days are past, unless, indeed, I fight seated on a chair. However, I ought not to grumble. I have lost many brave comrades, and others are wounded more sorely than I am."

Sir Louis Ricord now joined them. He embraced Piccolomini warmly.

"I never heard a more welcome shout, Piccolomini, than that which you gave when you fell upon the Moslems, for in truth the issue of the conflict was doubtful. I was delighted when this morning at daybreak Santoval's galley rowed in. We had all kept watch during the night, thinking the pirates might obtain boats and make an attack upon us; and, with but twenty of us fit to wield a sword, our position would have been a bad one, and at any rate they might have recaptured the prizes. We agreed that Santoval and his knights should land at once. This they did. Sir John Boswell had of course told me how his boat had been chased by a fishing craft, manned by a large number of the pirates, and that he feared the rest might similarly have escaped, and might have gone to bring some more of Hassan Ali's ships upon us.

"As soon as Santoval landed, some of the natives came down and told him that there was not a pirate remaining there, the rest having started in another boat a few minutes after the one that had chased Boswell. Santoval left two of his men with orders to ascend to the highest spot on the island, and to keep watch, and then brought the rest off to his galley. Our first step was, of course, to send all the women and children ashore. Then we consulted as to what had best be done if the pirates should come back in force. We hoped, at any rate, that this would not happen until you arrived. We expected that you would be here before noon; but we decided that, should they get here before you, we from our galley would embark on Santoval's, as it was better to fight in one strongly manned boat than to divide our forces.

"It was scarce half an hour after Santoval came down before the men left on the lookout appeared on the beach. On fetching them off, they told us that as soon as they reached the top of the hill they saw five vessels approaching with sails and oars, and that they would be here in half an hour at the outside. We at once abandoned my galley, brought the rowers and the wounded here, and prepared for the fight. As you saw, they ran their two biggest ships alongside us, and for two hours the fight went on. They were crowded with men, who in vain strove to get a footing on our decks. Had we only had these two to deal with, we should have had nothing to fear, heavily manned though they were; but the other three kept sailing backwards and forwards, discharging their guns into us as they passed, firing not only shot, but bags of bullets.

"Their gunners were skilful, and, as you see, they have completely riddled our poop. Twenty knights have been killed, and eleven others are sorely wounded. Scarce one has escaped unscathed.

You may guess, then, how welcome was your aid, which we had not expected for another three hours. We were on the point of abandoning the waist and gathering on the poop, which we could still have defended for a considerable time, when, as if dropped from the skies, you fell upon the pirates, and turned the tables. How is it that you were here so early?"

"We started at three o'clock, instead of waiting for daybreak. It seemed, from the story of the two young knights, that it was possible you might be attacked early, and, crippled as your command was, and with four prizes on your hands, I deemed it best to come on as soon as the rowers had had a few hours' rest."

"It is well that you did so; it would have been a grievous affair had two of our galleys been captured by the pirates. It would have been a blow to the prestige of the Order, and would have brought such strength to Hassan Ali and other pirate leaders that nothing short of sending out a fleet would have recovered our ascendancy; and as every ducat we can spare has to be spent on the fortifications, it would have been a misfortune indeed had we been obliged to fit out such an expedition at present."

"Who have fallen, Sir Louis?"

"Five more of the knights of my galley—Pierre des Vignes, Raoul de Montpelier, Ernest Schmidt, Raymond Garcia, and Albert Schenck. Here is the list of the knights of Santoval's galley."

"'Tis a long list, and a sad one," Piccolomini said, after reading the names. "With the seven who fell in your first fight, twenty-seven knights have fallen, all brave comrades. Truly, we can ill spare such a loss. It is true there are five prizes to show for it, and we have struck Hassan Ali a blow that will resound through the Levant; but the cost is heavy."

"It is indeed," Ricord agreed. "The four vessels are well filled with rich spoil that the scoundrels had gathered, and I doubt not the one you captured is equally rich. Still, had they been ten times as valuable, the booty would be dearly purchased at such a price."

There was now a consultation among the leaders, and it was agreed that six knights should be placed in each of the captured ships, with ten of the galley slaves to work the sails, the others being equally divided between the three galleys. They were, in the first place, to row to the island where the pirates were imprisoned, and to slay or capture the whole of them; afterwards they were to make direct for Rhodes; with so numerous a fleet there was no fear of their being attacked. The arrangements took but a short time to complete. An hour later they left the port, the three galleys rowing ahead, while the five prizes, under easy sail, followed them.

Sir John Boswell had been wounded, but not so seriously as to altogether disable him, and he was in command of one of the prizes, having Sir Adam Tedbond, Harcourt, Gervaise, and a German knight, with him. Sir Marmaduke Lumley, who, after the first fight was over, was found, to the surprise and pleasure of his comrades, to be still living, was, with the rest of the wounded, on board one of the galleys. Two of the pirates had fallen dead across him, and in the ardour of their attack on the knights, he had lain there unnoticed until the return of Sir Louis and his comrades had driven the pirates overboard. The leech was of opinion that he might yet recover from his wound.

On arriving at the island, sixty of the knights disembarked. The woods near the shore were first searched, but were found untenanted. They were about to advance up the hill when a man appeared on the crest above them waving a white flag. He was told to come down, and on his arrival said that he was sent by his companions to offer to surrender, on the promise that their lives should be spared. The knights were well pleased to be saved the trouble of a long search through the woods, and the messenger left at once to acquaint the pirates that their terms were accepted. In a short time some eighty men made their way down the hill. On reaching the beach they were disarmed, divided equally between the galleys, and distributed among the rowers, filling up the places of those who had been killed by the fire of the Moslems, and of the men drafted into the prizes. They begged for food and water before they began work, and, on being questioned, admitted that their surrender was due principally to the fact that they had been unable to find food of any sort on the island, and that after searching all over it no spring of water could be discovered.

"In that case," Sir John Boswell said, "I have no doubt they have all surrendered. I before thought it probable that a good many of them would have remained hidden, trusting to be able to make a raft after we had left, and so get away, believing rightly enough that we should be disinclined to search every foot of the island for them. As it is, I doubt not, all are here."

The little fleet anchored that night at the rendezvous, and after two more days' rowing reached Rhodes, where the appearance of the three galleys, followed by their five prizes, was greeted with great acclamation. The news, however, that twenty-seven knights had fallen, and that thirteen or fourteen others were very gravely wounded, damped the satisfaction that every one had at first felt. D'Aubusson came down as soon as they reached the mole, and was greatly affected when he received Ricord's report.

"It is an unfortunate loss indeed, Sir Louis," he said, "though it may be that the victory is not too dearly purchased. I do not speak of the captured ships, nor of the spoil they contain, nor even of the slaves you have brought us, welcome though all may be, but of the effect that the defeat and capture of these craft of Hassan Ali's will have. It is plain that the preparations the sultan is making, and the belief that Rhodes is doomed, have so encouraged the infidels that they are becoming really formidable at sea. This blow will show them that the Order has yet power to sweep the sea of pirates. Since, however, this adventure has taught us that a single leader like Hassan sails with at least nine ships under his orders, it is clear that in future our galleys must not adventure singly among the islands. It was fortunate indeed that first Santoval, and then Piccolomini, arrived to your assistance. How was it that they happened to come up so opportunely?"

"Sir John Boswell, with Ralph Harcourt and Gervaise Tresham; went in a boat to the rendezvous we had arranged, and reached it after an adventure, which I will leave Sir John to tell himself. I may say that the two young knights named had in our encounter both obtained very high credit amongst us all for the valour with which they fought. No one bore himself more stoutly, and I am glad to take this early opportunity of bringing their conduct before your notice. As you will learn from Sir John, Gervaise Tresham afterwards showed a quickness of wit that was the means of saving the lives of those with him, and I may say also of all with me, for had they failed to reach the rendezvous we should have fallen easy victims to the five ships Hassan Ali brought against us."

Sending for Sir John Boswell, the grand prior heard from him the details of his adventure in the boat.

"I am right glad to hear you speak so warmly of Tresham, Sir John, for I regard him as my special protege, and am pleased indeed to find that at this outset of his career he has proved himself not only a brave knight, but full of resource, and quick at invention. I think, Sir John, that these two young knights have shown themselves well worthy of receiving the honour of secular knighthood."

"Assuredly they have," Sir John agreed.

"Then, Sir John, will you bestow it upon them? The Order, as an Order, does not bestow the honour, but its members do not forfeit their right as knights to bestow it individually, and none among us are more worthy of admitting them to your rank than yourself."

"I would gladly do it, Sir Peter; but the honour would come far better from yourself, and would not only be more highly prized by them, but would be of greater value in the eyes of others. I am but a simple knight commander of the Order, and my name would scarce be known beyond its ranks. But to be knighted by one whose name is known and honoured throughout Europe would give them a standing wherever they went, and place them on a level with the best."

"If that is your opinion, Boswell, I will myself undertake it, and will do it at once; it were better done here than at a conclave of the Order—now, when they are fresh from the battle. Let the knights be summoned from the other galleys at once."

In a few minutes the whole of the knights were assembled on the poop of the galley.

"Friends, and brother knights," D'Aubusson said. "First, in the name of the Order, I have to thank you all most heartily for the brave deeds that you have performed, and for the fresh honour

you have won for it. Every man has, as I learn from the three commanders, borne himself as a true and valiant knight, ready to give his life in the cause of the Order and of humanity. Two names have been specially brought before me by commander Ricord, and by the good knight Sir John Boswell; they are those of two young companions who, though knights of our Order, have not yet received secular knighthood, and this, in the opinion of these two knights, they have right worthily won. Sir Ralph Harcourt and Sir Gervaise Tresham, step forward."

The two young knights, colouring with pleasure at this unexpected honour, removed their helmets, and stood with bowed heads before the grand prior. D'Aubusson went on, turning to the knights around him, "I am about, comrades, to undertake the office of knighting them. Sir Louis Ricord and Sir John Boswell stand as their sponsors. But before I proceed I would ask you all whether you, too, approve, and hold that Sir Ralph Harcourt and Sir Gervaise Tresham have proved themselves worthy of the honour of secular knighthood at my hands?"

There was a general reply in the affirmative, the answer of the survivors of Ricord's crew being specially emphatic. The grand prior drew his sword, and the two young knights knelt before him, their sponsors standing beside them.

"Sir Ralph Harcourt, you have now been four years a knight of this Order, but hitherto you have had no opportunity of drawing sword against the infidels. Now that the chance has come, you have proved yourself a true and valiant brother of the Order, and well worthy of the secular accolade. It is in that capacity that I now knight you. It is not the grand prior of Auvergne, but Sir Peter D'Aubusson, of the grand cross of St. Louis, who now bestows upon you the honour of secular knighthood." He touched him lightly with the sword. He then turned to Gervaise.

"You, Sir Gervaise Tresham, are young indeed to receive the honour of secular knighthood; but valour is of no age, and in the opinion of your commanders, and in that of your comrades, you have proved yourself worthy of the honour. You have shown too, that, as Sir John Boswell has related to me, you are not only brave in action, but able, in the moment of danger, to plan and to execute. You were, he tells me, the means of saving his life and that of your comrade, and, by thus enabling him to bear to the place of rendezvous the news of Sir Louis's danger, were also the means of saving the lives of Sir Louis and his companions, and of bringing home in safety the prizes he had taken. With such a beginning it is easy to foresee that you will win for yourself some day a distinguished position in the ranks of the Order, and are most worthy of the honour I now bestow upon you." And he touched him with his sword.

The two young knights rose to their feet, bowed deeply to D'Aubusson, and then retired, with their sponsors. They were at once surrounded by the knights, who shook them by the hand, and warmly congratulated them upon the honour that had befallen them, receiving equally warm congratulations on their arrival at the auberge of the langue.

The five prizes turned out, when their cargoes were landed, to be much more valuable than the cursory examination made by the knights had warranted them in expecting. They contained, indeed, an accumulation of the most valuable contents of the prizes taken by the pirates for a long time previously; and as these desperadoes preyed upon Turkish commerce as well as Christian, the goods consisted largely of Eastern manufactures of all kinds. Costly robes, delicate embroidery, superb carpets, shawls, goldsmiths' work, and no small amount of jewels, were among the spoil collected, and the bulk of the merchandise captured was, two days later, despatched in galleys to Genoa and Marseilles, to be sold for the benefit of the Order.

D'Aubusson without hesitation carried out Sir John Boswell's promise to the slaves who had rowed his boat. They were not only set at liberty, but were each presented with a sum of money, and were placed on board a galley, and landed on the mainland.

The English knights were all proud of the honour that had been won by their young countrymen, the only exception being Robert Rivers, who was devoured with jealousy at their advancement. He did not openly display his feelings, for the reports not only of Sir John Boswell, but of the other

two English knights, were so strong that he dared not express his discontent. He himself had twice been engaged with pirates, but had gained no particular credit, and indeed had, in the opinion of his comrades, been somewhat slack in the fray. He was no favourite in the auberge, though he spared no pains to ingratiate himself with the senior knights, and had a short time before been very severely reprimanded by the bailiff for striking one of the servants.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.