

Literature, & c.

THE TRIALS OF A TEMPLAR.

A SKETCH OF THE CRUSADES.

A SUMMER day in Syria was rapidly drawing towards its close, as a handful of European cavalry, easily recognized by their flat-topped helmets, cumbersome hauberts, and chargers sheathed like their riders, in plate and mail, were toiling their weary way through the deep sand of the desert, scorched almost to the heat of molten lead by the intolerable glare of an eastern sun. Insignificant in numbers, but high of heart, confident from repeated success, elated with enthusiastic valor, and the inspiring sense of a holy cause, they followed the guidance of their leader, one of the best and most tried lances of the Temple, careless whether, and secure of triumph; their steel armor glowing like burnished gold, their lance heads flashing in the level rays of the setting orb, and the party-coloured banner of the Beauseant hanging motionless in the still atmosphere.

Before them lay an interminable waste of bare and dusty plain, broken into long swells succeeding each other in monotonous regularity, though occasionally varied by stunted patches of thorny shrubs and dwarf palm trees. As they wheeled round one of these thickets, their commander halted suddenly at the sight of some fifty horsemen, whose fluttering garb and turbaned brows, as well as the springy pace of their Arab steeds, proclaimed them natives of the soil, winding along the bottom of the valley beneath him, with the stealthy silence of prowling tigers. Although the enemy nearly trebled his own force in numerical power, without a moment's hesitation, Albert of Vermandois arrayed his little band, and before the infidels had discovered his presence, much less drawn a blade, or concentrated their scattered line, the dreaded war-cry rang upon their ears—"Ha, Beauseant! For the temple! For the temple!" and down thundered the irresistible charge of the western crusaders on their unguarded flank. Not an instant did the Saracens withstand the brunt of the Norman lance; they broke away on all sides, leaving a score of their templars stretched to rise no more, on the bloody plain. Scarcely, however had the victors checked their blown horses, or re-organized their phalanx disordered by the hot struggle, when the distant clang of cymbal, horn, and kettle drum, mingled with the shrill *telies* of the heathen sounding in every direction, announced that their march had been anticipated, their route beset, themselves surrounded. Hastily taking possession of the vantage ground afforded by an abrupt hillock, and dismissing the lightest of his party to ride for life to the Christian camp, and demand immediate aid, Albert awaited the onset with the stern composure which springs from self-possession. A few minutes sufficed to show the Christians the extent of their embarrassment, and the imminence of their peril. Three heavy masses of cavalry were approaching them from many different quarters, their gaudy turbans, gilded arms, and waving pennons of an hundred hues, blazing in marked contrast to the stern and martial simplicity of the iron soldiers of the west. To the quick eye of Albert it was instantly evident that their hope consisted in protracting the conflict till the arrival of succor, and even this hope was diminished by the unwonted velocity with which the Mahometans hurried to the attack. It seemed as if they also were aware that in order to conquer, they must conquer quickly; for, contrary to their usual mode of fighting, they charged resolutely upon the very lances of the motionless Christians, who, in a solid circle, opposed their mailed breasts in firm array to their volatile antagonists. Fiercely, however, as they charged, their lighter coursers recoiled before the bone and weight of the European war-steeds. The lances of the Crusaders were shivered in the onset, but to the thrust of these succeeding the deadly sweep of the two-handed swords flashing above the scimitars of the infidel with the sway of some terrific engine. Time after time the eastern warriors rushed on, time after time they retreated like the surf from some lonely rock on which it has wasted its thunders in vain. At length they changed their plan, and wheeling in rapid circles, poured their arrows in, as fast, and for a time as fruitlessly, as the snow storm of a December day. On they came again, right upon the point where Vermandois was posted, headed by a tall chief, distinguished no less by his gorgeous arms, than by his gallant bearing. Rising in his stirrups, when at a few paces distance, he hurled his long javelin full in the face of the Crusader. Bending his crest to the saddle-bow as the dart passed harmlessly over him, Albert cast his massive battle-axe in return; the tremendous missile hurled past the chief at whom it was aimed, and smote his shield bearer to the earth, at the very moment when an arrow pierced the Templar's charger through the eyeball to the brain; the animal, frantic with the pain, bounded forward and rolled lifeless, bearing his rider with him to the ground; yet, even in that last struggle the stern knight clove the turbaned leader down to the teeth before he fell. Five hundred horse dashed over him—his array was broken—his companions were hewn from their saddles, even before their commander was snatched from beneath the trampling hoofs, disarmed, fettered, and reserved for a doom to which the fate of his comrades had been a boon of mercy. Satisfied with their success, and aware that a few hours at the farthest must bring up the rescue from the Christian army, the Saracens retreated as rapidly as they had advanced; all night long they travelled with unabated speed towards their inaccessible fastnesses, in the recesses of their wild mountains. Arrived at

their encampment, the prisoner was cast into a dungeon hewn from the living rock. Day after day rolled heavily on, and Albert lay in utter darkness, ignorant of his destiny, unvisited by any being except the swart and bearded savage who brought the daily pittance scarcely sufficient for the wants of his wretched condition.

Albert of Vermandois, a Burgundian youth of high nobility, and yet more exalted renown, had left his country stung almost to madness, by the early death of her, to whom he had vowed his affections, and whose name he had already made "glorious by his sword," from the banks of the Danube, to the pillars of Hercules. He had bound the cross upon his breast, he had mortified all worldly desires, all earthly passions, beneath the strict rule of his order. While yet in the flush and pride of manhood—before a gray hair had streaked his dark locks, or a single line wrinkled his lofty brow—he had changed his nature, his very being; he had attained a height of dignity and fame, scarcely equalled by the best and oldest warriors of the temple. The vigor of his arm, the vast scope of his political foresight, no less than the unimpeached rigor of his morals, had long rendered him a glory to his brotherhood, a cause of terror, and an engine of defeat to the Saracen lords of the Holy Land. Many a league had been formed to overpower, many a dark plot hatched to enslave him; but so invariably had he borne down all odds in open warfare before his irresistible lance, so certainly had he hurled back all secret treasons with redoubled vengeance on the heads of the schemers, that he was almost deemed the possessor of some cabalistic spirit, framed for the downfall and destruction of the sons of Islam.

Deep were the consultations of the infidel leaders concerning the destiny of the formidable captive. The slaughter actually wrought by his hand had been so fearful, the ravages produced in their armies by his policy so unbounded, that a large majority were in favour of his instant execution; nor could human ingenuity devise, or brute cruelty perform, more hellish methods of torture than were calmly discussed in that infuriate assembly.

It was late on the third day of his captivity, when the hinges of his dungeon grate creaked, and a broader glare streamed through the aperture than had hitherto disclosed the secrets of his prison house. The red light streamed from a lamp in the grasp of a dark figure,—an Imam, known by his high cap of lambskin, his loose black robes, his parchment cincture, figured with Arabic characters, and the long beard that flowed, even below his girdle in unrestrained luxuriance. A negro, bearing food of a better quality, and the beverage abhorred by the prophet, the forbidden juice of grapes, followed; his ivory teeth, and the livid circles of his eyes glittering with a ghastly whiteness, in the clear lamp-light. He arranged the unaccustomed dainties on the rocky floor.—The priest seated himself so that the light should reveal every change of the Templar's features, while his own were veiled in the deepest shadow.

"Arise, young Nazarine," he said, "arise and eat, for to-morrow thou shalt die. Eat, drink, and let thy soul be strengthened to bear thy doom, for as surely as there is one God, and one prophet, which is Mahomet, so surely is the black wing of Azrael outstretched above thee."

"It is well," was the unmoved reply, "I am a consecrated knight, and how should a Templar tremble? A Christian; and how should a follower of Jesus fear to die?"

"My brother hath spoken wisely, yet is his wisdom but folly. Truly hast thou said—it is well to die; for is it not written that the faithful and the *Yacoor* must alike go hence? But is it the same thing for a warrior to fall amidst the flutter of banners, and the flourish of trumpets,—which are to the strong man, even as the breath of his nostrils, or as the mild showers in seed time to the thirsty plain,—and to perish by inches afar from his comrades, surrounded by tribes to whom the very name of his race is a byword and a scorn?"

"Now, by the blessed light of heaven!" cried the indignant soldier, "rather shouldst thou say a terror, and a ruin; for when have the eons endured the waving of our pennons, or the flashing of our armor? But it skills not talking,—leave me, priest, for I abhor thy creed, as I despise thy loathsome impostor."

For a short space the wise man of the tribes was silent; he gazed intently on the countenance of his foe, but not a sign of wavering or dismay could his keen eye trace in the stern and haughty features. "Allah Acbar," he said at length, "to God all things are possible—would the Christian live?"

"All men would live, and I am but a man," returned the knight, "yet praise be to him where all praise is due, I have never shrunk from death in the field, nor can he fright me on the scaffold; if my Master has need of his servant, he who had power to deliver Israel from bondage, and Daniel from the jaws of the lion, surely he shall deliver my soul from the power of the dog. And if he has appointed for me the crown of martyrdom, it shall never be said that Albert of Vermandois was deaf to the will of the God of Battles, and the Lord of Hosts."

"The wise man hath said," replied the slow musical notes of the priest, in strange contrast to the fiery zeal of the prisoner, "the wise man hath said, better is the cottage that standeth firm, than the tower which tottereth in its fall. Will my brother hear reason? Cast away the Cross from thy breast—bid the turban upon thy brow—and behold thou shalt be as a prince among our people."

"Peace, blasphemer!—I spit at thee—I despise—I defy thee!—I, a worshipper of the living Jehovah, shall I debase myself to the carnal driver of Mecca.—Peace! Begone!" He turned his face to the wall, flung his arms upon

his chest, and was silent. No entreaties, no threats of torment, no promises of mercy, could induce him again to open his lips. His eyes were fixed as if they beheld some shape, unseen by others; his brow was calm, and but for a slight expression of scorn about the muscles of the mouth, he might have passed for a visionary. After a time the Imam arose, quitted the cell—and the warrior was again alone! But a harder trial was yet before him;—the door of his prison opened yet once more, and a form entered—a being, whom the poets in her own land of mistrely would have described under the types of a young date tree, bowing its graceful head to the breath of evening—of a pure spring in the burning desert—of a gazelle bounding over the unshaken herbage—of a dove gliding on the wings of the morning! And in truth she was lovely. Her jetty hair braided above her transparent brow, and floating in a veil of curls over her shoulders—her large eyes swimming in liquid languor—and above all, that indescribable charm,

"The mind, the music breathing from her face."

Her form slighter, and more sylph-like, than the maids of Europe can boast, yet rounded into the fairest mould of female beauty—all combined to make up a creature resembling rather a houri of Mahomet's Paradise, than

"One of earth's least earthly daughters." For a moment the Templar gazed, as if he doubted whether he were not looking upon one of those spirits, which are said to have assailed, and almost shaken, the sanctity of many an holy anchorite. His heart, for the first time in many years, throbbed wildly—he bowed his head between his knees, and prayed fervently; nor did he again raise his eyes, till a voice, as harmonious as the breathing of a lute, addressed him in the lingua Franca.

"If the sight of his hand-maiden is offensive to the eyes of the Nazarene, she will depart as she came, in sorrow."

The soldier lifted up his eyes, and saw her bending over him with so sad an expression of tenderness, that despite of himself, his heart melted within him, and his answer was courteous, and even kind.—"I thank thee, dear lady, I thank thee for thy good will, though it can avail me nothing; but wherefore does one so fair, and, it may well be, so happy as thou art visit the cell of a condemned captive?"

"Say not condemned, oh! say not condemned! Thy bearer is a servant of life, and freedom, and honor. She saw thy manly form, she looked upon thine undaunted demeanour, and she loved thee,—loved thee to distraction,—would follow thee to the ends of earth,—would die to save thee,—has already saved thee, if thou wilt be saved!—Rank—honor—life—and love—"

"Lady"—he interrupted her—"Listen! for ten long years I have not lent my ear to the witchery of a woman's voice! Ten years ago, I was the betrothed lover of a maid, I had well nigh said, as fair as thou art. She died! died—and left me desolate,—I have fled from my native land, I have devoted to my God the feelings which I once cherished for your sex.—I could not give thee love in return for thy love,—nor would I stoop to feign that which I felt not, although it were to win not temporal, but eternal life."

"Oh! dismiss me not,"—she sobbed, as she threw her white arms around his neck, and panted on his bosom,—"Oh! dismiss me not thus,—I ask no vows,—I ask no love. Be but mine,—let my country be your country, my God yours,—and you are safe and free!"

"My Master,"—he replied coldly, as he disengaged her grasp, and removed her from his arms,—"hath said, 'what would it profit a man, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul.'—I have listened to thee, lady, and I have answered thee,—but my heart is heavy,—for it is mournful, to see that so glorious a form should be the habitation of so frail a spirit. I pray thee leave me!—To-morrow I shall meet my God, and I would come mune with him now in spirit and in truth!"

Slowly she turned away,—wrapped her face in her veil, and moved with faltering steps,—wailing as if her heart was about to burst,—through the low portal;—the gate clanged heavily as she departed, but the sounds of her lamentation were audible, long after the last being who would show a sign of pity for his woes, or of admiration for his merits, had gone forth never again to return.

All night long, the devotions, the fervent, and heartfelt prayers of the Crusader ascended to the throne of his Master, and often, though he struggled to suppress the feeling, a petition for his lovely, though deluded visitor, was mingled with entreaties for strength, to bear the fate he anticipated.—Morning came at last, not as in the frigid climates of the north, creeping through its gradations of gray dawn, and dappled twilight. The prison gates were open for the last time, the fetters were struck off from the limbs of the undaunted captive, and himself led forth like a victim to the sacrifice. From leagues around, all the hordes of the desert had come together in swarms, outnumbering the winged notes, that stream like dusty atoms in every sunbeam. It was a strange, and under other circumstances would have been a glorious spectacle; in a vast sandy basin, surrounded on every side by low and rugged eminences, were the swarthy sons of Syria mustered, rank above rank, to feast their eyes on the unawaited spectacle of a Christian's suffering. The rude tribes of the remotest regions, Arab and Turcoman, mounted on the uncouth dromedary, or on steeds of matchless symmetry, and unsustained pedigree, mingling their dark barabans with the brilliant arms and gorgeous garbs of the Soldan's court,—even the unseen beauties of an hundred harems watched from their canopied litter, the preparations for the execution with as much interest, and as little concern, as the belles of our own day exhibit before

the curtain has been drawn aside, which is to disclose the performances of a Pedrotti or a Malibran to the enraptured audience.

In the centre of this natural amphitheatre, stood the scathed and whitening trunk of a thunder stricken palm; to this inartificial stake was the captive led, one by one his garments were torn assunder, till his muscular form and splendid proportions were revealed in naked majesty to the wondering multitude. Once, before he was attached to the fatal tree, a formal offer of life, and liberty, and high office in the Moslem court was tendered to him, on condition of his embracing the faith of the prophet, and refused by one contemptuous motion of his hand. He was bound firmly to the stump, with his hands secured far above his head,—at some fifty paces distant, stood a group of dark and fierce warriors, with banded bows, and well filled quivers, evidently awaiting the signal to pour in their arrowy sleet upon his unguarded limbs. He gazed upon them with a countenance unmoved and serene, though somewhat paler than its usual tints. His eyes did not, however, long dwell on the unattractive sight; he turned them upwards, and his lips moved at intervals, though no sound was conveyed to the ear of the bystanders. Some minutes had elapsed thus, when the shrill voice of the Muezzin was heard proclaiming the hour of munita-prayer in his measured chant,—"There is no God, but God, and Mahomet is his prophet." In an instant the whole was prostrate in the dust, and motionless as though the fatal blast of the simoon was careering through the tainted atmosphere. A flash of contempt shot across the features of the Templar, but it quickly vanished in a more holy expression, as he muttered to himself the words, used on a far more memorable occasion by divinity itself,—"Forgive them Lord, they know not what they do!" The cause was of short duration; with a rustle like the voice of the forest, when the first breath of the rising tempest agitates its shivering foliage, the multitude rose to their feet. A gallant horseman dashed from the cavalcade which thronged around the person of their Soldan, checked his steed beside the archer band, spoke a few hasty words, and galloped back to his station.

Another minute—and arrow after arrow whistled from the Paynim bows, piercing the limbs, and even grazing the body of the Templar; but not a murmur escaped from the victim,—scarcely did a frown contract his brow; there was an irradiation, as if of celestial happiness, upon his countenance; nor could a spectator have imagined for a moment that his body was almost convulsed with agony, but for the weapons quivering even to their feathered extremities in every joint, and the large blood drops trickling like rain upon the thirsty soil.

Again there was a pause. Circled by his Nubian guard, followed by the bravest and the brightest of his court, the Soldan himself rode up to the bleeding Crusader. Yet, even there, decked with all the pomp of royalty, and pride of war, goodly in person, and sublime in bearing, the monarch of the east was shamed,—shamed like a slave before his master,—by the native majesty of Christian virtue; nor could the prince at first find words to address the tarred mortal, who stood at his feet with the serene deportment which would have besseemed the judge upon his tribunal, no less than the martyr at the stake.

"Has the Nazarene yet learned experience from the bitter sting of adversity?—The skill of the leech may yet assuage thy wounds, and the honors which shall be poured upon thee may yet efface thine injuries—even as the rich grain live—or will he die the death of a dog?"

"The Lord is on my side,"—was the low but firm reply—"the Lord is on my side; I will not fear what man doeth unto me." On swept the monarch's train, and again the iron shewer fell fast and fatally, not as before on the mercenary, but on the broad chest and manly trunk; the blood gushed forth in blacker streams,—when warrior's life was ebbing fast away,—when from the roar of the broken hills, a sudden trumpet blew a point of war in notes so thrilling, that it pierced the ears like the thrust of some sharp weapon. Before the astonishment of the crowd had time to vent itself, in word or deed, the eminences were crowded with down mail clad myriads of the Christian force. Down they came, like the blasts of the tornado on some frail and scattered fleet, with war cry and clang of instruments, and the thick trampling of twice ten thousand hoofs! They to the sons of the desert in that hour! They were swept away before the mottled steeds and levelled lances of the Templars, like dust before the wind, or stubble before the devouring flame!

The eye of the dying hero lightened as he saw the banners of his countrymen. His whole form dilated with exultation and triumph. He tore his arm from its fetters, waved it around his blood-stained forehead, and for the last time shouted forth his cry of battle, "Ha Beauseant! A Vermandois for the temple!" Then, in a lower tone, he cried, "Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." He bowed his head, and his undaunted spirit passed away.

From Ainsworth's Magazine.
THE NINETY-NINE GOOD TURNS.

Strangely inconsistent it is that one who is thankful in his heart for a single service. Such a man is ungrateful for a long continued series. He too frequently, is he who fails to obtain the hundredth favor. Show him, at the outset of your acquaintance, a little courtesy—offer him your opera-glass or your snuff box—write him what is called a civil note when there is no absolute necessity for doing so, and he will treat