

Literature, &c.

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THE CRUSADER'S TALE.

BY EDWARD J. PORTER.

CHAPTER I.

I HAD but just landed after an absence of five years. The feelings of the moment are now fresh in my recollection, and when called up by the remembrance of the scenes which presented themselves on my arrival. Every rock had its tales, to me worth all the volumes of romance; every tree its voices, countless as the leaves that crowned it; the roar of the torrent, as it leaped in its wild glee from the heart of the mountain, had a tone for my impassioned ear, surpassing the sweetness of the lute. It was a dark November day; the sun smiled not on my return to my native land. Dark clouds, in thickening masses, rolled heavily over the face of the heavens. The wild winds were sweeping with melancholy moanings through the mountain passes and dark ravines. The waves rushed wildly on in their mad career, weaving a thousand foam-wreaths for the rude rocks they sought to embrace. A towering precipice hung over the spot where I had landed, with its pointed crags stretching far into the elements above, upon whose dreary peaks the clouds seemed to rest. I commenced the ascent, which was narrow, winding and steep, scarcely affording foothold for the most agile adventurers. I reached the first ledge, which supplied a few moments' rest in my tiresome and perilous ascent.

Fearing to look back on the dangers I had passed, my eyes could only look upward to the point where my hazardous climbing was to terminate. My ear caught the broken tones of a faint voice, as it came at intervals between the deep peals of thunder that rolled over me; they were incoherent, wild and unconnected, like the shattered links of a ruined chain. I gazed upwards to discover whence the sounds proceeded, when the shadowy form of a woman standing on the point of a projecting rock, met my sight. Her hair was spread on the wings of the storm; her mantle was drawn closely around her; her features seemed haggard; and the wild light, that, fitful as the flashes from the conflicting elements above, shot from her sunken eyes, terrifically spoke the ruin that reigned within.

I knew her at a glance, though her form was attenuated; the beauty that once shone like a mantle of light around her was gone; but yet the traces of her former loveliness remained. It was Blanche, the fisherman's maniac daughter. She came to chide the storm for overwhelming the vessel of her lover; from the very point of the rock on which she stood, she beheld the ruin of the temple her hopes had reared to a glorious fabric.

In her sight the bark of her Henry had foundered on his nuptial eve; the stormy ocean opened to receive its victim; the wild waves swept on leaving no trace of their merciless fury behind; and Blanche was borne a maniac to her father's cottage.

Years of misery rolled slowly along; the ocean slept in peace or awoke at times in rage; the winds swept gently along, or rushed in storms over the waves; the sun looked out in smiles, or hid his light in the dusky clouds that opened their shadowy arms to receive him: like them, at times, the troubled spirit of the unhappy Blanche knew some momentary repose—some gleam of reason illumined the dark chaos of her mind. I resumed my toilsome task, and ascending steep by steep, crag by crag, approached the end of my dangerous path. I came near the rock on which she stood, and called her by her name; she knew my voice, and came with outstretched hand to welcome my arrival.

"Ah! more fortunate than Blanche," said she, "but soon to be almost as wretched; why have the waves rejected you from their depths, reserving you for more dreadful sufferings on land? But look there, look there!" and she pointed to where a sheet of lightning at that instant illumined the waves. "My Henry's ship is sinking—save him, save him! Oh, God, he's gone, he's gone!"

I knew by her wild shrieks and broken exclamations that the web of reason which spread over her for a moment was rent asunder, and the light had fled from the ruined shrine, leaving it in utter darkness.

I have gazed in melancholy silence on the magnificent ruins of Thebes; the pride of her hundred gates, the grandeur of her countless temples laid prostrate in the dust of ages. I have sighed above the fallen splendor of the desolate cities of the East. I have wept over the ruined trophies of art in ancient Greece and Rome; the rank weeds clustered around their monuments of glory; their temples, pillars and triumphal arches broken and decayed; but here the lovely fabric of a mind, fresh from the hand of its creator, and that too in one of the last, the purest, the brightest productions of his skill, lay in ruins before me. Time had no lost relic of antiquity in all his vast treasure chambers of equal value with the gem, the loss of which now awakened my sympathies. It may be considered effeminate to weep, but I, in whose heart there was no response for the miseries of the Saracen widow, widowed by my sword; for the cries of the orphan left fatherless by my spear, or the tears of the maiden whose lover I had trampled beneath the hoofs of my charger, even I could not refrain from tears at the sight of this wreck.

CHAPTER II.

I endeavored to restore the tangled web of her wandering thoughts to at least a momentary calm, but in vain. I besought her to seek composure in some sheltering retreat; but my words were as oil to the flame—her reason had departed—her paroxysms became wilder, but this could not last.

The wildest tempest will, at length, find its sublime elevation; then the war of the elements must subside. The swiftest shaft will sink to earth, when the force that impelled it is suspended or exhausted. Blanche grew calm; the lightning flashes of her dark eyes, came in less rapid succession, until at length their own melancholy light burned with a steady lustre.

"Blanche is unhappy," said the bewildered maiden, as if offering excuse for the miseries of her situation. "The dark fiends seize upon her brain with their glowing fingers, until it turns to flame beneath their touch, and they change her heart to a ball of fire, which they toss to and fro. But Blanche will not always be alone in her misery, though she would avert the evil from the pathway of another. Ernest, thy happiness, like the sword of the Sicilian, hangs by a single hair; let that but break and thy glorious dreams of hope will forever be dissipated. The morrow's sunset will gleam on the bridal of your cherished Irene and your kindred's foe Fitzherbert. Reports have reached us that you had fallen in the wars of Palestine; and years of mourning have passed wearily over the sorrowing Irene. Fitzherbert, glorying in secret triumph at the removal of so great an obstacle, as a successful rival, gradually won on the credulity of her father, and she is to be led unwillingly to the nuptial altar. The Abbey of St. Genevieve will record the whisperings of a loveless vow ere to-morrow's sun shall have tinged the forest leaves with the hues of his parting splendor."

I listened in silent agony to the painful narrative of Blanche; her words like growing lava drops, sunk burning in my soul; I fain would believe her still writhing under the paroxysms of her delirium; but, no—her words were uttered in a moment when her reason was unclouded. Her dark eye beamed in the melancholy light known only to her rational intervals; it told that the wild waves of her troubled spirit, all their curbs and fury exhausted, had sunk to rest for a while.

A distraction scarcely less wild than that which took possession of the ruined shrine of the maniac's reason seized on my wandering senses.

Could Irene have forgotten the love of her earlier years? Could she have believed the tales so darkly invented and so sedulously scattered by the dissembling Fitzherbert? were questions that immediately forced themselves on my imagination. To fly to the dwelling of Fitzherbert, and extinguish the last spark of personal animosity and hereditary feud in a villain's death, at first suggested itself to my excited spirit; but how to present myself before the purity of Irene with my hands imbued in the life-blood of so base a wretch, was a question not readily solved. I determined on a milder method of punishment, as better suited to my purpose. I resolved on permitting him to live in the pleasing anticipation of happiness until the moment when he thought realized and then I would snatch the last stay of his gilded hopes away and plunge him into the depths of despair. Tantalus-like he should behold the vinds approach within reach, but grasp at a fleeting delusion.

CHAPTER III.

It was evening; the bell on the tower of St. Genevieve pealed forth its summons, while the light breeze bore its deep swelling tones far over hill and dale. Groups of peasantry, dressed in their holiday garb, were scattered in various parts of the grove, in the centre of which the abbey was situated, conversing on the different topics of the day. At length the splendid train of Fitzherbert approached, arrayed in all the pomp his vast income enabled him to display. His retinue were gorgeously apparelled in uniforms of blue and gold with black plumes waving over their brazen helmets, and all mounted on snow white chargers almost weighed down by their splendid trappings. They moved on toward the abbey amid the murmured astonishment of the multitude who had never before beheld so gorgeous a spectacle.

What a draft was drawn on futurity that day by the haughty Fitzherbert! What visions of happiness did he not revel in! What glorious dreams did hope present to his wondering senses, through which he floated in transport until recalled by the dark realities of his situation!

Blanche had prepared Irene for the measures I had adopted. She told her of my return, of my intended rescue of her from the snares of Fitzherbert, of the time, place and manner in which I would meet her. She approved of all; she consented to my scheme.

I had stationed myself in a thicket near the castle of her father with a trusty band of retainers who had experienced all kinds of danger by flood and field and were not unprepared for an undertaking like the present.

The bridal train of Irene approached my hiding place; her lovely face wore an expression of triumphant joy; her long white veil was blown back by the wind, and the pale orange flower, mingling with the waves of her dark hair, added a soft lustre to her pale but beautiful brow.

My time for action had come. I bounded from my retreat, seized the reins of her steed, which she willingly resigned to me—the next moment we were enveloped in a cloud of dust. Our course was to the sea-shore, where a boat was waiting to convey us to my pinnace, which, to avoid discovery, was moored behind

a projecting point of rock, at a distance of about a mile from the place where I had stationed the barge. To gain that was but a task of some twenty minutes, but during that time the entire country was in a state of alarm. The bridal train of Irene, wondering at her strange abduction, fled in terror and dismay; some to the castle of her father to inform him of his daughter's disappearance, and others to the abbey in search of Fitzherbert.

We had scarcely gained the boat and pushed off from the shore, when the rocks and cliffs above us became crested with numerous groups, seemingly led by no other motive than to gratify a desire of beholding so daring an adventurer.

Fitzherbert himself appeared soon after, on a ledge of rock farther down. I was rejoiced at the sight. I took off my helmet that he might the more easily recognise me, and then I displayed the white cross of a crusader on my mantle. At that moment a shout rose to the heavens from the crowds above and around him. This was the last drop of gall in his already bitter cup; he seized a bow from the hand of a retainer that stood near, placed an arrow on the string, and with a demoniac scowl, sent it winging towards us. It came fearfully, swiftly on, but erringly; for aimed at mine, the bosom of Irene received it, despite my effort to shield her. The murderer gazed on the ruin he had wrought, uttered a piercing shriek and fled from the scene. The young, the lovely, the innocent, breathed her last in my arms—her last words begging forgiveness for her murderer.

I turned with a sorrowing heart to the shore I had so lately left with hopes so buoyant. I consigned my precious charge to the care of the maidens, who had observed from the land the fate of the loved one. I mounted my horse in haste, to pursue her murderer; I traveled over leagues in reckless precipitation, with the hope of overtaking him; but my efforts were in vain. I followed all night and part of the next day but having lost his trail turned back, baffled and disappointed.

When I had reached the desolate home of Irene, her aged father met me with tears; he embraced me as his son. His reason was shaken by the blow it had received. His words were few and stifled by his sorrows. The priests were around the dead; they had just finished the last rites of the church. The maidens, standing in a group near the coffin, commenced, in low and sorrowing tones the following.

HYMN TO THE DEAD.

We've arrayed thee for the bridal,

We have decked thee for the tomb;

O'er the orange flower and myrtle

The cypress casts its gloom.

The peals that told thy bridal-hour,

Thy passing bells have been;

Thou, the life-breath of our circle,

Thou art lost to us—Irene!

We've arrayed thee for the bridal,

We have decked thee for the grave;

The shroud now clasps thee coldly;

While the snow-white veil should wave.

Too pure, too beautiful for earth

Thy loveliness has been;

Thou art flown to paradise,

Though lost to us—Irene!

CHAPTER IV.

THE suns of seven summers had shone on the grave of Irene. It was situated in a delightful spot, in the garden attached to the chapel of St. Genevieve; and near it slept the ashes of her father, who had long since been committed to the dust. The shrubs I had planted around them had grown nearly to their full size; and the vines which I had trailed there drooped mournfully over the sacred trust they guarded. The circumstances I have narrated were fast fading from the memories of almost all, but they were too deeply engraved on mine ever to be obliterated. The miseries they entailed on me had rendered them proof against all time: they stamped the impress of age on a youthful form; scattered the snow-wreaths of winter among the tresses of summer, and taught manhood, instead of gazing on the noon star of fame, to look down to the tomb, his name and his race almost

"Unknown, unhonored and unsung."

On a gloomy September morning, after having paid my customary visit to the grave of Irene, I walked to the seashore. The sky was lowering and dark, the thick clouds were rolled on each other and seemed gathering all their strength for some threatening conflict. The sea was dark; its long and heavy surges rolled sullenly along; it seemed as if the angry spirit struggled to reveal some hidden secret of its depths; and a melancholy stillness, the certain precursor of storms, reigned through the air.

The light form of Blanche passed swiftly by me; she was hastening to her favorite station on the bleak rock, where she invariably met the tempest in its pathway over land and sea. She was muttering some wild and unintelligible jargon as usual. I would have detained her, but I knew it would be a fruitless task to attempt to divert her from her purpose. Her spirit was as wild as the storm that now broke from its barriers and swept in full career through the sky.

The wind rushed along the waves, bearing off the snowy foam-wreath on its wings, or tossing them high in the air sped shrieking on its course. The thunder rolled in sullen peals, the echoes of its thousand voices careering

from cloud to cloud till they died away in the boundless infinity; while the quick successive lightning-flashes illumined the dark surface of the awakened deep. A scream from Blanche drew my attention to an almost indistinct object, to which she pointed, far away on the horizon. Her vision, for once at least, was not cheated by a phantom, for it was a small bark that was approaching the point where she stood. It was driven furiously on before the gale, the white waves curling around her prow. She had lost a mast, as we discovered on her nearer approach, and appeared otherwise disabled from her motion through the water. Her crew had at length perceived the dangers of their position; but it was too late to hope for safety, and they yielded to despair.

Numbers had assembled in the vain hope of rendering assistance to the crew of the laboring bark; but that was impossible. The doom of the hapless vessel was sealed. She neared the rocks with fearful speed, dashed against a jutting point and, while a despairing shriek from the crew rose wildly above the howlings of the storm, and went down with all aboard. Of all their number but one arose to the surface; he struggled bravely among the boiling breakers, and, thrown by the waves against a rock, was saved from the watery tomb of his comrades.

By our assistance he gained a place of safety; but scarcely had he reached it when, overwhelmed by his exertions, he sunk exhausted. After some time he recovered and looking up to me, while a death-like hue spread over his emaciated features, said in a hollow voice—

"It was for this hour that I have lived, ever while life was burdensome. I could have found a nameless grave in a distant clime where my crimes would have remained a mystery forever but could not hope for peace, even in the grave, until I had besought forgiveness from him I had wronged so deeply. Ernest, you see before you the wretched Fitzherbert—the murderer of Irene."

He said no more but fell back insensible. I bent over him; I assured him of my forgiveness; but the spirit had fled to the Being who gave it.

We placed him in the tomb of his fathers.

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CHARITY.

BY E. FERRETT.

TRUE charity is the offspring of benevolence, although charity, so called, the mere giving of alms, frequently has very little in common with benevolence. Giving alms, mixing with societies, and various other deeds by which some folks procure the character of being charitably disposed, frequently indicates ostentation and a love of public estimation, rather than true charity—many give without kindly feeling. It has been somewhere observed, that a certain class of people will afford a man more pleasure in refusing a favor, than others do in granting it; showing that it is not simply relieving distress that exhibits true charity. Pure charity is often felt by those to whom fortune denies the means of affording pecuniary aid, and many who give liberally have no charity. We once knew a gentleman, whose name was at the head of every charitable subscription who passed for an angel of mercy, but who, in reality, would not give a cent unless his name was first on the list.

Charity may be exercised in our daily life in an endless variety of forms. Charitable constructions of the words and actions of others—charitable consideration for the feelings and foibles of others—and charitable forbearance from outraging the sensibility of our brethren, are only a few operations of the greatest of all virtues. In all relations of life, from the earliest to the latest period—in the highest and lowest, forbearance, the offspring of charity, secures happiness, while its absence incurs misery. In the domestic circle—in home relations more especially—charity should be a constant attendant and guide—it teaches us to consider others and forget ourselves—it induces us to investigate our actions, and when about to condemn those of others, to enquire what our own would be under similar circumstances? It teaches us to know ourselves—not to estimate too highly our own abilities—begets humility and meekness—freedom from arrogance and assumption—and makes its possessors really amiable people.

In this world of unkindness, where harsh and ill-natured constructions seem—where every action and word of doubtful tendency invariably have the worst face put upon them by the good-natured mass, it is a positive relief to meet with a truly charitable person; one who will not readily condemn, who allows the benefit of doubt to all criminals, and believes every man innocent of a bad action and evil intention until clearly proved against him, and then thinks that there may be some excuse some mitigating circumstances which palliate the offence. We are all too prone to judge our fellows,—we see and hear of deeds that are horrible, and unhesitatingly condemn the authors, without thinking that the temptation to sin might to ourselves have been as irresistible as it had proved to those whom we condemn.

Let us endeavor to look upon all things in the best light,—this world, though a troublesome one, is not all evil. Good can be extracted from anything, provided our knowledge of alchemy be sufficient,—the bee sucks honey alike from every flower, whether odoriferous or not, and we may if so minded see

"Books in the running brooks,

Sermons in stones, and good in every thing."

To accomplish this much to be desired end, true charity is essential—it engenders a kindly