

Literature, &c.

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THE CROWN AND DAGGER.

A TALK OF THE THIRD CRUSADE.

ONE bright autumnal morning, towards the close of the twelfth century, a martial cavalcade, consisting of about a hundred armed and mounted knights, descended one of the valleys of the Coele-Libanus, and, emerging into the plain, spurred their horses towards the sea-coast of Phœnicia, in the direction of Tyre.

The leader of the warriors rode proudly foremost. He was completely armed, but his visor was up, and displayed the features of an eminently handsome man, in the early prime of life. The finely chiseled outline of the face; the powerful, yet elastic frame of the Frankish warrior—for the arms and accoutrements of the knights, as well as the cross which was conspicuously embroidered on his surcoat, bespoke him a Crusader—were blended with an imperious brow and haughty expression, which impressed the beholder less pleasingly.

The band had scarcely emerged from the mountain defile, when their commander—who had rapidly explored the horizon with an eagle glance—called to his nearest companion—

‘What think ye, Count Henry, of that cloud of dust towards the south? I should pronounce it the dust of many horsemen—and spurring toward us. Be they friends or foes, they shall not find us unprepared.’

‘We are still within easy reach of shelter,’ said his companion, after gazing a moment from under the screen of his gauntleted hand ‘and, by my faith, I question if we had not better fall back upon the mountains. We are but a handful of men, and dare not venture to break lances with such a force of Moslems, as I take the party advancing towards us to be.’

‘Let the fox crawl to cover, Count de Champagne,’ replied the leader haughtily; ‘Conrad of Montferrat does not conceal himself from his foes, were they twice the power they seem. For my part, I turn not back from the faces of these enemies of Christ.’

‘I counselled prudence, not cowardice,’ retorted the Count of Champagne with some asperity. ‘I but speak the lesson taught by our past bitter experience. Can we so soon forget the effects of our former rash imprudence? Jerusalem is lost. Her king, the noble Lusignan, a captive!—and wherefore!—but that a pseudo courage, and false principle of honor, impelled us to give battle at Tiberias, when we should have made a timely retreat before the overwhelming hosts of our assailants!’

‘The defeat at Tiberias, the surrender of the Holy City, and the captivity of Guy de Lusignan, prove only his utter incapacity for command,’ rejoined the Marquis of Montferrat. ‘Why the Knights of Palestine should have bent the knee in homage to so weak a ruler, when they were free to select the noblest and the bravest for their King, I own passes my poor comprehension.’

‘Guy de Lusignan is the husband of our rightful queen, the gracious lady Sybilla. He has been unfortunate as a commander, but he is a brave soldier,’ said the Count of Champagne with warmth. He added in a tone of irony, yet with acourteous inclination towards his companion, ‘I grant that it is very possible that the Marquis of Montferrat might have proved a more successful leader.’

‘Come, come, your hand, Henry—I did not mean to raise your ire,’ said Conrad frankly. ‘We must not weaken our cause by dissensions in the presence of a common foe.’

‘Then beware of the dictates of your own ambitious heart, Lord Marquis. But think not I address you from jealousy or anger. I know you to be a brave and daring soldier; and though my personal rank is inferior to none, cheerfully serve under your leadership—a sufficient acknowledgement how highly I appreciate your talent for command. But see! the horsemen advance. By the Cross! they are friends, and fellow pilgrims.—Thanks to the clear atmosphere of Syria, I can see their banners, though I cannot yet discern the devices which they bear.’

‘Let us advance leisurely to meet them,’ said Conrad. ‘Count Henry, you will lead the van, while I fall back for a few moments to our centre. I shall rejoin you in front when my presence is needed.’

So saying, he turned his horse's head and retreated till he found himself by the side of a litter, which was carefully borne along in the very centre of his little band. He bent low over his charger's neck, and drew aside the curtain which concealed the fair form of one of Syria's loveliest daughters.

‘Zaide, my beloved!’ he murmured, while his countenance, before so stern and inflexible, beamed with inexpressible tenderness, ‘how bearest thou the fatigues of this rapid journey, so trying to thy sex and condition?’

‘I feel wearied only when away from thee,’ the lady replied, in the melodious speech of her country; and raising her large lustrous eyes, she returned her companion's ardent gaze, with an expression of confiding love.

‘And couldst thou, dear one, bear the rough journey uninjured if prolonged until night-fall, or perchance until midnight?’ asked Conrad of his Syrian wife. ‘I see the approaching pennons of the soldiers of the Cross probably fugitives from Tiberias or Jerusalem. If they will unite under my leadership I propose to push forward for Tyre this very night. Should the darkness favor us, we may avoid a collision with the besieging forces; if not, doubt not our gallant band, thus augmented, will prove strong enough to cut their way into the beleaguered city, even through the body guard of Saladin himself. Dost fear, Zaide? A prince's daughter—a warrior's wife—should not pale at anticipated dangers.’

‘When the Emir's daughter became wife of the Frankish chieftain, she could not overcome at once the timid apprehensions incident to her sex. But fear not, Conrad,’ the lady continued, with great animation, ‘your Zaide has a courageous heart—it trembles not for aught that concerns her own safety, and shudders only at the thought of your exposure to danger.’

‘Think not of me, Zaide, for I bear a charmed life,’ replied Conrad cheerfully. ‘In my youth a sybil predicted that my brow should wear a princely diadem; and added to her flattering prophecy, that I should prove invincible to all my foes.’ *The desire of thy heart shall be granted thee; she proclaimed; ‘dread no hostile hand; hatred cannot harm thee; for thy fate lies in the hands of the one who loves thee best.’* And who should love me best? he continued, archly as he bent towards the lady, and pressed her small fingers in his iron grasp; then waving an adieu, he closed the silken draperies of her litter, and putting spurs to his horse, reappeared at the head of his gallant cavalcade.

‘How interminable are these Syrian plains!’ wearily exclaimed the Count of Champagne, as Conrad resumed his post by his side. ‘Our friends have perceived us, and are hastening to join us; yet the distance which separates us hardly seems to diminish. We must wait some time longer before we can discern the cognizance of their leader.’

‘They are from Palestine, and will doubtless bring us important intelligence,’ said the Marquis of Montferrat. ‘I would fain learn whether Queen Sybilla lives; and DeLusignan, if he is still a captive.’

‘I fear the gracious queen will sink under her accumulated misfortunes. The loss of the Holy City, which she so gallantly defended—her privations during the siege—and her grief for the captivity of the husband she adored, must press heavily on her sensitive heart. The royal daughter of the royal Amaury has a soul which cannot brook disgrace or dishonor.’

‘And as DeLusignan derives his kingly claim through her alone, to whom will you transfer your allegiance when she is gone, most scrupulous and loyal knight?’ asked Conrad of his companion.

‘To the husband of her sister, Isabelle, younger daughter to the *feu roi*, Amaury,’ unhesitatingly answered the count of Champagne. ‘And see, Lord Marquis, if my eyes deceive me not, he is the leader of yonder men-at-arms! Is not that the Spread Eagle the cognizance of Sir Humfroi de Thoron, the husband of our Princess Isabelle?’

‘The pale-faced boy, who has not yet won the spurs of belted knight! Truly, he will make but a sorry king over the territory won by the lances of Europe's chivalry,’ contemptuously exclaimed the haughty Marquis. ‘Well, be it so! Humfroi de Thoron is husband to the Lady Isabelle, and may yet be king in her right. But he is now my inferior; and should he purpose to force his entrance into Tyre with us, as seems probable, he shall do so under my leadership, let his forces outnumber ours fourfold, as they appear to do.’

In a short time—sufficiently long, however, to restore Conrad's equanimity—Sir Humfroi's party had joined the forces of the Marquis; and the leaders, having courteously exchanged greetings, rode side by side, conversing on the prospects of their friends in Palestine.

‘We play a desperate game in attempting to throw ourselves into Tyre,’ resumed Conrad of Montferrat, after an interval of silent thoughtfulness. ‘Unless fortune betide us, and we pass to-night the forces of the besiegers, favored by darkness and the unexpected nature of our descent, we shall probably be cut off to a man. Even if we obtain safe entrance into the city, it is doubtful if we shall be able to hold out without provisions, or hope from Europe. Jerusalem lost—Guy de Lusignan a captive—and Sybilla at the point of death; these are not encouraging antecedents. For myself, I am a military adventurer, unshackled by the ties which bind men to life—craving the excitement of war, and ambitious of distinction in an honorable field; and, therefore, this desperate

defence of Tyre has attraction for my restless spirit. With you, Sir Humfroi de Thoron, it is otherwise; and I confess myself at a loss to understand your motive in thus attempting to enter the city. Why should you not avail yourself of the facilities accorded by Saladin to our dispersed warriors, and take shipping for Europe at Ptolemais, or some other accessible port of Syria?’

‘My conduct will seem more intelligible,’ rejoined Sir Humfroi de Thoron, ‘when I tell you that my fair wife, the Princess Isabelle, is blockaded in Tyre, I cannot forget, also, that if Sybilla dies—and of her recovery there is little hope—my Isabelle, as next daughter of King Amaury, is heiress to the throne of Jerusalem. It would be, it is true, but an empty title; but, perchance, the piety of Christendom may re-conquer at no distant date, all that has been lost in our late disastrous campaign, and then my position will be sufficiently brilliant—my destiny, and that of my family, a glorious one.’

‘The future King of Jerusalem—be he who he may—will need a bold heart, a clear hand and a strong arm,’ said Conrad moodily. Then, as if aware, that he had touched on a delicate topic, he suddenly changed his tone, exclaiming to his companion—‘See yonder! the ramparts of Tyre, gilded by the setting sun, standing out in plain relief on the distant horizon. How grand, how imposing they appear.’

It was even so. The glorious luminary just touched the bosom of the ocean, as if sinking into its furthest depths, and its trailing line of splendor played over the blue waters of the Mediterranean, as it lay, like a mirror, before the eyes of the travellers. They paused, in delighted admiration, and inhaled the fresh, pure breeze so aromatic and balmy—laden as it was with fragrance, and cooling as water to a thirsty soul. The temporary refreshment reinvigorated the weary wanderers, exhausted by their ride over the sultry plain. It was deemed necessary, too, to linger until the increasing darkness should render their projected attempt to enter Tyre somewhat less perilous.

Night at length closed in; but the pale light of innumerable stars enabled the silent band, now headed by the Marquis of Montferrat, to pursue their way without difficulty. No word was uttered; not a sound was heard, save the footfall of the horses, who seemed not less conscious than their riders that some high enterprise was before them. The evening was calm and cloudless; and the scene, when the moon arose adding her radiance to the night, realized in its peaceful serenity, the magnificent description of Hemer:

“As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night
O'er heaven's clear azure spreads her sacred light,
When not a breath disturbs the deep serene,
And not a cloud o'ercrosses the solemn scene;
Around her throne the vivid planets roll,
And stars unnumbered gild the glowing pole,
O'er the dark trass a yellow verdure shed,
And tip with silver every mountain's head;
Then shine the vales, the rocks in prospect rise,
A flood of glory bursts from all the skies.”

It was, indeed, a glorious spectacle. The wandering moon, the splendid constellations, with their many-colored starry orbs delighting the eyes of the Oriental traveller with those varied hues unknown to the inhabitants of our northern latitudes; and yet these planetary influences soothed not the perturbed spirit of Conrad of Montferrat. As he cautiously moved at the head of his troop, his mind reverted to the conversation so lately held with the Count of Champagne, and afterwards with Humfroi de Thoron; and, by degrees, the dictates of cold and cruel ambition shaped themselves into form, and he resolved on a career of personal aggrandizement, to which he was prepared to sacrifice all the better instincts, even of his aspiring nature. He foresaw that the piety or fanaticism of Western Europe would again hurl on the East her myriad of pilgrim soldiers; and that the city of the Holy Sepulchre might yet, and at no remote period, be recaptured from the Mussulman. If Tyre could only hold out against Saladin's forces until success or should arrive from Venice, or some other friendly maritime power, this great city, with its capacious harbor, would be the key to Palestine, and afford a sure port of entrance and egress, as well as a rallying-point from the Latin adventures. Conrad, if its successful defender, would eventually become its ruler; and, if his ulterior designs on the sovereignty of the Holy Land should fail, the Marquisate of Tyre itself was no mean object of ambition.

The Marquis, however, in his heartless selfishness, had more exalted views. He pondered whether he might not succeed in breaking the marriage of the Princess Isabelle and Sir Humfroi de Thoron, and uniting himself with the inheritor of the Kingdom, bear down all opposition, and securely seat himself on the re-established throne of Jerusalem. He mentally contrasted himself with his rival; and, strong in the conviction of his personal advantages—commanding intellect, physical beauty, and strength of will, compared these with the insignificant character, and mean exterior of the husband of Isabelle. He doubted not, on the retro-

spection of his former experiences, that he should prove a successful wooer, if he applied himself to the task of pleasing the lady's fancy and winning her heart.

In this dream of ambition, the Marquis of Montferrat gave not a thought to his own beautiful Syrian bride. Zaide was but the daughter of an obscure Emir. Their marriage had not transpired; from motives we are about to mention, it had been performed in secret. The Syrian lady was an orphan, and without protectors; her father perished on the battle field, and her only brother embraced a religious life, and became lost to her as a votary of the Ansarii. Rumour was rife with the name of Conrad at the time he crossed over into Asia from Constantinople. It was said that he had married a Greek lady while in the service of the Emperor. Whether, then, he feared inquiry into his antecedents, or from any other motive, it is certain only that he had conducted his courtship of the dark-eyed Zaide with so little publicity, that no report of his marriage had reached the ears of comrades in arms. He considered not what would be the feelings of his young wife, soon to be a mother, when he should break to her the intelligence of his falsehood; and yet, so far as one so ambitious was capable of the sentiment, he loved the gentle girl who had left her home to follow him in weal or wo through his hitherto uncertain fortunes. ‘I will not leave Zaide,’ he uttered to himself. ‘Should I speed in my wooing with the princess, it will then be time enough to tell her that she must consider herself only as my mistress, and that our marriage was a feigned compliance with her scruples at the time. Unprotected as she is, and submissively devoted to me, she will resign herself after a brief struggle to her inevitable destiny, and I may succeed in my ambition without foregoing my love.’

Thus ruminating Conrad found himself, after a few hours' hard riding, close to the outposts of Saladin's army. Here unexpected good fortune awaited him. Guided by a renegade from the Moslem camp, his band directed their chargers toward a spot which the besiegers had left unoccupied, and passing unchallenged through the sleeping host, gained one of the city gates, where they were joyfully welcomed by the few surviving defenders which yet remained of the enfeebled and diminished garrison of Tyre.

On the following day all was bustle and excitement within the beleaguered city. Conrad of Montferrat had assumed the conduct of the garrison, inspected its condition, allocated with judicious foresight the remaining scanty resources, repaired as if by magic, the most formidable breaches in its fortifications, and manned the walls and ramparts with the brave soldiery, ranged beneath his banner. These proved a seasonable reinforcement to the garrison of Tyre, decimated, as they had been, by famine, and the lances of their foes.

Conrad's masterly arrangements had so completely restored order and discipline within the city, and had so reanimated the hopes of its defenders, that, ere long, he deemed himself sufficiently strong to act on the offensive. Saladin had raised formidable entrenchments, behind which he hoped to shelter his army from the missiles of the Tyrians; and these the marquis of Montferrat resolved, if possible, to demolish.

As soon as his project was ripe for execution, Conrad, splendidly armed and mounted, on a noble steed, sallied forth at the city gates at the head of a small but chosen band. As he rode towards the nearest point of the enemy's outworks, resolved to try what might be achieved by discipline and enthusiastic bravery against overwhelming numbers, a strange and unwonted spectacle met his eye. He paused for a moment in extreme perplexity, and as, if uncertain how to act, awaited, with evident emotion, the approach of a herald from Saladin, who was spurring toward him, bearing a flag of truce in his hand.

But before the envoy could reach him, Conrad turned to the knight who rode by his side. ‘Count of Champagne,’ he said, earnestly addressing him, ‘should I now resign my command into your hands, will you swear by the Holy Cross, never to turn back till our mission is accomplished? Come what will we must destroy the lines of the foe. If the city is now to be saved—and our manoeuvre can hardly fail of success—it must be saved at the price of our life blood. True, our victory may be dearly purchased; by me so dearly, that I shudder to think of it.’

‘What meanest thou, Conrad?’ exclaimed the count, amazed at the agitated tones of his voice, and the sudden change which had passed over his leader's spirit.

‘Look yonder,’ said the Marquis, shuddering, ‘and see how the miscreants have unnerved me!’

He pointed to the rampart, on the summit of which was exposed an aged man, so placed that the first volley from the weapons of the assailants must inevitably tranfix him. A single discharge from the archers' bow would stain his snow-white locks with the purple current yet flowing through his veins.

‘By this hand, your father, the venerable