

Five hundred horses dashed over him—his array was broken—his companions were hewed from their saddles, 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 farthest must bring up the rescue from the Christian army, the Saracens retreated rapidly as they had advanced. All night long with unabated speed, toward their fastnesses in the ravines of their wild mountains. Arrived at their encampment, the prisoner was cast into a dungeon hewn from a living rock. Day after day Albert lay in utter darkness, unvisited only by the swart and bearded savage who brought his miserable pittance, scarcely sufficient for his wretched subsistence. Albert, a Burgundian youth of high nobility, and yet more exalted renown, had left his native land stung almost to madness by the early death of her to whom he had pledged 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, mortified worldly desires, beneath the strict rule of his order. While yet in the flush of manhood, before a single line wrinkled his lofty brow, or he had gained man's stature, he had attained a height of dignity and fame, scarcely equaled by the best and oldest warriors of the Temple. The vigor, the vast scope of his political foresight, had long rendered him a glory to his brethren, a cause of terror to the Saracen lords of the Holy Land. Many a league had been formed to overpower, many a plot hatched to inveigle him; but so invariably had he borne down all odds in open warfare before his irresistible blade, so certainly had he hurled treasons with vengeance on the heads of the schemers, that he was almost deemed the possessor of some cabalistic spell framed for the downfall and destruction of the sons of Islam.

Deep were the consultations of the infidels concerning the destiny of their formidable captive. The slaughter by his hand had been so fearful that a large majority favored his instant execution, nor could human ingenuity devise, or brute cruelty perform, more hellish methods of torture than were calmly discussed in that infernal assembly.

Late on the third day of his captivity the hinges of his dungeon gate 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 Imaum known by his high cap of lambskin, his loose black robes, his parchment cincture, figured with Arabic characters, his long dark beard that flowed unrestrained, luxuriantly.

A negro, bearing food of a better quality, and the forbidden juice of the grape, followed; his ivory teeth glistened with a ghastly whiteness in the clear lamp-light. He arranged the dainties on the rocky floor. The slave withdrew.

The priest seated himself so that the light should reveal every change of the Templar's features, while his own were veiled in deep shadow.

"Arise young Nazarene, 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 a 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 should a Templar tremble? A Christian, and he a follower of Jesus, fear to die?"

"My brother has 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 faithless 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 as the breath of his nostrils, or as the mild showers in seed time to the thirsty plant—and to perish by inches afar from his comrades, surrounded by tribes to whom the very name of his race is a by-word 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 dogs endured the waving of our pennons, or the clash of our armor? But it skills not talking—leave me, priest! I abhor thy creed, as I despise thy loathsome impostor."

"*Allah Acbar*," said the priest at length, "to God all things are possible. Would the Christian live?"

"A man 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 out of bondage and Daniel from the jaws of the lion, surely He shall deliver my soul from the power of a dog. And if he has appointed for me a 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 priest, in his slow musical notes, in strange contrast to the fiery zeal of the prisoner, "the wise man hath said—better is the cot-