POOR DOCUMENT

MC 2033

THE BRETHREN

H. Rider Haggard's Great Romance of the Crusades

Copyright by H. Rider Haggard, and Published in This Territory Exclusively by The Telegraph

CHAPTER XVII.—(Continued.)

They were gone—they were gone! Even the sound of their horses' hoofs had died away, and she was desolate as a child lost in a cityful of folk. Oh! and her heart was filled with fears for them, and most of all for one of them. If he should not come back into it, what would her life be? She bowed her head and wept; then, hearing a sound behind her, turned to see that Masouda was weeping also.

"Why do you weep?" she asked.

"The maid should copy her mistress," answered Masouda with a hard laugh; "but, lady, why do you weep? At least you are beloved, and, come what may, nothing can take that from you. You are not of less value than the good horse between the rider's knees, or the faithful dog that runs at his side."

A thought rose in Rosamund's mind—a new and terrible thought. The eyes of the two women met, and those of Rosamund asked, "Which?" Between them stood a table inlaid with ivory and pearl, whereon the dust from the street had gathered through the open lattice. Masouda leaned over, and with her finger wrote a single Arabic letter in the dust upon the table, then passed her hand across it.

Rosamund's breast heaved twice or thrice and was still. Then she asked:

"Why did not you who are free go with him?"

"Because he prayed me to bide here and watch over the lady whom he loved. So to the death—I watch."

Slowly Masouda spoke, and the heavy words seemed like blood dropping from a death wound. Then she sank forward into the arms of Rosamund.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Battle of Hattin.

Many a day had gone by since the brethern bid farewell to Rosamund at Damascus. Now, one burning July night, they sat upon their horses, the moonlight gleaming on their mail, looking out from a rocky mountain top across that grey and arid plain which stretches from near Nazareth to the lip of the hills at whose foot lie Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee. Beneath them, camped round the fountain of Seffurieh, were spread the hosts of the Franks to which they did sentinel; thirteen hundred knights, twenty thousand foot, and hordes of Turcopoles—that is, natives of the country, armed after the fashion of the Saracens.

Two miles away to the south-east glimmered the white houses of Nazareth, set in the lap of the mountains—Nazareth the holy city, where for thirty years lived and toiled the Saviour of the world. Doubtless, thought Godwin, His feet has often trod that mountain whereon they stood, and in the watered vales below His hands had sped the plow or reaped the corn. Long, long had His voice been silent, yet in Godwin's ears it still seemed to speak in the murmur of the vast camp, and to echo from the slopes of the Galilean hills, and the words it said were: "I bring not peace, but a sword."

Tomorrow they were to advance, so rumor said, across yonder desert plain and give battle to Saladin, who lay with all his power by Hattin, above Tiberias. Godwin and his brother thought that it was a madness; for they had seen the might of the Saracens and ridden across that thirsty plain beneath the summer sun. But who were they, two wandering unattended knights, that they should dare to lift up their voices against those of the lords of the land, skilled from their birth in desert warfare? Yet Godwin's heart was troubled and fear took hold of him, not for himself, but for all the countless army that lay asleep yonder, and for the cause of Christendom, which staked its last throw upon this battle.

"I go to watch yonder; bide you here," he said to Wulf, and turning the head of Flame, rode some sixty yards over a shoulder of the rock to the further edge of the mountain which looked toward the north. Here he could see neither the camp, nor Wulf, nor any living thing, but indeed was utterly alone. Dismounting, and bidding the horse stand, which it would do like a dog, he walked forward a few steps to where there was a rock, and, kneeling down, began to pray with all the strength of his pure, warrior heart.

"Oh Lord," he prayed, "Who once wast man and a dweller in these mountains, and knowest what is in man, hear me. I am afraid for all the thousands who sleep round Nazareth, not for myself, who care nothing for my life, but for all those, Thy servants and my brethren. Yes, and for the Cross upon which Thou didst hang, and for the faith itself throughout the East. Oh! give me light! Oh! let me hear and see, that I may warn them, unless my fears are vain!"

And he beat his hands against his brow, praying, ever praying, as he had never prayed before that wisdom and vision might be given to his soul.

It seemed to Godwin that a sleep fell on him—at least, his mind grew clouded and confused. Then it cleared again, slowly, as stirred water clears, till it was bright and still; yet another mind to that which was his servant day by day which never could see or hear those things he saw and heard in that strange hour. Lo! he heard the spirits pass, whispering as they went; whispering, and, as it seemed to him, weeping also for some great woe which was to be; weeping yonder over Nazareth. Then like curtains the veils were lifted from his eyes, and as they swung aside he saw further, and yet further.

He saw the king of the Franks in his tent beneath, and about him the council of his captains, among them the fierce-eyed master of the Templars, and a man whom he had seen in Jerusalem where they had been dwelling, and knew for Count Raymond of Tripoli, the lord of Tiberias. They were reasoning together, till, presently, in a rage, the Master of the Templars drew his sword and dashed it down upon the table.

Another veil was lifted, and lo! he saw the camp of Saladin, the mighty, endless camp, with its ten thousand tents, amongst which the Saracens cried to Allah through all the watches of the night. He saw the royal pavilion, and in it the Sultan walked to and fro alone—none of his emirs, not even his son, were with him. He was lost in thought, and Godwin read his thought.

It was: "Behind me the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee, into which, if my flanks were turned, I should be driven, I and all my host. In front the territories of the Franks, where I have no friend; and by Nazareth their great army. Allah alone can help me. If they sit still and force me to advance across the desert and attack them before my army melts away, then I am lost. If they advance upon me round the Mountain Tabor and by the watered land, I may be lost. But if—oh! if Allah should make them mad, and they should strike straight across the desert—then, then they are lost, and the reign of the Cross in Syria is forever at an end. I will wait here. I will wait here. . . ."

Look! near to the pavilion of Saladin stood another tent, closely guarded, and in it on a cushioned bed lay two women. One was Rosamund, and she slept sound; and the other was Masouda, and she was waking, for her eyes met his in the darkness.

The last veil was withdrawn, and now Godwin saw a sight at which his soul shivered. A fire-blackened plain, and above it a frowning mountain, and that mountain thick, thick with dead, thousands and thousands and thousands of dead, among which the hyenas wandered and the night-birds screamed. He could see their faces; many of them he knew again as those of living men whom he had met in Jerusalem and elsewhere, or had seen with the army. He could hear also the moanings of the few who were yet alive.

About that field—yes, and in the camp of Saladin, where lay more dead—his body seemed to wander searching for something, he knew not what, till it came to him that it was the corpse of Wulf for which he sought and it was not—nay, nor his own either. Then once more he heard the spirits pass—a very great company, for to them were gathered all those dead—heard them pass away, wailing, ever more faintly wailing, for the lost cause of Christ.

Godwin awoke from his dream trembling, mounted his horse, and rode back to Wulf. Beneath, as before, lay the sleeping camp, yonder stretched the brown desert, and there sat Wulf watching both.

"Tell me," asked Godwin, "how long is it since I left you?"

"Some few minutes—twenty perhaps," answered his brother.

"A short while to have seen so much," replied Godwin. Then Wulf looked at him curiously and asked:

"What have you seen?"

"If I told you, Wulf, you would not believe."

"Tell me, and I will say."

So Godwin told him all, and at the end asked him, "What think you?"

Wulf considered awhile, and answered: "Well, brother, you have touched no wine today, so you are not drunk, and you have done nothing foolish, so you are not mad. Therefore it would seem that the saints have been talking to you, or, at least, so I should think of any other man whom I believed to be as good as you are. Yet it is folk like you that see visions, and those visions are not always true, for sometimes, I believe, the devil is their showman. Our watch is ended, for I hear the horses of the knights who come to relieve us. Listen; this is my counsel. In the camp yonder is our friend with whom we traveled from Jerusalem, Egbert, the Bishop of Nazareth, who marches with the host. Let us go to him and lay this matter before him, for he is a holy man and learned; no false, self-seeking priest."

Godwin nodded in assent, and presently, when the other knights had come and they had made their report to them, they rode off together to the tent of Egbert, and, leaving their horses in charge of a servant, entered.

Egbert was an Englishman who had spent more than thirty years of his life in the East, whereof the suns had tanned his wrinkled face to the hue of bronze, that seemed the darker in contrast with his blue eyes and snow-white hair and beard. Entering the tent, they found him at his prayers before a little image of the Virgin, and stood with bowed heads until he had finished. Presently he arose, and greeting them with a blessing, asked them what they needed.

"Your counsel, holy father," answered Wulf. "Godwin, set out your tale."

So, having seen that the tent flap was closed and that none lingered near, Godwin told him his dream.

The old man listened patiently, nor did he seem surprised at this strange story, since in those days men saw—or thought that they saw—many such visions, which were accepted by the Church as true.

When he had finished Godwin asked of him as he had asked of Wulf: "What think you, holy father? Is this a dream, or is it a message? And if so, from whom comes the message?"

Godwin D'Arcy," he answered, "in my youth I knew your father. It was I who shrove him when he lay dying of his wounds, and a nobler soul never passed from earth to heaven. After you had left Damascus, when you were the guest of Saladin, we dwelt together in the same lodging in Jerusalem, and together we travelled here, during all which time I learned to know you also as the worthy son of a worthy sire—no dissolute knight, but a true servant of the Church. It well may be that to such a one as you foresight has been given, that through you those who rule us may be warned, and all Christendom saved from great sorrow and disgrace. Come; let us go to the king and tell this story, for he still sits in council yonder."

So they went out together and rode to the royal tent. Here the bishop was admitted, leaving them without. Presently he returned and beckoned to them, and as they passed the guards whispered to them:

"A strange council, sirs, and a fateful!"

Already it was near midnight, but still the great pavilion was crowded with barrons and chief captains who stood in groups, or sat round a narrow table made of boards placed upon trestles. At the head of the table sat the king, Guy of Lusignan, a weak-faced man, clad in splendid armor. On his right was the white-haired Count Raymond of Tripoli, and on his left the black-bearded, frowning master of the Templars, clad in his white mantle on the left breast of which the red cross was blazoned. Words had been running high, their faces showed it, but just then a silence reigned as though the disputants were weary, and the king leaned back in his chair, passing his hand to and fro across his forehead. He looked up, and seeing the bishop, asked peevishly:

"What is it now? Oh! I remember, some tale from those tall twin knights. Well, bring them forward and speak it out, for we have no time to lose."

So the three of them came forward and at Godwin's prayer the bishop Egbert told of the vision that had come to him not more than an hour ago while he kept watch upon the mountain top. At first one or two of the barons seemed disposed to laugh, but when they looked at Godwin's high and spiritual face, their laughter died away, for it did not seem wonderful to them that such a man should see visions. Indeed, as the tale of the rocky hill and the dead who were stretched upon it went on, they grew white with fear, and whitest of them all was the king, Guy of Lusignan.

"Is all this true, Sir Godwin?" he asked, when tne bishop had finished.

"It is true, my lord king," answered Godwin

"His word is not enough," broke in the Master of the Templars. "Let him swear to it on the Holy Rood, knowing that if he lies it will blast his soul to all eternity." And the council muttered, "Aye, let him swear."

Now there was an annexe to the tent, rudely furnished as a chapel, and at the end of this annexe, a tall, veiled object. Rufinus the bishop of Acre, who was clad in the armor of a knight, went to the object, and drawing the veil, revealed a broken, blackened cross, set around with jewels, that stood about the height of a man above the ground, for all its lower part was gone.

At the sight of it Godwin and every man present there fell upon his knees, for since St. Helena found it, over seven centuries before, this had been accounted the most precious relic in all Christendom; the very wood upon which the Saviour suffered, as, indeed, it may have been. Millions had worshipped it, tens of thousands had died for it, and now, in the hour of this great struggle between Christ and the false prophet, it was brought from its shrine, that the host which escorted it might prove invincible in battle. Soldiers who fought around the very Cross could not be defeated, they said, for, if need were, legions of angels would come to aid them.

Godwin and Wulf stared at the relic with wonder, fear, and adoration. There were the nail marks, there was the place where the scroll of Pilate had been affixed above the holy head—almost could they seem to see that Form divine, and dying.

"Now," broke in the voice of the Master of the Templars, "let Sir Godwin D'Arcy swear to the truth of his tale upon this Rood."

Rising from his knees Godwin advanced to the Cross, and laying his hand upon the wood, said:

"Upon the very Rood I swear that not much more than an hour ago I saw the vision that has been told to the king's highness and to all; that I believe this vision was sent to me in answer to my prayer to preserve our host and the holy City from the power of the Saracen, and that it is a true foreshadowing of what will come about should we advance upon the Sultan. I can say no more. I swear, knowing that if I lie eternal damnation is my doom."

The bishop drew back the covering over the Cross, and in silence the council took their seats again about the table. Now the king was very pale, and fearful; indeed a gloom lay upon all of them.

"It would seem," he said, "that here a messenger has been sent to us from heaven. Dare we disobey his message?"

The Grand Templar lifted his rugged, frowning face.

"A messenger from heaven, said you, king? To me he seems more like a messenger from Saladin. Tell us, Sir Godwin, were not you and your brother once the Sultan's guests at Damascus?"

"That is so, my lord Templar. We left before the war was declared."

"And," went on the Master, "were you not officers of the Sultan's bodyguard?"

Now all looked intently at Godwin, who hesitated a little, foreseeing how his answer would be read, whereon Wulf spoke in his loud voice:

"Aye, we acted as such for awhile, and—doubtless you have heard the story—saved Saladin's life when he was attacked by the Assassins."

"Oh!" said the Templar with bitter sarcasm, "you saved Saladin's life, did you? I can well believe it. You, being Christians, who above everything should desire the death of Saladin, saved his life! Now, Sir Knights, answer me one more question——"

"Sir Templar, with my tongue or with my sword?" broke in Wulf, but the king held up his hand and bade him be silent.

"A truce to your tavern ruffling, young sir, and answer," went on the Templar. "Or, rather, do you answer, Sir Godwin. Is your cousin, Rosamund, the daughter of Sir Andrew D'Arcy, a niece of Saladin, and has she been created by him princess of Baalbec, and is she at this moment in his city of Damascus?"

"She is his niece," answered Godwin quietly; "she is the princess of Baalbec, but at this moment she is not in Damascus."

"How do you know that," Sir Godwin?"

"I know it because in the vision of which you have been told I saw her sleeping in a tent in the camp of Saladin."

Now the council began to laugh, but Godwin, with a set, white face, went on:

"Aye, my lord Templar, and near that very blazoned tent I saw scores of the Templars and of the Hospitallers lying dead. Remember it when the hour comes and you see them also."

Now the laughter died away, and a murmur of fear ran round the board, mixed with such words as "Wizardry." "He has learnt it from the Paynims." "A black sorcerer, without doubt."

Only the Templar, who feared neither man nor spirit, laughed, and gave him the lie with his eyes.

"You do not believe me," said Godwin, "nor will you believe me when I say that while I was on guard on yonder hill-top I saw you wrangling with the Count of Tripoli—aye, and draw your sword and dash it down in front of him upon this very table."

Now again the council stared and muttered, for they too had seen this thing; but the Master answered:

"He may have learnt it otherwise than from an angel. Folk have been in and out of this tent. My lord king, have we more time to waste upon these visions of a knight of whom all we know for certain is, that like his brother, he has been in the service of Saladin, which they left, he says, in order to fight against him in this war. It may be so; it is not for us to judge; though were the times different I would inform against Sir Godwin D'Arcy as a sorcerer, and one who has been in traiterous communication with our common foe."

"And I would thrust the lie down your throat with my sword's point!" shouted Wulf.

But Godwin only shrugged his shoulders and said nothing, and the Master went on, taking no heed.

"King, we wait your word, and it must be spoken soon, for in four hours it will be dawn. Do we march against Saladin like bold, Christian men, or do we bide here like cowards?"

Then Count Raymond of Tripoli rose, and said:

"Before you answer, king, hear me, if it be for the last time, who am old in war and know the Saracens. My town of Tiberias is sacked; my vassels have been put to the sword by thousands; my wife is imprisoned in her citadel, and soon must yield, if she be not rescued. Yet I say to you, and to the barons here assembled, better so than that you should advance across the desert to attack Saladin. Leave Tiberias to its fate and my wife with it, and save your army, which is the last hope of the Christians of the East. Christ has no more soldiers in these lands, Jerusalem has no other shield. The army of the Sultan is larger than yours; his cavalry are more skilled. Turn his flank—or, better still, bide here and wait his attack, and victory will be to the soldiers of the Cross. Advance and the vision of that knight at whom you scoff will come true, and the cause of Christendom be lost in Syria. I have spoken, and for the last time."

"Like his friend the Knight of Visions," sneered the Grand Master, "the Count Raymond is an old ally of Saladin. Will you take such coward council? On—on! and smite these heathen dogs, or be for ever shamed. On, in the name of the Cross! The Cross is with us!"

"Aye," answered Raymond, "for the last time."

Then there arose a tumult through which every man shouted to his fellow, some saying one thing and some another, while the king sat at the head of the board, his face hidden in his hands. Presently he lifted it, and said:

"I command that we march at dawn. If the Count Raymond and these brethern think the words unwise, let them leave us and remain here under guard until the issue be known."

Now followed a great silence, for all there knew that the words were fateful, in the midst of which Count Raymond said:

"Nay, I go with you," while Godwin echoed, "And we go also to show whether or not we are the spies of Saladin."

Of these speeches none of them seemed to take heed, for all were lost in their own thoughts. One by one they rose, bowed to the king, and left the tent to give their commands and rest awhile, before it was time to ride. Godwin and Wulf went also, and with them the bishop of Nazareth, who wrung his hands and seemed ill at ease. But Wulf comforted him, saying:

"Grieve no more, father; let us think of the joy of battle, not of the sorrow by which it may be followed."

"I find no joy in battles," answered the holy Egbert.

When they had slept awhile, Godwin and Wulf rose and fed their horses. After they had washed and groomed them, they tested and did on their armor, then took them down to the spring to drink their fill, as their masters did. Also Wulf, who was cunning in war, brought with him four large wineskins which he had provided against this hour, and filling them with pure water, fastened two of them with throngs behind the saddle of Godwin and two behind his own. Further he filled the water-bottles at their saddle-bows, saying:

"At least we will be among the last to die of thirst."

Then they went back and watched the host break its camp, which it did with no light heart, for many of them knew of the danger in which they stood; moreover, the tale of Godwin's vision had been spread abroad. Not knowing where to go, they and Egbert, the Bishop of Nazareth—who was unarmed and rode upon a mule, for stay behind he would not—joined themselves to the great body of knights who followed the king. As they did so, the Templars, five hundred strong, came up, a fierce and gallant band, and the Master, who was at their head, saw the brethern and called out, pointing to the wineskins which were hung behind their saddles:

"What do these water-carriers here among brave knights who trust in God alone?"

Wulf would have answered, but Godwin bade him be silent, saying:

"Fall back; we will find less ill-omened company."

So they stood on one side and bowed themselves as the Cross went by, guarded by the mailed Bishop of Acre. Then came Reginald of Chatillon, Saladin's enemy, the cause of all this woe, who saw them and cried:

"Sir Knights, whatever they may say, I know you for brave men, for I have heard the tale of your doings among the Assassins. There is room for you among my suite—follow me."

"As well him as another," said Godwin. "Let us go where we are led." So they followed him.

By the time that the army reached Kenna, where once the water was made wine, the July sun was already hot, and the spring was so soon drunk dry that many men could get no water. On they pushed into the desert lands below, which lay between them and Tiberias, and were bordered on the right and left by hills. Now clouds of dust were seen moving across the plains, and in the heart of them bodies of Saracen horsemen, which continually attacked the vanguard under Count Raymond, and as continuallly retreated before they could be crushed, slaying many with their spears and arrows. Also these came round behind them, and charged the rearguard, where marched the Templars and the light-armed troops named Turcopoles, and the band of Reginald Chatillon, with which rode the brethern.

From noon till near sundown the long harassed line, broken now into fragments, struggled forward across the rough, stony plain, the burning heat beating upon their armor till the air danced about it as it does before a fire. Towards evening men and horses became exhausted, and the soldiers cried to their captains to lead them to water. But in that place there was no water.

The rearguard fell behind, worn out with constant attacks that must be repelled in the burning heat, so that there was a great gap between it and the king who marched in the centre. Messages reached them to push on, but they could not, and at length camp was pitched in the desert near a place called Marescalcia, and upon this camp Raymond and his vanguard were forced back. As Godwin and Wulf rode up, they saw him come in bringing his wounded with him, and heard him pray the king to push on and at all hazards to cut his way through to the lake, where they might drink—aye, and heard the king say that he could not, since the soldiers would march no more that day. Then Raymond wrung his hands in despair and rode back to his men, crying aloud:

Alas! alas! Oh! Lord God, alas! We are dead, and Thy Kingdom is lost."

That night none slept, for all were athirst, and who can sleep with a burning throat? Now also Godwin and Wulf were no longer laughed at because of the water-skins they carried on their horses. Rather did great nobles come to them, and almost on their knees crave for the boon of a single cup. Having watered their horses sparingly from a bowl, they gave what they could, till at length only two skins remained, and one of these was split by a thief, who crept up and slashed it with his knife that he might drink while the water ran to waste. After this the brethern drew swords and watched, swearing that they would kill any man who so much as touched the skin which was left.

All that long night through there arose a confused clamour from the camp, of which the burden seemed to be, "Water! Give us water!" while from without came the shouts of the Saracens calling upon Allah. Here, too, the hot summer drought, and to this the Saracens set fire so that the smoke rolled down on the Christian host and choked them, and the place became a hell.

Day dawned at last, and the army was formed up in order of battle, its two wings being thrown forward. Thus they struggled on, those of them that were not too weak to stir, who were slaughtered as they lay. Nor as yet did the Saracens attack them, since they knew that the sun was stronger than all their spears. On they labored towards the northern wells, till about mid-day the battle began with a flight of arrows so thick that for awhile they hid the heavens.

After this came charge and countercharge, attack and repulse, and always above the noise of war that dreadful cry for water. What chanced Godwin and Wulf never knew, for the smoke and dust blinded them so that they could see but a little way. At length there was a last furious charge, and the knights with whom they were clove the dense mass of Saracens like a serpent of steel, leaving a broad trail of dead behind them. When they pulled rein and wiped the sweat from their eyes it was to find themselves with thousands of others upon the top of a steep hill, of which the sides were thick with dry grass and bush that already was being fired.

"The Rood! The Rood! Rally round the Rood!" said a voice, and looking behind them they saw the black and jewelled fragment of the true Cross set upon a rock, and by it the Bishop of Acre. Then the smoke of the burning grass rose up and hid it from their sight.

Now began one of the most hideous fighters that is told of in the history of the world. Again and again the Saracens attacked in thousands, and again and again they were driven back by the desperate valour of the Franks, who fought on, their jaws agape with thirst. A black-bearded man stumbled up to the brethern, his tongue protruding from his lips, and they knew him for the Master of the Templars.

"For the love of Christ, give me to drink," he said, recognizing them as the knights at whom he had mocked as water carriers.

They gave him of the little they had left, and while they and their horses drank the rest themselves, saw him rush down the hill refreshed, shaking his red sword. Then came a pause, and they heard the voice of the Bishop of Nazareth who had clung to them all this while, saying, as though to himself:

"And here it was that the Saviour preached the sermon on the mount. Yes, He preached the words of peace upon this very spot. Oh! it cannot be that He will desert us—it cannot be."

While the Saracens held off, the soldiers began to put up the king's pavilion, and with it other tents, around the rock on which stood the Cross.

"Do you mean to camp here?" asked Wulf bitterly.

"Peace," answered Godwin; "they hope to make a wall about the Rood. But it is of no avail, for this is the place of my dream."

Wulf shrugged his shoulders.

"At least, let us die well," he said.

Then the last attack began. Up the hillside rose dense volumes of smoke, and with the smoke came the Saracens. Thrise they were driven back; thrice they came on. At the fourth onset few of the Franks could fight more, for thirst had conquered them on this waterless hill of Hattin. They lay down upon the dry grass with gaping jaws and protruding tongues, and let themselves be slain or taken prisoners. A great company of Saracen horsemen broke through the ring and rushed at the scarlet tent. It rocked to and fro, then down it fell in a red heap, entangling the king in its folds.

At the foot of the Cross, Rufinus, the Bishop of Acre, still fought on bravely. Suddenly an arrow struck him in the throat, and throwing his arms wide, he fell to earth. Then the Saracens hurled themselves upon the Rood, tore it from its place, and with mockery and spittings bore it down the hill towards their camp, as ants may be seen carrying a little stick into their nest, while all who were left alive of the Christian army stared upwards, as though they awaited some miracle from Heaven. But no angels appeared in the brazen sky, and knowing that God had deserted them, they groaned aloud in their shame and wretchedness.

"Come," said Godwin to Wulf in a strange, quiet voice. "We have seen enough. It is time to die. Look! yonder below us are the Mamelukes, our old regiment, and amongst them Saladin, for I see his banner. Having had water, we and our horses are still fresh and strong. Now, let us make an end of which they will tell in Essex yonder. Charge for the flag of Saladin!"

Wulf nodded, and side by side they sped down the hill. Scimitars flashed at them, arrows struck upon their mail, and the shields blazoned with the Death's-head D'Arcy crest. Through it all they went unscathed, and while the army of the Saracens stared, at the foot of the Horn of Hatin turned their horses' heads straight for the royal standard of Saladin. On they struggled, felling or riding down a foe at every stride. On, still on, although Flame and Smoke bled from a score of wounds.

They were among the Mamelukes, where their line was thin; by Heaven! they were through them, and riding straight at the well-known figure of the Sultan, mounted on his white horse with his young son and his emir, the prince Hassan, at his side.

"Saladin for you, Hassan for me," shouted Wulf.

Then they met, and all the host of Islam cried out in dismay as they saw the Commander of the Faithful and his horse borne to the earth before the last despairing charge of these mad Christian knights. Another instant, and the Sultan was on his feet again, and a score of scimitars were striking at Godwin. His horse, Flame, sank down dying, but he sprang from the saddle, swinging his long sword. Now Saladin recognized the crest upon his bucker, and cried out:

"Yield you, Sir Godwin! You have done well—yield you!"

But Godwin, who would not yield, answered:

"When I am dead—not before."

Thereupon Saladin spoke a word, and while certain of the Mamelukes engaged Godwin in front, keeping out of reach of that red and terrible sword, others crept up behind, and springing on him, seized his arms and dragged him to the ground, where they bound him fast.

Meanwhile Wulf had fared otherwise, for it was his horse Smoke, already stabbed in the vitals, that fell as he plunged on Prince Hassan. Yet he also arose but little hurt, and cried out:

"Thus, Hassan, old foe and friend, we meet at last in war. Come, pay the debt you owe me for that drugged wine, man to man and sword to sword."

"Indeed, it is your due," said Wulf," answered the prince, laughing. "Guards, touch not this brave knight who has dared so much to reach me. Sultan, I ask a boon of you, between Sir Wulf and me there is an ancient quarrel that can only be washed away in blood. Let it be decided here and now, and let this be your decree—that if I fall in fair fight, none shall set upon my conqueror, and no vengeance shall be taken for my blood."

"Good," said Saladin. "Then Sir Wulf shall be my prisoner and no more, and his brother is already. I owe it to the men who saved my life when we were friends. Give the Frank drink that the fight may be fair."

So they gave Wulf a cup of which he drank, and when he had done it was handed to Godwin. For even the Mamelukes knew and loved these brethren who had been their officers, and praised the fierce charge that they had dared to make alone.

Hassan sprang to the ground saying:

"Your horse is dead, Sir Wulf, so we must fight a foot."

"Generous as ever," laughed Wulf. "Even the poisoned wine was a gift!"

"If so, for the last time, I fear me," answered Hassan with a smile.

Then they faced each other, and oh! the scene was strange. Up on the slopes of Hattin the fight still raged. There amidst the smoke and fires of the burning grass little companies of soldiers stood back to back while the Saracens wheeled round them, thrusting and cutting at them till they fell. Here and there knights charged singly or in groups, and so came to death and capture. Upon the plain hundreds of foot soldiers were being slaughtered, while their officers were taken prisoners. Towards the camp of Saladin a company advanced with sounds of triumph, carrying aloft a black stump which was the holy Rood, while others drove or led mobs of prisoners, among them the king and his chosen knights.

The wilderness was red with blood, the air rent with shouts of victory and cries of agony and despair. And there, in the midst of it all, ringed round with grave, courteous Saracens, stood the emir, clad above his mail in his white robe and jewelled turban, facing the great Christian knight, with harness hacked and reddened, the light of battle shinging in his fierce eyes, and a smile upon his stained features.

For those who watched, the battle was forgotten—or, rather, its interest was centred on this point.

"It will be a good fight," said one of them to Godwin whom they had suffered to rise, "for though your brother is the younger and the braver man, he is hurt and weary, whereas the emir is fresh and unwounded. Ah! they are at it!".

Hassan had struck the first and the blow went home. Falling upon the point of Wulf's steel helm, the heavy, razor-edged scimitar glanced from it and shore away the links from the flap which hung upon his shoulder, causing the Frank to stagger. Again he struck, this time upon the shield, and so heavily that Wulf came to his knees.

"Your brother is sped," said the Saracen captain to Godwin, but Godwin only answered:

"Wait."

As he spoke Wulf twisted his body out of reach of a third blow, and while Hassan staggered forward with the weight of the missed stroke, placed his hand upon the ground, and springing to his feet, ran backwards six or eight paces.

"He flies!" cried the Saracens; but again Godwin said, "Wait." Nor was there long to wait.

For now, throwing aside his buckler and grasping the great sword in both his hands, with a shout of "A D'Arcy! A D'Arcy!" Wulf leapt at Hassan as a wounded lion leaps. The sword wheeled and fell, and lo! the shield of the Saracen was severed in two. Again it fell, and his helm was cloven. A third time, and the right shoulder and arm with the scimitar that grasped it seemed to spring from his body, and Hassan sank dying to the ground.

Wulf stood and looked at him, while a murmur of grief went up from those who watched, for they loved this emir. Hassan beckoned to Wulf with his left hand, and throwing down his sword to show that he feared no treachery, he came to him and knelt beside him.

"A good stroke," Hassan said faintly, "that could shear the double links of Damascus steel as though it were silk. Well as I told you long ago I knew that the hour of our meeting in war would be an ill hour for me and my debt is paid. Farewell brave knight. Would that I could hope that we should meet in Paradise! Take that star-jewel the badge of my House, from my turban and wear it in memory of me. Long long and happy be your days.

Then while Wulf held him in his arms, Saladin came up and spoke to him, till he fell back and was dead.

Thus died Hassan, and thus ended the battle of Hattin, which broke the power of the Christians in the East.

CHAPTER XIX.

Before the Walls of Ascalon.

When Hassan was dead, at a sign from Saladin, a captain of the Mamelukes named Abdullah unfastened the jewel from the emir's turban and handed it to Wulf. It was a glorious star-shaped thing, made of great emeralds set round with diamonds, and the captain Abdullah, who like all Easterns loved such ornaments, looked at it greedily, and muttered.

"Alas! that an unbeliever should wear the enchanted star, the ancient Luck of the house of Hassan!" a saying that Wulf remembered.

He took the jewel, then turned to Saladin and said, pointing to the dead body of Hassan:

"Have I your peace, Sultan, after such a deed?"

"Did I not give you and your brother to drink?" asked Saladin with meaning. "Whoever dies, you are safe. There is but one sin which I will not pardon you—you know what it is," and he looked at them. "As for Hassan, he was my beloved friend and servant, but you slew him in fair fight, and his soul is now in Paradise. "None in my army will raise a blood fued against you on that score."

Then dismissing the matter with a wave of his hand, he turned to receive a great body of Christian prisoners that, panting and stumbling like overdriven sheep, were being thrust on towards the camp with curses, blows, and mockery by the victorious Saracens.

Among them the brethren rejoiced to see Egbert, the gentle and holy Bishop of Nazareth, whom they had thought dead. Also, wounded in many places, his hacked harness hanging about him like a beggar's rags, there was the black-browed Master of the Templars, who even now could be fierce and insolent.

"So I was right," he mocked in a husky voice, "and here you are, safe with your friends the Saracens, Sir Knights of the visions and the water-skins—"

"From which you were glad enough to drink just now," said Godwin. "Also," he added sadly, "all the vision is not done." And turning, he looked towards a blazoned tent which, with the Sultan's great pavilion, and not far behind it, was being pitched by the Arab camp-setters. The Master saw and remembered Godwin's vision of the dead Templars.

"Is it there that you mean to murder me, traitor and wizard?" he asked.

Then rage took hold of Godwin and he answered him:

"Were it not for your plight, here and now I would thrust those words down your throat, as, should we both live, I yet shall hope to do. You call us traitors. Is it the work of traitors to have charged alone through all this host until our horses died beneath us?"—he pointed to where Smoke and Flame lay with glazing eyes—"to have unhoarsed Saladin and to have slain this prince in single combat?" and he turned to the body of the emir Hassan, which the servants were carrying away.

"You speak to me as wizard and murderer," he went on, "because some angel brought me a vision which, had you believed it, Templar, would have saved tens of thousands from a bloody death, the Christian kingdom from destruction, and yonder holy thing from mockery," and with a shudder he glared at the Rood which its captons had set upon a rock not far away with a dead knight tied to its black arms. You, Sir Templar, are the murderer who by your madness and ambition have brought ruin on the cause of Christ, as was foretold by the Count Raymond."

"That other traitor who also has escaped," snarled the Master.

Then Saracen guards dragged him away, and they were parted.

By now the pavilion was up and Saladin entered it, saying:

"Bring before me the king of the Franks and prince Arnat, he who is called Reginald of Chatillon."

Then a thought struck him, and he called to Godwin and Wulf, saying:

"Sir, Knights, you know our tongue; give up your swords to the officer—they shall be returned to you—and come, be my interpreters."

So the brethren followed him into the tent, where presently were brought the wretched king and the grey-haired Reginald de Chatillon, and with them a few other great knights, who, even in the midst of their misery, stared at Godwin and Wulf in wonderment. Saladin read the look, and lest their prezence should be misunderstood, said:

"King and nobles, be not mistaken. These knights are my prisoners, as you are, and none have shown themselves braver today, or done me and mine more damage.

"Indeed, had it not been for my guards, within the hour I should have fallen beneath the sword of Sir Godwin. But as they know Arabic, I have asked them to render my words into your tongue. Do you accept them as interpreters? If not, others must be found."

When they had translated this, the king said that he accepted them, adding to Godwin:

"Would that I had also accepted you two nights gone as an interpreter of the will of Heaven!"

The Sultan bade his captains be seated, and seeing their terrible thirst, commanded slaves to bring a great bowl of sherbet made of rose-water cooled with snow, and with his own hand gave it to king Guy. He drank in great gulps, then passed the bowl to Reginald de Chatillon, whereon Saladin cried out to Godwin:

"Say to the king it is he and not I who gives this man to drink. There is no bond of salt between me and the prince Arnat."

Godwin translated, sorrowfully enough, and Reginald, who knew the habits of the Saracens, answered:

"No need to explain, Sir Knight, those words are my death-warrant. Well, I never expected less."

Then Saladin spoke again.

"Prince Arnat, you strove to take the holy city of Mecca and to desecrate the tomb of the Prophet, and then I swore to kill you. Again, when in a time of peace a caravan came from Egypt and passed by Ech-Shobek, where you were, forgetting your oath, you fell upon them and slew them. They asked for mercy in the name of Allah, saying that there was truce between Saracen and Frank. But you mocked them, telling them to seek aid from Mahomet, in whom they trusted. Then for the second time I swore to kill you. Yet I give you one more chance. Will you subscribe the Koran and embrace the faith of Islam. Or will you die?"

Now the lips of Reginald turned pale, and for a moment he swayed upon his seat. Then his courage came back to him, and he answered in a strong voice:

"Sultan, I will have none of your mercy at such a price, nor do I bow the knee to your dog of a false prophet, who perish in the faith of Christ, and, being weary of the world, am content to go to Him."

Saladin sprang to his feet, his very beard bristling with wrath, and drawing his sabre, shouted aloud:

"You scorn Mohamet! Behold! I avenge Mahomet upon you! Take him away!" Then he struck him with the flat of his scimitar.

Then Mamelukes leapt upon the prince. Dragging him to the entrance of the tent, they forced him to his knees and there beheaded him in sight of the soldiers and of the other prisoners.

Thus, bravely enough, died Reginald de Chatillon, whom the Saracens called prince Arnat. In the hush that followed the terrible deed king Guy said to Godwin:

"Ask the Sultan if it is my turn nex

"Nay," answered Saladin; "kings not kill kings, but that truce-breaker met with no more than his deserts."

Then came a scene still more dre Saladin went to the door of his ten standing over the body of Reginald them parade the captive Templa Hospitallers before him. They brought to the number of over t dred, for it was easy to distingui by the red and white crosses breasts.

(To be continued.)