

"THE SIRE DE CREQUY."

When at the voice of St. Bernard, in 1147 King Louis took the cross, none of his gallant gentlemen refused to follow him. All the young nobles, crowded with their vassals to the standard and an army of twenty four thousand men was soon in motion for the Holy Land.

Among the brave crusaders vowed "to defend the Sepulchre of Christ" the Sire de Crequy was remarkable for the nobleness of his origin, his illustrious name, and his excellent personal qualities. His father, Gerard, Count of Jernay, an old crusader-comrade of Godfrey of Bouillon was still alive, and was filled with joy by the sacred purpose of his son. But his young wife, then about to give birth to her first child, was deeply affected at her husband's resolution and opposed its fulfilment strenuously. The Baron, did all he could to induce her to consent, and the aged Count then spoke to her.

"I also, my daughter, have crossed the Sea; I went without my father's knowledge, and against the sad entreaties of my mother; but both were repaid when I came back with honors. Certainly, dear lady, your baron cannot let his king go forth to battle for the faith and not accompany him. He is thirty years old, and that is the age of great action for gentlemen. Should he remain at home, he will gain only shame, and contempt." At last, the pious lady yielded to the claims of honor, and duty and agreed to let her lord depart. So he went, taking with him Roger and Godfrey, the bravest of his three brothers, and thirty mounted followers.

But the lady wept bitterly, when the hour for departing came, and Baron Raoul strove to comfort her by vows of loyal constancy. He took from her finger, their bridal ring, broke it in two, and gave to her one half, keeping the other. "The half of this ring," he said, "which was blessed for our union, I will keep, as a loyal and faithful husband should, and will bring it back to you when my pilgrimage is over, as a proof of my faith."

He then led her to his father, whom he besought to watch over and guard her. Then kneeling as reverent children did in those days, he begged the old man's blessing.

"O Lord omnipotent," prayed the aged Count, "bless thou, my son, in this war, which he is undertaking in Thy name. Be Thou his star, O gentlest Virgin Mary, Our Lady and Our Queen! Protect him in all peril and bring him back spotless and irreproachable to his home."

Then the Count blessed and embraced his younger sons and their followers, and they, after commending themselves to Our Lady of Victories, sprang upon their chargers and set forth.

Time passed, and the army of the Crusaders had commenced their duties in Palestine. Crequy had heard before leaving the coasts of Europe, that a son, and heir, had been born to him, and the news put double vigor into his arm, double wisdom into his counsels, for he had honor to win for his boy also now.

But good will, wise counsel and strong arm, cannot always keep the soldier safely; and the day of Raoul's trial was at hand. In a great battle, he bore the Christian banner, and in his ardor pressed into the very thick of the Saracen hosts, followed only by a hundred lances.

The archers proved his ruin, he was surrounded by multitudes of Paynims, his little band was cut to pieces; his brothers fell at his side, he himself was pierced with wounds. At last, when but seven of his followers were left, an arrow pierced his gorget, and he fell from loss of blood. The seven survivors turned, cut their way through the Saracens, and bore the news of the

defeat, and of de Crequy's fall to the Christian camp.

Meanwhile, far off in France the boy was growing fast, the Count was drawing nearer to the tomb, and the lady of Crequy was praying and waiting for her crusader.

When the Saracens came to plunder the bodies of the fallen Christians, they saw that the Sire de Crequy was still alive.

"This one is not dead," cried the archer who was searching the Baron, "let us not finish him. He was the leader of the troop, his ransom will make us rich."

So they wrapped him in a cloak, and carried him to their camp, where his wounds were carefully dressed. The struggle for life and death was long, for the Scimitars of the Paynim had bitten deeply. But life won the prize, and the Sire de Crequy recovered. But he recovered to find himself a slave.

The beautiful spirit of courtesy and gentleness characteristic of the middle ages, and which grew out of love for, and reverential devotion to Our Blessed Lady. Those fair flowers, which sprang up naturally in the soil cultivated for Mary the Mystical Rose, for Mary the Lily of Israel, for Mary, God's violet on earth. God's amaranth in heaven—this spirit and those characteristics, had to some degree influenced the Saracens in their long wars with the Christians. It had influenced the Chiefs to whom the Sire de Crequy, had been assigned as his share of the booty.

So when that gentleman begged for permission to keep, a little sack which he had worn round his neck, and which contained a reliquary and the half of his bridal ring, the master accorded the favor. Raoul was told that he was a slave, and must perform the labors of a slave until he could obtain his ransom, two hundred gold besants. A messenger was sent to the Christians, but he unfortunately joined a party of his armed countrymen, who were soon after surprised by a troop of crusaders and cut to pieces, and following this, the success of the Christian Knights struck terror into the hearts of many of the Saracens, and they fled into the interior. One of the first to flee, with his slaves and his family, was the master of the Baron de Crequy. From that moment the release of the Christian captive appeared hopeless. He wrote many a letter but none ever reached either the Christian camp, or Europe.

Meanwhile those who had returned to France carried the news of the disastrous battle and of Sire de Crequy's death. The poor wife was prostrated by the sudden and sad intelligence, and would have died but for her child. The old Count, however sunk beneath the blow. He never smiled again, but soon afterwards departed, in hope to meet his sons in heaven. Deprived thus of her protectors the widow suffered keenly. The youngest brother, Baldwin, who had, it will be remembered, remained at home began to plot against her to defraud his nephew, and so win the broad lands of Crequy for himself. The lady's father was a powerful lord, but he lived far off in Brittany, and could not conveniently give her the aid and consolation of his presence. Therefore he urged her to contract a second marriage with a neighboring Seigneur de Rentig; but she preferred to live alone with her memory, and with hope.

So the long years passed on wearily, mournfully, to the lady of Castle Crequy, and to the captive Knight, her lord. He, in his shepherd's services on the Syrian hills, passed seven sad years of bondage; never forgetting when alone amid his flocks to pray to God, and to our Lady, earnestly for relief, yet saying with sweet resignation, "Fiat Voluntas tua."

Then his kind master died, and all his slaves were sold. Two things occurred to set a high price upon the Sire de Crequy, his lofty stature and athletic form, and the hope of a large ransom. He was bought however by a bigoted Saracen who hated the Christians, and who commenced from the first to treat the crusader cruelly.

"You see yourself abandoned by your nation," he would say. Deny then your God, invoke our prophet, and I will give you an estate, money, and a wife. But the good gentleman would rather far have died than deny his God, or forsake the wife whom God had given him. In the hope of breaking his spirit, his master loaded him with chains, imprisoned him, tortured him. There was no roof to the tower in which he was confined, and the hot beams of the torrid Syrian sun poured into it, and made of it a furnace. Gyves clasped his wrists and ankles, a rusted chain attached him to the wall, a little black bread, and flat sun heated water formed all his nourishment. Day by day his master came and called on him to deny his faith, and on his refusal, which continued steadfast had him beaten with rods until he fainted. At last when three years had been thus spent, making in all ten of captivity, the Saracen hopeless of his perversion, informed him one night, that on the morrow he would be strangled.

Raoul shed tears for his wife, and his boy whom he had never seen, and then turned his thoughts towards Heaven.

"Oh! Mary my blessed Lady" so he prayed, "do thou pray for my soul unto our Father! Never more shall I embrace my wife; never behold my son; do thou protect and bless them, gentlest of mothers! To Thee I commend their future and my soul."

Overcome with watching sorrow and weariness, he sank down upon the stone floor of the dungeon and slept deeply.

He dreamed, and in his dream he saw a sweet and gentle face bending above him, he had seen those features sculptured in marble in the chapel of Crequy. A lady surrounded by a halo of light stood beside him. She touched the fetters, and they fell from his limbs. Scarcely believing what he saw he attempted to move, and found that he could do so with freedom. He arose and walked.

The sun shone brilliantly upon him, but did not burn him as it had done. He looked round him and discovered that he was in the middle of a wood. He recognized that he was awake and free and falling upon his knees he heartily thanked God and our Lady. The birds sang above him in the trees, flowers of long unfamiliar grew at his feet. Seeing a wood-cutter at his work, the knight approached him, but he seeing a tall half naked figure scamed with scars, blistered and tanned by the sun, his head shaved, and his chin and throat covered with a bushy beard took the good Christian for a spectre and fled.

The Baron, however, gave chase, and soon overtaking him addressed him in the peasant dialect of the Moors. To this the poor fellow tremblingly replied in French that he did not understand.

Amazed at the sound, the Sire de Crequy cried out, "good friend, if indeed you are a reality tell me if I dream; relieve my pain. Tell me where I am, for I am an utter stranger in this country. Where am I?" "This," said the wood-cutter, "is the forest of Crequy. It is on the Flemish border. But you are doubtless a shipwrecked Mariner?"

But the Baron had thrown himself upon the earth, and extended his arms in the form of a cross.

"O! God, most mighty and most merciful." So he prayed. "O! most Holy Mary, our Lady and our help, our Queen and Mother, accept my

thanks for this miracle of my deliverance." Then rising, he asked "if the old lord Gerard were still alive; if the lady and the youthful heir of Crequy were well."

But the woodcutter said: "What do you know our lords? Alas the Count Gerard went years ago, broken hearted to the grave, weeping for his sons slain in Palestine. Then the lord Baldwin, who remained alone here would fain have deprived the lady, and the heir of all their lands, and she worn out with hopeless weeping for her husband, harassed by her brother-in-law, unprotected and urged by her father to marry a second time, has consented at last, and will this day be married to the Sire de Rentig. Come up to the castle, you will get a good meal there." Raoul followed the woodcutter to the castle. There all was joyous preparation and bustle. The sentinels would have stopped the poor half naked pilgrim, asking him if he were an escaped slave. "I am," said the Knight, "a pilgrim from beyond the Sea. My business is important, and I must speak at once with the lady of Crequy."

The sentinel laughed, "a fellow in such an undress cannot enter here," no said, nor can anyone speak to day to the lady even now, they are dressing her for her bridal. You may wait in the passage here if you like however.

The Knight sat down in silence and soon afterwards the lady appeared pale, sad, and her eyelids red with weeping, but robed in bridal lace, adorned with jewels, and followed by a gay and jocund train. Raoul knelt before her. "Noble lady," he said, "I come from beyond the sea. I bring you news of the Sire de Crequy, for ten long years a slave in Syria."

"Alas!" she answered, bursting into tears, "This cannot be true. My lord, his brothers, and his followers fell fighting against the Paynim."

"Raoul de Crequy, did not perish lady, he stands before you now. Look on me, O my wife, and recognize your husband once so dear, despite his wretchedness, and the change that suffering has wrought upon him. See here the half of our bridal ring broken, and shared between us when we parted. I bring my pledge of faith, kept loyally, back to you now. And then, with her heart swelling with joy, the lady of Crequy fell into the arms of her long lost, but forgotten lord. And the boy was brought for his father's blessing, and the bridal party was changed into a feast of welcome; but first of all when the Baron had procured suitable raiment, the re-united pair, followed by their friends, went to the Chapel of Our Lady, and kneeling there poured out the thankfulness which filled their hearts to the gentle author of this wonderful escape, to Mary Consolatrix Afflictorum.

A St. Bernard Dog.

L'Impartial des Alpes tells a St. Bernard dog story. Father Nicholas, a monk of the Grande-Chartreuse, once aide-de-camp to the Czar, was returning from Fourvoirie to his monastery, followed by a fine St. Bernard, to which he was greatly attached. As he walked on reading his breviary, he fell down a precipice. The dog presented himself at the monastery, and by plaintive barking and gestures did his best to tell the monks that something was wrong. In the end some of them decided to follow him, and the dog with many manifestations of delight, led the way to the place where he had left his master. Father Nicholas was found, much hurt, but alive.

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