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THE ENGLISH MERCHANT AND SARACEN LADY.



IN the reign of Henry the First of England, called *Beaucerc*, or *Fine Scholar*, for he was actually so learned that he could write his own name—a great attainment for a king in those days,—there lived in London a rich young man named Gilbert a Becket.

In that simple old time the wonders of science and art, among which we walk and live just as if they had always been—like the trees, the flowers, the sky and the stars—were never thought of or dreamed of, except by the great poets, who, may be, with their prophet eyes, looked away into the far future, and saw them looming up above the coming ages like mountain peaks in a distance of a landscape. Then the great ocean could heave and swell, and roar, and rage, and toss their mad frothing waves up at the sky, as if to defy the great God—and then obedient to His will, grow quiet and smooth again, year after

year, without one single ship venturing over their vast expanse—to be made afraid of their violence, or flattered by their calm—and all the commerce of the world was scarcely equal to that of the smallest and poorest kingdoms of our times. Then going to sea was considered more perilous than going to battle; voyagers never failed to make their will and set their worldly affairs in order, before they weighed anchor and set sail for foreign parts. To be sure, it has lately seemed very much as if we were fast going back to these old doubtful, dangerous times—those dark ages of navigation, and that after all our wonderful improvements and discoveries, we can count very little upon safe and prosperous voyages.

But to return to Gilbert a Becket. He was thought a brave and adventurous man when he left his comfortable English home, and sailed for the Holy Land, to trade with the rich Syrians for satins, velvet and gems, which he meant to bring to England and sell at a great profit. He probably calculated to double his fortune, and perhaps be able to buy a title and so become one of the nobles of the land, and live in a brave castle, where he would receive the king