

Morning Star and Catholic Messenger.

NEW ORLEANS, SUNDAY, JULY 19, 1874.

given to him, before tasting them he invariably went with the nicest portion and offered it to the Holy Child. One could have fancied Our Lady smiled as these gifts were laid at the feet of her Son.

On this beautiful summer's evening the boy played till he was tired; then he crept to his mother's knee, and looked over the illuminations in the manuscript. Mrs. Talbot was reading the story of St. George of England, and there was a picture of the knightly Saint in his armor.

"There, mamma," cried the child, "that is how I see papa in my dreams—that is how he looked when he started for the Holy Land. I too must be a knight."

"You shall be a knight, if you wish," replied his mother. "What will you be—a knight of St. George?"

"No," said Bertrand; "I shall be 'Our Lady's Knight.' I care for no other title. For my shield I will have a stainless lily on a field of blue. I am not worthy to carry the image of the Queen of Heaven on my banner, but the lily is her emblem, and it shall be my pride."

"Then you will want to go to the Holy Wars," Bertrand said his mother.

"Yes," was the blithe reply. "I must be a crusader, and you, mother, must take care of the Helde, and pray for me as you prayed for my father before me."

"Your father was slain by a Saracen chief," the lady said—"a wealthy and powerful man who lives near Damascus. What should you do, my son, if ever he fell into your hands?"

"Do!" said the child hastily, "why, kill him, as he killed my father."

"Would that revenge be worthy of Our Lady's Knight?" she asked.

"In war," murmured the boy—"it is all different in war. I would freely pardon any enemy who offended me; but that Saracen dog who slew my father, I could not forgive him."

"Yesterday," said the lady gently, "I read to you the history of the men who murdered St. Stephen. Do you remember his prayer?"

"Yes," he said thoughtfully.

"Do you think," continued his mother, "that when Our Lady prayed for pardon for all men she said, 'Except for those who murdered my Son'?"

"No," replied the boy; "I am sure she did not."

"And if you call yourself Our Lady's Knight, who must you imitate?"

"Our Lady herself," replied the child. "Ah, mamma, I see all you mean. If I go to the Holy Land, and the Saracen who slew my father should fall into my power, I will pardon him, and show him a Christian's revenge."

"This is my brave noble boy," said the lady. "You may never reach Palestine; but you may never see the man who is your enemy; and if you do so, do not forget the promise you have made this fair summer evening."

"I will not," replied the child. And then he left his mother's side; for she had turned from him, and lifted her calm face to the sweet evening sky, while her lips moved rapidly in prayer.

From that time the boy's destiny was settled. He grew rapidly. He was strong and healthy, gifted with wonderful strength and quickness. He studied deeply all knightly lore. He could ride the wildest horses, and with the sword, the dagger, and the crossbow he could do wonders.

His mother's eyes lingered lovingly on his comely young face. There was in it the strength of a brave warrior, the tenderness of a woman, and the purity of a child. At times when he lay sleeping she would kneel by him and pray. Ah, we know how good mothers pray for their sons. She never asked for riches or honors to be given to this her idolized boy; she never asked for talent or genius. Her one prayer was, that her son might have grace to save his soul; that in this life he might do and suffer as God willed; but that, come what would, her son should win for himself the kingdom of heaven.

He was not softly and delicately reared, this child whose life was one longing after the Holy Land. His fare was coarse and simple. He was better satisfied with a goblet of clear water from the cool well than with the richest and most costly wine. Body and soul, he was trained to be a true Catholic knight.

It was a proud day for his mother when he, by the hand of the brave Richard Cour de Lion, received the order of knighthood—a proud day, although he was going from her, and her home would be desolate without him. The hour came when she kissed his comely face for the last time, when she clasped him in her arms, and prayed God to bless her son.

CHAPTER II.

It was on one of the brightest of days that the young knight set out for the Holy Land. Proudly enough did the gallant fleet sail over the sunny seas. Bright and beautiful were the visions that filled the crusader's heart as he watched the blue sky and the sunlit waves. The lion-hearted king had spoken kindly to the young knight, and looked pleased when he saw the stainless lily upon the blue shield.

They reached the Holy Land at last; and then the desire of Bertrand Talbot's heart was accomplished. He was soon famous, even amongst the flower of chivalry, for his brave deeds, for the strength and prowess of his arm. Foremost in all danger, reckless of hardships and fatigue, always cheerful and gay, even when others desponded—there was no one more popular or beloved in the Christian camp than he who was known as Our Lady's Knight. He helped the weak, sustained the drooping and weary, comforted the sorrowing. His hand, so strong in battle, was gentle and tender as a woman's when he took care of the sick. By many a dying man Our Lady's Knight knelt and said the last prayers, and wiped the death-agony from his brow. Ask him anything in Our Lady's name, and he would grant it, if it were the half of his life.

The blue shield and the stainless lily were well known in the camp as the royal arms of England or France. Once he had inquired from those who were present when the siege of Acre first began, if anything were known of Solymon, the Saracen chief, who lived near Damascus. He heard nothing, save that he was a renowned warrior, and was supposed to have in his palace many Christian knights as slaves. They spoke, too, of his immense wealth, and the wondrous beauty of his daughter Solyma.

That was all Our Lady's Knight could hear of the man who had slain his father. He thought with horror of the Christian captives in the gorgeous palace.

"Let me die," he said, "on the battle-field with knights and warriors around me, the clash of arms, the sound of the trumpet, and the cheers of the soldiers in my ears; but to linger out a long life in that helpless captivity,—ah, God save me from a fate like that!"

His ardent spirit, his brave heart and fiery valor, rebelled at the thought. Any road to heaven, any martyrdom save this. Sad stories were told of the Christian captives, who were forced to labor loaded with chains, and oftentimes kept in a darksome prison. So large were the sums demanded for their ransom, that in many cases it was impossible to raise them, and the drooping captives died a long, lingering, living death.

Such stories were told round the camp-fires, and filled the heart of the young crusader with an untold dread. Was it a foreboding of what would fall upon that bright, glad young life, of the long and weary discipline that would fit this immortal soul for heaven?

King Richard, of the Lion Heart, often sent for Our Lady's knight into his camp. The boy had a voice of most marvellous sweetness; never was heard one more beautiful among the children of men. It was so rich, so clear, so melodious, that it was only fitted to sing the praises of God and of Our Lady. In the grove at the Helde he had often amused himself for hours together, in singing sweet simple stories of Mary, his Queen and Patroness—little legends that one would think the angels had whispered to him, they were so quaint and lovely. When the warrior king was tired, and wished for rest, he would send for the young knight, and liked nothing better than the sweet legends he sang of Our Lady.

And one evening he sang so sweetly and so clearly, that the king and his officers were charmed. Then King Richard drew a chain of gold from his neck, to which was suspended a little cross.

"I have not shed tears," said the Lion Heart, "since I saw my father the king lying dead; but thou hast forced them from me, Sir Bertrand, by the sweetness of thy voice and the words of thy story. Until I die I shall love the great Queen of Heaven better for what thou hast sung of her. Take this chain, and if ever the time comes when thou requirest aid, send to me, and by the memory of this night I will give thee help and succor."

The young knight took the chain and thanked the kindly monarch for his gift. Never again did he sing before the Lion Heart, or stand in the midst of that goodly array of stately warriors.

On the morrow came one of those sharp engagements between the Christians and the Saracens. Our Our Lady's Knight fought boldly; the stainless lily upon the blue shield was ever seen where danger was most prominent. The steed upon which he rode was killed beneath him; he mounted another, and nothing daunted, cried to the soldiers around him to fight in the name of Our Lady and St. George. Then came a sharp, quick blow from a Saracen dagger, and Our Lady's Knight fell upon a heap of the slain.

He was not dead, although his wound was painful and even dangerous. For many hours he lay there senseless and numb with pain. It was sad and sorrowful to see that young face, once the light of his mother's home, all white with agony and stained with blood. Was this the end of that gallant life, so full of high hope and brave resolve? The blue shield and the stainless lily lay broken by his side.

And then, O sad and sorrowful hour! a Saracen horseman, mounted on a magnificent steed, and attended by a troop of followers, rode lightly by where so lately that deadly fight had raged. The glitter of the gold chain around the crusader's neck attracted him. He reined in his horse, and told one of his retainers to dismount and carry off the spoil from the Christian.

With cruel, ruthless hands, they tore the chain from his neck, and then a deep moan burst from Bertrand's lips.

"Ah!" cried the chief, "he is not dead. And then, as the light from the evening sky fell upon the Saxon face and fair hair, he said, "How comely he is, the Christian knight! Surely he is of noble and of high rank in his own land; there will be a goodly ransom for him."

In obedience to his lord's commands, one of the horsemen flung the motionless body of the young crusader across his saddle, and he was carried off a captive in the hands of the Saracens.

Dire was the sorrow and dismay in the camp when it was known that Our Lady's Knight had been made a prisoner. The king declared he would have revenge; but great events were happening, and men had no time either to mourn or avenge those they loved best. The King of France, in what seemed the moment of victory, had declared his intention of returning home, and the whole army were in a state of anxious suspense.

The sun's last rays had departed when Bertrand opened his eyes. Under an escort of Saracen horsemen, he had been sent by his captor to his own home, there to be guarded as a prisoner until a heavy ransom should be paid. The men had stopped to rest on the high road that lead to Damascus, when slowly and confessedly his senses returned. His first glance fell upon the dark faces of his guards; and then his heart sank, for he knew that the doom he had dreaded more than death was upon him—he was a prisoner in the hands of the Saracens.

He was weak and faint with loss of blood, and in his heart there reigned a desolation worse than death. While they hurried him along the high road, under the pale light of the evening sky, there came to him a vision of the beloved, gentle mother at home, who was even then praying on her knees for him. He asked but one question— "Whose captive am I?"

They understood the meaning of his words, although his language was unknown to them, and a harsh voice replied: "You are the prisoner of our mighty lord Solymon, the Saracen chief—Solymon, who lives near Damascus."

Then the young knight's heart stood almost still.

"For what am I reserved, my God?" he cried wildly. "Why have I fallen into the hands of the man who slew my father?"

The great loss of blood so weakened him, that he ceased to know the hours as they rolled on: he was only conscious of the rough arms that supported him on that dreary journey. Yet those pains were all of use, for he offered them in union with the sufferings of his Divine Master.

The magnificent palace of Solymon was reached at last, and they threw the weary captive into a narrow cell. It was neither damp nor dark. The Saracen chief had no wish to harm his prisoner; he desired that he should recover, in order that the heavy ransom might come to him. It was a small, low room at the western end of the building, but it overlooked part of the magnificent gardens that belonged to the palace. A rude bed was prepared, and the young crusader was laid upon it. His wounds were dressed by skilful hands, cooling drinks were placed at his side, and orders were given that he should want for nothing.

"Great would be the sum of gold," said the Saracen chief, "sent for the ransom of the comely Christian who now languished upon that sick bed." Ripe rich fruits were given him, and when the fever caused by his wounds abated, they gave him the generous wine of the grape, that gladdens the hearts of men.

There was much wonder in the young knight's mind; he had not thought of the ransom, and he marvelled why this kindness was shown to him.

Among the prisoners of Solymon there were men of almost every nation: there were captives from sunny France and fair Italy; from Spain, the home of chivalry; and every other Catholic nation whose sons had joined in the Holy Wars.

The greater part of the captives were treated with barbarous cruelty. Forced to labor loaded with chains, ill-treated in every way, deprived of sufficient food, it was woe to the Christians who fell into the hands of the Saracens.

When a large ransom was looked for, as in the case of Bertrand Talbot, the ill-treatment was not carried far. When all hope or chance of obtaining a ransom was over, then the captives dragged on a weary life, full of suffering and deprived of hope.

Slowly enough did health and strength return to our Lady's Knight. He never ceased to call upon his Lady and Queen for help and deliverance.

The soul little understands the discipline that is sent in all love to prepare it for the glories of heaven. The proud must endure humiliation; ardent, fiery natures must learn the sublime lesson of meekness and patience. The discipline sent to prepare the soul of the young crusader for its future glory was that of a long and painful imprisonment, wherein all that was most human died away from him, and his heart became detached from all earthly things, and inflamed only with the desire of heaven.

CHAPTER III.

When Bertrand was able to leave his bed and sit up, he gazed with a rapture of delight on the gorgeous flowers and magnificent gardens upon which his window opened. It was a scene of marvellous beauty to him: the varied beauty, the glowing colors of the richly perfumed plants, the fountains where each drop of spray was like a rainbow, the picturesque and graceful shrubs, the trees of luxuriant foliage, and over all the clear blue sky. As it set in the "crimson west," the sun seemed to send him sweet messages of love and home in every beam. The soft breeze, that came laden with rich perfume, whispered to him of the tender mother across the seas, who would never let her son languish in prison while a rood remained of the lands of the Helde. He did not murmur as yet; he was weak and languid, and he filled his heart and imagination with visions of swift-coming liberty and home. But as health returned, and new strength and life came with it, a wild longing for liberty seized him. He whose childhood had been spent amidst woods and fields, whose ardent hopes and thirst for glory had brought him to the Holy Land—he who had led soldiers on to danger and to death, whose name had become a proverb for bravery and strength—to be shut up in that little room where he had barely space to move! It seemed incredible. He thought of his past glories, his military renown, the hopes with which he had left his home: was all to end in this, a prison cell and a captive's death?

The proud martial spirit writhed at the thought. Anything but that. Give him the keenest pang death brings on the battle-field, the sharpest torture that could end his life; but not that—not the long torturing imprisonment and the wretched ending.

Poor boy! he was a boy in heart although a man in years. He bowed his head on the narrow grating where the sunbeams peeped in, and wept aloud. Vividly before his mind came the thought of the noblest conquest of all. Greater than the warrior who wins whole kingdoms, greater than the victor whose arms have never failed, greater than the king whose standard should wave over the grandest countries of earth—greater than all these is the man who conquers self; who can win the victory over his own will, wishes, and desires, satisfied to leave his life in God's hands, to shape it as He will—to crown it with the

brightest of diadems, suffering and sorrow, and so conform it to the life of His son, or to allow the sunshine of His love to play around it. He who has won this conquest is a brave man before God, he is the true warrior, and his victory is more glorious by far than the triumphs of Caesar or Alexander.

Our Lady's Knight, though good and courageous, had not reached that sublime height yet; human wishes and desires, human love of glory and of fame, clung to him strongly and dimmed the brightness of a beautiful soul. When these should be conquered and trampled under foot, the true warrior of Jesus Christ would be ready for his reward.

But the struggle would be long and painful before this was accomplished, and God's sweet will fulfilled in this dear soul.

When he was considered well, he had a certain portion of labor given to him, and it was to work in the gardens and help in the cultivation of flowers. Life was not then quite so unendurable; he liked the hours spent out in the bright sunshine amidst the beauty of blossoms and trees. There were even times when he forgot that he was a captive; and while the sun shone and the perfumed breeze sighed around him, he sang again the sweet simple stories that had charmed the lion-hearted king.

One day there came to his cell the great chief Solymon himself; he wished to arrange about the ransom. It was a heavy sum he asked, amounting to what would be now over five thousand dollars in gold. Our Lady's Knight answered him cheerfully, for he knew the gentle mother in that far-off home would raise it for him, even should she sell the last jewel in her case and the last inch of ground belonging to the Helde.

At first his face flushed when he stood in the presence of the man who had treacherously slain his gallant father. For one moment only his strong young figure trembled, and his hands were tightly clenched. It was a temptation, for the old chief was there in his cell alone; but the Christian murmured to himself a prayer, and the dark thought fell away before the sweet names of Jesus and Mary.

It was no easy task, when the Saracen chief had left him, and sent to him a roll of parchment to write to that gentle mother at home the history of all that happened; to tell her that his martial hopes of glory and high renown had ended in a captive's cell, and that for life he must remain there, unless she could send this heavy ransom, the raising of which would impoverish her so greatly.

His mother did not value the parchment any the less for the bitter tears that had fallen upon it. Not one word was said to Bertrand of how it should be sent, or how the ransom would be conveyed. But when it was taken from his hands, he felt a new hope in his heart, and he sang that evening sweetly and clearly among the flowers—so sweetly and clearly that the Saracen's daughter Solyma overheard him, and asked who was the captive with a voice more musical than that of the bulbul.

They told her it was one of her father's prisoners, a brave young knight who had won great fame in the Christian camp. They could not tell his name save that it was Bertrand, and he was known as Our Lady's Knight. On his blue shield he carried a stainless lily, and he was always singing the praises of Mary his Queen.

Ab, and still more: in his cell he had a cross made of two pieces of wood; on the wall with his own hands he had designed a pure lily, and under the cross there hung a picture of a beautiful and gracious Lady, whose face was more lovely than the sun, and in her arms she held a little child. Who it was they did not know; but underneath her feet, in small letters of gold, was written the name of Mary, and Solyma murmured over and over again to herself that wondrously sweet name.

Nothing, then, would please the Saracen's daughter but she must see this Christian knight. One evening, when he was at work among the flowers, she, with her maidens, went into the garden, and there she saw the comely noble young knight who was so strangely to influence her life. She said no word to him, but something in the pure face she gazed upon filled her with wonder, and she thought much about him, and how dearly he loved Mary his Queen.

Bertrand had been some time a prisoner before he saw any of the Christian captives. Their labor was harder than his. But one morning early he saw them chained and led to work. His heart sickened at the sight. Some were young as himself, others gray-haired and feeble. For some there was hope of ransom; for others all hope had fled. Ah, if his mother should be sick—if he should fall in raising the heavy sum demanded—then his fate would be even worse than theirs.

The Saracen chief, aged and worn, had come home to his palace to live. He had grown old and feeble to fight; he longed only for rest. His beautiful daughter Solyma tended and cared for him. Those who had known him in the strong prime of his manhood believed the old warrior had come home to die. He was fond of visiting the garden, sitting where the warm rays of the sun fell upon him, and dreaming over again the battles of his youth and prime.

Two years had passed since the demand for the ransom had been sent home, and as yet no tidings had been heard. Thinking of this, Bertrand had no song to sing as he worked among the flowers. There was a grove of roses—rich and rare, queenly flowers, whose perfume was ravishingly sweet—and near them the aged chief liked to sit and dream. He never looked at the young crusader, whose bright life was fading in his prison walls. He was thinking of nothing save the glory he had won. The morning was very warm; the sunbeams fell upon his dark worn face, and the scent of the roses lulled him to sleep. The young captive saw his master sleeping, and he moved gently among the flowers. All at once his eye fell upon something dark and small, which seemed to glide underneath the sleeve of the Saracen's robe.

Bertrand drew near quietly. Upon the dark skin of the chief's hand he saw a viper, one of

a kind he well knew, whose bite was deadly poison.

His senses for a moment were confused. One bite from the reptile, one touch of its poisoned fangs, and his father's death was avenged, and he was free. Why should he save the life of his destroyer? Let him die the death he merited. The blood rushed in a fiery torrent to his brain. Let it be so. There was no one present to see. Death from a reptile's bite was a meet end for the vile heathen who treacherously slew his father.

Above the wild beating of his heart and the tumult of his thoughts, that flashed like lightning across his mind, he heard his mother's words: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

For one second he saw her pure gentle face and pleading eyes. He signed himself with the sign of the Cross, and went at the risk of his own life to save that of his enemy. One moment more and he would have been too late. With a vigorous grasp he clutched the reptile so that its fangs could not touch him, and destroyed it with a heavy stone that lay near.

With a start and a cry the old man awoke. In a confused mixture of Greek and Arabic, Bertrand told him what he had done, and showed him the dead reptile.

It was a Christian revenge, worthy of Our Lady's Knight. He had won a victory over himself more noble than any triumph of arms. He thanked God for having given him the grace to resist temptation.

"You have saved my life," muttered the aged chief; and the young crusader's heart leaped with joy. He thought the Saracen was about to say, "I will give you liberty in return;" but the wished-for words did not come.

Before evening, every one in the palace knew that the young Christian captive had saved the life of his captor and foe, the Saracen chief. But no token of gratitude was offered to him save one. His lord's daughter Solyma with her maidens sought him, and she offered him her tribute of thanks. He told her he had but done his duty; and she asked him to fetch for her the picture he had in his cell. It was a small one of the ever-Blessed Mother of God, that for many years he had preserved as an especial treasure. He was almost loath to show the picture to heathen eyes, but he remembered the mild face of the Saracen's daughter, and hoped much. Out into the bright sunlight where she stood he brought the little painting, and she took it gently in her hands.

"And who is this?" she asked, after gazing silently for some minutes upon that beautiful, pure face. "Is it your queen?"

"Yes," said Bertrand; "it is my Queen, and I am her knight."

"How do you call this name in your own tongue?" she asked.

And with bowed head and eyes that gleamed with tears, he said slowly, "Mary."

"Where does your beautiful Queen live?" continued the young girl, "I should like to see her."

With a face that glowed with love and faith, he raised his hand to the fair skies. "There," he replied, "in the blue heavens lives a Mother and Queen."

(Concluded next week.)

A NEW PICTURE BY GUSTAVE DORE.—His large picture, "The Christian Martyrs," is most striking and characteristic. Night has fallen on a huge Roman amphitheatre, which during the day has been the scene of one of those dreadful spectacles that marked the reign of Diocletian with blood. The seats are all deserted, but huddled together in the centre of the arena are a group of a score or more of the dead and dying Christians—men, women and children. The savage beasts of prey are finishing in the moonlight the work of prey over the corpses of the martyrs; and one, still thirsty for blood, seeks the door through which the victims came. Above this awful scene the heavens shine with stars, and a company of angels descend to bear off the spirits of the persecuted to the realms of light and peace. It is a picture that makes a strong impression on the mind; it is weird and sad without being horrible.—Paris Letter to Boston Advertiser.

To be always a man of rule and duty—to follow with fidelity to the end, and the way to honor—to renew each day, with calm weariness and weakness, the laborious struggle of a soul wrestling with itself—to draw from the sacrifice of the eve the force necessary to accomplish that of the morrow—to attach one good work to another like the link of the chain, of which each one is joined to that which precedes it and supports that which follows it—to accomplish in silence that which follows it—longed immolation of the senses to the spirit of reason to faith, of interest to duty, of passion to law, of self-will to authority, of one's whole existence to God, this is true perfection of life.—Mgr. Freppel.

We should only take trouble in doing our duty, and leave everything else in the hands of God.

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