YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

A BOOK OF GOLDEN DEEDS

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Содержание

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PREFACE

As the most striking lines of poetry are the most hackneyed, because they have grown to be the common inheritance of all the world, so many of the most noble deeds that earth can show have become the best known, and enjoyed their full meed of fame. Therefore it may be feared that many of the events here detailed, or alluded to, may seem trite to those in search of novelty; but it is not for such that the collection has been made. It is rather intended as a treasury for young people, where they may find minuter particulars than their abridged histories usually afford of the soul-stirring deeds that give life and glory to the record of events; and where also other like actions, out of their ordinary course of reading, may be placed before them, in the trust that example may inspire the spirit of heroism and self-devotion. For surely it must be a wholesome contemplation to look on actions, the very essence of which is such entire absorption in others that self is forgotten; the object of which is not to win promotion, wealth, or success, but simple duty, mercy, and loving-kindness. These are the actions wrought, 'hoping for nothing again', but which most surely have their reward.

The authorities have not been given, as for the most [Page] part the narratives lie on the surface of history. For the description of the Coliseum, I have, however, been indebted to the Abbé Gerbet's Rome Chrétienne; for the Housewives of Lowenburg, and St. Stephen's Crown, to Freytag's Sketches of German Life; and for the story of George the Triller, to Mr. Mayhew's Germany. The Escape of Attalus is narrated (from Gregory of Tours) in Thierry's 'Lettres sur l'Histoire de France;' the Russian officer's adventures, and those of Prascovia Lopouloff the true Elisabeth of Siberia, are from M. le Maistre; the shipwrecks chiefly from Gilly's 'Shipwrecks of the British Navy;' the Jersey Powder Magazine from the Annual Registrer, and that at Ciudad Rodrigo, from the traditions of the 52nd Regiment.

See Clebration of Women Writers:

There is a cloud of doubt resting on a few of the tales, which it may be honest to mention, though they were far too beautiful not to tell. These are the details of the Gallic occupation of Rome, the Legend of St. Genevieve, the Letter of Gertrude von der Wart, the stories of the Keys of Calais, of the Dragon of Rhodes, and we fear we must add, both Nelson's plan of the Battle of the Nile, and likewise the exact form of the heroism of young Casabianca, of which no two accounts agree. But it was not possible to give up such stories as these, and the thread of truth there must be

in them has developed into such a beautiful tissue, that even if unsubstantial when tested, it is surely delightful to contemplate.

Some stories have been passed over as too devoid of foundation, in especial that of young Henri, Duke of Nemours, who, at ten years old, was said to have been hung up with his little brother of eight in one of Louis XI's cages at Loches, with orders that two of the children's teeth should daily be pulled out and brought to the king. The elder child was said to have insisted on giving the whole supply of teeth, so as to save his brother; but though they were certainly imprisoned after their father's execution, they were released after Louis's death in a condition which disproves this atrocity.

The Indian mutiny might likewise have supplied glorious instances of Christian self-devotion, but want of materials has compelled us to stop short of recording those noble deeds by which delicate women and light- hearted young soldiers showed, that in the hour of need there was not wanting to them the highest and deepest 'spirit of self-sacrifice.'

At some risk of prolixity, enough of the surrounding events has in general been given to make the situation comprehensible, even without knowledge of the general history. This has been done in the hope that these extracts may serve as a mother's storehouse for reading aloud to her boys, or that they may be found useful for short readings to the intelligent, though uneducated classes.

NOVEMBER 17, 1864.

WHAT IS A GOLDEN DEED?

We all of us enjoy a story of battle and adventure. Some of us delight in the anxiety and excitement with which we watch the various strange predicaments, hairbreadth escapes, and ingenious contrivances that are presented to us; and the mere imaginary dread of the dangers thus depicted, stirs our feelings and makes us feel eager and full of suspense.

This taste, though it is the first step above the dullness that cannot be interested in anything beyond its own immediate world, nor care for what it neither sees, touches, tastes, nor puts to any present use, is still the lowest form that such a liking can take. It may be no better than a love of reading about murders in the newspaper, just for the sake of a sort of startled sensation; and it is a taste that becomes unwholesome when it absolutely delights in dwelling on horrors and cruelties for their own sake; or upon shifty, cunning, dishonest stratagems and devices. To learn to take interest in what is evil is always mischievous.

But there is an element in many of such scenes of woe and violence that may well account for our interest in them. It is that which makes the eye gleam and the heart throb, and bears us through the details of suffering, bloodshed, and even barbarity —feeling our spirits moved and elevated by contemplating the courage and endurance that they have called forth. Nay, such is the charm of brilliant valor, that we often are tempted to forget

the injustice of the cause that may have called forth the actions that delight us. And this enthusiasm is often united with the utmost tenderness of heart, the very appreciation of suffering only quickening the sense of the heroism that risked the utmost, till the young and ardent learn absolutely to look upon danger as an occasion for evincing the highest qualities.

> 'O Life, without thy chequer'd scene
> Of right and wrong, of weal and woe,
> Success and failure, could a ground
> For magnanimity be found?'

The true cause of such enjoyment is perhaps an inherent consciousness that there is nothing so noble as forgetfulness of self. Therefore it is that we are struck by hearing of the exposure of life and limb to the utmost peril, in oblivion, or recklessness of personal safety, in comparison with a higher object.

That object is sometimes unworthy. In the lowest form of courage it is only avoidance of disgrace; but even fear of shame is better than mere love of bodily ease, and from that lowest motive the scale rises to the most noble and precious actions of which human nature is capable—the truly golden and priceless deeds that are the jewels of history, the salt of life.

And it is a chain of Golden Deeds that we seek to lay before our readers; but, ere entering upon them, perhaps we had better clearly understand what it is that to our mind constitutes a Golden Deed.

It is not mere hardihood. There was plenty of hardihood in Pizarro when he led his men through terrible hardships to attack the empire of Peru, but he was actuated by mere greediness for gain, and all the perils he so resolutely endured could not make his courage admirable. It was nothing but insensibility to danger, when set against the wealth and power that he coveted, and to which he sacrificed thousands of helpless Peruvians. Daring for the sake of plunder has been found in every robber, every pirate, and too often in all the lower grade of warriors, from the savage plunderer of a besieged town up to the reckless monarch making war to feed his own ambition.

There is a courage that breaks out in bravado, the exuberance of high spirits, delighting in defying peril for its own sake, not indeed producing deeds which deserve to be called golden, but which, from their heedless grace, their desperation, and absence of all base motives—except perhaps vanity have an undeniable charm about them, even when we doubt the right of exposing a life in mere gaiety of heart.

Such was the gallantry of the Spanish knight who, while Fernando and Isabel lay before the Moorish city of Granada, galloped out of the camp, in full view of besiegers and besieged, and fastened to the gate of the city with his dagger a copy of the Ave Maria. It was a wildly brave action, and yet not without service in showing the dauntless spirit of the Christian army. But the same can hardly be said of the daring shown by the Emperor Maximilian when he displayed himself to the citizens of Ulm

upon the topmost pinnacle of their cathedral spire; or of Alonso de Ojeda, who figured in like manner upon the tower of the Spanish cathedral. The same daring afterwards carried him in the track of Columbus, and there he stained his name with the usual blots of rapacity and cruelty. These deeds, if not tinsel, were little better than gold leaf.

A Golden Deed must be something more than mere display of fearlessness. Grave and resolute fulfillment of duty is required to give it the true weight. Such duty kept the sentinel at his post at the gate of Pompeii, even when the stifling dust of ashes came thicker and thicker from the volcano, and the liquid mud streamed down, and the people fled and struggled on, and still the sentry stood at his post, unflinching, till death had stiffened his limbs; and his bones, in their helmet and breastplate, with the hand still raised to keep the suffocating dust from mouth and nose, have remained even till our own times to show how a Roman soldier did his duty. In like manner the last of the old Spanish infantry originally formed by the Great Captain, Gonzalo de Cordova, were all cut off, standing fast to a man, at the battle of Rocroy, in 1643, not one man breaking his rank. The whole regiment was found lying in regular order upon the field of battle, with their colonel, the old Count de Fuentes, at their head, expiring in a chair, in which he had been carried, because he was too infirm to walk, to this his twentieth battle. The conqueror, the high-spirited young Duke d'Enghien, afterwards Prince of Condé, exclaimed, 'Were I not a victor, I should have wished thus

to die!' and preserved the chair among the relics of the bravest of his own fellow countrymen.

Such obedience at all costs and all risks is, however, the very essence of a soldier's life. An army could not exist without it, a ship could not sail without it, and millions upon millions of those whose 'bones are dust and good swords are rust' have shown such resolution. It is the solid material, but it has hardly the exceptional brightness, of a Golden Deed.

And yet perhaps it is one of the most remarkable characteristics of a Golden Deed that the doer of it is certain to feel it merely a duty; 'I have done that which it was my duty to do' is the natural answer of those capable of such actions. They have been constrained to them by duty, or by pity; have never even deemed it possible to act otherwise, and did not once think of themselves in the matter at all.

For the true metal of a Golden Deed is self-devotion. Selfishness is the dross and alloy that gives the unsound ring to many an act that has been called glorious. And, on the other hand, it is not only the valor, which meets a thousand enemies upon the battlefield, or scales the walls in a forlorn hope, that is of true gold. It may be, but often it is a mere greed of fame, fear of shame, or lust of plunder. No, it is the spirit that gives itself for others—the temper that for the sake of religion, of country, of duty, of kindred, nay, of pity even to a stranger, will dare all things, risk all things, endure all things, meet death in one moment, or wear life away in slow, persevering tendance and

suffering.

Such a spirit was shown by Leaena, the Athenian woman at whose house the overthrow of the tyranny of the Pisistratids was concerted, and who, when seized and put to the torture that she might disclose the secrets of the conspirators, fearing that the weakness of her frame might overpower her resolution, actually bit off her tongue, that she might be unable to betray the trust placed in her. The Athenians commemorated her truly golden silence by raising in her honor the statue of a lioness without a tongue, in allusion to her name, which signifies a lioness.

Again, Rome had a tradition of a lady whose mother was in prison under sentence of death by hunger, but who, at the peril of her own life, visited her daily, and fed her from her own bosom, until even the stern senate were moved with pity, and granted a pardon. The same story is told of a Greek lady, called Euphrasia, who thus nourished her father; and in Scotland, in 1401, when the unhappy heir of the kingdom, David, Duke of Rothesay, had been thrown into the dungeon of Falkland Castle by his barbarous uncle, the Duke of Albany, there to be starved to death, his only helper was one poor peasant woman, who, undeterred by fear of the savage men that guarded the castle, crept, at every safe opportunity, to the grated window on a level with the ground, and dropped cakes through it to the prisoner, while she allayed his thirst from her own breast through a pipe. Alas! the visits were detected, and the Christian prince had less mercy than the heathen senate. Another woman, in 1450, when

Sir Gilles of Brittany was savagely imprisoned and starved in much the same manner by his brother, Duke François, sustained him for several days by bringing wheat in her veil, and dropping it through the grated window, and when poison had been used to hasten his death, she brought a priest to the grating to enable him to make his peace with Heaven. Tender pity made these women venture all things; and surely their doings were full of the gold of love.

So again two Swiss lads, whose father was dangerously ill, found that they could by no means procure the needful medicine, except at a price far beyond their means, and heard that an English traveler had offered a large price for a pair of eaglets. The only eyrie was on a crag supposed to be so inacessible, that no one ventured to attempt it, till these boys, in their intense anxiety for their father, dared the fearful danger, scaled the precipice, captured the birds, and safely conveyed them to the traveler. Truly this was a deed of gold.

Such was the action of the Russian servant whose master's carriage was pursued by wolves, and who sprang out among the beasts, sacrificing his own life willingly to slake their fury for a few minutes in order that the horses might be untouched, and convey his master to a place of safety. But his act of self-devotion has been so beautifully expanded in the story of 'Eric's Grave', in 'Tales of Christian Heroism', that we can only hint at it, as at that of the 'Helmsman of Lake Erie', who, with the steamer on fire around him, held fast by the wheel in the very jaws of the

flame, so as to guide the vessel into harbour, and save the many lives within her, at the cost of his own fearful agony, while slowly scorched by the flames.

Memorable, too, was the compassion that kept Dr. Thompson upon the battlefield of the Alma, all alone throughout the night, striving to alleviate the sufferings and attend to the wants, not of our own wounded, but of the enemy, some of whom, if they were not sorely belied, had been known to requite a friendly act of assistance with a pistol shot. Thus to remain in the darkness, on a battlefield in an enemy's country, among the enemy themselves, all for pity and mercy's sake, was one of the noblest acts that history can show. Yet, it was paralleled in the time of the Indian Mutiny, when every English man and woman was flying from the rage of the Sepoys at Benares, and Dr. Hay alone remained because he would not desert the patients in the hospital, whose life depended on his care—many of them of those very native corps who were advancing to massacre him. This was the Roman sentry's firmness, more voluntary and more glorious. Nor may we pass by her to whom our title page points as our living type of Golden Deeds—to her who first showed how woman's ministrations of mercy may be carried on, not only within the city, but on the borders of the camp itself—'the lady with the lamp', whose health and strength were freely devoted to the holy work of softening the after sufferings that render war so hideous; whose very step and shadow carried gladness and healing to the sick soldier, and who has opened a path of like shining

light to many another woman who only needed to be shown the way. Fitly, indeed, may the figure of Florence Nightingale be shadowed forth at the opening of our roll of Golden Deeds.

Thanks be to God, there is enough of His own spirit of love abroad in the earth to make Golden Deeds of no such rare occurrence, but that they are of 'all time'. Even heathen days were not without them, and how much more should they not abound after the words have been spoken, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend', and after the one Great Deed has been wrought that has consecrated all other deeds of self-sacrifice. Of martyrdoms we have scarcely spoken. They were truly deeds of the purest gold; but they are too numerous to be dwelt on here: and even as soldiers deem it each man's simple duty to face death unhesitatingly, so the 'glorious army of martyrs' had, for the most part, joined the Church with the expectation that they should have to confess the faith, and confront the extremity of death and torture for it.

What have been here brought together are chiefly cases of self-devotion that stand out remarkably, either from their hopelessness, their courage, or their patience, varying with the character of their age; but with that one essential distinction in all, that the dross of self was cast away.

Among these we cannot forbear mentioning the poor American soldier, who, grievously wounded, had just been laid in the middle bed, by far the most comfortable of the three tiers of berths in the ship's cabin in which the wounded were to be

conveyed to New York. Still thrilling with the suffering of being carried from the field, and lifted to his place, he saw a comrade in even worse plight brought in, and thinking of the pain it must cost his fellow soldier to be raised to the bed above him, he surprised his kind lady nurses (daily scatterers of Golden Deeds) by saying, 'Put me up there, I reckon I'll bear hoisting better than he will'.

And, even as we write, we hear of an American Railway collision that befell a train on the way to Elmira with prisoners. The engineer, whose name was William Ingram, might have leapt off and saved himself before the shock; but he remained in order to reverse the engine, though with certain death staring him in the face. He was buried in the wreck of the meeting train, and when found, his back was against the boiler he was jammed in, unable to move, and actually being burnt to death; but even in that extremity of anguish he called out to those who came round to help him to keep away, as he expected the boiler would burst. They disregarded the generous cry, and used every effort to extricate him, but could not succeed until after his sufferings had ended in death.

While men and women still exist who will thus suffer and thus die, losing themselves in the thought of others, surely the many forms of woe and misery with which this earth is spread do but give occasions of working out some of the highest and best qualities of which mankind are capable. And oh, young readers, if your hearts burn within you as you read of these various forms of the truest and deepest glory, and you long for time and place

to act in the like devoted way, bethink yourselves that the alloy of such actions is to be constantly worked away in daily life; and that if ever it be your lot to do a Golden Deed, it will probably be in unconsciousness that you are doing anything extraordinary, and that the whole impulse will consist in the having absolutely forgotten self.

THE STORIES OF ALCESTIS AND ANTIGONE

It has been said, that even the heathens saw and knew the glory of self- devotion; and the Greeks had two early instances so very beautiful that, though they cannot in all particulars be true, they must not be passed over. There must have been some foundation for them, though we cannot now disentangle them from the fable that has adhered to them; and, at any rate, the ancient Greeks believed them, and gathered strength and nobleness from dwelling on such examples; since, as it has been truly said, 'Every word, look or thought of sympathy with heroic action, helps to make heroism'. Both tales were presented before them in their solemn religious tragedies, and the noble poetry in which they were recounted by the great Greek dramatists has been preserved to our time.

Alcestis was the wife of Admetus, King of Pherae, who, according to the legend, was assured that his life might be prolonged, provided father, mother, or wife would die in his stead. It was Alcestis alone who was willing freely to give her life to save that of her husband; and her devotion is thus exquisitely described in the following translation, by Professor Anstice, from the choric song in the tragedy by Euripides:

'Be patient, for thy tears are vain
They may not wake the dead again:
E'en heroes, of immortal sire
And mortal mother born, expire.
Oh, she was dear
While she linger'd here;
She is dear now she rests below,
And thou mayst boast
That the bride thou hast lost
Was the noblest earth can show.

'We will not look on her burial sod
As the cell of sepulchral sleep,
It shall be as the shrine of a radiant god,
And the pilgrim shall visit that blest abode
To worship, and not to weep;
And as he turns his steps aside,
Thus shall he breathe his vow:
'Here sleeps a self-devoted bride,
Of old to save her lord she died.
She is a spirit now.

Hail, bright and blest one! grant to me
The smiles of glad prosperity.'
Thus shall he own her name divine,
Thus bend him at Alcestis' shrine.'

The story, however, bore that Hercules, descending in the course of one of his labors into the realms of the dead, rescued

Alcestis, and brought her back; and Euripides gives a scene in which the rough, jovial Hercules insists on the sorrowful Admetus marrying again a lady of his own choice, and gives the veiled Alcestis back to him as the new bride. Later Greeks tried to explain the story by saying that Alcestis nursed her husband through an infectious fever, caught it herself, and had been supposed to be dead, when a skilful physician restored her; but this is probably only one of the many reasonable versions they tried to give of the old tales that were founded on the decay and revival of nature in winter and spring, and with a presage running through them of sacrifice, death, and resurrection. Our own poet Chaucer was a great admirer of Alcestis, and improved upon the legend by turning her into his favorite flower—

> 'The daisie or els the eye of the daie,
> The emprise and the floure of flouris all'.

Another Greek legend told of the maiden of Thebes, one of the most self-devoted beings that could be conceived by a fancy untrained in the knowledge of Divine Perfection. It cannot be known how much of her story is true, but it was one that went deep into the hearts of Grecian men and women, and encouraged them in some of their best feelings; and assuredly the deeds imputed to her were golden.

Antigone was the daughter of the old King Oedipus of Thebes. After a time heavy troubles, the consequence of the sins of

his youth, came upon him, and he was driven away from his kingdom, and sent to wander forth a blind old man, scorned and pointed at by all. Then it was that his faithful daughter showed true affection for him. She might have remained at Thebes with her brother Eteocles, who had been made king in her father's room, but she chose instead to wander forth with the forlorn old man, fallen from his kingly state, and absolutely begging his bread. The great Athenian poet Sophocles began his tragedy of 'Oedipus Coloneus' with showing the blind old king leaning on Antigone's arm, and asking—

'Tell me, thou daughter of a blind old man,
Antigone, to what land are we come,
Or to what city? Who the inhabitants
Who with a slender pittance will relieve
Even for a day the wandering Oedipus?'

POTTER.

The place to which they had come was in Attica, hear the city of Colonus. It was a lovely grove—

'All the haunts of Attic ground,
Where the matchless coursers bound,
Boast not, through their realms of bliss,
Other spot so fair as this.
Frequent down this greenwood dale
Mourns the warbling nightingale,
Nestling 'mid the thickest screen

Of the ivy's darksome green,
Or where each empurpled shoot
Drooping with its myriad fruit,
Curl'd in many a mazy twine,
Droops the never-trodden vine.'

ANSTICE.

This beautiful grove was sacred to the Eumenides, or avenging goddesses, and it was therefore a sanctuary where no foot might tread; but near it the exiled king was allowed to take up his abode, and was protected by the great Athenian King, Theseus. There his other daughter, Ismene, joined him, and, after a time, his elder son Polynices, arrived.

Polynices had been expelled from Thebes by his brother Eteocles, and had been wandering through Greece seeking aid to recover his rights. He had collected an army, and was come to take leave of his father and sisters; and at the same time to entreat his sisters to take care that, if he should fall in the battle, they would prevent his corpse from being left unburied; for the Greeks believed that till the funeral rites were performed, the spirit went wandering restlessly up and down upon the banks of a dark stream, unable to enter the home of the dead. Antigone solemnly promised to him that he should not be left without these last rites. Before long, old Oedipus was killed by lightning, and the two sisters returned to Thebes.

The united armies of the seven chiefs against Thebes came on, led by Polynices. Eteocles sallied out to meet them, and there

was a terrible battle, ending in all the seven chiefs being slain, and the two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, were killed by one another in single combat. Creon, the uncle, who thus became king, had always been on the side of Eteocles, and therefore commanded that whilst this younger brother was entombed with all due solemnities, the body of the elder should be left upon the battlefield to be torn by dogs and vultures, and that whosoever durst bury it should be treated as a rebel and a traitor to the state.

This was the time for the sister to remember her oath to her dead brother. The more timid Ismene would have dissuaded her, but she answered,

> 'To me no sufferings have that hideous form
> Which can affright me from a glorious death'.

And she crept forth by night, amid all the horrors of the deserted field of battles, and herself covered with loose earth the corpse of Polynices. The barbarous uncle caused it to be taken up and again exposed, and a watch was set at some little distance. Again Antigone

> 'Was seen, lamenting shrill with plaintive notes,
> Like the poor bird that sees her lonely nest
> Spoil'd of her young'.

Again she heaped dry dust with her own hands over the body, and poured forth the libations of wine that formed an essential

part of the ceremony. She was seized by the guard, and led before Creon. She boldly avowed her deed, and, in spite of the supplications of Ismene, she was put to death, a sufferer for her noble and pious deeds; and with this only comfort:

> 'Glowing at my heart
> I feel this hope, that to my father, dear
> And dear to thee, my mother, dear to thee,
> My brother, I shall go.'

POTTER.

Dim and beautiful indeed was the hope that upbore the grave and beautiful Theban maiden; and we shall see her resolution equaled, though hardly surpassed, by Christian Antigones of equal love and surer faith.

THE CUP OF WATER

No touch in the history of the minstrel king David gives us a more warm and personal feeling towards him than his longing for the water of the well of Bethlehem. Standing as the incident does in the summary of the characters of his mighty men, it is apt to appear to us as if it had taken place in his latter days; but such is not the case, it befell while he was still under thirty, in the time of his persecution by Saul.

It was when the last attempt at reconciliation with the king had been made, when the affectionate parting with the generous and faithful Jonathan had taken place, when Saul was hunting him like a partridge on the mountains on the one side, and the Philistines had nearly taken his life on the other, that David, outlawed, yet loyal at the heart, sent his aged parents to the land of Moab for refuge, and himself took up his abode in the caves of the wild limestone hills that had become familiar to him when he was a shepherd. Brave captain and Heaven-destined king as he was, his name attracted around him a motley group of those that were in distress, or in debt, or discontented, and among them were the 'mighty men' whose brave deeds won them the foremost parts in that army with which David was to fulfill the ancient promises to his people. There were his three nephews, Joab, the ferocious and imperious, the chivalrous Abishai, and Asahel the fleet of foot; there was the warlike Levite Benaiah,

who slew lions and lionlike men, and others who, like David himself, had done battle with the gigantic sons of Anak. Yet even these valiant men, so wild and lawless, could be kept in check by the voice of their young captain; and, outlaws as they were, they spoiled no peaceful villages, they lifted not their hands against the persecuting monarch, and the neighboring farms lost not one lamb through their violence. Some at least listened to the song of their warlike minstrel:

'Come, ye children, and hearken to me,
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
What man is he that lusteth to live,
And would fain see good days?
Let him refrain his tongue from evil
And his lips that they speak no guile,
Let him eschew evil and do good,
Let him seek peace and ensue it.'

With such strains as these, sung to his harp, the warrior gained the hearts of his men to enthusiastic love, and gathered followers on all sides, among them eleven fierce men of Gad, with faces like lions and feet swift as roes, who swam the Jordan in time of flood, and fought their way to him, putting all enemies in the valleys to flight.

But the Eastern sun burnt on the bare rocks. A huge fissure, opening in the mountain ridge, encumbered at the bottom with broken rocks, with precipitous banks, scarcely affording a

foothold for the wild goats—such is the spot where, upon a cleft on the steep precipice, still remain the foundations of the 'hold', or tower, believed to have been the David's retreat, and near at hand is the low-browed entrance of the galleried cave alternating between narrow passages and spacious halls, but all oppressively hot and close. Waste and wild, without a bush or a tree, in the feverish atmosphere of Palestine, it was a desolate region, and at length the wanderer's heart fainted in him, as he thought of his own home, with its rich and lovely terraced slopes, green with wheat, trellised with vines, and clouded with grey olive, and of the cool cisterns of living water by the gate of which he loved to sing—

> 'He shall feed me in a green pasture,
> And lead me forth beside the waters of comfort'.

His parched longing lips gave utterance to the sigh, 'Oh that one would give me to drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate?'

Three of his brave men, apparently Abishai, Benaiah, and Eleazar, heard the wish. Between their mountain fastness and the dearly loved spring lay the host of the Philistines; but their love for their leader feared no enemies. It was not only water that he longed for, but the water from the fountain which he had loved in his childhood. They descended from their chasm, broke through the midst of the enemy's army, and drew the water from

the favorite spring, bearing it back, once again through the foe, to the tower upon the rock! Deeply moved was their chief at this act of self-devotion—so much moved that the water seemed to him to be too sacred to be put to his own use. 'May God forbid it me that I should do this thing. Shall I drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy, for with the jeopardy of their lives they brought it?' And as a hallowed and precious gift, he poured out unto the Lord the water obtained at the price of such peril to his followers.

In later times we meet with another hero, who by his personal qualities inspired something of the same enthusiastic attachment as did David, and who met with an adventure somewhat similar, showing the like nobleness of mind on the part of both leader and followers.

It was Alexander of Macedon, whose character as a man, with all its dark shades of violence, rage, and profanity, has a nobleness and sweetness that win our hearts, while his greatness rests on a far broader basis than that of his conquests, though they are unrivalled. No one else so gained the love of the conquered, had such wide and comprehensive views for the amelioration of the world, or rose so superior to the prejudice of race; nor have any ten years left so lasting a trace upon the history of the world as those of his career.

It is not, however, of his victories that we are here to speak, but of his return march from the banks of the Indus, in BC 326, when he had newly recovered from the severe wound which

he had received under the fig tree, within the mud wall of the city of the Malli. This expedition was as much the expedition of a discoverer as the journey of a conqueror: and, at the mouth of the Indus, he sent his ships to survey the coasts of the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf, while he himself marched along the shore of the province, then called Gedrosia, and now Mekhran. It was a most dismal tract. Above towered mountains of reddish- brown bare stone, treeless and without verdure, the scanty grass produced in the summer being burnt up long before September, the month of his march; and all the slope below was equally desolate slopes of gravel. The few inhabitants were called by the Greeks fish-eaters and turtle-eaters, because there was apparently, nothing else to eat; and their huts were built of turtle shells.

The recollections connected with the region were dismal. Semiramis and Cyrus were each said to have lost an army there through hunger and thirst; and these foes, the most fatal foes of the invader, began to attack the Greek host. Nothing but the discipline and all-pervading influence of Alexander could have borne his army through. Speed was their sole chance; and through the burning sun, over the arid rock, he stimulated their steps with his own high spirit of unshrinking endurance, till he had dragged them through one of the most rapid and extraordinary marches of his wonderful career. His own share in their privations was fully and freely taken; and once when, like the rest, he was faint with heat and deadly thirst, a small

quantity of water, won with great fatigue and difficulty, was brought to him, he esteemed it too precious to be applied to his own refreshment, but poured it forth as a libation, lest, he said, his warriors should thirst the more when they saw him drink alone; and, no doubt, too, because he felt the exceeding value of that which was purchased by loyal love. A like story is told of Rodolf of Hapsburgh, the founder of the greatness of Austria, and one of the most open-hearted of men. A flagon of water was brought to him when his army was suffering from severe drought. 'I cannot,' he said, 'drink alone, nor can all share so small a quantity. I do not thirst for myself, but for my whole army.'

Yet there have been thirsty lips that have made a still more trying renunciation. Our own Sir Philip Sidney, riding back, with the mortal hurt in his broken thigh, from the fight at Zutphen, and giving the draught from his own lips to the dying man whose necessities were greater than his own, has long been our proverb for the giver of that self-denying cup of water that shall by no means lose its reward.

A tradition of an act of somewhat the same character survived in a Slesvig family, now extinct. It was during the wars that ranged from 1652 to 1660, between Frederick III of Denmark and Charles Gustavus of Sweden, that, after a battle, in which the victory had remained with the Danes, a stout burgher of Flensborg was about to refresh himself, ere retiring to have his wounds dressed, with a draught of beer from a wooden bottle, when an imploring cry from a wounded Swede, lying on the field,

made him turn, and, with the very words of Sidney, 'Thy need is greater than mine,' he knelt down by the fallen enemy, to pour the liquor into his mouth. His requital was a pistol shot in the shoulder from the treacherous Swede. 'Rascal,' he cried, 'I would have befriended you, and you would murder me in return! Now I will punish you. I would have given you the whole bottle; but now you shall have only half.' And drinking off half himself, he gave the rest to the Swede. The king, hearing the story, sent for the burgher, and asked him how he came to spare the life of such a rascal.

'Sire,' said the honest burgher, 'I could never kill a wounded enemy.'

'Thou meritest to be a noble,' the king said, and created him one immediately, giving him as armorial bearings a wooden bottle pierced with an arrow! The family only lately became extinct in the person of an old maiden lady.

HOW ONE MAN HAS SAVED A HOST B.C. 507

There have been times when the devotion of one man has been the saving of an army. Such, according to old Roman story, was the feat of Horatius Cocles. It was in the year B.C. 507, not long after the kings had been expelled from Rome, when they were endeavoring to return by the aid of the Etruscans. Lars Porsena, one of the great Etruscan chieftains, had taken up the cause of the banished Tarquinius Superbus and his son Sextus, and gathered all his forces together, to advance upon the city of Rome. The great walls, of old Etrurian architecture, had probably already risen round the growing town, and all the people came flocking in from the country for shelter there; but the Tiber was the best defense, and it was only crossed by one wooden bridge, and the farther side of that was guarded by a fort, called the Janiculum. But the vanguards of the overwhelming Etruscan army soon took the fort, and then, in the gallant words of Lord Macaulay's ballad, —

'Thus in all the Senate
  There was no heart so bold
But sore it ached, and fast it beat,

When that ill news was told.
Forthwith uprose the Consul,
Up rose the Fathers all,
In haste they girded up their gowns,
And hied them to the wall.

'They held a council standing
Before the River Gate:
Short time was there, ye well may guess,
For musing or debate.
Out spoke the Consul roundly,
'The bridge must straight go down,
For, since Janiculum is lost,
Nought else can save the town.'

'Just then a scout came flying,
All wild with haste and fear:
'To arms! To arms! Sir Consul,
Lars Porsena is here.'
On the low hills to westward
The Consul fixed his eye,
And saw the swarthy storm of dust
Rise fast along the sky.

•••

'But the Consul's brow was sad,
  And the Consul's speech was low,
And darkly looked he at the wall,
  And darkly at the foe.
'Their van will be upon us
  Before the bridge goes down;
And if they once may win the bridge
  What hope to save the town?'

'Then out spoke brave Horatius,
  The Captain of the Gate,
'To every man upon this earth
  Death cometh soon or late;
And how can man die better
  Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers,
  And the temples of his gods?

'And for the tender mother
  Who dandled him to rest,
And for the wife who nurses
  His baby at her breast?
And for the holy maidens
  Who feed the eternal flame,
To save them from false Sextus,
  That wrought the deed of shame?

'Hew down the bridge, Sir Consul,
  With all the speed ye may,

I, with two more to help me,
  Will hold the foe in play.
In yon strait path a thousand
  May well be stopp'd by three:
Now who will stand on either hand,
  And keep the bridge with me?'

'Then out spake Spurius Lartius,
  A Ramnian proud was he,
'Lo, I will stand at thy right hand,
  And keep the bridge with thee.'
And out spake strong Herminius,
  Of Titian blood was he,
'I will abide on thy left side,
  And keep the bridge with thee.'

So forth went these three brave men, Horatius, the Consul's nephew, Spurius Lartius, and Titus Herminius, to guard the bridge at the farther end, while all the rest of the warriors were breaking down the timbers behind them.

'And Fathers mixed with commons,
  Seized hatchet, bar, and crow,
And smote upon the planks above,
  And loosen'd them below.
'Meanwhile the Tuscan army,
  Right glorious to behold,
Came flashing back the noonday light,
Rank behind rank, like surges bright,

Of a broad sea of gold.
Four hundred trumpets sounded
A peal of warlike glee,
As that great host, with measured tread,
And spears advanced, and ensigns spread,
Roll'd slowly towards the bridge's head,
Where stood the dauntless three.

'The three stood calm and silent,
And look'd upon the foes,
And a great shout of laughter
From all the vanguard rose.'

They laughed to see three men standing to meet the whole army; but it was so narrow a space, that no more than three enemies could attack them at once, and it was not easy to match them. Foe after foe came forth against them, and went down before their swords and spears, till at last—

'Was none that would be foremost
To lead such dire attack;
But those behind cried 'Forward!'
And those before cried 'Back!'

•••

However, the supports of the bridge had been destroyed.

'But meanwhile axe and lever
Have manfully been plied,
And now the bridge hangs tottering
Above the boiling tide.
'Come back, come back, Horatius!'
Loud cried the Fathers all;

'Back, Lartius! Back, Herminius!
Back, ere the ruin fall!'
'Back darted Spurius Lartius,
Herminius darted back;
And as they passed, beneath their feet
They felt the timbers crack;
But when they turn'd their faces,
And on the farther shore
Saw brave Horatius stand alone,
They would have cross'd once more.

'But with a crash like thunder
Fell every loosen'd beam,
And, like a dam, the mighty wreck
Lay right athwart the stream;
And a long shout of triumph
Rose from the walls of Rome,
As to the highest turret-tops
Was splashed the yellow foam.'

The one last champion, behind a rampart of dead enemies,

remained till the destruction was complete.

'Alone stood brave Horatius,
But constant still in mind,
Thrice thirty thousand foes before
And the broad flood behind.'

A dart had put out one eye, he was wounded in the thigh, and his work was done. He turned round, and—

'Saw on Palatinus,
The white porch of his home,
And he spake to the noble river
That rolls by the walls of Rome:
'O Tiber! father Tiber!
To whom the Romans pray,
A Roman's life, a Roman's arms
Take thou in charge this day.'

And with this brief prayer he leapt into the foaming stream. Polybius was told that he was there drowned; but Livy gives the version which the ballad follows:—

'But fiercely ran the current,
Swollen high by months of rain,
And fast his blood was flowing,
And he was sore in pain,
And heavy with his armor,

And spent with changing blows,
And oft they thought him sinking,
But still again he rose.

'Never, I ween, did swimmer,
In such an evil case,
Struggle through such a raging flood
Safe to the landing place.
But his limbs were borne up bravely
By the brave heart within,
And our good father Tiber
Bare bravely up his chin.

•••

'And now he feels the bottom,
Now on dry earth he stands,
Now round him throng the Fathers,
To press his gory hands.
And now with shouts and clapping,
And noise of weeping loud,
He enters through the River Gate,
Borne by the joyous crowd.

'They gave him of the corn land,
That was of public right,

As much as two strong oxen
  Could plough from morn to night.
And they made a molten image,
  And set it up on high,
And there it stands unto this day,
  To witness if I lie.

'It stands in the Comitium,
  Plain for all folk to see,
Horatius in his harness,
  Halting upon his knee:
And underneath is written,
  In letters all of gold,
How valiantly he kept the bridge
  In the brave days of old.'

Never was more honorable surname than his, of Cocles, or the one-eyed; and though his lameness prevented him from ever being a Consul, or leading an army, he was so much beloved and honored by his fellow citizens, that in the time of a famine each Roman, to the number of 300,000, brought him a day's food, lest he should suffer want. The statue was shown even in the time of Pliny, 600 years afterwards, and was probably only destroyed when Rome was sacked by the barbarians.

Nor was the Roman bridge the only one that has been defended by one man against a host. In our own country, Stamford Bridge was, in like manner, guarded by a single brave Northman, after the battle fought A.D. 1066, when Earl Tostig,

the son of Godwin, had persuaded the gallant sea king, Harald Hardrada, to come and invade England. The chosen English king, Harold, had marched at full speed from Sussex to Yorkshire, and met the invaders marching at their ease, without expecting any enemy, and wearing no defensive armor, as they went forth to receive the keys of the city of York. The battle was fought by the Norsemen in the full certainty that it must be lost. The banner, 'Landwaster', was planted in the midst; and the king, chanting his last song, like the minstrel warrior he had always been, stood, with his bravest men, in a death ring around it. There he died, and his choicest warriors with him; but many more fled back towards the ships, rushing over the few planks that were the only way across the River Ouse. And here stood their defender, alone upon the bridge, keeping back the whole pursuing English army, who could only attack him one at a time; until, with shame be it spoken, he died by a cowardly blow by an enemy, who had crept down the bank of the river, and under the bridge, through the openings between the timbers of which he thrust up his spear, and thus was able to hurl the brave Northman into the river, mortally wounded, but not till great numbers of his countrymen had reached their ships, their lives saved by his gallantry.

In like manner, Robert Bruce, in the time of his wanderings, during the year 1306, saved his whole band by his sole exertions. He had been defeated by the forces of Edward I. at Methven, and had lost many of his friends. His little army went wandering among the hills, sometimes encamping in the woods, sometimes

crossing the lakes in small boats. Many ladies were among them, and their summer life had some wild charms of romance; as the knightly huntsmen brought in the salmon, the roe, and the deer that formed their food, and the ladies gathered the flowering heather, over which soft skins were laid for their bedding. Sir James Douglas was the most courtly and graceful knight of all the party, and ever kept them enlivened by his gay temper and ready wit; and the king himself cherished a few precious romances, which he used to read aloud to his followers as they rested in their mountain home.

But their bitter foe, the Lord of Lorn, was always in pursuit of them, and, near the head of the Tay, he came upon the small army of 300 men with 1000 Highlanders, armed with Lochaber axes, at a place which is still called Dalry, or the King's Field. Many of the horses were killed by the axes; and James Douglas and Gilbert de la Haye were both wounded. All would have been slain or fallen into the hand of the enemy, if Robert Bruce had not sent them all on before him, up a narrow, steep path, and placed himself, with his armor and heavy horse, full in the path, protecting the retreat with his single arm. It was true, that so tall and powerful a man, sheathed in armor and on horseback, had a great advantage against the wild Highlanders, who only wore a shirt and a plaid, with a round target upon the arm; but they were lithe, active, light-footed men, able to climb like goats on the crags around him, and holding their lives as cheaply as he did.

Lorn, watching him from a distance, was struck with

amazement, and exclaimed, 'Methinks, Marthokson, he resembles Gol Mak Morn protecting his followers from Fingal;' thus comparing him to one the most brilliant champions a Highland imagination could conceive. At last, three men, named M'Androsser, rushed forward, resolved to free their chief from this formidable enemy. There was a lake on one side, and a precipice on the other, and the king had hardly space to manage his horse, when all three sprang on him at once. One snatched his bridle, one caught him by the stirrup and leg, and a third leaped from a rising ground and seated himself behind him on his horse. The first lost his arm by one sweep of the king's sword; the second was overthrown and trampled on; and the last, by a desperate struggle, was dashed down, and his skull cleft by the king's sword; but his dying grasp was so tight upon the plaid that Bruce was forced to unclasp the brooch that secured it, and leave both in the dead man's hold. It was long preserved by the Macdougals of Lorn, as a trophy of the narrow escape of their enemy.

Nor must we leave Robert the Bruce without mentioning that other Golden Deed, more truly noble because more full of mercy; namely, his halting his little army in full retreat in Ireland in the face of the English host under Roger Mortimer, that proper care and attendance might be given to one sick and suffering washerwoman and her new-born babe. Well may his old Scotch rhyming chronicler remark:—

'This was a full great courtesy
That swilk a king and so mighty,
Gert his men dwell on this manner,
But for a poor lavender.'

We have seen how the sturdy Roman fought for his city, the fierce Northman died to guard his comrades' rush to their ships after the lost battle, and how the mail-clad knightly Bruce periled himself to secure the retreat of his friends. Here is one more instance, from far more modern times, of a soldier, whose willing sacrifice of his own life was the safety of a whole army. It was in the course of the long dismal conflict between Frederick the Great of Prussia and Maria Theresa of Austria, which was called the Seven Years' War. Louis XV. of France had taken the part of Austria, and had sent an army into Germany in the autumn of 1760. From this the Marquis de Castries had been dispatched, with 25,000 men, towards Rheinberg, and had taken up a strong position at Klostercamp. On the night of the 15th of October, a young officer, called the Chevalier d'Assas, of the Auvergne regiment, was sent out to reconnoitre, and advanced alone into a wood, at some little distance from his men. Suddenly he found himself surrounded by a number of soldiers, whose bayonets pricked his breast, and a voice whispered in his ear, 'Make the slightest noise, and you are a dead man!' In one moment he understood it all. The enemy were advancing, to surprise the French army, and would be upon them when night was further advanced. That moment decided his fate. He shouted, as loud as

his voice would carry the words, 'Here, Auvergne! Here are the enemy!' By the time the cry reached the ears of his men, their captain was a senseless corpse; but his death had saved the army; the surprise had failed, and the enemy retreated.

Louis XV was too mean-spirited and selfish to feel the beauty of this brave action; but when, fourteen years later, Louis XVI came to the throne, he decreed that a pension should be given to the family as long as a male representative remained to bear the name of D'Assas. Poor Louis XVI had not long the control of the treasure of France; but a century of changes, wars, and revolutions has not blotted out the memory of the self-devotion of the chevalier; for, among the new war-steamers of the French fleet, there is one that bears the ever-honored name of D'Assas.

THE PASS OF THERMOPYLAE B.C. 430

There was trembling in Greece. 'The Great King', as the Greeks called the chief potentate of the East, whose domains stretched from the Indian Caucasus to the Aegaeus, from the Caspian to the Red Sea, was marshalling his forces against the little free states that nestled amid the rocks and gulfs of the Eastern Mediterranean. Already had his might devoured the cherished colonies of the Greeks on the eastern shore of the Archipelago, and every traitor to home institutions found a ready asylum at that despotic court, and tried to revenge his own wrongs by whispering incitements to invasion. 'All people, nations, and languages,' was the commencement of the decrees of that monarch's court; and it was scarcely a vain boast, for his satraps ruled over subject kingdoms, and among his tributary nations he counted the Chaldean, with his learning and old civilization, the wise and steadfast Jew, the skilful Phoenician, the learned Egyptian, the wild, free-booting Arab of the desert, the dark-skinned Ethiopian, and over all these ruled the keen-witted, active native Persian race, the conquerors of all the rest, and led by a chosen band proudly called the Immortal. His many capitals—Babylon the great, Susa, Persepolis, and the like—were names of dreamy splendor to the Greeks, described now

and then by Ionians from Asia Minor who had carried their tribute to the king's own feet, or by courtier slaves who had escaped with difficulty from being all too serviceable at the tyrannic court. And the lord of this enormous empire was about to launch his countless host against the little cluster of states, the whole of which together would hardly equal one province of the huge Asiatic realm! Moreover, it was a war not only on the men but on their gods. The Persians were zealous adorers of the sun and of fire, they abhorred the idol worship of the Greeks, and defiled and plundered every temple that fell in their way. Death and desolation were almost the best that could be looked for at such hands—slavery and torture from cruelly barbarous masters would only too surely be the lot of numbers, should their land fall a prey to the conquerors.

True it was that ten years back the former Great King had sent his best troops to be signally defeated upon the coast of Attica; but the losses at Marathon had but stimulated the Persian lust of conquest, and the new King Xerxes was gathering together such myriads of men as should crush down the Greeks and overrun their country by mere force of numbers.

The muster place was at Sardis, and there Greek spies had seen the multitudes assembling and the state and magnificence of the king's attendants. Envoys had come from him to demand earth and water from each state in Greece, as emblems that land and sea were his, but each state was resolved to be free, and only Thessaly, that which lay first in his path, consented to yield

the token of subjugation. A council was held at the Isthmus of Corinth, and attended by deputies from all the states of Greece to consider of the best means of defense. The ships of the enemy would coast round the shores of the Aegean sea, the land army would cross the Hellespont on a bridge of boats lashed together, and march southwards into Greece. The only hope of averting the danger lay in defending such passages as, from the nature of the ground, were so narrow that only a few persons could fight hand to hand at once, so that courage would be of more avail than numbers.

The first of all these passes was called Tempe, and a body of troops was sent to guard it; but they found that this was useless and impossible, and came back again. The next was at Thermopylae. Look in your map of the Archipelago, or Aegean Sea, as it was then called, for the great island of Negropont, or by its old name, Euboea. It looks like a piece broken off from the coast, and to the north is shaped like the head of a bird, with the beak running into a gulf, that would fit over it, upon the main land, and between the island and the coast is an exceedingly narrow strait. The Persian army would have to march round the edge of the gulf. They could not cut straight across the country, because the ridge of mountains called Ceta rose up and barred their way. Indeed, the woods, rocks, and precipices came down so near the seashore, that in two places there was only room for one single wheel track between the steeps and the impassable morass that formed the border of the gulf on its south side. These

two very narrow places were called the gates of the pass, and were about a mile apart. There was a little more width left in the intervening space; but in this there were a number of springs of warm mineral water, salt and sulphurous, which were used for the sick to bathe in, and thus the place was called Thermopylae, or the Hot Gates. A wall had once been built across the westernmost of these narrow places, when the Thessalians and Phocians, who lived on either side of it, had been at war with one another; but it had been allowed to go to decay, since the Phocians had found out that there was a very steep narrow mountain path along the bed of a torrent, by which it was possible to cross from one territory to the other without going round this marshy coast road.

This was, therefore, an excellent place to defend. The Greek ships were all drawn up on the farther side of Euboea to prevent the Persian vessels from getting into the strait and landing men beyond the pass, and a division of the army was sent off to guard the Hot Gates. The council at the Isthmus did not know of the mountain pathway, and thought that all would be safe as long as the Persians were kept out of the coast path.

The troops sent for this purpose were from different cities, and amounted to about 4,000, who were to keep the pass against two millions. The leader of them was Leonidas, who had newly become one of the two kings of Sparta, the city that above all in Greece trained its sons to be hardy soldiers, dreading death infinitely less than shame. Leonidas had already made up his mind that the expedition would probably be his death, perhaps

because a prophecy had been given at the Temple of Delphi that Sparta should be saved by the death of one of her kings of the race of Hercules. He was allowed by law to take with him 300 men, and these he chose most carefully, not merely for their strength and courage, but selecting those who had sons, so that no family might be altogether destroyed. These Spartans, with their helots or slaves, made up his own share of the numbers, but all the army was under his generalship. It is even said that the 300 celebrated their own funeral rites before they set out, lest they should be deprived of them by the enemy, since, as we have already seen, it was the Greek belief that the spirits of the dead found no rest till their obsequies had been performed. Such preparations did not daunt the spirits of Leonidas and his men, and his wife, Gorgo, who was not a woman to be faint-hearted or hold him back. Long before, when she was a very little girl, a word of hers had saved her father from listening to a traitorous message from the King of Persia; and every Spartan lady was bred up to be able to say to those she best loved that they must come home from battle 'with the shield or on it'—either carrying it victoriously or borne upon it as a corpse.

When Leonidas came to Thermopylae, the Phocians told him of the mountain path through the chestnut woods of Mount Ceta, and begged to have the privilege of guarding it on a spot high up on the mountain side, assuring him that it was very hard to find at the other end, and that there was every probability that the enemy would never discover it. He consented, and encamping

around the warm springs, caused the broken wall to be repaired, and made ready to meet the foe.

The Persian army were seen covering the whole country like locusts, and the hearts of some of the southern Greeks in the pass began to sink. Their homes in the Peloponnesus were comparatively secure—had they not better fall back and reserve themselves to defend the Isthmus of Corinth? But Leonidas, though Sparta was safe below the Isthmus, had no intention of abandoning his northern allies, and kept the other Peloponnesians to their posts, only sending messengers for further help.

Presently a Persian on horseback rode up to reconnoitre the pass. He could not see over the wall, but in front of it, and on the ramparts, he saw the Spartans, some of them engaged in active sports, and others in combing their long hair. He rode back to the king, and told him what he had seen. Now, Xerxes had in his camp an exiled Spartan Prince, named Demaratus, who had become a traitor to his country, and was serving as counsellor to the enemy. Xerxes sent for him, and asked whether his countrymen were mad to be thus employed instead of fleeing away; but Demaratus made answer that a hard fight was no doubt in preparation, and that it was the custom of the Spartans to array their hair with special care when they were about to enter upon any great peril. Xerxes would, however, not believe that so petty a force could intend to resist him, and waited four days, probably expecting his fleet to assist him, but as it did not appear, the attack was made.

The Greeks, stronger men and more heavily armed, were far better able to fight to advantage than the Persians, with their short spears and wicker shields, and beat them off with great ease. It is said that Xerxes three times leapt off his throne in despair at the sight of his troops being driven backwards; and thus for two days it seemed as easy to force a way through the Spartans as through the rocks themselves. Nay, how could slavish troops, dragged from home to spread the victories of an ambitious king, fight like freemen who felt that their strokes were to defend their homes and children!

But on that evening a wretched man, named Ephialtes, crept into the Persian camp, and offered, for a great sum of money, to show the mountain path that would enable the enemy to take the brave defenders in the rear! A Persian general, named Hydarnes, was sent off at nightfall with a detachment to secure this passage, and was guided through the thick forests that clothed the hillside. In the stillness of the air, at daybreak, the Phocian guards of the path were startled by the crackling of the chestnut leaves under the tread of many feet. They started up, but a shower of arrows was discharged on them, and forgetting all save the present alarm, they fled to a higher part of the mountain, and the enemy, without waiting to pursue them, began to descend.

As day dawned, morning light showed the watchers of the Grecian camp below a glittering and shimmering in the torrent bed where the shaggy forests opened; but it was not the sparkle of water, but the shine of gilded helmets and the gleaming

of silvered spears! Moreover, a Cimmerian crept over to the wall from the Persian camp with tidings that the path had been betrayed, that the enemy were climbing it, and would come down beyond the Eastern Gate. Still, the way was rugged and circuitous, the Persians would hardly descend before midday, and there was ample time for the Greeks to escape before they could be shut in by the enemy.

There was a short council held over the morning sacrifice. Megistias, the seer, on inspecting the entrails of the slain victim, declared, as well he might, that their appearance boded disaster. Him Leonidas ordered to retire, but he refused, though he sent home his only son. There was no disgrace to an ordinary tone of mind in leaving a post that could not be held, and Leonidas recommended all the allied troops under his command to march away while yet the way was open. As to himself and his Spartans, they had made up their minds to die at their post, and there could be no doubt that the example of such a resolution would do more to save Greece than their best efforts could ever do if they were careful to reserve themselves for another occasion.

All the allies consented to retreat, except the eighty men who came from Mycenae and the 700 Thespians, who declared that they would not desert Leonidas. There were also 400 Thebans who remained; and thus the whole number that stayed with Leonidas to confront two million of enemies were fourteen hundred warriors, besides the helots or attendants on the 300 Spartans, whose number is not known, but there was probably at

least one to each. Leonidas had two kinsmen in the camp, like himself, claiming the blood of Hercules, and he tried to save them by giving them letters and messages to Sparta; but one answered that 'he had come to fight, not to carry letters'; and the other, that 'his deeds would tell all that Sparta wished to know'. Another Spartan, named Dienices, when told that the enemy's archers were so numerous that their arrows darkened the sun, replied, 'So much the better, we shall fight in the shade.' Two of the 300 had been sent to a neighboring village, suffering severely from a complaint in the eyes. One of them, called Eurytus, put on his armor, and commanded his helot to lead him to his place in the ranks; the other, called Aristodemus, was so overpowered with illness that he allowed himself to be carried away with the retreating allies. It was still early in the day when all were gone, and Leonidas gave the word to his men to take their last meal. 'To-night,' he said, 'we shall sup with Pluto.'

Hitherto, he had stood on the defensive, and had husbanded the lives of his men; but he now desired to make as great a slaughter as possible, so as to inspire the enemy with dread of the Grecian name. He therefore marched out beyond the wall, without waiting to be attacked, and the battle began. The Persian captains went behind their wretched troops and scourged them on to the fight with whips! Poor wretches, they were driven on to be slaughtered, pierced with the Greek spears, hurled into the sea, or trampled into the mud of the morass; but their inexhaustible numbers told at length. The spears of the Greeks

broke under hard service, and their swords alone remained; they began to fall, and Leonidas himself was among the first of the slain. Hotter than ever was the fight over his corpse, and two Persian princes, brothers of Xerxes, were there killed; but at length word was brought that Hydarnes was over the pass, and that the few remaining men were thus enclosed on all sides. The Spartans and Thespians made their way to a little hillock within the wall, resolved to let this be the place of their last stand; but the hearts of the Thebans failed them, and they came towards the Persians holding out their hands in entreaty for mercy. Quarter was given to them, but they were all branded with the king's mark as untrustworthy deserters. The helots probably at this time escaped into the mountains; while the small desperate band stood side by side on the hill still fighting to the last, some with swords, others with daggers, others even with their hands and teeth, till not one living man remained amongst them when the sun went down. There was only a mound of slain, bristled over with arrows.

Twenty thousand Persians had died before that handful of men! Xerxes asked Demaratus if there were many more at Sparta like these, and was told there were 8,000. It must have been with a somewhat failing heart that he invited his courtiers from the fleet to see what he had done to the men who dared to oppose him! and showed them the head and arm of Leonidas set up upon a cross; but he took care that all his own slain, except 1,000, should first be put out of sight. The body of the brave king was buried where he fell, as were those of the other dead.

Much envied were they by the unhappy Aristodemus, who found himself called by no name but the 'Coward', and was shunned by all his fellow-citizens. No one would give him fire or water, and after a year of misery, he redeemed his honor by perishing in the forefront of the battle of Plataea, which was the last blow that drove the Persians ingloriously from Greece.

The Greeks then united in doing honor to the brave warriors who, had they been better supported, might have saved the whole country from invasion. The poet Simonides wrote the inscriptions that were engraved upon the pillars that were set up in the pass to commemorate this great action. One was outside the wall, where most of the fighting had been. It seems to have been in honor of the whole number who had for two days resisted —

> 'Here did four thousand men from Pelops' land
> Against three hundred myriads bravely stand'.

In honor of the Spartans was another column—

> 'Go, traveler, to Sparta tell
> That here, obeying her, we fell'.

On the little hillock of the last resistance was placed the figure of a stone lion, in memory of Leonidas, so fitly named the lion-like, and Simonides, at his own expense, erected a pillar to his friend, the seer Megistias—

'The great Megistias' tomb you here may view,
Who slew the Medes, fresh from Spercheius fords;
Well the wise seer the coming death foreknew,
Yet scorn'd he to forsake his Spartan lords'.

The names of the 300 were likewise engraven on a pillar at Sparta.

Lions, pillars, and inscriptions have all long since passed away, even the very spot itself has changed; new soil has been formed, and there are miles of solid ground between Mount Ceta and the gulf, so that the Hot Gates no longer exist. But more enduring than stone or brass—nay, than the very battlefield itself—has been the name of Leonidas. Two thousand three hundred years have sped since he braced himself to perish for his country's sake in that narrow, marshy coast road, under the brow of the wooded crags, with the sea by his side. Since that time how many hearts have glowed, how many arms have been nerved at the remembrance of the Pass of Thermopylae, and the defeat that was worth so much more than a victory!

THE ROCK OF THE CAPITOL
B.C. 389

The city of Rome was gradually rising on the banks of the Tiber, and every year was adding to its temples and public buildings.

Every citizen loved his city and her greatness above all else. There was as yet little wealth among them; the richest owned little more than a few acres, which they cultivated themselves by the help of their families, and sometimes of a few slaves, and the beautiful Campagna di Roma, girt in by hills looking like amethysts in the distance, had not then become almost uninhabitable from pestilential air, but was rich and fertile, full of highly cultivated small farms, where corn was raised in furrows made by a small hand plough, and herds of sheep, goats, and oxen browsed in the pasture lands. The owners of these lands would on public days take off their rude working dress and broad-brimmed straw hat, and putting on the white toga with a purple hem, would enter the city, and go to the valley called the Forum or Marketplace to give their votes for the officers of state who were elected every year; especially the two consuls, who were like kings all but the crown, wore purple togas richly embroidered, sat on ivory chairs, and were followed by lictors carrying an axe in a bundle of rods for the execution of justice. In their

own chamber sat the Senate, the great council composed of the patricians, or citizens of highest birth, and of those who had formerly been consuls. They decided on peace or war, and made the laws, and were the real governors of the State, and their grave dignity made a great impression on all who came near them. Above the buildings of the city rose steep and high the Capitoline Hill, with the Temple of Jupiter on its summit, and the strong wall in which was the chief stronghold and citadel of Rome, the Capitol, the very centre of her strength and resolution. When a war was decided on, every citizen capable of bearing arms was called into the Forum, bringing his helmet, breast plate, short sword, and heavy spear, and the officers called tribunes, chose out a sufficient number, who were formed into bodies called legions, and marched to battle under the command of one of the consuls. Many little States or Italian tribes, who had nearly the same customs as Rome, surrounded the Campagna, and so many disputes arose that every year, as soon as the crops were saved, the armies marched out, the flocks were driven to folds on the hills, the women and children were placed in the walled cities, and a battle was fought, sometimes followed up by the siege of the city of the defeated. The Romans did not always obtain the victory, but there was a staunchness about them that was sure to prevail in the long run; if beaten one year, they came back to the charge the next, and thus they gradually mastered one of their neighbors after another, and spread their dominion over the central part of Italy.

They were well used to Italian and Etruscan ways of making war, but after nearly 400 years of this kind of fighting, a stranger and wilder enemy came upon them. These were the Gauls, a tall strong, brave people, long limbed and red-haired, of the same race as the highlanders of Scotland. They had gradually spread themselves over the middle of Europe, and had for some generations past lived among the Alpine mountains, whence they used to come down upon the rich plans of northern Italy for forays, in which they slew and burnt, and drove off cattle, and now and then, when a country was quite depopulated, would settle themselves in it. And thus, the Gauls conquering from the north and the Romans from the south, these two fierce nations at length came against one another.

The old Roman story is that it happened thus: The Gauls had an unusually able leader, whom Latin historians call Brennus, but whose real name was most likely Bran, and who is said to have come out of Britain. He had brought a great host of Gauls to attack Clusium, a Tuscan city, and the inhabitants sent to Rome to entreat succor. Three ambassadors, brothers of the noble old family of Fabius, were sent from Rome to intercede for the Clusians. They asked Brennus what harm the men of Clusium had done the Gauls, that they thus made war on them, and, according to Plutarch's account, Brennus made answer that the injury was that the Clusians possessed land that the Gauls wanted, remarking that it was exactly the way in which the Romans themselves treated their neighbors, adding, however,

that this was neither cruel nor unjust, but according—

'To the good old plan
That they should take who have the power And they should keep who can.'[1]

The Fabii, on receiving this answer, were so foolish as to transgress the rule, owned by the savage Gauls, that an ambassador should neither fight nor be fought with; they joined the Clusians, and one brother, named Quintus, killed a remarkably large and tall Gallic chief in single combat. Brennus was justly enraged, and sent messengers to Rome to demand that the brothers should be given up to him for punishment. The priests and many of the Senate held that the rash young men had deserved death as covenant-breakers; but their father made strong interest for them, and prevailed not only to have them spared, but even chosen as tribunes to lead the legions in the war that was expected. [Footnote: These events happened during an experiment made by the Romans of having six military tribunes instead of two consuls.] Thus he persuaded the whole nation to take on itself the guilt of his sons, a want of true self-devotion uncommon among the old Romans, and which was severely punished.

The Gauls were much enraged, and hurried southwards, not waiting for plunder by the way, but declaring that they were friends to every State save Rome. The Romans on their side

[1] These lines of Wordsworth on Rob Roy's grave almost literally translate the speech Plutarch gives the first Kelt of history, Brennus.

collected their troops in haste, but with a lurking sense of having transgressed; and since they had gainsaid the counsel of their priests, they durst not have recourse to the sacrifices and ceremonies by which they usually sought to gain the favor of their gods. Even among heathens, the saying has often been verified, 'a sinful heart makes failing hand', and the battle on the banks of the River Allia, about eleven miles from Rome, was not so much a fight as a rout. The Roman soldiers were ill drawn up, and were at once broken. Some fled to Veii and other towns, many were drowned in crossing the Tiber, and it was but a few who showed in Rome their shame-stricken faces, and brought word that the Gauls were upon them.

Had the Gauls been really in pursuit, the Roman name and nation would have perished under their swords; but they spent three day in feasting and sharing their plunder, and thus gave the Romans time to take measures for the safety of such as could yet escape. There seems to have been no notion of defending the city, the soldiers had been too much dispersed; but all who still remained and could call up something of their ordinary courage, carried all the provisions they could collect into the stronghold of the Capitol, and resolved to hold out there till the last, in hopes that the scattered army might muster again, or that the Gauls might retreat, after having revenged themselves on the city. Everyone who could not fight, took flight, taking with them all they could carry, and among them went the white-clad troop of vestal virgins, carrying with them their censer of fire, which was

esteemed sacred, and never allowed to be extinguished. A man named Albinus, who saw these sacred women footsore, weary, and weighted down with the treasures of their temple, removed his own family and goods from his cart and seated them in it—an act of reverence for which he was much esteemed—and thus they reached the city of Cumae. The only persons left in Rome outside the Capitol were eighty of the oldest senators and some of the priests. Some were too feeble to fly, and would not come into the Capitol to consume the food that might maintain fighting men; but most of them were filled with a deep, solemn thought that, by offering themselves to the weapons of the barbarians, they might atone for the sin sanctioned by the Republic, and that their death might be the saving of the nation. This notion that the death of a ruler would expiate a country's guilt was one of the strange presages abroad in the heathen world of that which alone takes away the sin of all mankind.

On came the Gauls at last. The gates stood open, the streets were silent, the houses' low-browed doors showed no one in the paved courts. No living man was to be seen, till at last, hurrying down the steep empty streets, they reached the great open space of the Forum, and there they stood still in amazement, for ranged along a gallery were a row of ivory chairs, and in each chair sat the figure of a white-haired, white- bearded man, with arms and legs bare, and robes either of snowy white, white bordered with purple, or purple richly embroidered, ivory staves in their hands, and majestic, unmoved countenances. So motionless were

they, that the Gauls stood still, not knowing whether they beheld men or statues. A wondrous scene it must have been, as the brawny, red-haired Gauls, with freckled visage, keen little eyes, long broad sword, and wide plaid garment, fashioned into loose trousers, came curiously down into the marketplace, one after another; and each stood silent and transfixed at the spectacle of those grand figures, still unmoving, save that their large full liquid dark eyes showed them to be living beings. Surely these Gauls deemed themselves in the presence of that council of kings who were sometimes supposed to govern Rome, nay, if they were not before the gods themselves. At last, one Gaul, ruder, or more curious than the rest, came up to one of the venerable figures, and, to make proof whether he were flesh and blood, stroked his beard. Such an insult from an uncouth barbarian was more than Roman blood could brook, and the Gaul soon had his doubt satisfied by a sharp blow on the head from the ivory staff. All reverence was dispelled by that stroke; it was at once returned by a death thrust, and the fury of the savages wakening in proportion to the awe that had at first struck them, they rushed on the old senators, and slew each one in his curule chair.

Then they dispersed through the city, burning, plundering, and destroying. To take the Capitol they soon found to be beyond their power, but they hoped to starve the defenders out; and in the meantime they spent their time in pulling down the outer walls, and such houses and temples as had resisted the fire, till the defenders of the Capitol looked down from their height on

nothing but desolate black burnt ground, with a few heaps of ruins in the midst, and the barbarians roaming about in it, and driving in the cattle that their foraging parties collected from the country round. There was much earnest faith in their own religion among the Romans: they took all this ruin as the just reward of their shelter of the Fabii, and even in their extremity were resolved not to transgress any sacred rule. Though food daily became more scarce and starvation was fast approaching, not one of the sacred geese that were kept in Juno's Temple was touched; and one Fabius Dorso, who believed that the household gods of his family required yearly a sacrifice on their own festival day on the Quirinal Hill, arrayed himself in the white robes of a sacrificer, took his sacred images in his arms, and went out of the Capitol, through the midst of the enemy, through the ruins to the accustomed alter, and there preformed the regular rites. The Gauls, seeing that it was a religious ceremony, let him pass through them untouched, and he returned in safety; but Brennus was resolved on completing his conquest, and while half his forces went out to plunder, he remained with the other half, watching the moment to effect an entrance into the Capitol; and how were the defenders, worn out with hunger, to resist without relief from without? And who was there to bring relief to them, who were themselves the Roman State and government?

Now there was a citizen, named Marcus Furius Camillus, who was, without question, at that time, the first soldier of Rome, and had taken several of the chief Italian cities, especially that

of Veii, which had long been a most dangerous enemy. But he was a proud, haughty man, and had brought on himself much dislike; until, at last, a false accusation was brought against him, that he had taken an unfair share of the plunder of Veii. He was too proud to stand a trial; and leaving the city, was immediately fined a considerable sum. He had taken up his abode at the city of Ardea, and was there living when the plundering half of Brennus' army was reported to be coming thither. Camillus immediately offered the magistrates to undertake their defense; and getting together all the men who could bear arms, he led them out, fell upon the Gauls as they all lay asleep and unguarded in the dead of night, made a great slaughter of them, and saved Ardea. All this was heard by the many Romans who had been living dispersed since the rout of Allia; and they began to recover heart and spirit, and to think that if Camillus would be their leader, they might yet do something to redeem the honor of Rome, and save their friends in the Capitol. An entreaty was sent to him to take the command of them; but, like a proud, stern man as he was, he made answer, that he was a mere exile, and could not take upon himself to lead Romans without a decree from the Senate giving him authority. The Senate was—all that remained of it—shut up in the Capitol; the Gauls were spread all round; how was that decree to be obtained?

A young man, named Pontius Cominius, undertook the desperate mission. He put on a peasant dress, and hid some corks under it, supposing that he should find no passage by the bridge

over the Tiber. Traveling all day on foot, he came at night to the bank, and saw the guard at the bridge; then, having waited for darkness, he rolled his one thin light garment, with the corks wrapped up in it, round his head, and trusted himself to the stream of Father Tiber, like 'good Horatius' before him; and he was safely borne along to the foot of the Capitoline Hill. He crept along, avoiding every place where he saw lights or heard noise, till he came to a rugged precipice, which he suspected would not be watched by the enemy, who would suppose it too steep to be climbed from above or below. But the resolute man did not fear the giddy dangerous ascent, even in the darkness; he swung himself up by the stems and boughs of the vines and climbing plants, his naked feet clung to the rocks and tufts of grass, and at length he stood on the top of the rampart, calling out his name to the soldiers who came in haste around him, not knowing whether he were friend or foe. A joyful sound must his Latin speech have been to the long-tried, half starved garrison, who had not seen a fresh face for six long months! The few who represented the Senate and people of Rome were hastily awakened from their sleep, and gathered together to hear the tidings brought them at so much risk. Pontius told them of the victory at Ardea, and that Camillus and the Romans collected at Veii were only waiting to march to their succor till they should give him lawful power to take the command. There was little debate. The vote was passed at once to make Camillus Dictator, an office to which Romans were elected upon great emergencies, and which gave them, for

the time, absolute kingly control; and then Pontius, bearing the appointment, set off once again upon his mission, still under shelter of night, clambered down the rock, and crossed the Gallic camp before the barbarians were yet awake.

There was hope in the little garrison; but danger was not over. The sharp-eyed Gauls observed that the shrubs and creepers were broken, the moss frayed, and fresh stones and earth rolled down at the crag of the Capitol: they were sure that the rock had been climbed, and, therefore, that it might be climbed again. Should they, who were used to the snowy peaks, dark abysses, and huge glaciers of the Alps, be afraid to climb where a soft dweller in a tame Italian town could venture a passage? Brennus chose out the hardiest of his mountaineers, and directed them to climb up in the dead of night, one by one, in perfect silence, and thus to surprise the Romans, and complete the slaughter and victory, before the forces assembling at Veii would come to their rescue.

Silently the Gauls climbed, so stilly that not even a dog heard them; and the sentinel nearest to the post, who had fallen into a dead sleep of exhaustion from hunger, never awoke. But the fatal stillness was suddenly broken by loud gabbling, cackling, and flapping of heavy wings. The sacred geese of Juno, which had been so religiously spared in the famine, were frightened by the rustling beneath, and proclaimed their terror in their own noisy fashion. The first to take the alarm was Marcus Manlius, who started forward just in time to meet the foremost climbers as they set foot on the rampart. One, who raised an axe to strike,

lost his arm by one stroke of Manlius' short Roman sword; the next was by main strength hurled backwards over the precipice, and Manlius stood along on the top, for a few moments, ready to strike the next who should struggle up. The whole of the garrison were in a few moments on the alert, and the attack was entirely repulsed; the sleeping sentry was cast headlong down the rock; and Manlius was brought, by each grateful soldier, that which was then most valuable to all, a little meal and a small measure of wine. Still, the condition of the Capitol was lamentable; there was no certainty that Pontius had ever reached Camillus in safety; and, indeed, the discovery of his path by the enemy would rather have led to the supposition that he had been seized and detected. The best hope lay in wearying out the besiegers; and there seemed to be more chance of this since the Gauls often could be seen from the heights, burying the corpses of their dead; their tall, bony forms looked gaunt and drooping, and, here and there, unburied carcasses lay amongst the ruins. Nor were the flocks and herds any longer driven in from the country. Either all must have been exhausted, or else Camillus and his friends must be near, and preventing their raids. At any rate, it appeared as if the enemy was quite as ill off as to provisions as the garrison, and in worse condition as to health. In effect, this was the first example of the famous saying, that Rome destroys her conquerors. In this state of things one of the Romans had a dream that Jupiter, the special god of the Capitol, appeared to him, and gave the strange advice that all the remaining flour should be baked, and the

loaves thrown down into the enemy's camp. Telling the dream, which may, perhaps, have been the shaping of his own thoughts, that this apparent waste would persuade the barbarians that the garrison could not soon be starved out, this person obtained the consent of the rest of the besieged. Some approved the stratagem, and no one chose to act contrary to Jupiter's supposed advice; so the bread was baked, and tossed down by the hungry men.

After a time, there was a report from the outer guards that the Gallic watch had been telling them that their leader would be willing to speak with some of the Roman chiefs. Accordingly, Sulpitius, one of the tribunes, went out, and had a conference with Brennus, who declared that he would depart, provided the Romans would lay down a ransom, for their Capital and their own lives, of a thousand pounds' weight of gold. To this Sulpitius agreed, and returning to the Capitol, the gold was collected from the treasury, and carried down to meet the Gauls, who brought their own weights. The weights did not meet the amount of gold ornaments that had been contributed for the purpose, and no doubt the Gauls were resolved to have all that they beheld; for when Sulpitius was about to try to arrange the balance, Brennus insultingly threw his sword into his own scale, exclaiming, Voe victis! 'Woe to the conquered!' The Roman was not yet fallen so low as not to remonstrate, and the dispute was waxing sharp, when there was a confused outcry in the Gallic camp, a shout from the heights of the Capitol, and into the midst of the open space rode a band of Roman patricians and knights in armor,

with the Dictator Camillus at their head.

He no sooner saw what was passing, than he commanded the treasure to be taken back, and, turning to Brennus, said, 'It is with iron, not gold, that the Romans guard their country.'

Brennus declared that the treaty had been sworn to, and that it would be a breach of faith to deprive him of the ransom; to which Camillus replied, that he himself was Dictator, and no one had the power to make a treaty in his absence. The dispute was so hot, that they drew their swords against one another, and there was a skirmish among the ruins; but the Gauls soon fell back, and retreated to their camp, when they saw the main body of Camillus' army marching upon them. It was no less than 40,000 in number; and Brennus knew he could not withstand them with his broken, sickly army. He drew off early the next morning: but was followed by Camillus, and routed, with great slaughter, about eight miles from Rome; and very few of the Gauls lived to return home, for those who were not slain in battle were cut off in their flight by the country people, whom they had plundered.

In reward for their conduct on this occasion, Camillus was termed Romulus, Father of his Country, and Second Founder of Rome; Marcus Manlius received the honorable surname of Capitolinus; and even the geese were honored by having a golden image raised to their honor in Juno's temple, and a live goose was yearly carried in triumph, upon a soft litter, in a golden cage, as long as any heathen festivals lasted. The reward of Pontius Cominius does not appear; but surely he, and the old

senators who died for their country's sake, deserved to be for ever remembered for their brave contempt of life when a service could be done to the State.

The truth of the whole narrative is greatly doubted, and it is suspected that the Gallic conquest was more complete than the Romans ever chose to avow. Their history is far from clear up to this very epoch, when it is said that all their records were destroyed; but even when place and period are misty, great names and the main outline of their actions loom through the cloud, perhaps exaggerated, but still with some reality; and if the magnificent romance of the sack of Rome be not fact, yet it is certainly history, and well worthy of note and remembrance, as one of the finest extant traditions of a whole chain of Golden Deeds.

THE TWO FRIENDS OF SYRACUSE B.C. 380 (CIRCA)

Most of the best and noblest of the Greeks held what was called the Pythagorean philosophy. This was one of the many systems framed by the great men of heathenism, when by the feeble light of nature they were, as St. Paul says, 'seeking after God, if haply they might feel after Him', like men groping in the darkness. Pythagoras lived before the time of history, and almost nothing is known about him, though his teaching and his name were never lost. There is a belief that he had traveled in the East, and in Egypt, and as he lived about the time of the dispersion of the Israelites, it is possible that some of his purest and best teaching might have been crumbs gathered from their fuller instruction through the Law and the Prophets. One thing is plain, that even in dealing with heathenism the Divine rule holds good, 'By their fruits ye shall know them'. Golden Deeds are only to be found among men whose belief is earnest and sincere, and in something really high and noble. Where there was nothing worshiped but savage or impure power, and the very form of adoration was cruel and unclean, as among the Canaanites and Carthaginians, there we find no true self-devotion. The great deeds of the heathen world were all done by early Greeks and

Romans before yet the last gleams of purer light had faded out of their belief, and while their moral sense still nerved them to energy; or else by such later Greeks as had embraced the deeper and more earnest yearnings of the minds that had become a 'law unto themselves'.

The Pythagoreans were bound together in a brotherhood, the members of which had rules that are not now understood, but which linked them so as to form a sort of club, with common religious observances and pursuits of science, especially mathematics and music. And they were taught to restrain their passions, especially that of anger, and to endure with patience all kinds of suffering; believing that such self-restraint brought them nearer to the gods, and that death would set them free from the prison of the body. The souls of evil-doers would, they thought, pass into the lower and more degraded animals, while those of good men would be gradually purified, and rise to a higher existence. This, though lamentably deficient, and false in some points, was a real religion, inasmuch as it gave a rule of life, with a motive for striving for wisdom and virtue. Two friends of this Pythagorean sect lived at Syracuse, in the end of the fourth century before the Christian era. Syracuse was a great Greek city, built in Sicily, and full of all kinds of Greek art and learning; but it was a place of danger in their time, for it had fallen under the tyranny of a man of strange and capricious temper, though of great abilities, namely Dionysius. He is said to have been originally only a clerk in a public office, but his

talents raised him to continually higher situations, and at length, in a great war with the Carthaginians, who had many settlements in Sicily, he became general of the army, and then found it easy to establish his power over the city.

This power was not according to the laws, for Syracuse, like most other cities, ought to have been governed by a council of magistrates; but Dionysius was an exceedingly able man, and made the city much more rich and powerful, he defeated the Carthaginians, and rendered Syracuse by far the chief city in the island, and he contrived to make everyone so much afraid of him that no one durst attempt to overthrow his power. He was a good scholar, and very fond of philosophy and poetry, and he delighted to have learned men around him, and he had naturally a generous spirit; but the sense that he was in a position that did not belong to him, and that everyone hated him for assuming it, made him very harsh and suspicious. It is of him that the story is told, that he had a chamber hollowed in the rock near his state prison, and constructed with galleries to conduct sounds like an ear, so that he might overhear the conversation of his captives; and of him, too, is told that famous anecdote which has become a proverb, that on hearing a friend, named Damocles, express a wish to be in his situation for a single day, he took him at his word, and Damocles found himself at a banquet with everything that could delight his senses, delicious food, costly wine, flowers, perfumes, music; but with a sword with the point almost touching his head, and hanging by a single horsehair! This was to show the condition

in which a usurper lived!

Thus Dionysius was in constant dread. He had a wide trench round his bedroom, with a drawbridge that he drew up and put down with his own hands; and he put one barber to death for boasting that he held a razor to the tyrant's throat every morning. After this he made his young daughters shave him; but by and by he would not trust them with a razor, and caused them to singe of his beard with hot nutshells! He was said to have put a man named Antiphon to death for answering him, when he asked what was the best kind of brass, 'That of which the statues of Harmodius and Aristogeiton were made.' These were the two Athenians who had killed the sons of Pisistratus the tyrant, so that the jest was most offensive, but its boldness might have gained forgiveness for it. One philosopher, named Philoxenus, he sent to a dungeon for finding fault with his poetry, but he afterwards composed another piece, which he thought so superior, that he could not be content without sending for this adverse critic to hear it. When he had finished reading it, he looked to Philoxenus for a compliment; but the philosopher only turned round to the guards, and said dryly, 'Carry me back to prison.' This time Dionysius had the sense to laugh, and forgive his honesty.

All these stories may not be true; but that they should have been current in the ancient world shows what was the character of the man of whom they were told, how stern and terrible was his anger, and how easily it was incurred. Among those who came

under it was a Pythagorean called Pythias, who was sentenced to death, according to the usual fate of those who fell under his suspicion.

Pythias had lands and relations in Greece, and he entreated as a favor to be allowed to return thither and arrange his affairs, engaging to return within a specified time to suffer death. The tyrant laughed his request to scorn. Once safe out of Sicily, who would answer for his return? Pythias made reply that he had a friend, who would become security for his return; and while Dionysius, the miserable man who trusted nobody, was ready to scoff at his simplicity, another Pythagorean, by name of Damon, came forward, and offered to become surety for his friend, engaging, if Pythias did not return according to promise, to suffer death in his stead.

Dionysius, much astonished, consented to let Pythias go, marveling what would be the issue of the affair. Time went on and Pythias did not appear. The Syracusans watched Damon, but he showed no uneasiness. He said he was secure of his friend's truth and honor, and that if any accident had cause the delay of his return, he should rejoice in dying to save the life of one so dear to him.

Even to the last day Damon continued serene and content, however it might fall out; nay even when the very hour drew nigh and still no Pythias. His trust was so perfect, that he did not even grieve at having to die for a faithless friend who had left him to the fate to which he had unwarily pledged himself. It was not

Pythias' own will, but the winds and waves, so he still declared, when the decree was brought and the instruments of death made ready. The hour had come, and a few moments more would have ended Damon's life, when Pythias duly presented himself, embraced his friend, and stood forward himself to receive his sentence, calm, resolute, and rejoiced that he had come in time.

Even the dim hope they owned of a future state was enough to make these two brave men keep their word, and confront death for one another without quailing. Dionysius looked on more struck than ever. He felt that neither of such men must die. He reversed the sentence of Pythias, and calling the two to his judgment seat, he entreated them to admit him as a third in their friendship. Yet all the time he must have known it was a mockery that he should ever be such as they were to each other—he who had lost the very power of trusting, and constantly sacrificed others to secure his own life, whilst they counted not their lives dear to them in comparison with their truth to their word, and love to one another. No wonder that Damon and Pythias have become such a byword that they seem too well known to have their story told here, except that a name in everyone's mouth sometimes seems to be mentioned by those who have forgotten or never heard the tale attached to it.

THE DEVOTION OF THE DECII
B.C. 339

The spirit of self-devotion is so beautiful and noble, that even when the act is performed in obedience to the dictates of a false religion, it is impossible not to be struck with admiration and almost reverence for the unconscious type of the one great act that has hallowed every other sacrifice. Thus it was that Codrus, the Athenian king, has ever since been honored for the tradition that he gave his own life to secure the safety of his people; and there is a touching story, with neither name nor place, of a heathen monarch who was bidden by his priests to appease the supposed wrath of his gods by the sacrifice of the being dearest to him. His young son had been seized on as his most beloved, when his wife rushed between and declared that her son must live, and not by his death rob her of her right to fall, as her husband's dearest. The priest looked at the father; the face that had been sternly composed before was full of uncontrolled anguish as he sprang forward to save the wife rather than the child. That impulse was an answer, like the entreaty of the mother before Solomon; the priest struck the fatal blow ere the king's hand could withhold him, and the mother died with a last look of exceeding joy at her husband's love and her son's safety. Human sacrifices are of course accursed, and even

the better sort of heathens viewed them with horror; but the voluntary confronting of death, even at the call of a distorted presage of future atonement, required qualities that were perhaps the highest that could be exercised among those who were devoid of the light of truth.

In the year 339 there was a remarkable instance of such devotion. The Romans were at war with the Latins, a nation dwelling to the south of them, and almost exactly resembling themselves in language, habits, government, and fashions of fighting. Indeed the city of Rome itself was but an offshoot from the old Latin kingdom; and there was not much difference between the two nations even in courage and perseverance. The two consuls of the year were Titus Manlius Torquatus and Publius Decius Mus. They were both very distinguished men. Manlius was a patrician, or one of the high ancient nobles of Rome, and had in early youth fought a single combat with a gigantic Gaul, who offered himself, like Goliath, as a champion of his tribe; had slain him, and taken from him a gold torque, or collar, whence his surname Torquatus. Decius was a plebeian; one of the free though not noble citizens who had votes, but only within a few years had been capable of being chosen to the higher offices of state, and who looked upon every election to the consulship as a victory. Three years previously, when a tribune in command of a legion, Decius had saved the consul, Cornelius Cossus, from a dangerous situation, and enabled him to gain a great victory; and this exploit was remembered, and led

to the choice of this well-experienced soldier as the colleague of Manlius.

The two consuls both went out together in command of the forces, each having a separate army, and intending to act in concert. They marched to the beautiful country at the foot of Mount Vesuvius, which was then a harmless mountain clothed with chestnut woods, with spaces opening between, where farms and vineyards rejoiced in the sunshine and the fresh breezes of the lovely blue bay that lay stretched beneath. Those who climbed to the summit might indeed find beds of ashes and the jagged edge of a huge basin or gulf; the houses and walls were built of dark- red and black material that once had flowed from the crater in boiling torrents: but these had long since cooled, and so long was it since a column of smoke had been seen to rise from the mountain top, that it only remained as a matter of tradition that this region was one of mysterious fire, and that the dark cool lake Avernus, near the mountain skirts, was the very entrance to the shadowy realms beneath, that were supposed to be inhabited by the spirits of the dead.

It might be that the neighborhood of this lake, with the dread imaginations connected with it by pagan fancy, influenced even the stout hearts of the consuls; for, the night after they came in sight of the enemy, each dreamt the same dream, namely, that he beheld a mighty form of gigantic height and stature, who told him 'that the victory was decreed to that army of the two whose leader should devote himself to the Dii Manes,' that is, to the

deities who watched over the shades of the dead. Probably these older Romans held the old Etruscan belief, which took these 'gods beneath' to be winged beings, who bore away the departing soul, weighted its merits and demerits, and placed it in a region of peace or of woe, according to its deserts. This was part of the grave and earnest faith that gave the earlier Romans such truth and resolution; but latterly they so corrupted it with the Greek myths, that, in after times, they did not even know who the gods of Decius were.

At daybreak the two consuls sought one another out, and told their dreams; and they agreed that they would join their armies in one, Decius leading the right and Manlius the left wing; and that whichever found his troops giving way, should at once rush into the enemy's columns and die, to secure the victory to his colleague. At the same time strict commands were given that no Roman should come out of his rank to fight in single combat with the enemy; a necessary regulation, as the Latins were so like, in every respect, to the Romans, that there would have been fatal confusion had there been any mingling together before the battle. Just as this command had been given out, young Titus Manlius, the son of the consul, met a Latin leader, who called him by name and challenged him to fight hand to hand. The youth was emulous of the honor his father had gained by his own combat at the same age with the Gaul, but forgot both the present edict and that his father had scrupulously asked permission before accepting the challenge. He at once came forward, and after a brave conflict,

slew his adversary, and taking his armor, presented himself at his father's tent and laid the spoils at his feet.

But old Manlius turned aside sadly, and collected his troops to hear his address to his son: 'You have transgressed,' he said, 'the discipline which has been the support of the Roman people, and reduced me to the hard necessity of either forgetting myself and mine, or else the regard I owe to the general safety. Rome must not suffer by one fault. We must expiate it ourselves. A sad example shall we be, but a wholesome one to the Roman youth. For me, both the natural love of a father, and that specimen thou hast given of thy valor move me exceedingly; but since either the consular authority must be established by thy death, or destroyed by thy impunity, I cannot think, if thou be a true Manlius, that thou wilt be backward to repair the breach thou hast made in military discipline by undergoing the just meed of thine offence. He then placed the wreath of leaves, the reward of a victor, upon his son's head, and gave the command to the lictor to bind the young man to a stake, and strike off his head. The troops stood round as men stunned, no one durst utter a word; the son submitted without one complaint, since his death was for the good of Rome: and the father, trusting that the doom of the Dii Manes was about to overtake him, beheld the brave but rash young head fall, then watched the corpse covered with the trophies won from the Latins, and made no hindrance to the glorious obsequies with which the whole army honored this untimely death. Strict discipline was indeed established, and no

one again durst break his rank; but the younger men greatly hated Manlius for his severity, and gave him no credit for the agony he had concealed while giving up his gallant son to the wellbeing of Rome.

A few days after, the expected battle took place, and after some little time the front rank of Decius' men began to fall back upon the line in their rear. This was the token he had waited for. He called to Valerius, the chief priest of Rome, to consecrate him, and was directed to put on his chief robe of office, the beautiful toga proetexta, to cover his head, and standing on his javelin, call aloud to the 'nine gods' to accept his devotion, to save the Roman legions, and strike terror into his enemies. This done, he commanded his lictors to carry word to his colleague that the sacrifice was accomplished, and then girding his robe round him in the manner adopted in sacrificing to the gods, he mounted his white horse, and rushed like lightning into the thickest of the Latins. At first they fell away on all sides as if some heavenly apparition had come down on them; then, as some recognized him, they closed in on him, and pierced his breast with their weapons; but even as he fell the superstition that a devoted leader was sure to win the field, came full on their minds, they broke and fled. Meanwhile the message came to Manlius, and drew from him a burst of tears—tears that he had not shed for his son—his hope of himself meeting the doom and ending his sorrow was gone; but none the less he nerved himself to complete the advantage gained by Decius' death. Only one wing of the Latins

had fled, the other fought long and bravely, and when at last it was defeated, and cut down on the field of battle, both conqueror and conquered declared that, if Manlius had been the leader of the Latins, they would have had the victory. Manlius afterwards completely subdued the Latins, who became incorporated with the Romans; but bravely as he had borne up, his health gave way under his sorrow, and before the end of the year he was unable to take the field.

Forty-five years later, in the year 294, another Decius was consul. He was the son of the first devoted Decius, and had shown himself worthy of his name, both as a citizen and soldier. His first consulate had been in conjunction with one of the most high-spirited and famous Roman nobles, Quintus Fabius, surnamed Maximus, or the Greatest, and at three years' end they were again chosen together, when the Romans had been brought into considerable peril by an alliance between the Gauls and the Samnites, their chief enemies in Italy.

One being a patrician and the other a plebeian, there was every attempt made at Rome to stir up jealousies and dissensions between them; but both were much too noble and generous to be thus set one against the other; and when Fabius found how serious was the state of affairs in Etruria, he sent to Rome to entreat that Decius would come and act with him. 'With him I shall never want forces, nor have too many enemies to deal with.'

The Gauls, since the time of Brennus, had so entirely settled in northern Italy, that it had acquired the name of Cisalpine Gaul,

and they were as warlike as ever, while better armed and trained. The united armies of Gauls, Samnites, and their allies, together, are said to have amounted to 143,330 foot and 46,000 horse, and the Roman army consisted of four legions, 24,000 in all, with an unspecified number of horse. The place of battle was at Sentinum, and here for the first time the Gauls brought armed chariots into use,—probably the wicker chariots, with scythes in the midst of the clumsy wooden wheels, which were used by the Kelts in Britain two centuries later. It was the first time the Romans had encountered these barbarous vehicles; they were taken by surprise, the horses started, and could not be brought back to the charge, and the legions were mowed down like corn where the furious Gaul impelled his scythe. Decius shouted in vain, and tried to gather his men and lead them back; but the terror at this new mode of warfare had so mastered them, that they paid no attention to his call. Then, half in policy, half in superstition, he resolved to follow his father in his death. He called the chief priest, Marcus Livius, and standing on his javelin, went through the same formula of self-dedication, and in the like manner threw himself, alone and unarmed, in the midst of the enemy, among whom he soon fell, under many a savage stroke. The priest, himself a gallant soldier, called to the troops that their victory was now secured, and thoroughly believing him, they let him lead them back to the charge, and routed the Gauls; whilst Fabius so well did his part against the other nations, that the victory was complete, and 25,000 enemies were slain. So

covered was the body of Decius by the corpses of his enemies, that all that day it could not be found; but on the next it was discovered, and Fabius, with a full heart, pronounced the funeral oration of the second Decius, who had willingly offered himself to turn the tide of battle in favor of his country. It was the last of such acts of dedication—the Romans became more learned and philosophical, and perhaps more reasonable; and yet, mistaken as was the object, it seems a falling off that, 200 years later, Cicero should not know who were the 'nine gods' of the Decii, and should regard their sacrifice as 'heroic indeed, but unworthy of men of understanding'.

REGULUS
B.C. 249

The first wars that the Romans engaged in beyond the bounds of Italy, were with the Carthaginians. This race came from Tyre and Zidon; and were descended from some of the Phoenicians, or Zidonians, who were such dangerous foes, or more dangerous friends, to the Israelites. Carthage had, as some say, been first founded by some of the Canaanites who fled when Joshua conquered the Promised Land; and whether this were so or not, the inhabitants were in all their ways the same as the Tyrians and Zidonians, of whom so much is said in the prophecies of Isaiah and Ezekiel. Like them, they worshipped Baal and Ashtoreth, and the frightful Moloch, with foul and cruel rites; and, like them, they were excellent sailors and great merchants trading with every known country, and living in great riches and splendor at their grand city on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. That they were a wicked and cruel race is also certain; the Romans used to call deceit Punic faith, that is, Phoenician faith, and though no doubt Roman writers show them up in their worst colours, yet, after the time of Hiram, Solomon's ally at Tyre, it is plain from Holy Scripture that their crimes were great.

The first dispute between Rome and Carthage was about their possession in the island of Sicily; and the war thus begun

had lasted eight years when it was resolved to send an army to fight the Carthaginians on their own shores. The army and fleet were placed under the command of the two consuls, Lucius Manlius and Marcus Attilius Regulus. On the way, there was a great sea fight with the Carthaginian fleet, and this was the first naval battle that the Romans ever gained. It made the way to Africa free; but the soldiers, who had never been so far from home before, murmured, for they expected to meet not only human enemies, but monstrous serpents, lions, elephants, asses with horns, and dog-headed monsters, to have a scorching sun overhead, and a noisome marsh under their feet. However, Regulus sternly put a stop to all murmurs, by making it known that disaffection would be punished by death, and the army safely landed, and set up a fortification at Clypea, and plundered the whole country round. Orders here came from Rome that Manlius should return thither, but that Regulus should remain to carry on the war. This was a great grief to him. He was a very poor man, with nothing of his own but a little farm of seven acres, and the person whom he had employed to cultivate it had died in his absence; a hired laborer had undertaken the care of it, but had been unfaithful, and had run away with his tools and his cattle; so that he was afraid that, unless he could return quickly, his wife and children would starve. However, the Senate engaged to provide for his family, and he remained, making expeditions into the country round, in the course of which the Romans really did fall in with a serpent as monstrous as their imagination had

depicted. It was said to be 120 feet long, and dwelt upon the banks of the River Bagrada, where it used to devour the Roman soldiers as they went to fetch water. It had such tough scales that they were obliged to attack it with their engines meant for battering city walls, and only succeeded with much difficulty in destroying it.

The country was most beautiful, covered with fertile cornfields and full of rich fruit trees, and all the rich Carthaginians had country houses and gardens, which were made delicious with fountains, trees, and flowers. The Roman soldiers, plain, hardy, fierce, and pitiless, did, it must be feared, cruel damage among these peaceful scenes; they boasted of having sacked 300 villages, and mercy was not yet known to them. The Carthaginian army, though strong in horsemen and in elephants, kept upon the hills and did nothing to save the country, and the wild desert tribes of Numidians came rushing in to plunder what the Romans had left. The Carthaginians sent to offer terms of peace; but Regulus, who had become uplifted by his conquests, made such demands that the messengers remonstrated. He answered, 'Men who are good for anything should either conquer or submit to their betters;' and he sent them rudely away, like a stern old Roman as he was. His merit was that he had no more mercy on himself than on others.

The Carthaginians were driven to extremity, and made horrible offerings to Moloch, giving the little children of the noblest families to be dropped into the fire between the brazen

hands of his statue, and grown- up people of the noblest families rushed in of their own accord, hoping thus to propitiate their gods, and obtain safety for their country. Their time was not yet fully come, and a respite was granted to them. They had sent, in their distress, to hire soldiers in Greece, and among these came a Spartan, named Xanthippus, who at once took the command, and led the army out to battle, with a long line of elephants ranged in front of them, and with clouds of horsemen hovering on the wings. The Romans had not yet learnt the best mode of fighting with elephants, namely, to leave lanes in their columns where these huge beasts might advance harmlessly; instead of which, the ranks were thrust and trampled down by the creatures' bulk, and they suffered a terrible defeat; Regulus himself was seized by the horsemen, and dragged into Carthage, where the victors feasted and rejoiced through half the night, and testified their thanks to Moloch by offering in his fires the bravest of their captives.

Regulus himself was not, however, one of these victims. He was kept a close prisoner for two years, pining and sickening in his loneliness, while in the meantime the war continued, and at last a victory so decisive was gained by the Romans, that the people of Carthage were discouraged, and resolved to ask terms of peace. They thought that no one would be so readily listened to at Rome as Regulus, and they therefore sent him there with their envoys, having first made him swear that he would come back to his prison if there should neither be peace nor an exchange

of prisoners. They little knew how much more a true- hearted Roman cared for his city than for himself—for his word than for his life.

Worn and dejected, the captive warrior came to the outside of the gates of his own city, and there paused, refusing to enter. 'I am no longer a Roman citizen,' he said; 'I am but the barbarian's slave, and the Senate may not give audience to strangers within the walls.'

His wife Marcia ran out to greet him, with his two sons, but he did not look up, and received their caresses as one beneath their notice, as a mere slave, and he continued, in spite of all entreaty, to remain outside the city, and would not even go to the little farm he had loved so well.

The Roman Senate, as he would not come in to them, came out to hold their meeting in the Campagna.

The ambassadors spoke first, then Regulus, standing up, said, as one repeating a task, 'Conscript fathers, being a slave to the Carthaginians, I come on the part of my masters to treat with you concerning peace, and an exchange of prisoners.' He then turned to go away with the ambassadors, as a stranger might not be present at the deliberations of the Senate. His old friends pressed him to stay and give his opinion as a senator who had twice been consul; but he refused to degrade that dignity by claiming it, slave as he was. But, at the command of his Carthaginian masters, he remained, though not taking his seat.

Then he spoke. He told the senators to persevere in the

war. He said he had seen the distress of Carthage, and that a peace would only be to her advantage, not to that of Rome, and therefore he strongly advised that the war should continue. Then, as to the exchange of prisoners, the Carthaginian generals, who were in the hands of the Romans, were in full health and strength, whilst he himself was too much broken down to be fit for service again, and indeed he believed that his enemies had given him a slow poison, and that he could not live long. Thus he insisted that no exchange of prisoners should be made.

It was wonderful, even to Romans, to hear a man thus pleading against himself, and their chief priest came forward, and declared that, as his oath had been wrested from him by force, he was not bound to return to his captivity. But Regulus was too noble to listen to this for a moment. 'Have you resolved to dishonor me?' he said. 'I am not ignorant that death and the extremest tortures are preparing for me; but what are these to the shame of an infamous action, or the wounds of a guilty mind? Slave as I am to Carthage, I have still the spirit of a Roman. I have sworn to return. It is my duty to go; let the gods take care of the rest.'

The Senate decided to follow the advice of Regulus, though they bitterly regretted his sacrifice. His wife wept and entreated in vain that they would detain him; they could merely repeat their permission to him to remain; but nothing could prevail with him to break his word, and he turned back to the chains and death he expected so calmly as if he had been returning to his home. This was in the year B.C. 249.

'Let the gods take care of the rest,' said the Roman; the gods whom alone he knew, and through whom he ignorantly worshipped the true God, whose Light was shining out even in this heathen's truth and constancy. How his trust was fulfilled is not known. The Senate, after the next victory, gave two Carthaginian generals to his wife and sons to hold as pledges for his good treatment; but when tidings arrived that Regulus was dead, Marcia began to treat them both with savage cruelty, though one of them assured her that he had been careful to have her husband well used. Horrible stories were told that Regulus had been put out in the sun with his eyelids cut off, rolled down a hill in a barrel with spikes, killed by being constantly kept awake, or else crucified. Marcia seems to have set about, and perhaps believed in these horrors, and avenged them on her unhappy captives till one had died, and the Senate sent for her sons and severely reprimanded them. They declared it was their mother's doing, not theirs, and thenceforth were careful of the comfort of the remaining prisoner.

It may thus be hoped that the frightful tale of Regulus' sufferings was but formed by report acting on the fancy of a vindictive woman, and that Regulus was permitted to die in peace of the disease brought on far more probably by the climate and imprisonment, than by the poison to which he ascribed it. It is not the tortures he may have endured that make him one of the noblest characters of history, but the resolution that would neither let him save himself at the risk of his country's prosperity,

nor forfeit the word that he had pledged.

THE BRAVE BRETHREN OF JUDAH B.C. 180

It was about 180 years before the Christian era. The Jews had long since come home from Babylon, and built up their city and Temple at Jerusalem. But they were not free as they had been before. Their country belonged to some greater power, they had a foreign governor over them, and had to pay tribute to the king who was their master.

At the time we are going to speak of, this king was Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria. He was descended from one of those generals who, upon the death of Alexander the Great, had shared the East between them, and he reigned over all the country from the Mediterranean Sea even into Persia and the borders of India. He spoke Greek, and believed in both the Greek and Roman gods, for he had spent some time at Rome in his youth; but in his Eastern kingdom he had learnt all the self-indulgent and violent habits to which people in those hot countries are especially tempted.

He was so fierce and passionate, that he was often called the 'Madman', and he was very cruel to all who offended him. One of his greatest desires was, that the Jews should leave their true faith in one God, and do like the Greeks and Syrians, his other

subjects, worship the same idols, and hold drunken feasts in their honor. Sad to say, a great many of the Jews had grown ashamed of their own true religion and the strict ways of their law, and thought them old-fashioned. They joined in the Greek sports, played games naked in the theatre, joined in riotous processions, carrying ivy in honor of Bacchus, the god of wine, and offered incense to the idols; and the worst of all these was the false high priest, Menelaus, who led the King Antiochus into the Temple itself, even into the Holy of Holies, and told him all that would most desecrate it and grieve the Jews. So a little altar to the Roman god Jupiter was set up on the top of the great brazen altar of burnt offerings, a hog was offered up, and broth of its flesh sprinkled everywhere in the Temple; then all the precious vessels were seized, the shewbread table of gold, the candlesticks, and the whole treasury, and carried away by the king; the walls were thrown down, and the place made desolate.

Some Jews were still faithful to their God, but they were horribly punished and tortured to death before the eyes of the king; and when at last he went away to his own country, taking with him the wicked high priest Menelaus, he left behind him a governor and an army of soldiers stationed in the tower of Acra, which overlooked the Temple hill, and sent for an old man from Athens to teach the people the heathen rites and ceremonies. Any person who observed the Sabbath day, or any other ordinance of the law of Moses, was put to death in a most cruel manner; all the books of the Old Testament Scripture that could be found were

either burnt or defiled, by having pictures of Greek gods painted upon them; and the heathen priests went from place to place, with a little brazen altar and image and a guard of soldiers, who were to kill every person who refused to burn incense before the idol. It was the very saddest time that the Jews had ever known, and there seemed no help near or far off; they could have no hope, except in the promises that God would never fail His people, or forsake His inheritance, and in the prophecies that bad times should come, but good ones after them.

The Greeks, in going through the towns to enforce the idol worship, came to a little city called Modin, somewhere on the hills on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, not far from Joppa. There they sent out, as usual, orders to all the men of the town to meet them in the marketplace; but they were told beforehand, that the chief person in the place was an old man named Mattathias, of a priestly family, and so much respected, that all the other inhabitants of the place were sure to do whatever he might lead them in. So the Greeks sent for him first of all, and he came at their summons, a grand and noble old man, followed by his five sons, Johanan, Simon, Judas, Jonathan, and Eleazar. The Greek priest tried to talk him over. He told him that the high priest had forsaken the Jewish superstition, that the Temple was in ruins, and that resistance was in vain; and exhorted him to obtain gratitude and honor for himself, by leading his countrymen in thus adoring the deities of the king's choice, promising him rewards and treasures if he would comply.

But the old man spoke out with a loud and fearless voice: 'Though all the nations that are under the king's dominion obey him, and fall away every one from the religion of their fathers, and give consent to his commandments; yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers. God forbid that we should forsake the law and the ordinances! We will not hearken to the king's words, to go from our religion, either on the right hand or the left!'

As he spoke, up came an apostate Jew to do sacrifice at the heathen altar. Mattathias trembled at the sight, and his zeal broke forth. He slew the offender, and his brave sons gathering round him, they attacked the Syrian soldiers, killed the commissioner, and threw down the altar. Then, as they knew that they could not there hold out against the king's power, Mattathias proclaimed throughout the city: 'Whosoever is zealous of the law, and maintaineth the covenant, let him follow me!' With that, he and his five sons, with their families, left their houses and lands, and drove their cattle with them up into the wild hills and caves, where David had once made his home; and all the Jews who wished to be still faithful, gathered around them, to worship God and keep His commandments.

There they were, a handful of brave men in the mountains, and all the heathen world and apostate Jews against them. They used to come down into the villages, remind the people of the law, promise their help, and throw down any idol altars that they found, and the enemy never were able to follow them into their

rocky strongholds. But the old Mattathias could not long bear the rude wild life in the cold mountains, and he soon died. First he called all his five sons, and bade them to 'be zealous for the law, and give their lives for the covenant of their fathers'; and he reminded them of all the many brave men who had before served God, and been aided in their extremity. He appointed his son Judas, as the strongest and mightiest, to lead his brethren to battle, and Simon, as the wisest, to be their counsellor; then he blessed them and died; and his sons were able to bury him in the tomb of his fathers at Modin.

Judas was one of the bravest men who ever lived; never dreading the numbers that came against him. He was surnamed Maccabeus, which some people say meant the hammerer; but others think it was made up of the first letters of the words he carried on his banner, which meant 'Who is like unto Thee, among the gods, O Lord?' Altogether he had about six thousand men round him when the Greek governor, Apollonius, came out to fight with him. The Jews gained here their first victory, and Judas killed Apollonius, took his sword, and fought all his other battles with it. Next came a captain called Seron, who went out to the hills to lay hold of the bold rebels that dared to rise against the King of Syria. The place where Judas met him was one to make the Jews' hearts leap with hope and trust. It was on the steep stony broken hillside of Beth-horon, the very place where Joshua had conquered the five kings of the Amorites, in the first battle on the coming in of the children of Israel to Palestine. There was

the rugged path where Joshua had stood and called out to the sun to stand still in Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon. Miracles were over, and Judas looked for no wonder to help him; but when he came up the mountain road from Joppa, his heart was full of the same trust as Joshua's, and he won another great victory.

By this time King Antiochus began to think the rising of the Jews a serious matter, but he could not come himself against them, because his provinces in Armenia and Persia had refused their tribute, and he had to go in person to reduce them. He appointed, however, a governor, named Lysias, to chastise the Jews, giving him an army of 40,000 foot and 7000 horse. Half of these Lysias sent on before him, with two captains, named Nicanor and Gorgias, thinking that these would be more than enough to hunt down and crush the little handful that were lurking in the hills. And with them came a great number of slave merchants, who had bargained with Nicanor that they should have ninety Jews for one talent, to sell to the Greeks and Romans, by whom Jewish slaves were much esteemed.

There was great terror in Palestine at these tidings, and many of the weaker-minded fell away from Judas; but he called all the faithful together at Mizpeh, the same place where, 1000 years before, Samuel had collected the Israelites, and, after prayer and fasting, had sent them forth to free their country from the Philistines. Shiloh, the sanctuary, was then lying desolate, just as Jerusalem now lay in ruins; and yet better times had come.

But very mournful was that fast day at Mizpeh, as the Jews looked along the hillside to their own holy mountain crowned by no white marble and gold Temple flashing back the sunbeams, but only with the tall castle of their enemies towering over the precipice. They could not sacrifice, because a sacrifice could only be made at Jerusalem, and the only book of the Scriptures that they had to read from was painted over with the hateful idol figures of the Greeks. And the huge army of enemies was ever coming nearer! The whole assembly wept, and put on sackcloth and prayed aloud for help, and then there was a loud sounding of trumpets, and Judas stood forth before them. And he made the old proclamation that Moses had long ago decreed, that no one should go out to battle who was building a house, or planting a vineyard, or had just betrothed a wife, or who was fearful and faint- hearted. All these were to go home again. Judas had 6,000 followers when he made this proclamation. He had only 3,000 at the end of the day, and they were but poorly armed. He told them of the former aid that had come to their fathers in extremity, and made them bold with his noble words. Then he gave them for their watchword 'the help of God', and divided the leadership of the band between himself and his brothers, appointing Eleazar, the youngest, to read the Holy Book.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.