

CHAPTER 33

THE STORY OF RICHARD CŒUR DE LION

*This King Richard, I understand,
E'er he went out of England,
Let make an axe for the nonce,
There with to cleave the Saracen's bones,
The head in soothe was wrought full weel,
Thereon was twenty pounds of steel.*

THE country where Christ was born, lived, and died is called Palestine. The capital of that country is Jerusalem. From that far-off country the story of Christ was carried all over the world. Many listened to the story and were glad, but the country where he lived fell into the hands of the Saracens and Turks who neither believed in nor loved Christ. When people, for the love of Christ, went the long, long, journey to Palestine, in order to see for themselves the Holy Sepulchre, these Saracens and Turks ill-treated them, and insulted their religion.

At last a monk, called Peter the Hermit, went through Europe, preaching and calling upon all Christians to fight for the city of their Lord. If they truly loved Christ, he said, they would deliver His grave from the hands of the Saracens. At his call Christian people rose, eager to show their love, and journeyed to Palestine; but the way was long and difficult, and few reached the capital. The people, however, were not disheartened, and the following year a great army set out which did reach Jerusalem, and after much fighting the Holy Sepulchre was taken from the Turks. Later on the Turks took it back again, and so, for nearly two hundred years, with times of peace between, Christians and Turks were at war.

These wars were called crusades, which means, wars of the cross. The word comes from the Latin word *crux*. They were called crusades because the people who fought in them were fighting for the place where Christ died upon the cross. As a badge or a sign, they wore a cross upon their armour or clothes.

Many kings and princes joined these wars. King Henry II. had been making ready to go to Palestine when he died. His son Richard I., who was king after him, made up his mind to go as soon as he was crowned.

Richard had not been a good son. He had helped to make his father's last days unhappy, but when his father was dead he was sorry for what he had done, and he punished the people who had helped him to rebel, instead of rewarding them as they had expected. Richard was very brave as his name, Cœur de Lion, which means Lionhearted, shows. He was a great soldier, he loved to fight, he loved to have adventures. So instead of staying at home and looking after his kingdom as he ought to have done, he went far away to Palestine to fight. And his people were very proud of their king and glad to have him go, for they knew that he would make the name of England famous wherever he went, although Richard himself was really hardly English. He had indeed been born in England, but he had lived nearly all his life in France, and he did not know nor care much about the English people.

Richard Cœur de Lion came to England to be crowned. He sold everything he could in order to get money for the crusade (for wars always cost a great deal of money), and then he sailed away. But first he chose two bishops to rule the country while he was gone. One was a very old man, and the other, William Longchamps, was a Norman. He could hardly speak a word of English and he treated the people so badly that they hated him and soon rebelled.

Now Richard's younger brother, John, wanted to be King of England, so he encouraged the people to rebel. Then he began to rule, but the unhappy people soon found that John was no kinder than

William Longchamps. Indeed he was rather worse, for John wanted the kingdom for himself, and Longchamps, although proud and haughty and cruel to the people, was at least true to his king. John and his Norman friends oppressed the people, and the hatred between English and Norman, to which Henry II. had done so much to put an end, flamed up again. Many of the English left their homes, or were driven from them, and the land became full of robbers and outlaws. One of the most famous of these outlaws was Robin Hood. He lived in Sherwood, a forest which at that time covered a great part of the centre of England. He was the head of a large band and so powerful was he that he was called the King of Sherwood. And indeed his followers loved and obeyed him as they would have done a king.

Robbers as a rule are not men to be admired, but these were wild times, very different from ours, and Robin had been forced to become a robber through the wickedness of the rulers of the land. Among his own band he kept such good order, that in Sherwood women and children could wander safely, where it was dangerous for haughty knights and wicked priests to go. Robin's rules were strict, and those who would not obey them were driven out of the band of Merrie Men, as his followers were called.

*But, look ye, do no husbandman harm,
That tilleth with his plough,
No more ye shall the good yeoman
That walketh by green wood shaw;
Nor no knight, nor no squire,
That will be good fellow.
These bishops and archbishops
Ye shall them beat and bind;
The high sheriff of Nottingham
Hold him in your mind.*

The sheriff of Nottingham was Robin's greatest enemy. Many times he tried to catch Robin but he never succeeded.

In those days bows and arrows were used in battle instead of guns, as gunpowder had not been invented. Bows and arrows were also used for hunting wild animals. The English archers were the most famous in the world, and Robin Hood was the most famous archer in England. He could split a willow wand, and hit a mark which another man could hardly see.

Robin and his men lived in caves in the forest, shooting the King's deer for food and getting money by robbing the rich knights and priests who travelled through the Green Wood. But they never hurt nor robbed the poor people, indeed Robin used to help many of them. The common people loved him, although the rich, and great barons and nobles hated him.

Far away in Palestine news of the wicked things which John was doing reached Richard, and he felt that it was time that he should go home again. He had not succeeded in what he had set out to do. He had not won Jerusalem from the Turks. But he made a truce with their great leader, Saladin. A truce means that the people who have been fighting do not make peace for good and all, but that they promise not to fight against each other for some arranged time. Saladin and Richard made a truce for three years, during which time Saladin promised that no harm should be done to the pilgrims who came to the Holy Sepulchre.

Richard set sail for home, but his heart was in the Holy Land. Tears filled his eyes as its shores grew dim in the distance. Stretching out his hand, as if in prayer, "Blessed land," he cried, "farewell. To God's keeping I commend thee. May He give me life that I may return to deliver thee from the hand

of the unbeliever.”

As Richard sailed homeward, storms arose and his ship was wrecked upon the shore of Austria. Nearly everyone was drowned, but the King and a few of his knights escaped. While in Palestine, Richard had quarrelled with the Duke of Austria, and he knew that it would not be safe to travel openly in this land. So the King and his knights disguised themselves as merchants, hoping in that way to pass safely on their journey.

But they had many adventures, and more than once were nearly discovered. At last Richard was left with only one knight and one little page. When they arrived at the large town near which the Duke of Austria lived, Richard and the knight lay hidden, while the page went into the town to buy food. They had been travelling for several days without daring to enter a house, and all the food they had was finished, and they were both weary and hungry.

Richard, like many brave and reckless people, was neither thoughtful nor careful. He gave the page a large sum of money and allowed him to go into the town carrying the King's gloves in his belt. In those days only very rich people wore gloves, and Richard's were beautifully embroidered with silk and gold, such as only kings and princes wore. The page had often before bought food for his master, and he went fearlessly into the market-place to get what was needed. But when he handed the merchant a large piece of gold in payment, the man looked sharply at him.

“Who is your master?” he asked.

“My master is a rich merchant called Hugh,” replied the boy. “He is returning from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.”

“Merchant, indeed,” said another man. “Look at his gloves.”

A third plucked them from his belt. “Merchant indeed,” he too cried. “These are king's gloves. Who is your master, boy?”

“I have told you,” replied the page steadily, “he is a merchant called Hugh.”

But the townspeople would not believe that. They beat and tortured the poor lad. Still he would not tell.

Then they dragged him before the duke with whom Richard had quarreled in Palestine. He was more strong and cruel than the others, and at last forced the page to confess that his master was Richard Cœur de Lion, the King of England.

Then Leopold, Duke of Austria, was very glad. He hated Richard with a great hatred. He sent soldiers to the King's hiding place, seized him, and put him in prison.

Duke Leopold kept Richard prisoner for some time, and then he sold him to the Emperor of Germany for a large sum of money. The Emperor of Germany also hated Richard, so he, in his turn, put him into prison.

Then the Emperor wrote to the King of France telling him that the King of England was safely imprisoned in one of his strong castles. And King Philip of France was glad, for he, too, hated Richard, and had been helping Prince John stir up the English people to rebellion. When Prince John heard about it, he was glad too. So a great many people rejoiced that Richard Cœur de Lion was in prison.

CHAPTER 34

RICHARD CŒUR DE LION— THE STORY OF HOW BLONDEL FOUND THE KING

RICHARD CŒUR DE LION, who loved to be free, who loved to fight and ride and hunt, to do great deeds of strength and daring, hated to be shut up in a dark and narrow prison. Yet he did not despair. He loved, too, to laugh and sing, and he made friends with his gaolers, wrestling and fighting with them, and astonishing them by his great strength. And when he was weary of that, he would sing to them or write poetry.

But sometimes he was sad.

Although nearly all the poetry which Richard wrote has been lost, one mournful little song which he made in prison is still left. It was written in French, for Richard, you remember, was almost French, and could speak very little English.

Here it is in English words:—

*No captive ever sings so sweet a strain
As he who weareth not the prisoner's chain,
Yet song may glad his days of weariness;
Friends fail me not, but shame for them I fear.
If I for lack of gold, this vile duress
Sustain another year.
If I for lack of gold, this vile duress
Sustain another year.*

*Well know my knights and servants every one,
English, Poitevin, Norman, or Gascon,
That to no comrade would I help refuse,
But I would spend my wealth till he were free;
And this I say, yet them I not accuse
For my captivity.
And this I say, yet them I not accuse
For my captivity.*

*True it is said, and I have learned it sore.
Dead folk no lovers have, nor captives more,
But if to save their wealth here I do lie,
Disgrace and scorn shall unto them be still.
And if I suffer, more they suffer will.
Though I be left to die.
And if I suffer, more they suffer will.
Though I be left to die.*

Prince John felt that nothing now stood between him and the throne of England. He told the people that the King was dead and would never come back again. He seized the royal castles and what gold and jewels he could find belonging to the King in England. But the English would neither believe nor follow John.

Meanwhile Blondel, a minstrel or singer who loved King Richard, took his harp, and, wandering from castle to castle, sought his master through all Germany. For the Emperor kept secret where he had imprisoned Richard. Wherever Blondel heard of some unknown prisoner, there he stopped and sang a song which Richard and he had made and sung together.

Again and again Blondel sang this song, but no answering voice ever came from any of the grim castle walls. At last one evening, weary and almost hopeless, he began to sing beneath the walls of a castle called Trifels.

*O Richard! O my king!
Thou art by all forgot,
Through the wide world I sadly sing,
Lamenting thy drear lot.
Alone, I pass through many lands
Alone, I sigh to break thy bands
O Richard! O my king!
Thou art by all forgot,
Though the wide world I sadly sing,
Lamenting thy drear lot.*

Blondel's voice was sad and broken, his heart was heavy, and he could scarcely sing for tears. But hardly had he finished the first verse when, from a window high above him, another voice took up the tune and sang:—

*The minstrel's song
Is Love alone,
Fidelity and Constancy,
Though recompense be none.*

The voice rang out clear and full and strong. Blondel knew and loved it. It was the voice of Richard Cœur de Lion. Blondel leaned his head against the rough stone of the castle wall and wept for joy. He had found his King.

Back to England the minstrel went with his great news, and when the English people heard it, they were glad. But the Emperor would not set Richard free until the people paid a large sum of money called a ransom. The land had already been made very poor through the wars and robberies of John, but the English people wanted their king so much that they denied themselves almost everything in order to raise enough money. When they had gathered the money they sent it to the Emperor, and Richard was at last set free.

As soon as he was out of prison, Richard hurried to England. He must have been glad to see the white cliffs of his own land again. He had been away four years, and fourteen months of that time he had been shut up in a dark and lonely prison.

The people were so glad to see their King again that, poor though they were, they had such grand decorations and rejoicings that a German knight who came home with Richard was quite astonished. Had my lord the Emperor known, said he, how rich a country England still was, he would have demanded yet more money.

Richard set himself at once to bring order into the kingdom. Most of the people were on the side of the King, and Prince John soon submitted to him. Their mother, Queen Eleanor, begged Richard to forgive his brother.

“I forgive him,” said Richard, “and I hope I shall as easily forget the wrong he has done me as I know he will forget my pardon.” He knew John was not really sorry, and would rebel again as soon as he had a chance.

Richard remained in England only a few months, and then he went to France. There he spent the rest of his life, chiefly fighting with the king of that country.

But Richard left a good and wise man to rule England, and the people were happier, although they had to pay heavy taxes in order to help Richard in his French wars. This was very unfair, as these wars did England no good. But as long as the kings of England had possessions in France, the English had to pay for French wars. So it was a good thing for England when at last all the French possessions were lost.

Richard was killed in France in 1199 A.D., while besieging a castle called Chaluz. He was riding round the walls with one of his captains, looking for the best place of attack, when a young archer put an arrow to his bow, and saying, “Now, God speed my arrow,” let it fly.

The arrow hit Richard on the shoulder. The wound was not a bad one, but doctors in those days were not very clever, and the doctor who drew out the arrow-head did it so badly that the wound was made much worse.

In a day or two it became so bad that Richard felt he was going to die. But he swore that he would first take the castle and kill the archer who had caused his death.

The castle was taken, and Richard, in his terrible wrath, hanged all the soldiers except the archer. He was kept for some more dreadful death.

“Villain,” said the King, looking fiercely at him, “what have I done to you that you should kill me?” The young man drew himself up, and looking proudly at the King, and not in the least afraid of his angry frown, replied, “With your own hand you killed my father and my two brothers. Kill me, torture me if you will. I am glad to die, having rid the world of one who has wrought so much ill in it.”

Then there was silence between these two proud, brave men, as they looked each other in the eyes, the one a poor soldier, the other a dying king.

But Richard, although fierce and hasty, was generous, and, above all things, he loved courage.

“Boy,” he said, “I forgive you.” Then turning to his captains, “Loose his chains,” he added, “let him go free, and give him a hundred shillings to boot.”

So Richard Cœur de Lion died. He was so brave that all Europe rang with his fame. The Saracens stood in such awe of him that when little children were naughty their mothers would say to them, “Be good now, or Richard of England will come to you,” and the children would be good at once for fear of him. “Thinkest thou that Richard of England is in that bush?” a rider would say to his horse if it were startled, so great was the terror of his name.

Richard was a good knight and brave soldier, but he was not a good king. He reigned for ten years, yet only six months of that time did he spend in England. No doubt he thought it was a great and good thing to fight for Jerusalem, but how much better it would have been if he had tried to rule his own land peacefully, and bring happiness to his people.