

Coleridge Christabel Rose

The Constant Prince



Christabel Coleridge
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Содержание

Preface	5
Chapter One	6
Chapter Two	10
Chapter Three	13
Chapter Four	16
Chapter Five	19
Chapter Six	22
Chapter Seven	25
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	27

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Preface

It is commonly supposed that the writer of an historical tale idealises the characters therein represented, heightens the romance of the situation, and at any rate brings the fairer tints of the scene into undue prominence. I wish to make it clearly understood that I have not done so in this instance. The high cultivation, the mutual affection, the deep piety, all the peculiar characteristics of the Princes of Avis, are matters of history, and I have only found it impossible to do justice to them. The personal appearance of the three eldest, and the special line taken by all of them with regard to the cession of Ceuta, indeed the whole tragical story, I found ready to hand, the only imaginary incidents being the meeting of Enrique and Fernando at Arzella, and the presence of the two boy princes at the siege of Ceuta.

There is a life of the Constant Prince which was written by the priest to whom I have given the name of Father José, which I regret much not having been able to obtain, though the outline of the story of his imprisonment is, I believe, taken from it.

The details of the Treaty of Tangier are very obscure; but it appears that the Moorish king of Granada considered his African brethren as guilty of a breach of faith in detaining Fernando.

The English characters are of course wholly fictitious.

Lastly, Calderon in his play, “Il Principe Costante,” and Archbishop Trench, in his beautiful poem of the “Steadfast Prince,” represent Fernando as refusing to be ransomed by the cession of Ceuta. This refusal he had neither the power nor the right to make. His real nobleness lay in his willing acceptance of the suffering brought on him by the decision of others.

C.R. Coleridge.
Hanwell Rectory, —
December 2, 1878.

Chapter One Foreshadowings

“The child is father of the man.”

In a small marble-paved court belonging to the newly-built palace of King Joao the First of Portugal, on a splendid summer day in the year 1415, five youths were engaged in earnest consultation. The summer air, the luscious scent of the orange-trees beneath which they were seated, might have inclined them to mere lazy enjoyment of their young existence – the busy sounds from the tilt-yard near have summoned them to the sports and exercises for which their graceful, well-grown strength evidently fitted them, or the books, several of which were scattered on the marble steps of the court, have employed their attention. But they were evidently so deeply interested by the subject in hand as to have no thoughts to spare for anything else – a fact the more remarkable as they were not engaged in a dispute, but were discussing something on which they were evidently all agreed, and which they regarded as of the highest importance.

“When our great uncle, Edward the Black Prince, won his spurs,” said the eldest, a tall, dark-haired young man, with a singularly considerate and intelligent countenance, “it was at Crecy by hard fighting. *He* did something to deserve knighthood. His father let him win the field for himself. ‘Is my son unhorsed,’ he said, ‘or mortally wounded? Nay, then let him win his spurs.’ And see how he won them!”

“And *he* was only sixteen!” said the second brother, who resembled the first speaker, but had a more fiery and vivacious expression.

“Ay, Pedro, we have waited too long for our chance; it suits not with our honour.”

“Oh,” broke in the fourth boy vehemently, “why cannot the King find some pretext for war? If Castile or Arragon would but insult us! But my father says he cannot engage in an unjust war merely to knight his sons. ’Tis very unlucky.”

“Nay,” said the eldest brother, “I cannot blame him. He must consider the country’s good.”

“Ah!” said Pedro, “there always *were* wars and deeds of arms in those good old days. But these are dull times; it is not worth while living in the world now. Everything is for policy and justice; no one acts for pure glory and knight-errantry.”

“That is a stupid thing to say,” said the third brother, who had not hitherto spoken, a youth with broad, thoughtful brows and large grey eyes. “We do not know what one half of the world is like; there is quite enough to do in finding out.”

“Enrique is for ever wondering about countries beyond seas,” said Pedro. “Are Duarte and he and I to seek knighthood by sailing away to look for savages – the saints know where?”

“We have not yet killed *nearly* all the infidels,” said the youngest brother of all, rather dreamily.

“There are no Crusades now, Fernando,” said Duarte; “and to my thinking absent sovereigns make ill-governed kingdoms.”

“And are there no Infidels except in Palestine?” cried the little Fernando, springing to his feet. “I would sooner earn *my* knighthood by destroying the villains who steal children and imprison noble knights than by fighting with brave gentlemen like ourselves. I would sooner be Godfrey de Bouillon than our uncle Edward. Let us go and take Tangiers or Ceuta at the sword’s point; then can we be knighted with honour, and the blessed Cross – ” Here the child’s excitement fairly overcame him, tears filled his eyes, and he hid his face behind Enrique.

“There is much in the child’s words,” said Duarte. “Weep not, Fernando, if I go to fight the infidel, thou shalt be my page. Come, Pedro and Enrique, walk this way with me.” And the three elders strolled away together, leaving their juniors to speculate on their subject of conversation.

These five brothers, afterwards perhaps among the most brilliant, and certainly among the most virtuous, princes who ever adorned a royal house, were the sons of Joao the First of Portugal, the founder of the house of Avis, so called from the order of knighthood of which he was grand-master. He succeeded to the throne of Portugal rather by election than by inheritance, and after a period of disturbance and trouble; but his great qualities raised the little kingdom to quite a new place among nations, and in Philippa of Lancaster, the daughter of John of Gaunt by his first wife, he met with a Queen fully worthy of him. The interest which John of Gaunt's second marriage gave him in the affairs of Castile made an alliance in the Peninsula desirable to him; but Philippa was free from the distracting claims to the Castilian succession of her young half-sister Catherine, and involved her husband in no quarrels. It may well be a source of pride to the English reader to remember that her sons were of Plantagenet blood, for they inherited all the virtues and few of the faults of that noble and generous race.

Perhaps the profound peace which made it so difficult to these young princes to signalise their knighthood by any deed of arms worthy of their name may seem more to King Joao's credit in modern eyes than in those of his sons; but it was not strange that young men, all with talents and aims far above the average in any age, rank, or country, should wish to make a reality of that which was perhaps on the verge of becoming a splendid form, and burning with the truest spirit of chivalry, should, as many have done since, sigh for times when it was easier to express it. They were all as highly educated as was possible to the times in which they lived, and Edward, or Duarte, as he was called by the Portuguese form of his English name, was a considerable scholar; but war was still the calling of a prince and a gentleman, and they felt hardly used in being debarred from it. King Joao, however, was of so enlightened or so degenerate a spirit that he refused to plunge his kingdom into war solely for the purpose of knighting his sons. Hence the foregoing discussion.

The three elder brothers walked up and down under the shade of the orange-trees – tall and stately youths, with serious faces, and minds set on the subject in hand. Duarte walked in the middle, and seemed to be weighing the arguments addressed to him by Enrique; his more rounded outlines, and a certain tender gentleness of expression in his dark eyes, gave him the air of being younger than Pedro, whose colouring was darker and his face sterner and more impetuous. He was sometimes arrogant and hasty; but no one ever heard a sharp word from the just and gentle Duarte, whose mental power and high scholarship seemed but to add to his unselfish consideration. The tallest of the three was Enrique, in whose great size and strength and fair skin the English mother loved to trace the characteristics of the Plantagenets. He talked with intense eagerness, and his great dark eyes were full of ardour, but of the dreaminess accompanying ardour for an unseen object. The two younger boys had meanwhile remained sitting on the steps, ostensibly learning their lessons from a very crabbed-looking Latin manuscript spread out between them. Joao was a fine dark-eyed boy of fourteen, with an exceedingly acute and intelligent countenance. Fernando was two years younger, and though tall for his age, was slender and fragile. He had the flaxen hair and brilliant fairness of his mother's race, but the large blue eyes had the same dreamy intensity that marked Enrique's, with a sweetness all their own. These two were kindred spirits beyond the bond that united all the five, and never failed them through the long lives spent in toil and self-denial.

Enrique having parted from the two elder ones came up to the steps, and Fernando looked up at him eagerly, while Joao jumped up, announcing that he knew his lesson, and should go and play.

"But I do not know mine," said Fernando, disconsolately.

Enrique sat down on the step, and drawing the child up to his side, began to translate the Latin for him into French, in which language the Portuguese court, in imitation of the English one, usually conversed. Fernando was so delicate that the strict and severe system under which they were all educated was sometimes relaxed in his favour. He was, however, an apt pupil, and presently Enrique closed the book.

"There, now you can go and play."

“No,” said Fernando, pressing up to his brother. “Tell me, have you been talking about the knighthood?”

“Yes,” said Enrique; “we are resolved that if we have to wait for ever, we will not make a pretence of that which should be so great a thing. Not the year of tournaments shall tempt us.”

“When I am knighted,” said Fernando, “I will go and fight the Moors in Africa, and destroy the castles where they make good Christians to toil as slaves. Would it not be joy to open the prisons and set them free?”

“Ay,” said Enrique, looking straight out of his wide-opened eyes as if he saw far away. “Then, too, should we see what lies behind – behind Tangiers and Ceuta, beyond the sands. There might we spread the Cross.”

“And there maybe are the two-headed giants and the dragons like the one Saint George of England killed; and magic castles, and fiery pits, the very entrance of hell. You used to say so.”

“Ah, maybe,” said Enrique, smiling. “Anyway there is the wide earth, the world that we do not know.”

“Then you do not think all the countries are discovered yet?” looking up in his face.

“Nay, surely not,” said Enrique, with gathering eagerness. “There,” pointing to the sparkling bay before them, “does that go on for ever, and for ever. Well is the Atlantic called the Sea of Darkness, blue and bright as it may be! But the lost path to the Indies, where is it? Where is that island the Englishman saw in mid-ocean? Where, where?” Enrique paused, his face one unanswered question. “Some day I will know.”

“But in the meantime,” said Fernando, “the enemies of the Blessed Saviour are here close by, killing and destroying good Christians?”

“Well,” said Enrique, coming out of the clouds, “we will deal first with them, sooner maybe than you think for! But there are more ways than one of subduing the world for Christ. You can win your knighthood in Barbary by and by, while *I* look for the fiery dragons beyond.”

He pulled a roughly-drawn map towards him, and began to study it.

“Ah, but not all alone,” said Fernando, vehemently; “the fiery dragons might kill you, and I could not fight the infidels by myself.”

“Not yet,” said Enrique, soothingly, “you have to grow strong first.”

He stretched himself out, leaning on his elbow, and knitting his brows in absorbed study of the map before him. Fernando sat leaning against him in silence. His brothers were all tender and good to him; but Enrique was the best-loved of them all, and the idea that these eagerly-desired adventures involved a parting had never been realised by him before. Presently he raised himself, and sat a little apart, looking before him with a face that, with all its fair tinting and delicate outline, set into lines of remarkable force and firmness.

“Enrique,” he said, presently.

“Well?”

“I *will* go without you to fight the infidel if there is no other way. For we are soldiers of the Cross, and our Blessed Lord is our Captain, and He would be with me. But oh! dear Enrique, I will pray every day that He will send you too.”

“Now, then, mother will be angry,” said Enrique, as the excitable boy broke into a passion of tears.

“Did she not say you should not talk of infidels, or Christians either, if it made you cry? I feel sure our uncle Edward did not cry at the thought of the French.”

“I am not afraid; it is not that I am afraid,” sobbed Fernando, indignantly.

“No, no! I know. See, Fernando, I promise I will go with you when you win your spurs. Hush, now, it is almost supper-time. Shall I take you to mother first?”

“No,” said Fernando, recovering himself. “I will not cry.”

“Come then,” said Enrique, pulling his long limbs up from their lounging attitude, and holding out his hand. “Come and see the English mastiffs, and some day, maybe, I will tell you a secret.”

Chapter Two

The Deed of Arms

“I know, Sir King,
All that belongs to knighthood, and I love.”

The supper was over, and King Joao was seeking for some relaxation from the cares of state in the society of his wife and children. He and his fair English Queen would then sit in their private room, and the five sons would give an account of their studies, exercises, and amusements during the day, or sometimes practise speaking English with their mother, or receive from her good advice or tender encouragement. The King and Queen sat on chairs, the princes stood respectfully near them, when, after a silence, Duarte suddenly advanced and spoke.

“Sire, I and my brothers have a proposal to make to your grace.”

“Say on. I am ready to hear you, though I do not promise to find wisdom in the proposals of your rash youth,” said Dom Joao, while the fair-haired mother smiled encouragement.

“Sire, it has pleased you to regard without displeasure our wish not to receive the sacred order of knighthood without some deed of arms that should render us worthy of it; and I, and at least my brother Pedro, have waited till the usual age is past, in the hope that some fortunate quarrel would give your highness the power to grant our request.”

“My son,” said King Joao, “I cannot risk the interests of my subjects for your desire of fame. A knight has other duties – to guard the oppressed, to defend the weak, is indeed the calling of princes; but not always at the point of the sword.”

Duarte bowed submissively; but, after a pause, he continued —

“Yet there is one enemy with whom we cannot be said to be either at war or at peace, since there cannot be honourable peace with the enemies of Christ. Yet Christian nations suffer nests of pirates to dwell undisturbed opposite our very coasts. Our soldiers, our ships, and innocent children are not safe from the Moors of Africa. When they swoop down on our shores, it is death or – apostasy for Christian men, and for our maidens slavery and imprisonment. The very key of their fastnesses is Ceuta. Could we but take that fortress at the point of the sword, it would be a deed worthy of Christian princes, of use to your grace’s subjects, and honourable in the eyes of Europe.”

Dom Joao looked at his son as if somewhat surprised, to hear so reasonable and well-considered a proposal. His authority was absolute over his five young sons, and though he could not but be satisfied with their progress and development, he had not expected from any of them an independent opinion.

“Since when have you thought of this expedition?” he said.

“It was suggested to me, sire, by some words of Fernando’s,” said Duarte; and Fernando, who had listened with breathless interest, sprang forward, and with more freedom than Duarte had ventured to use, exclaimed —

“Oh, dear father, it is the greatest desire of us all!”

“It would be fitter for you and Joao to pursue your studies at home,” said the King. “Nevertheless, I will consider of this proposal.”

The five lads did not shout, as perhaps nature would have inclined them to do, they bowed, and stood silent till their father withdrew, when there was a sudden relaxation of their attitude of respectful attention, and they surrounded their mother, pressing up to her, kissing her hand, and demanding if they had not at last found the right thing to do.

Philippa was a tall, fair woman, with a beautiful Plantagenet face, and an expression at once simple and noble, a fit mother of heroes.

“My fair sons,” she said, “it is a noble purpose, an object worthy of Christian swords. It is good that you should win your knighthood by fighting for Holy Church, rather than for your own vain-glory. If your father thinks this attempt wise, it will be well, if not – ”

“If not,” said Dom Duarte, “I will not consent to the year of tournaments my father proposed for us. It is a mockery, a pretence – I hate false seeming.”

“You do well, my son,” said the English mother; “yet the tournaments might show you fit for real warfare.”

“That might be very well for the younger ones,” said Pedro.

“I am taller than you,” said Enrique, indignantly.

“You said I should be your page, and I will not stay at home,” said Fernando.

“Hush, my boys; do not dispute,” said the Queen. “Remember, the true glory is in doing our duty. If every prince and gentleman went out to war, who would punish evil-doers and succour the distressed at home! Your father, who is the wisest man alive, knows that; and Edward must remember it when his time comes. For you younger ones it will be different. The blessed saints guide you to seek the right, and to be worthy of your forefathers.”

To whatever degree of cultivation and even of virtue the Mohammedan kingdoms had attained among themselves, and whatever injury to learning may have been caused afterwards to mediaeval Christendom by their violent expulsion from the Peninsula, the Moors of Africa were and must have been simply an embodiment of evil. The organised system of piracy which they maintained rendered life and property totally unsafe all along the Mediterranean. A regular system of ransom was in vogue, and where the friends of an unfortunate captive were unable to satisfy their demands, neither rank, nor age, nor calling, was any protection; and noble knights and aged priests were chained to the oars of their galleys, or toiled among the sands of Africa, while their fate remained a mystery to their friends at home – whether death, prolonged suffering, or far worse, apostasy had been their portion. Martyr or renegade, it was an awful choice, to be placed once for all before many an honest, ignorant squire or knight; but “captive among the Moors” was written in many a pedigree of Southern Europe, in some few even of distant countries. More still returned, impoverished by their ransom, to tell of their frightful sufferings; while, most terrible thought of all, girls and children disappeared now and again – to what fate? Every Christian sovereign and gentleman felt the ransom to be a disgraceful black-mail demanded of them, which yet they knew not how to refuse! There is nothing in the modern world that is quite analogous to the situation.

The Moors were the enemies of life and property, like the brigands of our own time, only infinitely more powerful, and as such were feared and hated. They were also, of course, as now, unbelievers, outside the pale of the Church; their conversion was a subject of prayer; they were, or might have been, the objects of missionary labour. But the Moors of the Middle Ages were something more than this. They were not only ignorant of Christ; they were the hereditary enemies of Christendom: not merely of Spain, of Portugal, or of France, nor exactly of the Church Catholic, as we should understand it, but of that sort of visible, territorial embodiment of it for which, in old romance, the Seven Champions fought and which Arthur and his Knights laboured to spread, and the defence of which made honour as well as religion a spur to every Crusader. Therefore it was not only as national and personal enemies, or as blinded heathens, that the knights of Europe regarded the Turks and Moors, but as the powerful foes of Christ’s kingdom on earth, embodied in Christian nations; so that national honour and religious fervour worked together, and glory alike for earth and for Heaven was won in attacking the Crescent with the Cross. It was not only very sad for a Christian man to see the unbeliever triumph, it was very disgraceful also.

Alas! if *all* the evil in the world could have been so embodied! – if Christendom had had no foes in its own household! – the fight between good and evil would indeed have been simplified, though not dispensed with. It was very clear to an old Christian champion that it was his duty to fight with evil; to do so with a pure heart and unwavering spirit was just as hard then as now. Our

heroes lived in the dawn of a new day: when other duties were rising into view, other talents coming to be consecrated, but when the old visible symbolical struggle was still in full force. For faith, for knowledge, for good government, for the honour of Christendom, for the old and the new, they all fought and toiled – and one died.

Chapter Three

The Three Swords

“Oh, mother! mother! can this be true?”

Many months passed before the crude suggestion of the young Infantes was worked by the King and his ministers into a practicable form; and it is not necessary here to enter into all the considerations of policy and prudence that were involved. In spite of many feints and pretences hardly worthy of so liberal a prince as Dom Joao, the Moorish sovereign became aware of his intentions, and sent offers of splendid presents to the Queen for her young daughter, if she would intercede with her husband and preserve peace.

“My daughter,” said Queen Philippa, “has jewels enough of her own. I know not your customs; but with us, wives do not interfere with their husbands’ business.”

So, after much discussion to and fro, the fleets were prepared, the army gathered together, and the King determined to take the command of the expedition. Still, the foremost places were to be given to his three sons, who would thus have every opportunity of earning worthily their long-deferred knighthood.

Joao and Fernando were too young for any such hopes, and, to their great disappointment, were forbidden to take any part in the expedition at all, but were to remain at home with their mother. Joao consoled himself with planning future feats of marvellous bravery; but Fernando, who had relied on Duarte’s promise, was pronounced naughty and rebellious, and received double tasks, because he would not submit patiently to his father’s decision. His conscience was very tender, and he learnt the hard lessons diligently, and repented of his fault, while he pondered over the tales of boy-martyrs and child-crusaders, which, though held up to his admiration, it seemed so impossible, and even so wrong, to imitate. It was much harder simply to do as he was told; but Fernando did his best, and practised patience.

The time was drawing near for the expedition to start, when one morning the little boy was sitting by himself in a room in the palace of Lisbon which was devoted to the studies of the young princes. Fernando sat on a bench by the great oak table, employed in what a boy would now call “doing his sums” – that is to say, he was working out, in the cumbrous method of the time, a somewhat abstruse mathematical problem. There was no ornament to the bare wall, but a great crucifix over the high fireplace; the window was high up in the wall, offering no temptation to wandering eyes; and the only spot of colour in the room was the crimson dress and long fair hair of the little prince as he bent over his task. Fernando shared in some degree the strong mathematical turn of his elder brothers, and did not find his work uninteresting, though it strained his boyish powers to the utmost. His brothers were engaged in preparations for war, and his mother and sister Isabel were at a place called Saccavem with the chief part of the court. The little boys had been left behind with their tutors.

Suddenly the door was flung open, and Enrique, dusty and travel-stained, and with a face pale as death, came in. Fernando sprang up with a cry of joy, but his brother’s look silenced him. Enrique took him into his arms and sat down on the bench.

“I have come to fetch you, Fernando,” he said, huskily. “Be a brave boy; do not cry. You and Joao must come to mother, for she is ill at Saccavem, and – and – I must take you to her.”

Fernando was more frightened by his brother’s look of anguish than by his words, which were too new and strange to be more than half comprehended, and there was little time for the indulgence of grief. Enrique hurried their preparations, and soon the two boys were riding beside him, with but a few followers, hardly realising, in the haste of their journey, what awaited them at the end of it.

For the good Queen Philippa was dying, and the children must lose her motherly care – her encouragement of all their efforts after goodness and learning. High aims and kindly ways she had alike set before them; by her own example she had taught them the severest self-denial in the midst of the state necessary for the support of their rank: and the old chronicles tell – us that her five sons owed to her tender training much of the deep religious feeling, the loyalty to their father and to each other, the strong mutual affection and the remarkable virtue, that afterwards distinguished them. “She constantly talked with them of their duties towards their father and to the state,” and, spite of the stiff and ceremonious manners of the times, they loved her tenderly, and showed their love; and for her dear sake, her English habits, opinions, and language became dear to her husband and children, and largely influenced the development of her adopted country.

She lay on her death-bed in the palace of Saccavem. Her ladies stood weeping round, her confessor was by her side, the low chanting of the priests who had been praying for her departing soul had ceased for the time, and before receiving the last Sacraments of the Church she had desired to take leave of all her children.

Joao and Fernando, as they entered awe-struck into the dim chamber, were clasped and held back by their sobbing sister, who knelt at some distance from the high daïs on which the Queen’s bed was placed. She lay raised high on her pillows, and on the silken coverlet beside her were three swords, their jewelled scabbards catching here and there the light of the lamp.

The King sat near her, his head resting on his hand, his elder sons standing behind his chair, and at the further end of the long room several people were kneeling, sadly watching the dying Queen – her English squires, and other members of her household, to whom she had been the most faithful of friends. All was silent, save for the sounds of weeping that could not be repressed.

“My sons, come hither,” suddenly said the Queen; and the five brothers came slowly forward and stood beside her, Fernando following the rest in a sort of trance of awe and bewilderment.

“My sons!” said Philippa, in a clear and audible voice, “you all know well that my blessing goes with you in your undertaking.”

“Alas, dear wife?” said the King, weeping, “it will be long before your sons or I have heart for any such enterprise.”

“Not so,” said the Queen, heartily; “you will sail, I doubt not, on Saint James’s Day, and the fair wind I feel in my face from the casement will fill your sails and blow you to victory.”

The King could not answer; but he felt as if Saint James’s Day might come and go before he could take the field, in his great grief.

“My sons!” again said Philippa, “it has pleased me well that you have so earnestly desired to earn your spurs by real service, and especially against the enemies of Holy Church; for pretences and empty forms are unworthy of princes. Therefore, I have caused to be made these swords, which ye will draw, I trust, in many a good fight in a good cause, and never against your sovereign or each other. Duarte, the time will come when you must use this sword in defence of your subjects; see that you rule them with justice, and make their happiness your highest good. And, my son, be kind to your brothers, to Isabel, and to Fernando; he is weakly and young – ”

“Always, dear mother, so help me God and the Holy Saints,” said Duarte, kneeling and kissing her hand.

“Pedro, you are brave and strong; let it be ever your part to do a knight’s duty, in defending the weak and helpless, – fight for the oppressed. And Enrique, our soldiers love you, as my good father and uncle were loved; look ever to their welfare, nor ever regard them as churls and their deaths of no account.”

“Oh, mother, mother, give us swords too!” cried Joao, pressing forward as his brothers faintly promised all that was asked of them.

“Alas! my little boys,” said the mother, for the first time faltering, “I have no swords for you. I had thought to keep you with me longer. Alas! what will become of you! Love God, and serve Him. What better can I say?”

Then gentle Duarte drew first Joao and then Fernando up to the bed-side for their mother’s kiss. Joao sobbed aloud; but Fernando remembered how his mother had blamed him for his tears, and shed none; while in his childish heart was the thought that he too would one day be worthy of a good knight’s sword.

Then the Queen commended her daughter to the King’s care, and bid him choose a good husband for her, that her lot might be happy, as her mother’s had been before her; and then she grew worse, and her speech failed her; and Joao and Fernando were sent away into another room.

The fair wind of which the Queen had spoken blew into their faces as the two boys, so soon to be motherless, crouched up in the window and looked out at the sunset, feeling less wretched so than in the dark. It was not long before they heard a movement, and sounds of weeping and lamenting; but no one came near them, and they were afraid to stir.

“Let us say our prayers,” suggested Fernando: and they knelt down in the fading light; but it seemed an endless time before Enrique came in to them.

“Have you been here alone?” he said. “Ah, there is no one now to care for us. Our mother is dead.”

Enrique’s voice was stifled with grief; but Joao flung himself up against him, Fernando laid his head on his shoulder; both feeling their worst misery softened by the mere presence of their kind, strong brother.

Chapter Four

Perils and Dangers

“He sails in dreams
Between the setting stars and finds new day.”

The Queen’s dying words were fulfilled. The fair wind she had promised sprang up in time, and on Saint James’s Day, 1414, such a fleet as had never been known in Portugal before set sail from the Bay of Lagos. The Portuguese ministers had wished to delay the expedition till the days of public mourning were over, but Dom Joao and his sons knew better what Philippa would have wished them to do, and did not wait an hour after their preparations were complete. Fifty-nine galleys, thirty-three tall ships of war, and 120 transports carried 50,000 sailors and seamen on board; while several English ships had volunteered to join in an expedition that promised so much glory, and was in so good a cause. For the Pope had granted them a bull of Crusade, making the war a holy one, and the blessing of the Church had been invoked on their arms by a series of solemn services, immediately following on the ceremonies of the Queen’s funeral; and no doubt the grief which they were enduring with all its chastening influences, deprived the young Infantes of none of their crusading spirit; but caused them rather to strive more earnestly to be worthy in their inmost souls of that knighthood which they hoped to win at the sword’s point. All had done their utmost to further the preparation; but Enrique had shown so much skill in the arrangements as to win for himself a foremost place in making them. After all, the younger brothers were not left behind. Dona Isabel had been left in the charge of the abbess of a great Lisbon convent; and it was at first proposed to leave the boys at Lisbon with their tutors. But Enrique and Duarte had pleaded for them, the latter urging that Joao was really old enough for the duties of a page, and strong enough not to suffer from hardship, and Enrique promising to take care of Fernando. He might stay on board ship when they neared the enemy’s quarters, and the change would rouse him from his grief. A little rough living would be much less hurtful to him than the misery of solitude and separation.

The sun was setting clear and bright over a sea of purple blue. A light wind stirred the gay banners and devices which floated from the mastheads, an unceasing source of admiration to the Portuguese sailors, for they had been introduced in imitation of the more northern nations, and were hitherto unknown in the Peninsula. The invention and embroidery of these banners had been for a long time a favourite employment of Queen Philippa’s court. Dom Enrique’s ship was one of the largest, and all on board was well ordered, and ready for action. “*Talent de bien faire*” was inscribed on his crimson flag, and “The desire to do well,” as the old French is said to signify, inspired him in small things as well as great.

The evening hour was a time of leisure, and on the deck of the vessel a group of young gentlemen were lounging about telling stories, prophesying success, and indulging in speculations as to what Ceuta would be like when they got there, while Enrique, at a little distance in his deep mourning dress, was sitting on a bench, his chin resting on his hand, and his great eyes gazing out towards the horizon, as if longing to see to the very world’s end. Fernando, who was more sociably inclined, was listening with great interest to a description of the interior of a Moorish city, given by a lively young Englishman, named Northberry, who belonged to Dom Enrique’s household, and who insisted forcibly that the Moors were in the habit of feasting on their Christian prisoners, arrayed in silks and cloth of gold, in palaces ornamented with untold splendour. Other poor slaves were forced to serve, sometimes to share the horrible banquet, and were driven to it with blows and curses.

Poor Fernando grew pale with horror, and Dom José de Alemquer, a knight of some renown, and brother to the Portuguese Prime Minister, remarked grimly —

“And with whom, Señor, have you conversed who has partaken of this extraordinary feast?”

“’Tis commonly believed in England, I understand, sir,” said Northberry. “What matter, since we are about to punish the miscreants?”

“When you are served up, may I be there to see!” muttered Dom José. “We shall find our work out for us; it were better to prepare for it in a pious spirit.”

“Prepare! we shall prepare,” shouted another young man, enthusiastically. “We are ready to wade through rivers of blood, and tear down the accursed Crescent if we leave not one infidel found alive in Ceuta.”

“If we fall ourselves, it is a sure path to heaven,” said another.

“That depends, so said the Bishop, on whether we have a true crusading spirit,” remarked a third.

“By Saint George!” said Northberry, “I’ll strike a good blow, crusade or no crusade; and God defend the right!”

“We are sure of success in such a cause!” cried the first speaker.

“But the crusaders were sometimes defeated,” said Fernando.

“Ah, my lord, doubtless they had not the true spirit,” said Northberry, with something of earnestness, carried off by the apparent sneer.

Fernando moved away towards his brother, and, pulling his sleeve to attract his attention, repeated some of the foregoing conversation.

“Did Enrique think it possible that they might be defeated?”

“Surely,” said Enrique, “it is possible, if it were God’s will, but,” he added, colouring with enthusiasm, “I think, we are so well prepared, it is not likely.”

“But could it be God’s will that the infidels should triumph?”

“Why, yes,” said Enrique; “you do not think what you say. It is His will that we should offer ourselves to his service; but it is not always His will to give us the victory. Else there would have been no martyrdoms. But yet,” he continued, with the grave ardour peculiar to him, “there is a blessing on zeal and self-devotion. I, for one, would risk the result!”

Fernando looked satisfied, and then demanded if Enrique thought that the Moors were really man-eaters.

No; Enrique did not think so. They were very cruel and treacherous; kept no faith with Christians; but they were not, so far as he understood, savages. In fact, he hardly thought that they would treat prisoners of distinction otherwise than well.

“What else?” he added, smiling, as Fernando still looked thoughtful.

“It would be better to convert them than to kill them,” said the boy, earnestly.

“That is what I hope for,” returned Enrique. “Their crimes have deserved a just punishment; but Ceuta once in our hands, we can there show them what Christian life and Christian worship really is; and from thence I hope to send out missionaries to the lands beyond, where all is darkness. The good Franciscans will be willing to go, and who knows into what strange worlds they may penetrate?”

“I don’t think,” said Fernando, “that your gentlemen here think of converting them.”

“Perhaps not. It is the part of princes to show themselves of a more enlightened spirit than other men. We must take heed that no needless cruelty stain our arms, and especially that in our own lives we show what it is to be Christians.”

“Even a prisoner might do that, if he were very patient,” said Fernando.

“Yes, like the holy martyrs. See, Fernando, I think there is no object worth living for, but that of winning men to the service of our Lord by conquest, by preaching, by the discovery of distant lands. I long to make myself worthy of it!”

Fernando's young heart thrilled within him, and he longed ardently for the day when he too should be old and strong enough to fight for the holy Cross. For he did not quite follow all that Enrique said, and the storming of Ceuta was, as was natural, much the distinctest image in his mind.

The sun sank below the horizon, the purple headland of Turo came into view, one by one the stars came out in the deep clear sky; while at the prow of each vessel was hung a great lantern, so that in the gathering darkness the fleet seemed almost as if composed of ships of fire. Enrique threw himself back on the bench, and lay looking up at the sky. The study of the heavens was familiar to him, and the movements of the stars, both as a means of guiding mariners and as in themselves wonderful, were a favourite source of contemplation both to himself and to his elder brothers. They were indeed among the first to find the true science more interesting than the false one, and in their study of astronomy deliberately to lay astrology on one side. He was pointing out to Fernando the different constellations that were visible, when suddenly, as they gazed upward, the dark still heaven flashed into lurid light, and the peaceful silence was broken by a loud shout of alarm. The great lantern of their own ship had caught fire.

"Back! back! Stand still," shouted Enrique, springing to his feet, and, in a moment, he rushed forward, climbed on to the high prow of the ship, and clinging on with one hand, with the other he detached the burning lantern, and flung it into the sea. Another moment and the ship must have been on fire: as it was, the wind caught a piece of flaming framework and wafted it on to the deck at Fernando's feet. He caught it up – it was too large to trample out, or he thought so – he could not push through the crowd that had rushed to the sides of the vessel, and he held out the burning mass at arm's length, unflinchingly, till Northberry, turning, snatched it out of his hand, and succeeded in throwing it into the water. At the same moment Enrique sprang down upon the deck, giving orders, and, allaying the excitement, desiring torches to be lit, and calling on all to give thanks to God for the saving of their lives.

Morning and evening a solemn service of prayer and praise arose from the whole fleet, and now on board the ship of *Good Hope*, as Dom Enrique had named his vessel, the sense of recent danger quickened every heart to thanksgiving.

Messages came from the King and from the other Infantes, to know what had caused the sudden extinction of Dom Enrique's lantern, and in the answering of these no one thought of Fernando till Enrique missed him, and, hastily looking for him, found him on the bench where they had been sitting, half fainting with the pain of his burnt fingers.

"I did not think of it at first," he said; "and then if I am a soldier I must bear pain."

Enrique could not understand how he had been hurt; and when he heard the story, declared that Fernando's courage had saved the ship, and then turned on Northberry with one of his rare outbursts of anger. Could he not see that Dom Fernando was burnt when he took the flaming wood from him!

Enrique was habitually gentle; but there was an intensity in his displeasure when it was once roused, which was not easily forgotten.

"I hid my hand behind me; it did not hurt me *much*," said Fernando, who was reviving. "Señor Northberry could not see."

"Dom Fernando is as true a soldier as yourself, my lord," said Northberry.

"I know it," returned Enrique; but he said no more, only anxiously watching while one of his chaplains, Father José, who, like most priests, was something of a surgeon, bound up the injured hand, saying that it was after all but a trifle.

He would hardly, for the rest of the voyage, let Fernando out of his sight; though the boy, exceedingly anxious to prove that he was able to bear such trifling casualties of war, resolutely concealed all the ill-effects which the adventure caused to his delicate constitution.

Chapter Five

The Siege of Ceuta

“Upon them with the lance!”

The Christian host approached the pillars of Hercules amid violent storm and tempest. Separated from each other, and scattered far and wide in the darkness of the night, there were hours when they feared that all their preparations had been in vain, when they dreaded the morning light that would reveal to them the gaps in their numbers. But the winds sank, and the sun rose, and the dispersed vessels drew together again, after but little damage, and the King prepared to superintend the landing of the troops. He did not then know what would have greatly encouraged him, that Zala-ben-Zala, the Governor of Ceuta, trusting too much to the effects of the tempest, had allowed the 5,000 allies whom he had collected to return home, thinking the danger over.

Joao and Fernando were ordered to remain and watch the assault from a vessel, moored at a safe distance from the shore, behind the rest of the fleet; in which were also safely stored all the Church vessels and furniture, which it was hoped might be used in the conquered city, but which must not in the event of a defeat, be allowed to fall into the hands of the Infidels. Here, too, many of the priests and chaplains, after saying mass in the different vessels, retired to watch the event, and here, all day long, the voice of prayer went up for the success of the Christian arms.

The two little boys were taken, before daybreak, on board their father's ship that he might bid them farewell, and here they saw all their three brothers ready armed for the attack, full of joy at the thought that the long-wished-for moment had at last come when they were to prove themselves worthy of knighthood. All looked grave, collected, and resolute, and the boys caught the tone of their elders, and bore themselves as like soldiers as they could.

“If we were *only* going too!” whispered Joao, as they went down again into their boat.

“We will one day,” returned Fernando; but as he glanced up at the ship, he saw Enrique looking down at him with the light of the dawn on his shining helmet and clear, solemn eyes. Fernando thought that Enrique would look like that in heaven, and for the first time it occurred to him how likely it was that his brothers would be killed in the attack, and he felt that Ceuta might be dearly won. That was a strange day on board the young princes' ship. They heard, and could dimly see, the attack on the town of Ceuta, led by the Infantes Duarte and Enrique, and directed by their father from a small boat near the shore. They heard the shouting, the noise of the cannon, the rush, and the hurly-burly, behind the constant chanting kept up all day by the waiting priests, who bade the young princes pray for their father, since they could not otherwise aid him. The sea was now perfectly calm, the ships, lately so busy, almost deserted, save this one, where high on the deck an altar had been raised, and the solemn chant went up through all the conflict of hope and fear.

At last they became aware that the Infantes had entered the town, at least there was no retreat. The long, hot afternoon wore on, when, suddenly from every soldier in reserve, from every sailor in charge of the fleet, there rose a mighty shout; for, on the walls of Ceuta, there appeared the banner of the Cross. The town was taken. Over the fortress above the Crescent still drooped as if in despair.

Joao shouted and danced, and threw himself about in an ecstasy of triumph. Fernando felt half stifled; he could not speak. Presently a boat put off from the shore, and was rowed rapidly towards their vessel.

“What news; what news?” shouted Joao, pressing before captain and chaplains, and nearly throwing himself overboard in his eagerness.

“Good news, my lord,” said the young squire, as he came up the side of the ship. “The town is taken, the fortress is yielding to the attack. The King, your father, bids me summon you and my

lord Dom Fernando to his presence, as he is now in a place of safety, and would that you should see how towns are won.”

“And the Infantes?” said Fernando as he prepared eagerly to obey the summons.

“They have shown courage worthy of their name, in particular my lord Dom Enrique, to whom, in great part, this happy result is owing.”

The young princes were taken by a strong guard through the half-conquered city, for on the outskirts the battle still continued, or rather the Portuguese soldiers were still engaged in completing their conquest. The wonderful architecture, with its splendid colouring of red, blue, and gold all blazing in the hot light of an August sun against a sapphire sky, astounded the Portuguese princes, in whose native country the Moors had left no trace. All along the streets as they passed lay the bodies of the slain, Christian and Infidel side by side, while here and there frightful groans were uttered. Most of the inhabitants had fled or hidden themselves; but by chance a face scowled at the new-comers from the windows, and once they passed a group of dark-skinned, strangely-attired children, who were uttering in their unknown language griefs which needed no interpretation.

“We will make them Christians,” thought Fernando, as he shrank a little from the terrible sights around him, through all the thrill of triumph.

They were taken to a mosque in the middle of the town, where their father, in full armour, was seated, receiving reports and giving orders to his different captains. Duarte was standing behind his father’s chair; he looked grave and troubled. The King made a sign to the boys to wait while he listened to Dom Pedro, who was speaking to him.

“And so, sire, we fear my brother must have been surrounded, and his retreat cut off. Duarte and I have endeavoured to show ourselves worthy to be your sons, but Enrique – ”

Pedro paused, and Duarte added with a faltering voice, “It was he who forced a way into the town and beat back the enemy. If we have lost him, would the victory were a defeat?”

The King’s face was pale as when he had stood by the death-bed of his beloved wife, but he answered firmly, “My sons, this is the fortune of war. If my son Dom Enrique has fallen, he has fallen as becomes a Christian prince. Weep not for him, but see that we make sure of that which we have gained, and to-morrow shall the traces of the accursed worship be removed from this mosque. And in a Christian temple will I give you the knighthood you have so nobly won. And for my son Enrique there is a martyr’s crown.”

Many and many a time had Fernando, in daydreams and fancies, pictured to himself the fall of Ceuta. He had seen his brothers triumphant in the fresh honours of their knighthood, had heard the Infidel city proclaimed the property of Christ and of His Church, seen the Cross raised and the Crescent cast down. And now these things had come to pass, and for him, instead of joy and triumph, were grief and sorrow of heart. Ceuta was Christian, but Enrique was dead! This was the cost of the victory!

Probably, if the alarm had arisen earlier, the boys would not have been sent for into the city; but now their father welcomed them with the same stern self-control, and bid them listen to the orders he gave, and hear of their brothers’ prowess. Nothing would ordinarily have pleased them better; and the excitement and novelty prevented Joao from realising their loss. Fernando stood still, pale and silent, till the ever-kind Duarte, in a pause of the arrangements, beckoned him up to his side and put his arm round him, and Fernando knew by the grasp of Duarte’s hand that he was quite as unhappy as himself. How long this lasted Fernando could not tell; he felt as if it was a whole day since he came into the city, but it could not have been much more than an hour, for the sun had not yet gone down, when there was a great shouting among the soldiers who were guarding the mosque without, the door was flung back, and Enrique, alive and unhurt, came hurriedly in and dropped on his knees before his father.

“My father, I grieve to have alarmed you, but I and my troop were surrounded in a mosque at the farther end of the town, and had much ado to cut our way out. We have now crushed the

last efforts at resistance; the town is ours by the grace and mercy of God, we can offer what terms we will.”

There was no drawback now to the joy of victory. The King and his sons embraced Enrique, and presently a messenger was sent to demand the surrender of the fortress where Zala-ben-Zala with the remnant of his troops had taken refuge, and, after some delay, terms for its delivery on the next morning were agreed upon. The inhabitants of Ceuta were to be offered the choice of leaving the city or of submitting to the Christian rule. The mosques were to be turned into Christian churches, a Bishop to be appointed, and every effort made to induce the people to adopt the faith of their conquerors, which faith the Portuguese princes were too high-minded and far-seeing to discredit by permitting cruelty, plunder, or rapine to their troops, as was too often done in like circumstances.

So all was quiet and orderly when the sun went down, and the King retired to rest in a house near the central mosque, taking his two younger sons with him, while the other princes occupied themselves in the disposal of the troops.

Chapter Six

The Captured City

“Where bells make Catholic the trembling air.”

Royal prince though he was, Fernando had never slept under such embroidered coverlets, nor seen such hangings of gold and silver, such carving and fretwork, as met his waking eyes in the dawn of the new day. The horseshoe arch of the window framed a piece of deep blue sky, against which a gilded dome, surmounted by a crescent, glittered in the morning sun.

Fernando sat upright and devoutly crossed himself, with a thrill of joy, as he thought how soon that symbol of evil would give place to the golden cross brought with them so carefully from Lisbon for the purpose. Presently he became aware that Enrique, still fully dressed but with the heavier parts of his armour removed, was lying asleep near the window, his long limbs extended on a coverlet of pink and silver, as if he had thrown himself down, wearied with his day of fighting. As Fernando looked round the room he heard an extraordinary chattering and screaming, a noise quite unknown to him, and, not having any confidence in the character of his surroundings, he began to feel frightened. What powers of evil might not lurk amid those unnatural splendours! Joao was in the next room, and Enrique slept through the increasing clatter, which actually sounded like spoken words in an unknown tongue; and yes, a peal of horrible mocking laughter apparently just over his head.

Fernando could bear it no longer. He jumped up and seized his brother's arm.

“Enrique – Enrique, wake up! I think the foul fiend is in this room?”

“Fernando, hark! there is some Moorish devilry here!” and Joao, looking quite pale with alarm, peeped out of the inside chamber, then fled to Enrique as a refuge. The latter awoke, considerably surprised to feel his little brothers pulling at each arm, and as they had considered it their duty, as soldiers in war-time, to go to bed in their clothes, with their long hair rumped and their dress disordered, they presented rather a startling aspect.

“What ails you both?” cried Enrique.

“Enrique, listen! it is certainly the devil.”

Enrique sat up and looked round, and presently began to laugh heartily himself. “There are your foul fiends,” he said, pointing to some carving over the window, where were perched two huge green and scarlet birds with hooked bills, the like of which the boys had never seen before.

“Are they birds?” said Joao, slowly.

“Yes, they are parrots,” said Enrique. “Once, when I went to the Court of Castile, I saw such a one that the King of Granada had sent as a present to my aunt Catalina. Moreover I have read of them in the writings of the ancients. They were sent formerly from Africa to Rome, and these are doubtless favourites of the ladies of this house. For I suspect we are in the ladies' chamber.”

“But it is wonderful – they laugh,” said Joao.

“Ay, and speak, though not in our tongue. There are wonderful things in the world that we know not of.”

“Well,” said Joao, “since no one can tell *what* there may be in these Infidel places, I came to take care of Fernando.”

“Indeed,” said Enrique; “I thought you woke me to take care of you. However 'tis small blame to you to have been puzzled.”

Joao, not finding an answer ready, applied himself to trying to catch the parrots, and pursued them on to the balcony, while Enrique looked thoughtfully and curiously round the strange scene which he had entered in the dark two or three hours before. Presently he looked at Fernando, and smiled.

“So,” he said, “Ceuta, praise be to God, is ours, fortress and all, for Zala-ben-Zala fled in the night, and before I came here Duarte and Pedro were there in command. It was your words, Fernando, that set us on this track.”

Fernando blushed deeply. “Enrique,” he said, “I am not a good Christian, and I shall never be like the holy martyrs.”

“Why not?” said Enrique. “I do not wonder that the chattering parrot frightened you.”

“No; but I thought I would do anything in the world to win Ceuta to be a Christian city, and the day our mother was buried, while we knelt in the abbey at Batalha, I made a vow that I would give up my life to convert the Infidel, to win the world back to holy Church.”

“I think,” said Enrique, “that you are too young to make vows save with your confessor’s permission, or what holy Church ordains for you.”

“That is what Father José said, when I told him what I had done. He bade me prepare myself by prayer and obedience for whatever life God might send me. But I did make the vow, Enrique, and I shall keep it. I thought – and this is what I want to tell you – that it would be quite easy, for I thought I cared more about it than about anything in the world.”

“Well,” said Enrique, as Fernando paused, faltering, but with his great ardent eyes fixed on his brother, “surely it is not now in the hour of triumph that you change your mind?”

“No; but dear Enrique, when I thought you dead, I did not care at all about Ceuta: I would have given it back to save you! Was that wrong?”

How little Enrique thought, as he listened with tender indulgence to his little brother’s troubled conscience, with what awful force that question would one day ring in his own ears. Now he put it aside.

“If we were fighting side by side, Fernando, we should not hold each other back; but if it were easy to imitate the holy martyrs, they would the less have deserved their crowns. If we would seek any object earnestly, we must count the cost. But it was ill-managed that you should have had such an alarm. Never heed it. I am safe, and Ceuta *is* ours, and *will* be a Christian city soon. And now I must go to make all due arrangements; for we must confess our sins and prepare ourselves for the knighthood that is to come at last.”

Fernando looked after him with admiring envy, as he pictured to himself a future day, when he and Joao should head such another expedition, and be themselves the heroes of it. But all vain-glorious thoughts received a rebuke when he heard Duarte and Pedro petition their father, that since Enrique had certainly distinguished himself the most in the attack, he might receive the honour of knighthood *first*, before his elder brothers.

The King replied that he owed so much to his son Enrique, that he was willing to grant this request; but Enrique refused, saying that the rights of seniority should be respected; he would rather be knighted in his turn after his brothers.

So the next morning beheld a wonderful and glorious sight. Over the fortress of Ceuta hung the Portuguese colours; instead of the Crescent on the great mosque was to be seen a golden Cross. Within all traces of the Mohammedan ritual had been swept away, an altar which, with all its furniture, had been brought from Lisbon, was erected, and instead of the turbans and the bare feet of the Mussulman worshippers were the clanking spurs and uncovered heads of the Christians; while, most wonderful of all, the sweet peal of Catholic bells for the first time woke the echoes of the Moorish city. (A fact.) For the conquerors had actually discovered, stowed away in the mosque, a peal of imprisoned bells, doubtless carried off from some sea-side church by the pirates of Ceuta.

Then after high Mass had been duly performed, with all the ceremony possible under the circumstances, one by one, Duarte, Pedro, and Enrique stepped forward, and were knighted by their father before the altar of the new Christian church. Nobly had their desire been fulfilled; they had proved their courage, and in a noble cause.

All this time bands of Moorish people were pouring unmolested out of the gates of the city, great numbers choosing rather to go than to stay; and in the darkness, when the gates were closed, they came back and beat wildly against them with outcries of anguish and despair.

“Oh, why will not they stay and become Christians?” cried Fernando, bursting into tears, as he listened to their lamentations.

“That is not to be expected,” said Enrique; “but now we have drawn their fangs for them. More than half their detestable privateers sailed from this port. It is in our hands, and we can penetrate into the unknown world beyond, and from hence send out missionaries among the people. That is what I mean to do.”

“All is not gained by the taking of Ceuta,” said Fernando, dreamily.

“No,” returned Enrique, “we cannot gain in a day objects which need the devotion of our lives.”

Chapter Seven

The Twin Sisters

“Against injustice, fraud, or wrong,
His blood beat high, his hand waxed strong.”

Twelve or thirteen years after the taking of Ceuta a little group was assembled in the central court of a handsome house in Lisbon. This open space was indeed the summer sitting-room of the family; the sleeping apartments and the great entrance hall opened into it. Large orange, citron, and pomegranate-trees, were ranged round the marble pavement, and filled the air with their fragrance, while in the centre was a little fountain falling into a carved basin. An awning was palled across the top to exclude the sun, and a few seats and coaches were arranged round the fountain. On one of these sat a tall man in the prime of life dressed in deep mourning. Several women, one prepared for a journey, were standing near, and also a couple of men-servants. In front of the gentleman, hand-in-hand stood two little girls of seven or eight years old. They were dressed in black, with little black hoods tied over their light-brown hair, which hang down in long curls beneath; they had fair, rosy faces and large grey eyes, out of which they were staring with an expression of alarmed solemnity. Poor little things! They were as merry-hearted a pair as ever made home cheerful, by chatter and laughter and pattering feet; but life looked very serious to them then, for they were about to be sent away from home, their mother's recent death having left them with no efficient female protector.

The gay young Walter Northberry, who had been attached to Dom Enrique's suite at the time of the taking of Ceuta, had some time after married Mistress Eleanor Norbury, a lady whose father, like his own, had followed Queen Philippa from England; and on her death he had resolved on sending her little twin daughters to be educated by his English relations. His own habits were not such as made it easy for him to bring up his little girls at home, and he was jealous enough of their nationality not to wish to send them to any of the Lisbon convents, where all their training must have been Portuguese. So having received affectionate offers from his brother, who represented the old family in England, the little maidens were to be sent under fitting escort to Northberry Manor House, in Devonshire. Communications were frequent between the two countries, and there was no difficulty in arranging for their journey.

“Well, Kate and Nell,” the father said, “it's a hard matter to part with you after all, my pretty blossoms. Be good maids, and obey your aunt, and soon, maybe, I'll come and see you, and my father's country too.”

“We want to stay at home,” said Nell, with a pout, and with a tone of decision.

“Father, keep us?” said Kate more softly, with her big eyes full.

“No, no, my pretty ones,” said Walter Northberry, wiping his own eyes; “'tis a fine place you are going to see; come along.”

He held out his arms, and the two little black-frocked things sprang into them, clinging round his neck and crying.

“Come – come. Is the litter ready, else I shall be too late to get you aboard Dom Manuel's ship? But hark! who comes? 'Tis my lord the Infante himself.”

Sir Walter set down his daughters, who retreated, hand-in-hand, under a great orange-tree; while their father rose and went to the door, as he heard horses stopping without. In a few moments he returned, accompanied by a tall, slender young man, dressed in black velvet, with a red cross on his breast. Fernando of Avis, as he was called, since, like his father, he was Grand-Master of the Order of Avis, had led, during the twelve years since the taking of Ceuta, neither an idle nor a useless life, but his boyish ambition was still unsatisfied; he had struck no blow against the Infidel

power, led no armies to battle, and won no triumphs. His health had always been so delicate, and he was subject to such long attacks of illness, that it was only at intervals that he could indulge in his taste for military towards which, however, his natural impulse was so strong that he had no inconsiderable skill in riding, fencing, and tilting. The delicate Fernando was more essentially a soldier than any of his powerful brothers; he longed with a more ardent desire for knightly glory – a longing hitherto perforce suppressed; but it was for glory to be won by that chivalrous self sacrifice which formed the ideal of the Middle Ages, however seldom it was put in practice. And Fernando's dreams were of personal distinction only in one cause – the cause of the Church; he had therefore gladly accepted the control of one of these military orders which, somewhat similar in character to the Knights Templar, were so common in Spain and Portugal. The vows of these orders pledged their members to the most perfect devotion and purity of life. They did not always preclude marriage; and where celibacy was their rule, dispensations were obtainable, as in the case of King Joao himself; and their great revenues formed an ample provision for princes of the blood, and were applied by Dom Enrique – who was head of the Order of Christ; Dom Joao, who was Master of that of Saint James; and by Dom Fernando himself – to many useful and charitable ends.

Fernando was thus pledged to the life of a soldier-saint. He could not be a soldier, and with the discontent of his ambitious and ardent nature he daily felt himself still less of a saint. But those who watched his deep religious fervour, his constant self-denials, and his untiring patience, thought differently; still more those who felt his kindly charity and his unfailing sweetness of temper and warmth of heart. He still possessed the fair colouring regular features of his English cousins, but his blue Plantagenet eyes had a softened, wistfulness as of unsatisfied desires.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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