

BLUE BOOK

OF FICTION AND ADVENTURE

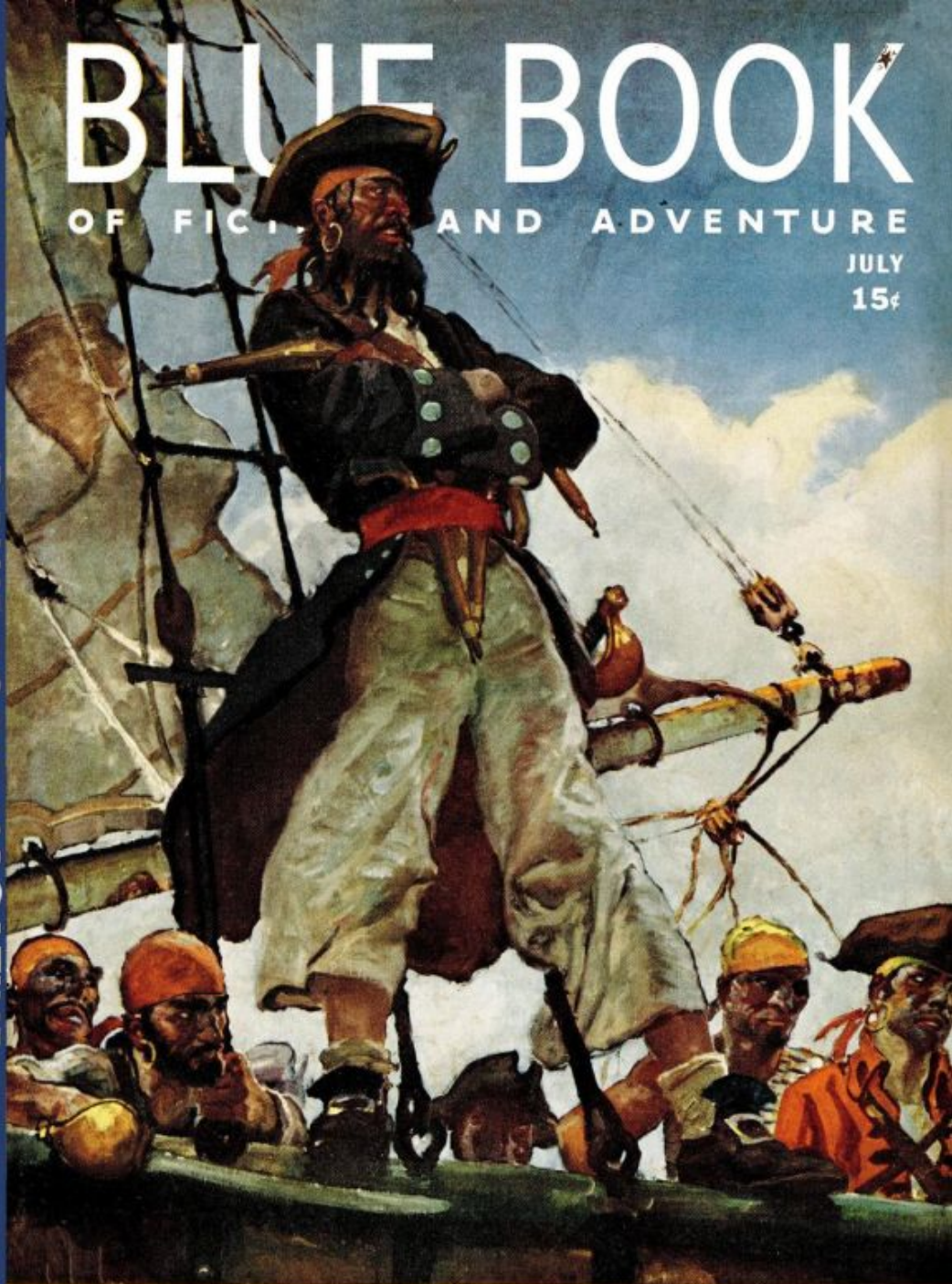
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Painted by HERBERT MORTON STOOPS to illustrate "THE DEVIL IS DEAD"

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LADY of the EVIL EYE

By

H. BEDFORD-JONES

Illustrated by Jeremy Cannon, a pseudonym for Herbert Stoops.

First published *Blue Book Magazine*, July 1939.

The ninth dramatic tale in "Trumpets from Oblivion"—stories based on the reality of old legends.

The day that I shared in one of Norman Fletcher's experiments, or rather watched him at work, gave me a brutally shocking experience that I have no desire to repeat.

Our Inventors' Club, before which Fletcher had been demonstrating what he termed his "Trumpets from Oblivion," had disbanded for the summer. That day I drove out to the Pan-American laboratories on a business errand. Some one mentioned that Fletcher had been ill, and I looked him up. I found him at work in his private office, and he received me with hearty acclaim.

"Come in, come in! Make yourself comfortable; I'm glad to see you. I've had a touch of flu but it's over now, and I'm taking things easy."

"If you're busy—"

"I'm not! In fact, I'm about to play around with my pet invention, so you're just in time to sit in on an experiment and name the subject. Half a minute, now, till I finish these notes, then we'll go at it."

As I waited, it was with a self-conscious feeling. Here was a famous man, hailed by the world as an electrical genius, heir to the wizardry of Steinmetz and of Marconi, placing himself and his time and skill at my service! His affability, his friendship, were genuine. My heart warmed to the old Yankee, with his bushy snow-white hair, his ruddy features, his shrewdly twinkling eyes.

My thoughts flickered back over his odd theory, that all the old myths and legends of the world invariably had a basis of fact. He had proven this theory, too, with the astonishing apparatus he had invented, comprising his researches in ultrasonic waves, light waves, and other little-known and untrodden paths of physics. In recalling light and sound, which never die, in bringing back scenes from the past with what I can only describe as a sort of backfiring television, he had amazed everyone. Unperfected though his invention was, it was none the less a thing of rank magic to me.



Gervase, marked for death, meant to take full toll before dying.

“Ready? Come along to the laboratory,” he exclaimed cheerfully. “Now I can relax for the day. Have you thought of some subject you’d like to probe?”

“Along the line of your myth theory?”

He chuckled. “Trumpets from oblivion, eh? Yes.”

“Well,” I said, “do you suppose we could learn anything about the origin of the evil-eye notion?”

“The evil eye?” He ruffled a hand through his white hair. “You’ve certainly picked something there! That belief is actually as old as the human race. Archaeology has turned it up even in prehistoric days. Excellent! We’ll see what we can get.”

And, thought I with a thrill, I would settle a few doubts of my own. I had always half suspected that Norman Fletcher’s experiments were part trickery or illusion, that his demonstrations were somehow made up beforehand. No chance for that here.



“Remember,” he said, as we came into his gaunt laboratory with naked granite walls, “you’ll have the language problem to cope with. We can’t understand the words used in the dim far past; I’ll have no opportunity to translate them into English and synchronize the speech. Now, make yourself at home and we’ll get to work.”

I dropped into one of the easy chairs, and took a cigar from the box on the table. Fletcher seated himself before the keyboard, no larger than an organ manual and not unlike one in appearance, from which he controlled all his apparatus; there was none in sight, but I knew it must be somewhere about the place.

Under the touch of his finger, the room lights dimmed. Fletcher had never explained his invention, had never discussed how it worked. Now he gave a mere hint, which was quite

incredible had it not been justified by results.

“We never know what we’ll pick up, while fishing for the subject.” He took a cigar, bit at it, and lighted it in his careful way. With it, he pointed to metal plates under his feet. “Conductors. I must obtain results by sending thought impulses into time and space—a difficult thing to explain, yet quite simple. You know, we’re on the threshold of vast discoveries in the field of light, sound, invisible waves and impulses of all kinds. The little I’ve learned leaves me terrified and awed, I assure you.”



“Mansur,” she said, “see that Sir Gervase, leaving, has competent guides.” “I am not leaving,” said Gervase.

“You can’t mean that you produce these—these visions—with mental telepathy?” I blurted out. He smiled, then broke into a hearty laugh.

“No, and yes; the radiations of the brain, amplified and controlled—who knows how far they reach? Not I. It was by accident that I stumbled on this one manifestation. For years, bacteriologists have been at work on much the same thing: One well-known scientist has

made some surprising discoveries in the field of human radiation and in ultrasonic-wave phenomena; then there are the Russian and German investigations into ultra-violet and other invisible radiations of wave-lengths shorter than visible light, and so on. Such human radiations have been measured at two thousand angstrom units—”

He broke off abruptly, and I learned no more.

On the stone wall before us, where a golden glow of light was glowing, a huge and shapeless something now was crawling, palpitating, moving. Fletcher leaned forward to his controls, his fingers moving swiftly. The shapeless thing disappeared, the stone wall began to disappear and dissolve. I heard Fletcher catch his breath.

“Too damned close!” he muttered. “That’s the first time it’s materialized on this side of the wall—careless of me! By the way,”—he turned his head, speaking casually to me,—“I should add that human blood possesses this power of radiation, to a marked degree.”

Where the light rested on the wall, the stones had vanished. As through a wide-open doorway, we looked upon another room. I knew that outside it was mid-afternoon of bright sunlight; yet this room before us was in night, lighted by a massive candelabrum on a table, and beside the table sat a veiled woman working at embroidery.

She was richly attired, jewels sparkled on her fingers, everything about the room conveyed an impression of luxury, of Oriental richness. Tapestries of Bagdad weave hung on the walls, the stone floor was thick with rugs, and above the empty fireplace were a pair of gold-damascened Arab scimitars, with an emblazoned Arab shield. One vaguely recalled that heraldry had started in the Orient and been brought to Europe by the Crusaders.

The veiled woman looked up. A door opened and an old serving-man appeared. At first his speech was without meaning; then it became intelligible. For he was speaking French—not the French of today, but old Norman-French. While to the eye this differs vastly from the present-day language, to the ear it was otherwise; not by any means clear and distinct, but not difficult to comprehend.

“Lady Alixe,” said the old servitor, “a knight has arrived at the castle—an English knight, Sir Gervase of Cliffden. He landed at Acre three days ago and is on his way to Jerusalem. He has two Arab guides, and a letter to your father.”

“Did you tell him,” asked the lady, in a low, controlled voice, “that my father was killed by the Saracens last week?”

“I did, lady. He asks shelter for the night, and an interview with you.”

“Did you tell him,” her voice came more bitterly now, “that this is an evil place, that Lady Alixe of Beltran is an evil, murderous woman accursed by God?”

“God forbid, lady!” exclaimed the old man hastily. “Those things are not true. We know that you are the most beautiful and good—”

“Never mind,” she broke in wearily. “Send the man here, when he has eaten. And send us wine.”

The old servitor departed. The veiled woman resumed her embroidery. Her hair was massed in vivid gold; nothing of her face could be seen, but her fingers plying the needle were slim and young and lovely to see.

Suddenly all became clear, with these words, with the hints of the Orient all about. This Beltran was one of the numerous castles scattered about the Holy Land, held by the Crusaders or their descendants, before the Saracens expelled them. Lady Alixe was one of these

transplanted offshoots of chivalry, fighting and dying in a far land for their faith, surrounded by a half-Arab environment. Her father slain, she held the castle in his place. But why the veil? Why was she not married? Was she young or old?

The door opened again. Into the room strode a man young, yet not young; he was ablaze with virility, a strapping, powerful figure in leather surcoat and chain shirt. His face, framed in shaggy black hair, was eager, dominant, masterful, its youth belied by harshness of sun and wind and suffering. To gain the Holy Land, in those days, one suffered much.

He fell on one knee before Lady Alixe and kissed her hand, and spoke.

“Lady, my father and yours were old comrades in arms; it grieves me to hear that your father, good Count Beltran, is no more. Here,”—and he produced a folded, sealed vellum,—“is a letter the learned monks at Cliffden wrote for my father, introducing me.”

“I thank you, Sir Gervase,” she replied, taking the document and laying it aside. “Sit down, I beseech you; what little hospitality we have, is yours.”

A servant brought in wine; he was a dark Arab who saluted the lady silently.

Gervase took a seat, gave her gossamer veil a curious glance, and spoke out impulsively.

“Let me remain here and serve you. No doubt you have need of a soldier, with things as they are, and more need of a friend. I’m in no haste to reach Jerusalem. No protests, I insist! We’re old friends, or should be.”

She glanced aside, startled, as a sound came at the door, a scratching sound. Gervase laughed and swung to his feet.

“That’s my friend Molitor—I picked him up at Venice, and he won’t let me out of his sight. A stout fellow, and intelligent as the devil. You’ll like him.”

He jerked open the door as he spoke. A dog leaped in, a lean hunting shape of greyhound blood, who sprang on him with avid joy. “Down!” commanded Gervase, and went back to his seat. The dog stood looking around, and a change came over him.

His hackles rose, his eyes glared; he crouched to the floor and then came to Gervase and crouched again, fear and a fierce angry terror upon him. Gervase touched his head and he relaxed.

“What’s got into you, Molitor? Nothing to fear here, old fellow.”

“But there is,” said Lady Alixe.

Gervase jerked up his head. “Eh?”

“The dog knows, what you do not know,” she went on, sadness in her voice. “The dog knows what all the peasants know, what people all around me know, what is whispered through the whole land. God knows it is no fault of mine, but the lords of the kingdom at Jerusalem have threatened to burn me for a witch, and now that my father is gone, they may do it.”

Gervase drained his flagon.

“Nonsense or madness, which?” said he angrily. “Are you jesting with me?”

“This veil is no jest,” she said. “This is why I cannot accept your friendship or your offer of service, though I thank you with all my heart. This is why you must leave here in the morning.”

“I will not,” he rejoined curtly. “What’s the reason, in God’s name?”

“Ask Mansur, the Arab castellan who will take you to your room.” She touched a bell. “And before he comes, let me give you an earnest of what he’ll tell you. Here, Molitor!”

The dog looked up, rose, came to her outstretched hand, sniffing. She lifted her veil so that he could look up into her face. Gervase, from one side, caught a glimpse of loveliness—but the dog suddenly shivered and sank down. Terror came upon him; an acute shiver seized him, and pitiful whines, until Lady Alixe leaned back again, and hid her face. Gervase looked on frowningly, perplexed, and the door opened to admit the Arab.

“Mansur, take Sir Gervase to the best chamber, give him all he desires, tell him all he wishes to know,” she said. “When he leaves in the morning, see that he has food and competent guides.”

“I am not leaving,” said Gervase, and stalked out of the room with the dog at heel, following closely.

Mansur took him to a room in the tower, overlooking the countryside and the Arab village and the palm groves. When they were alone, Gervase turned to the dark man.

“Why does Lady Alixe wear a veil?” he demanded. “What is this mystery about her?”

“Lord, I will tell you,” said the Arab. “But first, I pray you, give us aid; there’s no time to lose. Sergeant Giles commands the garrison, for all the officers were killed with the Count, and he’s a fool; no one knows what to do. You must take charge.”

“What the devil are you talking about?” snapped Gervase, staring. “Your whole castle is at sixes and sevens—that’s easy to see, and a worse-looking garrison I never beheld; but what’s so urgent?”

Mansur dropped his voice. “We have not told Lady Alixe, my lord, but two men arrived just before you, knights from Jerusalem, seeking her. We’ve given them food and wine in a room apart and put them off with lies—for we fear they have come to kill her.”

Sir Gervase crossed himself. “Before God, such madness I never heard! You’re all mad here! You suspect noble knights of dastardly actions—”

“Lord, come and meet them yourself, but keep your sword-belt on,” said the Arab. “All we ask is a man to lead us, in her service!”

Gervase, who had loosened his belt, buckled it again. “Show the way.”

Molitor at his heels, he followed the Arab to another chamber, and strode in upon two knights at table, being served by their squires. They gaped at him. One, a stern scowling man, wore the mantle of a Hospitaller; the other was beefy, ponderous, sinister of eye.

“Who the devil are you?” demanded the latter.

“Sir Gervase of Cliffden, an English knight, in acting command of this castle,” said Gervase. “I’ve just learned of your arrival, gentlemen. And you?”

“Sir Hubert Montjoy,” the Hospitaller rejoined. “This is my companion, Sir Balthasar, a very worthy knight of Provence. We have orders from the King at Jerusalem; but whence came you? We knew of no knight left alive here.”



Lady Alixe lifted her veil—and the dog suddenly shivered and sank down, terror upon him.

“Live and learn,” Gervase said curtly. “Your business here?”

“Is with Lady Alixe of Beltran. Is she ready to receive us and hear our errand?”

“Let me hear it first.”

Sir Balthasar came out of his chair, angrily.

“Ha! Some damned English adventurer just arrived!” His French was difficult to understand. “Out of this, rascal! We bear orders under the royal seal to take over command of this castle and send Lady Alixe to Jerusalem.”

“Let’s see your orders,” said Gervase, stonily, and advanced to the table.

Montjoy drew a sealed packet from his pocket, and showed the dangling ribbon and seal.

“Does this satisfy your worship?” he said with a sneer. “Or have you fallen under the spell of her basilisk eye?”

“I fear, Sir Hubert, that I don’t comprehend,” Gervase replied. “Did you say ‘basilisk eye’?”

“Certainly. All the world knows that Lady Alixe is accursed, that she possesses the Evil Eye which casts death and misfortune on all around. That’s why she’s to be burned at Jerusalem—after fair trial, understand.”

“Oh!” said Gervase. “And you’re eating her food and drinking her wine! You, who should be patterns of chivalry; you who have sworn to serve womanhood and protect it!”

“Young sir, apparently you have high ideals,” sneered the Hospitaller.

The long arm of Gervase went to a wine-flagon; he shot the contents into Sir Hubert’s face. Swinging around, he gave the Provençal a buffet that knocked him back into his chair.

“Is my meaning plain?” he demanded. “You are recreant, traitor knights—”

“You damned fool, I’ll have you flayed alive for this!” Montjoy, sputtering, hauled out his sword and stalked around the table. “You’ve resisted the royal authority—at him, men!”

The two squires leaped up. Sir Balthasar was out of his chair again, roaring oaths. Gervase scraped his long steel out of the scabbard and perceived that the Arab had fled.

“Up, Molitor!” said he, and leaned forward to meet the sweeping, vicious attack of Sir Hubert. What followed, was sudden and terrible beyond words; for, with death all around him, the English knight could waste neither time nor motion.

He ducked low under Montjoy’s blade, his sword swept out low and far. A squire came in with dagger drawn to stab him from the side, and his point ripped that man’s throat open, even before Montjoy came to the floor, screaming, with a leg gashed off. Sir Balthasar was almost upon him, swinging a sword as ponderous as himself, and the other squire was darting forward with a hunting-spear in hand.

Molitor took this squire, leaping in upon him, gripping his throat and dragging him down with worrying growls. Gervase gave the point to the Provençal before the latter could strike a blow—gave it to him full and deep, piercing from midriff to back and jerking his blade loose again. Ludicrous anguished surprise swept into the man’s fat face, his sword dropped, he clutched at himself and fell atop the cursing, groaning Hospitaler, whose life was running out with his bloodstream.



“Off, Molitor!” shouted Gervase, but was too late to save the hapless squire, for the long jaws had torn out his jugular.

Gervase, leaning on his sword, stood shaking his head sadly at the ghastly scene. Sir Hubert cursed him and sank down in death. The Provençal was groaning his last.

“God rest them!” said Gervase, and wiped his sword. He was not callous at all, but death was very common in this day, life was cheap, and the man who could not kill quickly did not live long himself, except in servitude. Gervase had learned to kill, and so had lived.

He took the parchment from the table, opened it and eyed it curiously, being unable to read. He held it to a candle-flame, and was watching it burn when the door was burst open and Mansur came into the room, followed by a number of men-at-arms. Gervase turned to the silent, staring group.

“To my room with me, Mansur. You others, give these men burial and clean the room, and say nothing to the Lady Alixe.”

Mansur accompanied him back to his own chamber. There he began to stammer something.

“Never mind about the dead men,” cut in Gervase. “What’s all this nonsense about Lady Alixe and the Evil Eye? Out with the truth, on your life!”

“Lord, it is no nonsense.” The Arab shrugged and spoke resignedly. “As the wise men of my race know well, once in many generations is born a person whose gaze holds the power of evil influence. Such a person is the Lady Alixe, not of her own will but by the will of Allah; who is man, to avert his destiny? Upon all who endure her gaze, falls misfortune or death. Animals of all kinds perish; children die or fall ill if she caresses them. The monk who served the castle took care of her last year when she was ill; he sickened and died. Many of those who served her have likewise died. Now she wears a veil, which lessens the power of the Evil Eye. Mind you, there is no harm in her! She is a sweet and gentle lady, and grieves bitterly for the harm she has done.”

“So that’s the explanation!” said Gervase. “Who is the overlord of this place?”

“It is held in fief direct from the King, at Jerusalem.”

“Good; then no one will bother about those two knights, for a while at least. Waken me early. At sunrise, I want every man in this castle assembled in the courtyard. How many men-at-arms have you?”

“Barely thirty remain, Lord.”

Gervase flung himself down in the darkness, but not to sleep for a while. He was superstitious; the whole world was ridden by superstition. Yet he refused to accept this story of Lady Alixe and the Evil Eye. There might be some basis for it, yes, but it had been enlarged and aided by ill luck and evil mischance. So he dismissed it, resolving to test the matter for himself. Nor would he accept the testimony of Molitor, snorting in uneasy slumber beside him.

That he had come at the right moment to save Lady Alixe from harsh destiny, he saw quite clearly. His own destiny had been abruptly altered; this killing of the two knights had changed everything for him. No Jerusalem now, no service with the King there!

“We’ll think about the future when the time comes,” he resolved, and fell asleep.

Sunrise found him at work in the courtyard, inspecting, ordering, arranging, with a blaze of vigorous energy that swept everything before it. He was, in fact, appalled at what he found. Thirty men-at-arms, mostly French or of French descent, and fifty Greek mercenaries, in the main a slovenly lot. The castle was well supplied with food and wine, but arms lacked and defenses were slight. Below stretched a rich and fertile valley, with a large village and clumps of palms three miles distant; the villages and farmers were chiefly Arab and Syrian, he learned. Of horses, barely a dozen. The raid on which Count Beltran had perished had been disastrous in the extreme; the castle was an easy prey for the first band of Saracens to come this way.

Gervase took what measures he might. In the midst, he became aware of a veiled figure and the voice of his hostess.

“What, Sir Gervase, still here? I ordered you to depart this morning.”

“Destiny ordered otherwise,” said he. “I want you to ride with me to the village, yonder, and a bit farther.”

She stiffened a little. “You talk as though you were master here!”

"I am," he said, regarding her steadily, trying vainly to pierce the thin veil. "It's my belief that I was sent here by God to save a very gentle lady from evil fortune; and I mean to do it. I've no patience with fools or rascals or silly childish nonsense. Suffer me to have my way, lady, since it's for your own good. I've found a mission in life, and intend to see it through."

His voice was resolute; so powerful was his air, that he dominated the whole place. As she hesitated, sudden interruption came.

Villagers had been streaming in at the open gates, bringing produce and fruits.

A wagon laden with oil-casks creaked across the stone, for the olives were in fruit and were being pressed. A man came to Lady Alixe and dropped on his knee before her, averting his face as he in barbarous French he said:

"Lady, there is sickness in the house of Mar Obed. Two children and the woman."

"Mar Obed has no children!" she exclaimed in surprise. "What woman?"

"A wandering Arab woman with two children, who came to the village yesterday on a dying horse. Mar Obed sheltered them; the woman was weak and ill, and is in no great peril, but the two children are dying."

"What does he say?" asked Gervase, and she repeated the words.

"We'll stop in and look at them," he said. "I have some skill with wounds and sickness. It's part of the knightly training; and God knows I've practiced it on many a poor soul since leaving England! Go and dress for the ride, Lady Alixe; I'll have out the horses."

With a gesture of helpless assent, she departed.

A little later they were riding down the cart-track toward the village, the two of them, with Molitor gamboling jocosely around and ahead. Gervase wore his chain mail and a light steel cap; the sunlight well became his alert, strong features, saved from arrogance by the humorous wrinkles about his swift eyes.

"You're a very foolish man," she said softly, as they headed away from the castle. "Didn't Mansur tell you about me?"

"We'll discuss that later," he answered curtly.

"And the terrible thing you did last night. I heard the sounds as those men were being buried, and made Mansur tell me all about it. At least, all he knew."

Dismayed, he checked his horse for a moment. His gaze went to her, keenly. In this instant he cursed the veil that hid her face.

"Then you know!" he exclaimed. "They had come to take over the castle, to send you to be burned as a witch. They tried to murder me. And you call it a terrible thing to defend my life?"

"I did not know," she said gently.

"Well, you do now. This land is no longer safe for me, or for you; now it's a matter of saving ourselves. If we had money, we could do it; money is power. But I've so cursed little. You probably have none."

She laughed. "Plenty, Gervase! My father has ransomed more than one Saracen. I have money and jewels at the castle; more is on deposit with a Genoese banker in Acre. What good is it to me? A woman alone is helpless."

"Ha!" His eye kindled. "You're not alone nor helpless, my lady."

"Hopeless, rather." Her hands made a fluttering gesture of futility, mournful as her voice. "What can I do? Nothing, accursed as I am! Better to let them take me, and end my life."

“Bosh!” he said roughly “I’ve got the thing through my head by this time. I’ll make it plain later. There’s a woman at home, in England, near Clifden; she lives in a hut in the woods. Goody Toad, they call her; she has the Evil Eye and is a witch. My father saved her from being burned, and she has told me all about it.”

“About what?” she asked, as he paused.

“The Evil Eye. Something inside of her—a kind of power. If she stares at weak or sick animals, they die. But if she shuts her eyes and touches them, something goes out of her that cures them. People don’t know this; they think she’s wicked and accursed and can do only bad. Well, here we are at the village! Who’s the man we seek?”

“Mar Obed. He’s not an Arab but a Syrian. This is his house on the right.”

They were among the houses, and Gervase noted a scattering on every hand. Mothers caught up their children and vanished hurriedly. Men drew back, although they saluted Lady Alixe humbly enough. One man hurriedly daubed his face and breast with a white powder. A girl, staring in fright, jerked a little box from her gown and scattered more white powder on her head and breast.

They dismounted at the door of Mar Obed. The Syrian, a bearded, bronzed man, saluted them, and Gervase noted that his bearded countenance, also, had been hurriedly strewn with the white powder. Lady Alixe talked with him, and turned to Gervase.

“He says the wandering Arab woman has been taken to another house, but the children are here; young children, fevered and dying. Go and see, if you like. I cannot. They would say that I looked on them and killed them.”

“No, you’re coming with me,” Gervase replied. “Remember, your destiny is in my hands. I want you. Do as I say, lady, and trust me.”

She moaned a little, but obeyed.

Inside the house, two children, dark-skinned and obviously Arab, lay on a pallet. The wife of Mar Obed, a kindly woman of middle age, was hurriedly dusting them with white powder, dusting her own face as well; she regarded Lady Alixe in abject terror.

The children, their little bodies drawn and emaciated, were muttering and tossing, looking about with fever-bright, uncomprehending eyes. Gervase examined them attentively, then asked for wine. Lady Alixe translated, and Mar Obed brought a cup of wine. Into it, Gervase put a few drops of liquid from a tiny phial.

“A fever remedy I got from a leech in Marseilles,” he said. “Tell them to give it to the children later, a few drops at a time. Now lean over the bed and place a hand on each child.”

She drew away. “No, no! You don’t understand—”

“I understand better than you,” he said gravely, compellingly. “Do as I say! Put a hand on each child, and close your eyes. Remain quietly until I give the word. If old Goody Toad had the right of it, we’ll scotch this Evil Eye nonsense once and for all. Obey me!”

She was trembling violently, but yielded, and he placed one of her hands on the head of each child. A groan of fear came from the watching Mar Obed.

Gervase, regarding the two little ones keenly, saw a change come over them, and his heart leaped. The feverish tossing gradually ceased. The racing pulses quieted, the bright eyes closed. Presently they fell into peaceful slumber, breathing gently and easily.

“Enough.” Gervase caught the hands of Alixe away. She staggered, and he supported her within his arm. “Ask them what this white powder is.”

She did so. Mar Obed responded at length and showed a small box of the powder.

“He says,” she translated, “that it’s a powder used everywhere in the Arab countries, here and in Egypt and in Persia, as a protection against the Evil Eye. The greatest Arab wizards and doctors make use of it.”

“Hm! Those Arab doctors are wise men,” he rejoined thoughtfully. “I heard of them in Sicily; they positively work wonders. Ask him to give me some of the stuff.”

Mar Obed complied readily.

Gervase tasted the powder, made a wry grimace, and tucked it carefully away. Then he strode out, handed Lady Alixe to her saddle, and mounted. Instead of heading back, he gestured toward the desert.

“Ride past the palms, out into the wilderness a way. I want to talk with you.”

She assented in silence, and they rode on, with Molitor keeping company. The village and the palms dropped away. Amid untrodden sand, they came into a little hollow, a bowl whose edges rimmed the sky. Gervase drew rein, dismounted, and gave her his hand. As she came from the saddle, he caught swiftly at her veil and ripped it away.

Tears sparkled on her cheeks, tears filled her eyes; she had been weeping as they rode. Despite the anger that now came into her face, it was very lovely. Her eyes were a bright and vivid blue. A proud face, touched with sadness and beauty ineffable.

“How dare you! How dare you!” she gasped. Gervase came to one knee, seized her hand, and brought it to his lips.

“Pardon, lady! But I had to see you as you are; your voice told me, last night, how beautiful you were. Your voice has filled my soul. The touch of your hand has been singing in my heart. Dear lady, don’t you see the truth? It’s like Goody Toad said—a power for good, not a thing accursed!”

“Oh, if I could believe it!” Her anger vanished, and anguished emotion filled her eyes. “Those children—they slept, they slept! My touch did them no harm! Yet it can’t be true. If my eyes are accursed—”

“They’re the most beautiful eyes in the world,” broke in Gervase. “Listen! It’s very simple, dear lady, just as old Goody Toad said. There’s a certain power, yes; it can exert harm sometimes. That happened to you, perhaps once or twice, in little things; just as your vivid, bright eyes frightened Molitor last night. Then came exaggeration. Everything that happened was laid at your door. Tales spread and spread more wildly; fear lent wings to thought. You came to believe what was said. Others believed it. But now—you’re looking at me, looking into my face. Does it harm me? No, by the saints! I ask no more than to meet the kindness and tenderness of your dear eyes all my life long!”

“Gervase! You are insane, mad!” she murmured. He laughed a little and once more pressed his lips to her fingers.

“Not at all; I’m utterly happy,” he said, and rose, looking into her eyes. His sternly chiseled features were no longer harsh, but very gentle. “Look, dear lady! You’ve seen how this same power can heal, can do good. Here, let me prove it. Molitor! Here, you rascal!”

The dog came bounding to his side, caught sight of Lady Alixe, and shrank, stiffening.

“Close your eyes. Stoop down, touch his head,” said Gervase, smiling. “Dogs read the eyes of humans, dear lady; it’s a fact few people know. Do it, do it!”

She complied. Molitor shivered slightly at her touch, then quieted. As she stroked his neck, he lost his cowering air; after a moment, his head came around and he nuzzled her hand

and licked it affectionately. She drew erect with a swift and startled word.

“True! It’s true—oh, Gervase!”

Color swept into her cheeks, a rush of tears came into her eyes. She put out her hands to him, and Gervase upheld her, pressed her head against his shoulder, and his lips brushed the golden mass of her hair.

“What did you do to him—ah, the powder!” She shrank away, lifting her face in sharp conjecture. “Did you put that white powder on Molitor? Is that why he feared me not?”

Gervase broke into a laugh, but checked it thoughtfully.

“Heaven forbid! That powder, by the taste, is nothing but alum. Hm! There may be something to that powder, after all; these Arab wise men possess many secrets. This powder, that puckers the skin—hm! It might possibly fend off any such influences, in some queer way we don’t understand. Bah! Sweep all that nonsense out of your head, my dear! From now on, we go up the world together. We’ll abandon your castle and leave this land.”

As she listened, she yielded and drew against him, sobbing softly and happily, her face against his shoulder.

“We’ll go to Acre,” he went on, kindling to the thought. “There we’ll take ship for Venice or Byzantium—perhaps to England; why not? The weight is off your heart and mind together. Here between sky and sand, you’ve come awake, you’ve learned the truth, you’ve cast off the darkness of your life. And I’ll make the truth clearer to you, God helping me, through the years—”

His voice died away upon silence. A growl came from Molitor, a yapping angry bark; at the voice of Gervase, the dog subsided at his feet. Lady Alixe lifted her head and looked up, following the gaze of Gervase.



Gervase gave the point to the Provençal—full and deep, piercing from midriff to back.

The rim of sand against the sky, above them, was broken by the shape of a horseman in glittering mail, who sat looking down at them. One low, incredulous gasp escaped the woman.

“Khalid! The Emir himself—Khalid of Damascus!”

As they looked, the rim of the bowl was broken all around. Men came into view, outlined against the blue sky, checking their horses silently; dark, bearded men in Arab chain mail, bows strung and shafts notched. Gervase relaxed. Caught, beyond escape! Caught, by swift savage raiders of the Saracen!

Lady Alixe moved swiftly. “I know him,” she breathed. “He speaks French, he has often been a guest at our castle—Emir Khalid!” She lifted her voice in a clear, ringing call. “I’m the lady of Beltran! This knight is a friend—”

“It matters not who you are,” broke in the Emir, a darkly indomitable, impassive shape. “I have sworn death to all Franks. It was I who slew your father Count Beltran. I shall kill every Frank I meet, for the injury that was done me last month, when my wife and children were carried off by Franks. Yield, both of you! Yield or die!”

Gervase scraped out sword. “Die like a man, then,” he said grimly. White to the lips, Alixe tried once again.

“Khalid! We’ve done you no harm—”

“Take the woman alive,” said the impassive Emir. “Kill the man. Shoot, Ali, and may Allah further your shaft!”

Alixé, who understood the Arabic words, flung herself before Gervase.

“No, *no!*” she cried fiercely. “They give no mercy—rather death, than a harem! Those infidel dogs shall not take me!”

Her long dagger flashed out in her hand. The Emir lifted his hand.

“Four of you, dismount and seize her. Ali, kill the man for me!”

Four of the Arabs dismounted; and of a sudden everything was happening at once. The bowman beside the Emir drew back his shaft. The four Arabs were plunging ankle-deep down the sandy slope. Gervase quickly stepped aside and put Alixe away from him with a shove. The bowstring twanged, and the shaft flew like a flicker of light.

Lightly the sword of Gervase swung. It struck the arrow in mid-air and knocked it aside. The Arabs gasped; to them, it was magic. To Gervase, it was nothing; mere child’s play, the everyday training of the straight-sworded Northmen and Normans.

Another twang, another flying shaft. He struck—and missed, losing balance in the sand. The arrow hammered on his mail-shirt. It broke, but the shock bore him back, overbalanced as he was, and he came down. To those who looked, it seemed that he was dead.

“*Allah!*”

With the shrill pealing yell, the other men dismounted and came rushing down the slope. The first four were already closing in upon Alixe, wolfishly.

She evaded one; her dagger struck out at another, but the man caught her in his grip. Molitor came up in one terrific leap and caught the Arab by the throat; but another, curved scimitar swinging, struck at the dog and killed him.

For that man, it was an evil moment. Gervase was already coming to his feet; a cry of grief and fury burst from him as he struck. His blade clove through helmet and skull of the warrior, who pitched forward across the dead hound.

Alixé poniarded the man who held her. Then, smitten across the head by a mailed fist, she slipped down sidewise and lay quiet, senseless. The man who had struck her died, as the point of the long straight sword sheared across his belly; a spring, and Gervase was above her, bestriding her figure, feet planted firmly in the sand. He wasted no breath on battle-cries; he was marked for death and knew it, and meant to take full toll before dying.

They were flooding all around him now; they had left their bows with the horses, but steel was out and whanging at him. The first tried to rush him off his feet, but he met them halfway in this. He struck at their faces, swift and hard and fast; screams rang and blood spurted, for it was a ghastly business. The lithe curved blades were swept aside by the heavy sword; men staggered or reeled away from before him.

He leaped suddenly, turned about, caught those striking at him from behind. With point and edge he drove death into them, his tall figure towering above their lesser build. They pressed in for a moment. A Toledo blade slashed across his breast, piercing the chain-mail and bringing blood; another scimitar clanged on his steel cap, so that blood streaked down his cheek. Then they rolled back, as the smiting heavy sword struck down man after man, and blood spurted in the sunlight, and hurt men crawled, and screamed to Allah.

It could not last. He knew it most desperately; they were too many. Two came plunging at him, from either side. He cut down one, but his sword stuck there, and the other was in upon him, bearing him down. His sword was lost. His naked hands broke that man's neck, but already others were in, and he went down, down, slipping in the bloody sand, and they piled up above him.

"Back! Back, I say! Away from him!" The clarion voice of the Emir Khalid reached into them. The pile broke away. One warrior, poised to stab Gervase in the throat, was dragged off by his fellows. They scrambled clear, looking up in amazement to their leader. Gervase came to one elbow and reached out for his lost sword, but they did not move.

"Touch him not!" roared the Emir, swinging out of the saddle.

A man had come up to him, panting, gasping out eager words. In hot haste, the Emir turned and came down the slope in long leaps, and halted before Gervase. The latter came to one knee, sword ready, thinking it was the end, but the Emir checked him.

"Is this true?" The dark face was all ablaze, the eyes wildly alight. "Was it you, and this woman, who healed those children in the village? Answer, *answer!*"

"Aye," panted Gervase. "What of it?"

"My children, my children!" Reaching out, the Arab caught him in a wild embrace. "My wife, escaped from her captors with the two children! Allah bless you! Allah reward you, my friend and brother—"

The hot gasping voices died out; the sunlight faded, the red goutts of blood were gone. The stones of the wall became visible once more. Then the experiment went wrong.

A cry broke from Norman Fletcher. Against the wall something moved. A wild bloody figure, holding a long ax, moved in front of us, came rushing at us—no picture, no vision, but some actual thing from the past. I saw Fletcher plunge at his keyboard, as the ax swung. It fell, missed him, struck a chair beside him—then it faded and was gone, with the crash of the blow still in our ears.

It was gone. The light was over, and died away. Fletcher came to his feet and looked at me; he was very pale and shaken. I looked at the chair. It was rent and splintered by a tremendous blow; but the room was very quiet.

“Good Lord!” I cried. “Did I dream that thing—that ax?”

Fletcher exhaled a deep breath, laughed shakily, and pointed to the chair. “There’s your answer,” he said. “Those controls went screwy on me—confound it! Well, well, all’s right that ends right. Here, have a fresh cigar. Anyhow, you got the answer to your request for the Evil Eye material, eh?”

“More or less,” I said, biting at the cigar. Right then, I needed a drink. “But I’m afraid I didn’t get much of it. That alum stuff, for example.”

He gave me a shrewd glance.

“No? To me, that was the most interesting detail of all,” he observed reflectively. “We’ve just been told, flatly and unqualifiedly, that at the time of the Crusades, and presumably later, alum was used all over the Moslem world to avert the Evil Eye. Suppose we look this up and find it true,—and mind you, I’ve no doubt whatever that it will be substantiated in fact,—then what?”

“Well?” I said. “I’ll bite. What?”

He shook his head. “There may be something in it from a scientific standpoint, that’s all, directly in line with my own experiments. Alum, a powerful astringent, puckering the skin and membranes—yes, yes, it might have some such effect as we’ve been told. I’ve learned something today, let me tell you! Certain persons do emanate magnetic power, or invisible rays; science has proven that the Evil Eye is no mere fancy, but founded on sober reality. Once in generations, a person may show up whose radiations are extremely strong—for good or for evil. Hm! I’m going to experiment with the alum idea. Those old Arab physicians had something on the ball!”

Looking at the smashed and broken chair, I could not repress a shiver.

“So has your damned machinery, whatever it is!”

Fletcher took my arm, his shrewd eyes twinkling. “My friend,” he said impressively, “come along to the library, where I’ll lay before you the kindest words of tongue or pen.”

“What are they?” I asked suspiciously.

“‘Scotch or Bourbon?’ ” he rejoined, smiling.

“For once you’re dead right,” I said. “And the quicker the better!”

Another spirited story in this already famous series will be a feature of our forthcoming August issue.

[The end of *Lady of the Evil Eye* by Henry Bedford-Jones]