

ERNOUL: THE BATTLE OF HATTIN, 1187

Account of the Battle of Hattin, 1187
by a local Frank, «Ernoul», written soon after 1197

Now I will tell you about King Guy and his host. They left the spring of Saffuriya to go to the relief of Tiberias. As soon as they had left the water behind, Saladin came before them and ordered his skirmishers to harass them from morning until midday. The heat was so great that they could not go on so that they could come to water. The king and all the other people were spread out and did not know what to do. They could not turn back for the losses would have been too great. He sent to the count of Tripoli, who led the advance guard, to ask advice as to what to do. He sent word that he should pitch his tent and make camp. The king gladly accepted this bad advice. When (the count) had given him good advice he would never take it. Some people in the host said that if the Christians had gone on to meet the Saracens, Saladin would have been defeated. As soon as they were encamped, Saladin ordered all his men to collect brushwood, dry grass, stubble and anything else with which they could light fires, and make barriers which he had made all round the Christians. They soon did this, and the fires burned vigorously and the smoke from the fires was great; and this, together with the heat of the sun above them caused them discomfort and great harm. Saladin had commanded caravans of camels loaded with water from the Sea of Tiberias to be brought up and had water pots placed near the camp. The water pots were then emptied in view of the Christians so that they should have still greater anguish through thirst, and their mounts too. A strange thing happened in the Christian host the day they were encamped at the spring of Saffuriya, for the horses refused to drink the water either at night or in the morning, and because of their thirst they were to fault their masters when they most needed them. Then a knight named Geoffrey of Franc Leuc went to the king and said, 'Sire, it is now high time for you to make the poleins with their beards dear to the men of your country (i.e. Poitou)'.^[1] It was one of the causes of the hatred between King Guy and the Poitevins and those of this land, that the men of that land sang a song in Jerusalem which greatly annoyed the men of the kingdom. The song went:

Maugrñ li polein,

Aurons nous roi Poiteven.

[`Despite the poleins,

we shall have a Poitevin king.']

This hatred and scorn led to the loss of the kingdom of Jerusalem.

When the fires were lit and the smoke was great, the Saracens surrounded the host and shot their darts through the smoke and so wounded and killed men and horses. When the king saw the disadvantageous position the host was in, he called the master of the Temple and Prince Raynald and told them to give him their advice. They counselled him that he must fight the Saracens. He ordered his brother Aimery, who was the constable,^[2] to organise the squadrons. He organised them as best he could. The count of Tripoli who led the advance guard at their arrival led the first division and was in front. This division included Raymond, the son of the prince of Antioch, with all his company and the four sons of the lady of Tiberias, Hugh, William, Ralph and Otto.^[3] Balian of Ibelin and Count Joscelin made up the rear guard. Just as the divisions were being put in position and the battle lines ordered, five knights from the count of Tripoli's division left him and went to Saladin and said, 'Sire, what are you doing? Go and take the Christians for they are all defeated'. When he heard these words he ordered his squadron to move forward, and they moved off and approached the Christians. When the king was aware that Saladin was coming against him he ordered the count of Tripoli to charge. It is the right of the barons of the kingdom that when there is a host summoned by the king (ost banie) in their lordship, the baron on whose land the battle is to take place leads the first division and is out in front, and on entering his land leads the advance guard and on leaving leads the rear guard. Because of this the count of Tripoli took the forward position, since Tiberias was his. The count and his division charged at a large squadron of Saracens. The Saracens parted and made a way through and let them pass; then, when they were in the middle of them, they surrounded them. Only 10 or 12 knights from the count's division escaped them. Among those who escaped were the count of Tripoli and Raymond, son of the prince of Antioch, and the four sons of the lady of Tiberias. When the count saw that they were defeated he did not dare go to Tiberias which was only 2 miles away, for he feared that if he shut himself up in there and Saladin found out he could come and take him. He went off with what company he had and went to the city of Tyre. After this