

Historic Girls

by E. S. Brooks

STORIES OF GIRLS WHO HAVE INFLUENCED THE
HISTORY OF THEIR TIMES

E. S. BROOKS

PREFACE.

In these progressive days, when so much energy and discussion are devoted to what is termed equality and the rights of woman, it is well to remember that there have been in the distant past women, and girls even, who by their actions and endeavors proved themselves the equals of the men of their time in valor, shrewdness, and ability.

This volume seeks to tell for the girls and boys of to-day the stories of some of their sisters of the long-ago,--girls who by eminent position or valiant deeds became historic even before they had passed the charming season of girlhood.

Their stories are fruitful of varying lessons, for some of these historic girls were wilful as well as courageous, and

mschievous as well as tender-hearted.

But from all the lessons and from all the morals, one truth stands out most clearly--the fact that age and country, time and surroundings, make but little change in the real girl-nature, that has ever been impulsive, trusting, tender, and true, alike in the days of the Syrian Zenobia and in those of the modern American school-girl.

After all, whatever the opportunity, whatever the limitation, whatever the possibilities of this same never-changing girl-nature, no better precept can be laid down for our own bright young maidens, as none better can be deduced from the stories herewith presented, than that phrased in Kingsley's noble yet simple verse:

"Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever
Do noble things, not dream them, all day long
And so make

life, death, and the vast forever One grand, sweet song."

Grateful acknowledgment is made by the author for the numerous expressions of interest that came to him from his girl-readers as the papers now gathered into book-form appeared from time to time in the pages of St. Nicholas. The approval of those for whom one studies and labors is the pleasantest and most enduring return.

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ZENOBIA OF PALMYRA: THE GIRL OF THE SYRIAN DESERT.

[Afterward known as "Zenobia Augusta, Queen of the East."] A.D.250.

MANY and many miles and many days' journey toward the rising sun, over seas and mountains and deserts,-- farther to the east than Rome, or Constantinople, or even Jerusalem and old Damascus,-- stand the ruins of a once mighty city, scattered over a mountain-walled oasis of the great Syrian desert, thirteen hundred feet above the sea, and just across the northern border of Arabia. Look for it in your geographies. It is known as Palmyra. To-day the jackal prowls through its deserted streets and the lizard suns himself on its fallen columns, while thirty or forty miserable Arabian huts huddle together in a small corner

of what was once the great court-yard of the magnificent Temple of the Sun.

And yet, sixteen centuries ago, Palmyra, or Tadmor as it was originally called, was one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Nature and art combined to make it glorious.

Like a glittering mirage out of the sand-swept desert arose its palaces and temples and grandly sculptured archways. With aqueducts and monuments and gleaming porticos with countless groves of palm-trees and gardens full of verdure; with wells and fountains, market and circus; with broad streets stretching away to the city gates and lined on either side with magnificent colonnades of rose-colored marble--such was Palmyra in the year of our Lord 250, when, in the soft Syrian month of Nisan, or April, in an open portico in the great colonnade and screened from the sun by gayly colored awnings, two young people--a boy of sixteen and a girl of twelve--looked down upon the

beautiful Street of the Thousand Columns, as lined with bazaars and thronged with merchants it stretched from the wonderful Temple of the Sun to the triple Gate-way of the Sepulchre, nearly a mile away.

Both were handsome and healthy--true children of old Tadmor, that glittering, fairy-like city which, Arabian legends say, was built by the genii for the great King Solomon ages and ages ago. Midway between the Mediterranean and the Euphrates, it was the meeting-place for the caravans from the east and the wagon trains from the west, and it had thus become a city of merchant princes, a wealthy commercial republic, like Florence and Venice in the middle ages--the common toll-gate for both the East and West.

But, though a tributary colony of Rome, it was so remote a dependency of that mighty mistress of the world that the

yoke of vassalage was but carelessly worn and lightly felt. The great merchants and chiefs of caravans who composed its senate and directed its affairs, and whose glittering statues lined the sculptured cornice of its marble colonnades, had more power and influence than the far-off Emperor at Rome, and but small heed was paid to the slender garrison that acted as guard of honor to the strategical or special officers who held the colony for Rome and received its yearly tribute. And yet so strong a force was Rome in the world that even this free-tempered desert city had gradually become Romanized in manners as in name, so that Tadmor had become first Adrianapolis and then Palmyra. And this influence had touched even these children in the portico. For their common ancestor--a wealthy merchant of a century before--had secured honor and rank from the Emperor Septimus Severus --the man who "walled in" England, and of whom it was said that "he never performed an act of humanity or forgave a

fault." Becoming, by the Emperor's grace, a Roman citizen, this merchant of Palmyra, according to a custom of the time, took the name of his royal patron as that of his own "fahdh," or family, and the father of young Odhainat in the portico, as was Odhainat himself, was known as Septimus Odaenathus, while the young girl found her Arabic name of Bath Zabbai, Latinized into that of Septima Zenobia.

But as, thinking nothing of all this, they looked lazily on the throng below, a sudden exclamation from the lad caused his companion to raise her flashing black eyes inquiringly to his face.

"What troubles you, my Odhainat?" she asked.

"There, there; look there, Bath Zabbai!" replied the boy excitedly; "coming through the Damascus arch, and we

thought him to be in Emesa."

The girl's glance followed his guiding finger, but even as she looked a clear trumpet peal rose above the din of the city, while from beneath a sculptured archway that spanned a colonnaded cross-street the bright April sun gleamed down upon the standard of Rome with its eagle crest and its S. P. Q. R. design beneath. There is a second trumpet peal, and swinging into the great Street of the Thousand Columns, at the head of his light-armed legionaries, rides the centurion Rufinus, lately advanced to the rank of tribune of one of the chief Roman cohorts in Syria. His coming, as Odhainat and even the young Bath Zabbai knew, meant a stricter supervision of the city, a re-enforcement of its garrison, and the assertion of the mastership of Rome over this far eastern province on the Persian frontier.

"But why should the coming of the Roman so trouble you, my Odhainat?" she asked. "We are neither Jew nor Christian that we should fear his wrath, but free Palmyreans who bend the knee neither to Roman nor Persian masters."

"Who WILL bend the knee no longer, be it never so little, my cousin," exclaimed the lad hotly, "as this very day would have shown had not this crafty Rufinus--may great Solomon's genii dash him in the sea!--come with his cohort to mar our measures! Yet see--who cometh now?" he cried; and at once the attention of the young people was turned in the opposite direction as they saw, streaming out of the great fortress-like court-yard of the Temple of the Sun, another hurrying throng.

Then young Odhainat gave a cry of joy.

"See, Bath Zabbai; they come, they come"! he cried. "It is my father, Odhainat the esarkos,[1] with all the leaders and all the bowmen and spearmen of our fahdh armed and in readiness. This day will we fling off the Roman yoke and become the true and unconquered lords of Palmyra. And I, too, Must join them," he added.

[1] The "head man," or chief of the "fahdh," or family.

But the young girl detained him. "Wait, cousin," she said; "watch and wait. Our fahdh will scarce attempt so brave a deed to-day,with these new Roman soldiers in our gates. That were scarcely wise.

But the boy broke out again. "So; they have seen each other," he said; "both sides are pressing on!"

"True; and they will meet under this very portico," said

Bath Zabbai, and moved both by interest and desire this dark-eyed Syrian girl, to whom fear was never known, standing by her cousin's side, looked down upon the tossing sea of spears and lances and glittering shields and helmets that swayed and surged in the street below.

"So, Odaenathus!" said Rufinus, the tribune, reining in his horse and speaking in harsh and commanding tones, "what meaneth this array of armed followers?"

"Are the movements of Septius Odaenathus, the headman, of such importance to the noble tribune that he must needs question a free merchant of Palmyra as to the number and manner of his servants?" asked Odaemathus haughtily.

"Dog of a Palmyrean; slave of a camel-driver," said the Roman angrily, "trifle not with me. Were you ten times

the free merchant you claim, you should not thus reply. Free, forsooth!None are free but Romans."

"Have a care, O Rufinus," said the Palmyrean boldly, "choose wiser words if you would have peaceful ways. Palmyra brooks no such slander of her foremost men."

"And Rome brooks no such men as you, traitor," said Rufinus. "Ay,traitor, I say," h repeated, as Odaenathus started at the word."Think not to hide your plots to overthrow the Roman power in your city and hand the rule to the base Sapor of Persia. Every thing is known to our great father the Emperor, and thus doth he reckon with traitors. Macrinus, strike!" and at his word the short Gallic sword in the ready hand of the big German foot-soldier went straight to its mark and Odaenathus, the "head-man" of Palmyra, lay dead in the Street of the Thousand Columns.

So sudden and so unexpected was the blow that the Palmyreans stood as if stunned, unable to comprehend what had happened. But the Roman was swift to act.

"Sound, trumpets! Down, pikes!" he cried, and as the trumpet peal rose loud and clear, fresh legionaries came hurrying through the Damascus arch, and the pilum[1] and spatha of Rome bore back the shields and lances of Palmyra.

[1] The pilum was the Roman pike, and the spatha the short single-edged Roman sword.

But, before the lowered pikes could fully disperse the crowd, the throng parted and through the swaying mob there burst a lithe and flying figure--a brown-skinned maid of twelve with streaming hair, loose robe, and angry,