

**THE CHILDREN OF
THE KING: A TALE OF
SOUTHERN ITALY**

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The Children of the King: A Tale of Southern Italy by F. Marion Crawford

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F. MARION CRAWFORD

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CHILDREN OF THE KING

A TALE OF SOUTHERN ITALY

BY

F. MARION CRAWFORD

AUTHOR OF "MR. ISAACS," "DR. CLAUDIUS," "SARACINESCA," ETC.

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Dedication

TO

THE MIDDY, THE LADDIE, THE MATE

AND THE MEN

THE SKIPPER OF THE OLD *LEONE*

DEDICATES

THIS STORY

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CHILDREN OF THE KING.

CHAPTER I.

LAY your course south-east half east from the Campanella. If the weather is what it should be in late summer you will have a fresh breeze on the starboard quarter from ten in the morning till four or five o'clock in the afternoon. Sail straight across the wide gulf of Salerno, and when you are over give the Licosa Point a wide berth, for the water is shallow and there are reefs along shore. Moreover there is no light on Licosa Point, and many a good ship has gone to pieces there in dark winter nights when the surf is rolling in. If the wind holds you may run on to Palinuro in a long day before the evening calm comes on, and the water turns oily and full of pink and green and violet streaks, and the sun settles down in the north-west. Then the big sails will hang

like curtains from the long slanting yards, the slack sheets will dip down to the water, the rudder will knock softly against the stern-post as the gentle swell subsides. Then all is of a golden orange colour, then red as wine, then purple as grapes, then violet, then grey, then altogether shadowy as the stars come out—unless it chances that the moon is not yet full, and edges everything with silver on your left hand while the sunset dyes fade slowly to darkness upon your right.

Then the men forward will bestir themselves and presently a red glow rises and flickers and paints what it touches, with its own colours. The dry wood crackles and flares on the brick and mortar hearth, and the great kettle is put on. Presently the water boils—in go the long bundles of fine-drawn paste, and everybody collects forward to watch the important operation. Stir it quickly at first. Let it boil till a bit of it is tender under the teeth. In with the coarse salt, and stir again. Up with kettle. Chill it with a quart of cold water from the keg. A hand with the colander and one with the wooden spoon while the milky boiling water is drained

off. Garlic and oil, or tomato preserve? Which-ever it is, be quick about it. And so to supper, with huge hard biscuit and stony cheese, and the full wine jug passed from mouth to mouth. To every man a fork and to every man his place within arm's length of the great basin—mottled green and white within, red brown and unglazed on the outside. But the man at the helm has an earthen plate, and the jug is passed aft to him from time to time.

Not that he has much to do as he lies there on his six-foot deck that narrows away so sharply to the stern. He has taken a hitch round the heavy tiller with the slack of the main sheet to keep it off the side of his head while he eats. There is no current, and there is not a breath of air. By and by, before midnight, you will smell the soft land breeze blowing in puffs out of every little bay and indentation. There is no order needed. The men silently brace the yards and change the sheets over. The small jib is already bent in place of the big one, for the night is dark and some of those smart puffs will soon be like little squalls. Full and by. Hug the land, for there are no more reefs before Scalea.

If you do not get aground on what you can see in Calabria, you will not get aground at all, says the old proverb. Briskly over two or three miles to the next point, and the breeze is gone again. While she is still forging ahead out go the sweeps, six or eight of them, and the men throw themselves forward over the long slender loom, as they stand. Half an hour to row, or more perhaps. Down helm, as you meet the next puff, and the good felucca heels over a little. And so through the night, the breeze freshening before the rising sun to die away in the first hot morning hours, just as you are abreast of Camerota. L'Infresco Point is ahead, not three miles away. It is of no use to row, for the breeze will come up before long and save you the trouble. But the sea is white and motionless. Far in the offing a Sicilian schooner and a couple of clumsy "martinganes" — there is no proper English name for the craft — are lying becalmed, with hanging sails. The men on board the felucca watch them and the sea. There is a shadow on the white, hazy horizon, then a streak, then a broad dark blue band. The schooner braces her top-

sail yard and gets her main sheet aft. The martinganes flatten in their jibs along their high steeving bowsprits and jib-booms. Shift your sheets, too, now, for the wind is coming. Past L'Infresco with its lovely harbour of refuge, lonely as a bay in a desert island, its silent shade and its ancient spring. The wind is south by west at first, but it will go round in an hour or two, and before noon you will make Scalea — stand out for the reef, the only one in Calabria — with a stern breeze. You have passed the most beautiful spot on the beautiful Italian coast, without seeing it. There, between the island of Dino and the cape lies San Nicola, with its grand deserted tower, its mighty cliffs, its deep, safe bay and its velvet sand. What matter? The wind is fair and you are for Calabria with twenty tons of macaroni from Amalfi. There is no time to be lost, either, for you will probably come home in ballast. Past Scalea, then, where tradition says that Judas Iscariot was born and bred and did his first murder. Right ahead is the sharp point of the Diamante, beyond that low shore where the cane brake grows to within fifty yards of the sea.