# THE CONAN DOYLE HISTORICAL ROMANCES

A Conan Doyle

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THE LOST WORLD; THE POISON BELT; THE LAND OF MIST; THE DISINTEGRATION MACHINE; WHEN THE WORLD SCREAMED

THE

# CONAN DOYLE HISTORICAL ROMANCES

VOLUME ONE

THE WHITE COMPANY

SIR NIGEL

MICAH CLARKE

THE REFUGEES

By SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

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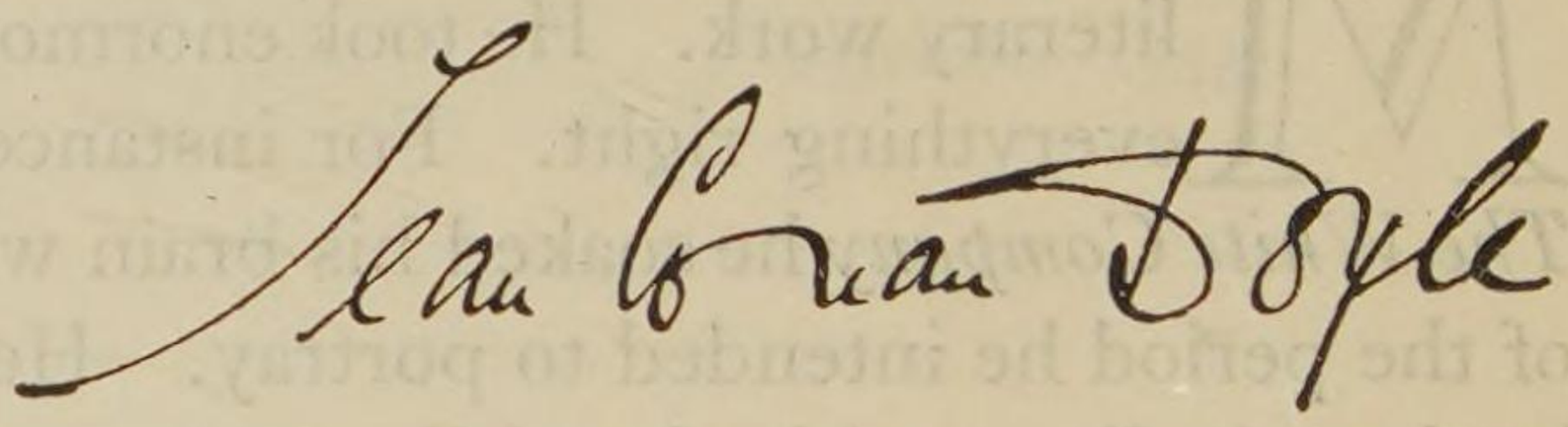
# PREFACE

MY husband was intensely thorough in all his literary work. He took enormous pains to have everything right. For instance before writing *The White Company* he soaked his brain with a knowledge of the period he intended to portray. He read over sixty books dealing with heraldry—armour—falconry—the medieval habits of the peasants of that time—the social customs of the higher folk of the land, etc. Only when he knew those days as though he had lived in them—when he had got the very atmosphere steeped into his brain—did he put pen to paper and let loose the creations of his mind. That perfect knight—Sir Nigel—so human and attractive and so lovable, is an example of all that a gentleman—a true knight in life—should be, and in portraying Sir Nigel's adventurous life my husband has given a wonderful and living description of that romantic and chivalrous period of English history.

His literary versatility was truly remarkable. When one considers the wide range of subjects and characters created by that one mind: His historical romances covering several different eras—his sporting novels—his poems—the detective stories—his brilliantly imaginative works, such as *The Lost World*, *The Maracot Deep*, his pirate and adventure yarns—his simple human study as embodied in *The Duet*—his plays—his marvellously accurate and humanly described Histories of the Boer

War and the Great War, as well as all his psychic books, etc.—how many finely cut facets to be parts of one brain !

Apart from all my husband's literary inspiration and genius there was in his work—as in his life—such sincerity and thoroughness, honesty and fearlessness. His big heart and human understanding was the keynote —the undercurrent of his great brain and personality.



WINDLESHAM,
CROWBOROUGH,
1931.

## NOTE

*White Company* is given first in this volume, as it was published before *Sir Nigel*. It should, however, be read as a sequel to *Sir Nigel*.

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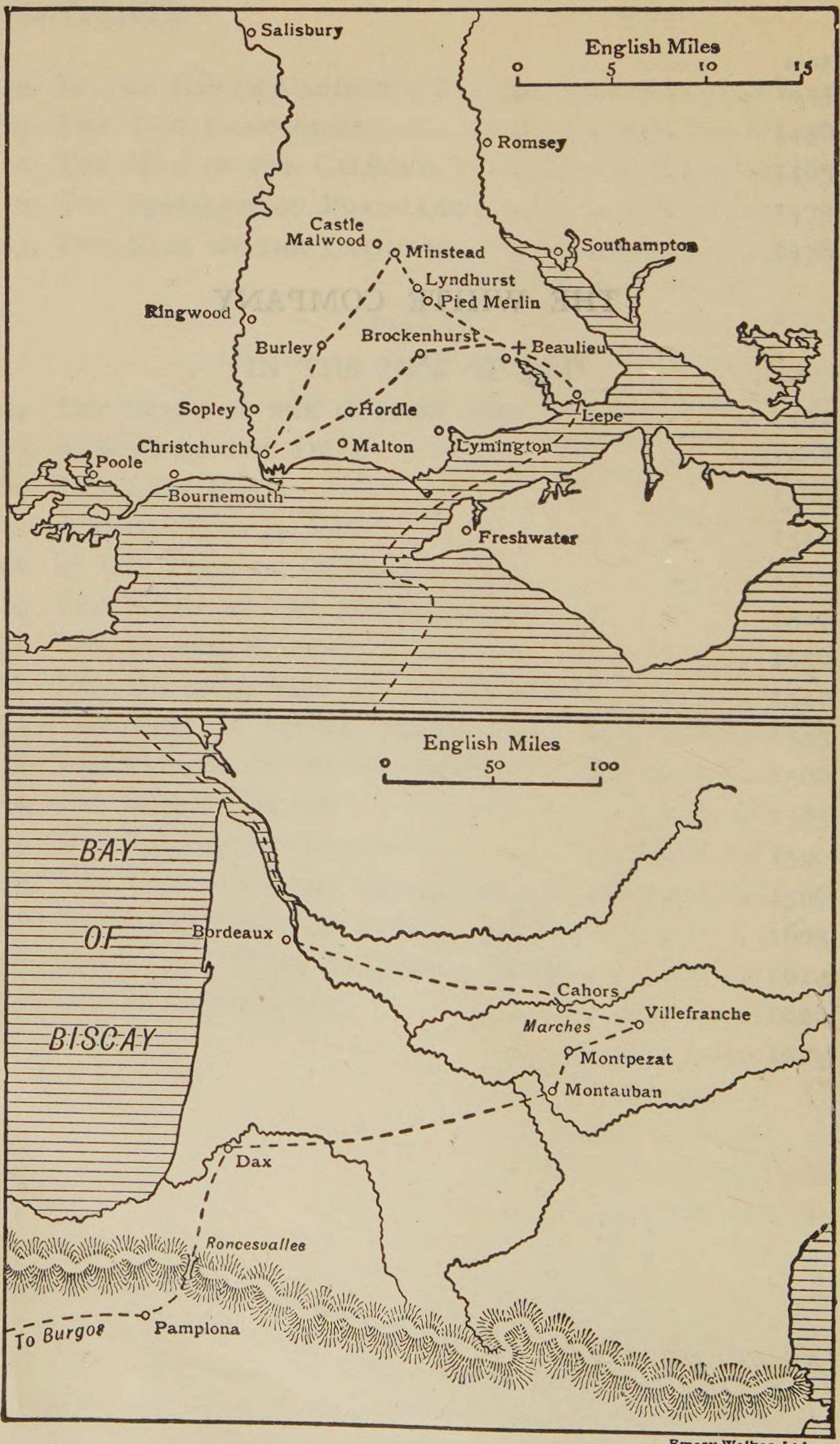
# THE WHITE COMPANY

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# 1. *How the Black Sheep came forth from the Fold*

THE great bell of Beaulieu was ringing. Far away through the forest might be heard its musical clangour and swell. Peat-cutters on Blackdown and fishers upon the Exe heard the distant throbbing rising and falling upon the sultry summer air. It was a common sound in those parts—as common as the chatter of the jays and the booming of the bittern. Yet the fishers and the peasants raised their heads and looked questions at each other, for the Angelus had already gone and Vespers was still far off. Why should the great bell of Beaulieu toll when the shadows were neither short nor long ?

All round the Abbey the monks were trooping in. Under the long green-paved avenues of gnarled oaks and of lichened beeches the white-robed brothers gathered to the sound. From the vineyard and the vinepress, from the bouvary or ox-farm, from the marl-pits and salterns, even from the distant ironworks of Sowley and the outlying grange of St. Leonard's, they had all turned their steps homewards. It had been no sudden call. A swift messenger had the night before sped round to the outlying dependencies of the Abbey and had left the summons for every monk to be back in the cloisters by the third hour after noontide. So urgent a message had not been issued within the memory of old lay-brother Athanasius, who had cleaned the Abbey knocker since the year after the Battle of Bannockburn.

A stranger who knew nothing either of the Abbey or of its immense resources might have gathered from the

appearance of the brothers some conception of the varied duties which they were called upon to perform, and of the busy widespread life which centred in the old monastery. As they swept gravely in by twos and by threes, with bended heads and muttering lips, there were few who did not bear upon them some signs of their daily toil. Here were two with wrists and sleeves all spotted with the ruddy grape juice. There again was a bearded brother with a broad-headed axe and a bundle of faggots upon his shoulders, while beside him walked another with the shears under his arm and the white wool still clinging to his whiter gown. A long straggling troop bore spades and mattocks, while the two rearmost of all staggered along under a huge basket of fresh-caught carp—for the morrow was Friday, and there were fifty platters to be filled and as many sturdy trenchermen behind them. Of all the throng there was scarce one who was not labour-stained and weary, for Abbot Berghersh was a hard man to himself and to others.

Meanwhile, in the broad and lofty chamber set apart for occasions of import, the Abbot himself was pacing impatiently backwards and forwards, with his long white nervous hands clasped in front of him. His thin thought-worn features and sunken haggard cheeks bespoke one who had indeed beaten down that inner foe whom every man must face, but had none the less suffered sorely in the contest. In crushing his passions he had well-nigh crushed himself. Yet, frail as was his person, there gleamed out ever and anon from under his drooping brows a flash of fierce energy, which recalled to men's minds that he came of a fighting stock, and that even now his twin brother, Sir Bartholomew Berghersh, was one of the most famous of those stern warriors who had planted the Cross of St. George before the gates of Paris. With lips compressed and clouded brow, he strode up and down the oaken floor, the very genius and impersonation of asceticism, while the great bell still thundered and clanged above his head. At last the uproar died away in three

last, measured throbs, and ere their echo had ceased the Abbot struck a small gong which summoned a lay-brother to his presence.

"Have the brethren come?" he asked, in the Anglo-French dialect used in religious houses.

"They are here," the other answered, with his eyes cast down, and his hands crossed upon his chest.

"All?"

"Two-and-thirty of the seniors and fifteen of the novices, most holy father. Brother Mark of the Spicarium is sore smitten with a fever and could not come. He said that——"

"It boots not what he said. Fever or no, he should have come at my call. His spirit must be chastened, as must that of many more in this Abbey. You yourself, brother Francis, have twice raised your voice, so that it hath come to my ears, when the reader in the refectory hath been dealing with the lives of God's most blessed saints. What hast thou to say?"

The lay-brother stood meek and silent, with his arms still crossed in front of him.

"One thousand Aves and as many Credos, said standing with arms outstretched before the shrine of the Virgin, may help thee to remember that the Creator hath given us two ears and but one mouth, as a token that there is twice the work for the one as for the other. Where is the master of the novices?"

"He is without, most holy father."

"Send him hither."

The sandalled feet clattered over the wooden floor, and the iron-bound door creaked upon its hinges. In a few moments it opened again to admit a short square monk with a heavy composed face and authoritative manner.

"You have sent for me, holy father?"

"Yes, brother Jerome, I wish that this matter be disposed of with as little scandal as may be; and yet it is needful that the example should be a public one." The Abbot spoke in Latin now, as a language which was more

fitted by its age and solemnity to convey the thoughts of two high dignitaries of the order.

"It would perchance be best that the novices be not admitted," suggested the master. "This mention of a woman may turn their minds from their pious meditations to worldly and evil thoughts."

"Woman! woman!" groaned the Abbot. "Well has the holy Chrysostom termed them *radix malorum*. From Eve downwards, what good hath come from any of them? Who brings the plaint?"

"It is brother Ambrose."

"A holy and devout young man."

"A light and a pattern to every novice."

"Let the matter be brought to an issue, then, according to our old-time monastic habit. Bid the chancellor and the sub-chancellor lead in the brothers according to age, together with brother John the accused and brother Ambrose the accuser."

"And the novices?"

"Let them bide in the north alley of the cloisters. Stay! Bid the sub-chancellor send out to them Thomas the lector to read unto them from the 'Gesta beati Benedicti.' It may save them from foolish and pernicious babbling."

The Abbot was left to himself once more, and bent his thin grey face over his illuminated breviary. So he remained while the senior monks filed slowly and sedately into the chamber, seating themselves upon the long oaken benches which lined the wall on either side. At the farther end, in two high chairs as large as that of the Abbot, though hardly as elaborately carved, sat the master of the novices and the chancellor, the latter a broad and portly priest, with dark mirthful eyes and a thick outgrowth of crisp black hair all round his tonsured head. Between them stood a lean white-faced brother who appeared to be ill at ease, shifting his feet from side to side and tapping his chin nervously with the long parchment roll which he held in his hand. The Abbot, from his

point of vantage, looked down on the two lines of faces, placid and sun-browned for the most part, with the large bovine eyes and unlined features which told of their easy, unchanging existence. Then he turned his eager, fiery gaze upon the pale-faced monk who faced him.

"This plaint is thine, as I learn, brother Ambrose," said he. "May the holy Benedict, patron of our house, be present this day and aid us in our findings. How many counts are there?"

"Three, most holy father," the brother answered in a low and quavering voice.

"Have you set them forth according to rule?"

"They are here set down, most holy father, upon a cantle of sheepskin."

"Let the sheepskin be handed to the chancellor. Bring in brother John, and let him hear the plaints which have been urged against him."

At this order a lay-brother swung open the door, and two other lay-brothers entered, leading between them a young novice of the order. He was a man of huge stature, dark-eyed and red-headed, with a peculiar half humorous, half defiant expression upon his bold, well-marked features. His cowl was thrown back upon his shoulders, and his gown, unfastened at the top, disclosed a round sinewy neck, ruddy and corded like the bark of the fir. Thick muscular arms, covered with a reddish down, protruded from the wide sleeves of his habit, while his white skirt, looped up upon one side, gave a glimpse of a huge leg, scarred and torn with the scratches of brambles. With a bow to the Abbot, which had in it perhaps more pleasantry than reverence, the novice strode across to the carved prie-dieu which had been set apart for him, and stood silent and erect with his hand upon the gold bell which was used in the private orisons of the Abbot's own household. His dark eyes glanced rapidly over the assembly, and finally settled with a grim and menacing twinkle upon the face of his accuser.

The chancellor rose, and having slowly unrolled the

parchment scroll, proceeded to read it out in a thick and pompous voice, while a subdued rustle and movement among the brothers bespoke the interest with which they followed the proceedings.

"Charges brought upon the second Thursday after the feast of the Assumption, in the year of our Lord thirteen hundred and sixty-six, against brother John, formerly known as Hordle John, or John of Hordle, but now a novice in the holy monastic order of the Cistercians. Read upon the same day at the Abbey of Beaulieu in the presence of the most reverend Abbot Berghersh and of the assembled order.

"The charges against the said brother John are the following, namely, to wit :

"First, that on the above-mentioned feast of the Assumption, small beer having been served to the novices in the proportion of one quart to each four, the said brother John did drain the pot at one draught to the detriment of brother Paul, brother Porphyry, and brother Ambrose, who could scarce eat their none-meat of salted stock-fish, on account of their exceeding dryness."

At this solemn indictment the novice raised his hand and twitched his lip, while even the placid senior brothers glanced across at each other and coughed to cover their amusement. The Abbot alone sat grey and immutable, with a drawn face and a brooding eye.

"Item, that having been told by the master of the novices that he should restrict his food for two days to a single three-pound loaf of bran and beans, for the greater honouring and glorifying of St. Monica, mother of the holy Augustine, he was heard by brother Ambrose and others to say that he wished twenty thousand devils would fly away with the said Monica, mother of the holy Augustine, or any other saint who came between a man and his meat. Item, that upon brother Ambrose reproving him for this blasphemous wish, he did hold the said brother face downwards over the piscatorium or fishpond for a space during which the said brother was able to repeat a

Pater and four Aves for the better fortifying of his soul against impending death."

There was a buzz and murmur among the white-frocked brethren at this grave charge; but the Abbot held up his long quivering hand. "What then?" said he.

"Item, that between Nones and Vespers on the feast of James the Less the said brother John was observed upon the Brockenhurst road, near the spot which is known as Hatchett's Pond, in converse with a person of the other sex, being a maiden of the name of Mary Sowley, the daughter of the King's verderer. Item, that after sundry japes and jokes the said brother John did lift up the said Mary Sowley and did take, carry, and convey her across a stream, to the infinite relish of the devil and the exceeding detriment of his own soul, which scandalous and wilful falling away was witnessed by three members of our order."

A dead silence throughout the room, with a rolling of heads and upturning of eyes, bespoke the pious horror of the community. The Abbot drew his grey brows low over his fiercely questioning eyes.

"Who can vouch for this thing?" he asked.

"That can I," answered the accuser. "So too can brother Porphyry, who was with me, and brother Mark of the Spicarium, who hath been so much stirred and inwardly troubled by the sight that he now lies in a fever through it."

"And the woman?" asked the Abbot. "Did she not break into lamentation and woe that a brother should so demean himself?"

"Nay, she smiled sweetly upon him and thanked him. I can vouch it, and so can brother Porphyry."

"Canst thou?" cried the Abbot, in a high, tempestuous tone. "Canst thou so? Hast forgotten that the five-and-thirtieth rule of the order is that in the presence of a woman the face should be ever averted and the eyes cast down? Hast forgot it, I say? If your eyes were upon your sandals, how came ye to see this smile of which

ye prate? A week in your cells, false brethren, a week of rye-bread and lentils, with double Lauds and double Matins, may help ye to a remembrance of the laws under which ye live."

At this sudden outflame of wrath the two witnesses sank their faces on to their chests, and sat as men crushed. The Abbot turned his angry eyes away from them and bent them upon the accused, who met his searching gaze with a firm and composed face.

"What hast thou to say, brother John, upon these weighty things which are urged against thee?"

"Little enough, good father, little enough," said the novice, speaking English with a broad West Saxon drawl. The brothers, who were English to a man, pricked up their ears at the sound of the homely and yet unfamiliar speech: but the Abbot flushed red with anger, and struck his hand upon the oaken arm of his chair.

"What talk is this?" he cried. "Is this a tongue to be used within the walls of an old and well-famed monastery? But grace and learning have ever gone hand in hand, and when one is lost it is needless to look for the other."

"I know not about that," said brother John; "I know only that the words come kindly to my mouth, for it was the speech of my fathers before me. Under your favour I shall either use it now or hold my peace."

The Abbot patted his foot and nodded his head, as one who passes a point but does not forget it.

"For the matter of the ale," continued brother John, "I had come in hot from the fields and had scarce got the taste of the thing before mine eye lit upon the bottom of the pot. It may be, too, that I spoke somewhat shortly concerning the bran and the beans, the same being poor provender and unfitted for a man of my inches. It is true also that I did lay my hands upon this jack-fool of a brother Ambrose, though, as you can see, I did him little scathe. As regards the maid, too, it is true that I did heft her over the stream, she having on her hosen and shoon,

whilst I had but my wooden sandals, which could take no hurt from the water. I should have thought shame upon my manhood, as well as my monkhood, if I had held back my hand from her." He glanced around as he spoke, with the half-amused look which he had worn during the whole proceedings.

"There is no need to go further," said the Abbot. "He has confessed to all. It only remains for me to portion out the punishment which is due to his evil conduct."

He rose, and the two long lines of brothers followed his example, looking sideways with scared faces at the angry prelate.

"John of Hordle," he thundered, "you have shown yourself during the two months of your novitiate to be a recreant monk, and one who is unworthy to wear the white garb which is the outer symbol of the spotless spirit. That dress shall therefore be stripped from thee, and thou shalt be cast into the outer world without benefit of clerkship, and without lot or part in the graces and blessings of those who dwell under the care of the blessed Benedict. Thou shalt come back neither to Beaulieu nor to any of the granges of Beaulieu, and thy name shall be struck off the scrolls of the order."

The sentence appeared a terrible one to the older monks, who had become so used to the safe and regular life of the Abbey that they would have been as helpless as children in the outer world. From their pious oasis they looked dreamily out at the desert of life—a place full of stormings and strivings, comfortless, restless, and overshadowed by evil. The young novice, however, appeared to have other thoughts, for his eyes sparkled and his smile broadened. It needed but that to add fresh fuel to the fiery mood of the prelate.

"So much for thy spiritual punishment," he cried. "But it is to the grosser feelings that we must turn in such natures as thine, and as thou art no longer under the shield of holy Church there is the less difficulty. Ho

there ! lay-brothers—Francis, Naomi, Joseph—seize him and bind his arms ! Drag him forth, and let the foresters and the porters scourge him from the precincts ! ”

As these three brothers advanced towards him to carry out the Abbot’s direction the smile faded from the novice’s face, and he glanced right and left with his fierce brown eyes ; like a bull at a baiting. Then, with a sudden deep-chested shout, he tore up the heavy oaken prie-dieu, and poised it to strike, taking two steps backward the while, that none might take him at a vantage.

“ By the black rood of Waltham ! ” he roared, “ if any knave among you lays a finger-end upon the edge of my gown, I will crush his skull like a filbert ! ” With his thick knotted arms, his thundering voice, and his bristle of red hair, there was something so repellent in the man that the three brothers flew back at the very glare of him ; and the two rows of white monks strained away from him like poplars in a tempest. The Abbot only sprang forward with shining eyes ; but the chancellor and the master hung upon either arm and wrested him back out of danger’s way.

“ He is possessed of a devil ! ” they shouted. “ Run, brother Ambrose, brother Joachim ! Call Hugh of the Mill, and Woodman Wat, and Raoul with his arbalest and bolts. Tell them that we are in fear of our lives ! Run, run ! for the love of the Virgin ! ”

But the novice was a strategist as well as a man of action. Springing forward, he hurled his unwieldy weapon at brother Ambrose, and, as desk and monk clattered on to the floor together, he sprang through the open door and down the winding stair. Sleepy old brother Athanasius, at the porter’s cell, had a fleeting vision of twinkling feet and flying skirts ; but before he had time to rub his eyes the recreant had passed the lodge, and was speeding as fast as his sandals could patter along the Lyndhurst road.

## 2. *How Alleyne Edricson came out into the World*

NEVER had the peaceful atmosphere of the old Cistercian house been so rudely ruffled. Never had there been insurrection so sudden, so short, and so successful. Yet the Abbot Berghersh was a man of too firm a grain to allow one bold outbreak to imperil the settled order of his great household. In a few hot and bitter words, he compared their false brother's exit to the expulsion of our first parents from the garden, and more than hinted that unless a reformation occurred some others of the community might find themselves in the same evil and perilous case. Having thus pointed the moral and reduced his flock to a fitting state of docility, he dismissed them once more to their labours and withdrew himself to his own private chamber, there to seek spiritual aid in the discharge of the duties of his high office.

The Abbot was still on his knees, when a gentle tapping at the door of his cell broke in upon his orisons. Rising in no very good humour at the interruption, he gave the word to enter ; but his look of impatience softened down into a pleasant and paternal smile as his eyes fell upon his visitor.

He was a thin-faced, yellow-haired youth, rather above the middle size, comely and well shapen, with straight lithe figure and eager boyish features. His clear, pensive grey eyes, and quick delicate expression, spoke of a nature which had unfolded far from the boisterous joys and sorrows of the world. Yet there was a set of the mouth and a prominence of the chin which relieved him of any trace of effeminacy. Impulsive he might be, enthusiastic, sensitive, with something sympathetic and adaptive in his disposition ; but an observer of nature's tokens would have confidently pledged himself that there was native firmness and strength underlying his gentle, monk-bred ways.

The youth was not clad in monastic garb, but in lay attire, though his jerkin, cloak, and hose were all of a sombre hue, as befitted one who dwelt in sacred precincts. A broad leather strap hanging from his shoulder supported a scrip or satchel such as travellers were wont to carry. In one hand he grasped a thick staff pointed and shod with metal, while in the other he held his coif or bonnet, which bore in its front a broad pewter medal stamped with the image of Our Lady of Rocamadour.

"Art ready, then, fair son?" said the Abbot. "This is indeed a day of comings and of goings. It is strange that in one twelve hours the Abbey should have cast off its foulest weed, and should now lose what we are fain to look upon as our choicest blossom."

"You speak too kindly, father," the youth answered. "If I had my will I should never go forth, but should end my days here in Beaulieu. It hath been my home as far back as my mind can carry me, and it is a sore thing for me to have to leave it."

"Life brings many a cross," said the Abbot gently. "Who is without them? Your going forth is a grief to us as well as to yourself. But there is no help. I had given my foreword and sacred promise to your father, Edric the Franklin, that at the age of twenty you should be sent out into the world to see for yourself how you liked the savour of it. Seat thee upon the settle, Alleyne, for you may need rest ere long."

The youth sat down as directed, but reluctantly and with diffidence. The Abbot stood by the narrow window, and his long black shadow fell slantwise across the rush-strewn floor.

"Twenty years ago," he said, "your father, the Franklin of Minstead, died, leaving to the Abbey three hides of rich land in the hundred of Malwood, and leaving to us also his infant son on condition that we should rear him until he came to man's estate. This he did partly because your mother was dead, and partly because your elder brother, now Socman of Minstead, had already

given sign of that fierce and rude nature which would make him no fit companion for you. It was his desire and request, however, that you should not remain in the cloisters, but should at a ripe age return into the world."

"But, father," interrupted the young man, "it is surely true that I am already advanced several degrees in clerkship?"

"Yes, fair son, but not so far as to bar you from the garb you now wear or the life which you must now lead. You have been porter?"

"Yes, father."

"Exorcist?"

"Yes, father."

"Reader?"

"Yes, father."

"Acolyte?"

"Yes, father."

"But have sworn no vow of constancy or chastity?"

"No, father."

"Then you are free to follow a worldly life. But let me hear, ere you start, what gifts you take away with you from Beaulieu. Some I already know. There is the playing of the citole and the rebec. Our choir will be dumb without you. You carve, too?"

The youth's pale face flushed with the pride of the skilled workman. "Yes, holy father," he answered. "Thanks to good brother Bartholomew, I carve in wood and in ivory, and can do something also in silver and in bronze. From brother Francis I have learned to paint on vellum, on glass, and on metal, with a knowledge of those pigments and essences which can preserve the colour against damp or a biting air. Brother Luke hath given me some skill in damask work, and in the enamelling of shrines, tabernacles, diptychs and triptychs. For the rest, I know a little of the making of covers, the cutting of precious stones, and the fashioning of instruments."

"A goodly list, truly," cried the superior with a smile. "What clerk of Cambrig or of Oxenford could say as

much? But of thy reading—hast not so much to show there, I fear?"

"No, father, it hath been slight enough. Yet, thanks to our good chancellor, I am not wholly unlettered. I have read Ockham, Bradwardine, and other of the schoolmen, together with the learned Duns Scotus and the book of the holy Aquinas."

"But of the things of this world, what have you gathered from your reading? From this high window you may catch a glimpse over the wooded point and the smoke of Bucklershard, of the mouth of the Exe, and the shining sea. Now, I pray you, Alleyne, if a man were to take a ship and spread sail across yonder waters, where might he hope to arrive?"

The youth pondered, and drew a plan amongst the rushes with the point of his staff. "Holy father," said he, "he would come upon those parts of France which are held by the King's Majesty. But if he trended to the south he might reach Spain and the Barbary States. To his north would be Flanders and the country of the Eastlanders and of the Muscovites."

"True. And how if, after reaching the King's possessions, he still journeyed on to the eastward?"

"He would then come upon that part of France which is still in dispute, and he might hope to reach the famous city of Avignon, where dwells our blessed father, the prop of Christendom."

"And then?"

"Then he would pass through the land of the Almains and the great Roman Empire, and so to the country of the Huns and of the Lithuanian pagans, beyond which lie the great city of Constantine and the kingdom of the unclean followers of Mahmoud."

"And beyond that, fair son?"

"Beyond that is Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and the great river which hath its source in the Garden of Eden."

"And then?"

"Nay, good father, I cannot tell. Methinks the end of the world is not far from there."

"Then we can still find something to teach thee, Alleyne," said the Abbot complaisantly. "Know that many strange nations lie betwixt there and the end of the world. There is the country of the Amazons, and the country of the dwarfs, and the country of the fair but evil women who slay with beholding, like the basilisk. Beyond that again is the kingdom of Prester John and of the Great Cham. These things I know for very sooth, for I had them from that pious Christian and valiant knight, Sir John de Mandeville, who stopped twice at Beaulieu on his way to and from Southampton, and discoursed to us concerning what he had seen from the reader's desk in the refectory, until there was many a good brother who got neither bit nor sup, so stricken were they by his strange tales."

"I would fain know, father," asked the young man, "what there may be at the end of the world?"

"There are some things," replied the Abbot gravely, "into which it was never intended that we should inquire. But you have a long road before you. Whither will you first turn?"

"To my brother's at Minstead. If he be indeed an ungodly and violent man, there is the more need that I should seek him out and see whether I cannot turn him to better ways."

The Abbot shook his head. "The Socman of Minstead hath earned an evil name over the countryside," he said. "If you must go to him, see at least that he doth not turn you from the narrow path upon which you have learned to tread. But you are in God's keeping, and Godward should you ever look in danger and in trouble. Above all, shun the snares of women, for they are ever set for the foolish feet of the young. Kneel down, my child, and take an old man's blessing."

Alleyne Edricson bent his head while the Abbot poured out his heartfelt supplication that Heaven would watch

over this young soul, now going forth into the darkness and danger of the world. It was no mere form for either of them. To them the outside life of mankind did indeed seem to be one of violence and of sin, beset with physical and still more with spiritual danger. Heaven, too, was very near to them in those days. God's direct agency was to be seen in the thunder and the rainbow, the whirlwind and the lightning. To the believer, clouds of angels and confessors, and martyrs, armies of the sainted and the saved, were ever stooping over their struggling brethren upon earth, raising, encouraging, and supporting them. It was then with a lighter heart and a stouter courage that the young man turned from the Abbot's room, while the latter, following him to the stair-head, finally commended him to the protection of the holy Julian, patron of travellers.

Underneath, in the porch of the Abbey, the monks had gathered to give him a last God-speed. Many had brought some parting token by which he should remember them. There was brother Bartholomew with a crucifix of rare carved ivory, and brother Luke with a white-backed psalter adorned with golden bees, and brother Francis with the "Slaying of the Innocents" most daintily set forth upon vellum. All these were duly packed away deep in the traveller's scrip, and above them old pippin-faced brother Athanasius had placed a parcel of simnel bread and rammel cheese, with a small flask of the famous blue-sealed Abbey wine. So, amid hand-shakings and laughings and blessings, Alleyne Edricson turned his back upon Beaulieu.

At the turn of the road he stopped and gazed back. There was the widespread building which he knew so well, the Abbot's house, the long church, the cloisters with their line of arches, all bathed and mellowed in the evening sun. There too was the broad sweep of the river Exe, the old stone well, the canopied niche of the Virgin, and, in the centre of all, the cluster of white-robed figures who waved their hands to him. A sudden mist swam up

before the young man's eyes, and he turned away upon his journey with a heavy heart and a choking throat.

## 3. *How Hordle John cozened the Fuller of Lymington*

IT is not, however, in the nature of things that a lad of twenty, with young life glowing in his veins and all the wide world before him, should spend his first hours of freedom in mourning for what he had left. Long ere Alleyne was out of sound of the Beaulieu bells he was striding sturdily along, swinging his staff and whistling as merrily as the birds in the thicket. It was an evening to raise a man's heart. The sun shining slantwise through the trees threw delicate traceries across the road, with bars of golden light between. Away in the distance, before and behind, the green boughs, now turning in places to a coppery redness, shot their broad arches across the track. The still summer air was heavy with the resinous smell of the great forest. Here and there a tawny brook prattled out from among the underwood and lost itself again in the ferns and brambles upon the farther side. Save the dull piping of insects and the sough of the leaves, there was silence everywhere—the sweet restful silence of nature.

And yet there was no want of life—the whole wide wood was full of it. Now it was a lithe, furtive stoat which shot across the path upon some fell errand of its own ; then it was a wild cat which squatted upon the outlying branch of an oak and peeped at the traveller with a yellow and dubious eye. Once it was a wild sow which scuttled out of the bracken, with two young sounders at her heels ; and once a lordly red staggard walked daintily out from among the tree-trunks and looked around him with the fearless gaze of one who lived under the king's own high protection. Alleyne gave his staff a merry

flourish, however, and the red deer bethought him that the king was far off, so bounded away whence he came.

The youth had now journeyed considerably beyond the farthest domains of the Abbey. He was the more surprised therefore when, on coming round a turn in the path, he perceived a man clad in the familiar garb of the order, and seated in a clump of heather by the roadside. Alleyne had known every brother well, but this was a face which was new to him—a face which was very red and puffed, working this way and that, as though the man were sore perplexed in his mind. Once he shook both hands furiously in the air, and twice he sprang from his seat and hurried down the road. When he rose, however, Alleyne observed that his robe was much too long and loose for him in every direction, trailing upon the ground and bagging about his ankles, so that even with trussed-up skirts he could make little progress. He ran once, but the long gown clogged him so that he slowed down into a shambling walk, and finally plumped into the heather once more.

"Young friend," said he, when Alleyne was abreast of him, "I fear from thy garb that thou canst know little of the Abbey of Beaulieu."

"Then you are in error, friend," the clerk answered, "for I have spent all my days within its walls."

"Hast so indeed?" cried he. "Then perhaps canst tell me the name of a great loathly lump of a brother wi' freckled face an' a hand like a spade. His eyes were black an' his hair was red an' his voice like the parish bull. I trow that there cannot be two alike in the same cloisters."

"That surely can be no other than brother John," said Alleyne. "I trust he has done you no wrong, that you should be so hot against him."

"Wrong, quotha?" cried the other, jumping out of the heather. "Wrong! why, he hath stolen every plack of clothing off my back, if that be a wrong, and hath left me here in this sorry frock of white falding, so that I have

shame to go back to my wife, lest she think that I have donned her old kirtle. Harrow and alas that ever I should have met him!"

"But how came this?" asked the young clerk, who could scarce keep from laughter at the sight of the hot little man so swathed in the great white cloak.

"It came in this way," he said, sitting down once more: "I was passing this way, hoping to reach Lymington ere nightfall, when I came on this red-headed knave seated even where we are sitting now. I uncovered and louted as I passed, thinking that he might be a holy man at his orisons, but he called to me and asked me if I had heard speak of the new indulgence in favour of the Cistercians. "Not I," I answered. "Then the worse for thy soul," said he; and with that he broke into a long tale how that on account of the virtues of the Abbot Berghersh it had been decreed by the Pope that whoever should wear the habit of a monk of Beaulieu for as long as he might say the seven psalms of David should be assured of the kingdom of Heaven. When I heard this I prayed him on my knees that he would give me the use of his gown, which after many contentions he at last agreed to do, on my paying him three marks towards the regilding of the image of Laurence the martyr. Having stripped his robe, I had no choice but to let him have the wearing of my good leathern jerkin and hose, for, as he said, it was chilling to the blood and unseemly to the eye to stand frockless whilst I made my orisons. He had scarce got them on, and it was a sore labour, seeing that my inches will scarce match my girth—he had scarce got them on, I say, and I not yet at the end of the second psalm, when he bade me do honour to my new dress, and with that set off down the road as fast as feet would carry him. For myself, I could no more run that if I had been sewn in a sack; so here I sit, and here I am like to sit, before I set eyes upon my clothes again."

"Nay, friend, take it not so sadly," said Alleyne, clapping the disconsolate one upon the shoulder. "Canst

change thy robe for a jerkin once more at the Abbey, unless perchance you have a friend near at hand."

"That have I," he answered, "and close; but I care not to go nigh him in this plight, for his wife hath a gibing tongue, and would spread the tale until I could not show my face in any market from Fordingbridge to Southampton. But if you, fair sir, out of your kind charity, would be pleased to go a matter of two bow-shots out of your way, you would do me such a service as I could scarce repay."

"With all my heart," said Alleyne readily.

"Then take this pathway on the left, I pray thee, and then the deer-track which passes on the right. You will then see under a great beech-tree the hut of a charcoal-burner. Give him my name, good sir, the name of Peter the Fuller, of Lymington, and ask him for a change of raiment, that I may pursue my journey without delay. There are reasons why he would be loth to refuse me."

Alleyne started off along the path indicated, and soon found the log-hut where the burner dwelt. He was away faggot-cutting in the forest; but his wife, a ruddy, bustling dame, found the needful garments and tied them into a bundle. While she busied herself in finding and folding them Alleyne Edricson stood by the open door looking in at her with much interest and some distrust, for he had never been so nigh to a woman before. She had red arms, a dress of some sober woollen stuff, and a brass brooch the size of a cheese-cake stuck in the front of it.

"Peter the Fuller!" she kept repeating. "Marry come up! if I were Peter the Fuller's wife, I would teach him better than to give his clothes to the first knave who asks for them. But he was always a poor, fond, silly creature, was Peter, though we are beholden to him for helping to bury our second son, Wat, who was a 'prentice to him at Lymington in the year of the Black Death. But who are you, young sir?"

"I am a clerk on my road from Beaulieu to Minstead."

"Aye, indeed! Hast been brought up at the Abbey then. I could read it from thy reddened cheek and downcast eye. Hast learned from the monks, I trow, to fear a woman as thou wouldst a lazar-house. Out upon them that they should dishonour their own mothers by such teaching! A pretty world it would be with all the women out of it."

"Heaven forefend that such a thing should come to pass!" said Alleyne.

"Amen and amen! But thou art a pretty lad, and the prettier for thy modest ways. It is easy to see from thy cheek that thou hast not spent thy days in the rain and the heat and the wind, as my poor Wat hath been forced to do."

"I have indeed seen little of life, good dame."

"Wilt find nothing in it to pay thee for the loss of thy own freshness. Here are the clothes, and Peter can leave them when next he comes this way. Holy Virgin! see the dust upon thy doublet. It were easy to see that there is no woman to tend to thee. So!—that is better. Now buss me, boy."

Alleyne stooped and kissed her, for the kiss was the common salutation of the age, and, as Erasmus long afterwards remarked, more used in England than in any other country. Yet it sent the blood to his temples again, and he wondered, as he turned away, what the Abbot Berghersh would have answered to so frank an invitation. He was still tingling from this new experience when he came out upon the high road and saw a sight which drove all other thoughts from his mind.

Some way down from where he had left him the unfortunate Peter was stamping and raving tenfold worse than before. Now, however, instead of the great white cloak, he had no clothes on at all, save a short woollen shirt and a pair of leather shoes. Far down the road a long-legged figure was running, with a bundle under one arm and the other hand to his side, like a man who laughs until he is sore.

"See him!" yelled Peter. "Look to him! You shall be my witness. He shall see Winchester gaol for this. See where he goes with my cloak under his arm!"

"Who then!" cried Alleyne.

"Who but that cursed brother John! He hath not left me clothes enough to make a galleybagger. The double thief hath cozened me out of my gown."

"Stay though, my friend, it was his gown," objected Alleyne.

"It boots not. He hath them all—gown, jerkin, hosen, and all. Gramercy to him that he left me the shirt and the shoon! I doubt not that he will be back for them anon."

"But how came this?" asked Alleyne, open-eyed with astonishment.

"Are those the clothes? For dear charity's sake, give them to me. Not the Pope himself shall have these from me though he sent the whole college of cardinals to ask it. How came it? Why, you had scarce gone ere this loathly John came running back again, and when I oped mouth to reproach him, he asked me whether it was indeed likely that a man of prayer would leave his own godly raiment in order to take a layman's jerkin. He had, he said, but gone for a while that I might be the freer for my devotions. On this I plucked off the gown, and he with much show of haste did begin to undo his points; but when I threw his frock down he clipped it up and ran off all untrussed, leaving me in this sorry plight. He laughed so the while, like a great croaking frog, that I might have caught him, had my breath not been as short as his legs were long."

The young man listened to this tale of wrong with all the seriousness that he could maintain; but at the sight of the pursy red-faced man and the dignity with which he bore him, the laughter came so thick upon him that he had to lean up against a tree-trunk. The fuller looked sadly and gravely at him; but finding that he still laughed, he bowed with much mock politeness and stalked on-

wards in his borrowed clothes. Alleyne watched him until he was small in the distance, and then, wiping the tears from his eyes, he set off briskly once more upon his journey.

## 4. *How the Bailiff of Southampton slew the Two Masterless Men*

THE road along which he travelled was scarce as populous as most other roads in the kingdom, and far less so than those which lie between the larger towns. Yet from time to time Alleyne met other wayfarers, and more than once was overtaken by strings of pack-mules and horsemen journeying in the same direction as himself. Once a begging friar came limping along in a brown habit, imploring him in a most dolorous voice to give him a single groat to buy bread wherewith to save himself from impending death. Alleyne passed him swiftly by, for he had learned from the monks to have no love for the wandering friars, and, besides, there was a great half-gnawed mutton-bone sticking out of his pouch to prove him a liar. Swiftly as he went, however, he could not escape the curse of the four blessed Evangelists which the mendicant howled behind him. So dreadful were his execrations that the frightened lad thrust his fingers into his ear-holes, and ran until the fellow was but a brown smirch upon the yellow road.

Farther on, at the edge of the woodland, he came upon a chapman and his wife, who sat upon a fallen tree. He had put his pack down as a table, and the two of them were devouring a great pasty, and washing it down with some drink from a stone jar. The chapman broke a rough jest as he passed, and the woman called shrilly to Alleyne to come and join them, on which the man, turning suddenly from mirth to wrath, began to belabour her with his cudgel. Alleyne hastened on, lest he make more mischief, and his heart was heavy as lead within him. Look where

he would, he seemed to see nothing but injustice and violence, and the hardness of man to man.

But even as he brooded sadly over it, and pined for the sweet peace of the Abbey, he came on an open space dotted with holly-bushes, where was the strangest sight that he had yet chanced upon. Near to the pathway lay a long clump of greenery, and from behind this there stuck straight up into the air four human legs clad in parti-coloured hosen, yellow and black. Strangest of all was it when a brisk tune struck suddenly up and the four legs began to kick and twitter in time to the music. Walking on tiptoe round the bushes, he stood in amazement to see two men bounding about on their heads while they played, the one a viol and the other a pipe, as merrily and as truly as though they were seated in choir. Alleyne crossed himself as he gazed at this unnatural sight, and could scarce hold his ground with a steady face, when the two dancers, catching sight of him, came bouncing in his direction. A spear's length from him they each threw a somersault into the air, and came down upon their feet with smirking faces and their hands over their hearts.

"A guerdon—a guerdon, my knight of the staring eyes!" cried one.

"A gift, my prince!" shouted the other. "Any trifle will serve—a purse of gold, or even a jewelled goblet."

Alleyne thought of what he had read of demoniac possession—the jumpings, the twitchings, the wild talk. It was in his mind to repeat over the exorcism proper to such attacks; but the two burst out a-laughing at his scared face, and, turning on to their heads once more, clapped their heels in derision.

"Hast never seen tumblers before?" asked the elder, a black-browed swarthy man, as brown and supple as a hazel-twig. "Why shrink from us, then, as though we were the spawn of the Evil One?'

"Why shrink, my honey-bird? Why so afeard, my sweet cinnamon?" exclaimed the other, a loose-jointed lanky youth with a dancing roguish eye.

"Truly, sirs, it is a new sight to me," the clerk answered. "When I saw your four legs above the bush I could scarce credit my own eyes. Why is it that you do this thing?"

"A dry question to answer," cried the younger, coming back on to his feet. "A most husky question, my fair bird! But how? A flask, a flask!—by all that is wonderful!" He shot out his hand as he spoke, and plucking Alleyne's bottle out of his scrip,he deftly knocked the neck off, and poured the half of it down his throat. The rest he handed to his comrade, who drank the wine, and then, to the clerk's increasing amazement, made a show of swallowing the bottle, with such skill that Alleyne seemed to see it vanish down his throat. A moment later, however, he flung it over his head, and caught it bottom downwards upon the calf of his left leg.

"We thank you for the wine, kind sir," said he, "and for the ready courtesy wherewith you offered it. Touching your question, we may tell you that we are strollers and jugglers, who, having performed with much applause at Winchester fair, are now on our way to the great Michaelmas market at Ringwood. As our art is a very fine and delicate one, however, we cannot let a day go by without exercising ourselves in it, to which end we choose some quiet and sheltered spot, where we may break our journey. Here you find us; and we cannot wonder that you, who are new to tumbling, should be astounded, since many great barons, earls, marshals, and knights, who have wandered as far as the Holy Land, are of one mind in saying that they have never seen a more noble or gracious performance. If you will be pleased to sit upon that stump, we will now continue our exercise."

Alleyne sat down willingly as directed, with two great bundles on either side of him which contained the strollers' dresses—doublets of flame-coloured silk and girdles of leather, spangled with brass and tin. The jugglers were on their heads once more, bounding about with rigid necks, playing the while in perfect time and

tune. It chanced that out of one of the bundles there stuck the end of what the clerk saw to be a cittern, so, drawing it forth, he tuned it up and twanged a harmony to the merry lilt which the dancers played. On that they dropped their own instruments, and putting their hands to the ground they hopped about faster and faster, ever shouting to him to play more briskly, until at last for very weariness all three had to stop.

"Well played, sweet poppet!" cried the younger. "Hast a rare touch on the strings."

"How knew you the tune?" asked the other.

"I knew it not. I did but follow the notes I heard."

Both opened their eyes at this, and stared at Alleyne with as much amazement as he had shown at them.

"You have a fine trick of ear, then," said one. "We have long wished to meet such a man. Wilt join us and jog on to Ringwood? Thy duties shall be light, and thou shalt have twopence a day and meat for supper every night.'

"With as much beer as you can put away," said the other, "and a flask of Gascon wine on Sabbaths."

"Nay, it may not be. I have other work to do. I have tarried with you over long," quoth Alleyne, and resolutely set forth upon his journey once more. They ran behind him some little way, offering him first fourpence and then sixpence a day; but he only smiled and shook his head, until at last they fell away from him. Looking back, he saw that the smaller had mounted on the younger's shoulders, and that they stood so, some ten feet high, waving their adieus to him. He waved back to them, and then hastened on, the lighter of heart for having fallen in with these strange men of pleasure.

Alleyne had gone no great distance for all the many small passages that had befallen him. Yet to him, used as he was to a life of such quiet that the failure of a brewing, or the altering of an anthem, had seemed to be of the deepest import, the quick changing play of the lights and shadows of life was strangely startling and interesting. A

gulf seemed to divide this brisk, uncertain existence from the old steady round of work and of prayer which he had left behind him. The few hours that had passed since he saw the Abbey tower stretched out in his memory until they outgrew whole months of the stagnant life of the cloister. As he walked and munched the soft bread from his scrip, it seemed strange to him to feel that it was still warm from the ovens of Beaulieu.

When he passed Penerley, where were three cottages and a barn, he reached the edge of the tree country, and found the great barren heath of Blackdown stretching in front of him, all pink with heather and bronzed with the fading ferns. On the left the woods were still thick, but the road edged away from them and wound over the open. The sun lay low in the west upon a purple cloud, whence it threw a mild chastening light over the wild moorland and glittered on the fringe of forest, turning the withered leaves into flakes of dead gold, the brighter for the black depths behind them. To the seeing eye decay is as fair as growth, and death as life. The thought stole into Alleyne's heart as he looked upon the autumnal country-side and marvelled at its beauty. He had little time to dwell upon it, however, for there were still six good miles between him and the nearest inn. He sat down by the roadside to partake of his bread and cheese, and then with a lighter scrip he hastened upon his way.

There appeared to be more wayfarers on the down than in the forest. First he passed two Dominicans in their long black dresses, who swept by him with downcast looks and pattering lips, without so much as a glance at him. Then there came a grey friar, or minorite, with a good paunch upon him, walking slowly and looking about him with the air of a man who was at peace with himself and with all men. He stopped Alleyne to ask him whether it were not true that there was a hostel somewhere in those parts which was especially famous for the stewing of eels. The clerk having made answer that he had heard the eels of Sowley well spoken of, the friar

sucked in his lips and hurried forward. Close at his heels came three labourers walking abreast, with spade and mattock over their shoulders. They sang some rude chorus right tunefully as they walked, but their English was so coarse and rough that to the ears of a cloister-bred man it sounded like a foreign and barbarous tongue. One of them carried a young bittern which they had caught upon the moor, and they offered it to Alleyne for a silver groat. Very glad he was to get safely past them, for, with their bristling red beards and their fierce blue eyes, they were uneasy men to bargain with upon a lonely moor.

Yet it is not always the burliest and the wildest who are the most to be dreaded. The workers looked hungrily at him, and then jogged onwards upon their way in slow lumbering Saxon style. A worse man to deal with was a wooden-legged cripple who came hobbling down the path, so weak and so old to all appearance that a child need not stand in fear of him. Yet when Alleyne had passed him, of a sudden, out of pure devilment, he screamed out a curse at him, and sent a jagged flint-stone hurtling past his ear. So horrid was the causeless rage of the crooked creature, that the clerk came over a cold thrill, and took to his heels until he was out of shot from stone or word. It seemed to him that in this country of England there was no protection for a man save that which lay in the strength of his own arm and the speed of his own foot. In the cloisters he had heard vague talk of the law—the mighty law which was higher than prelate or baron, yet no sign could he see of it. What was the benefit of a law written fair upon parchment, he wondered, if there were no officers to enforce it? As it fell out, however, he had that very evening, ere the sun had set, a chance of seeing how stern was the grip of the English law when it did happen to seize the offender.

A mile or so out upon the moor the road takes a very sudden dip into a hollow, with a peat-coloured stream running swiftly down the centre of it. To the right of this stood, and stands to this day, an ancient barrow, or

burying mound, covered deeply in a bristle of heather and bracken. Alleyne was plodding down the slope upon one side, when he saw an old dame coming towards him upon the other, limping with weariness and leaning heavily upon a stick. When she reached the edge of the stream she stood helpless, looking to right and to left for some ford. Where the path ran down a great stone had been fixed in the centre of the brook, but it was too far from the bank for her aged and uncertain feet. Twice she thrust forward at it, and twice she drew back, until at last, giving it up in despair, she sat herself down by the brink and wrung her hands wearily. There she still sat when Alleyne reached the crossing.

"Come, mother," quoth he, "it is not so very perilous a passage."

"Alas! good youth," she answered, "I have a humour in the eyes, and though I can see that there is a stone there, I can by no means be sure as to where it lies."

"That is easily amended," said he cheerily, and picking her lightly up, for she was much worn with time, he passed across with her. He could not but observe, however, that as he placed her down her knees seemed to fail her, and she could scarcely prop herself up with her staff.

"You are weak, mother," said he. "Hast journeyed far, I wot."

"From Wiltshire, friend," said she, in a quavering voice; "three days have I been on the road. I go to my son, who is one of the king's regarders at Brockenhurst. He has ever said that he would care for me in mine old age."

"And rightly, too, mother, since you cared for him in his youth. But when have you broken fast?"

"At Lyndenhurst; but, alas! my money is at an end, and I could but get a dish of bran-porridge from the nunnery. Yet I trust that I may be able to reach Brockenhurst to-night, where I may have all that heart can desire; for, oh, sir! but my son is a fine man, with a kindly heart of his own, and it is as good as food to me to think that he

should have a doublet of Lincoln-green to his back and be the king's own paid man."

"It is a long road yet to Brockenhurst," said Alleyne; "but here is such bread and cheese as I have left, and here, too, is a penny which may help you to supper. May God be with you!"

"May God be with you, young man!" she cried. "May He make your heart as glad as you have made mine!" She turned away, still mumbling blessings, and Alleyne saw her short figure and her long shadow stumbling slowly up the slope.

He was moving away himself, when his eyes lit upon a strange sight, and one which sent a tingling through his skin. Out of the tangled scrub on the old overgrown barrow two human faces were looking at him; the sinking sun glimmered full upon them, showing up every line and feature. The one was an oldish man with a thin beard, a crooked nose, and a broad red smudge from a birth-mark over his temple; the other was a negro, a thing rarely met in England at that day, and rarer still in the quiet south-land parts. Alleyne had read of such folk, but had never seen one before, and could scarce take his eyes from the fellow's broad pouting lip and shining teeth. Even as he gazed, however, the two came writhing out from among the heather, and came down towards him with such a guilty, slinking carriage, that the clerk felt that there was no good in them, and hastened onwards upon his way.

He had not gained the crown of the slope, when he heard a sudden scuffle behind him, and a feeble voice bleating for help. Looking round, there was the old dame down upon the roadway, with her red wimple flying on the breeze, while the two rogues, black and white, stooped over her, wresting away from her the penny and such other poor trifles as were worth the taking. At the sight of her thin limbs struggling in weak resistance, such a glow of fierce anger passed over Alleyne as set his head in a whirl. Dropping his scrip, he bounded over the stream once more, and made for the two villains, with his

staff whirled over his shoulder, and his grey eyes blazing with fury.

The robbers, however, were not disposed to leave their victim until they had worked their wicked will upon her. The black man, with the woman's crimson scarf tied round his swarthy head, stood forward in the centre of the path, with a long dull-coloured knife in his hand, while the other, waving a ragged cudgel, cursed at Alleyne and dared him to come on. His blood was fairly aflame, however, and he needed no such challenge. Dashing at the black man, he smote at him with such good will that he let his knife tinkle into the roadway, and hopped howling to a safer distance. The second rogue, however, made of sterner stuff, rushed in upon the clerk, and clipped him round the waist with a grip like a bear, shouting the while to his comrade to come round and stab him in the back. At this the negro took heart of grace, and, picking up his dagger again, he came stealing with prowling step and murderous eye, while the two swayed backwards and forwards, staggering this way and that. In the very midst of the scuffle, however, whilst Alleyne braced himself to feel the cold blade between his shoulders, there came a sudden scurry of hoofs, and the black man yelled with terror, and ran for his life through the heather. The man with the birth-mark, too, struggled to break away, and Alleyne heard his teeth chatter and felt his limbs grow limp to his hand. At this sign of coming aid the clerk held on the tighter, and at last was able to pin his man down and glance behind him to see whence all the noise was coming.

Down the slanting road there was riding a big burly man, clad in a tunic of purple velvet and driving a great black horse as hard as it could gallop. He leaned well over its neck as he rode, and made a heaving with his shoulders at every bound as though he were lifting the steed instead of it carrying him. In the rapid glance Alleyne saw that he had white doeskin gloves, a curling white feather in his flat velvet cap, and a broad gold

embroidered baldric across his bosom. Behind him rode six others, two and two, clad in sober brown jerkins, with the long yellow staves of their bows thrusting out from behind their right shoulders. Down the hill they thundered, over the brook, and up to the scene of the contest.

"Here is one!" said the leader, springing down from his reeking horse, and seizing the white rogue by the edge of his jerkin. "This is one of them. I know him by that devil's touch upon his brow. Where are your cords, Peterkin? So! Bind him hand and foot. His last hour has come. And you, young man, who may you be?"

"I am a clerk, sir, travelling from Beaulieu."

"A clerk!" cried the other. "Art from Oxenford or from Cambridge? Hast thou a letter from the chancellor of thy college, giving thee a permit to beg? Let me see thy letter." He had a stern square face, with bushy side whiskers, and a very questioning eye.

"I am from Beaulieu Abbey, and I have no need to beg," said Alleyne, who was all of a tremble now that the ruffle was over.

"The better for thee," the other answered. "Dost know who I am?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"I am the law!"—nodding his head solemnly. "I am the law of England and the mouthpiece of his most gracious and royal majesty, Edward the Third."

Alleyne louted low to the king's representative.

"Truly you came in good time, honoured sir," said he. "A moment later and they would have slain me."

"But there should be another one," cried the man in the purple coat. "There should be a black man. A shipman with St. Anthony's fire, and a black man who had served him as cook—those are the pair that we are in chase of."

"The black man fled over to that side," said Alleyne, pointing towards the barrow.

"He could not have gone far, sir bailiff," cried one of the archers, unslinging his bow. "He is in hiding some-

where, for he knew well, black paynim as he is, that our horses' four legs could outstrip his two."

"Then we shall have him," said the other. "It shall never be said whilst I am Bailiff of Southampton, that any waster, riever, drawlatch or murtherer came scathless away from me and my posse. Leave that rogue lying. Now stretch out in line, my merry ones, with arrow on string, and I shall show you such sport as only the king can give. You on the left, Howett, and Thomas of Redbridge upon the right. So! Beat high and low among the heather, and a pot of wine to the lucky marksman."

As it chanced, however, the searchers had not far to seek. The negro had burrowed down into his hiding-place upon the barrow, where he might have lain snug enough, had it not been for the red gear upon his head. As he raised himself to look over the bracken at his enemies, the staring colour caught the eye of the bailiff, who broke into a long screeching whoop and spurred forward sword in hand. Seeing himself discovered, the man rushed out from his hiding-place, and bounded at the top of his speed down the line of archers, keeping a good hundred paces to the front of them. The two who were on either side of Alleyne bent their bows as calmly as though they were shooting at the popinjay at a village fair.

"Seven yards windage, Hal," said one, whose hair was streaked with grey.

"Five," replied the other, letting loose his string. Alleyne gave a gulp in his throat, for the yellow streak seemed to pass through the man; but he still ran forward.

"Seven, you jack-fool," growled the first speaker, and his bow twanged like a harpstring. The black man sprang high up into the air, and shot out both his arms and his legs, coming down all asprawl among the heather.

"Right under the blade bone!" quoth the archer, sauntering forward for his arrow.

"The old hound is the best when all is said," quoth the Bailiff of Southampton, as they made back for the roadway. "That means a quart of the best malmsey in

Southampton this very night, Matthew Atwood. Art sure that he is dead?"

"Dead as Pontius Pilate, worshipful sir."

"It is well. Now, as to the other knave. There are trees and to spare over yonder, but we have scarce leisure to make for them. Draw thy sword, Thomas of Redbridge, and hew me his head from his shoulders."

"A boon, gracious sir, a boon!" cried the condemned man.

"What then?" asked the bailiff.

"I will confess to my crime. It was indeed I and the black cook, both from the ship *La Rose de Gloire*, of Southampton, who did set upon the Flanders merchant and rob him of his spicery and his mercery, for which, as we well know, you hold a warrant against us."

"There is little merit in this confession," quoth the bailiff sternly. "Thou hast done evil within my bailiwick, and must die."

"But, sir," urged Alleyne, who was white to the lips at these bloody doings, "he hath not yet come to trial."

"Young clerk," said the bailiff, "you speak of that of which you know nothing. It is true that he hath not come to trial, but the trial hath come to him. He hath fled the law and is beyond its pale. Touch not that which is no concern of thine. But what is this boon, rogue, which you would crave?"

"I have in my shoe, most worshipful sir, a strip of wood which belonged once to the bark wherein the blessed Paul was dashed up against the island of Melita. I bought it for two rose nobles from a shipman who came from the Levant. The boon I crave is that you will place it in my hands and let me die still grasping it. In this manner, not only shall my own eternal salvation be secured, but thine also, for I shall never cease to intercede for thee."

At the command of the bailiff they plucked off the fellow's shoe, and there sure enough at the side of the instep, wrapped in a piece of fine sendal, lay a long dark splinter of wood. The archers doffed their caps at the

sight of it, and the bailiff crossed himself devoutly as he handed it to the robber.

"If it should chance," he said, "that through the surpassing merits of the blessed Paul your sin-stained soul should gain way into paradise, I trust that you will not forget that intercession which you have promised. Bear in mind, too, that it is Herward the Bailiff for whom you pray, and not Herward the Sheriff, who is my uncle's son. Now, Thomas, I pray you despatch, for we have a long ride before us and sun has already set."

Alleyne gazed upon the scene—the portly velvet-clad official, the knot of hard-faced archers with their hands to the bridles of their horses, the thief with his arms trussed back and his doublet turned down upon his shoulders. By the side of the track the old dame was standing, fastening her red wimple once more round her head. Even as he looked one of the archers drew his sword with a sharp whirr of steel and stepped up to the lost man. The clerk hurried away in horror; but, ere he had gone many paces, he heard a sudden, sullen thump, with a choking, whistling sound at the end of it. A minute later the bailiff and four of his men rode past him on their journey back to Southampton, the other two having been chosen as grave-diggers. As they passed, Alleyne saw that one of the men was wiping his sword-blade upon the mane of his horse. A deadly sickness came over him at the sight, and sitting down by the wayside he burst out a-weeping, with his nerves all in a jangle. It was a terrible world, thought he, and it was hard to know which were the more to be dreaded, the knaves or the men of the law.

## 5. *How a Strange Company gathered at the "Pied Merlin"*

THE night had already fallen, and the moon was shining between the rifts of ragged drifting clouds, before Alleyne Edricson, footsore and weary from the unwonted exercise, found himself in front of the forest inn

which stood upon the outskirts of Lyndhurst. The building was long and low, standing back a little from the road, with two flambeaux blazing on either side of the door as a welcome to the traveller. From one window there thrust forth a long pole with a bunch of greenery tied to the end of it—a sign that liquor was to be sold within. As Alleyne walked up to it he perceived that it was rudely fashioned out of beams of wood, with twinkling lights all over where the glow from within shone through the chinks. The roof was poor and thatched ; but in strange contrast to it there ran all along under the eaves a line of wooden shields, most gorgeously painted with chevron, bend, saltire, and every heraldic device. By the door a horse stood tethered, the ruddy glow beating strongly upon his brown head and patient eyes, while his body stood back in the shadow.

Alleyne stood still in the roadway for a few minutes reflecting upon what he should do. It was, he knew, only a few miles farther to Minstead, where his brother dwelt. On the other hand, he had never seen his brother since childhood, and the reports which had come to his ears concerning him were seldom to his advantage. By all accounts he was a hard and a bitter man. It might be an evil start to come to his door so late and claim the shelter of his roof. Better to sleep here at this inn and then travel on to Minstead in the morning. If his brother would take him in, well and good. He would bide with him for a time and do what he might to serve him. If, on the other hand, he should have hardened his heart against him, he could only go on his way and do the best he might by his skill as a craftsman and a scrivener. At the end of a year he would be free to return to the cloisters, for such had been his father's bequest. A monkish upbringing, one year in the world after the age of twenty, and then free selection one way or the other—it was a strange course which had been marked out for him. Such as it was, however, he had no choice but to follow it, and if he were to begin by making a friend of his brother he

had best wait until morning before he knocked at his dwelling.

The rude plank door was ajar, but as Alleyne approached it there came from within such a gust of rough laughter and clatter of tongues that he stood irresolute upon the threshold. Summoning courage, however, and reflecting that it was a public dwelling, in which he had as much right as any other man, he pushed it open and stepped into the common room.

Though it was an autumn evening and somewhat warm, a huge fire of heaped billets of wood crackled and sparkled in a broad, open grate, some of the smoke escaping up a rude chimney, but the greater part rolling out into the room, so that the air was thick with it, and a man coming from without could scarce catch his breath. On this fire a great caldron bubbled and simmered, giving forth a rich and promising smell. Seated round it were a dozen or so folk, of all ages and conditions, who set up such a shout as Alleyne entered that he stood peering at them through the smoke uncertain what this riotous greeting might portend.

" A rouse ! A rouse ! " cried one rough-looking fellow in a tattered jerkin. " One more round of mead or ale and the score to the last comer."

" 'Tis the law of the ' Pied Merlin,' " shouted another. " Ho, there, Dame Eliza ! Here is fresh custom come to the house, and not a drain for the company."

" I will take your orders, gentles ; I will assuredly take your orders," the landlady answered, bustling in with her hands full of leathern drinking-cups. " What is that you drink then ? Beer for the lads of the forest, mead for the gleeman, strong waters for the tinker, and wine for the rest. It is an old custom of the house, young sir. It has been the use at the ' Pied Merlin ' this many a year back that the company should drink to the health of the last comer. Is it your pleasure to humour it ? "

" Why, good dame," said Alleyne, " I would not offend the customs of your house, but it is only sooth when I say

that my purse is a thin one. As far as two pence will go, however, I shall be right glad to do my part."

"Plainly said and bravely spoken, my sucking friar," roared a deep voice, and a heavy hand fell upon Alleyne's shoulder. Looking up, he saw beside him his former cloister companion, the renegade monk, Hordle John.

"By the thorn of Glastonbury! ill days are coming upon Beaulieu," said he. "Here they have got rid in one day of the only two men within their walls—for I have had mine eyes upon thee, youngster, and I know that for all thy baby-face there is the making of a man in thee. Then there is the Abbot, too. I am no friend of his, nor he of mine; but he has warm blood in his veins. He is the only man left among them. The others, what are they?"

"They are holy men," Alleyne answered gravely.

"Holy men? Holy cabbages! Holy bean-pods! What do they do but live and suck in sustenance and grow fat? If that be holiness, I could show you hogs in this forest who are fit to head the Calendar. Think you it was for such a life that this good arm was fixed upon my shoulder, or that head placed upon your neck? There is work in the world, man, and it is not by hiding behind stone walls that we shall do it."

"Why, then, did you join the brothers?" asked Alleyne.

"A fair enough question; but it is as fairly answered. I joined them because Margery Alspaye, of Bolder, married Crooked Thomas of Ringwood, and left a certain John of Hordle in the cold, for that he was a ranting, roving blade who was not to be trusted in wedlock. That was why, being fond and hot-headed, I left the world; and that is why, having had time to take thought, I am right glad to find myself back in it once more. Ill betide the day that ever I took off my yeoman's jerkin to put on the white gown!"

Whilst he was speaking the landlady came in again, bearing a broad platter, upon which stood all the beakers and flagons charged to the brim with the brown ale or the ruby wine. Behind her came a maid with a high pile of

wooden plates, and a great sheaf of spoons, one of which she handed round to each of the travellers. Two of the company, who were dressed in the weather-stained green doublet of foresters, lifted the big pot off the fire, and a third with a huge pewter ladle, served out a portion of steaming collops to each guest. Alleyne bore his share and his ale-mug away with him to a retired trestle in the corner, where he could sup in peace and watch the strange scene, which was so different to those silent and well-ordered meals to which he was accustomed.

The room was not unlike a stable. The low ceiling, smoke-blackened and dingy, was pierced by several square trap-doors with rough-hewn ladders leading up to them. The walls of bare unpainted planks were studded here and there with great wooden pins, placed at irregular intervals and heights, from which hung overtunics, wallets, whips, bridles, and saddles. Over the fireplace were suspended six or seven shields of wood, with coats-of-arms rudely daubed upon them, which showed by their varying degrees of smokiness and dirt that they had been placed there at different periods. There was no furniture, save a single long dresser covered with coarse crockery, and a number of wooden benches and trestles, the legs of which sank deeply into the soft clay floor, while the only light, save that of the fire, was furnished by three torches stuck in sockets on the wall, which flickered and crackled, giving forth a strong resinous odour. All this was novel and strange to the cloister-bred youth ; but most interesting of all was the motley circle of guests who sat eating their collops round the blaze. They were a humble group of wayfarers, such as might have been found that night in any inn through the length and breadth of England ; but to him they represented that vague world against which he had been so frequeutly and so earnestly warned. It did not seem to him from what he could see of it to be such a very wicked place after all.

Three or four of the men round the fire were evidently under-keepers and verderers from the forest, sunburned

and bearded, with the quick restless eye and lithe movements of the deer among which they lived. Close to the corner of the chimney sat a middle-aged gleeman, clad in a faded garb of Norwich cloth, the tunic of which was so outgrown that it did but fasten at the neck and at the waist. His face was swollen and coarse, and its watery protruding eyes spoke of a life which never wandered very far from the wine-pot. A gilt harp, blotched with many stains and with two of its strings missing, was tacked under one of his arms, while with the other he scooped greedily at his platter. Next to him sat two other men of about the same age, one with a trimming of fur to his coat, which gave him a dignity which was evidently dearer to him than his comfort, for he still drew it around him in spite of the hot glare of the faggots. The other, clad in a dirty russet suit with a long sweeping doublet, had a cunning foxy face with keen twinkling eyes and a peaky beard. Next to him sat Hordle John, and beside him three other rough unkempt fellows with tangled beards and matted hair—free labourers from the adjoining farms, where small patches of freehold property had been suffered to remain scattered about in the heart of the royal demesne. The company was completed by a peasant in a rude dress of undyed sheepskin, with the old-fashioned galligaskins about his legs, and a gaily dressed young man with striped cloak jagged at the edges and parti-coloured hosen, who looked about him with a high disdain upon his face, and held a blue smelling flask to his nose with one hand, while he brandished a busy spoon with the other. In the corner a very fat man was lying all asprawl upon a truss, snoring stertorously, and evidently in the last stage of drunkenness.

"That is Wat the Limner," quoth the landlady, sitting down beside Alleyne, and pointing with the ladle to the sleeping man. "That is he who paints the signs and the tokens. Alack and alas that ever I should have been fool enough to trust him! Now, young man, what manner of a bird would you suppose a pied merlin to be—that being the proper sign of my hostel?"

" Why," said Alleyne, " a merlin is a bird of the same form as an eagle or a falcon. I can well remember that learned brother Bartholomew, who is deep in all the secrets of Nature, pointed one out to me as we walked together near Vinney Ridge."

" A falcon, or an eagle, quotha ? And pied, that is of two several colours. So any man would say except this barrel of lies. He came to me, look you, saying that if I would furnish him with a gallon of ale, wherewith to strengthen himself as he worked, and also the pigments and a board, he would paint for me a noble pied merlin which I might hang along with the blazonry over my door. I, poor simple fool, gave him the ale and all that he cared, leaving him alone too, because he said that a man's mind must be left untroubled when he had great work to do. When I came back the gallon jar was empty, and he lay as you see him, with the board in front of him with this sorry device." She raised up a panel which was leaning against the wall, and showed a rude painting of a scraggy and angular fowl, with very long legs and a spotted body.

" Was that," she asked, " like the bird which thou hast seen ? "

Alleyne shook his head, smiling.

" No, nor any other bird that ever wagged a feather. It is most like a plucked pullet which has died of the spotted fever. And scarlet, too ! What would the gentles, Sir Nicholas Borhunte, or Sir Bernard Brocas, of Roche Court, say if they saw such a thing—or, perhaps, even the king's own majesty himself, who often has ridden past this way, and who loves his falcons, as he loves his sons ? It would be the downfall of my house."

" The matter is not past mending," said Alleyne. " I pray you, good dame, to give me those three pigment-pots and the brush, and I shall try whether I cannot better this painting."

Dame Eliza looked doubtfully at him, as though fearing some other stratagem, but, as he made no demand for ale, she finally brought the paints, and watched him as he

smeared on his background, talking the while about the folk round the fire.

"The four forest lads must be jogging soon," she said. "They bide at Emery Down, a mile or more from here. Yeomen-prickets they are, who tend to the king's hunt The gleeman is called Floyting Will. He comes from the north country, but for many years he hath gone the round of the forest from Southampton to Christchurch. He drinks much and pays little; but it would make your ribs crackle to hear him sing the 'Jest of Hendy Tobias.' Mayhap he will sing it when the ale has warmed him."

"Who are those next to him?" asked Alleyne, much interested. "He of the fur mantle has a wise and reverent face."

"He is a seller of pills and salves, very learned in humours, and rheums, and fluxes, and all manner of ailments. He wears, as you perceive, the vernicle of Sainted Luke, the first physician, upon his sleeve. May good St. Thomas of Kent grant that it may be long before either I or mine need his help! He is here to-night for herbergage, as are the others, except the foresters. His neighbour is a tooth-drawer. That bag at his girdle is full of the teeth that he drew at Winchester fair. I warrant that there are more sound ones than sorry, for he is quick at his work, and a trifle dim in the eye. The lusty man next to him with the red head I have not seen before. The four on this side are all workers, three of them in the service of the bailiff of Sir Baldwin Redvers, and the other, he with the skeepskin, is, as I hear, a villein from the midlands who hath run from his master. His year and day are well-nigh up, when he will be a free man."

"And the other?" asked Alleyne in a whisper. "He is surely some very great man, for he looks as though he scorned those who were about him."

The landlady looked at him in a motherly way and shook her head. "You have had no great truck with the world," she said, "or you would have learned that it is the small men and not the great who hold their noses in the

air. Look at those shields upon my wall and under my eaves. Each of them is the device of some noble lord or gallant knight who hath slept under my roof at one time or another. Yet milder men or easier to please I have never seen: eating my bacon and drinking my wine with a merry face, and paying my score with some courteous word or jest which was dearer to me than my profit. Those are the true gentles. But your chapman or your bearward will swear that there is a lime in the wine, and water in the ale, and fling off at the last with a curse instead of a blessing. This youth is a scholar from Cambrig, where men are wont to be blown out by a little knowledge, and lose the use of their hands in learning the laws of the Romans. But I must away to lay down the beds. So may the saints keep you and prosper you in your undertaking!"

Thus left to himself, Alleyne drew his panel of wood where the light of one of the torches would strike full upon it, and worked away with all the pleasure of the trained craftsman, listening the while to the talk which went on round the fire. The peasant in the sheepskins, who had sat glum and silent all evening, had been so heated by his flagon of ale that he was talking loudly and angrily with clenched hands and flashing eyes.

"Sir Humphrey Tennant of Ashby may till his own fields for me," he cried. "The castle has thrown its shadow upon the cottage over long. For three hundred years my folk have swinked and sweated, day in and day out, to keep the wine on the lord's table and the harness on the lord's back. Let him take off his plates and delve himself, if delving must be done."

"A proper spirit, my fair son!" said one of the free labourers. "I would that all men were of thy way of thinking."

"He would have sold me with his acres," the other cried, in a voice which was hoarse with passion. "'The man, the woman, and their litter'—so ran the words of the dotard bailiff. Never a bullock on the farm was sold

more lightly. Ha ! he may wake some black night to find the flames licking about his ears—for fire is a good friend to the poor man, and I have seen a smoking heap of ashes where overnight there stood just such another castlewick as Ashby."

"This is a lad of metal ! " shouted another of the labourers. "He dares to give tongue to what all men think. Are we not all from Adam's loins, all with flesh and blood, and with the same mouth that must needs have food and drink ? Where all this difference, then, between the ermine cloak and the leathern tunic, if what they cover is the same ? "

"Aye, Jenkin," said another, "our foeman is under the stole and the vestment as much as under the helmet and plate of proof. We have as much to fear from the tonsure as from the hauberk. Strike at the noble and the priest shrieks, strike at the priest and the noble lays his hand upon glaive. They are twin thieves who live upon our labour."

"It would take a clever man to live upon thy labour, Hugh," remarked one of the foresters, "seeing that the half of thy time is spent in swilling mead at the 'Pied Merlin.' "

"Better that than stealing the deer that thou art placed to guard, like some folk I know."

"If you dare open that swine's mouth against me," shouted the woodman, "I'll crop your ears for you before the hangman has the doing of it, thou long-jawed lack-brain."

"Nay, gentles, gentles ! " cried Dame Eliza, in a sing-song, heedless voice, which showed that such bickerings were nightly things among her guests. "No brawling or brabbling, gentles ! Take heed to the good name of the house."

"Besides, if it comes to the cropping of ears, there are other folk who may say their say," quoth the third labourer. "We are all freemen, and I trow that a yeoman's cudgel is as good as a forester's knife. By St.

Anslem! it would be an evil day if we had to bend to our masters' servants as well to our masters."

"No man is my master save the king," the woodman answered. "Who is there, save a false traitor, who would refuse to serve the English king?"

"I know not about the English king," said the man Jenkin. "What sort of English king is it who cannot lay his tongue to a word of English? You mind last year when he came down to Malwood, with his inner marshal and his outer marshal, his justiciar, his seneschal, and his four-and-twenty guardsmen. One noontide I was by Franklin Swinton's gate, when up he rides with a yeoman-pricker at his heels. 'Ouvre,' he cried, 'ouvre,' or some such word, making sign for me to open the gate; and then 'Merci,' as though he were adrad of me. And you talk of an English king!"

"I do not marvel at it," cried the Cambrig scholar, speaking in the high drawling voice which was common among his class. "It is not a tongue for men of sweet birth and delicate upbringing. It is a foul, snorting, snarling manner of speech. For myself, I swear by the learned Polycarp that I have most ease with Hebrew, and after that perchance with Arabian."

"I will not hear a word against old King Ned," cried Hordle John in a voice like a bull. "What if he is fond of a bright eye and a saucy face? I know one of his subjects who could match him at that. If he cannot speak like an Englishman, I trow that he can fight like an Englishman; and he was hammering at the gates of Paris while alehouse topers were grutching and grumbling at home."

This loud speech, coming from a man of so formidable an appearance, somewhat daunted the disloyal party, and they fell into a sudden silence, which enabled Alleyne to hear something of the talk which was going on in the farther corner between the physician, the tooth-drawer, and the gleeman.

"A raw rat," the man of drugs was saying, "that is

what it is ever my use to order for the plague—a raw rat with its paunch cut open."

"Might it not be broiled, most learned sir?" asked the tooth-drawer. "A raw rat sounds a most sorry and cheerless dish."

"Not to be eaten," cried the physician, in high disdain. "Why should any man eat such a thing?"

"Why, indeed?" asked the gleeman, taking a long drain at his tankard.

"It is to be placed on the sore or swelling. For the rat, mark you, being a foul-living creature, hath a natural drawing or affinity for all foul things, so that the noxious humours pass from the man into the unclean beast."

"Would that cure the black death, master?" asked Jenkin.

"Aye, truly would it, my fair son."

"Then I am right glad that there were none who knew of it. The black death is the best friend that ever the common folk had in England."

"How that then?" asked Hordle John.

"Why, friend, it is easy to see that you have not worked with your hands, or you would not need to ask. When half the folk in the country were dead it was then that the other half could pick and choose who they would work for, and for what wage. That is why I say that the murrain was the best friend that the borel folk ever had."

"True, Jenkin," said another workman; "but it is not all good that is brought by it either. We well know that through it corn land has been turned into pasture, so that flocks of sheep with perchance a single shepherd wander now where once a hundred men had work and wage."

"There is no great harm in that," remarked the tooth-drawer, "for the sheep give many folk their living. There is not only the herd, but the shearer and brander, and then the dresser, the curer, the dyer, the fuller, the webster, the merchant, and a score of others."

"If it come to that," said one of the foresters, "the

tough meat of them will wear folks' teeth out, and there is a trade for the man who can draw them."

A general laugh followed this sally at the dentist's expense, in the midst of which the gleeman placed his battered harp upon his knee, and began to pick out a melody upon the frayed strings.

"Elbow room for Floyting Will!" cried the woodmen. "Twang us a merry lilt."

"Aye, aye, the 'Lasses of Lancaster,'" one suggested.

"Or 'St. Simeon and the Devil.'"

"Or the 'Jest of Hendy Tobias.'"

To all these suggestions the jongleur made no response, but sat with his eye fixed abstractedly upon the ceiling, as one who calls words to his mind. Then, with a sudden sweep across the strings, he broke out into a song so gross and so foul that ere he had finished a verse the pure-minded lad sprang to his feet with the blood tingling in his face.

"How can you sing such things?" he cried. "You, too, an old man who should be an example to others."

The wayfarers all gazed in the utmost astonishment at the interruption.

"By the holy Dicon of Hampole! our silent clerk has found his tongue," said one of the woodmen. "What is amiss with the song then? How has it offended your baby-ship?"

"A milder and better mannered song hath never been heard within these walls," cried another. "What sort of talk is this for a public inn?"

"Shall it be a litany, my good clerk?" shouted the third; "or would a hymn be good enough to serve?"

The jongleur had put down his harp in high dudgeon. "Am I to be preached to by a child?" he cried, staring across at Alleyne with an inflamed and angry countenance. "Is a hairless infant to raise his tongue against me, when I have sung in every fair from Tweed to Trent, and have twice been named aloud by the High Court of the Minstrels at Beverley? I shall sing no more to-night."

"Nay, but you will so," said one of the labourers. "Hi! Dame Eliza, bring a stoup of your best to Will to clear his throat. Go forward with thy song, and if our girl-faced clerk does not love it he can take to the road and go whence he came."

"Nay, but not too fast," broke in Hordle John. "There are two words in this matter. It may be that my little comrade has been over quick in reproof, he having gone early into the cloisters and seen little of the rough ways and words of the world. Yet there is truth in what he says, for, as you know well, the song was not of the cleanest. I shall stand by him, therefore, and he shall neither be put out on the road, nor shall his ears be offended indoors."

"Indeed, your high and mighty grace," sneered one of the yeomen, "have you in sooth so ordained?"

"By the Virgin!" said a second, "I think that you may both chance to find yourselves upon the road before long."

"And so belaboured as to be scarce able to crawl along it," cried a third.

"Nay, I shall go! I shall go!" said Alleyne hurriedly, as Hordle John began to slowly roll up his sleeve, and bare an arm like a leg of mutton. "I would not have you brawl about me."

"Hush, lad!" he whispered, "I count them not a fly. They may find they have more tow on their distaff than they know how to spin. Stand thou clear and give me space."

Both the foresters and the labourers had risen from their bench, and Dame Eliza and the travelling doctor had flung themselves between the two parties with soft words and soothing gestures, when the door of the 'Pied Merlin' was flung violently open, and the attention of the company was drawn from their own quarrel to the new-comer who had burst so unceremoniously upon them.

## 6. *How Samkin Aylward wagered His Feather-bed*

HE was a middle-sized man, of most massive and robust build, with an arching chest and extraordinary breadth of shoulder. His shaven face was as brown as a hazel-nut, tanned and dried by the weather, with harsh well-marked features, which were not improved by a long white scar which stretched from the corner of his left nostril to the angle of the jaw. His eyes were bright and searching, with something of menace and of authority in their quick glitter, and his mouth was firm set and hard, as befitted one who was wont to set his face against danger. A straight sword by his side and a painted long-bow jutting over his shoulder proclaimed his profession, while his scarred brigandine of chain-mail and his dinted steel cap showed that he was no holiday soldier, but one who was even now fresh from the wars. A white surcoat with the lion of St. George in red upon the centre covered his broad breast, while a sprig of new-plucked broom at the side of his headgear gave a touch of gaiety and grace to his grim war-worn equipment.

"Ha!" he cried, blinking like an owl in the sudden glare. "Good even to you, camarades! Hola! a woman, by my soul!" and in an instant he had clipped Dame Eliza round the waist and was kissing her violently. His eye happening to wander upon the maid, however, he instantly abandoned the mistress and danced off after the other, who scurried in confusion up one of the ladders, and dropped the heavy trap-door upon her pursuer. He then turned back and saluted the landlady once more with the utmost relish and satisfaction.

"La petite is frightened," said he. "Ah, c'est l'amour, l'amour! Curse this trick of French, which will stick to my throat. I must wash it out with some good English ale. By my hilt! camarades, there is no drop of French blood in my body, and I am a true English bowman,

Samkin Aylward by name, once of Crooksbury; and I tell you, mes amis, that it warms my very heartroots to set my feet on the dear old land once more. When I came off the galley at Hythe, this very day, I down on my bones, and I kissed the good brown earth, as I kiss thee now, ma belle, for it was eight long years since I had seen it. The very smell of it seemed life to me. But where are my six rascals? Hola, there! En avant!"

At the order, six men, dressed as common drudges, marched solemnly into the room, each bearing a huge bundle upon his head. They formed in military line, while the soldier stood in front of them with stern eyes, checking off their several packages.

"Number one—a French feather-bed with the two counterpanes of white sendal," said he.

"Here, worthy sir," answered the first of the bearers, laying a great package down in the corner.

"Number two—seven ells of red Turkey cloth and nine ells of cloth of gold. Put it down by the other. Good dame, I prythee give each of these men a bottrine of wine or a jack of ale. Three—a full piece of white Genoan velvet with twelve ells of purple silk. Thou rascal, there is dirt on the hem! Thou hast brushed it against some wall, coquin!"

"Not I, most worthy sir," cried the carrier, shrinking away from the fierce eyes of the bowman.

"I say yes, dog! By the three kings! I have seen a man gasp out his last breath for less. Had you gone through the pain and unease that I have done to earn these things you would be at more care. I swear by my ten finger-bones that there is not one of them that hath not cost its weight in French blood! Four—an incense boat, an ewer of silver, a gold buckle and a cope worked in pearls. I found them, camarades, at the Church of St. Denis in the harrying of Narbonne, and I took them away with me lest they fall into the hands of the wicked. Five—a cloak of fur turned up with minever, a gold goblet with stand and cover, and a box of rose-coloured sugar. See that

you lay them together. Six—a box of monies, three pounds of Limousine gold-work, a pair of boots, silver tagged, and, lastly, a store of naping linen. So, the tally is complete ! Here is a groat apiece and you may go."

"Go whither, worthy sir ?" asked one of the carriers.

"Whither ? To the devil if ye will. What is it to me ? Now, ma belle, to supper. A pair of cold capons, a mortress of brawn, or what you will, with a flask or two of the right Gascony. I have crowns in my pouch, my sweet, and I mean to spend them. Bring in wine while the food is dressing. Buvons, my brave lads ! you shall each empty a stoup with me."

Here was an offer which the company in an English inn at that or any other date are slow to refuse. The flagons were regathered, and came back with the white foam dripping over their edges. Two of the woodmen and three of the labourers drank their portions off hurriedly and trooped off together, for their homes were distant and the hour late. The others, however, drew closer, leaving the place of honour to the right of the gleeman to the free-handed new-comer. He had thrown off his steel cap and his brigandine, and had placed them with his sword, his quiver and his painted long-bow, on the top of his varied heap of plunder in the corner. Now, with his thick and somewhat bowed legs stretched in front of the blaze, his green jerkin thrown open, and a great quart pot held in his corded fist, he looked the picture of comfort and of good fellowship. His hard-set face had softened, and the thick crop of crisp brown curls which had been hidden by his helmet grew low upon his massive neck. He might have been forty years of age, though hard toil and harder pleasure had left their grim marks upon his features. Alleyne had ceased painting his pied merlin, and sat, brush in hand, staring with open eyes at a type of man so strange and so unlike any whom he had met. Men had been good or had been bad in his catalogue, but here was a man who was fierce one instant and gentle the next, with a curse on his lips and a smile

in his eye. What was to be made of such a man as that?

It chanced that the soldier looked up and saw the questioning glance which the young clerk threw upon him. He raised his flagon and drank to him, with a merry flash of his white teeth.

"À toi, mon garçon!" he cried. "Hast surely never seen a man-at-arms, that thou shouldst stare so?"

"I never have," said Alleyne frankly, "though I have oft heard talk of their deeds."

"By my hilt!" cried the other, "if you were to cross the narrow sea you would find them as thick as bees at a tee-hole. Couldst not shoot a bolt down any street of Bordeaux, I warrant, but you would pink archer, squire or knight. There are more breastplates than gaberdines to be seen, I promise you."

"And where got you all those pretty things?" asked Hordle John, pointing at the heap in the corner.

"Where there is as much more waiting for any brave lad to pick it up. Where a good man can always earn a good wage, and where he need look upon no man as his paymaster, but just reach his hand out and help himself. Aye, it is a goodly and a proper life. And here I drink to mine old comrades, and the saints be with them! A rouse all together, mes enfants, under pain of my displeasure! To Sir Claude Latour and the White Company!"

"Sir Claude Latour and the White Company!" shouted the travellers, draining off their goblets.

"Well quaffed, mes braves! It is for me to fill your cups again, since you have drained them to my dear lads of the white jerkin. Hola! mon ange, bring wine and ale. How runs the old stave?

We'll drink all together
To the grey goose feather
And the land where the grey goose flew.

He roared out the catch in a harsh unmusical voice, and

ended with a shout of laughter. "I trust that I am a better bowman than a minstrel," said he.

"Methinks I have some remembrance of the lilt," remarked the gleeman, running his finger over the strings. "Hoping that it will give thee no offence, most holy sir" —with a vicious snap at Alleyne—"and with the kind permit of the company, I will even venture upon it."

Many a time in the after days Alleyne Edricson seemed to see that scene, for all that so many which were stranger and more stirring were soon to crowd upon him. The fat, red-faced gleeman, the listening group, the archer with upraised finger beating in time to the music, and the huge sprawling figure of Hordle John, all thrown into red light and black shadow by the flickering fire in the centre—memory was to come often lovingly back to it.

At the time he was lost in admiration at the deft way in which the jongleur disguised the loss of his two missing strings, and the lusty, hearty fashion in which he trolled out his little ballad of the outland bowmen, which ran in some such fashion as this :

What of the bow ?
The bow was made in England :
Of true wood, of yew-wood,
The wood of English bows ;
So men who are free
Love the old yew-tree
And the land where the yew-tree grows.

What of the cord ?
The cord was made in England :
A rough cord, a tough cord,
A cord that bowmen love ;
So we'll drain our jacks
To the English flax
And the land where the hemp was wove.

What of the shaft ?
The shaft was cut in England :
A long shaft, a strong shaft,
Barbed and trim and true ;
So we'll drink all together
To the grey goose feather
And the land where the grey goose flew.

What of the men ?
The men were bred in England :
The bowmen—the yeomen—
The lads of dale and fell.
Here's to you—and to you !
To the hearts that are true
And the land where the true hearts dwell.

" Well sung, by my hilt ! " shouted the archer in high delight. " Many a night have I heard that song, both in the old war-time and after, in the days of the White Company, when Black Simon of Norwich would lead the stave and four hundred of the best bowmen that ever drew string would come roaring in upon the chorus. I have seen old John Hawkwood, the same who has led half the Company into Italy, stand laughing in his beard as he heard it, until his plates rattled again. But to get the full smack of it ye must yourselves be English bowmen, and be far off upon an outland soil."

Whilst the song had been singing Dame Eliza and the maid had placed a board across two trestles, and had laid upon it the knife, the spoon, the salt, the tranchoir of bread, and finally the smoking dish which held the savoury supper. The archer settled himself to it like one who had known what it was to find good food scarce ; but his tongue still went as merrily as his teeth.

" It passes me," he cried, " how all you lusty fellows can bide scratching your backs at home when there are such doings over the seas. Look at me—what have I to do ? It is but the eye to the cord, the cord to the shaft, and the shaft to the mark. There is the whole song of it. It is but what you do yourselves for pleasure upon a Sunday evening at the parish village butts."

" And the wage ? " asked a labourer.

" You see what the wage brings," he answered. " I eat of the best, and I drink deep. I treat my friend, and I ask no friend to treat me. I clap a silk gown on my girl's back. Never a knight's lady shall be better betrimmed and betrinketed. How of all that, mon garçon ? And how of the heap of trifles that you can see for yourselves in

yonder corner? They are from the South French, every one, upon whom I have been making war. By my hilt! camarades, I think that I may let my plunder speak for itself."

"It seems indeed to be a goodly service," said the tooth-drawer.

"Tête bleue! yes, indeed. Then there is the chance of a ransom. Why, look you, in the affair at Brignais, some four years back, when the companies slew James of Bourbon, and put his army to the sword, there was scarce a man of ours who had not count, baron, or knight. Peter Karsdale, who was but a common country lout newly brought over, with the English fleas still hopping under his doublet, laid his great hands upon the Sieur Amaury de Chatonville, who owns half Picardy, and had five thousand crowns out of him, with horse and harness. 'Tis true that a French wench took it all off Peter as quick as the Frenchman paid it; but what then? By the twang of string! it would be a bad thing if money was not made to be spent; and how better than on woman—eh, ma belle?"

"It would indeed be a bad thing if we had not our brave archers to bring wealth and kindly customs into the country," quoth Dame Eliza, on whom the soldier's free and open ways had made a deep impression.

"À toi, ma chérie!" said he, with his hand over his heart. "Hola! there is la petite peeping from behind the door. À toi, aussi, ma petite! Mon Dieu! but the lass has a good colour!"

"There is one thing, fair sir," said the Cambridge student in his piping voice, "which I would fain that you would make more clear. As I understand it, there was a peace made at the town of Brétigny some six years back between our most gracious monarch and the King of the French. This being so, it seems most passing strange that you should talk so loudly of war and of companies when there is no quarrel between the French and us."

"Meaning that I lie," said the archer, laying down his knife.

"May heaven forefend!" cried the student hastily. "*Magna est veritas sed rara*, which means in the Latin tongue that archers are all honourable men. I come to you seeking knowledge, for it is my trade to learn."

"I fear that you are yet a 'prentice to that trade," quoth the soldier; "for there is no child over the water but could answer what you ask. Know, then, that though there may be peace between our own provinces and the French, yet within the marches of France there is always war, for the country is much divided against itself, and is furthermore harried by bands of flayers, skinners, Brabaçons, tardvenus, and the rest of them. When every man's grip is on his neighbour's throat, and every five-sous-piece of a baron is marching with tuck of drum to fight whom he will, it would be a strange thing if five hundred brave English boys could not pick up a living. Now that Sir John Hawkwood hath gone with the East Anglian lads and the Nottingham woodmen into the service of the Marquis of Montferrat to fight against the Lord of Milan, there are but ten-score of us left; yet I trust that I may be able to bring some back with me to fill the ranks of the White Company. By the tooth of Peter! it would be a bad thing if I could not muster many a Hamptonshire man who would be ready to strike in under the red flag of St. George, and the more so if my old master Sir Nigel Loring, of Christchurch, should don hauberk once more and take the lead of us."

"Ah! you would indeed be in luck then," quoth a woodman; "for it is said that, setting aside the prince, and mayhap good old Sir John Chandos, there was not in the whole army a man of such tried courage."

"It is sooth, every word of it," the archer answered. "I have seen him with these two eyes on stricken fields and never did man carry himself better. Mon Dieu! yes, ye would not credit to look at him, or to hearken to his soft voice, but for clear twenty years, there was not skirmish, onfall, sally, bushment, escalado, or battle, but Sir Nigel was in the heart of it. I go now to Christchurch

with a letter to him from Sir Claude Latour, to ask him if he will take the place of Sir John Hawkwood ; and there is the more chance that he will if I bring one or two likely men at my heels. What say you, woodman : wilt leave the bucks to loose a shaft at a nobler mark ? "

The forester shook his head. " I have wife and child at Emery Down," quoth he ; " I would not leave them for such a venture."

" You then, young sir ? " asked the archer.

" Nay, I am a man of peace," said Alleyne Edricson. " Besides, I have other work to do."

" Peste ! " growled the soldier, striking his flagon on the board until the dishes danced again. " What, in the name of the devil, hath come over the folk ? Why sit ye all moping by the fireside, like crows round a dead horse, when there is man's work to be done within a few short leagues of ye ? Out upon you all, as a set of laggards and hang-backs ! By my hilt ! I believe that the men of England are all in France already, and that what is left behind are in sooth the women dressed up in their paltocks and hosen."

" Archer," quoth Hordle John, " you have lied more than once and more than twice ; for which, and also because I see much in you to mislike, I am sorely tempted to lay you upon your back."

" By my hilt ! then, I have found a man at last ! " shouted the bowman. " And, 'fore God, you are a better man than I take you for if you can lay me on my back, mon garçon. I have won the ram more times than there are toes to my feet, and for seven long years I have found no man in the Company who could make my jerkin dusty."

" We have had enough bobance and boasting," said Hordle John, rising and throwing off his doublet. " I will show you that there are better men left in England than ever went thieving to France."

" Pasques Dieu ! " cried the archer, loosening his jerkin, and eyeing his foeman over with the keen glance

of one who is a judge of manhood. "I have only once before seen such a body of a man. By your leave, my red-headed friend, I should be right sorry to exchange buffets with you; and I will allow that there is no man in the Company who would pull against you on a rope; so let that be a salve to your pride. On the other hand, I should judge that you have led a life of ease for some months back, and that my muscle is harder than your own. I am ready to wager upon myself against you, if you are not afeard."

"Afeard, thou lurden!" growled big John. "I never saw the face yet of the man that I was afeard of. Come out, and we shall see who is the better man."

"But the wager?"

"I have nought to wager. Come out for the love and the lust of the thing."

"Nought to wager!" cried the soldier. "Why, you have that which I covet above all things. It is that big body of thine that I am after. See, now, mon garçon. I have a French feather-bed there, which I have been at pains to keep these years back. I had it at the sacking of Issodun, and the king himself hath not such a bed. If you throw me, it is thine; but, if I throw you, then you are under a vow to take bow and bill and hie with me to France, there to serve in the White Company as long as we be enrolled."

"A fair wager!" cried all the travellers, moving back their benches and trestles, so as to give fair field for the wrestlers.

"Then you may bid farewell to your bed, soldier," said Hordle John.

"Nay; I shall keep the bed, and I shall have you to France in spite of your teeth, and you shall live to thank me for it. How shall it be, then, mon enfant? Collar and elbow, or close-lock, or catch how you can?"

"To the devil with your tricks," said John, opening and shutting his great red hands. "Stand forth, and let me clip thee."

"Shalt clip me as best you can, then," quoth the archer, moving out into the open space, and keeping a most wary eye upon his opponent. He had thrown off his green jerkin, and his chest was covered only by a pink silk jupon, or undershirt, cut low in the neck and sleeveless. Hordle John was stripped from his waist upwards, and his huge body, with his great muscles swelling out like the gnarled roots of an oak, towered high above the soldier. The other, however, though near a foot shorter, was a man of great strength; and there was a gloss upon his white skin which was wanting in the heavier limbs of the renegade monk. He was quick on his feet, too, and skilled at the game; so that it was clear, from the poise of head and shine of eye, that he counted the chances to be in his favour. It would have been hard that night, through the whole length of England, to set up a finer pair in face of each other.

Big John stood waiting in the centre with a sullen, menacing eye, and his red hair in a bristle, while the archer paced lightly and swiftly to the right and the left with crooked knee and hands advanced. Then, with a sudden dash, so swift and fierce that the eye could scarce follow it, he flew in upon his man and locked his leg round him. It was a grip that, between men of equal strength, would mean a fall; but Hordle John tore him off from him as he might a rat, and hurled him across the room, so that his head cracked up against the wooden wall.

"Ma foi!" cried the bowman, passing his fingers through his curls, "you were not far from the feather-bed then, mon gar. A little more, and this good hostel would have a new window."

Nothing daunted, he approached his man once more; but this time with more caution than before. With a quick feint he threw the other off his guard, and then, bounding upon him, threw his legs round his waist and his arms round his bull-neck, in the hope of bearing him to the ground with the sudden shock. With a bellow of rage, Hordle John squeezed him limp in his huge arms;

and then, picking him up, cast him down upon the floor with a force which might well have splintered a bone or two, had not the archer with the most perfect coolness clung to the other's forearms to break his fall. As it was, he dropped upon his feet and kept his balance, though it sent a jar through his frame which set every joint a-creaking. He bounded back from his perilous foeman; but the other, heated by the bout, rushed madly after him, and so gave the practised wrestler the very vantage for which he had planned. As big John flung himself upon him, the archer ducked under the great red hands that clutched for him, and, catching his man round the thighs, hurled him over his shoulder—helped as much by his own mad rush as by the trained strength of the heave. To Alleyne's eye, it was as if John had taken unto himself wings and flown. As he hurtled through the air, with giant limbs revolving, the lad's heart was in his mouth; for surely no man ever yet had such a fall and came scathless out of it. In truth, hardy as the man was, his neck had been assuredly broken had he not pitched head first on the very midriff of the drunken artist, who was slumbering so peacefully in the corner, all unaware of these stirring doings. The luckless limner, thus suddenly brought out from his dreams, sat up with a piercing yell, while Hordle John bounded back into the circle almost as rapidly as he had left it.

"One more fall, by all the saints!" he cried, throwing out his arms.

"Not I," quoth the archer, pulling on his clothes. "I have come well out of the business. I would sooner wrestle with the great bear of Navarre."

"It was a trick," cried John.

"Aye was it. By my ten finger-bones! it is a trick that will add a proper man to the ranks of the Company."

"Oh, for that," said the other, "I count it not a fly; for I had promised myself a good hour ago that I should go with thee, since the life seems to be a goodly and proper one. Yet I would fain have had the feather-bed."

"I doubt it not, mon ami," quoth the archer, going back to his tankard. "Here is to thee, lad, and may we be good comrades to each other! But hola! what is it that ails our friend of the wrathful face?"

The unfortunate limner had been sitting up, rubbing himself ruefully and staring about with a vacant gaze, which showed that he knew neither where he was nor what had occurred to him. Suddenly, however, a flash of intelligence had come over his sodden features, and he rose and staggered for the door. "'Ware the ale!" he said in a hoarse whisper, shaking a warning finger at the company. "Oh, holy Virgin, 'ware the ale!" and clapping his hands to his injury, he flitted off into the darkness, amid a shout of laughter, in which the vanquished joined as merrily as the victor. The remaining forester and the two labourers were also ready for the road, and the rest of the company turned to the blankets which Dame Eliza and the maid had laid out for them upon the floor. Alleyne, weary with the unwonted excitements of the day, was soon in a deep slumber, broken only by fleeting visions of twittering legs, cursing beggars, black robbers, and the many strange folk whom he had met at the "Pied Merlin."

## 7. *How the Three Comrades journeyed through the Woodlands*

AT early dawn the country inn was all alive, for it was rare indeed that an hour of daylight would be wasted at a time when lighting was so scarce and dear. Indeed, early as it was when Dame Eliza began to stir, it seemed that others could be earlier still, for the door was ajar and the learned student of Cambridge had taken himself off, with a mind which was too intent upon the high things of antiquity to stoop to consider the fourpence which he owed for bed and board. It was the shrill outcry of the landlady when she found her loss,

and the clucking of the hens, which had streamed in through the open door, that first broke in upon the slumbers of the tired wayfarers.

Once afoot, it was not long before the company began to disperse. A sleek mule with red trappings was brought round from some neighbouring shed for the physician, and he ambled away with much dignity upon his road to Southampton. The tooth-drawer and the gleeman called for a cup of small ale apiece, and started off together for Ringwood Fair, the old jongleur looking very yellow in the eye and swollen in the face after his overnight potations. The archer, however, who had drunk more than any man in the room, was as merry as a grig, and having kissed the matron and chased the maid up the ladder once more, he went out to the brook, and came back with the water dripping from his face and hair.

"Hola! my man of peace," he cried to Alleyne, "whither are you bent this morning?"

"To Minstead," quoth he. "My brother Simon Edricson is socman there, and I go to bide with him for a while. I prythee, let me have my score, good dame."

"Score, indeed!" cried she, standing with upraised hands in front of the panel on which Alleyne had worked the night before. "Say, rather, what it is that I owe to thee, good youth. Aye, this is indeed a pied merlin, and with a leveret under its claws, as I am a living woman. By the rood of Waltham! but thy touch is deft and dainty."

"And see the red eye of it!" cried the maid.

"Aye, and the open beak."

"And the ruffled wing," added Hordle John.

"By my hilt!" cried the archer, "it is the very bird itself."

The young clerk flushed with pleasure at this chorus of praise, rude and indiscriminate indeed, and yet so much heartier and less grudging than any which he had ever heard from the critical brother Jerome or the short-spoken Abbot. There was, it would seem, great kindness as well as great wickedness in this world, of which he had heard

so little that was good. His hostess would hear nothing of his paying either for bed or for board, while the archer and Hordle John placed a hand upon either shoulder and led him off to the board, where some smoking fish, a dish of spinach, and a jug of milk were laid out for their breakfast.

"I should not be surprised to learn, mon camarade," said the soldier, as he heaped a slice of the fish upon Alleyne's tranchoir of bread, "that you could read written things, since you are so ready with your brushes and pigments."

"It would be shame to the good brothers of Beaulieu if I could not," he answered, "seeing that I have been their clerk this ten years back."

The bowman looked at him with great respect. "Think of that!" said he. "And you with not a hair to your face, and a skin like a girl. I can shoot three hundred and fifty paces with my little popper there, and four hundred and twenty with the great war-bow; yet I can make nothing of this, nor read my own name if you were to set 'Sam Aylward' up against me. In the whole Company there was only one man who could read, and he fell down a well at the taking of Ventadour, which proves that the thing is not suited to a soldier, though most needful to a clerk."

"I can make some show at it," said big John; "though I was scarce long enough among the monks to catch the whole trick of it."

"Here, then, is something to try upon," quoth the archer, pulling a square of parchment from the inside of his tunic. It was tied securely with a broad band of purple silk, and firmly sealed at either end with a large red seal. John pored long and earnestly over the inscription upon the back, with his bows bent as one who bears up against great mental strain.

"Not having read much of late," he said, "I am loth to say too much about what this may be. Some might say one thing and some another, just as one bowman loves

the yew, and a second will not shoot save with the ash. To me, by the length and look of it, I should judge this to be a verse from one of the Psalms."

The bowman shook his head. "It is scarce likely," he said, "that Sir Claude Latour should send me all the way across seas with nought more weighty than a psalm-verse. You have clean overshot the butts this time, mon camarade. Give it to the little one. I will wager my feather-bed that he makes more sense of it."

"Why, it is written in the French tongue," said Alleyne, "and in a right clerkly hand. This is how it runs: 'À le moult puissant et moult honorable chevalier, Sir Nigel Loring de Christchurch, de sont très fidèle amis Sir Claude Latour, capitaine de la Compagnie blanche, châtelain de Biscar, grand seigneur de Montchâteau, vavaseur de le renommé Gaston, Comte de Foix, tenant les droits de la haute justice, de la milieu, et de la basse.' Which signifies in our speech: 'To the very powerful and very honourable knight, Sir Nigel Loring of Christchurch, from his very faithful friend Sir Claude Latour, captain of the White Company, chatelain of Biscar, grand lord of Montchâteau, and vassal to the renowned Gaston, Count of Foix, who holds the rights of the high justice, the middle and the low.'"

"Look at that now!" cried the bowman in triumph. "That is just what he would have said."

"I can see now that it is even so," said John, examining the parchment again. "Though I scarce understand this high, middle, and low."

"By my hilt! you would understand it if you were Jacques Bonhomme. The low justice means that you fleece him, and the middle that you may torture him, and the high that you may slay him. That is about the truth of it. But this is the letter which I am to take; and since the platter is clean it is time that we trussed up and were afoot. You come with me, mon gros Jean; and as to you, little one, where did you say that you journeyed?"

"To Minstead."

"Ah yes, I know this forest-country well, though I was born myself in the Hundred of Easebourne, in the Rape of Chichester, hard by the village of Midhurst. Yet I have not a word to say against the Hampton men, for there are no better comrades or truer archers in the whole Company than some who learned to loose the string in these very parts. We shall travel round with you to Minstead, lad, seeing that it is little out of our way."

"I am ready," said Alleyne, right pleased at the thought of such company upon the road.

"So am not I. I must store my plunder at this inn, since the hostess is an honest woman. Hola, my chérie, I wish to leave with you my gold-work, my velvet, my silk, my feather-bed, my incense-boat, my ewer, my naping linen, and all the rest of it. I take only the money in a linen bag, and the box of rose-coloured sugar, which is a gift from my Captain to the Lady Loring. Wilt guard my treasure for me?"

"It shall be put in the safest loft, good archer. Come when you may, you shall find it ready for you."

"Now there is a true friend!" cried the bowman, taking her hand. "There is a bonne amie! English land and English women, say I, and French wine and French plunder. I shall be back anon, mon ange. I am a lonely man, my sweeting, and I must settle some day when the wars are over and done. Mayhap you and I—— Ah, méchante, méchante! There is la petite peeping from behind the door. Now, John, the sun is over the trees; you must be brisker than this when the bugleman blows 'Bows and Bills.'"

"I have been waiting this time back," said Hordle John gruffly.

"Then we must be off. Adieu, ma vie! The two livres shall settle the score and buy some ribbons against the next kermesse. Do not forget Sam Aylward, for his heart shall ever be thine alone—and thine, ma petite! So, marchons, and may St. Julian grant us as good quarters elsewhere!"

The sun had risen over Ashurst and Denny woods, and was shining brightly, though the eastern wind had a sharp flavour to it, and the leaves were flickering thickly from the trees. In the High Street of Lyndhurst the wayfarers had to pick their way, for the little town was crowded with the guardsmen, grooms, and yeomen-prickers who were attached to the king's hunt. The king himself was staying at Castle Malwood, but several of his suite had been compelled to seek such quarters as they might find in the wooden or wattle-and-daub cottages of the village. Here and there a small escutcheon, peeping from a glassless window, marked the night's lodging of knight or baron. These coats-of-arms could be read, where a scroll would be meaningless, and the bowman, like most men of his age, was well versed in the common symbols of heraldry.

"There is the Saracen's head of Sir Bernard Brocas," quoth he. "I saw him last at the ruffle at Poictiers some ten years back, when he bore himself like a man. He is the master of the king's horse, and can sing a right jovial stave, though in that he cannot come nigh to Sir John Chandos, who is the first at the board or in the saddle. Three martlets on a field azure. That must be one of the Luttrells. By the crescent upon it, it should be the second son of old Sir Hugh, who had a bolt through his ankle at the intaking of Romorantin, he having rushed into the fray ere his squire had time to clasp his solleret to his greave. There too is the hackle which is the old device of the De Brays. I have served under Sir Thomas de Bray, who was as jolly as a pie, and a lusty swordsman until he got too fat for his harness."

So the archer gossiped as the three wayfarers threaded their way among the stamping horses, the busy grooms, and the knots of pages and squires who disputed over the merits of their master's horses and deerhounds. As they passed the old church, which stood upon a mound at the left-hand side of the village street, the door was flung open, and a stream of worshippers wound down the slop-

ing path, coming from the morning mass, all chattering like a cloud of jays. Alleyne bent knee and doffed hat at the sight of the open door ; but ere he had finished an ave, his comrades were out of sight round the curve of the path, and he had to run to overtake them.

"What!" he said, "not one word of prayer before God's own open house? How can ye hope for His blessing upon the day?"

"My friend," said Hordle John, "I have prayed so much during the last two months, not only during the day, but at matins, lauds, and the like, when I could scarce keep my head upon my shoulders for nodding, that I feel that I have somewhat overprayed myself."

"How can a man have too much religion?" cried Alleyne earnestly. "It is the one thing that availeth. A man is but a beast as he lives from day to day, eating and drinking, breathing and sleeping. It is only when he raises himself, and concerns himself with the immortal spirit within him, that he becomes in very truth a man. Bethink ye how sad a thing it would be that the blood of the Redeemer should be spilled to no purpose."

"Bless the lad, if he doth not blush like any girl, and yet preach like the whole College of Cardinals," cried the archer.

"In truth I blush that anyone so weak and so unworthy as I should try to teach another that which he finds it so passing hard to follow himself."

"Prettily said, mon garçon. Touching that same slaying of the Redeemer, it was a bad business. A good padre in France read to us from a scroll the whole truth of the matter. The soldiers came upon Him in the garden. In truth, these Apostles of His may have been holy men, but they were of no great account as men-at-arms. There was one, indeed, Sir Peter, who smote out like a true man ; but, unless he is belied, he did but clip a varlet's ear, which was no very knightly deed. By these ten finger-bones! had I been there, with Black Simon of Norwich, and but one score picked men of the Company,

we had held them in play. Could we do no more, we had at least filled the false knight, Sir Judas, so full of English arrows that he would curse the day that ever he came on such an errand."

The young clerk smiled at his companion's earnestness. "Had He wished help," he said, "He could have summoned legions of archangels from heaven, so what need had He of your poor bow and arrow? Besides, bethink you of His own words—that those who live by the sword shall perish by the sword."

"And how could man die better?" asked the archer. "If I had my wish, it would be to fall so—not, mark you, in any mere skirmish of the Company, but in a stricken field, with the great lion banner waving over us and the red oriflamme in front, amid the shouting of my fellows and the twanging of the strings. But let it be sword, lance or bolt that strikes me down: for I should think it shame to die from an iron ball from fire-crake or bombard or any such unsoldierly weapon, which is only fitted to scare babes with its foolish noise and smoke."

"I have heard much even in the quiet cloisters of these new and dreadful engines," quoth Alleyne. "It is said, though I can scarce bring myself to believe it, that they will send a ball twice as far as a bowman can shoot his shaft, and with such force as to break through armour of proof."

"True enough, my lad. But while the armourer is thrusting in his devil's lust, and dropping his ball, and lighting his flambeau, I can very easily loose six shafts, or, eight maybe, so he hath no great vantage after all. Yet I will not deny that at the intaking of a town it is well to have good store of bombards. I am told that at Calais they made dints in the wall that a man might put his head into. But surely, comrades, someone who is grievously hurt hath passed along this road before us."

All along the woodland track there did indeed run a scattered straggling trail of blood-marks, sometimes in single drops, and in other places in broad ruddy gouts,

smudged over the dead leaves or crimsoning the white flint stones.

"It must a stricken deer," said John.

"Nay, I am woodman enough to see that no deer hath passed this way this morning; and yet the blood is fresh. But hark to the sound!"

They stood listening all three with sidelong heads. Through the silence of the great forest there came a swishing, whistling sound, mingled with the most dolorous groans, and the voice of a man raised in a high quavering kind of song. The comrades hurried onwards eagerly, and topping the brow of a small rising they saw upon the other side the source from which these strange noises arose.

A tall man, much stooped in the shoulders, was walking slowly with bended head and clasped hands in the centre of the path. He was dressed from head to foot in a long white linen cloth, and a high white cap with a red cross printed upon it. His gown was turned back from his shoulders, and the flesh there was a sight to make a man wince, for it was all beaten to a pulp, and the blood was soaking into his gown and trickling down upon the ground. Behind him walked a smaller man, with his hair touched with grey, who was clad in the same white garb. He intoned a long whining rhyme in the French tongue, and at the end of every line he raised a thick cord, all jagged with pellets of lead, and smote his companion across the shoulders until the blood spurted again. Even as the three wayfarers stared, however, there was a sudden change, for the smaller man, having finished his song, loosened his own gown and handed the scourge to the other, who took up the stave once more and lashed his companion with all the strength of his bare and sinewy arm. So, alternately beating and beaten, they made their dolorous way through the beautiful woods and under the amber arches of the fading beech-trees, where the calm strength and majesty of Nature might serve to rebuke the foolish energies and misspent strivings of mankind.

Such a spectacle was new to Hordle John and to Alleyne Edricson ; but the archer treated it lightly, as a common matter enough.

" These are the Beating Friars, otherwise called the Flagellants," quoth he. " I marvel that ye should have come upon none of them before, for across the water they are as common as gallybaggers. I have heard that there are no English among them, but that they are from France, Italy and Bohemia. En avant, camarades ! that we may have speech with them."

As they came up to them, Alleyne could hear the doleful dirge which the beater was chanting, bringing down his heavy whip at the end of each line, while the groans of the sufferer formed a sort of dismal chorus. It was in old French, and ran somewhat in this way :

Or avant, entre nous tous frères
Battons nos charognes bien fort
En remembrant la grant misère
De Dieu et sa piteuse mort,
Qui fut pris en la gent amère
Et vendus et trais à tort
Et bastu sa chair, vierge et dère
Au nom de ce battons plus fort.

Then at the end of the verse the scourge changed hands and the chanting began anew.

" Truly, holy fathers," said the archer in French as they came abreast of them, " you have beaten enough for to-day. The road is all spotted like a shambles at Martinmas. Why should ye mishandle yourselves thus ? "

" C'est pour vos péchés—pour vos péchés," they droned, looking at the travellers with sad lack-lustre eyes and then bent to their bloody work once more without heed to the prayers and persuasions which were addressed to them. Finding all remonstrance useless, the three comrades hastened on their way, leaving these strange travellers to their dreary task.

" Mort Dieu ! " cried the bowman. " There is a bucketful or more of my blood over in France, but it was all spilled in hot fight, and I should think twice before I

drew it drop by drop as these friars are doing. By my hilt! our young one here is as white as a Picardy cheese. What is amiss then, mon cher?"

"It is nothing," Alleyne answered. "My life has been too quiet. I am not used to such sights."

"Ma foi!" the other cried. "I have never yet seen a man who was so stout of speech and yet so weak of heart."

"Not so, friend," quoth big John; "it is not weakness of heart, for I know the lad well. His heart is as good as thine or mine, but he hath more in his pate than ever you will carry under that tin pot of thine, and as a consequence he can see farther into things, so that they weigh upon him more."

"Surely to any man it is a sad sight," said Alleyne, "to see these holy men, who have done no sin themselves, suffering so for the sin of others. Saints are they, if in this age any may merit so high a name."

"I count them not a fly," cried Hordle John; "for who is the better for all their whipping and yowling? They are like other friars, I trow, when all is done. Let them leave their backs alone, and beat the pride out of their hearts."

"By the three kings! there is sooth in what you say," remarked the archer. "Besides, methinks if I were le bon Dieu, it would bring me little joy to see a poor devil cutting the flesh off his bones; and I should think that he had but a small opinion of me, that he should hope to please me by such provost-marshal work. No, by my hilt! I should look with a more loving eye upon a jolly archer who never harmed a fallen foe and never feared a hale one."

"Doubtless you mean no sin," said Alleyne. "If your words are wild, it is not for me to judge them. Can you not see that there are other foes in this world besides Frenchmen, and as much glory to be gained in conquering them? Would it not be a proud day for knight or squire if he could overthrow seven adversaries in the lists?

Yet here are we in the lists of life, and there come the seven black champions against us : Sir Pride, Sir Covetousness, Sir Lust, Sir Anger, Sir Gluttony, Sir Envy, and Sir Sloth. Let a man lay those seven low, and he shall have the prize of the day, from the hands of the fairest queen of beauty, even from the Virgin-Mother herself. It is for this that these men mortify their flesh, and to set us an example, who would pamper ourselves overmuch. I say again that they are God's own saints and I bow my head to them."

"And so you shall, mon petit," replied the archer. "I have not heard a man speak better since old Dom Bertrand died, who was at one time chaplain to the White Company. He was a very valiant man, but at the battle of Brignais he was spitted through the body by a Hainault man-at-arms. For this we had an excommunication read against the man, when next we saw our holy father at Avignon ; but as we had not his name, and knew nothing of him, save that he rode a dapple-grey roussin, I have feared sometimes that the blight may have settled upon the wrong man."

"Your Company has been, then, to bow knee before our holy father, the Pope Urban, the prop and centre of Christendom ? " asked Alleyne, much interested. "Perchance you have yourself set eyes upon his august face ? "

"Twice I saw him," said the archer. "He was a lean little rat of a man, with a scab on his chin. The first time we had five thousand crowns out of him, though he made much ado about it. The second time we asked ten thousand, but it was three days before we could come to terms, and I am of opinion myself that we might have done better by plundering the palace. His chamberlain and cardinals came forth, as I remember, to ask whether we would take seven thousand crowns with his blessing and a plenary absolution, or the ten thousand with his solemn ban by bell, book and candle. We were all of one mind that it was best to have the ten thousand with the curse ; but in some way they prevailed upon Sir

John, so that we were blessed and shriven against our will. Perchance it is as well, for the Company were in need of it about that time."

The pious Alleyne was deeply shocked by this reminiscence. Involuntarily he glanced up and around to see if there were any trace of those opportune levin-flashes and thunderbolts which, in the "Acta Sanctorum," were wont so often to cut short the loose talk of the scoffer. The autumn sun streamed down as brightly as ever, and the peaceful red path still wound in front of them through the rustling yellow-tinted forest. Nature seemed to be too busy with her own concerns to heed the dignity of an outraged pontiff. Yet he felt a sense of weight and reproach within his breast, as though he had sinned himself in giving ear to such words. The teachings of twenty years cried out against such licence. It was not until he had thrown himself down before one of the many wayside crosses, and had prayed from his heart both for the archer and for himself that the dark cloud rolled back again from his spirit.

## 8. *The Three Friends*

ALLEYNE'S companions had passed on whilst he was at his orisons ; but his young blood and the fresh morning air both invited him to a scamper. His staff in one hand and his scrip in the other, with springy step and floating locks, he raced along the forest path, as active and as graceful as a young deer. He had not far to go, however, for, on turning a corner, he came on a roadside cottage with a wooden fence-work around it, where stood big John and Aylward the bowman, staring at something within. As he came up with them he saw that two little lads, the one about nine years of age and the other somewhat older, were standing on the plot in front of the cottage, each holding out a round stick in their left hands, with their arms stiff and straight from

the shoulder, as silent and still as two small statues. They were pretty blue-eyed yellow-haired lads, well made and sturdy, with bronzed skins, which spoke of a woodland life.

"Here are young chips from an old bow-stave!" cried the soldier in great delight. "This is the proper way to raise children. By my hilt! I could not have trained them better had I the ordering of it myself."

"What is it, then?" asked Hordle John. "They stand very stiff, and I trust that they have not been struck so."

"Nay, they are training their left arms, that they may have a steady grasp of the bow. So my own father trained me, and six days a week I held out his walking-staff till my arm was heavy as lead. Hola, mes enfants! how long will you hold out?"

"Until the sun is over the great lime-tree, good master, the elder answered.

"What would ye be, then? Woodmen? Verderers?"

"Nay, soldiers," they cried both together.

"By the beard of my father! but ye are whelps of the true breed. Why so keen, then, to be soldiers?"

"That we may fight the Scots," they answered. "Daddy will send us to fight the Scots."

"And why the Scots, my pretty lads? We have seen French and Spanish galleys no farther away than Southampton, but I doubt that it will be some time before the Scots find their way to these parts."

"Our business is with the Scots," quoth the elder; "for it was the Scots who cut off daddy's string fingers and his thumbs."

"Aye, lads, it was that," said a deep voice from behind Alleyne's shoulder. Looking round, the wayfarers saw a gaunt big-boned man, with sunken cheeks and a sallow face, who had come up behind them. He held up his two hands as he spoke, and showed that the thumbs and two first fingers had been torn away from each of them.

"Ma foi, camarade!" cried Aylward. "Who hath served thee in so shameful a fashion?"

"It is easy to see, friend, that you were born far from the marches of Scotland," quoth the stranger, with a bitter smile. "North of Humber there is no man who would not know the handiwork of Devil Douglas, the black Lord James."

"And how fell you into his hands?" asked John.

"I am a man from the north country, from the town of Beverley and the wapentake of Holderness," he answered. "There was a day when, from Trent to Tweed, there was no better marksman than Robin Heathcot. Yet, as you see, he hath left me, as he hath left many another poor border archer, with no grip for bill or bow. Yet the king hath given me a living here in the southlands, and please God these two lads of mine will pay off a debt that hath been owing over long. What is the price of daddy's thumbs, boys?"

"Twenty Scottish lives," they answered together.

"And for the fingers?"

"Half a score."

"When they can bend my war-bow, and bring down a squirrel at a hundred paces, I send them to take service under Johnny Copeland, the Lord of the Marches and Governor of Carlisle. By my soul, I would give the rest of my fingers to see the Douglas within arrow-flight of them."

"May you live to see it," quoth the bowman. "And hark ye, mes enfants, take an old soldier's rede and lay your bodies to the bow, drawing from hip and thigh as much as from arm. Learn also, I pray you, to shoot with a dropping shaft; for though a bowman may at times be called upon to shoot straight and fast, yet it is more often that he has to do with a town-guard behind a wall, or an arbalestier with his mantlet raised, when you cannot hope to do him scathe unless your shaft fall straight upon him from the clouds. I have not drawn string for two weeks, but I may be able to show ye how such shots should be made." He loosened his long bow, slung his quiver round to the front, and then glanced keenly round for a fitting mark. There was a yellow and withered

stump some way off, seen under the drooping branches of a lofty oak. The archer measured the distance with his eye ; and then, drawing three shafts, he shot them off with such speed that the first had not reached the mark ere the last was on the string. Each arrow passed high over the oak ; and, of the three, two stuck fair into the stump ; while the third, caught in some wandering puff of wind, was driven a foot or two to one side.

"Good!" cried the north countryman. "Hearken to him, lads! He is a master bowman. Your dad says amen to every word he says."

"By my hilt!" said Aylward, "if I am to preach on bowmanship, the whole long day would scarce give me time for my sermon. We have marksmen in the Company who will notch with a shaft every crevice and joint of a man-at-arm's harness, from the clasp of his bassinet to the hinge of his greave. But, with your favour, friend, I must gather my arrows again, for while a shaft costs a penny, a poor man can scarce leave them sticking in wayside stumps. We must, then, on our road again, and I hope from my heart that you may train these two young goshawks here until they are ready for a cast even at such a quarry as you speak of."

Leaving the thumbless archer and his brood, the wayfarers struck through the scattered huts of Emery Down, and out on to the broad rolling heath covered deep in ferns and in heather, where droves of the half-wild black forest pigs were rooting about amongst the hillocks. The woods about this point fall away to the left and the right, while the road curves upwards and the wind sweeps keenly over the swelling uplands. The broad strips of bracken glowed red and yellow against the black peaty soil, and a queenly doe who grazed among them turned her white front and her great questioning eyes towards the wayfarers. Alleyne gazed in admiration at the supple beauty of the creature, but the archer's fingers played with his quiver, and his eyes glistened with the fell instinct which urges a man to slaughter.

"Tête Dieu!" he growled, "were this France, or even Guienne, we should have a fresh haunch for our none-meat. Law or no law, I have a mind to loose a bolt at her."

"I would break your stave across my knee first," cried John, laying his great hand upon the bow. "What! man, I am forest born, and I know what comes of it. In our own township of Hordle two have lost their eyes and one his skin for this very thing. On my troth, I felt no great love when I first saw you, but since then I have conceived over much regard for you to wish to see the verderer's flayer at work upon you."

"It is my trade to risk my skin," growled the archer; but none the less he thrust his quiver over his hip again and turned his face for the west.

As they advanced, the path still trended upwards, running from heath into copses of holly and yew, and so back into heath again. It was joyful to hear the merry whistle of blackbirds as they darted from one clump of greenery to the other. Now and again a peaty amber-coloured stream rippled across their way, with ferny overgrown banks, where the blue kingfisher flitted busily from side to side, or the grey and pensive heron, swollen with trout and dignity, stood ankle-deep among the sedges. Chattering jays and loud wood-pigeons flapped thickly overhead, while ever and anon the measured tapping of Nature's carpenter, the great green woodpecker, sounded from each wayside grove. On either side, as the path mounted, the long sweep of country broadened and expanded, sloping down on the one side through yellow forest and brown moor to the distant smoke of Lymington and the blue misty channel which lay alongside of the sky-line, while to the north the woods rolled away, grove topping grove, to where in the farthest distance the white spire of Salisbury stood out hard and clear against the cloudless sky. To Alleyne, whose days had been spent in the low-lying coastland, the eager upland air and the wide free country-side gave a sense of life and of the joy

of living which made his young blood tingle in his veins. Even the heavy John was not unmoved by the beauty of their road, while the bowman whistled lustily or sang snatches of French love songs in a voice which might have scared the most stout-hearted maiden that ever hearkened to serenade.

"I have a liking for that north countryman," he remarked presently. "He hath good power of hatred. Couldst see by his cheek and eye that he is as bitter as verjuice. I warm to a man who hath some gall in his liver."

"Ah me!" sighed Alleyne. "Would it not be better if he hath some love in his heart?"

"I would not say nay to that. By my hilt! I shall never be said to be a traitor to the little king. Let a man love the sex. Pasques Dieu! they are made to be loved, les petites, from wimple down to shoe-string! I am right glad, mon garçon, to see that the good monks have trained thee so wisely and so well."

"Nay, I meant not worldly love, but rather that his heart should soften towards those who have wronged him."

The archer shook his head. "A man should love those of his own breed," said he. "But it is not in nature that an English-born man should love a Scot or a Frenchman. Ma foi! you have not seen a drove of Nithsdale raiders on their Galloway nags, or you would not speak of loving them. I would as soon take Beelzebub himself to my arms. I fear, mon gar, that they have taught thee but badly at Beaulieu, for surely a bishop knows more of what is right and what is ill than an abbot can do, and I myself with these very eyes saw the Bishop of Lincoln hew into a Scottish hobeler with a battle-axe, which was a passing strange way of showing him that he loved him."

Alleyne scarce saw his way to argue in the face of so decided an opinion on the part of a high dignity of the Church. "You have borne arms against the Scots, then?" he asked.

"Yes, I have many times taken the field against them. Ma foi! it is rough soldiering, and a good school for one who would learn to be hardy and war-wise."

"I have heard that the Scots are good men of war," said Hordle John.

"For axemen and for spearmen I have not seen their match," the archer answered. "They can travel, too, with bag of meal and gridiron slung to their sword-belt, so that it is ill to follow them. There are scant crops, and few beeves in the borderland, where a man must reap his grain with sickle in one fist and brown bill in the other. On the other hand, they are the sorriest archers that I have ever seen, and cannot so much as aim with the arbalest, to say nought of the long-bow. Again, they are mostly poor folk, even the nobles among them, so that there are few who can buy as good a brigandine of chain mail as that which I am wearing, and it is ill for them to stand up against our own knights, who carry the price of five Scotch farms upon their chest and shoulders. Man for man, with equal weapons, they are as worthy and valiant men as could be found in the whole of Christendom."

"And the French?" asked Alleyne, to whom the archer's light gossip had all the relish that the words of the man of action have for the recluse.

"The French are also very worthy men. We have had great good fortune in France, and it hath led to much bobance and camp-fire talk, but I have ever noticed that those who know the most have the least to say about it. I have seen Frenchmen fight both in open field, in the intaking and defending of towns or castlewicks, in escalados, camisades, night forays, bushments, sallies, outfalls, and knightly spear-runnings. Their knights and squires, lad, are every whit as good as ours, and I could pick out a score of those who ride behind De Guesclin who would hold the lists with sharpened lances against the best men in the army of England. On the other hand, their common folk are so crushed down with gabelle,

and poll-tax, and every manner of cursed tallage, that the spirit has passed right out of them. It is a fool's plan to teach a man to be a cur in peace, and think that he will be a lion in war. Fleece them like sheep, and sheep they will remain. If the nobles had not conquered the poor folk it is like enough that we should not have conquered the nobles."

"But they must be sorry folk to bow down to the rich in such a fashion," said big John. "I am but a poor commoner of England myself, and yet I know something of charters, liberties, franchises, usuages, privileges, customs and the like. If these be broken, then all men know that it is time to buy arrow-heads."

"Aye, but the men of the law are strong in France as well as the men of war. By my hilt! I hold that a man has more to fear there from the ink-pot of the one than from the iron of the other. There is ever some cursed sheepskin in their strong boxes to prove that the rich man should be richer and the poor man poorer. It would scarce pass in England, but they are quiet folk over the water."

"And what other nations have you seen in your travels, good sir?" asked Alleyne Edricson. His young mind hungered for plain facts of life, after the long course of speculation and of mysticism on which he had been trained.

"I have seen the Low-countryman in arms, and I have nought to say against him. Heavy and slow is he by nature, and is not to be brought into battle for the sake of a lady's eye-lash or the twang of a minstrel's string, like the hotter blood of the south. But, ma foi! lay hand on his wool-bales, or trifle with his velvet of Bruges, and out buzzes every stout burgher, like bees from the tee-hole, ready to lay on as though it were his one business in life. By Our Lady! they have shown the French at Courtrai and elsewhere that they are as deft in wielding steel as in welding it."

"And the men of Spain?"

"They too are very hardy soldiers, the more so as for many hundred years they have had to fight hard against the cursed followers of the black Mahound, who have pressed upon them from the south, and still, as I understand, hold the fairer half of the country. I had a turn with them upon the sea when they came over to Winchelsea, and the good queen with her ladies sat upon the cliffs looking down at us, as if it had been joust or tourney. By my hilt! it was a sight that was worth the seeing, for all that was best in England was out on the water that day. We went forth in little ships and came back in great galleys—for, of fifty tall ships of Spain over two score flew the Cross of St. George ere the sun had set. But now, youngster, I have answered you freely, and I trow it is time that you answered me. Let things be plat and plain between us. I am a man who shoots straight at his mark. You saw the things I had with me at yonder hostel; name which you will, save only the box of rose-coloured sugar which I take to the Lady Loring, and you shall have it if you will but come with me to France."

"Nay, said Alleyne, "I would gladly come with ye to France or where else ye will, just to list to your talk, and because ye are the only two friends that I have in the whole wide world outside of the cloisters; but indeed it may not be, for my duty is towards my brother, seeing that father and mother are dead, and he my elder. Besides, when ye talk of taking me to France, ye do not conceive how useless I should be to you, seeing that neither by training nor by nature am I fitted for the wars, and there seems to be nought but strife in those parts."

"That comes from my fool's talk," cried the archer; "for being a man of no learning myself, my tongue turns to blades and targets even as my hand does. Know then that for every parchment in England there are twenty in France. For every statue, cut gem, shrine, carven screen, or what else might please the eye of a learned clerk, there are a good hundred to our one. At the spoiling of Carcassonne I have seen chambers stored

with writings, though not one man in our Company could read them. Again, in Arles and Nîmes, and other towns that I could name, there are the great arches and fortalices still standing which were built of old by giant men who came from the south. Can I not see by your brightened eye how you would love to look upon these things? Come then with me, and by these ten finger-bones! there is not one of them which you shall not see."

"I should indeed love to look upon them," Alleyne answered; "but I have come from Beaulieu for a purpose and I must be true to my service, even as thou art true to thine."

"Bethink you again, mon ami," quoth Aylward, "that you might do much good yonder, since there are three hundred men in the Company, and none who has ever a word of grace for them, and yet the Virgin knows that there was never a set of men who were in more need of it. Sickerly the one duty may balance the other. Your brother hath done without you this many a year, and, as I gather, he hath never walked as far as Beaulieu to see you during all that time, so he cannot be in any great need of you."

"Besides," said John, "the Socman of Minstead is a bye-word through the forest, from Bramshaw Hill to Holmesley Walk. He is a drunken, brawling, perilous churl, as you may find to your cost."

"The more reason that I should strive to mend him," quoth Alleyne. "There is no need to urge me, friends, for my own wishes would draw me to France, and it would be a joy to me if I could go with you. But indeed and indeed it cannot be, so here I take my leave of you, for yonder square tower amongst the trees upon the right must surely be the church of Minstead, and I may reach it by this path through the woods."

"Well, God be with thee, lad!" cried the archer, pressing Alleyne to his heart. "I am quick to love, and quick to hate, and 'fore God I am loth to part."

"Would it not be well," said John, "that we should wait here, and see what manner of greeting you have from your brother? You may prove to be as welcome as the king's purveyor to the village dame."

"Nay, nay," he answered; "ye must not bide for me, for where I go I stay."

"Yet it may be as well that you should know whither we go," said the archer. "We shall now journey south through the woods until we come out upon the Christchurch road, and so onwards, hoping to-night to reach the castle of Sir William Montacute, Earl of Salisbury, of which Sir Nigel Loring is constable. There we shall bide and it is like enough that for a month or more you may find us there, ere we are ready for our viage back to France."

It was hard indeed for Alleyne to break away from these two new but hearty friends, and so strong was the combat between his conscience and his inclinations that he dared not look round, lest his resolution should slip away from him. It was not until he was deep among the tree trunks that he cast a glance backwards, when he found that he could still see them through the branches on the road above him. The archer was standing with folded arms, his bow jutting from over his shoulder, and the sun gleaming brightly upon his head-piece and the links of his chain-mail. Beside him stood his giant recruit, still clad in the home-spun and ill-fitting garments of the fuller of Lymington, with arms and legs shooting out of his scanty garb. Even as Alleyne watched them they turned upon their heels and plodded off together upon their way.

## 9. *How Strange Things befell in Minstead Wood*

THE path which the young clerk had now to follow lay through a magnificent forest of the very heaviest timber, where the giant boles of oak and of beech formed long aisles in every direction, shooting up their

huge branches to build the majestic arches of Nature's own cathedral. Beneath lay a broad carpet of the softest and greenest moss, flecked over with fallen leaves, but yielding pleasantly to the foot of the traveller. The track which guided him was one so seldom used that in places it lost itself entirely among the grass, to reappear as a reddish rut between the distant tree trunks. It was very still here in the heart of the woodlands. The gentle rustle of the branches and the distant cooing of pigeons were the only sounds which broke in upon the silence, save that once Alleyne heard afar off a merry call upon a hunting bugle and the shrill yapping of the hounds.

It was not without some emotion that he looked upon the scene around him, for, in spite of his secluded life, he knew enough of the ancient greatness of his own family to be aware that the time had been when they had held undisputed and paramount sway over all that tract of country. His father could trace his pure Saxon lineage back to that Godfrey Malf who had held the manors of Bisterne and of Minstead at the time when the Norman first set mailed foot upon English soil. The afforestation of the district, however, and its conversion into a royal demesne had clipped off a large section of his estate, while other parts had been confiscated as a punishment for his supposed complicity in an abortive Saxon rising. The fate of the ancestor had been typical of that of his descendants. During three hundred years their domains had gradually contracted, sometimes through royal or feudal encroachment, and sometimes through such gifts to the Church as that with which Alleyne's father had opened the doors of Beaulieu Abbey to his younger son. The importance of the family had thus dwindled, but they still retained the old Saxon manor-house, with a couple of farms and a grove large enough to afford pannage to a hundred pigs—"sylva de centum porcis," as the old family parchments describe it. Above all, the owner of the soil could still hold his head high as the veritable Socman of Minstead—that is, as holding the land in free

socage, with no feudal superior, and answerable to no man lower than the king. Knowing this, Alleyne felt some little glow of worldly pride as he looked for the first time upon the land with which so many generations of his ancestors had been associated. He pushed on the quicker, twirling his staff merrily, and looking out at every turn of the path for some sign of the old Saxon residence. He was suddenly arrested, however, by the appearance of a wild-looking fellow armed with a club, who sprang out from behind a tree and barred his passage. He was a rough, powerful peasant, with cap and tunic of untanned sheepskin, leather breeches, and galligaskins round legs and feet.

"Stand!" he shouted, raising his heavy cudgel to enforce the order. "Who are you who walk so freely through the wood? Whither would you go, and what is your errand?"

"Why should I answer your questions, my friend?" said Alleyne, standing on his guard.

"Because your tongue may save your pate. But where have I looked upon your face before?"

"No longer ago than last night at the 'Pied Merlin,'" the clerk answered, recognising the escaped serf who had been so outspoken as to his wrongs.

"By the Virgin! yes. You were the little clerk who sat so mum in the corner, and then cried fy on the gleeman. What hast in the scrip?"

"Nought of any price."

"How can I tell that, clerk? Let me see."

"Not I."

"Fool! I could pull you limb from limb like a pullet. What would you have? Hast forgot that we are alone, far from all men? How can your clerkship help you? Wouldst lose scrip and life too?"

"I will part with neither without a fight."

"A fight, quotha? A fight betwixt spurred cock and new-hatched chicken! Thy fighting days may soon be over."

"Hadst asked me in the name of charity I would have given freely," cried Alleyne. "As it stands, not one farthing shall you have with my free will, and when I see my brother, the Socman of Minstead, he will raise hue and cry from vill to vill, from hundred to hundred, until you are taken as a common robber and a scourge to the country."

The outlaw sank his club. "The Socman's brother!" he gasped. "Now, by the keys of Peter! I had rather that hand withered and tongue was palsied ere I had struck or miscalled you. If you are the Socman's brother you are one of the right side, I warrant, for all your clerkly dress."

"His brother I am," replied Alleyne. "But even if I were not, is that reason why you should molest me on the king's ground?"

"I give not the pip of an apple for king or for noble," cried the serf passionately. "Ill have I had from them, and ill I shall repay them. I am a good friend to my friends, and, by the Virgin! an evil foeman to my foes."

"And therefore the worst of foemen to thyself," said Alleyne. "But I pray you since you seem to know him, to point out to me the shortest path to my brother's house."

The serf was about to reply, when the clear ringing call of a bugle burst from the wood close behind them, and Alleyne caught sight for an instant of the dun side and white breast of a lordly stag glancing swiftly betwixt the distant tree trunks. A minute later came the shaggy deerhounds, a dozen or fourteen of them, running on a hot scent, with nose to earth and tail in air. As they streamed past the silent forest around broke suddenly into loud life, with galloping of hoofs, crackling of brushwood, and the short sharp cries of the hunters. Close behind the pack rode a fourrier and a yeoman-pricker, whooping on the laggards and encouraging the leaders, in the shrill half-French jargon which was the language of venery and woodcraft. Alleyne was still gazing after them,

listening to the loud "Hyke-a-Bayard! Hyke-a-Pomers! Hyke-a-Lebryt!" with which they called upon their favourite hounds, when a group of horsemen crashed out through the underwood at the very spot where the serf and he were standing.

The one who led was a man between fifty and sixty years of age, war-worn and weather-beaten, with a broad thoughtful forehead and eyes which shone brightly from under his fierce and overhung brows. His beard, streaked thickly with grey, bristled forward from his chin, and spoke of a passionate nature, while the long finely-cut face and firm mouth marked the leader of men. His figure was erect and soldierly, and he rode his horse with the careless grace of a man whose life had been spent in the saddle. In common garb, his masterful face and flashing eye would have marked him as one who was born to rule; but now, with his silken tunic powdered with golden fleurs-de-lis, his velvet mantle lined with the royal miniver, and the lions of England stamped in silver upon his harness, none could fail to recognise the noble Edward, most warlike and powerful of all the long line of fighting monarchs who had ruled the Anglo-Norman race. Alleyne doffed hat and bowed head at the sight of him, but the serf folded his hands and leaned them upon his cudgel, looking with little love at the knot of nobles and knights-in-waiting who rode behind the king.

"Ha!" cried Edward, reining up for an instant his powerful black steed, "Le cerf est passé? Non? Ici, Brocas; tu parles Anglais."

"The deer, clowns?" said a hard-visaged, swarthy-faced man, who rode at the king's elbow. "If ye have headed it back, it is as much as your ears are worth."

"It passed by the blighted beech there," said Alleyne, pointing, "and the hounds were hard at his heels."

"It is well," cried Edward, still speaking in French; for, though he could understand English, he had never learned to express himself in so barbarous and unpolished a tongue. "By my faith, sirs," he continued, half

turning in his saddle to address his escort, " unless my woodcraft is sadly at fault, it is a stag of six tines and the finest that we have roused this journey. A golden St. Hubert to the man who is the first to sound the mort." He shook his bridle as he spoke, and thundered away, his knights lying low upon their horses and galloping as hard as whip and spur would drive them, in the hope of winning the king's prize. Away they drove down the long green glade—bay horses, black and grey, riders clad in every shade of velvet, fur, or silk, with glint of brazen horn and flash of knife and spear. One only lingered, the black-browed Baron Brocas, who, making a gambade which brought him within arms' sweep of the serf, slashed him across the face with his riding whip. " Doff, dog, doff," he hissed, " when a monarch deigns to lower his eyes to such as you ! "—then spurred through the underwood and was gone, with a gleam of steel shoes and flutter of dead leaves.

The villein took the cruel blow without wince or cry, as one to whom stripes are a birthright and an inheritance. His eyes flashed, however, and he shook his bony hand with a fierce wild gesture after the retreating figure.

" Black hound of Gascony," he muttered, " evil the day that you and those like you set foot in free England ! I know thy kennel of Rochecourt. The night will come when I may do to thee and thine what you and yours have wrought upon mine and me. May God smite me if I fail to smite thee, thou French robber, with thy wife and thy child, and all that is under thy castle roof ! "

" Forbear ! " cried Alleyne. " Mix not God's name with these unhallowed threats ! And yet it was a coward's blow, and one to stir the blood and loose the tongue of the most peaceful. Let me find some soothing simples and lay them on the weal to draw the sting."

" Nay, there is but one thing that can draw the sting, and that the future may bring to me. But, clerk, if you would see your brother you must on, for there is a meeting to-day, and his merry men will await him ere

the shadows turn from west to east. I pray you not to hold him back, for it would be an evil thing if all the stout lads were there and the leader a-missing. I would come with you, but sooth to say I am stationed here and may not move. The path over yonder, betwixt the oak and the thorn, should bring you out into his netherfield."

Alleyne lost no time in following the directions of the wild, masterless man, whom he left among the trees where he had found him. His heart was the heavier for the encounter, not only because all bitterness and wrath were abhorrent to his gentle nature, but also because it disturbed him to hear his brother spoken of as though he were a chief of outlaws or the leader of a party against the State. Indeed, of all the things which he had seen yet in the world to surprise him, there was none more strange than the hate which class appeared to bear to class. The talk of the labourer, woodman and villein in the inn had all pointed to the widespread mutiny, and now his brother's name was spoken as though he were the very centre of the universal discontent. In good truth, the commons throughout the length and breadth of the land were heart-weary of this fine game of chivalry which had been played so long at their expense. So long as knight and baron were a strength and a guard to the kingdom they might be endured ; but now, when all men knew that the great battles in France had been won by English yeomen and Welsh stabbers, warlike fame, the only fame to which his class had ever aspired, appeared to have deserted the plate-clad horseman. The sports of the lists had done much in days gone by to impress the minds of the people, but the plumed and unwieldy champion was no longer an object either of fear or of reverence to men whose fathers and brothers had shot into the press at Crécy, or Poictiers, and seen the proudest chivalry in the world unable to make head against the weapons of disciplined peasants. Power had changed hands. The protector had become the protected, and the whole fabric of the feudal system was tottering to a

fall. Hence the fierce mutterings of the lower classes and the constant discontent breaking out into local tumult and outrage and culminating some years later in the great rising of Tyler. What Alleyne saw and wondered at in Hampshire would have appealed equally to the traveller in any other English county from the Channel to the marches of Scotland.

He was following the track, his misgivings increasing with every step which took him nearer to that home which he had never seen, when of a sudden the trees began to thin and the sward to spread out into a broad green lawn, where five cows lay in the sunshine and droves of black swine wandered unchecked. A brown forest stream swirled down the centre of this clearing, with a rude bridge flung across it, and on the other side was a second field sloping up to a long, low-lying wooden house, with thatched roof and open squares for windows. Alleyne gazed across at it with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes—for this, he knew, must be the home of his fathers. A wreath of blue smoke floated up through a hole in the thatch, and was the only sign of life in the place, save a great black hound which lay sleeping chained to the doorpost. In the yellow shimmer of the autumn sunshine it lay as peacefully and as still as he had oft pictured it to himself in his dreams.

He was roused, however, from his pleasant reverie by the sound of voices, and two people emerged from the forest some little way to his right and moved across the field in the direction of the bridge. The one was a man with yellow flowing beard and very long hair of the same tint drooping over his shoulders; his dress of good Norwich cloth and his assured bearing marked him as a man of position, while the sombre hue of his clothes and the absence of all ornament contrasted with the flash and glitter which had marked the king's retinue. By his side walked a woman, tall and slight and dark, with lithe graceful figure and clear-cut composed features. Her jet-black hair was gathered back under a light pink coif,

her head poised proudly upon her neck, and her step long and springy, like that of some wild tireless woodland creature. She held her left hand in front of her, covered with a red velvet glove, and on the wrist a little brown falcon, very fluffy and bedraggled, which she smoothed and fondled as she walked. As she came out into the sunshine, Alleyne noticed that her light gown, slashed with pink, was all stained with earth and with moss upon one side from shoulder to hem. He stood in the shadow of an oak staring at her with parted lips, for this woman seemed to him to be the most beautiful and graceful creature that mind could conceive of. Such had he imagined the angels, and such he had tried to paint them in the Beaulieu missals; but here there was something human, were it only in the battered hawk and discoloured dress, which sent a tingle and thrill through his nerves such as no dream of radiant and stainless spirit had ever been able to conjure up. Good, quiet, uncomplaining mother Nature, long slighted and miscalled, still bides her time and draws to her bosom the most errant of her children.

The two walked swiftly across the meadow to the narrow bridge, he in front and she a pace or two behind. There they paused, and stood for a few minutes face to face talking earnestly. Alleyne had read and had heard of love and of lovers. Such were these, doubtless—this golden-bearded man and the fair damsel with the cold proud face. Why else should they wander together in the woods or be so lost in talk by the rustic streams? And yet as he watched, uncertain whether to advance from the cover or to choose some other path to the house, he soon came to doubt the truth of this first conjecture. The man stood, tall and square, blocking the entrance to the bridge, and throwing out his hands as he spoke in a wild eager fashion, while the deep tones of his stormy voice rose at times into accents of menace and of anger. She stood fearlessly in front of him, still stroking her bird; but twice she threw a swift questioning glance over her

shoulder, as one who is in search of aid. So moved was the young clerk by these mute appeals, that he came forth from the trees and crossed the meadow, uncertain what to do, and yet loth to hold back from one who might need his aid. So intent were they upon each other that neither took note of his approach ; until, when he was close upon them, the man threw his arm roughly round the damsel's waist and drew her towards him, she straining her lithe supple figure away and striking fiercely at him, while the hooded hawk screamed with ruffled wings and pecked blindly in its mistress's defence. Bird and maid, however, had but little chance against their assailant, who, laughing loudly, caught her wrist in one hand while he drew her towards him with the other.

"The best rose has ever the longest thorns," said he. "Quiet, little one, or you may do yourself a hurt. Must pay Saxon toll on Saxon land, my proud Maude, for all your airs and graces."

"You boor!" she hissed. "You base underbred clod! Is this your care and your hospitality? I would rather wed a branded serf from my father's fields. Leave go, I say—— Ah! good youth, Heaven has sent you. Make him loose me! By the honour of your mother, I pray you to stand by me and to make this knave loose me."

"Stand by you I will, and that blithely," said Alleyne. "Surely, sir, you should take shame to hold the damsel againt her will."

The man turned a face upon him which was lion-like in its strength and in its wrath. With his tangle of golden hair, his fierce blue eyes, and his large, well-marked features, he was the most comely man whom Alleyne had ever seen ; and yet there was something so sinister and so fell in his expression that child or beast might well have shrunk from him. His brows were drawn, his cheek flushed, and there was a mad sparkle in his eyes which spoke of a wild untamable nature.

"Young fool!" he cried, holding the woman still to

his side, though every line of her shrinking figure spoke her abhorrence. "Do you keep your spoon in your own broth. I rede you to go on your way, lest worse befall you. This little wench has come with me, and with me she shall bide."

"Liar!" cried the woman; and, stooping her head, she suddenly bit fiercely into the broad brown hand which held her. He whipped it back with an oath, while she tore herself free and slipped behind Alleyne, cowering up against him like the trembling leveret who sees the falcon poising for the swoop above him.

"Stand off my land!" the man said fiercely, heedless of the blood which trickled freely from his fingers. "What have you to do here? By your dress you should be one of those cursed clerks who overrun the land like vile rats, poking and prying into other men's concerns, too caitiff to fight and too lazy to work. By the rood! if I had my will upon ye, I should nail you upon the abbey doors, as they hang vermin before their holes. Art neither man nor woman, young shaveling. Get thee back to thy fellows ere I lay hands upon you: for your foot is on my land, and I may slay you as a common draw-latch."

"Is this your land, then?" gasped Alleyne.

"Would you dispute it, dog? Would you wish by trick or quibble to juggle me out of these last acres? Know, base-born knave, that you have dared this day to stand in the path of one whose race have been the advisers of kings and the leaders of hosts, ere ever this vile crew of Norman robbers came into the land, or such half-blood hounds as you were let loose to preach that the thief should have his booty and the honest man should sin if he strove to win back his own."

"You are the Socman of Minstead!"

"That am I; and the son of Edric the Socman, of the pure blood of Godfrey the thane, by the only daughter of the house of Aluric, whose forefathers held the white-horse banner at the fatal fight where our shield was

broken and our sword shivered. I tell you, clerk, that my folk held this land from Bramshaw Wood to the Ringwood road; and by the soul of my father! it will be a strange thing if I am to be bearded upon the little that is left of it. Begone, I say, and meddle not with my affair."

"If you leave me now," whispered the woman, "then shame for ever upon your manhood."

"Surely, sir," said Alleyne, speaking in as persuasive and soothing a way as he could, "if your birth is gentle, there is more reason that your manners should be gentle too. I am well persuaded that you did but jest with this lady, and that you will now permit her to leave your land either alone or with me as a guide, if she should need one, through the wood. As to birth, it does not become me to boast, and there is sooth in what you say as to the unworthiness of clerks, but it is none the less true that I am as well born as you!"

"Dog!" cried the furious Socman, "there is no man in the south who can say as much."

"Yet can I," said Alleyne, smiling; "for indeed I also am the son of Edric the Socman, of the pure blood of Godfrey the thane, by the only daughter of Aluric of Brockenhurst. Surely, dear brother," he continued, holding out his hand, "you have a warmer greeting than this for me. There are but two boughs left upon this old Saxon trunk."

His elder brother dashed his hand aside with an oath, while an expression of malignant hatred passed over his passion-drawn features. "You are the young cub of Beaulieu, then?" said he. "I might have known it by the sleek face and the slavish manner, too monk-ridden and craven in spirit to answer back a rough word. Thy father, shaveling, with all his faults, had a man's heart; and there were few who could look him in the eyes on the day of his anger. But you! Look there, rat, on yonder field where the cows graze, and on that other beyond, and on the orchard hard by the church. Do you know that all these were squeezed out of your dying father by greedy

priests, to pay for your upbringing in the cloisters! I, the Socman, am shorn of my lands that you may snivel Latin and eat bread for which you never yet did hand's turn. You rob me first, and now you would come preaching and whining, in search mayhap of another field or two for your priestly friends. Knave! my dogs shall be set upon you; but, meanwhile, stand out of my path, and stop me at your peril!" As he spoke he rushed forward, and throwing the lad to one side, caught the woman's wrist; Alleyne, however, as active as a young deer-hound, sprang to her aid and seized her by the other arm, raising his iron-shod staff as he did so.

"You may say what you will to me," he said between his clenched teeth—"it may be no better than I deserve; but, brother or no, I swear by my hopes of salvation that I will break your arm if you do not leave hold of the maid."

There was a ring in his voice and a flash in his eyes which promised that the blow would follow quick at the heels of the word. For a moment the blood of the long line of hot-headed thanes was too strong for the soft whisperings of the doctrine of meekness and mercy. He was conscious of a fierce wild thrill through his nerves and a throb of mad gladness at his heart, as his real human self burst for an instant the bonds of custom and of teaching which had held it so long. The Socman sprang back, looking to left and to right for some stick or stone which might serve him for weapon; but, finding none, he turned and ran at the top of his speed for the house, blowing the while upon a shrill whistle.

"Come!" gasped the woman. "Fly, friend, ere he come back."

"Nay, let him come!" cried Alleyne. "I shall not budge a foot for him or his dogs."

"Come, come!" she cried, tugging at his arm. "I know the man: he will kill you. Come, for the Virgin's sake, or for my sake, for I cannot go and leave you here."

"Come, then," said he; and they ran together to the

cover of the woods. As they gained the edge of the brushwood, Alleyne, looking back, saw his brother come running out of the house again, with the sun gleaming upon his hair and his beard. He held something which flashed in his right hand, and he stooped at the threshold to unloose the black hound.

"This way!" the woman whispered, in a low eager voice. "Through the bushes to that forked ash. Do not heed me: I can run as fast as you, I trow. Now into the stream—right in, over ankles, to throw the dog off, though I think it is but a common cur, like its master." As she spoke, she sprang herself into the shallow stream and ran swiftly up the centre of it, with the brown water bubbling over her feet, and her hand outstretched to ward off the clinging branches of bramble or sapling. Alleyne followed close at her heels with his mind in a whirl at this black welcome and sudden shifting of all his plans and hopes. Yet, grave as were his thoughts, they would still turn to wonder as he looked at the twinkling feet of his guide and saw her lithe figure bend this way and that, dipping under boughs, springing over stones, with a lightness and ease which made it no small task for him to keep up with her. At last, when he was almost out of breath, she suddenly threw herself down upon a mossy bank, between two holly bushes, and looked ruefully at her own dripping feet and bedraggled skirt.

"Holy Mary!" said she, "what shall I do? Mother will keep me to my chamber for a month, and make me work at the tapestry of the nine bold knights. She promised as much last week, when I fell into Wilverley bog, and yet she knows that I cannot abide needlework."

Alleyne, still standing in the stream, glanced down at the graceful pink-and-white figure, the curve of raven-black hair, and the proud, sensitive face, which looked up frankly and confidingly at his own.

"We had best on," he said. "He may yet overtake us."

"Not so. We are well off his land now, nor can he

tell in this great wood which way we have taken. But you—you had him at your mercy. Why did you not kill him ? ”

“ Kill him ! My brother ! ”

“ And why not ? ”—with a quick gleam of her white teeth. “ He would have killed you. I know him, and I read it in his eyes. Had I had your staff I would have tried—aye, and done it, too.” She shook her clenched white hand as she spoke, and her lips tightened ominously.

“ I am already sad in heart for what I have done,” said he, sitting down on the bank, and sinking his face into his hands, “ God help me !—all that is worst in me seemed to come uppermost. Another instant, and I had smitten him ; the son of my own mother, the man whom I have longed to take to my heart. Alas ! that I should still be so weak ! ”

“ Weak ! ” she exclaimed, raising her black eyebrows. “ I do not think that even my father himself, who is a hard judge of manhood, would call you that. But it is, as you may think, sir, a very pleasant thing for me to hear that you are grieved at what you have done, and I can but rede that we should go back together, and you should make your peace with the Socman by handing back your prisoner. It is a sad thing that so small a thing as a woman should come between two who are of one blood.”

Simple Alleyne opened his eyes at this little spurt of feminine bitterness. “ Nay, lady,” said he, “ that were worst of all. What man would be so caitiff and thrall as to fail you at your need ? I have turned my brother against me, and now, alas ! I appear to have given you offence also with my clumsy tongue. But, indeed, lady, I am torn both ways, and can scarce grasp in my mind what it is that has befallen.”

“ Nor can I marvel at that,” said she, with a little tinkling laugh. “ You came in as the knight does in the jongleur's romances, between dragon and damsel, with small time for the asking of questions. Come,” she went on, springing to her feet, and smoothing down her

rumpled frock, " let us walk through the shaw together, and we may come upon Bertrand with the horses. If poor Troubadour had not cast a shoe, we should not have had this trouble. Nay, I must have your arm : for, though I speak lightly, now that all is happily over I am as frightened as my brave Roland. See how his chest heaves, and his dear feathers all awry—the little knight who would not have his lady mishandled." So she prattled on to her hawk, while Alleyne walked by her side, stealing a glance from time to time at this queenly and wayward woman. In silence they wandered together over the velvet turf and on through the broad Minstead woods, where the old lichen-draped beeches threw their circles of black shadow upon the sunlit sward.

" You have no wish, then, to hear my story ? " said she, at last.

" If it pleases you to tell it me," he answered.

" Oh ! " she cried, tossing her head, " if it is of so little interest to you, we had best let it bide."

" Nay," said he eagerly, " I would fain hear it."

" You have a right to know it, if you have lost a brother's favour through it. And yet—— Ah, well, you are, as I understand, a clerk, so I must think of you as one step further in orders, and make you my father-confessor. Know then that this man has been a suitor for my hand, less as I think for my own sweet sake than because he hath ambition, and had it on his mind that he might improve his fortunes by dipping into my father's strong-box—though the Virgin knows that he would have found little enough therein. My father, however, is a proud man, a gallant knight and tried soldier of the oldest blood, to whom this man's churlish birth and low descent—— Oh, lackaday ! I had forgot that he was of the same strain as yourself."

" Nay, trouble not for that," said Alleyne, " we are all from good mother Eve."

" Streams may spring from one source, and yet some be clear and some be foul," quoth she quickly. " But,

to be brief over the matter, my father would have none of his wooing, or in sooth would I. On that he swore a vow against us, and as he is known to be a perilous man, with many outlaws and others at his back, my father forbade that I should hawk or hunt in any part of the wood to the north of Christchurch road. As it chanced, however, this morning my little Roland here was loosed at a strong-winged heron, and page Bertrand and I rode on, with no thoughts but for the sport, until we found ourselves in Minstead Woods. Small harm then, but that my horse Troubadour trod with a tender foot upon a sharp stick, rearing and throwing me to the ground. See to my gown, the third that I have befouled within the week. Woe worth me when Agatha the tirewoman sets eyes upon it."

"And what then, lady?" asked Alleyne.

"Why, then away ran Troubadour, for belike I spurred him in falling, and Bertrand rode after him as hard as hoofs could bear him. When I rose there was the Socman himself by my side, with the news that I was on his land, but with so many courteous words besides, and such gallant bearing, that he prevailed upon me to come to his house for shelter, there to wait until the page return. By the grace of the Virgin and the help of my patron St. Magdalen, I stopped short ere I reached his door, though, as you saw, he strove to hale me up to it. And then—ah-h-h-h!"—she shivered and chattered like one in an ague fit.

"What is it?" cried Alleyne, looking about in alarm.

"Nothing, friend, nothing! I was but thinking how I bit into his hand. Sooner would I bite living toad or poisoned snake. Oh, I shall loathe my lips for ever! But you—how brave you were, and how quick! How meek for yourself, and how bold for a stranger! If I were a man, I should wish to do what you have done."

"It is a small thing," he answered, with a tingle of pleasure at these sweet words of praise. "But you—what will you do?"

"There is a great oak near here, and I think that Bertrand will bring the horses there, for it is an old hunting-tryst of ours. Then hey for home, and no more hawking to-day! A twelve-mile gallop will dry feet and skirt."

"But your father?"

"Not one word shall I tell him. You do not know him; but I can tell you he is not a man to disobey as I have disobeyed him. He would avenge me, it is true, but it is not to him that I shall look for vengeance. Some day, perchance in joust or in tourney, knight may wish to wear my colours, and then I shall tell him that if he does indeed crave my favour there is wrong unredressed, and the wronger the Socman of Minstead. So my knight shall find a venture such as bold knights love, and my debt shall be paid, and my father none the wiser, and one rogue the less in the world. Say, is not that a brave plan?"

"Nay, lady, it is a thought which is unworthy of you. How can such as you speak of violence and of vengeance? Are none to be gentle and kind, none to be piteous and forgiving? Alas! it is a hard, cruel world, and I would that I had never left my abbey cell. To hear such words from your lips is as though I heard an angel of grace preaching the devil's own creed."

She started from him as a young colt who first feels the bit. "Gramercy for your rede, young sir!" she said, with a little curtsey. "As I understand your words, you are grieved that you ever met me, and look upon me as a preaching devil. Why, my father is a bitter man when he is wroth, but hath never called me such a name as that. It may be his right and duty, but certes it is none of thine. So it would be best, since you think so lowly of me, that you should take this path to the left while I keep on upon this one; for it is clear that I can be no fit companion for you." So saying, with downcast lids and a dignity which was somewhat marred by her bedraggled skirt, she swept off down the ruddy track, leaving Alleyne standing staring ruefully after her. He waited in vain

for some backward glance or sign of relenting, but she walked on with a rigid neck until her dress was only a white flutter among the leaves. Then, with a sunken head and a heavy heart, he plodded wearily down the other path, wroth with himself for the rude and uncouth tongue which had given offence where so little was intended.

He had gone some way, lost in doubt and in self-reproach, his mind all tremulous with a thousand new-found thoughts and fears and wonderments, when of a sudden there was a light rustle of the leaves behind him, and glancing round, there was this graceful, swift-footed creature, treading in his very shadow, with her proud head bowed, even as his was—the picture of humility and repentance.

"I shall not vex you, nor even speak," she said; "but I would fain keep with you while we are in the wood."

"Nay, you cannot vex me," he answered, all warm again at the very sight of her. "It was my rough words which vexed you; but I have been thrown among men all my life, and indeed, with all the will, I scarce know how to temper my speech to a lady's ear."

"Then unsay it," cried she quickly; "say that I was right to wish to have vengeance on the Socman."

"Nay, I cannot do that," he answered gravely.

"Then who is ungentle and unkind now?" she cried in triumph. "How stern and cold you are for one so young! Art surely no mere clerk, but bishop or cardinal at the least. Shouldst have crozier for staff and mitre for cap. Well, well, for your sake I will forgive the Socman and take vengeance on none but on my own wilful self who must needs run into danger's path. So will that please you, sir?"

"There spoke your true self," said he; "and you will find more pleasure in such forgiveness than in any vengeance."

She shook her head, as if by no means assured of it, and then with a sudden little cry, which had more of surprise than of joy in it, "Here is Bertrand with the horses!"

Down the glade there came a little green-clad page with laughing eyes, and long curls floating behind him. He sat perched on a high bay horse, and held on to the bridle of a spirited black palfrey, the hides of both glistening from a long run.

"I have sought you everywhere, dear Lady Maude," said he in a piping voice, springing down from his horse and holding the stirrup. "Troubadour galloped as far as Holmhill ere I could catch him. I trust that you had no hurt or scath?" He shot a questioning glance at Alleyne as he spoke.

"No, Bertrand," said she, "thanks to this courteous stranger. And now, sir," she continued, springing into her saddle, "it is not fit that I leave you without a word more. Clerk or no, you have acted this day as becomes a true knight. King Arthur and all his table could not have done more. It may be that, as some small return, my father or his kin may have power to advance your interest. He is not rich, but he is honoured and hath great friends. Tell me what is your purpose, and see if he may not aid it."

"Alas! lady, I have now no purpose. I have but two friends in the world, and they have gone to Christchurch, where it is likely I shall join them."

"And where in Christchurch?"

"At the castle which is held by the brave knight, Sir Nigel Loring, constable to the Earl of Salisbury."

To his surprise she burst out a-laughing, and, spurring her palfrey, dashed off down the glade, with her page riding behind her. Not one word did she say, but as she vanished amid the trees she half turned in her saddle and waved a last greeting. Long time he stood, half hoping that she might again come back to him; but the thud of the hoofs had died away, and there was no sound in all the woods but the gentle rustle and dropping of the leaves. At last he turned away and made his way back to the high road—another person from the light-hearted boy who had left it a short three hours before.

## 10. *How Hordle John found a Man whom he might Follow*

IF he might not return to Beaulieu within the year, and if his brother's dogs were to be set upon him if he showed face upon Minstead land, then indeed he was adrift upon the earth. North, south, east and west—he might turn where he would, but all was equally chill and cheerless. The Abbot had rolled ten silver crowns in a lettuce-leaf and hid them away in the bottom of his scrip, but that would be a sorry support for twelve long months. In all the darkness there was but the one bright spot of the sturdy comrades whom he had left that morning; if he could find them again all would be well. The afternoon was not very advanced, for all that had befallen him. When a man is afoot at cock-crow much may be done in the day. If he walked fast he might yet overtake his friends ere they reached their destination. He pushed on, therefore, now walking and now running. As he journeyed he bit into a crust which remained from his Beaulieu bread, and he washed it down with a draught from a woodland stream.

It was no easy or light thing to journey through this great forest, which was some twenty miles from east to west and a good sixteen from Bramshaw Woods in the north to Lymington in the south. Alleyne, however, had the good fortune to fall in with a woodman, axe upon shoulder, trudging along in the very direction that he wished to go. With his guidance he passed the fringe of Bolderwood Walk, famous for old ash and yew, through Mark Ash, with its giant beech trees, and on through the Knightwood groves, where the giant oak was already a great tree, but only one of many comely brothers. They plodded along together, the woodman and Alleyne, with little talk on either side for, their thoughts were as far asunder as the poles. The peasant's gossip had been of the hunt, of the bracken, of the grey-headed kites that

had nested in Wood Fidley, and of the great catch of herring brought back by the boats of Pitt's Deep. The clerk's mind was on his brother, on his future—above all on this strange, fierce, melting, beautiful woman who had broken so suddenly into his life, and as suddenly had passed out of it again. So *distrait* was he, and so random his answers, that the woodman took to whistling, and soon branched off upon the track to Burley, leaving Alleyne upon the main Christchurch road.

Down this he pushed as fast as he might, hoping at every turn and rise to catch sight of his companions of the morning. From Vinney Ridge to Rhinefield Walk the woods grow thick and dense up to the very edges of the track, but beyond the country opens up into broad dun-coloured moors, flecked with clumps of trees, and topping each other in long low curves up to the dark lines of forest in the farthest distance. Clouds of insects danced and buzzed in the golden autumn light, and the air was full of the piping of the song-birds. Long glinting dragon-flies shot across the path, or hung tremulous with gauzy wings and gleaming bodies. Once a white-necked sea eagle soared screaming high over the traveller's head, and again a flock of brown bustards popped up from among the bracken, and blundered away in their clumsy fashion, half running, half flying, with strident cry and whirr of wings.

There were folk, too, to be met upon the road—beggars and couriers, chapmen and tinkers—cheery fellows for the most part, with a rough jest and homely greeting for each other and for Alleyne. Near Shotwood he came upon five seamen, on their way from Poole to Southampton—rude red-faced men, who shouted at him in a jargon which he could scarce understand, and held out to him a great pot from which they had been drinking—nor would they let him pass until he had dipped pannikin in and taken a mouthful which set him coughing and choking, with the tears running down his cheeks. Farther on he met a sturdy black-bearded man, mounted on a brown horse, with a rosary in his right hand and a long two-

handed sword jangling against his stirrup-iron. By his black robe and the eight-pointed cross upon his sleeve, Alleyne recognised him as one of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem, whose presbytery was at Baddesley. He held up two fingers as he passed, with a "*Benedic, fili mi!*" whereat Alleyne doffed hat and bent knee, looking with much reverence at one who had devoted his life to the overthrow of the infidel. Poor simple lad! he had not learned yet that what men are and what men profess to be are very wide asunder, and that the Knights of St. John, having come into large part of the riches of the ill-fated Templars, were very much too comfortable to think of exchanging their palace for a tent, or the cellars of England for the thirsty deserts of Syria. Yet ignorance may be more precious than wisdom, for Alleyne as he walked on braced himself to a higher life by the thought of this other's sacrifice, and strengthened himself by his example, which he could scarce have done had he known that the Hospitaller's mind ran more upon malmsey than on Mamelukes, and on venison rather than victories.

As he pressed on the plain turned to woods once more in the region of Wilverley Walk, and a cloud swept up from the south with the sun shining through the chinks of it. A few great drops came pattering loudly down, and then in a moment the steady swish of a brisk shower, with the dripping and dropping of the leaves. Alleyne, glancing round for shelter, saw a thick and lofty holly-bush, so hollowed out beneath that no house could have been drier. Under this canopy of green two men were already squatted, who waved their hands to Alleyne that he should join them. As he approached he saw that they had five dried herrings laid out in front of them, with a great hunch of wheaten bread and a leathern flask full of milk, but instead of setting to at their food they appeared to have forgotten all about it, and were disputing together with flushed faces and angry gestures. It was easy to see by their dress and manner that they were two of those

wandering students who formed about this time so enormous a multitude in every country in Europe. The one was long and thin, with melancholy features, while the other was fat and sleek, with a loud voice and the air of a man who is not to be gainsaid.

"Come hither, good youth," he cried, "come hither! *Vultus ingenui puer*. Heed not the face of my good coz here. *Fœnum habet in cornu*, as Dan Horace has it; but I warrant him harmless for all that."

"Stint your bull's bellowing!" exclaimed the other. "If it come to Horace, I have a line in my mind: *Loquaces si sapiat*—— How doth it run? The English o't being that a man of sense should ever avoid a great talker. That being so, if all were men of sense, then thou wouldst be a lonesome man, coz."

"Alas! Dicon, I fear that your logic is as bad as your philosophy or your divinity—and God wot it would be hard to say a worse word than that for it. For, hark ye: granting, *propter argumentum*, that I am a talker, then the true reasoning runs that since all men of sense should avoid me, and thou hast not avoided me, but art at the present moment eating herrings with me under a holly-bush, ergo you are no man of sense, which is exactly what I have been dinning into your long ears ever since I first clapped eyes on your sunken chops."

"Tut, tut!" cried the other. "Your tongue goes like the clapper of a mill-wheel. Sit down here, friend, and partake of this herring. Understand, first, however, that there are certain conditions attached to it."

"I had hoped," said Alleyne, falling into the humour of the twain, "that a tranchoir of bread and a draught of milk might be attached to it."

"Hark to him, hark to him!" cried the little fat man. "It is ever thus, Dicon! Wit, lad, is a catching thing, like the itch or the sweating sickness. I exude it around me; it is an aura. I tell you, coz, that no man can come within seventeen feet of me without catching a spark. Look at your own case. A duller man never stepped,

and yet within the week you have said three things which might pass, and one thing the day we left Fordingbridge which I should not have been ashamed of myself."

"Enough, rattlepate, enough!" said the other. "The milk you shall have and the bread also, friend, together with the herring, but you must hold the scales between us."

"If he hold the herring he holds the scales, my sapient brother," cried the fat man. "But I pray you, good youth, to tell us whether you are a learned clerk, and, if so, whether you have studied at Oxenford or at Paris."

"I have some small stock of learning," Alleyne answered, picking at his herring, "but I have been at neither of these places. I was bred amongst the Cistercian monks at Beaulieu Abbey."

"Pooh, pooh!" they cried both together. "What sort of an upbringing is that?"

"*Non cuivis contingit adire Corinthum*," quoth Alleyne.

"Come, brother Stephen, he hath some tincture of letters," said the melancholy man more hopefully. "He may be the better judge, since he hath no call to side with either of us. Now, attention, friend, and let your ears work as well as your nether jaw. *Judex damnatur*—you know the old saw. Here am I upholding the good fame of the learned Duns Scotus against the foolish quibblings and poor silly reasonings of Willie Ockham."

"While I," quoth the other loudly, "do maintain the good sense and extraordinary wisdom of that most learned William against the crack-brained fantasies of the muddy Scotchman, who hath hid such little wit as he has under so vast a pile of words, that it is like one drop of Gascony in a firkin of ditch-water. Solomon his wisdom would not suffice to say what the rogue means."

"Certes, Stephen Hapgood, his wisdom doth not suffice," cried the other. "It is as though a mole cried out against the morning star, because he could not see it. But our dispute, friend, is concerning the nature of that subtle essence which we call thought. For I hold with the learned Scotus that thought is in very truth a thing,

even as vapour or fumes, or many other substances which our gross bodily eyes are blind to. For, look you, that which produces a thing must be itself a thing, and if a man's thought may produce a written book, then must thought itself be a material thing, even as the book is. Have I expressed it? Do I make it plain?"

"Whereas I hold," shouted the other, "with my revered preceptor, *doctor præclarus et excellentissimus*, that all things are but thought; for when thought is gone I prythee where are the things then? Here are trees about us, and I see them because I think I see them; but if I have swooned, or sleep, or am in wine, then my thought having gone forth from me, lo the trees go forth also. How now, coz, have I touched thee on the raw?"

Alleyne sat between them munching his bread while the twain disputed across his knees, leaning forward with flushed faces and darting hands, in all the heat of argument. Never had he heard such jargon of scholastic philosophy, such fine-drawn distinctions, such cross-fire of major and minor proposition, syllogism, attack and refutation. Question clattered upon answer like a sword on a buckler. The ancients, the fathers of the Church, the moderns, the Scriptures, the Arabians, were each sent hurtling against the other, while the rain still dripped and the dark holly-leaves glistened with the moisture. At last the fat man seemed to weary of it, for he set to work quietly upon his meal, while his opponent, as proud as a rooster who is left unchallenged upon the midden, crowed away in a last long burst of quotation and deduction. Suddenly, however, his eyes dropped upon his food, and he gave a howl of dismay.

"You double thief!" he cried, "you have eaten my herrings, and I without bite or sup since morning."

"That," quoth the other complacently, "was my final argument, my crowning effort, or *peroratio*, as the orators have it. For, coz, since all thoughts are things, you have but to think a pair of herrings, and then conjure up a pottle of milk wherewith to wash them down."

"A brave piece of reasoning," cried the other, "and I know of but one reply to it." On which, leaning forward, he caught his comrade a rousing smack across his rosy cheek. "Nay, take it not amiss," he said; "since all things are but thoughts, then that also is but a thought, and may be disregarded."

This last argument, however, by no means commended itself to the pupil of Ockham, who plucked a great stick from the ground and signified his dissent by smiting the realist over the pate with it. By good fortune, the wood was so light and rotten that it went to a thousand splinters; but Alleyne thought it best to leave the twain to settle the matter at their leisure, the more so as the sun was shining brightly once more. Looking back down the pool-strewn road, he saw the two excited philosophers waving their hands and shouting at each other, but their babble soon became a mere drone in the distance, and a turn in the road hid them from his sight.

And now, after passing Holmesley Walk and the Wooton Heath, the forest began to shred out into scattered belts of trees, with gleam of cornfield and stretch of pasture-land between. Here and there by the wayside stood little knots of wattle-and-daub huts, with shock-haired labourers lounging by the doors and red-cheeked children sprawling in the roadway. Back among the groves he could see the high gable ends and thatched roofs of the franklins' houses, on whose fields these men found employment, or more often a thick dark column of smoke marked their position and hinted at the coarse plenty within. By these signs Alleyne knew that he was on the very fringe of the forest, and therefore no great way from Christchurch. The sun was lying low in the west and shooting its level rays across the long sweep of rich green country, glinting on the white-fleeced sheep, and throwing long shadows from the red kine who waded knee-deep in the juicy clover. Right glad was the traveller to see the high tower of Christchurch Priory gleaming in the mellow evening light, and gladder still

when, on rounding a corner, he came upon his comrades of the morning seated astraddle upon a fallen tree. They had a flat space before them, on which they alternately threw little square pieces of bone, and were so intent upon their occupation that they never raised eye as he approached them. He observed with astonishment, as he drew near, that the archer's bow was on John's back, the archer's sword by John's side, and the steel cap laid upon the tree-trunk between them.

"Mort de ma vie!" Aylward shouted, looking down at the dice. "Never had I such cursed luck. A murrain on the bones! I have not thrown a good main since I left Navarre. A one and a three! En avant, camarade!"

"Four and three," cried Hordle John, counting on his great fingers, "that makes seven. Ho, archer, I have thy cap! Now have at thee for thy jerkin!"

"Mon Dieu!" he growled, "I am like to reach Christchurch in my shirt." Then suddenly glancing up, "Hola, by the splendour of heaven, here is our cher petit! Now, by my ten finger-bones! this is a rare sight to mine eyes." He sprang up and threw his arms round Alleyne's neck, while John, no less pleased, but more backward and Saxon in his habits, stood grinning and bobbing by the wayside, with his newly won steel cap stuck wrong side foremost upon his tangle of red hair.

"Hast come to stop?" cried the bowman, patting Alleyne all over in his delight. "Shall not get away from us again!"

"I wish no better," said he, with a pringling in the eyes at this hearty greeting.

"Well said, lad!" cried big John. "We three shall to the wars together, and the devil may fly away with the Abbot of Beaulieu! But your feet and hosen are all besmudged. Hast been in the water, or I am the more mistaken."

"I have in good sooth," Alleyne answered, and then as they journeyed on their way he told them the many things that had befallen him, his meeting with the villein, his

sight of the king, his coming upon his brother, with all the tale of the black welcome and of the fair damsel. They strode on either side, each with an ear slanting towards him, but ere he had come to the end of his story the bowman had spun round upon his heel, and was hastening back the way they had come, breathing loudly through his nose.

"What then?" asked Alleyne, trotting after him and gripping at his jerkin.

"I am back for Minstead, lad."

"And why, in the name of sense?"

"To thrust a handful of steel into the Socman. What! hale a demoiselle against her will, and then loose dogs at his own brother! Let me go!"

"Nenny, nenny!" cried Alleyne, laughing. "There was no scath done. Come back, friend"—and so, by mingled pushing and entreaties, they got his head round for Christchurch once more. Yet he walked with his chin upon his shoulder, until, catching sight of a maiden by a wayside well, the smiles came back to his face and peace to his heart.

"But you," said Alleyne, "there have been changes with you also. Why should not the workman carry his tools? Where are bow, and sword, and cap—and why so warlike, John?"

"It is a game which friend Aylward hath been a-teaching of me."

"And I found him an over-apt pupil," grumbled the bowman. "He hath stripped me as though I had fallen into the hands of the tardvenus. But, by my hilt! you must render them back to me, camarade, lest you bring discredit upon my mission, and I will pay you for them at armourers' prices."

"Take them back, man, and never heed the pay," said John. "I did but wish to learn the feel of them, since I am like to have such trinkets hung to my own girdle for some years to come."

"Ma foi, he was born for a free companion!" cried

Aylward. "He hath the very trick of speech and turn of thought. I take them back then, and indeed it gives me unease not to feel my yew-stave tapping against my leg-bone. But see, mes garçons, on this side of the church rises the square and darkling tower of Earl Salisbury's castle, and even from here I seem to see on yonder banner the red roebuck of the Montacutes."

"Red upon white," said Alleyne, shading his eyes; "but whether roebuck or no is more than I could vouch. How black is the great tower, and how bright the gleam of arms upon the wall! See below the flag, how it twinkles like a star!"

"Aye, it is the steel head-piece of the watchman," remarked the archer. "But we must on, if we are to be there before the drawbridge rises at the vespers bugle; for it is likely that Sir Nigel, being so renowned a soldier, may keep hard discipline within the walls, and let no man enter after sundown." So saying, he quickened his pace, and the three comrades were soon close to the straggling and broadspread town which centred round the noble church and the frowning castle.

It chanced on that very evening that Sir Nigel Loring, having supped before sunset, as was his custom, and having himself seen that Pommers and Cadsand, his two war-horses, with the thirteen hacks, the five jennets, my lady's three palfreys, and the great dapple-grey roussin, had all their needs supplied, had taken his dogs for an evening breather. Sixty or seventy of them, large and small, smooth and shaggy—deer-hound, boar-hound, blood-hound, wolf-hound, mastiff, alaun, talbot, lurcher, terrier, spaniel—snapping, yelling and whining, with score of lolling tongues and waving tails, came surging down the narrow lane which leads from the Twynham kennels to the bank of Avon. Two russet-clad varlets, with loud halloo and cracking whips, walked thigh-deep amid the swarm, guiding, controlling, and urging. Behind came Sir Nigel himself, with Lady Loring upon his arm, the pair walking slowly and sedately, as befitted

both their age and their condition, while they watched with a smile in their eyes the scrambling crowd in front of them. They paused, however, at the bridge, and, leaning their elbows upon the stonework, they stood looking down at their own faces in the glassy stream, and at the swift flash of speckled trout against the tawny gravel.

Sir Nigel was a slight man of poor stature, with soft lisping voice and gentle ways. So short was he that his wife, who was no very tall woman, had the better of him by the breadth of three fingers. His sight having been injured in his early wars by a basketful of lime which had been emptied over him when he led the Earl of Derby's stormers up the breach at Bergerac, he had contracted something of a stoop, with a blinking, peering expression of face. His age was six-and-forty, but the constant practice of arms, together with a cleanly life, had preserved his activity and endurance unimpaired, so that from a distance he seemed to have the slight limbs and swift grace of a boy. His face, however, was tanned of a dull yellow tint, with a leathery poreless look, which spoke of rough outdoor doings, and the little pointed beard which he wore, in deference to the prevailing fashion, was streaked and shot with grey. His features were small, delicate, and regular, with clear-cut curving nose, and eyes which jutted forward from the lids. His dress was simple and yet spruce. A Flandrish hat of beevor, bearing in the band the token of Our Lady of Embrun, was drawn low upon the left side to hide that ear which had been partly shorn from his head by a Flemish man-at-arms in a camp broil before Tournay. His cote-hardie, or tunic, and trunk-hosen were of a purple plum colour, with long weepers which hung from either sleeve to below his knees. His shoes were of red leather, daintily pointed at the toes, but not yet prolonged to the extravagant lengths which the succeeding reign was to bring into fashion. A gold-embroidered belt of knighthood encircled his loins, with his arms, five roses gules on a field argent, cunningly worked upon the clasp. So stood Sir

Nigel Loring upon the bridge of Avon, and talked lightly with his lady.

And, certes, had the two visages alone been seen, and the stranger been asked which were the more likely to belong to the bold warrior whose name was loved by the roughest soldiery of Europe, he had assuredly selected the lady's. Her face was square and strong, with thick brows, and the eyes of one who was accustomed to rule. Taller and broader than her husband, her flowing gown of sendal, and fur-lined tippet, could not conceal the full outlines of her figure. It was the age of martial women. The deeds of Black Agnes of Dunbar, of Lady Salisbury and of the Countess of Montfort, were still fresh in the public mind. With such examples before them, the wives of the English captains had become as warlike as their mates, and ordered their castles in their absence with the prudence and discipline of veteran seneschals. Right easy were the Montacutes of their Castle of Twynham, and little had they to dread from roving galley or French squadron while Lady Mary Loring had the ordering of it. There were men who said that of all the stern passages and daring deeds by which Sir Nigel Loring had proved the true temper of his courage, not the least was his wooing and winning of so high-mettled a dame.

"I tell you, my fair lord," she was saying, "that it is no fit training for a demoiselle: hawks and hounds, rotes and citoles, singing a French rondel, or reading the Gestes de Doon de Mayence, as I found her yesternight, pretending sleep, the artful, with the corner of the scroll thrusting forth from under her pillow. Lent her by Father Christopher of the Priory, forsooth—that is ever her answer. How shall all this help her when she has castle of her own to keep, with a hundred mouths all agape for beef and beer?"

"True, my sweet bird, true," answered the knight, picking a comfit from his gold drageoir. "The maid is like the young filly, which kicks heels and plunges for very lust of life. Give her time, dame, give her time."

"Well I know that my father would have given me, not time, but a good hazel-stick across my shoulders. Ma foi! I know not what the world is coming to, when young maids may flout their elders. I wonder that you do not correct her, my fair lord."

"Nay, my heart's comfort, I never raised hand to woman yet, and it would be a passing strange thing if I began upon my own flesh and blood. It was a woman's hand which cast this lime into mine eyes, and though I saw her stoop, and might well have stopped her ere she threw, I deemed it unworthy of my knighthood to hinder or balk one of her sex."

"The hussy!" cried Lady Loring, clenching her broad right hand. "I would I had been at the side of her!"

"And so would I, since you would have been the nearer me, my own. But I doubt not that you are right, and that Maude's wings need clipping, which I may leave in your hands when I am gone, for, in sooth, this peaceful life is not for me, and were it not for your gracious kindness and loving care I could not abide it a week. I hear that there is talk of warlike muster at Bordeaux once more, and by St. Paul! it would be a new thing if the lions of England and the red pile of Chandos were to be seen in the field, and the roses of Loring were not waving by their side."

"Now woe worth me but I feared it!" cried she, with the colour all struck from her face. "I have noted your absent mind, your kindling eye, your trying and riveting of old harness. Consider, my sweet lord, that you have already won much honour, that we have seen but little of each other, that you bear upon your body the scars of over twenty wounds received in I know not how many bloody encounters. Have you not done enough for honour and the public cause?"

"My lady, when our liege lord the king at nigh threescore, and my Lord Chandos at threescore and ten, are blithe and ready to lay lance in rest for England's cause,

it would ill beseem me to prate of service done. It is sooth that I have received seven-and-twenty wounds. There is the more reason that I should be thankful that I am still long of breath and sound in limb. I have also seen some bickering and scuffling. Six great land battles I count, with four upon the sea, and seven-and-fifty onfalls, skirmishes and bushments. I have held two-and-twenty towns, and I have been at the intaking of thirty-one. Surely then it would be bitter shame to me, and also to you, since my fame is yours, that I should now hold back if a man's work is to be done. Besides, bethink you how low is our purse, with bailiff and reeve ever croaking of empty farms and wasting lands. Were it not for this constableship which the Earl of Salisbury hath bestowed upon us we could scarce uphold the state which is fitting to our degree. Therefore, my sweeting, there is the more need that I should turn to where there is good pay to be earned and brave ransoms to be won."

"Ah, my dear lord," quoth she, with sad, weary eyes. "I thought that at last I had you to mine own self, even though your youth had been spent afar from my side. Yet my voice, as I know well, should speed you on to glory and renown, not hold you back when fame is to be won. Yet what can I say?—for all men know that your valour needs the curb and not the spur. It goes to my heart that you should ride forth now a mere knight bachelor, when there is no noble in the land who has so good a claim to the square pennon, save only that you have not the money to uphold it."

"And whose fault that, my sweet bird?" said he.

"No fault, my fair lord, but a virtue; for how many rich ransoms have you won, and yet have scattered the crowns among page and archer and varlet, until in a week you had not as much as would buy food and forage. It is a most knightly largesse, and yet withouten money how can man rise?"

"Dirt and dross!" cried he. "What matter rise or fall, so that duty be done and honour gained! Banneret

or bachelor, square pennon or forked, I would not give a denier for the difference, and the less since Sir John Chandos, chosen flower of English chivalry, is himself but a humble knight. But meanwhile fret not thyself, my heart's dove, for it is like that there may be no war waged, and we must await the news. But here are three strangers, and one, as I take it, a soldier fresh from service. It is likely that he may give us word of what is stirring over the water."

Lady Loring glancing up, saw in the fading light three companions walking abreast down the road, all grey with dust, and stained with travel, yet chattering merrily between themselves. He in the midst was young and comely, with boyish open face and bright grey eyes, which glanced from right to left as though he found the world around him both new and pleasing. To his right walked a huge red-headed man with broad smile and merry twinkle, whose clothes seemed to be bursting and splitting at every seam, as though he were some lusty chick who was breaking bravely from his shell. On the other side, with his knotted hand upon the young man's shoulder, came a stout and burly archer, brown and fierce-eyed, with sword at belt and long yellow yew-stave peeping over his shoulder. Hard face, battered headpiece, dinted brigandine, with faded red lion of St. George ramping on a discoloured ground, all proclaimed as plainly as words that he was indeed from the land of war. He looked keenly at Sir Nigel as he approached, and then, plunging his hand under his breast-plate, he stepped up to him with a rough uncouth bow to the lady.

"Your pardon, fair sir," said he, "but I fear you forget one who was once your humble friend and comrade."

"Nay, it is Samkin Aylward," cried the knight. "Often have I wondered what cheer you made, for it is indeed many years since I last set eyes upon your face."

"Aye, my master; it is other days since we set forth together from Tilford with our faces towards the wars," said the archer.

"It is great joy to see you once again. Rest awhile, and you shall come to the hall anon and tell us what is passing in France, for I have heard that it is likely that our pennons may flutter to the south of the great Spanish mountains ere another year be passed."

"There was talk of it in Bordeaux," answered the archer, "and I saw myself that the armourers and smiths were as busy as rats in a wheat-rick. But I bring you this letter from the valiant Gascon knight, Sir Claude Latour. And to you, lady," he added after a pause, "I bring from him this box of red sugar of Narbonne, with every courteous and knightly greeting which a gallant cavalier may make to a fair and noble dame."

This little speech had cost the blunt bowman much pains and planning; but he might have spared his breath, for the lady was quite as much absorbed as her lord in the letter, which they held between them, a hand on either corner, spelling it out very slowly, with drawn brows and muttering lips. As they read it, Alleyne, who stood with Hordle John a few paces back from their comrade, saw the lady catch her breath, while the knight laughed softly to himself.

"You see, dear heart," said he, "that they will not leave the old dog in his kennel when the game is afoot. And what of this White Company, Aylward?"

"Ah, sir, you speak of dogs," cried Aylward; "but there are a pack of lusty hounds who are ready for any quarry, if they have but a good huntsman to halloo them on. Sir, we have been in the wars together, and I have seen many a brave following, but never such a set of woodland boys as this. They do but want you at their head, and who will bar the way to them?"

"Pardieu!" said Sir Nigel, "if they are all like their messengers they are indeed men of whom a leader may be proud. What is the name of this giant behind you?"

"He is big John, of Hordle, a forest man, who hath now taken service in the Company."

"A proper figure of a man-at-arms," said the little knight. "Why, man, you are no chicken, yet I warrant him the stronger man. See to that great stone from the coping which hath fallen upon the bridge. Four of my lazy varlets strove this day to carry it hence. I would that you two could put them to shame by budging it, though I fear that I overtask you, for it is of a grievous weight."

He pointed as he spoke to a huge rough-hewn block which lay by the roadside, deep sunken from its own weight in the reddish earth. The archer approached it, rolling back the sleeves of his jerkin, but with no very hopeful countenance, for indeed it was a mighty rock. John, however, put him aside with his left hand, and, stooping over the stone, he plucked it single-handed from its soft bed and swung it far into the stream. There it fell with mighty splash, one jagged end peaking out above the surface, while the waters bubbled and foamed with far-circling eddy.

"Good lack!" cried Sir Nigel, and "Good lack!" cried his lady, while John stood laughing and wiping the caked dirt from his fingers.

"I have felt his arms round my ribs," said the bowman, "and they crackle yet at the thought of it. This other comrade of mine is a right learned clerk, for all that he is so young, hight Alleyne, the son of Edric, brother to the Socman of Minstead."

"Young man," quoth Sir Nigel sternly, "if you are of the same way of thought as your brother, you may not pass under portcullis of mine."

"Nay, fair sir," cried Aylward hastily, "I will be pledge for it that they have no thought in common; for this very day his brother hath set his dogs upon him, and driven him from his lands."

"And are you, too, of the White Company?" asked Sir Nigel. "Hast had small experience of war, if I may judge by your looks and bearing."

"I would fain to France with my friends here,"

Alleyne answered ; " but I am a man of peace—a reader, exorcist, acolyte, and clerk."

" That need not hinder," quoth Sir Nigel.

" No, fair sir," cried the bowman joyously. " Why, I myself have served two terms with Arnold de Cervolles, he whom they called the archpriest. By my hilt ! I have seen him ere now, with monk's gown trussed to his knees, over his sandals in blood in the forefront of the battle. Yet, ere the last string had twanged, he would be down on his four bones among the stricken, and have them all houseled and shriven, as quick as shelling peas. Ma foi ! there were those who wished that he would have less care for their souls and a little more for their bodies ! "

" It is well to have a learned clerk in every troop," said Sir Nigel. " By St. Paul ! there are men so caitiff that they think more of a scrivener's pen than of their lady's smile, and do their devoir in hopes that they may fill a line in a chronicle or make a tag to a jongleur's romance. I remember well that, at the siege of Retters, there was a little, sleek, fat clerk of the name of Chaucer, who was so apt at rondel, sirvente, or tonson, that no man dare give back a foot from the walls, lest he find it all set down in his rhymes and sung by every underling and varlet in the camp. But, my soul's bird, you hear me prate as though all were decided, when I have not yet taken counsel either with you or with my lady mother. Let us to the chamber, while these strangers find such fare as pantry and cellar may furnish."

" The night air strikes chill," said the lady, and turned down the road with her hand upon her lord's arm. The three comrades dropped behind and followed : Aylward much the lighter for having accomplished his mission, Alleyne full of wonderment at the humble bearing of so renowned a captain, and John loud with snorts and sneers, which spoke his disappointment and contempt.

" What ails the man ? " asked Aylward in surprise.

" I have been cozened and bejaped," quoth he gruffly.

" By whom, Sir Samson the strong ? "

"By thee, Sir Balaam the false prophet."

"By my hilt!" cried the archer, "though I be not Balaam, yet I hold converse with the very creature that spake to him. What is amiss, then, and how have I played you false?"

"Why, marry, did you not say, and Alleyne here will be my witness, that, if I would hie to the wars with you, you would place me under a leader who was second to none in all England for valour? Yet here you bring me to a shred of a man, peaky and ill-nourished, with eyes like a moulting owl, who must needs, forsooth, take counsel with his mother ere he buckle sword to girdle."

"Is that where the shoe galls?" cried the bowman, and laughed aloud. "I will ask you what you think of him three months hence, if we be all alive; for sure I am that——"

Aylward's words were interrupted by an extraordinary hubbub which broke out that instant some little way down the street in the direction of the Priory. There was deep-mouthed shouting of men, frightened shrieks of women, howling and barking of curs, and over all a sullen thunderous rumble, indescribably menacing and terrible. Round the corner of the narrow street there came rushing a brace of whining dogs with tails tucked under their legs, and after them a white-faced burgher, with outstretched hands and widespread fingers, his hair all abristle and his eyes glinting back from one shoulder to the other, as though some great terror were at his very heels. "Fly, my lady, fly!" he screeched, and whizzed past them like a bolt from bow; while close behind came lumbering a huge black bear, with red tongue lolling from his mouth, and a broken chain jangling behind him. To right and left the folk flew for arch and doorway. Hordle John caught up the Lady Loring as though she had been a feather, and sprang with her into an open porch; while Aylward, with a whirl of French oaths, plucked at his quiver and tried to unsling his bow. Alleyne, all unnerved at so strange and unwonted a sight, shrank up

against a wall with his eyes fixed upon the frenzied creature, which came bounding along with ungainly speed, looking the larger in the uncertain light, its huge jaws agape, with blood and slaver trickling to the ground. Sir Nigel alone, unconscious to all appearance of the universal panic, walked with unfaltering step up the centre of the road, a silken handkerchief in one hand and his gold comfit-box in the other. It sent the blood cold through Alleyne's veins to see that as they came together —the man and the beast—the creature reared up, with eyes ablaze with fear and hate, and whirled its great paws above the knight to smite him to the earth. He, however, blinking with puckered eyes, reached up his kerchief, and flicked the beast twice across the snout with it. "Ah, saucy! saucy!" quoth he, with gentle chiding; on which the bear, uncertain and puzzled, dropped its fore legs to earth again, and waddling back, was soon swathed in ropes by the bear-ward and a crowd of peasants who had been in close pursuit.

A scared man was the keeper; for, having chained the brute to a stake while he drank a stoup of ale at the inn, it had been baited by stray curs until, in wrath and madness, it had plucked loose the chain, and smitten or bitten all who came in its path. Most scared of all was he to find that the creature had come nigh to harm the Lord and Lady of the castle, who had power to place him in the stretch-neck or to have the skin scourged from his shoulders. Yet, when he came with bowed head and humble entreaty for forgiveness, he was met with a handful of small silver from Sir Nigel, whose dame, however, was less charitably disposed, being much ruffled in her dignity by the manner in which she had been hustled from her lord's side. As they passed through the castle gate, John plucked at Aylward's sleeve, and the two fell behind.

"I must crave your pardon, comrade," said he, bluntly. "I was a fool not to know that a little rooster may be the gamest. I believe that this man is indeed a leader whom we may follow."

## II. *How a Young Shepherd had a Perilous Flock*

BLACK was the mouth of Twynham Castle, though a pair of torches burning at the farther end of the gateway cast a red glare over the outer bailey, and sent a dim ruddy flicker through the rough-hewn arch, rising and falling with fitful brightness. Over the door the travellers could discern the escutcheon of the Montacutes, a roebuck gules on a field argent, flanked on either side by smaller shields which bore the red roses of the veteran constable. As they passed over the drawbridge Alleyne marked the gleam of arms in the embrasures to right and left, and they had scarce set foot upon the causeway ere a hoarse blare burst from a bugle, and with screech of hinge and clank of chain, the ponderous bridge swung up into the air, drawn by unseen hands. At the same instant the huge portcullis came rattling down from above, and shut off the last fading light of day. Sir Nigel and his lady walked on in deep talk, while a fat understeward took charge of the three comrades, and led them to the buttery, where beef, bread, and beer were kept ever in readiness for the wayfarer. After a hearty meal and a dip in the trough to wash the dust from them, they strolled forth into the bailey, where the bowman peered about through the darkness at wall and at keep, with the carping eyes of one who has seen something of sieges, and is not lightly to be satisfied. To Alleyne and to John, however, it appeared to be as great and as stout a fortress as could be built by the hands of man.

Erected by Sir Baldwin de Redvers in the old fighting days of the twelfth century, when men thought much of war and little of comfort, Castle Twynham had been designed as a stronghold pure and simple, unlike those later and more magnificent structures where warlike strength had been combined with the magnificence of a palace. From the time of the Edwards such buildings as

Conway and Caernarvon Castles, to say nothing of Royal Windsor, had shown that it was possible to secure luxury in peace as well as security in times of trouble. Sir Nigel's trust, however, still frowned above the smooth-flowing waters of the Avon, very much as the stern race of early Anglo-Normans had designed it. There were the broad outer and inner bailies, not paved, but sown with grass to nourish the sheep and cattle which might be driven in on sign of danger. All round were high and turreted walls, with at the corner a bare square-faced keep, gaunt and windowless, rearing up from a lofty mound, which made it almost inaccessible to an assailant. Against the bailey-walls were rows of frail wooden houses and leaning sheds, which gave shelter to the archers and men-at-arms who formed the garrison. The doors of these humble dwellings were mostly open, and against the yellow glare from within Alleyne could see the bearded fellows cleaning their harness, while their wives would come out for a gossip, with their needlework in their hands, and their long black shadows streaming across the yard. The air was full of the clack of their voices and the merry prattling of children, in strange contrast to the flash of arms and constant warlike challenge from the walls above.

"Methinks a company of school lads could hold this place against an army," quoth John.

"And so say I," said Alleyne.

"Nay, there you are wide of the clout," the bowman said gravely. "By my hilt! I have seen a stronger fortalice carried in a summer evening. I remember such a one in Picardy, with a name as long as a Gascon's pedigree. It was when I served under Sir Robert Knolles, before the days of the Company; and we came by good plunder at the sacking of it. I had myself a great silver bowl, with two goblets, and a plastron of Spanish steel. Pasques Dieu! there are some fine women over yonder! Mort de ma vie! see to that one in the doorway; I will go speak to her. But whom have we here?"

"Is there an archer here hight Sam Aylward?" asked a gaunt man-at-arms, clanking up to them across the courtyard.

"My name, friend," quoth the bowman.

"Then sure I have no need to tell thee mine," saith the other.

"By the rood! if it is not Black Simon of Norwich!" cried Aylward. "À mon cœur, camarade, à mon cœur! Ah, but I am blithe to see thee!" The two fell upon each other and hugged like bears.

"And where from, old blood and bones?" asked the bowman.

"I am in service here. Tell me, comrade, is it sooth that we shall have another fling at these Frenchmen? It is so rumoured in the guard-room, and that Sir Nigel will take the field once more."

"It is like enough, mon gar, as things go."

"Now may the Lord be praised!" cried the other. "This very night will I set apart a golden ouche to be offered on the shrine of my name-saint. I have pined for this, Aylward, as a young maid pines for her lover."

"Art so set on plunder then? Is the purse so light that there is not enough for a rouse? I have a bag at my belt, camarade, and you have but to put your fist into it for what you want. It was ever share and share between us."

"Nay, friend, it is not the Frenchman's gold, but the Frenchman's blood that I would have. I should not rest quiet in the grave, coz, if I had not another turn at them. For with us in France it has ever been fair and honest war—a shut fist for the man, but a bended knee for the woman. But how was it at Winchelsea when their galleys came down upon it some few years back? I had an old mother there, lad, who had come down thither from the Midlands to be nearer her son. They found her afterwards by her own hearthstone, thrust through by a Frenchman's bill. My second sister, my brother's wife, and her two children, they were but ash-heaps in the

smoking ruins of their house. I will not say that we have not wrought great scath upon France, but women and children have been safe from us. And so, old friend, my heart is hot within me, and I long to hear the old battle-cry again, and, by God's truth, if Sir Nigel unfurls his pennon, here is one who will be right glad to feel the saddle-flaps under his knees."

"We have seen good work together, old war-dog," quoth Aylward; "and, by my hilt! we may hope to see more ere we die. But we are more like to hawk at the Spanish woodcock than at the French heron, though certes it is rumoured that Du Guesclin, with all the best lances of France, have taken service under the lions and towers of Castile. But, comrade, it is in my mind that there is some small matter of dispute still open between us."

"'Fore God, it is sooth," cried the other. "I had forgot it. The provost-marshal and his men tore us apart when last we met."

"On which, friend, we vowed that we should settle the point when next we came together. Hast thy sword, I see, and the moon throws glimmer enough for such old nightbirds as we. On guard, mon gar! I have not heard clink of steel this month or more."

"Out from the shadow, then," said the other, drawing his sword. "A vow is a vow, and not lightly to be broken."

"A vow to the saints," cried Alleyne, "is indeed not to be set aside; but this is a devil's vow, and, simple clerk as I am, I am yet the mouthpiece of the true Church when I say that it were mortal sin to fight on such a quarrel. What! shall two grown men carry malice for years, and fly like snarling curs at each other's throats?"

"No malice, my young clerk, no malice," quoth Black Simon. "I have not a bitter drop in my heart for mine old comrade; but the quarrel, as he hath told you, is still open and unsettled. Fall on, Aylward!"

"Not whilst I can stand between you," cried Alleyne, springing before the bowman. "It is shame and sin to

see two Christian Englishmen turn swords against each other like the frenzied bloodthirsty paynim."

"And, what is more," said Hordle John, suddenly appearing out of the buttery with the huge board upon which the pastry was rolled, "if either raise sword I shall flatten him like Shrove-tide pancake. By the black rood! I shall drive him into the earth like a nail into a door, rather than see you do scath to each other."

"'Fore God, this is a strange way of preaching peace," cried Black Simon. "You may find the scath yourself, my lusty friend, if you raise your great cudgel to me. I had as lief have the castle drawbridge drop upon my pate."

"Tell me, Aylward," said Alleyne earnestly, with hands outstretched to keep the pair asunder, "what is the cause of quarrel, that we may see whether honourable settlement may not be arrived at?"

The bowman looked down at his feet and then up at the moon. "Parbleu!" he cried, "the cause of quarrel? Why, mon petit, it was years ago in Limousin, and how can I bear in mind what was the cause of it? Simon there hath it at the end of his tongue."

"Not I, in troth," replied the other; "I have had other things to think of. There was some sort of bickering over dice, or wine, or was it a woman, coz?"

"Pasques Dieu! but you have nicked it," cried Aylward, "it was indeed about a woman; and the quarrel must go forward, for I am still of the same mind as before."

"What of the woman, then?" asked Simon. "May the murrain strike me if I can call to mind aught about her."

"It was La Blanche Rose, maid at the sign of the 'Trois Corbeaux' at Limoges. Bless her pretty heart! Why, mon gar, I loved her."

"So did a many," quoth Simon. "I call her to mind now. On the very day that we fought over the little hussy, she went off with Evan ap Price, a long-legged Welsh dagsman. They have a hostel of their own now, somewhere on the banks of Garonne, where the landlord

drinks so much of the liquor that there is little left for the customers."

"So ends our quarrel, then," said Aylward, sheathing his sword. "A Welsh dagsman, i' faith! C'était mauvais goût, camarade, and the more so when she had a jolly archer and a lusty man-at-arms to choose from."

"True, old lad. And it is as well that we can compose our differences honourably, for Sir Nigel had been out at the first clash of steel; and he hath sworn that if there be quarrelling in the garrison he would smite the right hand from the broilers. You know him of old, and that he is like to be as good as his word."

"Mort Dieu! yes. But there are ale, mead, and wine in the buttery, and the steward a merry rogue, who will not haggle over a quart or two. Buvons, mon gar, for it is not every day that two old friends come together."

The old soldiers and Hordle John strode off together in all good-fellowship. Alleyne had turned to follow them, when he felt a touch upon his shoulder, and found a young page by his side.

"The Lord Loring commands," said the boy, "that you will follow me to the great chamber, and await him there."

"But my comrades?"

"His commands were for you alone."

Alleyne followed the messenger to the east end of the courtyard, where a broad flight of steps led up to the doorway of the main hall, the outer wall of which is washed by the waters of the Avon. As designed at first, no dwelling had been allotted to the lord of the castle and his family but the dark and dismal basement story of the keep. A more civilised or more effeminate generation, however, had refused to be pent up in such a cellar, and the hall with its neighbouring chambers had been added for their accommodation. Up the broad steps Alleyne went, still following his boyish guide, until at the folding oak doors the latter paused, and ushered him into the main hall of the castle.

On entering the room the clerk looked round ; but, seeing no one, he continued to stand, his cap in his hand, examining with the greatest interest a chamber which was so different to any to which he was accustomed. The days had gone by when a nobleman's hall was but a barn-like rush-strewn enclosure, the common lounge and eating room of every inmate of the castle. The Crusaders had brought back with them experiences of domestic luxuries, of Damascus carpets and rugs of Aleppo, which made them impatient of the hideous bareness and want of privacy which they found in their ancestral strongholds. Still stronger, however, had been the influence of the great French war ; for, however well matched the nations might be in martial exercises, there could be no question but that our neighbours were infinitely superior to us in the arts of peace. A stream of returning knights, of wounded soldiers, and of unransomed French noblemen, had been for a quarter of a century continually pouring into England, every one of whom exerted an influence in the direction of greater domestic refinement ; while ship-loads of French furniture from Calais, Rouen and other plundered towns, had supplied our own artisans with models on which to shape their work. Hence, in most English castles, and in Castle Twynham among the rest, chambers were to be found which would seem to be not wanting either in beauty or in comfort.

In the great stone fireplace a log fire was spurting and crackling, throwing out a ruddy glare which, with the four bracket-lamps which stood at each corner of the room, gave a bright and lightsome air to the whole apartment. Above was a wreath-work of blazonry, extending up to the carved and corniced oaken roof ; while on either side stood the high canopied chairs placed for the master of the house and for his most honoured guest. The walls were hung all round with most elaborate and brightly coloured tapestry representing the achievements of Sir Bevis of Hampton, and behind this convenient screen were stored the tables dormant and benches which would

be needed for banquet or high festivity. The floor was of polished tiles, with a square of red and black diapered Flemish carpet in the centre ; and many settees, cushions, folding chairs and carved bancals littered all over it. At the further end was a long black buffet or dresser, thickly covered with gold cups, silver salvers and other such valuables. All this Alleyne examined with curious eyes ; but most interesting of all to him was a small ebony table at his very side, on which, by the side of a chess-board and the scattered chessmen, there lay an open manuscript written in a right clerkly hand, and set forth with brave flourishes and devices along the margins. In vain Alleyne bethought him of where he was, and of those laws of good breeding and decorum which should restrain him : those coloured capitals and black even lines drew his hand down to them as the loadstone draws the needle, until, almost before he knew it, he was standing with the romance of Garin de Montglane before his eyes, so absorbed in its contents as to be completely oblivious both of where he was and why he had come there.

He was brought back to himself, however, by a sudden little ripple of quick feminine laughter. Aghast, he dropped the manuscript among the chessmen and stared in bewilderment round the room. It was as empty and as still as ever. Again he stretched his hand out to the romance, and again came that roguish burst of merriment. He looked up at the ceiling, back at the closed door, and round at the stiff folds of motionless tapestry. Of a sudden, however, he caught a quick shimmer from the corner of a high-backed bancal in front of him, and, shifting a pace or two to the side, saw a white slender hand, which held a mirror of polished silver in such a way that the concealed observer could see without being seen. He stood irresolute, uncertain whether to advance or to take no notice ; but, even as he hesitated, the mirror was whipped in, and a tall and stately young lady swept out from behind the oaken screen, with a dancing light of mischief in her eyes. Alleyne started with astonishment

as he recognised the very maiden who had suffered from his brother's violence in the forest. She no longer wore her gay riding-dress, however, but was attired in a long sweeping robe of black velvet of Bruges, with delicate tracery of white lace at neck and at wrist, scarce to be seen against her ivory skin. Beautiful as she had seemed to him before, the lithe charm of her figure and the proud, free grace of her bearing were enhanced now by the rich simplicity of her attire.

"Ah, you start," said she, with the same sidelong look of mischief, "and I cannot marvel at it. Didst not look to see the distressed damozel again. Oh that I were a minstrel, that I might put it into rhyme, with the whole romance—the luckless maid, the wicked socman and the virtuous clerk! So might our fame have gone down together for all time, and you be numbered with Sir Percival or Sir Galahad, or all the other rescuers of oppressed ladies."

"What I did," said Alleyne, "was too small a thing for thanks; and yet, if I may say it without offence, it was too grave and near a matter for mirth and raillery. I had counted on my brother's love, but God has willed that it should be otherwise. It is a joy to me to see you again, lady, and to know that you have reached home in safety, if this be indeed your home."

"Yes, in sooth, Castle Twynham is my home, and Sir Nigel Loring my father. I should have told you so this morning, but you said that you were coming hither, so I bethought me that I might hold it back as a surprise to you. Oh dear, but it was brave to see you!" she cried, bursting out a-laughing once more, standing with her hand pressed to her side, and her half-closed eyes twinkling with amusement. "You drew back and came forward with your eyes upon my book there, like the mouse who sniffs the cheese and yet dreads the trap."

"I take shame," said Allyene, "that I should have touched it."

"Nay, it warmed my very heart to see it. So glad was

I that I laughed for very pleasure. My fine preacher can himself be tempted then, thought I ; he is not made of another clay to the rest of us."

"God help me! I am the weakest of the weak," groaned Alleyne. "I pray that I may have more strength."

"And to what end?" she asked sharply. "If you are, as I understand, to shut yourself for ever in your cell within the four walls of an abbey, then of what use would it be were your prayer to be answered?"

"The use of my own salvation."

She turned from him with a pretty shrug and wave. "Is that all?" she said. "Then you are no better than Father Christopher and the rest of them. Your own, your own, ever your own! My father is the king's man, and when he rides into the press of fight he is not thinking ever of the saving of his own poor body ; he recks little enough if he leave it on the field. Why then should you, who are soldier of the spirit, be ever moping and hiding in cell or in cave, with minds full of your own concerns, while the world, which you should be mending, is going on its way, and neither sees nor hears you? Were ye all as thoughtless of your own souls as the soldier is of his body, ye would be of more avail to the souls of others."

"There is sooth in what you say, lady," Alleyne answered ; "and yet I scarce can see what you would have the clergy and the church to do."

"I would have them live as others, and do men's work in the world, preaching by their lives rather than their words. I would have them come forth from their lonely places, mix with the borel folks, feel the pains and the pleasures, the cares and the rewards, the temptings and the stirrings of the common people. Let them toil, and swinken, and labour, and plough the land, and take wives to themselves——"

"Alas! alas!" cried Alleyne, aghast, "you have surely sucked this poison from the man Wicliffe, of whom I have heard such evil things."

"Nay, I know him not. I have learned it by looking from mine own chamber window and marking these poor monks of the priory, their weary life, their profitless round. I have asked myself if the best which can be done with virtue is to shut it within high walls as though it were some savage creature. If the good will lock themselves up, and if the wicked will still wander free, then alas for the world!"

Alleyne looked at her in astonishment for her cheek was flushed, her eyes gleaming, and her whole pose full of eloquence and conviction. Yet in an instant she had changed again to her old expression of merriment leavened with mischief.

"Wilt do what I ask?" said she.

"What is it, lady?"

"Oh, most ungallant clerk! A true knight would never have asked, but would have vowed upon the instant. 'Tis but to bear me out in what I say to my father."

"In what?"

"In saying, if he ask, that it was south of the Christchurch road that I met you. I shall be shut up with the tirewomen else, and have a week of spindle and bodkin, when I would fain be galloping Troubadour up Wilverley Walk, or loosing little Roland at the Vinney Ridge herons."

"I shall not answer him if he ask."

"Not answer! But he will have an answer. Nay, but you must not fail me, or it will go ill with me."

"But, lady," cried poor Alleyne in great distress, "how can I say that it was to the south of the road when I know well that it was four miles to the north?"

"You will not say it?"

"Surely, you will not, too, when you know that it is not so?"

"Oh, I weary of your preaching!" she cried, and swept away with a toss of her beautiful head, leaving Alleyne as cast down and ashamed as though he had him-

self proposed some infamous thing. She was back again in an instant, however, in another of her varying moods.

"Look at that, my friend!" said she. "If you had been shut up in an abbey or in cell this day you could not have taught a wayward maiden to abide by the truth. Is it not so? What avail is the shepherd if he leave his sheep?"

"A sorry shepherd!" said Alleyne humbly. "But here is your noble father."

"And you shall see how worthy a pupil I am. Father, I am much beholden to this young clerk, who was of service to me and helped me this very morning in Minstead Woods, four miles to the north of the Christchurch road, where I had no call to be, you having ordered it otherwise." All this she reeled off in a loud voice, and then glanced with sidelong questioning eyes at Alleyne for his approval.

Sir Nigel, who had entered the room with a silvery-haired old lady upon his arm, stared aghast at this sudden burst of candour.

"Maude, Maude!" said he, shaking his head, "it is more hard for me to gain obedience from you than from the ten score drunken archers who followed me to Guienne. Yet, hush! little one, for your fair lady-mother will be here anon, and there is no need that she should know it. We will keep you from the provost-marshal this journey. Away to your chamber, sweeting, and keep a blithe face, for she who confesses is shriven. And now, fair mother," he continued when his daughter had gone, "sit you here by the fire, for your blood runs colder than it did. Alleyne Edricson, I would have a word with you, for I would fain that you should take service under me. And here in good time comes my lady, without whose counsel it is not my wont to decide aught of import; but, indeed, it was her own thought that you should come."

"For I have formed a good opinion of you, and can see that you are one who may be trusted," said the Lady

Loring. "And in good sooth my dear lord hath need of such a one by his side, for he recks so little of himself that there should be one there to look to his needs and meet his wants. You have seen the cloisters: it were well that you should see the world too, ere you make choice for life between them."

"It was for that very reason that my father willed that I should come forth into the world at my twentieth year," said Alleyne.

"Then your father was a man of good counsel," said she, "and you cannot carry out his will better than by going on this path, where all that is noble and gallant in England will be your companions."

"You can ride?" asked Sir Nigel, looking at the youth with puckered eyes.

"Yes, I have ridden much at the abbey."

"Yet there is a difference betwixt a friar's hack and a warrior's destrier. You can sing and play?"

"On citole, flute and rebeck."

"Good! You can read blazonry?"

"Indifferent well."

"Then read this," quoth Sir Nigel, pointing upwards to one of the many quarterings which adorned the wall over the fireplace.

"Argent," Alleyne answered, "a fess azure charged with three lozenges dividing three mullets sable. Over all, on an escutcheon of the first, a jambe gules."

"A jambe gules erased," said Sir Nigel, shaking his head solemnly. "Yet it is not amiss for a monk-bred man. I trust that you are lowly and serviceable?"

"I have served all my life, my lord."

"Canst carve too?"

"I have carved two days a week for the brethren."

"A model truly! Wilt make a squire of squires. But tell me, I pray, canst curl hair?"

"No, my lord, but I could learn."

"It is of import," said he, "for I love to keep my hair well ordered, seeing that the weight of my helmet for

thirty years hath in some degree frayed it upon the top." He pulled off his velvet cap of maintenance as he spoke, and displayed a pate which was as bald as an egg, and shone bravely in the firelight. "You see," said he, whisking round, and showing one little strip where a line of scattered hairs, like the last survivors in some fatal field, still barely held their own against the fate which had fallen upon their comrades; "these locks need some little oiling and curling, for I doubt not that if you look slantwise at my head, when the light is good, you will yourself perceive that there are places where the hair is sparse."

"It is for you also to bear the purse," said the lady; "for my sweet lord is of so free and gracious a temper that he would give it gaily to the first who asked alms of him. All these things, with some knowledge of venerie, and of the management of horse, hawk and hound, with the grace and hardihood and courtesy which are proper to your age, will make you a fit squire for Sir Nigel Loring."

"Alas! lady," Alleyne answered, "I know well the great honour that you have done me in deeming me worthy to wait upon so renowned a knight, yet I am so conscious of my own weakness that I scarce dare incur duties which I might be so ill-fitted to fulfil."

"Modesty and a humble mind," said she, "are the very first and rarest gifts in page or squire. Your words prove that you have these, and all the rest is but the work of use and of time. But there is no call for haste. Rest upon it for the night, and let your orisons ask for guidance in the matter. We knew your father well, and would fain help his son, though we have small cause to love your brother the socman, who is for ever stirring up strife in the county."

"We can scarce hope," said Nigel, "to have all ready for our start before the feast of St. Luke, for there is much to be done in the time. You will have leisure therefore, if it please you to take service under me, in which to learn

your devoir. Bertrand, my daughter's page, is hot to go ; but in sooth he is over young for such rough work as may be before us."

"And I have one favour to crave from you," added the lady of the castle, as Alleyne turned to leave their presence. "You have, as I understand, much learning which you have acquired at Beaulieu."

"Little enough, lady, compared with those who were my teachers."

"Yet enough for my purpose, I doubt not. For I would have you give an hour or two a day whilst you are with us in discoursing with my daughter, the Lady Maude ; for she is somewhat backward, I fear, and hath no love for letters, save for these poor fond romances, which do but fill her empty head with dreams of enchanted maidens and of errant cavaliers. Father Christopher comes over after nones from the priory, but he is stricken with years and slow of speech, so that she gets small profit from his teaching. I would have you do what you can with her, and with Agatha my young tirewoman, and with Dorothy Pierpoint."

And so Alleyne found himself not only chosen as squire to a knight, but also as squire to three damozels, which was even farther from the part which he had thought to play in the world. Yet he could but agree to do what he might, and so went forth from the castle hall with his face flushed and his head in a whirl at the thought of the strange and perilous paths which his feet were destined to tread.

## 12. *How Alleyne Learned more than he could Teach*

AND now there came a time of stir and bustle, of furbishing of arms and clang of hammer from all the southland counties. Fast spread the tidings from thorpe to thorpe and from castle to castle, that the

old game was afoot once more, and the lions and lilies to be in the field with the early spring. Great news this for that fierce old country, whose trade for a generation had been war, her exports archers and her imports prisoners. For six years her sons had chafed under an unwonted peace. Now they flew to their arms as to their birthright. The old soldiers of Crécy, of Nogent and of Poictiers were glad to think that they might hear the war-trumpet once more, and gladder still were the hot youth who had chafed for years under the martial tales of their sires. To pierce the great mountains of the south, to fight the tamers of the fiery Moors, to follow the greatest captain of the age, to find sunny cornfields and vineyards, when the marches of Picardy and Normandy were as bare and bleak as the Jedburgh forests—here was a golden prospect for a race of warriors. From sea to sea there was stringing of bows in the cottage and clang of steel in the castle.

Nor did it take long for every stronghold to pour forth its cavalry, and every hamlet its footmen. Through the late autumn and the early winter every road and country lane resounded with nakir and trumpet, with the neigh of the war horse and the clatter of marching men. From the Wrekin in the Welsh marches to the Cotswolds in the west, or Butser in the south, there was no hill-top from which the peasant might not have seen the bright shimmer of arms, the toss and flutter of plume and of pensil. From bye-path, from woodland clearing or from winding moor-side track these little rivulets of steel united in the larger roads to form a broader stream, growing ever fuller and larger as it approached the nearest or most commodious seaport. And there all day, and day after day, there was bustle and crowding and labour, while the great ships loaded up, and one after the other spread their white pinions and darted off to the open sea, amid the clash of cymbals and rolling of drums and lusty shouts of those who went and of those who waited. From Orwell to the Dart there was no port which did not send forth its little fleet, gay with streamer and bunting, as for a joyous

festival. Thus in the season of the waning days the might of England put forth on to the waters.

In the ancient and populous county of Hampshire there was no lack of leaders or of soldiers for a service which promised either honour or profit. In the north the Saracen's head of the Brocas and the scarlet fish of the De Roches were waving over a strong body of archers from Holt, Woolmer and Harewood forests. De Borhunte was up in the east, and Sir John de Montague in the west. Sir Luke de Ponynges, Sir Thomas West, Sir Maurice de Bruin, Sir Arthur Lipscombe, Sir Walter Ramsey and stout Sir Oliver Buttesthorn were all marching south with levies from Andover, Alresford, Odiham and Winchester, while from Sussex came Sir John Clinton, Sir Thomas Cheyne and Sir John Fallislee, with a troop of picked men-at-arms, making for their port at Southampton. Greatest of all the musters, however, was that at Twynham Castle, for the name and the fame of Sir Nigel Loring drew towards him the keenest and boldest spirits, all eager to serve under so valiant a leader. Archers from the New Forest and the Forest of Bere, billmen from the pleasant country which is watered by the Stour, the Avon and the Itchen, young cavaliers from the ancient Hampshire houses, all were pushing for Christchurch to take service under the banner of the five scarlet roses.

And now, could Sir Nigel have shown the bachelles of land which the laws of rank required, he might well have cut his forked pennon into a square banner, and taken such a following into the field as would have supported the dignity of a banneret. But poverty was heavy upon him, his land was scant, his coffers empty, and the very castle which covered him the holding of another. Sore was his heart when he saw rare bowmen and war-hardened spearmen turned away from his gates, for the lack of the money which might equip and pay them. Yet the letter which Aylward had brought him gave him powers which he was not slow to use. In it Sir Claude Latour, the Gascon lieutenant of the White Company, assured him

that there remained in his keeping enough to fit out a hundred archers and twenty men-at-arms, which, joined to the three hundred veteran companions already in France, would make a force which any leader might be proud to command. Carefully and sagaciously the veteran knight chose out his men from the swarm of volunteers. Many an anxious consultation he held with Black Simon, Sam Aylward and other of his more experienced followers, as to who should come and who should stay. By All Saints' Day, however, ere the last leaves had fluttered to earth in the Wilverley and Holmesley glades, he had filled up his full numbers, and mustered under his banner as stout a following of Hampshire foresters as ever twanged their war-bows. Twenty men-at-arms, too, well mounted and equipped, formed the cavalry of the party, while young Peter Terlake of Fareham, and Walter Ford of Botley, the martial sons of martial sires, came at their own cost to wait upon Sir Nigel and to share with Alleyne Edricson the duties of his squireship.

Yet, even after the enrolment, there was much to be done ere the party could proceed upon its way. For armour, swords and lances there was no need to take much forethought, for they were to be had both better and cheaper in Bordeaux than in England. With the long-bow, however, it was different. Yew staves indeed might be got in Spain, but it was well to take enough and to spare with them. Then three spare cords should be carried for each bow, with a great store of arrow-heads, besides the brigandines of chain mail, the wadded steel caps, and the brassarts or arm-guards, which were the proper equipment of the archer. Above all, the women for miles round were hard at work cutting the white surcoats which were the badge of the Company, and adorning them with the red lion of St. George upon the centre of the breast. When all was completed and the muster called in the castle yard, the oldest soldier of the French wars was fain to confess that he had never looked upon a better equipped or more warlike body of men, from the old knight with

his silk jupon, sitting his great black war-horse in the front of them, to Hordle John, the giant recruit, who leaned carelessly upon a huge black bow-stave in the rear. Of the six score, fully half had seen service before, while a fair sprinkling were men who had followed the wars all their lives, and had a hand in those battles which had made the whole world ring with the fame and the wonder of the island infantry.

Six long weeks were taken in these preparations, and it was close on Martinmas ere all was ready for a start. Nigh two months had Alleyne Edricson been in Castle Twynham—months which were fated to turn the whole current of his life, to divert it from that dark and lonely bourne towards which it tended, and to guide it into freer and more sunlit channels. Already he had learned to bless his father for that wise provision which had made him seek to know the world ere he had ventured to renounce it.

For it was a very different place from that which he had pictured—very different from that which he had heard described when the master of the novices held forth to his charges upon the ravening wolves who lurked for them beyond the peaceful folds of Beaulieu. There was cruelty in it, doubtless, and lust and sin and sorrow ; but were there not virtues to atone, robust positive virtues, which did not shrink from temptation, which held their own in all the rough blasts of the work-a-day world ? How colourless by contrast appeared the sinlessness which came from inability to sin, the conquest which was attained by flying from the enemy ! Monk-bred as he was, Alleyne had native shrewdness and a mind which was young enough to form new conclusions and to outgrow old ones. He could not fail to see that the men with whom he was thrown in contact, rough-tongued, fierce and quarrelsome as they were, were yet of deeper nature and of more service in the world than the ox-eyed brethren who rose and ate and slept from year's end to year's end in their own narrow stagnant circle of existence. Abbot Berghersh was a good man, but how was he better than

this kindly knight, who lived as simple a life, held as lofty and inflexible an ideal of duty, and did with all his fearless heart whatever came to his hand to do? In turning from the service of the one to that of the other, Alleyne could not feel that he was lowering his aims in life. True that his gentle and thoughtful nature recoiled from the grim work of war, yet in those days of martial orders and militant brotherhoods there was no gulf fixed betwixt the priest and the soldier. The man of God and the man of the sword might without scandal be united in the same individual. Why then should he, a mere clerk, have scruples when so fair a chance lay in his way of carrying out the spirit as well as the letter of his father's provision? Much struggle it cost him, anxious spirit-questionings and midnight prayings, with many a doubt and a misgiving; but the issue was that ere he had been three days in Castle Twynham he had taken service under Sir Nigel, and had accepted horse and harness, the same to be paid for out of his share of the profits of the expedition. Henceforth for seven hours a day he strove in the tiltyard to qualify himself to be a worthy squire to so worthy a knight. Young, supple and active, with all the pent energies from years of pure and healthy living, it was not long before he could manage his horse and his weapon well enough to earn an approving nod from critical men-at-arms, or to hold his own against Terlake and Ford, his fellow-servitors.

But were there no other considerations which swayed him from the cloisters towards the world? So complex is the human spirit that it can itself scarce discern the deep springs which impel it to action. Yet to Alleyne had been opened now a side of life of which he had been as innocent as a child, but one which was of such deep import that it could not fail to influence him in choosing his path. A woman, in monkish precepts, had been the embodiment and concentration of what was dangerous and evil—a focus whence spread all that was to be dreaded and avoided. So defiling was her presence that a true

Cistercian might not raise his eyes to her face or touch her finger-tips under ban of church and fear of deadly sin. Yet here, day after day, for an hour after nones, and for an hour before vespers, he found himself in close communion with three maidens, all young, all fair, and all therefore doubly dangerous from the monkish standpoint. Yet he found that in their presence he was conscious of a quick sympathy, a pleasant ease, a ready response to all that was most gentle and best in himself, which filled his soul with a vague and new-found joy.

And yet the Lady Maude Loring was no easy pupil to handle. An older and more world-wise man might have been puzzled by her varying moods, her sudden prejudices, her quick resentment at all constraint and authority. Did a subject interest her, was there space in it for either romance or imagination, she would fly through it with her subtle active mind, leaving her two fellow-students and even her teacher toiling behind her. On the other hand, were there dull patience needed with steady toil and strain of memory, no single fact could by any driving be fixed in her mind. Alleyne might talk to her of the stories of old gods and heroes, of gallant deeds and lofty aims, or he might hold forth upon moon and stars, and let his fancy wander over the hidden secrets of the universe, and he would have a rapt listener with flushed cheeks and eloquent eyes, who could repeat after him the very words which had fallen from his lips. But when it came to almagest and astrolabe, the counting of figures and reckoning of epicycles, away would go her thoughts to horse and hound, and a vacant eye and listless face would warn the teacher that he had lost his hold upon his scholar. Then he had but to bring out the old romance book from the priory, with befingered cover of sheepskin and gold letters upon a purple ground, to entice her wayward mind back to the paths of learning.

At times, too, when the wild fit was upon her, she would break into pertness and rebel openly against Alleyne's gentle firmness. Yet he would jog quietly

on with his teachings, taking no heed to her mutiny, until suddenly she would be conquered by his patience, and break into self-revilings a hundred times stronger than her fault demanded. It chanced however that, on one of these mornings when the evil mood was upon her, Agatha, the young tirewoman, thinking to please her mistress, began also to toss her head and make tart rejoinder to the teacher's questions. In an instant the Lady Maude had turned upon her two blazing eyes and a face which was blanched with anger.

"You would dare!" said she. "You would dare!"

The frightened tirewoman tried to excuse herself. "But, my fair lady," she stammered, "what have I done? I have said no more than I heard."

"You would dare!" repeated the lady in a choking voice. "You, a graceless baggage, a foolish lack-brain, with no thought above the hemming of shifts! And he so kindly, and hendy and long-suffering! You would—ha, you may well flee the room!"

She had spoken with a rising voice, and a clasping and opening of her long white fingers, so that it was no marvel that ere the speech was over the skirts of Agatha were whisking round the door and the click of her sobs to be heard dying swiftly away down the corridor.

Alleyne stared open-eyed at this tigress who had sprung so suddenly to his rescue. "There is no need for such anger," he said mildly. "The maid's words have done me no scath. It is yourself who have erred."

"I know it," she cried; "I am a most wicked woman. But it is bad enough that one should misuse you. Ma foi! I will see that there is not a second one."

"Nay, nay, no one has misused me," he answered. "But the fault lies in your hot and bitter words. You have called her a baggage and a lack-brain, and I know not what."

"And you are he who taught me to speak the truth," she cried. "Now I have spoken it, and yet I cannot please you. Lack-brain she is, and lack-brain I shall call her."

Such was the sample of the sudden janglings which marred the peace of that little class. As the weeks passed, however, they became fewer and less violent, as Alleyne's firm and constant nature gained sway and influence over the Lady Maude. And yet, sooth to say, there were times when he had to ask himself whether it was not the Lady Maude who was gaining sway and influence over him. If she were changing, so was he. In drawing her up from the world, he was day by day being himself dragged down towards it. In vain he strove and reasoned with himself as to the madness of letting his mind rest upon Sir Nigel's daughter. What was he—a younger son, a penniless clerk, a squire unable to pay for his own harness—that he should dare to raise his eyes to the fairest maid in Hampshire? So spake reason; but, in spite of all, her voice was ever in his ears and her image in his heart. Stronger than reason, stronger than cloister teachings, stronger than all that might hold him back, was that old, old tyrant who will brook no rival in the kingdom of youth.

And yet it was a surprise and a shock to himself to find how deeply she had entered into his life; how completely those vague ambitions and yearnings which had filled his spiritual nature centred themselves now upon this thing of earth. He had scarce dared to face the change which had come upon him, when a few sudden chance words showed it all up hard and clear, like a lightning flash in the darkness.

He had ridden over to Poole, one November day, with his fellow-squire, Peter Terlake, in quest of certain yew-staves from Wat Swathling, the Dorsetshire armourer. The day for their departure had almost come, and the two youths spurred it over the lonely downs at the top of their speed on their homeward course, for evening had fallen and there was much to be done. Peter was a hard, wiry, brown-faced country-bred lad, who looked on the coming war as the schoolboy looks on his holidays. This day, however, he had been sombre and mute, with scarce a word a mile to bestow upon his comrade.

"Tell me, Alleyne Edricson," he broke out, suddenly, as they clattered along the winding track which leads over the Bournemouth hills, "has it not seemed to you that of late the Lady Maude is paler and more silent than is her wont?"

"It may be so," the other answered shortly.

"And would rather sit distrait by her oriel than ride gaily to the chase as of old. Methinks, Alleyne, it is this learning which you have taught her that has taken all the life and sap from her. It is more than she can master, like a heavy spear to a light rider."

"Her lady-mother has so ordered it," said Alleyne.

"By our Lady! and withouten disrespect," quoth Terlake, "it is in my mind that her lady-mother is more fitted to lead a company to a storming than to have the upbringing of this tender and milk-white maid. Hark ye, lad Alleyne, to what I never told man or woman yet. I love the fair Lady Maude, and would give the last drop of my heart's blood to serve her." He spoke with a gasping voice, and his face flushed crimson in the moonlight.

Alleyne said nothing, but his heart seemed to turn to a lump of ice in his bosom.

"My father has broad acres," the other continued, "from Fareham Creek to the slope of the Portsdown Hill. There is filling of granges, hewing of wood, malting of grain and herding of sheep as much as heart could wish, and I the only son. Sure am I that Sir Nigel would be blithe at such a match."

"But how of the lady?" asked Alleyne, with dry lips.

"Ah, lad, there lies my trouble. It is a toss of the head and a droop of the eyes if I say one word of what is in my mind. 'Twere as easy to woo the snow-dame that we shaped last winter in our castle yard. I did but ask her yesternight for her green veil, that I might bear it as a token or lambrequin upon my helm; but she flashed out at me that she kept it for a better man, and then all in a breath asked pardon for that she had spoke so rudely.

Yet she would not take back the words either, nor would she grant the veil. Has it seemed to thee, Alleyne, that she loves anyone ? "

" Nay, I cannot say," said Alleyne, with a wild throb of sudden hope in his heart.

" I have thought so, and yet I cannot name the man. Indeed, save myself, and Walter Ford, and you, who are half a clerk, and Father Christopher of the Priory, and Bertrand the page, who is there whom she sees ? "

" I cannot tell," quoth Alleyne shortly : and the two squires rode on again, each intent upon his own thoughts.

Next day at morning lesson the teacher observed that his pupil was indeed looking pale and jaded, with listless eyes and a weary manner. He was heavy-hearted to note the grievous change in her.

" Your mistress, I fear, is ill, Agatha," he said to the tirewoman, when the Lady Maude had sought her chamber.

The maid looked aslant at him with laughing eyes. " It is not an illness that kills," quoth she.

" Pray God not ! " he cried. " But tell me, Agatha, what it is that ails her."

" Methinks that I could lay my hand upon another who is smitten with the same trouble," said she, with the same sidelong look. " Canst not give a name to it, and thou so skilled in leechcraft ? "

" Nay, save that she seems aweary."

" Well, bethink you that it is but three days ere you will all be gone, and Castle Twynham be as dull as the Priory. Is there not enough there to cloud a lady's brow ? "

" In sooth, yes," he answered ; " I had forgot that she is about to lose her father."

" Her father ! " cried the tirewoman, with a little trill of laughter. " Oh, simple, simple ! " And she was off down the passage like arrow from bow, while Alleyne stood gazing after her, betwixt hope and doubt, scarce daring to put faith in the meaning which seemed to underlie her words.

## 13. *How the White Company set forth to the Wars*

ST. LUKE'S day had come and had gone, and it was in the season of Martinmas, when the oxen are driven in to the slaughter, that the White Company was ready for its journey. Loud shrieked the brazen bugles from keep and from gateway, and merry was the rattle of the war-drum, as the men gathered in the outer bailey, with torches to light them, for the morn had not yet broken. Alleyne, from the window of the armoury, looked down upon the strange scene—the circles of yellow flickering light, the lines of stern and bearded faces, the quick shimmer of arms and the lean heads of the horses. In front stood the bowmen, ten deep, with a fringe of under-officers, who paced hither and thither marshalling the ranks with curt precept or short rebuke. Behind were the little clump of steel-clad horsemen, their lances raised, with long pensils drooping down the oaken shafts. So silent and still were they, that they might have been metal-sheathed statues, were it not for the occasional quick impatient stamp of their chargers, or the rattle of chamfron against neck plates as they tossed and strained. A spear's length in front of them sat the spare and long-limbed figure of Black Simon, the Norwich fighting man, his fierce, deep-lined face framed in steel, and the silk guidon marked with the five scarlet roses slanting over his right shoulder. All round, in the edge of the circle of the light, stood the castle servants, the soldiers who were to form the garrison, and little knots of women, who sobbed in their aprons and called shrilly to their name-saints to watch over the Wat, or Will, or Peterkin who had turned his hand to the work of war.

The young squire was leaning forward, gazing at the stirring and martial scene, when he heard a short quick gasp at his shoulder, and there was the Lady Maude, with her hand to her heart, leaning up against the wall, slender

and fair like a half-plucked lily. Her face was turned away from him, but he could see, by the sharp intake of her breath, that she was weeping bitterly.

"Alas! alas!" he cried, all unnerved at the sight, "why is it that you are so sad, lady?"

"It is the sight of these brave men," she answered; "and to think how many of them go and how few are like to find their way back. I have seen it before, when I was a little maid, in the year of the Prince's great battle. I remember then how they mustered in the bailey, even as they do now, and my lady-mother holding me in her arms at this very window that I might see the show."

"Please God, you will see them all back ere another year be out," said he.

She shook her head, looking round at him with flushed cheeks and eyes which sparkled in the lamp-light. "Oh, but I hate myself for being a woman!" she cried, with a stamp of her little foot. "What can I do that is good? Here I must bide, and talk and sew and spin, and spin and sew and talk. Ever the same dull round, with nothing at the end of it. And now you are going too, who could carry my thoughts out of these grey walls, and raise my mind above tapestry and distaffs. What can I do? I am of no more use or value than that broken bow-stave."

"You are of such value to me," he cried, in a whirl of hot passionate words, "that all else has become nought. You are my heart, my life, my one and only thought. Oh, Maude, I cannot live without you, I cannot leave you without a word of love. All is changed to me since I have known you. I am poor and lowly and all unworthy of you; but if great love may weigh down such defects, then mine may do it. Give me but one word of hope to take to the wars with me—but one. Ah, you shrink, you shudder! My wild words have frightened you."

Twice she opened her lips, and twice no sound came from them. At last she spoke in a hard and measured voice, as one who dare not trust herself to speak too freely.

"This is over-sudden," she said; "it is not so long

since the world was nothing to you. You have changed once ; perchance you may change again."

" Cruel ! " he cried, " who hath changed me ? "

" And then your brother," she continued with a little laugh, disregarding his question. " Methinks this hath become a family custom amongst the Edricsons. Nay, I am sorry ; I did not mean a jibe. But indeed, Alleyne, this hath come suddenly upon me, and I scarce know what to say."

" Say some word of hope, however distant—some kind word that I may cherish in my heart."

" Nay, Alleyne, it were a cruel kindness, and you have been too good and true a friend to me that I should use you despitefully. There cannot be a closer link between us. It is madness to think of it. Were there no other reasons, it is enough that my father and your brother would both cry out against it."

" My brother, what has he to do with it ? And your father——"

" Come, Alleyne, was it not you who would have me act fairly to all men, and, certes, to my father amongst them ? "

" You say truly," he cried, " you say truly. But you do not reject me, Maude ? You give me some ray of hope ? I do not ask pledge or promise. Say only that I am not hateful to you—that on some happier day I may hear kinder words from you."

Her eyes softened upon him, and a kind answer was on her lips, when a hoarse shout, with the clatter of arms and stamping of steeds, rose up from the bailey below. At the sound her face set, her eyes sparkled, and she stood with flushed cheek and head thrown back—a woman's body but a soul of fire.

" My father hath gone down," she cried. " Your place is by his side. Nay, look not at me, Alleyne. It is no time for dallying. Win my father's love, and all may follow. It is when the brave soldier hath done his devoir that he hopes for his reward. Farewell, and may God

be with you!" She held out her white, slim hand to him, but as he bent his lips over it she whisked away and was gone, leaving in his outstretched hand the very green veil for which poor Peter Terlake had craved in vain. Again the hoarse cheering burst out from below, and he heard the clang of the rising portcullis. Pressing the veil to his lips, he thrust it into the bosom of his tunic, and rushed as fast as feet could bear him to arm himself and join the muster.

The raw morning had broken ere the hot spiced ale was served round and the last farewell spoken. A cold wind blew up from the sea and ragged clouds drifted swiftly across the sky. The Christchurch townsfolk stood huddled about the Bridge of Avon, the women pulling tight their shawls and the men swathing themselves in their gaberdines, while down the winding path from the castle came the van of the little army, their feet clanging on the hard frozen road. First came Black Simon with his banner, bestriding a lean and powerful dapple-grey charger, as hard and wiry and warwise as himself. After him, riding three abreast, were nine men-at-arms, all picked soldiers, who had followed the French wars before, and knew the marches of Picardy as they knew the downs of their native Hampshire. They were armed to the teeth with lance, sword and mace, with square shields notched at the upper right-hand corner to serve as a spear-rest. For defence each man wore a coat of interlaced leathern thongs strengthened at the shoulder, elbow and upper arm with slips of steel. Greaves and knee-pieces were also of leather backed by steel, and their gauntlets and shoes were of iron plates, craftily jointed. So, with jingle of arms and clatter of hoofs, they rode across the Bridge of Avon, while the burghers shouted lustily for the flag of the five roses and its gallant guard.

Close at the heels of the horses came two score archers, bearded and burly, their round targets on their backs and their long yellow bows, the most deadly weapon that the wit of man had yet devised, thrusting forth from

behind their shoulders. From each man's girdle hung sword or axe, according to his humour, and over the right hip there jutted out the leathern quiver, with its bristle of goose, pigeon and peacock feathers. Behind the bowmen strode two drummers beating their nakirs, and two trumpeters in parti-coloured clothes. After them came twenty-seven sumpter-horses carrying tent-poles, cloth, spare arms, spurs, wedges, cooking kettles, horse-shoes, bags of nails, and the hundred other things which experience had shown to be needful in a harried and hostile country. A white mule with red trappings, led by a varlet, carried Sir Nigel's own napery and table comforts. Then came two score more archers, ten more men-at-arms, and finally a rearguard of twenty bowmen, with big John towering in the front rank and the veteran Aylward marching by his side, his battered harness and faded surcoat in strange contrast with the snow-white jupons and shining brigandines of his companions. A quick cross-fire of greetings and questions and rough West Saxon jests flew from rank to rank, or were bandied about betwixt the marching archers and the gazing crowd.

"Hola, Gaffer Higginson!" cried Aylward, as he spied the portly figure of the village innkeeper. "No more of thy nut-brown, mon gar. We leave it behind us."

"By St. Paul, no!" cried the other. "You take it with you. Devil a drop have you left in the great kilderkin. It was time for you to go."

"If your cask is leer, I warrant your purse is full, gaffer," shouted Hordle John. "See that you lay in good store of the best for our home-coming."

"See that you keep your throat whole for the drinking of it, archer," cried a voice, and the crowd laughed at the rough pleasantry.

"If you will warrant the beer, I will warrant the throat," said John composedly.

"Close up the ranks!" cried Aylward. "En avant, mes enfants! Ah, by my finger-bones, there is my sweet Mary from the Priory Mill! Ma foi, but she is beautiful!

Adieu, Mary, ma chérie ! Mon cœur est toujours à toi. Brace your belt, Watkin, man, and swing your shoulders as a free companion should. By my hilt ! your jerkins will be as dirty as mine ere you clap eyes on Hengistbury Head again."

The Company had marched to the turn of the road ere Sir Nigel Loring rode out from the gateway, mounted on Pommers, his great black war-horse, whose ponderous foot-fall on the wooden drawbridge echoed loudly from the gloomy arch which spanned it. Sir Nigel was still in his velvet dress of peace, with flat velvet cap of maintenance, and curling ostrich feather clasped in a golden brooch. To his three squires riding behind him it looked as though he bore the bird's egg as well as its feather, for the back of his bald pate shone like a globe of ivory. He bore no arms save the long and heavy sword which hung at his saddle-bow ; but Terlake carried in front of him the high wivern-crested bassinet, Ford the heavy ash spear with swallow-tail pennon, while Alleyne was entrusted with the emblazoned shield. The Lady Loring rode her palfrey at her lord's bridle-arm, for she would see him as far as the edge of the forest, and ever and anon she turned her hard-lined face up wistfully to him and ran a questioning eye over his apparel and appointments.

" I trust that there is nothing forgot," she said, beckoning to Alleyne to ride on her farther side. " I trust him to you, Edricson. Hosen, shirts, cyclas and underjupons are in the brown basket on the left side of the mule. His wine he takes hot when the nights are cold, malvoisie or vernage, with as much spice as would cover the thumb-nail. See that he hath a change if he come back hot from the tilting. There is goose-grease in a box, if the old scars ache at the turn of the weather. Let his blankets be dry and——"

" Nay, my heart's life," the little knight interrupted, " trouble not now about such matters. Why so pale and wan, Edricson ? Is it not enow to make a man's heart

dance to see this noble company, such valiant men-at-arms, such lusty archers ? By St. Paul ! I should be ill to please if I were not blithe to see the red roses flying at the head of so noble a following ! "

" The purse I have already given you, Edricson," continued the lady. " There are in it twenty-three marks, one noble, three shillings and fourpence, which is a great treasure for one man to carry. And I pray you to bear in mind, Edricson, that he hath two pair of shoes, those of red leather for common use, and the others with golden toe-chains, which he may wear should he chance to drink wine with the Prince or with Chandos."

" My sweet bird," said Sir Nigel, " I am right loth to part from you, but we are now at the fringe of the forest, and it is not right that I should take the chatelaine too far from her trust."

" But oh, my dear lord," she cried with a trembling lip, " let me bide with you for one furlong further—or one and a half, perhaps. You may spare me this out of the weary miles that you will journey alone."

" Come then, my heart's comfort," he answered. " But I must crave a gage from thee. It is my custom, dearling, and hath been since I have first known thee, to proclaim by herald in such camps, townships or fortalices as I may chance to visit, that my ladylove being beyond compare the fairest and sweetest in Christendom, I should deem it great honour and kindly condescension if any cavalier would run three courses against me with sharpened lances, should he chance to have a lady whose claim he was willing to advance. I pray you then, my fair dove, that you will vouchsafe to me one of those doe-skin gloves, that I may wear it as the badge of her whose servant I shall ever be."

" Alack and alas for the fairest and sweetest ! " she cried. " Fair and sweet I would fain be for your dear sake, my lord, but old I am and ugly, and the knights would laugh should you lay lance in rest in such a cause."

" Edricson," quoth Sir Nigel, " you have young eyes,

and mine are somewhat bedimmed. Should you chance to see a knight laugh, or smile, or even, look you, arch his brows, or purse his mouth, or in any way show surprise that I should uphold the Lady Mary, you will take particular note of his name, his coat-armour and his lodging. Your glove, my life's desire!"

The Lady Mary Loring slipped her hand from her yellow leather gauntlet, and he, lifting it with dainty reverence, bound it to the front of his velvet cap.

"It is with mine other guardian angels," quoth he, pointing at the saints' medals which hung beside it. "And now, my dearest, you have come far enow. May the Virgin guard and prosper thee! One kiss!" He bent down from his saddle, and then striking spurs into his horse's sides, he galloped at top speed after his men, with his three squires at his heels. Half a mile farther, where the road topped a hill, they looked back, and the Lady Mary on her white palfrey was still where they had left her. A moment later they were on the downward slope, and she had vanished from their view.

## 14. *How Sir Nigel sought for a Wayside Venture*

FOR a time Sir Nigel was very moody and downcast, with bent brows and eyes upon the pommel of his saddle. Edricson and Terlake rode behind him in little better case, while Ford, a careless and light-hearted youth, grinned at the melancholy of his companions, and flourished his lord's heavy spear, making a point to right and a point to left, as though he were a paladin contending against a host of assailants. Sir Nigel happening, however, to turn himself in his saddle, Ford instantly became as stiff and as rigid as though he had been struck with a palsy. The four rode alone, for the archers had passed a curve in the road, though Alleyne could still hear the heavy clump, clump of their marching,

or catch a glimpse of the sparkle of steel through the tangle of leafless branches.

"Ride by my side, friends, I entreat of you," said the knight, reigning in his steed that they might come abreast of him. "For since it hath pleased you to follow me to the wars, it were well that you should know how you may best serve me. I doubt not, Terlake, that you will show yourself a worthy son of a valiant father, and you, Ford, of yours; and you, Edricson, that you are mindful of the old-time house from which all men know that you are sprung. And first I would have you bear very steadfastly in mind that our setting forth is by no means for the purpose of gaining spoil or exacting ransom, though it may well happen that such may come to us also. We go to France, and from thence, I trust, to Spain, in humble search of a field in which we may win advancement and perchance some small share of glory. For this purpose I would have you know that it is not my wont to let any occasion pass where it is in any way possible that honour may be gained. I would have you bear this in mind, and give great heed to it that you may bring me word of all cartels, challenges, wrongs, tyrannies, infamies and wronging of damsels. Nor is any occasion too small to take note of, for I have known such trifles as the dropping of a gauntlet, or the flicking of a breadcrumb, when well and properly followed up, lead to a most noble spear-running. But, Edricson, do I not see a cavalier who rides down yonder road amongst the nether shaw? It would be well, perchance, that you should give him greeting from me, and, should he be of gentle blood, it may be that he would care to exchange thrusts with me."

"Why, my lord," quoth Ford, standing in his stirrups and shading his eyes, "it is old Hob Davidson, the fat miller of Milton!"

"Ah, so it is, indeed," said Sir Nigel, puckering his cheeks; "but wayside ventures are not to be scorned, for I have seen no finer passages than are to be had from such chance meetings, when cavaliers are willing to ad-

vance themselves. I can well remember that two leagues from the town of Rheims I met a very valiant and courteous cavalier of France, with whom I had gentle and most honourable contention for upwards of an hour. It hath ever grieved me that I had not his name, for he smote upon me with a mace and went upon his way ere I was in condition to have much speech with him; but his arms were an allurion in chief above a fess azure. I was also on such an occasion thrust through the shoulder by Lyon de Montcourt, whom I met on the high road betwixt Libourne and Bordeaux. I met him but the once, but I have never seen a man for whom I bear a greater love and esteem. And so also with the squire Le Bourg Capillet, who would have been a very valiant captain had he lived."

"He is dead then?" asked Alleyne Edricson.

"Alas! it was my ill fate to slay him in a bickering which broke out in a field near the township of Tarbes. I cannot call to mind how the thing came about, for it was in the year of the Prince's ride through Languedoc, when there was much fine skirmishing to be had at barriers. By St. Paul! I do not think that any honourable cavalier could ask for better chance of advancement than might be had by spurring forth before the army and riding to the gateways of Narbonne, or Bergerac, or Mont Giscar, where some courteous gentleman would ever be at wait to do what he might to meet your wish to ease you of your vow. Such a one at Ventadour ran three courses with me betwixt daybreak and sunrise, to the great exaltation of his lady."

"And did you slay him also, my lord?" asked Ford with reverence.

"I could never learn, for he was carried within the barrier, and as I had chanced to break the bone of my leg it was a great unease to me to ride or even to stand. Yet by the goodness of heaven and the pious intercession of the valiant St. George, I was able to sit my charger in the great battle, which was no very long time afterwards.

But what have we here ? A very fair and courtly maiden, or I mistake."

It was indeed a tall and buxom country lass, with a basket of spinach leaves upon her head, and a great slab of bacon tucked under one arm. She bobbed a frightened curtsy as Sir Nigel swept his velvet hat from his head and reined up his great charger.

" God be with thee, fair maiden ! " said he.

" God guard thee, my lord ! " she answered, speaking in the broadest West Saxon speech and balancing herself first on one foot and then on the other in her bashfulness.

" Fear not, my fair damsel," said Sir Nigel, " but tell me if perchance a poor and most unworthy knight can in any wise be of service to you. Should it chance that you have been used despitefully, it may be that I may obtain justice for you."

" Lawk no, kind sir," she answered, clutching her bacon the tighter, as though some design upon it might be hid under this knightly offer. " I be the milking wench o' fairmer Arnold, and he be as kind a maister as heart could wish."

" It is well," said he, and with a shake of the bridle rode on down the woodland path. " I would have you bear in mind," he continued to his squires, " that gentle courtesy is not, as is the base use of so many false knights, to be shown only to maidens of high degree, for there is no woman so humble that a true knight may not listen to her tale of wrong. But here comes a cavalier who is indeed in haste. Perchance it would be well that we should ask him whither he rides, for it may be that he is one who desires to advance himself in chivalry."

The bleak, hard, wind-swept road dipped down in front of them into a little valley, and then, writhing up the heathy slope upon the other side, lost itself among the gaunt pine-trees. Far away between the black lines of trunks the quick glitter of steel marked where the Company pursued its way. To the north stretched the tree country, but to the south, between two swelling downs, a

glimpse might be caught of the cold grey shimmer of the sea, with the white fleck of a galley sail upon the distant sky-line. Just in front of the travellers a horseman was urging his steed up the slope, driving it on with whip and spur as one who rides for a set purpose. As he clattered up, Alleyne could see that the roan horse was grey with dust and flecked with foam, as though it had left many a mile behind it. The rider was a stern-faced man, hard of mouth and dry of eye, with a heavy sword clanking at his side, and a stiff white bundle swathed in linen balanced across the pommel of his saddle.

"The king's messenger!" he bawled as he came up to them. "The messenger of the king! Clear the causeway for the king's own man."

"Not so loudly, friend," quoth the little knight, reining his horse half round to bar the path. "I have myself been the king's man for thirty years and more, but I have not been wont to halloo about it on a peaceful highway."

"I ride in his service," cried the other, "and I carry that which belongs to him. You bar my path at your peril."

"Yet I have known the king's enemies claim to ride in his name," said Sir Nigel. "The foul fiend may lurk beneath a garment of light. We must have some sign or warrant of your mission."

"Then must I hew a passage," cried the stranger, with his shoulder braced round and his hand upon his hilt. "I am not to be stopped on the king's service by every gadabout."

"Should you be a gentleman of quarterings and coat-armour," lisped Sir Nigel, "I shall be very blithe to go further into the matter with you. If not, I have three very worthy squires, any one of whom would take the thing upon himself, and debate it with you in a very honourable way."

The man scowled from one to the other, and his hand stole away from his sword.

"You ask me for a sign," he said. "Here is a sign for

you, since you must have one." As he spoke he whirled the covering from the object in front of him and showed to their horror that it was a newly severed human leg. "By God's tooth!" he continued, with a brutal laugh, "you ask me if I am a man of quarterings, and it is even so, for I am officer to the verderer's court at Lyndhurst. This thievish leg is to hang at Milton, and the other is already at Brockenhurst, as a sign to all men of what comes of being over fond of venison pasty."

"Faugh!" cried Sir Nigel. "Pass on the other side of the road, fellow, and let us have the wind of you. We shall trot our horses, my friends, across this pleasant valley, for, by Our Lady, a breath of God's fresh air is right welcome after such a sight."

"We hoped to snare a falcon," said he presently, "but we netted a carrion-crow. Ma foi! but there are men whose hearts are tougher than a boar's hide. For me, I have played the old game of war since ever I had hair on my chin, and I have seen ten thousand brave men in one day with their faces to the sky, but I swear by Him who made me that I cannot abide the work of the butcher."

"And yet, my fair lord," said Edricson, "there has, from what I hear, been much of such devil's work in France."

"Too much, too much," he answered. "But I have ever observed that the foremost in the field are they who would scorn to mishandle a prisoner! By St. Paul! it is not they who carry the breach who are wont to sack the town, but the laggard knaves who come crowding in when a way has been cleared for them. But what is this among the trees?"

"It is a shrine of Our Lady," said Terlake, "and a blind beggar who lives by the alms of those who worship there."

"A shrine!" cried the knight. "Then let us put up an orison." Pulling off his cap, and clasping his hands, he chaunted in a shrill voice: "Benedictus dominus Deus meus, qui docet manus meas ad prœlium, et digitos meos

ad bellum." A strange figure he seemed to his three squires, perched on his huge horse, with his eyes upturned and the wintry sun shimmering upon his bald head. "It is a noble prayer," he remarked, putting on his hat again, "and it was taught to me by the noble Chandos himself. But how fares it with you, father? Methinks that I should have ruth upon you, seeing that I am myself like one who looks through a horn window while his neighbours have the clear crystal. Yet, by St. Paul! there is a long stride between the man who hath a horn casement and him who is walled in on every hand."

"Alas! fair sir," cried the blind old man, "I have not seen the blessed blue of heaven this two score years, since a levin flash burned the sight out of my head."

"You have been blind to much that is goodly and fair," quoth Sir Nigel, "but you have also been spared much that is sorry and foul. This very hour our eyes have been shocked with that which would have left you unmoved. But, by St. Paul! we must on, or our Company will think that they have lost their captain somewhat early in the venture. Throw the man my purse, Edricson, and let us go."

Alleyne, lingering behind, bethought him of the Lady Loring's counsel, and reduced the noble gift which the knight had so freely bestowed to a single penny, which the beggar with many mumbled blessings thrust away into his wallet. Then, spurring his steed, the young squire rode at the top of his speed after his companions, and overtook them just at the spot where the trees fringe off into the moor and the straggling hamlet of Hordle lies scattered on either side of the winding and deeply rutted track. The Company was already well-nigh through the village; but as the knight and his squires closed up upon them, they heard the clamour of a strident voice, followed by a roar of deep-chested laughter from the ranks of the archers. Another minute brought them up with the rear-guard, where every man marched with his beard on his shoulder and a face which was agrin with merriment. By

the side of the column walked a huge red-headed bowman, with his hands thrown out in argument and expostulation, while close at his heels followed a little wrinkled woman, who poured forth a shrill volley of abuse, varied by an occasional thwack from her stick, given with all the force of her body, though she might have been beating one of the forest trees for all the effect that she seemed likely to produce.

"I trust, Aylward," said Sir Nigel gravely, as he rode up, "that this doth not mean that any violence hath been offered to women. If such a thing happened, I tell you that the man shall hang, though he were the best archer that ever wore brassart."

"Nay, my fair lord," Aylward answered with a grin, "it is violence which is offered to a man. He comes from Hordle, and this is his mother who hath come forth to welcome him."

"You rammucky lurden," she was howling, with a blow between each catch of her breath, "you shammocking yaping over-long good-for-nought. I will teach thee! I will baste thee! Aye, by my faith!"

"Whist, mother," said John, looking back at her from the tail of his eye. "I go to France as an archer to give blows and to take them."

"To France, quotha?" cried the old dame. "Bide here with me, and I shall warrant you more blows than you are like to get in France. If blows be what you seek, you need not go further than Hordle."

"By my hilt! the good dame speaks truth," said Aylward. "It seems to be the very home of them."

"What have you to say, you clean-shaved galley-bagger?" cried the fiery dame, turning upon the archer. "Can I not speak with my own son but you must let your tongue clack? A soldier, quotha, and never a hair on his face. I have seen a better soldier with pap for food and swaddling clothes for harness."

"Stand to it, Aylward," cried the archers, amid a fresh burst of laughter.

"Do not thwart her, comrade," said big John. "She hath a proper spirit for her years and cannot abide to be thwarted. It is kindly and homely to me to hear her voice and to feel that she is behind me. But I must leave you now, mother, for the way is over-rough for your feet; but I will bring you back a silken gown, if there be one in France, or Spain, and I will bring Jinny a silver penny; so good-bye to you, and God have you in his keeping!" Whipping up the little woman, he lifted her lightly to his lips, and then, taking his place in the ranks again, marched on with the laughing Company.

"That was ever his way," she cried, appealing to Sir Nigel, who reined up his horse and listened with the gravest courtesy. "He would jog on his own road for all that I could do to change him. First he must be a monk forsooth, and all because a wench was wise enough to turn her back on him. Then he joins a rascally crew and must needs trapse off to the wars, and me with no one to bait the fire if I be out, or tend the cow if I be home. Yet I have been a good mother to him. Three hazel switches a day have I broke across his shoulders, and he takes no more notice than you have seen him to-day."

"Doubt not that he will come back to you both safe and prosperous, my fair dame," quoth Sir Nigel. "Meanwhile it grieves me that, as I have already given my purse to a beggar up the road, I——"

"Nay, my lord," said Alleyne, "I still have some monies remaining."

"Then I pray you to give them to this very worthy woman." He cantered on as he spoke, while Alleyne, having dispensed two more pence, left the old dame standing by the farthest cottage of Hordle with her shrill voice raised in blessings instead of revilings.

There were two cross-roads before they reached the Lymington Ford, and at each of them Sir Nigel pulled up his horse, and waited with many a curvet and gambade, craning his neck this way and that to see if fortune would send him a venture. Cross-roads had, as he explained,

been rare places for knightly spear-runnings, and in his youth it was no uncommon thing for a cavalier to abide for weeks at such a point, holding gentle debate with all comers, to his own advancement and the great honour of his lady. The times were changed, however, and the forest tracks wound away from them deserted and silent, with no trample of war-horse or clang of armour which might herald the approach of an adversary—so that Sir Nigel rode on his way disconsolate. At the Lymington river they splashed through the ford, and lay in the meadows on the farther side to eat the bread and salt meat which they carried upon the sumpter horses. Then, ere the sun was up the slope of the heavens, they had deftly trussed up again, and were swinging merrily upon their way, two hundred feet moving like two.

There is a third cross-road where the track from Boldre runs down to the old fishing village of Pitt's Deep. Down this, as they came abreast of it, there walked two men, the one a pace or two behind the other. The cavaliers could not but pull up their horses to look at them, for a stranger pair were never seen journeying together. The first was a misshapen squalid man with cruel cunning eyes and a shock of tangled red hair, bearing in his hands a small unpainted cross, which he held high so that all men might see it. He seemed to be in the last extremity of fright, with a face the colour of clay and his limbs all ashake as one who hath an ague. Behind him, with his toe ever rasping upon the other's heels, there walked a very stern black-bearded man with a hard eye and a set mouth. He bore over his shoulder a great knotted stick with three jagged nails stuck in the head of it, and from time to time he whirled it up in the air with a quivering arm, as though he could scarce hold back from dashing his companion's brains out. So in silence they walked under the spread of the branches on the grass-grown path from Boldre.

"By St. Paul!" quoth the knight, "but this is a passing strange sight, and perchance some very perilous and honourable venture may arise from it. I pray you,

Edricson, to ride up to them and to ask them the cause of it."

There was no need, however, for him to move, for the twain came swiftly towards them until they were within a spear's length, when the man with the cross sat himself down sullenly upon a tussock of grass by the wayside, while the other stood beside him with his great cudgel still hanging over his head. So intent was he that he raised his eyes neither to knight nor squires, but kept them ever fixed with a savage glare upon his comrade.

"I pray you, friend," said Sir Nigel, "to tell us truthfully who you are, and why you follow this man with such bitter enmity."

"So long as I am within the pale of the king's law," the stranger answered, "I cannot see why I should render account to every passing wayfarer."

"You are no very shrewd reasoner, fellow," quoth the knight; "for if it be within the law for you to threaten him with your club, then it is also lawful for me to threaten you with my sword."

The man with the cross was down in an instant on his knees upon the ground, with hands clasped above him and his face shining with hope. "For dear Christ's sake, my fair lord," he cried in a crackling voice, "I have at my belt a bag with a hundred rose nobles, and I will give it to you freely if you will but pass your sword through this man's body."

"How, you foul knave?" exclaimed Sir Nigel hotly. "Do you think that a cavalier's arm is to be bought like a packman's ware? By St. Paul! I have little doubt that this fellow hath some very good cause to hold you in hatred."

"Indeed, my fair sir, you speak sooth," quoth he with the club, while the other seated himself once more by the wayside. "For this man is Peter Peterson, a very noted rieve, drawlatch and murtherer, who has wrought much evil for many years in the parts about Winchester. It was but the other day, upon the feast of the blessed Simon and Jude, that he slew my younger brother William in Bere

Forest—for which, by the black thorn of Glastonbury ! I shall have his heart's blood, though I walked behind him to the further end of the earth."

" But if this be indeed so," asked Sir Nigel, " why is it that you have come with him so far through the forest ? "

" Because I am an honest Englishman, and will take no more than the law allows. For when the deed was done this foul and base wretch fled to sanctuary at St. Cross, and I, as you may think, after him with all the posse. The Prior, however, hath so ordered that while he holds this cross no man may lay hand upon him without the ban of church, which heaven forefend from me or mine. Yet, if for an instant he lay the cross aside, or if he fail to journey to Pitt's Deep, where it is ordered that he shall take ship to outland parts, or if he take not the first ship, or if until the ship be ready he walk not every day into the sea as far as his loins, then he becomes outlaw, and I shall forthwith dash out his brains."

At this the man on the ground snarled up at him like a rat, while the other clenched his teeth, and shook his club, and looked down at him with murder in his eyes. Knight and squires gazed from rogue to avenger, but as it was a matter which none could mend they tarried no longer, but rode upon their way. Alleyne, looking back, saw that the murderer had drawn bread and cheese from his scrip, and was silently munching it, with the protecting cross still hugged to his breast, while the other, black and grim, stood in the sunlit road and threw his dark shadow athwart him.

## 15. *How the Yellow Cog sailed forth from Lepe*

THAT night the Company slept at St. Leonard's, in the great monastic barns and spicarium—ground well known both to Alleyne and to John, for they were almost within sight of the Abbey of Beaulieu. A

strange thrill it gave to the young squire to see the well-remembered white dress once more, and to hear the measured tolling of the deep vespers bell. At early dawn they passed across the broad, sluggish, reed-girt stream—men, horses and baggage in the flat ferry barges—and so journeyed on through the fresh morning air past Exbury to Lepe. Topping the heathy down, they came of a sudden full in sight of the old seaport—a cluster of houses, a trail of blue smoke and a bristle of masts. To right and left the long biue curve of the Solent lapped in a fringe of foam upon the yellow beach. Some way out from the town a line of pessoners, creyers and other small craft were rolling lazily on the gentle swell. Farther out still lay a great merchant-ship, high ended, deep waisted, painted of a canary yellow, and towering above the fishing boats like a swan among ducklings.

"By St. Paul!" said the knight, "our good merchant of Southampton hath not played us false, for methinks I can see our ship down yonder. He said that she would be of great size and of a yellow shade."

"By my hilt, yes!" muttered Aylward; "she is yellow as a kite's claw, and would carry as many men as there are pips in a pomegranate."

"It is as well," remarked Terlake; "for methinks, my fair lord, that we are not the only ones who are waiting a passage to Gascony. Mine eyes catches at times a flash and sparkle from among yonder houses which assuredly never came from shipman's jacket or the gaberdine of a burgher."

"I can also see it," said Alleyne, shading his eyes with his hand. "And I can see men-at-arms in yonder boats which ply betwixt the vessel and the shore. But me-thinks that we are very welcome here, for already they come forth to meet us."

A tumultuous crowd of fishermen, citizens and women had indeed swarmed out from the northern gate, ap-proached them up the side of the moor, waving their hands and dancing with joy, as though a great fear had been

rolled back from their minds. At their head rode a very large and solemn man with a long chin and a drooping lip. He wore a fur tippet round his neck and a heavy gold chain over it, with a medallion which dangled in front of him.

"Welcome, most puissant and noble lord," he cried, doffing his bonnet to Black Simon. "I have heard of your lordship's valiant deeds, and in sooth they might be expected from your lordship's face and bearing. Is there any small matter in which I may oblige you?"

"Since you ask me," said the man-at-arms, "I would take it kindly if you could spare a link or two of the chain which hangs round your neck."

"What, the corporation chain!" cried the other in horror. "The ancient chain of the township of Lepe! This is but a sorry jest, Sir Nigel."

"What the plague did you ask me for, then?" said Simon. "But if it is Sir Nigel Loring with whom you would speak, that is he upon the black horse."

The Mayor of Lepe gazed with amazement on the mild face and slender frame of the famous warrior.

"Your pardon, my very gracious lord," he cried. "You see in me the mayor and chief magistrate of the ancient and powerful town of Lepe. I bid you very heartily welcome, and the more so as you are come at a moment when we are sore put to it for means of defence."

"Ha!" cried Sir Nigel, pricking up his ears.

"Yes, my lord, for the town being very ancient, and the walls as old as the town, it follows that they are very ancient too. But there is a certain villainous and blood-thirsty Norman pirate hight Tête-noire, who, with a Genoan called Tito Caracci, commonly known as Spade-beard, hath been a mighty scourge upon these coasts. Indeed, my lord, they are very cruel and black-hearted men, graceless and ruthless, and if they should come to the ancient and powerful town of Lepe, then——"

"Then good-bye to the ancient and powerful town of Lepe," quoth Ford, whose lightness of tongue could at times rise above his awe of Sir Nigel.

The knight, however, was too much intent upon the matter in hand to give heed to the flippancy of his squire. "Have you then cause," he asked, "to think that these men are about to venture an attempt upon you?"

"They have come in two great galleys," answered the mayor, "with two bank of oars on either side, and great store of engines of war and of men-at-arms. At Weymouth and at Portland they have murdered and ravished. Yesterday morning they were at Cowes, and we saw the smoke from the burning crofts. To-day they lie at their ease near Freshwater, and we fear much lest they come upon us and do us a mischief."

"We cannot tarry," said Sir Nigel, riding towards the town, with the mayor upon his left side; "the Prince awaits us at Bordeaux, and we may not be behind the general muster. Yet I will promise you that on our way we shall find time to pass Freshwater and to prevail upon these rovers to leave you in peace."

"We are much beholden to you!" cried the mayor. "But I cannot see, my lord, how, without a war-ship you may venture against these men. With your archers, however, you might well hold the town and do them great scath if they attempt to land."

"There is a very proper cog out yonder," said Sir Nigel; "it would be a very strange thing if any ship were not a war-ship when it had such men as these upon her decks. Certes, we shall do as I say, and that no later than this very day."

"My lord," said a rough-haired, dark-faced man, who walked by the knight's other stirrup, with his head sloped to catch all that he was saying. "By your leave, I have no doubt that you are skilled in land fighting and the marshalling of lances, but, by my soul! you will find it another thing upon the sea. I am the master-shipman of this yellow cog, and my name is Goodwin Hawtayne. I have sailed since I was as high as this staff, and I have fought against these Normans and against the Genoese, as well as the Scotch, the Bretons, the Spanish and the Moors.

I tell you, sir, that my ship is over light and over frail for such work, and it will but end in our having our throats cut, or being sold as slaves to the Barbary heathen."

"I also have experienced one or two gentle and honourable ventures upon the sea," quoth Sir Nigel, "and I am right blithe to have so fair a task before us. I think, good master-shipman, that you and I may win great honour in this matter, and I can see very readily that you are a brave and stout man."

"I like it not," said the other sturdily. "In God's name, I like it not. And yet Goodwin Hawtayne is not the man to stand back when his fellows are for pressing forward. By my soul! be it sink or swim, I shall turn her beak into Freshwater Bay, and if good Master Witherton, of Southampton, like not my handling of his ship, then he may find another master-shipman."

They were close by the old north gate of the little town, and Alleyne, half turning in his saddle, looked back at the motley crowd who followed. The bowmen and men-at-arms had broken their ranks and were intermingled with the fishermen and citizens, whose laughing faces and hearty gestures bespoke the weight of care from which this welcome arrival had relieved them. Here and there among the moving throng of dark jerkins and of white surcoats were scattered dashes of scarlet or blue, the wimples or shawls of the women. Aylward, with a fishing lass on either arm, was vowing constancy alternately to her on the right and her on the left, while big John towered in the rear with a little chubby maiden enthroned upon his great shoulder, her soft white arm curled round his shining headpiece. So the throng moved on, until at the very gate it was brought to a stand by a wondrously fat man, who came darting forth from the town with rage in every feature of his rubicund face.

"How now, Sir Mayor?" he roared, in a voice like a bull. "How now, Sir Mayor? How of the clams and the scallops?"

"By our Lady, my sweet Sir Oliver," cried the mayor,

"I have had so much to think of, with these wicked villains so close upon us, that it had quite gone out of my head."

"Words, words!" shouted the other furiously. "Am I to be put off with words? I say to you again, how of the clams and scallops?"

"My fair sir, you flutter me," cried the mayor. "I am a peaceful trader, and I am not wont to be so shouted at upon so small a matter."

"Small!" shrieked the other. "Small! Clams and scallops! Ask me to your table to partake of the dainty of the town, and when I come a barren welcome and a bare board! Where is my spear-bearer?"

"Nay, Sir Oliver, Sir Oliver!" cried Sir Nigel, laughing. "Let your anger be appeased, since instead of this dish you come upon an old friend and comrade."

"By St. Martin of Tours!" shouted the fat knight, his wrath all changed in an instant to joy, "if it is not my dear little game rooster of the Garonne. Ah, my sweet coz, I am right glad to see you. What days we have seen together!"

"Aye, by my faith," cried Sir Nigel, with sparkling eyes, "we have seen some valiant men, and we have shown our pennons in some noble skirmishes. By St. Paul! we have had great joys in France."

"And sorrows also," quoth the other. "I have some sad memories of the land. Can you recall that which befell us at Libourne?"

"Nay, I cannot call to mind that we ever so much as drew sword at the place."

"Man, man," cried Sir Oliver, "your mind still runs on nought but blades and bassinets. Hast no space in thy frame for the softer joys? Ah, even now I can scarce speak of it unmoved. So noble a pie, such tender pigeons, and sugar in the gravy instead of salt! You were by my side that day, as were Sir Claude Latour and the Lord of Pommers."

"I remember it," said Sir Nigel, laughing, "and how

you harried the cook down the street, and spoke of setting fire to the inn. By St. Paul ! most worthy mayor, my old friend is a perilous man, and I rede you that you compose your difference with him on such terms as you may."

"The clams and scallops shall be ready within the hour," the mayor answered. "I had asked Sir Oliver Buttesthorn to do my humble board the honour to partake at it of the dainty upon which we take some little pride, but in sooth this alarm of pirates hath cast such a shadow on my wits that I am like one distrait. But I trust, Sir Nigel, that you will also partake of none-meat with me ? "

"I have overmuch to do," Sir Nigel answered, "for we must be aboard, horse and man, as early as we may. How many do you muster, Sir Oliver ? "

"Three-and-forty. The forty are drunk, and three are but indifferent sober. I have them all safe upon the ship."

"They had best find their wits again, for I shall have work for every man of them ere the sun set. It is my intention, if it seems good to you, to try to venture against these Norman and Genoese rovers."

"They carry caviare, and certain very noble spices from the Levant aboard of ships from Genoa," quoth Sir Oliver. "We may come to great profit through the business. I pray you, master-shipman, that when you go on board you pour a helmetful of sea-water over any of my rogues who you may see there."

Leaving the lusty knight and the Mayor of Lepe, Sir Nigel led the Company straight down to the water's edge, where long lines of flat lighters swiftly bore them to their vessel. Horse after horse was slung by main force up from the barges, and after kicking and plunging in empty air was dropped into the deep waist of the yellow cog, where rows of stalls stood ready for their safe-keeping. Englishmen in those days were skilled and prompt in such matters, for it was not so long before that Edward had embarked as many as fifty thousand men in the port

of Orwell, with their horses and their baggage, all in the space of four-and-twenty hours. So urgent was Sir Nigel on the shore, and so prompt was Goodwin Hawtayne on the cog, that Sir Oliver Buttesthorn had scarce swallowed his last scallop ere the peal of trumpet and clang of nakir announced that all was ready and the anchor drawn. In the last boat which left the shore the two commanders sat together in the sheets, a strange contrast to one another, while under the feet of the rowers was a litter of huge stones which Sir Nigel had ordered to be carried to the cog. These once aboard, the ship set her broad mainsail, purple in colour, with a golden St. Christopher bearing Christ upon his shoulder in the centre of it. The breeze blew, the sail bellied, over heeled the portly vessel, and away she plunged through the smooth blue rollers, amid the clang of the minstrels on her poop and the shouting of the crowd who fringed the yellow beach. To the left lay the green Island of Wight, with its long low curving hills peeping over each other's shoulders to the sky-line; to the right the wooded Hampshire coast as far as eye could reach; above a steel-blue heaven, with a wintry sun shimmering down upon them, and enough of frost to set the breath a-smoking.

"By St. Paul!" said Sir Nigel gaily, as he stood upon the poop and looked on either side of him, "it is a land which is very well worth fighting for, but it were pity to go to France for what may be had at home. Did you not spy a crooked man upon the beach?"

"Nay, I spied nothing," grumbled Sir Oliver, "for I was hurried down with a clam stuck in my gizzard and an untasted goblet of Cyprus on the board behind me."

"I saw him, my fair lord," said Terlake, "an old man with one shoulder higher than the other."

"'Tis a sign of good fortune," quoth Sir Nigel. "Our path was also crossed by a woman and by a priest, so all should be well with us. What say you, Edricson?"

"I cannot tell, my fair lord. The Romans of old were a very wise people, yet, certes, they placed their faith

in such matters. So, too, did the Greeks, and divers other ancient peoples who were famed for their learning. Yet of the moderns there are many who scoff at all omens."

"There can be no manner of doubt about it," said Sir Oliver Buttesthorn. "I can well remember that in Navarre one day it thundered on the left out of a cloudless sky. We knew that ill would come of it, nor had we long to wait. Only thirteen days after, a haunch of prime venison was carried from my very tent door by the wolves, and on the same day two flasks of old vernage turned sour and muddy."

"You may bring my harness from below," said Sir Nigel to his squires, "and also, I pray you, bring up Sir Oliver's, and we shall don it here. Ye may then see to your own gear; for this day you will, I hope, make a very honourable entrance into the field of chivalry, and prove yourselves to be very worthy and valiant squires. And now, Sir Oliver, as to our dispositions: would it please you that I should order them or will you?"

"You, my cockerel, you. By our Lady! I am no chicken, but I cannot claim to know as much of war as the squire of Sir Walter Manny. Settle the matter to your own liking."

"You shall fly your pennon upon the fore part, then, and I upon the poop. For foreguard I shall give you your own forty men, with two score archers. Two score men, with my own men-at-arms and squires, may serve as a poop guard. Ten archers, with thirty shipmen, under the master may hold the waist while ten lie aloft with stones and arbalests. How like you that?"

"Good, by my faith, good! But here comes my harness, and I must to work, for I cannot slip into it as I was wont when first I set my face to the wars."

Meanwhile there had been bustle and preparation in all parts of the great vessel. The archers stood in groups about the decks, new-stringing their bows, and testing that they were firm at the nocks. Among them moved

Aylward and other of the older soldiers, with a few whispered words of precept here and of warning there.

"Stand to it, my hearts of gold," said the old bowman as he passed from knot to knot. "By my hilt! we are in luck this journey. Bear in mind the old saying of the Company."

"What is that, Aylward?" cried several, leaning on their bows and laughing at him.

"'Tis the master-bowman's rede: 'Every bow well bent. Every shaft well sent. Every stave well nocked. Every string well locked.' There, with that jingle in his head, a bracer on his left hand, a shooting glove on his right, and a farthing's-worth of wax in his girdle, what more doth a bowman need?"

"It would not be amiss," said Hordle John, "if under his girdle he had four farthings'-worth of wine!"

"Work first, wine afterwards, mon camarade. But it is time that we took our order, for methinks that between the Needle rocks and the Alum cliffs yonder I can catch a glimpse of the topmasts of the galleys. Hewett, Cook, Johnson, Cunningham, your men are of the poop-guard. Thornbury, Walters, Hackett, Baddlesmere, you are with Sir Oliver to the forecastle. Simon, you bide with your lord's banner; but ten men must go forward."

Quietly and promptly the men took their places, lying flat upon their faces on the deck, for such was Sir Nigel's order. Near the prow was planted Sir Oliver's spear, with his arms—a boar's head gules upon a field of gold. Close by the stern stood Black Simon with the pennon of the house of Loring. In the waist gathered the Southampton mariners, hairy and burly men, with their jerkins thrown off, their waists braced tight, swords, mallets, and pole-axes in their hands. Their leader, Goodwin Hawtayne, stood upon the poop and talked with Sir Nigel, casting his eye up sometimes at the swelling sail, and then glancing back at the two seamen who held the tiller.

"Pass the word," said Sir Nigel, "that no man shall

stand to arms or draw his bowstring until my trumpeter shall sound. It would be well that we should seem to be a merchant-ship from Southampton and appear to flee from them."

"We shall see them anon," said the master-shipman. "Ha! said I not so? There they lie, the water-snakes in Freshwater Bay; and mark the reek of smoke from yonder point, where they have been at their devil's work. See how their shallops pull from the land! They have seen us and called their men aboard. Now they draw upon the anchor. See them like ants upon the forecastle! They stoop and heave like handy shipmen. But, my fair lord, these are no niefs. I doubt but we have taken in hand more than we can do. Each of these ships is a galeasse, and of the largest and swiftest make."

"I would I had your eyes," said Sir Nigel, blinking at the pirate galleys. "They seem very gallant ships, and I trust that we shall have much pleasance from our meeting with them. It would be well to pass the word that we should neither give nor take quarter this day. Have you perchance a priest or friar aboard this ship, Master Hawtayne?"

"No, my fair lord."

"Well, well, it is no great matter for my Company, for they were all houseled and shriven ere we left Twynham Castle; and Father Christopher of the Priory gave me his word that they were as fit to march to heaven as to Gascony. But my mind misdoubts me as to these Winchester men who have come with Sir Oliver, for they appear to be a very ungodly crew. Pass the word that the men kneel, and that the under-officers repeat to them the pater, the ave, and the credo."

With a clank of arms, the rough archers and seamen took to their knees, with bent heads and crossed hands, listening to the hoarse mutter from the file-leaders. It was strange to mark the hush; so that the lapping of the water, the straining of the sail, and the creaking of the timbers grew louder of a sudden upon the ear. Many of

the bowmen had drawn amulets and relics from their bosoms, while he who possessed some more than usually sanctified treasure passed it down the line of his comrades that all might kiss and reap the virtue.

The yellow cog had now shot out from the narrow waters of the Solent, and was plunging and rolling on the long heave of the open channel. The wind blew freshly from the east, with a very keen edge to it ; and the great sail bellied roundly out, laying the vessel over until the water hissed beneath her lee bulwarks. Broad and ungainly she floundered from wave to wave, dipping her round bows deeply into the blue rollers, and sending the white flakes of foam in a spatter over her decks. On her larboard quarter lay the two dark galleys, which had already hoisted sail, and were shooting out from Freshwater Bay in swift pursuit, their double line of oars giving them a vantage which could not fail to bring them up with any vessel which trusted to sails alone. High and bluff the English cog ; long, black and swift the pirate galleys, like two fierce lean wolves which have seen a lordly and unsuspecting stag walk past their forest lair.

"Shall we turn, my fair lord, or shall we carry on ?" asked the master-shipman, looking behind him with anxious eyes.

"Nay, we must carry on, and play the part of the helpless merchant."

"But your pennons ? They will see that we have two knights with us."

"Yet it would not be to a knight's honour or good name to lower his pennon. Let them be, and they will think that we are a wine-ship for Gascony, or that we bear the wool-bales of some mercer of the Staple. Ma foi ! but they are very swift ! They swoop upon us like two goshawks on a heron. Is there not some symbol or device upon their sails ?"

"That on the right," said Edricson, "appears to have the head of an Ethiop upon it."

"'Tis the badge of Tête-noire, the Norman," cried

the seaman-mariner. "I have seen it before when he harried us at Winchelsea. He is a wondrous large and strong man, with no ruth for man, woman, or beast. They say that he hath the strength of six; and, certes, he hath the crimes of six upon his soul. See, now, to the poor souls who swing at either end of his yard-arm!"

At each end of the yard there did indeed hang the dark figure of a man, jolting and lurching with hideous jerkings of its limbs at every plunge and swoop of the galley.

"By St. Paul!" said Sir Nigel, "and by the help of St. George and Our Lady, it will be a very strange thing if our black-headed friend does not himself swing thence ere he be many hours older. But what is that upon the other galley?"

"It is the red cross of Genoa. This Spade-beard is a very noted captain, and it is his boast there there are no seamen and no archers in the world who can compare with those who serve the Doge Boccanegra."

"That we shall prove," said Goodwin Hawtayne; "but it would be well, ere they close with us, to raise up the mantlets and pavises as a screen against their bolts." He shouted a hoarse order, and his seamen worked swiftly and silently, heightening the bulwarks and strengthening them. The three ship's anchors were at Sir Nigel's command carried into the waist, and tied to the mast, with twenty feet of cable between, each under the care of four seamen. Eight others were stationed with leather water-bags to quench any fire-arrows which might come aboard, while others were sent up the mast, to lie along the yard and drop stones or shoot arrows as the occasion served.

"Let them be supplied with all that is heavy and weighty in the ship," said Sir Nigel.

"Then we must send them up Sir Oliver Buttesthorn," quoth Ford.

The knight looked at him with a face which struck the smile from his lips. "No squire of mine," he said, "shall ever make jest of a belted knight. And yet," he

added, his eyes softening, "I know that it is but a boy's mirth, with no sting in it. Yet I should do ill my part towards your father if I did not teach you to curb your tongue-play."

"They will lay us aboard on either quarter, my lord," cried the master. "See how they stretch out from each other! The Norman hath a mangonel or a trabuch upon the forecastle. See, they bend to the levers! They are about to loose it."

"Aylward," cried the knight, "pick your three trustiest archers, and see if you cannot do something to hinder their aim. Methinks they are within long arrow flight."

"Seventeen score paces," said the archer, running his eye backwards and forwards. "By my ten finger-bones! it would be a strange thing if we could not notch a mark at that distance. Here, Watkin of Sowley, Arnold, Long Williams, let us show the rogues that they have English bowmen to deal with."

The three archers named stood at the farther end of the poop, balancing themselves with feet widely spread and bows drawn, until the heads of the cloth-yard arrows were level with the centre of the stave. "You are the surer, Watkin," said Aylward, standing by them with shaft upon string. "Do you take the rogue with the red coif. You two bring down the man with the head-piece and I will hold myself ready if you miss. Ma foi! they are about to loose her. Shoot, mes garçons, or you will be too late."

The throng of pirates had cleared away from the great wooden catapult, leaving two of their number to discharge it. One in a scarlet cap bent over it, steadying the jagged rock which was balanced on the spoon-shaped end of the long wooden lever. The other held the loop of the rope which would release the catch and send the unwieldy missile hurtling through the air. So for an instant they stood, showing hard and clear against the white sail behind them. The next, redcap had fallen across the stone with an arrow between his ribs; and the other,

struck in the leg and in the throat, was writhing and spluttering upon the ground. As he toppled backwards he had loosed the spring and the huge beam of wood, swinging round with tremendous force, cast the corpse of his comrade so close to the English ship that its mangled and distorted limbs grazed their very stern. As to the stone, it glanced off obliquely and fell midway between the vessels. A roar of cheering and of laughter broke from the rough archers and seamen at the sight, answered by a yell of rage from their pursuers.

"Lie low, mes infants," cried Aylward, motioning with his left hand. "They will learn wisdom. They are bringing forward shield and mantlet. We shall have some pebbles about our ears ere long."

## 16. *How the Yellow Cog fought the Two Rover Galleys*

THE three vessels had been sweeping swiftly westwards, the cog still well to the front, although the galleys were slowly drawing in upon either quarter. To the left was a hard sky-line unbroken by a sail. The island already lay like a cloud behind them, while right in front was St. Alban's Head, with Portland looming mistily in the farthest distance. Alleyne stood by the tiller, looking backwards, the fresh wind full in his teeth, the crisp winter air tingling on his face and blowing his yellow curls from under his bassinet. His cheeks were flushed and his eyes shining, for the blood of a hundred fighting Saxon ancestors was beginning to stir in his veins.

"What was that?" he asked, as a hissing, sharp-drawn voice seemed to whisper in his ear. The steersman smiled, and pointed with his foot to where a short heavy cross-bow quarrel stuck quivering in the boards. At the same instant the man stumbled forward upon his knee, and lay lifeless upon the deck, a blood-stained feather jutting out from his back. As Alleyne stooped to

raise him, the air seemed to be alive with the sharp zip-zip of the bolts, and he could hear them pattering on the deck like apples at a tree-shaking.

"Raise two more mantlets by the poop-lanthorn," said Sir Nigel quietly.

"And another man to the tiller," cried the master shipman.

"Keep them in play, Aylward, with ten of your men," the knight continued. "And let ten of Sir Oliver's bowmen do as much for the Genoese. I have no mind as yet to show them how much they have to fear from us."

Ten picked shots under Aylward stood in line across the broad deck, and it was a lesson to the young squires who had seen nothing of war to note how orderly and how cool were these old soldiers, how quick the command, and how prompt the carrying out, ten moving like one. Their comrades crouched beneath the bulwarks, with many a rough jest and many a scrap of criticism or advice. "Higher, Wat, higher!" "Put thy body into it, Will!" "Forget not the wind, Hal!" So ran the muttered chorus, while high above it rose the sharp twanging of the strings, the hiss of the shafts, and the short "Draw your arrow! Nick your arrow! Shoot wholly together!" from the master-bowman.

And now both mangonels were at work from the galleys but so covered and protected that, save at the moment of discharge, no glimpse could be caught of them. A huge brown rock from the Genoese sang over their heads and plunged sullenly into the slope of a wave. Another from the Norman whizzed into the waist, broke the back of a horse, and crashed its way through the side of the vessel. Two others, flying together, tore a great gap in the St. Christopher upon the sail, and brushed three of Sir Oliver's men-at-arms from the forecastle. The master-shipman looked at the knight with a troubled face.

"They keep their distance from us," said he. "Our archery is over good, and they will not close. What defence can we make against the stones?"

"I think I may trick them," the knight answered cheerfully, and passed his order to the archers. Instantly five of them threw up their hands and fell prostrate upon the deck. One had already been slain by a bolt, so that there were but four upon their feet.

"That should give them heart," said Sir Nigel, eyeing the galleys, which crept along on either side with a slow measured swing of their great oars, the water swirling and foaming under their sharp stems.

"They still hold aloof," cried Hawtayne.

"Then down with two more," shouted their leader. "That will do. Ma foi! but they come to our lure like chicks to the fowler. To your arms, men! The pennon behind me, and the squires round the pennon. Stand fast with the anchors in the waist, and be ready for a cast. Now blow out the trumpets, and may God's benison be with the honest men!"

As he spoke the roar of voices and a roll of drums came from either galley, and the water was lashed into spray by the hurried beat of a hundred oars. Down they swooped, one on the right, one on the left, the sides and shrouds black with men and bristling with weapons. In heavy clusters they hung upon the forecastle all ready for a spring—faces white, faces brown, faces yellow, and faces black, fair Norsemen, swarthy Italians, fierce rovers from the Levant, and fiery Moors from the Barbary States, of all hues and countries, and marked solely by the common stamp of a wild-beast ferocity. Rasping up on either side, with oars trailing to save them from snapping, they poured in a living torrent with horrid yell and shrill whoop upon the defenceless merchantman.

But wilder yet was the cry, and shriller still the scream, when there rose up from the shadow of those silent bulwarks the long lines of the English bowmen, and the arrows whizzed in a deadly sleet among the unprepared masses upon the pirate decks. From the higher sides of the cog the bowmen could shoot straight down, at a range which was so short as to enable a cloth-yard shaft to

pierce through mailcoats or to transfix a shield, though it were an inch thick of toughened wood. One moment Alleyne saw the galley's poop crowded with rushing figures, waving arms, exultant faces ; the next it was a blood-smeared shambles, with bodies piled three deep upon each other, the living cowering behind the dead to shelter themselves from that sudden storm-blast of death. On either side the seamen whom Sir Nigel had chosen for the purpose had cast their anchors over the side of the galleys, so that the three vessels, locked in an iron grip, lurched heavily forward upon the swell.

And now set in a fell and fierce fight, one of a thousand of which no chronicler has spoken and no poet sung. Through all the centuries, and over all those southern waters, nameless men have fought in nameless places, their sole monument a protected coast and an unravaged country-side.

Fore and aft the archers had cleared the galleys' decks, but from either side the rovers had poured down into the waist, where the seamen and bowmen were pushed back and so mingled with their foes that it was impossible for their comrades above to draw string to help them. It was a wild chaos where axe and sword rose and fell, while Englishmen, Norman, and Italian staggered and reeled on a deck which was cumbered with bodies and slippery with blood. The clang of blows, the cries of the stricken, the short deep shout of the islanders, and the fierce whoops of the rovers, rose together in a deafening tumult, while the breath of the panting men went up in the wintry air like the smoke from a furnace. The giant Tête-noir, towering above his fellows and clad from head to foot in plate of proof, led on his boarders, waving a huge mace in the air, with which he struck to the deck every man who opposed him. On the other side, Spade-beard, a dwarf in height, but of great breadth of shoulder and length of arm, had cut a road almost to the mast, with threescore Genoese men-at-arms close at his heels. Between these two formidable assailants the seamen were being slowly

wedged more closely together, until they stood back to back under the mast with the rovers raging upon every side of them.

But help was close at hand. Sir Oliver Buttesthorn with his men-at-arms had swarmed down from the forecastle, while Sir Nigel, with his three squires, Black Simon, Aylward, Hordle John, and a score more, threw themselves from the poop and hurled themselves into the thickest of the fight. Alleyne, as in duty bound, kept his eyes fixed ever on his lord and pressed forward close at his heels. Often had he heard of Sir Nigel's prowess and skill with all knightly weapons, but all the tales that had reached his ears fell far short of the real quickness anp coolness of the man. It was as if the devil was in him, for he sprang here and sprang there, now thrusting and now cutting, catching blows on his shield, turning them with his blade, stooping under the swing of an axe, springing over the sweep of a sword, so swift and so erratic that the man who braced himself for a blow at him might find him six paces off ere he could bring it down. Three pirates had fallen before him, and he had wounded Spade-beard in the neck when the Norman giant sprang at him from the side with a slashing blow from his deadly mace. Sir Nigel stooped to avoid it, and at the same instant turned a thrust from the Genoese swordsman, but, his foot slipping in a pool of blood, he fell heavily to the boards. Alleyne sprang in front of the Norman, but his sword was shattered and he himself beaten to the boards by a second blow from the ponderous weapon. Ere the pirate chief could repeat it, however, John's iron grip fell upon his wrist, and he found that for once he was in the hands of a stronger man than himself. Fiercely he strove to disengage his weapon, but Hordle John bent his arm slowly back until, with a sharp crack, like a breaking stave, it turned limp in his grasp, and the mace dropped from the nerveless fingers. In vain he tried to pluck it up with the other hand. Back and back still his foeman bent him, until, with a roar of pain and of fury,

the giant clanged his full length upon the boards, while the glimmer of a knife before the bars of his helmet warned him that short would be his shrift if he moved.

Cowed and disheartened by the loss of their leader, the Normans had given back and were now streaming over the bulwarks on to their own galley, dropping a dozen at a time on to her deck. But the anchor still held them in its crooked claw, and Sir Oliver with fifty men was hard upon their heels. Now, too, the archers had room to draw their bows once more, and great stones from the yard of the cog came thundering and crashing among the flying rovers. Here and there they rushed with wild screams and curses, diving under the sail, crouching behind booms, huddling into corners like rabbits when the ferrets are upon them, as helpless and as hopeless. They were stern days, and if the honest soldier, too poor for a ransom, had no prospect of mercy upon the battle-field, what ruth was there for sea-robbers, the enemies of human kind, taken in the very deed, with proofs of their crimes still swinging upon their yard-arm ?

But the fight had taken a new and a strange turn upon the other side. Spade-beard and his men had given slowly back, hard pressed by Sir Nigel, Aylward, Black Simon, and the poop-guard. Foot by foot the Italian had retreated, his armour running blood at every joint, his shield split, his crest shorn, his voice fallen away to a mere gasping and croaking. Yet he faced his foemen with dauntless courage, dashing in, springing back, sure-footed, steady-handed, with a point which seemed to menace three at once. Beaten back on to the deck of his own vessel, and closely followed by a dozen Englishmen, he disengaged himself from them, ran swiftly down the deck, sprang back into the cog once more, cut the rope which held the anchor, and was back in an instant among his crossbowmen. At the same time the Genoese sailors thrust with their oars against the side of the cog, and a rapidly widening rift appeared between the two vessels.

"By St. George!" cried Ford, "we are cut off from Sir Nigel."

"He is lost," gasped Terlake. "Come, let us spring for it." The two youths jumped with all their strength to reach the departing galley. Ford's feet reached the edge of the bulwarks, and his hand clutching a rope he swung himself on board. Terlake fell short, crashed in among the oars, and bounded off into the sea. Alleyne, staggering to the side, was about to hurl himself after him, but Hordle John dragged him back by the girdle.

"You can scarce stand, lad, far less jump," said he. "See how the blood drips from your bassinet."

"My place is by the flag," cried Alleyne, vainly struggling to break from the other's hold.

"Bide here, man. You would need wings ere you could reach Sir Nigel's side."

The vessels were indeed so far apart now that the Genoese could use the full sweep of their oars, and draw rapidly away from the cog.

"My God, but it is a noble fight!" shouted big John, clapping his hands. "They have cleared the poop, and they spring into the waist. Well struck, my lord! Well struck, Aylward! See to Black Simon, how he storms among the shipmen! But this Spade-beard is a gallant warrior. He rallies his men upon the forecastle. He hath slain an archer. Ha! my lord is upon him. Look to it, Alleyne! See to the whirl and glitter of it!"

"By heaven, Sir Nigel is down!" cried the squire.

"Up!" roared John. "It was but a feint. He bears him back. He drives him to the side. Ah, by Our Lady, his sword is through him! They cry for mercy. Down goes the red cross, and up springs Simon with the scarlet roses!"

The death of the Genoese leader did indeed bring the resistance to an end. Amid a thunder of cheering from cog and from galleys the forked pennon fluttered upon the forecastle, and the galley, sweeping round, came

slowly back, as the slaves who rowed it learned the wishes of their new masters.

The two knights had come aboard the cog, and the grapplings having been thrown off, the three vessels now moved abreast. Through all the storm and rush of the fight Alleyne had been aware of the voice of Goodwin Hawtayne, the master-shipman, with his constant "Hale the bowline! Veer the sheet!" and strange it was to him to see how swiftly the blood-stained sailors turned from the strife to the ropes and back. Now the cog's head was turned Francewards, and the shipman walked the deck, a peaceful master-mariner once more.

"There is sad scath done to the cog, Sir Nigel," said he. "Here is a hole in the side two ells across, the sail split through the centre, and the wood as bare as a friar's poll. In good sooth, I know not what I shall say to Master Witherton when I see the Itchen once more."

"By St. Paul! it would be a very sorry thing if we suffered you to be the worse for this day's work," said Sir Nigel. "You shall take these galleys back with you, and Master Witherton may sell them. Then from the monies he shall take as much as may make good the damage, and the rest he shall keep until our home-coming, when every man shall have his share. An image of silver fifteen inches high I have vowed to the Virgin, to be placed in her chapel within the Priory, for that she was pleased to allow me to come upon this Spade-beard, who seemed to me from what I have seen of him to be a very sprightly and valiant gentleman. But how fares it with you, Edricson?"

"It is nothing, my fair lord," said Alleyne, who had now loosened his bassinet, which was cracked across by the Norman's blow. Even as he spoke, however, his head swirled round, and he fell to the deck with the blood gushing from his nose and mouth.

"He will come to anon," said the knight, stooping over him and passing his fingers through his hair. "I have lost one very valiant and gentle squire this day. I

can ill afford to lose another. How many men have fallen ? "

" I have pricked off the tally," said Aylward, who had come aboard with his lord. " There are seven of the Winchester men, eleven seamen, your squire, young Master Terlake, and nine archers ! "

" And of the others ? "

" They are all dead—save only the Norman knight who stands behind you. What would you that we should do with him ? "

" He must hang on his own yard," said Sir Nigel. " It was my vow and must be done."

The pirate leader had stood by the bulwarks, a cord round his arms, and two stout archers on either side. At Sir Nigel's words he started violently, and his swarthy features blanched to a livid grey.

" How, Sir Knight ? " he cried in broken English. " Que dites-vous ? To hang, la mort du chien ! To hang ! "

" It is my vow," said Sir Nigel shortly. " From what I hear, you thought little enough of hanging others."

" Peasants, base roturiers," cried the other. " It is their fitting death. Mais Le Seigneur d'Andelys, avec le sang des rois dans ses veines ! C'est incroyable ! "

Sir Nigel turned upon his heel, while the seamen cast a noose over the pirate's neck. At the touch of the cord he snapped the bonds which bound him, dashed one of the archers to the deck, and seizing the other round the waist sprang with him into the sea.

" By my hilt, he is gone ! " cried Aylward, rushing to the side. " They have sunk together like a stone."

" I am right glad of it," answered Sir Nigel ; " for though it was against my vow to loose him, I deem that he has carried himself like a very gentle and débonnaire cavalier."

## 17. *How the Yellow Cog crossed the Bar of Gironde*

FOR two days the yellow cog ran swiftly before a north-easterly wind, and on the dawn of the third the highland of Ushant lay like a mist upon the shimmering sky-line. There came a plump of rain towards midday and the breeze died down, but it freshened again before nightfall, and Goodwin Hawtayne veered his sheet and held her head for the south. Next morning they had passed Belle Isle, and ran through the midst of a fleet of transports returning from Guienne. Sir Nigel Loring and Sir Oliver Buttesthorn at once hung their shields over the side, and displayed their pennons as was the custom, noting with the keenest interest the answering symbols which told the names of the cavaliers who had been constrained by ill health or wounds to leave the prince at so critical a time.

That evening a great dun-coloured cloud banked up in the west, and an anxious man was Goodwin Hawtayne, for a third part of his crew had been slain and half of the remainder were aboard the galleys, so that, with an injured ship, he was little fit to meet such a storm as sweeps over those waters. All night it blew in short fitful puffs, heeling the great cog over until the water curled over her lee bulwarks. As the wind still freshened the yard was lowered halfway down the mast in the morning. Alleyne, wretchedly ill and weak, with his head still ringing from the blow which he had received, crawled up upon deck. Water-swept and aslant, it was preferable to the noisome rat-haunted dungeons which served as cabins. There, clinging to the stout halliards of the sheet, he gazed with amazement at the long lines of black waves, each with its curling ridge of foam, racing in endless succession from out the inexhaustible west. A huge sombre cloud, flecked with livid blotches, stretched

over the whole seaward sky-line, with long ragged streamers whirled out in front of it. Far behind them the two galleys laboured heavily, now sinking between the rollers until their yards were level with the waves, and again shooting up with a reeling scooping motion until every spar and rope stood out hard against the sky. On the left the low-lying land stretched in a dim haze, rising here and there into a darker blur which marked the higher capes and headlands. The land of France! Alleyne's eyes shone as he gazed upon it. The land of France!—the very words sounded as the call of a bugle in the ears of the youth of England. The land where their fathers had bled, the home of chivalry and of knightly deeds, the country of gallant men, of courtly women, of princely buildings, of the wise, the polished and the sainted. There it lay, so still and grey beneath the drifting wrack—the home of things noble and of things shameful—the theatre where a new name might be made or an old one marred. From his bosom to his lips came the crumpled veil, and he breathed a vow that if valour and goodwill could raise him to his lady's side, then death alone should hold him back from her. His thoughts were still in the woods of Minstead and the old armoury of Twynham Castle, when the hoarse voice of the master-shipman brought them back once more to the Bay of Biscay.

"By my troth, young sir," he said, "you are as long in the face as the devil at a christening, and I cannot marvel at it, for I have sailed these waters since I was as high as this whinyard, and yet I never saw more sure promise of an evil night."

"Nay, I had other things upon my mind," the squire answered.

"And so has every man," cried Hawtayne, in an injured voice. "Let the shipman see to it. It is the master-shipman's affair. Put it all upon good Master Hawtayne! Never had I so much care since first I blew trumpet and showed cartel at the west gate of Southampton."

"What is amiss then?" asked Alleyne, for the man's words were as gusty as the weather.

"Amiss, quotha? Here am I with but half my mariners, and a hole in the ship, where that twenty-devil stone struck us, big enough to fit the fat widow of Northam through. It is well enough on this tack, but I would have you tell me what I am to do on the other. We are like to have salt water upon us until we be found pickled like the herrings in an Easterling's barrels."

"What says Sir Nigel to it?"

"He is below pricking out the coat-armour of his mother's uncle. 'Pester me not with such small matters,' was all that I could get from him. Then there is Sir Oliver. 'Fry them in oil with a dressing of Gascony,' quoth he, and then swore at me because I had not been the cook. 'Walawa,' thought I, 'mad master, sober man'—so away forward to the archers. Harrow and alas! but they were worse than the others."

"Would they not help you then?"

"Nay, they sat tway and tway at a board, him that they call Aylward and the great red-headed man who snapped the Norman's arm-bone, and the black man from Norwich, and a score of others, rattling their dice in an archer's gauntlet for want of a box. 'The ship can scarce last much longer, my masters,' quoth I. 'That is your business, old swine's head,' cried the black galliard. 'Le Diable t'emporte!' says Aylward. 'A five, a four, and the main,' shouted the big man, with a voice like the flap of a sail. Hark to them now, young sir, and say if I speak not sooth."

As he spoke, there sounded high above the shriek of the gale and the straining of the timbers a gust of oaths with a roar of deep-chested mirth from the gamblers in the forecastle.

"Can I be of avail?" asked Alleyne. "Say the word and the thing is done, if two hands may do it."

"Nay, nay, your head I can see is still totty, and i' faith little head would you have, had your bassinet not

stood your friend. All that may be done is already carried out, for we have stuffed the gape with sails and corded it without and within. Yet when we hale our bowline and veer the sheet our lives will hang upon the breach remaining blocked. See how yonder headland looms upon us through the mist! We must tack within three arrow flights, or we may find a rock through our timbers. Now, St. Christopher be praised! here is Sir Nigel, with whom I may confer."

"I prythee that you will pardon me," said the knight, clutching his way along the bulwark. "I would not show lack of courtesy toward a worthy man, but I was deep in a matter of some weight, concerning which, Alleyne, I should be glad of your rede. It touches the question of dimidiation or impalement in the coat of mine uncle, Sir John Leighton of Shropshire, who took unto wife the widow of Sir Henry Oglander of Nunwell. The case has been much debated by pursuivants and kings-of-arms. But how is it with you, master-shipman?"

"Ill enough, my fair lord. The cog must go about anon, and I know not how we may keep the water out of her."

"Go call Sir Oliver!" said Sir Nigel, and presently the portly knight made his way all astraddle down the slippery deck.

"By my soul, master-shipman, this passes all patience!" he cried wrathfully. "If this ship of yours must needs dance and skip like a clown at a kermesse, then I pray you that you will put me into one of these galeasses. I had but sat down to a flask of malvoisie and a mortress of brawn, as is my use about this hour, when there comes a cherking, and I find my wine over my legs and the flask in my lap, and then as I stoop to clip it there comes another cursed cherk, and there is a mortress of brawn stuck fast to the nape of my neck. At this moment I have two pages coursing after it from side to side, like hounds behind a leveret. Never did living pig gambol more lightly. But you have sent for me, Sir Nigel?"

"I would fain have your rede, Sir Oliver, for Master Hawtayne hath fears that when we veer there may come danger from the hole in our side."

"Then do not veer," quoth Sir Oliver hastily. "And now, fair sir, I must hasten back to see how my rogues have fared with the brawn."

"Nay, but this will scarce suffice," cried the shipman. "If we do not veer we shall be upon the rocks within the hour."

"Then veer," said Sir Oliver. "There is my rede; and now, Sir Nigel, I must crave——"

At this instant, however, a startled shout rang out from two seamen upon the forecastle. "Rocks!" they yelled, stabbing into the air with their forefingers, "rocks beneath our very bows!" Through the belly of a great great black wave, not one hundred paces to the front of them, there thrust forth a huge jagged mass of brown stone, which spouted spray as though it were some crouching monster, while a dull menacing boom and roar filled the air.

"Yare! yare!" screamed Goodwin Hawtayne, flinging himself upon the long pole which served as a tiller. "Cut the halliard! Haul her over! Lay her two courses to the wind!"

Over swung the great boom, and the cog trembled and quivered within five spear lengths of the breakers.

"She can scarce draw clear," cried Hawtayne, with his eyes from the sail to the seething line of foam. "May the holy Julian stand by us and the thrice-sainted Christopher!"

"If there be such peril, Sir Oliver," quoth Sir Nigel, "it would be very knightly and fitting that we should show our pennons. I pray you, Edricson, that you will command my guidon-bearer to put forward my banner."

"And sound the trumpets!" cried Sir Oliver. "In manus tuas, Domine! I am in the keeping of James of Compostella, to whose shrine I shall make pilgrimage, and in whose honour I vow that I will eat a carp each year

upon his feast-day. Mon Dieu, but the waves roar! How is it with us now, master-shipman?"

"We draw! We draw!" cried Hawtayne, with his eyes still fixed upon the foam which hissed under the very bulge of the side. "Ah, Holy Mother, be with us now!"

As he spoke the cog rasped along the edge of the reef and a long white curling sheet of wood was planed off from her side from waist to poop by a jutting horn of the rock. At the same instant she lay suddenly over, the sail drew full, and she plunged seawards amid the shoutings of the seamen and the archers.

"The Virgin be praised!" cried the shipman, wiping his brow. "For this shall bell swing and candle burn when I see Southampton Water once more. Cheerily, my hearts! Pull yarely on the bowline!"

"By my soul! I would rather have a dry death," quoth Sir Oliver. "Though, Mort Dieu! I have eaten so many fish that it were but justice that the fish should eat me. Now I must back to the cabin, for I have matters there which crave my attention."

"Nay, Sir Oliver, you had best bide with us, and still show your ensign," Sir Nigel answered; "for, if I understand the matter aright, we have but turned from one danger to the other."

"Good Master Hawtayne," cried the boatswain, rushing aft, "the water comes in upon us apace. The waves have driven in the sail wherewith we strove to stop the hole." As he spoke the seamen came swarming on to the poop and the forecastle to avoid the torrent which poured through the huge leak into the waist. High above the roar of the wind and the clash of the sea rose the shrill half-human cries of the horses, as they found the water rising rapidly around them.

"Stop it from without!" cried Hawtayne, seizing the end of the wet sail with which the gap had been plugged. "Speedily, my hearts, or we are gone!" Swiftly they rove ropes to the corners, and then, rushing forward to the bows they lowered them under the keel, and drew

them tight in such a way that the sail should cover the outer face of the gap. The force of the rush of water was checked by this obstacle, but it still squirted plentifully from every side of it. At the sides the horses were above the belly, and in the centre a man from the poop could scarce touch the deck with a seven-foot spear. The cog lay lower in the water and the waves splashed freely over the weather bulwark.

"I fear that we can scarce bide upon this tack," cried Hawtayne; "and yet the other will drive us on the rocks."

"Might we not haul down sail and wait for better times?" suggested Sir Nigel.

"Nay, we should drift upon the rocks. Thirty years have I been on the sea, and never yet in greater straits. Yet we are in the hands of the Saints."

"Of whom," cried Sir Oliver, "I look more particularly to Saint James of Compostella, who hath already befriended us this day, and on whose feast I hereby vow that I shall eat a second carp, if he will but interpose a second time."

The wrack had thickened to seaward, and the coast was but a blurred line. Two vague shadows in the offing showed where the galeasses rolled and tossed upon the great Atlantic rollers. Hawtayne looked wistfully in their direction. "If they would but lie closer we might find safety, even should the cog founder. You will bear me out with good Master Witherton of Southampton that I have done all that a shipman might. It would be well that you should doff camail and greaves, Sir Nigel, for, by the black rood, it is like enough that we shall have to swim for it."

"Nay," said the little knight, "it would be scarce fitting that a cavalier should throw off his harness for the fear of every puff of wind and puddle of water. I would rather that my Company should gather round me here on the poop, where we might abide together whatever God may be pleased to send. But, certes, Master

Hawtayne, for all that my sight is none of the best, it is not the first time that I have seen that headland upon the left."

The seaman shaded his eyes with his hand, and gazed earnestly through the haze and spray. Suddenly he threw up his arms, and shouted aloud in his joy.

"'Tis the Point of La Tremblade!" he cried. "I had not thought that we were as far as Oléron. The Gironde lies before us, and once over the bar, and under shelter of the Tour de Cordouan, all will be well with us. Veer again, my hearts, and bring her to try with the main course."

The sail swung round once more, and the cog, battered and torn and well-nigh water-logged, staggered in for this haven of refuge. A bluff cape to the north and a long spit to the south marked the mouth of the noble river, with a low-lying island of silted sand in the centre, all shrouded and curtained by the spume of the breakers. A line of broken water traced the dangerous bar, which in clear day and balmy weather has cracked the back of many a tall ship.

"There is a channel," said Hawtayne, "which was shown to me by the prince's own pilot. Mark yonder tree upon the bank, and see the tower which rises behind it. If these two be held in a line, even as we hold them now, it may be done, though our ship draws two good ells more than when she put forth."

"God speed you, Master Hawtayne!" cried Sir Oliver. "Twice have we come scathless out of peril, and now for the third time I commend me to the blessed James of Compostella, to whom I vow——"

"Nay, nay, old friend," whispered Sir Nigel. "You are like to bring a judgment upon us with these vows, which no living man could accomplish. Have I not already heard you vow to eat two carp in one day, and now you would venture upon a third?"

"I pray you that you will order the Company to lie down," cried Hawtayne, who had taken the tiller and was

gazing ahead with a fixed eye. "In three minutes we shall either be lost or in safety."

Archers and seamen lay flat upon the deck, waiting in stolid silence for whatever fate might come. Hawtayne bent his weight upon the tiller, and crouched to see under the bellying sail. Sir Oliver and Sir Nigel stood erect with hands crossed in front of the poop. Down swooped the great cog into the narrow channel which was the portal to safety. On either bow roared the shallow bar. Right ahead one small lane of black swirling water marked the pilot's course. But true was the eye and firm the hand which guided. A dull scraping came from beneath, the vessel quivered and shook, at the waist, at the quarter, and behind sounded that grim roaring of the waters, and with a plunge the yellow cog was over the bar and speeding swiftly up the broad and tranquil estuary of the Gironde.

## 18. *How Sir Nigel Loring put a Patch upon His Eye*

IT was on the morning of Friday, the eight-and-twentieth day of November, two days before the feast of St. Andrew, that the cog and her two prisoners, after a weary tacking up the Gironde and the Garonne, dropped anchor at last in front of the noble city of Bordeaux. With wonder and admiration, Alleyne, leaning over the bulwarks, gazed at the forest of masts, the swarm of boats darting hither and thither on the bosom of the broad curving stream, and the grey crescent-shaped city which stretched with many a tower and minaret along the western shore. Never had he in his quiet life seen so great a town, nor was there in the whole of England, save London alone, one which might match it in size or in wealth. Here came the merchandise of all the fair countries which are watered by the Garonne and the Dordogne—the cloths of the south, the skins of Guienne, the wines of the Médoc

—to be borne away to Hull, Exeter, Dartmouth, Bristol or Chester, in exchange for the wools and woolfels of England. Here too dwelt those famous smelters and welders who had made the Bordeaux steel the most trusty upon earth, and could give a temper to lance or to sword which might mean dear life to its owner. Alleyne could see the smoke of their forges reeking up in the clear morning air. The storm had died down now to a gentle breeze, which wafted to his ears the long-drawn stirring bugle-calls which sounded from the ancient ramparts.

"Holà, mon petit!" said Aylward, coming up where to he stood. "Thou art a squire now, and like enough to win the golden spurs, while I am still the master-bowman, and master-bowman I shall abide. I dare scarce wag my tongue so freely with you as when we tramped together past Wilverley Chase, else I might be your guide now, for indeed I know every house in Bordeaux as a friar knows the beads on his rosary."

"Nay, Aylward," said Alleyne, laying his hand upon the sleeve of his companion's frayed jerkin, "you cannot think me so thrall as to throw aside an old friend because I have had some small share of good fortune. I take it unkind that you should have thought such evil of me."

"Nay, mon gar. 'Twas but a flight shot to see if the wind blew steady, though I were a rogue to doubt it."

"Why, had I not met you, Aylward, at the Lyndhurst inn, who can say where I had now been? Certes, I had not gone to Twynham Castle, nor become squire to Sir Nigel, nor met——" He paused abruptly and flushed to his hair, but the bowman was too busy with his own thoughts to notice his young companion's embarrassment.

"It was a good hostel, that of the 'Pied Merlin,'" remarked Aylward. "By my ten finger-bones! when I hang bow on nail and change my brigandine for a tunic, I might do worse than take over the dame and her business."

"I thought," said Alleyne, "that you were betrothed to someone at Christchurch."

To three," Aylward answered moodily, " to three. I fear I may not go back to Christchurch. I might chance to see hotter service in Hampshire than I have ever done in Gascony. But mark you now yonder lofty turret in the centre, which stands back from the river and hath a broad banner upon the summit. See the rising sun flashes full upon it and sparkles on the golden lions. 'Tis the royal banner of England, crossed by the prince's label. There he dwells in the Abbey of St. Andrew, where he hath kept his court these years back. Beside it is the minster of the same saint, who hath the town under his very special care."

" And how of yon grey turret on the left ? "

" 'Tis the fane of St. Michael, as that upon the right is of St. Remi. There, too, above the poop of yonder nief, you see the towers of St. Croix and of Pey Berland. Mark also the mighty ramparts which are pierced by the three watergates, and sixteen others to the landward side."

" And how is it, good Aylward, that there comes so much music from the town ? I seem to hear a hundred trumpets, all calling in chorus."

" It would be strange else, seeing that all the great lords of England and of Gascony are within the walls, and each would have his trumpeter blow as loud as his neighbour, lest it might be thought that his dignity had been abated. Ma foi ! they make as much louster as a Scotch army, where every man fills himself with girdle-cakes, and sits up all night to blow upon the toodle-pipe. See all along the banks how the pages water the horses, and there beyond the town how they gallop them over the plain ! For every horse you see a belted knight hath herbergage in the town, for, as I learn, the men-at-arms and archers have already gone forward to Dax."

" I trust, Aylward," said Sir Nigel, coming upon deck, " that the men are ready for the land. Go tell them that the boats will be for them within the hour."

The archer raised his hand in salute, and hastened forward. In the meantime Sir Oliver had followed his

brother knight, and the two paced the poop together, Sir Nigel in his plum-coloured velvet suit with flat cap of the same, adorned in front with the Lady Loring's glove and girt round with a curling ostrich feather. The lusty knight, on the other hand, was clad in the very latest mode, with côte-hardie, doublet, pourpoint, court-pie, and paltock of olive-green, picked out with pink and jagged at the edges. A red chaperon or cap, with long hanging cornette, sat daintily on the back of his black-curled head, while his gold-hued shoes were twisted up *à la poulaine*, as though the toes were shooting forth a tendril which might hope in time to entwine itself around his massive leg.

"Once more, Sir Oliver," said Sir Nigel, looking shorewards with sparkling eyes, "do we find ourselves at the gate of honour, the door which hath so often led us to all that is knightly and worthy. There flies the prince's banner, and it would be well that we haste ashore and pay our obeisance to him. The boats already swarm from the bank."

"There is a goodly hostel near the west gate, which is famed for the stewing of spiced pullets," remarked Sir Oliver. "We might take the edge of our hunger off ere we seek the prince, for though his tables are gay with damask and silver, he is no trencherman himself, and hath no sympathy for those who are his betters."

"His betters!"

"His betters before the tranchoir, lad. Sniff not treason where none is meant. I have seen him smile in his quiet way because I had looked for the fourth time towards the carving squire. And indeed to watch him dallying with a little gobbet of bread, or sipping his cup of thrice-watered wine, is enough to make a man feel shame at his own hunger. Yet war and glory, my good friend, though well enough in their way, will not serve to tighten such a belt as clasps my waist."

"How read you that coat which hangs over yonder galley, Alleyne?" asked Sir Nigel.

"Argent, a bend vert between cotises dancetté gules."

"It is a northern coat. I have seen it in the train of the Percies. From the shields, there is not one of these vessels which hath not knight or baron aboard. I would mine eyes were better. How read you this upon the left?"

"Argent and azure, a barry wavy of six."

"Ha, it is the sign of the Wiltshire Stourtons! And there beyond I see the red and silver of the Worsleys of Apuldercombe, who like myself are of Hampshire lineage. Close behind us is the moline cross of the gallant William Molyneux, and beside it the bloody chevrons of the Norfolk Woodhouses, with the annulets of the Musgraves of Westmoreland. By Saint Paul! it would be a very strange thing if so noble a company were to gather without some notable deed of arms arising from it. And here is our boat, Sir Oliver, so it seems best to me that we should go to the abbey with our squires, leaving Master Hawtayne to have his own way in the unloading."

The horses both of knights and squires were speedily lowered into a broad lighter, and reached the shore almost as soon as their masters. Sir Nigel bent his knee devoutly as he put foot on land, and taking a small black patch from his bosom he bound it tightly over his left eye.

"May the blessed George and the memory of my sweet lady-love raise high in my heart!" quoth he. "And as a token I vow that I will not take this patch from mine eye until I have seen something of this country of Spain, and done such a small deed as it lies in me to do. And this I swear upon the cross of my sword and upon the glove of my lady."

"In truth, you take me back twenty years, Nigel," quoth Sir Oliver, as they mounted and rode slowly through the water-gate. "After Cadsand, I deem that the French thought that we were an army of the blind, for there was scarce a man who had not closed an eye for the greater love and honour of his lady. Yet it goes hard with you that you should darken one side, when with both

open you can scarce tell a horse from a mule. In truth, friend, I think that you step over the line of reason in this matter."

"Sir Oliver Buttesthorn," said the little knight shortly, "I would have you to understand that, blind as I am, I can yet see the path of honour very clearly, and that that is a road upon which I do not crave another man's guidance."

"By my soul," said Sir Oliver, "you are as tart as verjuice this morning! If you are bent upon a quarrel with me I must leave you to your humour and drop into the 'Tête d'Or' here, for I marked a varlet pass the door who bare a smoking dish, which had, methought, a most excellent smell."

"Nenny, nenny," cried his comrade, laying his hand upon his knee; "we have known each other over long to fall out, Oliver, like two raw pages at their first épreuves. You must come with me first to the prince, and then back to the hostel; though sure I am that it would grieve his heart that any gentle cavalier should turn from his board to a common tavern. But is not that my Lord Delewar who waves to us? Ha! my fair lord, God and Our Lady be with you! And there is Sir Robert Cheney. Good morrow, Robert! I am right glad to see you."

The two knights walked their horses abreast, while Alleyne and Ford, with John Norbury, who was squire to Sir Oliver, kept some paces behind them, a spear's length in front of Black Simon and of the Winchester guidon-bearer. Norbury, a lean silent man, had been to those parts before, and sat his horse with a rigid neck; but the two young squires gazed eagerly to right or left, and plucked each other's sleeves to call attention to the many strange things on every side of them.

"See to the brave stalls!" cried Alleyne. "See to the noble armour set forth, and the costly taffeta—and oh, Ford, see to where the scrivener sits with the pigments and the ink-horns, and the rolls of sheepskin as white as the Beaulieu napery! Saw man ever the like before?"

"Nay, man, there are finer stalls in Cheapside," answered Ford, whose father had taken him to London on occasion of one of the Smithfield joustings. "I have seen a silversmith's booth there which would serve to buy either side of this street. But mark these houses, Alleyne, how they thrust forth upon the top. And see to the coats-of-arms at every window, and banner or pensil on the roof."

"And the churches!" cried Alleyne. "The Priory at Christchurch was a noble pile, but it was cold and bare, methinks, by one of these, with their frettings, and their carvings and their traceries, as though some great ivy-plant of stone had curled and wantoned over the walls."

"And hark to the speech of the folk!" said Ford. "Was ever such a hissing and clacking? I wonder that they have not wit to learn English now that they have come under the English crown. By Richard of Hampole! there are fair faces amongst them. See the wench with the brown wimple! Out on you, Alleyne, that you would rather gaze upon dead stone than on living flesh!"

It was little wonder that the richness and ornament, not only of church and of stall, but of every private house as well, should have impressed itself upon the young squires. The town was now at the height of its fortunes. Besides its trade and its armourers, other causes had combined to pour wealth into it. War, which had wrought evil upon so many fair cities around, had brought nought but good to this one. As her French sisters decayed she increased, for here, from north, and from east, and from south, came the plunder to be sold and the ransom money to be spent. Through all her sixteen landward gates there had set for many years a double tide of empty-handed soldiers hurrying Francewards, and of enriched and laden bands who brought their spoils home. The prince's court, too, with its swarms of noble barons and wealthy knights, many of whom, in imitation of their master, had brought their ladies and their children from England, all hoped to swell the coffers of the burghers.

Now with this fresh influx of noblemen and cavaliers, food and lodgings were scarce to be had, and the prince was hurrying his forces to Dax in Gascony to relieve the overcrowding of his capital.

In front of the minster and abbey of St. Andrew's was a large square crowded with priests, soldiers, women, friars, and burghers, who made it their common centre for sight-seeing and gossip. Amid the knots of noisy and gesticulating townsfolk many small parties of mounted knights and squires threaded their way towards the prince's quarters, where the huge iron-clamped doors were thrown back to show that he held audience within. Two score archers stood about the gateway, and beat back from time to time with their bow-staves the inquisitive and chattering crowd who swarmed round the portal. Two knights in full armour, with lances raised and closed vizors, sat their horses on either side, while in the centre, with two pages to tend upon him, there stood a noble-faced man in flowing purple gown, who pricked off upon a sheet of parchment the style and title of each applicant, marshalling them in their due order, and giving to each the place and facility which his rank demanded. His long white beard and searching eyes imparted to him an air of masterful dignity, which was increased by his tabard-like vesture and the heraldic barret cap with triple plume which bespoke his office.

"It is Sir William de Pakington, the prince's own herald and scrivener," whispered Sir Nigel, as they pulled up amid the line of knights who awaited admission. "Ill fares it with the man who should venture to deceive him. He hath by rote the name of every knight of France or of England, and all the tree of his family, with his kinships, coat-armour, marriages, augmentations, abatements, and I know not what beside. We may leave our horses here with the varlets, and push forward with our squires."

Following Sir Nigel's counsel, they pressed on upon foot until they were close to the prince's secretary, who

was in high debate with a young and foppish knight, who was bent upon making his way past him.

"Mackworth!" said the king-at-arms. "It is in my mind, young sir, that you have not been presented before."

"Nay, it is but a day since I set foot in Bordeaux, but I feared lest the prince should think it strange that I had not waited upon him."

"The prince hath other things to think upon," quoth Sir William de Pakington; "but if you be a Mackworth you must be a Mackworth of Normanton, and indeed I see now that your coat is sable and ermine."

"I am a Mackworth of Normanton," the other answered, with some uneasiness of manner.

"Then you must be Sir Stephen Mackworth, for I learn that when old Sir Guy died he came in for the arms and the name, the war-cry and the profit."

"Sir Stephen is my elder brother, and I am Arthur, the second son," said the youth.

"In sooth and in sooth!" cried the king-at-arms with scornful eyes. "And pray, sir second son, where is the cadency mark which should mark your rank? Dare you to wear your brother's coat without the crescent which should stamp you as his cadet? Away to your lodgings, and come not nigh the prince until the armourer hath placed the true charge upon your shield." As the youth withdrew in confusion, Sir William's keen eye singled out the five red roses from amid the overlapping shields and clouds of pennons which faced him.

"Ha!" he cried, "there are charges here which are above counterfeit. The roses of Loring and the boar's head of Buttesthorn may stand back in peace, but, by my faith! they are not to be held back in war. Welcome, Sir Oliver, Sir Nigel! Chandos will be glad to his very heart-roots when he sees you. This way, my fair sirs. Your squires are doubtless worthy the fame of their masters. Down this passage, Sir Oliver! Edricson! Ha! one of the old strain of Hampshire Edricsons, I doubt not.

And Ford, they are of a south Saxon stock, and of good repute. There are Norburys in Cheshire and in Wiltshire, and also, as I have heard, upon the borders. So, my fair sirs, and I shall see that you are shortly admitted."

He had finished his professional commentary by flinging open a folding-door, and ushering the party into a broad hall, which was filled with a great number of people who were waiting, like themselves, for an audience. The room was very spacious, lighted on one side by three arched and mullioned windows, while opposite was a huge fireplace in which a pile of faggots was blazing merrily. Many of the company had crowded round the flames, for the weather was bitterly cold; but the two knights seated themselves upon a bancal, with their squires standing behind them. Looking down the room, Alleyne marked that both floor and ceiling were of the richest oak, the latter spanned by twelve arching beams which were adorned at either end by the lilies and the lions of the royal arms. On the farther side was a small door, on each side of which stood men-at-arms. From time to time an elderly man in black with rounded shoulders and a long white wand in his hand came softly from this inner room and beckoned to one or other of the company, who doffed cap and followed him.

The two knights were deep in talk, when Alleyne became aware of a remarkable individual who was walking round the room in their direction. As he passed each knot of cavaliers every head turned to look after him, and it was evident, from the bows and respectful salutations on all sides, that the interest which he excited was not due merely to his strange personal appearance. He was tall and as straight as a lance, though of a great age, for his hair, which curled from under his black velvet cap of maintenance, was as white as the new-fallen snow. Yet, from the swing of his stride and spring of his step, it was clear that he had not yet lost the fire and activity of his youth. His fierce hawk-like face was clean shaven like that of a priest, save for a long

thin wisp of white moustache which dropped down halfway to his shoulder. That he had been handsome might be easily judged from his high aquiline nose and clear-cut chin; but his features had been so distorted by the seams and scars of old wounds, and by the loss of one eye which had been torn from the socket, that there was little to remind one of the dashing young knight who had been fifty years ago the fairest as well as the boldest of the English chivalry. Yet what knight was there in that hall of St. Andrew's who would not have gladly laid down youth, beauty, and all that he possessed to win the fame of this man? For who could be named with Chandos, the stainless knight, the wise councillor, the valiant warrior, the hero of Crécy, of Winchelsea, of Poictiers, of Auray, and of as many other battles as there were years to his life?

"Ha, my little heart of gold!" he cried, darting forward suddenly and throwing his arms round Sir Nigel. "I heard that you were here, and have been seeking you."

"My fair and dear lord," said the knight, returning the warrior's embrace, "I have indeed come back to you, for where else shall I go that I may learn to be a gentle and a hardy knight?"

"By my troth," said Chandos with a smile, "it is very fitting that we should be companions, Nigel, for since you have tied up one of your eyes, and I have had the mischance to lose one of mine, we have but a pair between us. Ah, Sir Oliver! you were on the blind side of me and I saw you not. A wise woman hath made prophecy that this blind side will one day be the death of me. We shall go in to the prince anon; but in truth he hath much upon his hands, for what with Pedro, and the King of Majorca, and the King of Navarre, who is no two days of the same mind, and the Gascon barons, who are all chaffering for terms like so many hucksters, he hath an uneasy part to play. But how left you the Lady Loring?"

"She was well, my fair lord, and sent her service and greetings to you."

"I am ever her knight and slave. And your journey I trust that it was pleasant?"

"As heart could wish. We had sight of two rover galleys, and even came to have some slight bickering with them."

"Ever in luck's way, Nigel!" quoth Sir John. "We must hear the tale anon. But I deem it best that ye should leave your squires and come with me, for, howsoe'er pressed the prince may be, I am very sure that he would be loth to keep two old comrades in arms upon the farther side of the door. Follow close behind me, and I will forestall old Sir William, though I can scarce promise to roll forth your style and rank as is his wont." So saying, he led the way to the inner chamber, the two companions treading close at his heels, and nodding to right and left as they caught sight of familiar faces among the crowd.

## 19. *How there was Stir at the Abbey of St. Andrew's*

THE prince's reception room, although of no great size, was fitted up with all the state and luxury which the fame and power of its owner demanded. A high dais at the further end was roofed in by a broad canopy of scarlet velvet spangled with silver fleurs-de-lis, and supported at either corner by silver rods. This was approached by four steps carpeted with the same material, while all round were scattered rich cushions, Oriental mats, and costly rugs of fur. The choicest tapestries which the looms of Arras could furnish draped the walls, whereon the battles of Judas Maccabæus were set forth, with the Jewish warriors in plate of proof, with crest and lance and banderole, as the naïve artists of the day were wont to depict them. A few rich settles and bancals, choicely carved and decorated with glazed leather hangings of the sort termed *or basané*, completed the

furniture of the apartment, save that at one side of the dais there stood a lofty perch, upon which a cast of three solemn Prussian gerfalcons sat, hooded and jesseled, as silent and motionless as the royal fowler who stood beside them.

In the centre of the dais were two very high chairs with dorserets, which arched forwards over the heads of the occupants, the whole covered with light blue silk thickly powdered with golden stars. On that to the right sat a very tall and well-formed man with red hair, a livid face, and a cold blue eye, which had in it something peculiarly sinister and menacing. He lounged back in a careless position, and yawned repeatedly as though heartily weary of the proceedings, stooping from time to time to fondle a shaggy Spanish greyhound which lay stretched at his feet. On the other throne there was perched bolt upright, with prim demeanour, as though he felt himself to be upon his good behaviour, a little round, pippin-faced person, who smiled and bobbed to every one whose eye he chanced to meet. Between, and a little in front of them, on a humble charette or stool, sat a slim, dark young man, whose quiet attire and modest manner would scarce proclaim him to be the most noted prince in Europe. A jupon of dark blue cloth, tagged with buckles and pendants of gold, seemed but a sombre and plain attire amidst the wealth of silk and ermine and gilt tissue of fustian with which he was surrounded. He sat with his two hands clasped round his knee, his head slightly bent, and an expression of impatience and of trouble upon his clear well-chiselled features. Behind the thrones there stood two men in purple gowns, with ascetic, clean-shaven faces, and half a dozen other high dignitaries and office-holders of Aquitaine. Below on either side of the steps were forty or fifty barons, knights, and courtiers, ranged in a triple row to the right and the left, with a clear passage in the centre.

"There sits the prince," whispered Sir John Chandos as they entered. "He on the right is Pedro, whom we are about to put upon the Spanish throne. The other

is Don James, whom we purpose with the aid of God to help to his throne in Majorca. Now follow me, and take it not to heart, if he be a little short in his speech, for indeed his mind is full of many very weighty concerns."

The prince, however, had already observed their entrance, and, springing to his feet, he had advanced with a winning smile and the light of welcome in his eyes.

"We do not need your good offices as herald here, Sir John," said he in a low but clear voice; "these valiant knights are very well known to me. Welcome to Aquitaine, Sir Nigel Loring and Sir Oliver Buttesthorn. Nay, keep your knee for my sweet father at Windsor. I would have your hands, my friends. We are like to give you some work to do ere you see the downs of Hampshire once more. Know you ought of Spain, Sir Oliver?"

"Nought, my sire, save that I have heard men say that there is a dish named an olla which is prepared there, though I have never been clear in my mind as to whether it was but a ragout such as is to be found in the south, or whether there is some seasoning such as fennel or garlic which is peculiar to Spain."

"Your doubts, Sir Oliver, shall soon be resolved," answered the prince, laughing heartily, as did many of the barons who surrounded them. "His Majesty here will doubtless order that you have this dish hotly seasoned when we are all safely in Castile."

"I will have a hotly seasoned dish for some folk I know of," answered Don Pedro with a cold smile.

"But my friend Sir Oliver can fight right hardily without either bite or sup," remarked the prince. "Did I not see him at Poictiers, when for two days we had not more than a crust of bread and a cup of foul water, yet carrying himself most valiantly? With my own eyes I saw him in the rout sweep the head from a knight of Picardy with one blow of his sword."

"The rogue got between me and the nearest French victualwain," muttered Sir Oliver, amid a fresh titter from those who were near enough to catch his words.

"How many have you in your train?" asked the prince, assuming a graver mien.

"I have forty men-at-arms, sire," said Sir Oliver.

"And I have one hundred archers and a score of lances, but there are two hundred men who wait for me on this side of the water upon the borders of Navarre."

"And who are they, Sir Nigel?"

"They are a free company, sire, and they are called the White Company."

To the astonishment of the knight, his words provoked a burst of merriment from the barons round, in which the two kings and the prince were fain to join. Sir Nigel blinked mildly from one to the other, until at last, perceiving a stout black-bearded knight at his elbow, whose laugh rang somewhat louder than the others, he touched him lightly upon the sleeve.

"Perchance, my fair sir," he whispered, "there is some small vow of which I may relieve you. Might we not have some honourable debate upon the matter? Your gentle courtesy may perhaps grant me an exchange of thrusts."

"Nay, nay, Sir Nigel," cried the prince, "fasten not the offence upon Sir Robert Briquet, for we are one and all bogged in the same mire. Truth to say, our ears have just been vexed by the doings of the same Company, and I have even now made vow to hang the man who held the rank of captain over it. I little thought to find him among the bravest of my own chosen chieftains. But the vow is now nought, for, as you have never seen your Company, it would be a fool's act to blame you for their doings."

"My liege," said Sir Nigel, "it is a very small matter that I should be hanged, albeit the manner of death is somewhat more ignoble than I had hoped for. On the other hand, it would be a very grievous thing that you, the Prince of England, and the flower of knighthood, should make a vow, whether in ignorance or no, and fail to bring it to fulfilment."

"Vex not your mind on that," the prince answered,

smiling. "We have had a citizen from Montauban here this very day, who told us such a tale of sack and murder and pillage that it moved our blood; but our wrath was turned upon the man who was in authority over them, and not on him who had never set eyes upon them."

"My dear and honoured master," cried Sir Nigel, in great anxiety, "I fear me much that in your gentleness of heart you are straining this vow which you have taken. If there be so much as a shadow of a doubt as to the form of it, it were a thousand times best——"

"Peace! peace!" cried the prince impatiently. "I am very well able to look to my own vows and their performance. We hope to see you both in the banquet-hall anon. Meanwhile you will attend upon us with our train." He bowed, and Chandos, plucking Sir Oliver by the sleeve, led them both away to the back of the press of courtiers.

"Why, little coz," he whispered, "you are very eager to have your neck in a noose. By my soul! had you asked as much from our new ally, Don Pedro, he had not baulked you. Between friends, there is overmuch of the hangman in him, and too little of the prince. But indeed this White Company is a rough band, and may take some handling ere you find yourself safe in your captaincy."

"I doubt not, with the help of St. Paul, that I shall bring them to some order," Sir Nigel answered. "But there are many faces here which are new to me, though others have been before me since first I waited upon my dear master, Sir Walter. I pray you to tell me, Sir John, who are these priests upon the dais?"

"The one is the Archbishop of Bordeaux, Nigel, and the other the Bishop of Agen."

"And the dark knight with grey-streaked beard? By my troth, he seems to be a man of much wisdom and valour."

"He is Sir William Felton, who, with my unworthy self, is the chief counsellor of the prince, he being high steward and I the seneschal of Aquitaine."

"And the knights upon the right, beside Don Pedro?"

"They are cavaliers of Spain who have followed him in his exile. The one at his elbow is Fernando de Castro, who is as brave and true a man as heart could wish. In front to the right are the Gascon lords. You may well tell them by their clouded brows, for there hath been some ill-will of late betwixt the prince and them. The tall and burly man is the Captal de Buch, whom I doubt not that you know, for a braver knight never laid lance in rest. That heavy-faced cavalier who plucks his skirts and whispers in his ear is Lord Oliver de Clisson, known also as the Butcher. He it is who stirs up strife, and for ever blows the dying embers into flame. The man with the mole upon his cheek is the Lord Pommers, and his two brothers stand behind him, with the Lord Lesparre, Lord de Rosem, Lord de Mucident, Sir Perducas d' Albret, the Souldich de la Trane, and others. Further back are knights from Quercy, Limousin, Saintonge, Poitou, and Aquitaine, with the valiant Sir Guiscard d'Angle. That is he in the rose-coloured doublet with the ermine."

"And the knights upon this side?"

"They are all Englishmen, some of the household and others who, like yourself, are captains of companies. There is Lord Neville, Sir Stephen Cossington, and Sir Matthew Gourney, with Sir Walter Huet, Sir Thomas Banaster, and Sir Thomas Felton, who is the brother of the high steward. Mark well the man with the high nose and flaxen beard who hath placed his hand upon the shoulder of the dark hard-faced cavalier in the rust-stained jupon."

"Aye, by St. Paul!" observed Sir Nigel, "they both bear the print of their armour upon their côtes-hardies. Methinks they are men who breathe freer in a camp than a court."

"There are many of us who do that, Nigel," said Chandos, "and the head of the court is, I dare warrant, among them. But of these two men the one is Sir Hugh Calverley, and the other is Sir Robert Knolles."

Sir Nigel and Sir Oliver craned their necks to have the clearer view of these famous warriors, the one a chosen leader of free companies, the other a man who by his fierce valour and energy had raised himself from the lowest ranks until he was second only to Chandos himself in the esteem of the army.

"He hath no light hand in war, hath Sir Robert," said Chandos. "If he passes through a country you may tell it for some years to come. I have heard that in the north it is still the use to call a house which hath but the two gable-ends left, without walls and roof, a Knolles' mitre."

"I have served under him," said Sir Nigel, "and I have hoped to be so far honoured as to run a course with him. But hark, Sir John, what is amiss with the prince?"

Whilst Chandos had been conversing with the two knights a continuous stream of suitors had been ushered in, adventurers seeking to sell their swords, and merchants clamouring over some grievance, a ship detained for the carriage of troops, or a tun of sweet wine which had the bottom knocked out by a troop of thirsty archers. A few words from the prince disposed of each case, and if the applicant liked not the judgment, a quick glance from the prince's dark eyes sent him to the door with the grievance all gone out of him. The young ruler had sat listlessly upon his stool with the two puppet monarchs enthroned behind him, but of a sudden a dark shadow passed over his face, and he sprang to his feet in one of those gusts of passion which were the single blot upon his noble and generous character.

"How now, Don Martin de la Carra?" he cried. "How now, sirrah? What message do you bring to us from our brother of Navarre?"

The new-comer to whom this abrupt query had been addressed was a tall and exceedingly handsome cavalier who had just been ushered into the apartment. His swarthy cheek and raven black hair spoke of the fiery

south, and he wore his long black coat swathed across his chest and over his shoulders in a graceful sweeping fashion, which was neither English nor French. With stately steps and many profound bows he advanced to the foot of the dais before replying to the prince's question.

"My powerful and illustrious master," he began, "Charles, King of Navarre, Earl of Evreux, Count of Champagne, who also writeth himself Overlord of Bearn, hereby sends his love and greetings to his dear cousin Edward, the Prince of Wales, Governor of Aquitaine, Grand Commander of——"

"Tush! tush! Don Martin!" interrupted the prince, who had been beating the ground with his foot impatiently during this stately preamble. "We already know our cousin's titles and style, and, certes, we know our own. To the point, man, and at once. Are the passes open to us, or does your master go back from his word pledged to me at Libourne no later than last Michaelmas?"

"It would ill become my gracious master, sire, to go back from promise given. He does but ask some delay and certain conditions and hostages——"

"Conditions! Hostages! Is he speaking to the Prince of England, or is it to the bourgeois provost of some half-captured town? Conditions, quotha? He may find much to mend in his own condition ere long. The passes are, then, closed to us?"

"Nay, sire——"

"They are open, then?"

"Nay, sire, if you would but——"

"Enough, enough, Don Martin," cried the prince. "It is a sorry sight to see so true a knight pleading in so false a cause. We know the doings of our Cousin Charles. We know that while with the right hand he takes our fifty thousand crowns for the holding of the passes open, he hath his left outstretched to Henry of Trastamare, or to the King of France, all ready to take as many more for the keeping them closed. I know our good Charles, and, by my blessed name-saint the Confessor, he shall learn that

I know him. He sets his kingdom up to the best bidder, like some scullion farrier selling a glandered horse. He is——"

"My lord," cried Don Martin. "I cannot stand here to hear such words of my master. Did they come from other lips I should know better how to answer them."

Don Pedro frowned and curled his lip, but the prince smiled and nodded his approbation.

"Your bearing and your words, Don Martin, are such as I should have looked for in you," he remarked. "You will tell the king, your master, that he hath been paid his price, and that if he holds to his promise he hath my word for it that no scath shall come to his people, nor to their houses or gear. If, however, we have not his leave, I shall come close at the heels of this message without his leave, and bearing a key with me which shall open all that he may close." He stooped and whispered to Sir Robert Knolles and Sir Hugh Calverley, who smiled as men well pleased, and hastened from the room.

"Our Cousin Charles has had experience of our friendship," the prince continued, "and now, by the Saints! he shall feel a touch of our displeasure. I send now a message to our Cousin Charles which his whole kingdom may read. Let him take heed lest worse befall him. Where is my Lord Chandos? Ha, Sir John, I commend this worthy knight to your care. You will see that he hath refection, and such a purse of gold as may defray his charges, for indeed it is great honour to any court to have within it so noble and gentle a cavalier. How say you, sire?" he asked turning to the Spanish refugee, while the herald of Navarre was conducted from the chamber by the old warrior.

"It is not our custom in Spain to reward pertness in a messenger," Don Pedro answered, patting the head of his greyhound. "Yet we have all heard the lengths to which your royal generosity runs."

"In sooth, yes," cried the King of Majorca.

"Who should know it better than we," said Don Pedro

bitterly, " since we have had to fly to you in our trouble as to the natural protector of all who are weak ? "

" Nay, nay, as brothers to a brother," cried the prince, with sparkling eyes. " We doubt not, with the help of God, to see you very soon restored to those thrones from which you have been so traitorously thrust."

" When that happy day comes," said Pedro, " then Spain shall be to you as Aquitaine, and, be your project what it may, you may ever count on every troop and every ship over which flies the banner of Castile."

" And," added the other, " upon every aid which the wealth and power of Majorca can bestow."

" Touching the hundred thousand crowns in which I stand your debtor," continued Pedro carelessly, " it can no doubt——"

" Not a word, sire, not a word ! " cried the prince. " It is not now when you are in grief that I would vex your mind with such base and sordid matters. I have said once and for ever that I am yours with every bow-string of my army and every florin in my coffers."

" Ah ! here is indeed a mirror of chivalry," said Don Pedro. " I think, Sir Fernando, since the prince's bounty is stretched so far, that we may make further use of his gracious goodness to the extent of fifty thousand crowns. Good Sir William Felton, here, will doubtless settle the matter with you."

The stout old English councillor looked somewhat blank at this prompt acceptance of his master's bounty.

" If it please you, sire," he said, " the public funds are at their lowest, seeing that I have paid twelve thousand men of the companies, and the new taxes—the hearth tax and the wine tax—not yet come in. If you could wait until the promised help from England comes——"

" Nay, nay, my sweet cousin," cried Don Pedro. " Had we known that your own coffers were so low, or that this sorry sum could have weighed one way or the other, we had been loth indeed——"

" Enough, sire, enough ! " said the prince, flushing with

vexation. "If the public funds be, indeed, so backward Sir William, there is still, I trust, my own private credit, which hath never been drawn upon for my own uses, but is now ready in the cause of a friend in adversity. Go, raise this money upon our own jewels, if nought else may serve, and see that it be paid over to Don Fernando."

"In security I offer——" cried Don Pedro.

"Tush! tush!" said the prince. "I am not a Lombard, sire. Your kingly pledge is my security, without bond or seal. But I have tidings for you, my lords and lieges, that our brother of Lancaster is on his way for our capital with four hundred lances and as many archers to aid us in our venture. When he hath come, and when our fair consort is recovered in her health, which I trust by the grace of God may be ere many weeks be past, we shall then join the army at Dax, and set our banners to the breeze once more."

A buzz of joy at the prospect of immediate action arose up from the group of warriors. The prince smiled at the martial ardour which shone upon every face around him.

"It will hearten you to know," he continued, "that I have sure advices that this Henry is a very valiant leader, and that he has it in his power to make such a stand against us as promises to give us much honour and pleasure. Of his own people he hath brought together, as I learn, some fifty thousand, with twelve thousand of the French free companies, who are, as you know, very valiant and expert men-at-arms. It is certain, also, that the brave and worthy Bertrand du Guesclin hath ridden into France to the Duke of Anjou, and purposes to take back with him great levies from Picardy and Brittany. We hold Bertrand in high esteem, for he has oft before been at great pains to furnish us with an honourable encounter. What think you of it, my worthy Captal? He took you at Cocherel, and, by my soul! you will have the chance now to pay that score."

The Gascon warrior winced a little at the allusion, nor were his countrymen around him better pleased, for on

the only occasion when they had encountered the arms of France without English aid they had met with a heavy defeat.

"There are some who say, sire," said the burly De Clisson, "that the score is already overpaid, for that without Gascon help Bertrand had not been taken at Auray, nor had King John been overborne at Poictiers."

"By heaven, but this is too much!" cried an English nobleman. "Methinks that Gascony is too small a cock to crow so lustily."

"The smaller cock, my Lord Audley, may have the longer spur," remarked the Captal de Buch.

"May have its comb clipped if it make overmuch noise," broke in an Englishman.

"By Our Lady of Rocamadour!" cried the Lord of Mucident, "this is more than I can abide. Sir John Charnell, you shall answer to me for those words!"

"Freely, my lord, and when you will," returned the Englishman carelessly.

"My Lord de Clisson," cried Lord Audley, "you look somewhat fixedly in my direction. By God's soul! I should be right glad to go further into the matter with you."

"And you, my Lord of Pommers," said Sir Nigel, pushing his way to the front, "it is in my mind that we might break a lance in gentle and honourable debate over the question."

For a moment a dozen challenges flashed backwards and forwards at this sudden bursting of the cloud which had lowered so long between the knights of the two nations. Furious and gesticulating the Gascons, white and cold and sneering the English, while the prince with a half-smile glanced from one party to the other, like a man who loved to dwell upon a fiery scene, and yet dreaded lest the mischief go so far that he might find it beyond his control.

"Friends, friends!" he cried at last, "this quarrel must go no further. The man shall answer to me, be he Gascon or English, who carries it beyond this room. I

have overmuch need for your swords that you should turn them upon each other. Sir John Charnell, Lord Audley, you do not doubt the courage of our friends of Gascony ?"

"Not I, sire," Lord Audley answered. "I have seen them fight too often not to know that they are very hardy and valiant gentlemen."

"And so say I," quoth the other Englishman ; "but, certes, there is no fear of our forgetting it while they have a tongue in their heads."

"Nay, Sir John," said the prince, reprovingly, "all peoples have their own use and customs. There are some who might call us cold and dull and silent. But you hear, my lords of Gascony, that these gentlemen had no thought to throw a slur upon your honour or your valour, so let all anger fade from your mind. Clisson, Captal, De Pommers, I have your word ?"

"We are your subjects, sire," said the Gascon barons, though with no very good grace. "Your words are our law."

"Then shall we bury all cause of unkindness in a flagon of malvoisie," said the prince, cheerily. "Ho, there ! the doors of the banquet-hall ! I have been overlong from my sweet spouse, but I shall be back with you anon. Let the sewers serve and the minstrels play, while we drain a cup to the brave days that are before us in the south !" He turned away, accompanied by the two monarchs, while the rest of the company, with many a compressed lip and menacing eye, filed slowly through the side-door to the great chamber in which the royal tables were set forth.

## 20. *How Alleyne won his Place in an Honourable Guild*

WHILST the prince's council was sitting, Alleyne and Ford had remained in the outer hall, where they were soon surrounded by a noisy group of young Englishmen of their own rank, all eager to hear the latest news from England.

"How is it with the old man at Windsor?" asked one.

"And how with the good Queen Philippa?"

"And how with Dame Alice Perrers?" cried a third.

"The devil take your tongue, Wat!" shouted a tall young man, seizing the last speaker by the collar and giving him an admonitory shake. "The prince would take your head off for those words."

"By God's coif! Wat would miss it but little," said another. "It is as empty as a beggar's wallet."

"As empty as an English squire, coz," cried the first speaker. "What a devil has become of the maître-des-tables and his sewers? They have not put forth the trestles yet."

"Mon Dieu! if a man could eat himself into knighthood, Humphrey, you had been a banneret at the least," observed another, amid a burst of laughter.

"And if you could drink yourself in, old leather-head, you had been first baron of the realm," cried the aggrieved Humphrey. "But how of England, my lads of Loring?"

"I take it," said Ford, "that it is much as it was when you were there last, save that perchance there is a little less noise there."

"And why less noise, young Solomon?"

"Ah, that is for your wit to discover."

"Pardieu! here is a paladin come over, with the Hampshire mud still sticking to his shoes. He means that the noise is less for our being out of the country."

"They are very quick in these parts," said Ford, turning to Alleyne.

"How are we to take this, sir?" asked the ruffling squire.

"You may take it as it comes," said Ford carelessly.

"Here is pertness!" cried the other.

"Sir, I honour your truthfulness," said Ford.

"Stint it, Humphrey," said the tall squire, with a burst of laughter. "You will have little credit from this gentleman, I perceive. Tongues are sharp in Hampshire, sir."

"And swords?"

"Hum! we may prove that. In two days' time is the vêpres du tournoi, when we may see if your lance is as quick as your wit."

"All very well, Roger Harcomb," cried a burly bull-necked young man, whose square shoulders and massive limbs told of exceptional personal strength. "You pass too lightly over the matter. We are not to be so easily overcrowed. The Lord Loring hath given his proofs: but we know nothing of his squires, save that one of them hath a railing tongue. And how of you, young sir?" bringing his heavy hand down on Alleyne's shoulder.

"And what of me, young sir?"

"Ma foi! this is my lady's page come over. Your cheek will be browner and your hand harder ere you see your mother again."

"If my hand is not hard, it is ready."

"Ready? Ready for what? For the hem of my lady's train?"

"Ready to chastise insolence, sir!" cried Alleyne with flashing eyes.

"Sweet little coz!" answered the burly squire. "Such a dainty colour! Such a mellow voice! Eyes of a bashful maid, and hair like a three years' babe! Voilà!" He passed his thick fingers roughly through the youth's crisp golden curls.

"You seek to force a quarrel, sir," said the young man white with anger.

"And what then?"

"Why, you do it like a country boor, and not like a gentle squire. Hast been ill bred and as ill taught? I serve a master who could show you how such things should be done."

"And how would he do it, oh pink of squires?"

"He would neither be loud nor would he be unmannerly, but rather more gentle than is his wont. He would say, 'Sir, I should take it as an honour to do some small deed of arms against you, not for mine own glory or advancement, but rather for the fame of my lady and

for the upholding of chivalry.' Then he would draw his glove, thus, and throw it on the ground : or, if he had cause to think that he had to deal with a churl, he might throw it in his face—as I do now ! "

A buzz of excitement went up from the knot of squires as Alleyne, his gentle nature turned by this causeless attack into fiery resolution, dashed his glove with all his strength into the sneering face of his antagonist. From all parts of the hall squires and pages came running, until a dense swaying crowd surrounded the disputants.

" Your life for this ! " said the bully, with a face which was distorted with rage.

" If you can take it," returned Alleyne.

" Good lad," whispered Ford. " Stick to it close as wax."

" I shall see justice," cried Norbury, Sir Oliver's silent attendant.

" You brought it upon yourself, John Tranter," said the tall squire, who had been addressed as Roger Harcomb. " You must ever plague the new-comers. But it were shame if this went further. The lad hath shown a proper spirit."

" But a blow ! a blow ! " cried several of the older squires. " There must be a finish to this."

" Nay ; Tranter first laid hand upon his head," said Harcomb. " How say you, Tranter ? The matter may rest where it stands ? "

" My name is known in these parts," said Tranter, proudly, " I can let pass what might leave a stain upon another. Let him pick up his glove and say that he has done amiss."

" I would see him in the claws of the devil first," whispered Ford.

" You hear, young sir ? " said the peacemaker. " Our friend will overlook the matter if you do but say that you have acted in heat and haste."

" I cannot say that," answered Alleyne.

" It is our custom, young sir, when new squires come

amongst us from England, to test them in some such way. Bethink you that if a man have a destrier or a new lance he will ever try it in time of peace, lest in days of need it may fail him. How much more then is it proper to test those who are our comrades in arms ? "

"I should draw out if it may honourably be done," murmured Norbury in Alleyne's ear. "The man is a noted swordsman and far above your strength."

Edricson came, however, of that sturdy Saxon blood which is very slowly heated, but once up not easily to be cooled. The hint of danger which Norbury threw out was the thing needed to harden his resolution.

"I came here at the back of my master," he said, "and I looked on every man here as an Englishman and a friend. This gentleman hath shown me a rough welcome, and if I have answered him in the same spirit he has but himself to thank. I will pick the glove up ; but, certes, I shall abide by what I have done unless he first crave my pardon for what he hath said and done."

Tranter shrugged his shoulders. "You have done what you could to save him, Harcomb," said he. "We had best settle at once."

"So say I," cried Alleyne.

"The council will not break up until the banquet," remarked a grey-haired squire. "You have a clear two hours."

"And the place ? "

"The tilting-yard is empty at this hour."

"Nay ; it must not be within the grounds of the court, or it may go hard with all concerned if it come to the ears of the prince."

"But there is a quiet spot near the river," said one youth. "We have but to pass through the abbey grounds along the armoury wall, past the church of St. Remi, and so down the Rue des Apôtres."

"En avant, then ! " cried Tranter shortly, and the whole assembly flocked out into the open air, save only those whom the special orders of their masters held to

their posts. These unfortunates crowded to the small casements, and craned their necks after the throng as far as they could catch a glimpse of them.

Close to the bank of the Garonne there lay a little tract of green sward, with the high wall of a prior's garden upon one side and an orchard with a thick bristle of leafless apple-trees upon the other. The river ran deep and swift up to the steep bank ; but there were few boats upon it, and the ships were moored far out in the centre of the stream. Here the two combatants drew their swords and threw off their doublets, for neither had any defensive armour. The duello with its stately etiquette had not yet come into vogue, but rough and sudden encounters were as common as they must ever be when hot-headed youth goes abroad with a weapon strapped to its waist. In such combats, as well as in the more formal sports of the tilting-yard, Tranter had won a name for strength and dexterity which had caused Norbury to utter his well-meant warning. On the other hand, Alleyne had used his weapons in constant exercise and practice for every day for many months, and being by nature quick of eye and prompt of hand, he might pass now as no mean swordsman. A strangely opposed pair they appeared as they approached each other : Tranter dark and stout and stiff, with hairy chest and corded arms ; Alleyne a model of comeliness and grace, with his golden hair and his skin as fair as a woman's. An unequal fight it seemed to most ; but there were a few and they the most experienced who saw something in the youth's steady grey eye and wary step which left the issue open to doubt.

"Hold, sirs, hold !" cried Norbury, ere blow had been struck. "This gentleman hath a two-handed sword, a good foot longer than that of our friend."

"Take mine, Alleyne !" said Ford.

"Nay, friends," he answered, "I understand the weight and balance of mine own. To work, sir, for our lord may need us at the abbey !"

Tranter's great sword was indeed a mighty vantage in

his favour. He stood with his feet close together, his knees bent outwards, ready for a dash inwards or a spring out. The weapon he held straight up in front of him with blade erect, so that he might either bring it down with a swinging blow, or by a turn of the heavy blade he might guard his own head and body. A further protection lay in the broad and powerful guard which crossed the hilt, and which was furnished with a deep and narrow notch, in which an expert swordsman might catch his foeman's blade, and by a quick turn of his wrist might snap it across. Alleyne, on the other hand, must trust for his defence to his quick eye and active foot—for his sword, though keen as a whetstone could make it, was of a light and graceful build, with a narrow sloping pommel and a tapering steel.

Tranter well knew his advantage and lost little time in putting it to use. As his opponent walked towards him he suddenly bounded forward and sent in a whistling cut which would have severed the other in twain had he not sprung lightly back from it. So close was it that the point ripped a gash in the jutting edge of his linen cyclas. Quick, as a panther, Alleyne sprang in with a thrust, but Tranter, who was as active as he was strong, had already recovered himself and turned it aside with a movement of his heavy blade. Again he whizzed in a blow which made the spectators hold their breath, and again Alleyne very quickly and swiftly slipped from under it, and sent back two lightning thrusts which the other could scarce parry. So close were they to each other that Alleyne had no time to spring back from the next cut, which beat down his sword and grazed his forehead, sending the blood streaming into his eyes and down his cheeks. He sprang out beyond sword sweep, and the pair stood breathing heavily, while the crowd of young squires buzzed their applause.

"Bravely struck on both sides!" called Roger Harcomb. "You have both won honour from this meeting, and it would be sin and shame to let it go further."

"You have done enough, Edricson," said Norbury.

"You have carried yourself well," cried several of the older squires.

"For my part, I have no wish to slay this young man," said Tranter, wiping his heated brow.

"Does this gentleman crave my pardon for having used me despitefully?" asked Alleyne.

"Nay, not I."

"Then stand on your guard, sir!" With a clatter and clash the two blades met once more, Alleyne pressing in so as to keep within the full sweep of the heavy blade, while Tranter as continually sprang back to have space for one of his fatal cuts. A three-parts parried blow drew blood from Alleyne's left shoulder, but at the same moment he wounded Tranter slightly upon the thigh. Next instant, however, his blade had slipped into the fatal notch, there was a sharp cracking sound with a tinkling upon the ground, and he found a splintered piece of steel fifteen inches long was all that remained to him of his weapon.

"Your life is in my hands!" cried Tranter, with a bitter smile.

"Nay, nay, he makes submission!" broke in several squires.

"Another sword!" cried Ford.

"Nay, sir," said Harcomb, "that is not the custom."

"Throw down your hilt, Edricson," cried Norbury.

"Never!" said Alleyne. "Do you crave my pardon, sir?"

"You are mad to ask it."

"Then on guard again!" cried the young squire, and sprang in with a fire and a fury which more than made up for the shortness of his weapon. It had not escaped him that his opponent was breathing in short hoarse gasps, like a man who is dizzy with fatigue. Now was the time for the purer living and the more agile limb to show their value. Back and back gave Tranter, ever seeking time for a last cut. On and on came Alleyne, his jagged point now at his foeman's face, now at his throat,

now at his chest, still stabbing and thrusting to pass the line of steel which covered him. Yet his experienced foeman knew well that such efforts could not be long sustained. Let him relax for one instant and his death-blow had come. Relax he must! Flesh and blood could not stand the strain. Already the thrusts were less fierce, the foot less ready, although there was no abatement of the spirit in the steady grey eyes. Tranter, cunning and wary from years of fighting, knew that his chance had come. He brushed aside the frail weapon which was opposed to him, whirled up his great blade, sprang back to get the fairer sweep—and vanished into the waters of the Garonne.

So intent had the squires, both combatants and spectators, been on the matter in hand, that all thought of the steep bank and swift still stream had gone from their minds. It was not until Tranter, giving back before the other's fiery rush, was upon the very brink, that a general cry warned him of his danger. That last spring, which he hoped would have brought the fight to a bloody end, carried him clear of the edge, and he found himself in an instant eight feet deep in the ice-cold stream. Once and twice his gasping face and clutching fingers broke up through the still green water, sweeping outwards in the swirl of the current. In vain were sword-sheaths, apple branches, and belts linked together, thrown out to him by his companions. Alleyne had dropped his shattered sword and was standing, trembling in every limb, with his rage all changed in an instant to pity. For the third time the drowning man came to the surface, his hands full of green slimy water-plants, his eyes turned in despair to the shore. Their glance fell upon Alleyne, and he could not withstand the mute appeal which he read in them. In an instant he, too, was in the Garonne, striking out with powerful strokes for his late foeman.

Yet the current was swift and strong, and, good swimmer as he was, it was no easy task which Alleyne had set himself. To clutch at Tranter and to seize him by the

hair was the work of a few seconds, but to hold his head above water and to make their way out of the current was another matter. For a hundred strokes he did not seem to gain an inch. Then at last, amid a shout of joy and praise from the bank, they slowly drew clear into more stagnant water, at the instant that a rope, made of a dozen sword-belts linked together by the buckles, was thrown by Ford into their very hands. Three pulls from eager arms, and the two combatants, dripping and pale, were dragged up the bank and lay panting upon the grass.

John Tranter was the first to come to himself, for, although he had been longer in the water, he had done nothing during that fierce battle with the current. He staggered to his feet and looked down upon his rescuer, who had raised himself upon his elbow, and was smiling faintly at the buzz of congratulation and of praise which broke from the squires around him.

"I am much beholden to you, sir," said Tranter, though in no very friendly voice. "Certes, I should have been in the river now but for you, for I was born in Warwickshire, which is but a dry county, and there are few who swim in those parts."

"I ask no thanks," Alleyne answered shortly. "Give me your hand to rise."

"The river has been my enemy," said Tranter, "but it hath been a good friend to you, for it hath saved your life this day."

"That is as it may be," returned Alleyne.

"But all is now well over," quoth Harcomb, "and no scath come of it, which is more than I had at one time hoped for. Our young friend here hath very fairly and honestly earned his right to be craftsman of the Honourable Guild of the Squires of Bordeaux. Here is your doublet, Tranter."

"Alas, for my poor sword which lies at the bottom of the Garonne!" said the squire.

"Here is your pourpoint, Edricson," cried Norbury.

"Throw it over your shoulders, that you may have at least one dry garment."

"And now away back to the abbey," said several.

"One moment, sirs," cried Alleyne, who was leaning on Ford's shoulder, with the broken sword, which he had picked up, still clutched in his right hand. "My ears may be somewhat dulled by the water, and perchance what has been said has escaped me, but I have not yet heard this gentleman crave pardon for the insult which he put upon me in the hall."

"What! do you still pursue the quarrel?" asked Tranter.

"And why not, sir? I am slow to take up such things, but once afoot I shall follow it while I have life or breath."

"Ma foi! you have not too much of either, for you are as white as marble," said Harcomb bluntly. "Take my rede, sir, and let it drop, for you have come very well out from it."

"Nay," said Alleyne, "this quarrel is none of my making, but, now that I am here, I swear to you that I shall never leave this spot until I have that which I have come for: so ask my pardon, sir, or choose another glaive and to it again."

The young squire was deadly white from his exertions, both on the land and in the water. Soaking and stained, with a smear of blood on his white shoulder, and another on his brow, there was still in his whole pose and set of face the trace of an inflexible resolution. His opponent's duller and more material mind quailed before the fire and intensity of a higher spiritual nature.

"I had not thought that you had taken it so amiss," said he awkwardly. "It was but such a jest as we play upon each other, and, if you must have it so, I am sorry for it."

"Then I am sorry too," quoth Alleyne warmly, "and here is my hand upon it."

"And the none-meat horn has blown three times," quoth Harcomb, as they all streamed in chattering groups from the ground. "I know not what the prince's maître-

de-cuisine will say or think. By my troth! master Ford, your friend here is in need of a cup of wine, for he hath drunk deeply of Garonne water. I had not thought from his fair face that he had stood to this matter so shrewdly."

"Faith," said Ford, "this air of Bordeaux hath turned our turtle-dove into a game-cock. A milder or more courteous youth never came out of Hampshire."

"His master also, as I understand, is a very mild and courteous gentleman," remarked Harcomb; "yet I do not think that they are either of them men with whom it is very safe to trifle."

## 21. *How Agostino Pisano risked his Head*

EVEN the squires' table at the Abbey of St. Andrew's at Bordeaux was on a very sumptuous scale while the prince held his court there. Here first, after the meagre fare of Beaulieu and the stinted board of the Lady Loring, Alleyne learned the lengths to which luxury and refinement might be pushed. Roasted peacocks, with the feathers all carefully replaced so that the bird lay upon the dish even as it had strutted in life, boars' heads with the tusks gilded and the mouth lined with silver foil, jellies in the shape of the Twelve Apostles, and a great pasty which formed an exact model of the king's new castle at Windsor—these were a few of the strange dishes which faced him. An archer had brought him a change of clothes from the cog, and he had already, with the elasticity of youth, shaken off the troubles and fatigues of the morning. A page from the inner banqueting-hall had come with word that their master intended to drink wine at the lodgings of the Lord Chandos that night, and that he desired his squires to sleep at the hotel of the "Half Moon," on the Rue des Apôtres. Thither, then, they both set out in the twilight after the long course of juggling tricks and glee-singing with which the principal meal was concluded.

A thin rain was falling as the two youths, with their cloaks over their heads, made their way on foot through the streets of the old town, leaving their horses in the royal stables. An occasional oil-lamp at the corner of a street, or in the portico of some wealthy burgher, threw a faint glimmer over the shining cobble-stones and the varied motley crowd who, in spite of the weather, ebbed and flowed along every highway. In those escattered circles of dim radiance might be seen the whole busy panorama of life in a wealthy and martial city. Here passed the round-faced burgher, swollen with prosperity, his sweeping dark-clothed gaberdine, flat velvet cap, broad leather belt and dangling pouch all speaking of comfort and of wealth. Behind him his serving-wench, her blue wimple over her head, and one hand thrust forward to bear the lanthorn which threw a golden bar of light along her master's path. Behind them a group of swaggering half-drunken Yorkshire dalesmen, speaking a dialect which their own southland countrymen could scarce comprehend, their jerkins marked with the rampant lion, which showed that they had come over in the train of the north-country Stapletons. The burgher glanced back at their fierce faces and quickened his step, while the girl pulled her wimple closer round her ; for there was a meaning in their wild eyes as they stared at the purse and the maiden, which men of all tongues could understand. Then came archers of the guard, shrill-voiced women of the camp, English pages with their fair skins and blue wondering eyes, dark-robed friars, lounging men-at-arms, swarthy loud-tongued Gascon serving-men, seamen from the river, rude peasants of the Médoc, and becloaked and befeathered squires of the court, all jostling and pushing in an ever-changing many-coloured stream ; while English, French, Welsh, Basque, and the varied dialects of Gascony and Guienne filled the air with their babel. From time to time the throng would be burst asunder and a lady's horse-litter would trot past towards the abbey, or there would come a knot of torch-bearing archers

walking in front of Gascon baron or English knight, as he sought his lodgings after the palace revels. Clatter of hoofs, clinking of weapons, shouts from the drunken brawlers, and high laughter of women, they all rose up, like the mist from a marsh, out of the crowded streets of the dim-lit city.

One couple out of the moving throng especially engaged the attention of the two young squires, the more so as they were going in their own direction and immediately in front of them. They consisted of a man and a girl, the former very tall with rounded shoulders, a limp of one foot, and a large flat object covered with dark cloth under his arm. His companion was young and straight, with a quick elastic step and graceful bearing, though so swathed in a black mantle that little could be seen of her face save a flash of dark eyes and a curve of raven hair. The tall man leaned heavily upon her to take the weight off his tender foot, while he held his burden betwixt himself and the wall, cuddling it jealously to his side, and thrusting forward his young companion to act as a buttress whenever the pressure of the crowd threatened to bear him away. The evident anxiety of the man, the appearance of his attendant, and the joint care with which they defended their concealed possession, excited the interest of the two young Englishmen who walked within hand-touch of them.

"Courage, child!" they heard the tall man exclaim in strange hybrid French. "If we can win another sixty paces we are safe."

"Hold it safe, father," the other answered, in the same soft, mincing dialect. "We have no cause for fear."

"Verily, they are heathens and barbarians," cried the man; "mad, howling, drunken barbarians! Forty more paces, Tita mia, and I swear to the holy Eloi, patron of all learned craftsmen, that I will never set foot over my door again until the whole swarm are safely hived in their camp of Dax, or wherever else they curse with their presence. Twenty more paces, my treasure! Ah, my God! how

they push and brawl! Get in their way, Tita mia! Put your little elbow bravely out! Set your shoulders squarely against them, girl! Why should you give way to these mad islanders? Ah, cospetto! we are ruined and destroyed!"

The crowd had thickened in front, so that the lame man and the girl had come to a stand. Several half-drunken English archers, attracted, as the squires had been, by their singular appearance, were facing towards them, and peering at them through the dim light.

"By the three kings!" cried one, "here is an old dotard shrew to have so goodly a crutch! Use the leg that God hath given you, man, and do not bear so heavily upon the wench."

"Twenty devils fly away with him!" shouted another. "What, how, man! are brave archers to go maidless while an old man uses one as a walking-staff?"

"Come with me, my honey-bird!" cried a third, plucking at the girl's mantle.

"Nay, with me, my heart's desire!" said the first. "By St. George! our life is short, and we should be merry while we may. May I never see Chester Bridge again, if she is not a right winsome lass!"

"What hath the old toad under his arm?" cried one of the others. "He hugs it to him as the devil hugged the pardoner."

"Let us see, old bag of bones; let us see what it is that you have under your arm!" They crowded in upon him, while he, ignorant of their language, could but clutch the girl with one hand and the parcel with the other, looking wildly about in search of help.

"Nay, lads, nay!" cried Ford, pushing back the nearest archer. "This is but scurvy conduct. Keep your hands off, or it will be the worse for you."

"Keep your tongue still, or it will be the worse for you," shouted the most drunken of the archers. "Who are you to spoil sport?"

"A raw squire, new landed," said another. "By St.

Thomas of Kent! we are at the beck of our master, but we are not to be ordered by every babe whose mother hath sent him as far as Aquitaine."

"Oh, gentlemen," cried the girl in broken French, "for dear Christ's sake stand by us, and do not let these terrible men do us an injury."

"Have no fears, lady," Alleyne answered. "We shall see that all is well with you. Take your hand from the girl's wrist, you north-country rogue!"

"Hold to her, Wat!" said a great black-bearded man-at-arms, whose steel breast-plate glimmered in the dusk. "Keep your hands from your bodkins, you two, for that was my trade before you were born, and, by God's soul! I will drive a handful of steel through you if you move a finger."

"Thank God!" said Alleyne suddenly, as he spied in the lamp-light a shock of blazing red hair which fringed a steel cap high above the heads of the crowd. "Here is John, and Aylward, too! Help us, comrades, for there is wrong being done to this maid and to the old man."

"Holà, mon petit," said the old bowman, pushing his way through the crowd, with the huge forester at his heels. "What is all this, then? By the twang of string! I think that you will have some work upon your hands if you are to right all the wrongs that you may see upon this side of the water. It is not to be thought that a troop of bowmen, with the wine buzzing in their ears, will be as soft-spoken as so many young clerks in an orchard. When you have been a year with the Company you will think less of such matters. But what is amiss here? The provost-marshal with his archers is coming this way, and some of you may find yourselves in the stretch-neck, if you take not heed."

"Why, it is old Sam Aylward of the White Company!" shouted the man-at-arms. "Why, Samkin, what hath come upon thee? I can call to mind the day when you were as roaring a blade as ever called himself a free com-

panion. By my soul! from Limoges to Navarre, who was there who would kiss a wench or cut a throat as readily as bowman Aylward of Hawkwood's Company?"

"Like enough, Peter," said Aylward, "and, by my hilt! I may not have changed so much. But it was ever a fair loose and a clear mark with me. The wench must be willing, or the man must be standing up against me, else, by these ten finger-bones! either were safe enough for me."

A glance at Aylward's resolute face, and at the huge shoulders of Hordle John, had convinced the archers that there was little to be got by violence. The girl and the old man began to shuffle on in the crowd without their tormentors venturing to stop them. Ford and Alleyne followed slowly behind them, but Aylward caught the latter by the shoulder.

"By my hilt! camarade," said he, "I hear that you have done great things at the Abbey to-day, but I pray you to have a care, for it was I who brought you into the Company, and it would be a black day for me if aught were to befall you."

"Nay, Aylward, I will have a care."

"Thrust not forward into danger too much, mon petit. In a little time your wrist will be stronger and your cut more shrewd. There will be some of us at the 'Rose de Guienne' to-night, which is two doors from the hotel of the 'Half Moon,' so if you would drain a cup with a few simple archers you will be right welcome."

Alleyne promised to be there if his duties would allow, and then, slipping through the crowd, he rejoined Ford, who was standing in talk with the two strangers, who had now reached their own doorstep.

"Brave young signor," cried the tall man, throwing his arms round Alleyne, "how can we thank you enough for taking our parts against those horrible drunken barbarians? What should we have done without you? My Tita would have been dragged away, and my head would have been shivered into a thousand fragments."

"Nay, I scarce think that they would have mishandled you so," said Alleyne in surprise.

"Ho, ho!" cried he with a high crowing laugh, "it is not the head upon my shoulders that I think of. Cospetto! no. It is the head under my arm which you have preserved."

"Perhaps the signori would deign to come under our roof, father," said the maiden. "If we bide here, who knows that some fresh tumult may not break out?"

"Well said, Tita! Well said, my girl! I pray you, sirs, to honour my unworthy roof so far. A light, Giacomo! There are five steps up. Now, two more. So! Here we are at last in safety. Corpo di Baccho! I would not have given ten maravedi for my head when those children of the devil were pushing us against the wall. Tita mia, you have been a brave girl, and it was better that you should be pulled and pushed than that my head should be broken."

"Yes, indeed, father," said she earnestly.

"But those English! Ach! Take a Goth, a Hun, and a Vandal; mix them together and add a Barbary rover; then take this creature and make him drunk—and you have an Englishman. My God! were ever such people upon earth? What place is free from them? I hear that they swarm in Italy even as they swarm here. Everywhere you will find them, except in heaven."

"Dear father," cried Tita, still supporting the angry old man, as he limped up the curved oaken stair. "You must not forget that these good signori who have preserved us are also English."

"Ah yes. My pardon, sirs! Come into my room here. There are some who might find some pleasure in these paintings, but I learn that the art of war is the only art which is held in honour in your island."

The low-roofed, oak-panelled room into which he conducted them was brilliantly lighted by four scented oil-lamps. Against the walls, upon the table, on the floor, and in every part of the chamber, were great sheets of

glass painted in the most brilliant colours. Ford and Edricson gazed around them in amazement, for never had they seen such magnificent works of art.

"You like them, then," the lame artist cried, in answer to the look of pleasure and of surprise in their faces. "There are, then, some of you who have a taste for such trifling."

"I could not have believed it," exclaimed Alleyne. "What colour! What outlines! See to this martyrdom of the holy Stephen, Ford. Could you not yourself pick up one of these stones which lie to the hand of the wicked murtherers?"

"And see this stag, Alleyne, with the cross betwixt its horns. By my faith! I have never seen a better one at the Forest of Bere."

"And the green of this grass—how bright and clear! Why, all the painting that I have seen is but child's play beside this. This worthy gentleman must be one of those great painters of whom I have oft heard brother Bartholomew speak in the old days at Beaulieu."

The dark mobile face of the artist shone with pleasure at the unaffected delight of the two young Englishmen. His daughter had thrown off her mantle and disclosed a face of the finest and most delicate Italian beauty, which soon drew Ford's eyes from the pictures in front of him. Alleyne, however, continued with little cries of admiration and of wonderment to turn from the walls to the table and yet again to the walls.

"What think you of this, young sir?" asked the painter, tearing off the cloth which concealed the flat object which he had borne beneath his arm. It was a leaf-shaped sheet of glass, bearing upon it a face with a halo round it, so delicately outlined, and of so perfect a tint, that it might have been indeed a human face which gazed with sad and thoughtful eyes upon the young squire. He clapped his hands, with that thrill of joy which true art will ever give to a true artist.

"It is great!" he cried. "It is wonderful! But I

marvel, sir, that you should have risked a work of such beauty and value by bearing it at night through so unruly a crowd."

"I have indeed been rash," said the artist. "Some wine, Tita, from the Florence flask! Had it not been for you, I tremble to think of what might have come of it. See to the skin tint: it is not to be replaced; for, paint as you will, it is not once in a hundred times that it is not either burned too brown in the furnace or else the colour will not hold, and you get but a sickly white. There you can see the very veins and the throb of the blood. Yes, diavolo! if it had broken my heart would have broken too. It is for the choir window in the church of St. Remi, and we had gone, my little helper and I, to see if it was indeed of the size for the stonework. Night had fallen ere we finished, and what could we do save carry it home as best we might? But you, young sir, you speak as if you too knew something of the art."

"So little that I scarce dare speak of it in your presence," Alleyne answered. "I have been cloister bred, and it was no very great matter to handle the brush better than my brother novices."

"There are pigments, brush, and paper," said the old artist. "I do not give you glass, for that is another matter, and takes much skill in the mixing of colours. Now I pray you to show me a touch of your art. I thank you, Tita! The Venetian glasses, cara mia, and fill them to the brim. A seat, signor!"

While Ford, in his English-French, was conversing with Tita in her Italian-French, the old man was carefully examining his precious head to see that no scratch had been left upon its surface. When he glanced up again, Alleyne had, with a few bold strokes of the brush, tinted in a woman's face and neck upon the white sheet in front of him.

"Diavolo!" exclaimed the old artist, standing with his head on one side, "you have power; yes, cospetto! you have power. It is the face of an angel!"

"It is the face of the Lady Maude Loring!" cried Ford, even more astonished.

"Why, on my faith, it is not unlike her!" said Alleyne, in some confusion.

"Ah! a portrait! So much the better. Young man, I am Agostino Pisano, the son of Andrea Pisano, and I say again that you have power. Further, I say that, if you will stay with me I will teach you all the secrets of the glass-stainers' mystery: the pigments and their thickening, which will fuse into the glass and which will not, the furnace and the glazing—every trick and method you shall know."

"I would be right glad to study under such a master," said Alleyne; "but I am sworn to follow my lord while this war lasts."

"War! war!" cried the old Italian. "Ever this talk of war. And the men that you hold to be great—what are they? Have I not heard their names? Soldiers, butchers, destroyers! Ah, per Baccho! we have men in Italy who are in very truth great. You pull down, you despoil; but they build up, they restore. Ah, if you could but see my own dear Pisa, the duomo, the cloisters of Campo Santo, the high campanile, with the mellow throb of her bells upon the warm Italian air! Those are the works of great men. And I have seen them with my own eyes, these very eyes which look upon you. I have seen Andrea Orcagna, Taddeo Gaddi, Giottino, Stefano, Simone Memmi—men whose very colours I am not worthy to mix. And I have seen the aged Giotto, and he in turn was pupil to Cimabue, before whom there was no art in Italy, for the Greeks were brought to paint the chapel of the Gondi at Florence. Ah, signori, these are the real great men whose names will be held in honour when your soldiers are shown to have been the enemies of human kind."

"Faith, sir," said Ford, "there is something to say for the soldiers, also; for, unless they be defended, how are all these gentlemen whom you have mentioned to preserve the pictures which they have painted?"

"And all these?" said Alleyne. "Have you indeed done them all?—and where are they to go?"

"Yes, signor, they are all from my hand. Some are, as you see, upon one sheet, and some are in many pieces which may fasten together. There are some who do but paint upon the glass, and then, by placing another sheet of glass upon the top and fastening it, they keep the air from their painting. Yet I hold that the true art of my craft lies as much in the furnace as in the brush. See this rose window, which is from the model of the Church of the Holy Trinity at Vendôme, and this other of the 'Finding of the Grail,' which is for the apse of the Abbey church. Time was when none but my countrymen could do these things; but there is Clement of Chartres and others in France who are very worthy workmen. But, ah! there is that ever-shrieking brazen tongue which will not let us forget for one short hour that it is the arm of the savage, and not the hand of the master, which rules over the world."

A stern clear bugle call had sounded close at hand to summon some following together for the night.

"It is a sign to us as well," said Ford. "I would fain stay here for ever amid all these beautiful things"—staring hard at the blushing Tita as he spoke—"but we must be back at our lord's hostel ere he reach it."

Amid renewed thanks and with promises to come again, the two squires bade their leave of the old Italian glass-stainer and his daughter. The streets were clearer now, and the rain had stopped, so they made their way quickly from the Rue du Roi, in which their new friends dwelt, to the Rue des Apôtres, where the hostel of the "Half Moon" was situated.

## 22. *How the Bowmen held Wassail at the "Rose de Guienne"*

"MON DIEU! Alleyne, saw you ever so lovely a face?" cried Ford as they hurried along together. "So pure, so peaceful, and so beautiful!"

"In sooth, yes. And the hue of the skin the most perfect that ever I saw. Marked you also how the hair curled round the brow? It was wonder-fine."

"Those eyes too!" cried Ford. "How clear and how tender—simple, and yet so full of thought!"

"If there was a weakness, it was in the chin," said Alleyne.

"Nay, I saw none."

"It was well curved, it is true."

"Most daintily so."

"And yet——"

"What then, Alleyne? Wouldst find flaw in the sun?"

"Well, bethink you, Ford, would not more power and expression have been put into the face by a long and noble beard?"

"Holy Virgin!" cried Ford, "the man is mad. A beard on the face of little Tita!"

"Tita! Who spoke of Tita?"

"Who spoke of aught else?"

"It was the picture of St. Remi, man, of which I have been discoursing."

"You are, indeed," cried Ford, laughing, "a Goth, Hun, and Vandal, with all the other hard names which the old man called us. How could you think so much of a smear of pigments, when there was such a picture painted by the good God Himself in the very room with you? But who is this?"

"If it please you, sirs," said an archer, running across to them, "Aylward and others would be right glad to see

you. They are within here. He bade me say to you that the Lord Loring will not need your service to-night, as he sleeps with the Lord Chandos."

"By my faith!" said Ford, "we do not need a guide to lead us to their presence." As he spoke there came a roar of singing from the tavern upon the right, with shouts of laughter and stamping of feet. Passing under a low door, and down a stone-flagged passage, they found themselves in a long narrow hall lighted up by a pair of blazing torches, one at either end. Trusses of straw had been thrown down along the walls, and reclining on them were some twenty or thirty archers, all of the Company, their steel caps and jacks thrown off, their tunics open, and their great limbs sprawling upon the clay floor. At every man's elbow stood his leather black-jack of beer, while at the farther end a hogshead with its end knocked in promised an abundant supply for the future. Behind the hogshead, on a half-circle of kegs, boxes, and rude settles, sat Aylward, John, Black Simon and three or four other leading men of the archers, together with Goodwin Hawtayne, the master-shipman, who had left his yellow cog in the river to have a last rouse with his friends of the Company. Ford and Alleyne took their seats between Aylward and Black Simon, without their entrance checking in any degree the hubbub which was going on.

"Ale, mes camarades?" cried the bowman, "or shall it be wine? Nay, but ye must have the one or the other. Here, Jacques, thou limb of the devil, bring a bottrine of the oldest vernage, and see that you do not shake it. Hast heard the news?"

"Nay," cried both the squires.

"That we are to have a brave tourney."

"A tourney?"

"Aye, lads. For the Captal de Buch hath sworn that he will find five knights from this side of the water who will ride over any five Englishmen who ever threw leg over saddle; and Chandos hath taken up the challenge, and the prince hath promised a golden vase for the man

who carries himself best, and all the court is in a buzz over it."

"Why should the knights have all the sport?" growled Hordle John. "Could they not set up five archers for the honour of Aquitaine and of Gascony?"

"Or five men-at-arms," said Black Simon.

"But who are the English knights?" asked Hawtayne.

"There are three hundred and forty-one in the town," said Aylward, "and I hear that three hundred and forty cartels and defiances have already been sent in, the only one missing being Sir John Ravensholme, who is in his bed with the sweating sickness, and cannot set foot to ground."

"I have heard of it from one of the archers of the guard," cried a bowman from among the straw; "I hear that the prince wished to break a lance, but that Chandos would not hear of it, for the game is likely to be a rough one."

"Then there is Chandos."

"Nay, the prince would not permit it. He is to be marshal of the lists, with Sir William Felton and the Duc d'Armagnac. The English will be the Lord Audley, Sir Thomas Percy, Sir Thomas Wake, Sir William Beauchamp, and our own very good lord and leader."

"Hurrah for him, and God be with him!" cried several. "It is honour to draw string in his service."

"So you may well say," said Aylward. "By my ten finger-bones! if you march behind the pennon of the five roses you are like to see all that a good bowman would wish to see. Ha! yes, mes garçons, you laugh, but, by my hilt! you may not laugh when you find yourselves where he will take you, for you can never tell what strange vow he may not have sworn to. I see that he has a patch over his eye. There will come bloodshed of that patch, or I am the more mistaken."

"How chanced it at Poictiers, good Master Aylward?" asked one of the younger archers, leaning upon his

elbows, with his eyes fixed respectfully upon the old bowman's rugged face.

"Aye, Aylward, tell us of it," cried Hordle John.

"Here is to old Samkin Aylward!" shouted several at the farther end of the room, waving their black-jacks in the air.

"Ask him!" said Aylward, modestly, nodding towards Black Simon. "He saw more than I did. And yet, by the holy nails! there was not very much that I did not see either."

"Ah, yes," said Simon, shaking his head, "it was a great day. I never hope to see such another. There were some fine archers who drew their last shaft that day. We shall never see better men, Aylward."

"By my hilt! no. There was little Robby Withstaff, and Andrew Salblaster, and Wat Alspaye, who broke the neck of the German. Mon Dieu! what men they were! Take them how you would, at long butts or short, hoyles, rounds, or rovers, better bowmen never twirled a shaft over their thumbnails."

"But the fight, Aylward, the fight!" cried several, impatiently.

"Let me fill my jack first, boys, for it is a thirsty tale. It was at the first fall of the leaf that the prince set forth, and he passed through Auvergne, and Berry, and Anjou, and Touraine. In Auvergne the maids are kind, but the wines are sour. In Berry it is the women that are sour, but the wines are rich. Anjou, however, is a very good land for bowmen, for wine and women are all that heart could wish. In Touraine I got nothing save a broken pate, but at Vierzon I had a great good fortune, for I had a golden pyx from the minster, for which I afterwards got nine Genoan janes from the goldsmith in the Rue Mont Olive. From thence we went to Bourges, where I had a tunic of flame-coloured silk and a very fine pair of shoes, with tassels of silk, and drops of silver."

"From a stall, Aylward?" asked one of the young archers.

"Nay, from a man's feet, lad. I had reason to think that he might not need them again, seeing that a thirty-inch shaft had feathered in his back."

"And what then, Aylward?"

"On we went, coz, some six thousand of us, until we came to Issodun, and there again a very great thing befell."

"A battle, Aylward?"

"Nay, nay; a greater thing than that. There is little to be gained out of a battle, unless one have the fortune to win a ransom. At Issodun I and three Welshmen came upon a house which all others had passed, and we had the profit of it to ourselves. For myself, I had a fine feather-bed—a thing which you will not see in a long day's journey in England. You have seen it, Alleyne, and you, John. You will bear me out that it is a noble bed. We put it on a sutler's mule, and bore it after the army. It was in my mind that I would lay it by until I came to start house of mine own, and I have it now in a very safe place near Lyndhurst."

"And what then, master-bowman?" asked Hawtayne. "By St. Christopher! it is indeed a fair and goodly life which you have chosen, for you gather up the spoil as a Warsash man gathers lobsters, without grace or favour from any man."

"You are right, master-shipman," said another of the older archers. "It is an old bowyer's rede that the second feather of a fenny goose is better than the pinion of a tame one. Draw on, old lad, for I have come between you and the clout."

"On we went then," said Aylward, after a long pull at his black-jack. "There were some six thousand of us, with the prince and his knights, and the feather-bed upon a sutler's mule in the centre. We made great havoc in Touraine, until we came into Romorantin, where I chanced upon a gold chain and two bracelets of jasper, which were stolen from me the same day by a black-eyed wench from the Ardennes. Mon Dieu! there are some

folk who have no fear of Domesday in them, and no sign of grace in their souls, for ever clutching and clawing at another man's chattels."

"But the battle, Aylward, the battle!" cried several, amid a burst of laughter.

"I come to it, my young war-pups. Well, then, the King of France had followed us with fifty thousand men, and he made great haste to catch us; but when he had us he scarce knew what to do with us, for we were so drawn up among hedges and vineyards that they could not come nigh us, save by one lane. On both sides were archers, men-at-arms and knights behind, and in the centre the baggage, with my feather-bed upon a sutler's mule. Three hundred chosen knights came straight for it, and, indeed, they were very brave men, but such a drift of arrows met them that few came back. Then came the Germans, and they also fought very bravely, so that one or two broke through the archers and came as far as the feather-bed, but all to no purpose. Then out rides our own little hothead and my lord Audley with his four Cheshire squires, and a few others of like kidney, and after them went the prince and Chandos, and then the whole throng of us, with axe and sword, for we had shot away our arrows. Ma foi! it was a foolish thing, for we came forth from the hedges, and there was nought to guard the baggage had they ridden round behind us. But all went well with us, and the king was taken, and little Robby Withstaff and I fell in with a wain with twelve firkins of wine for the king's own table, and, by my hilt! if you asked me what happened after that, I cannot answer you, nor can little Robby Withstaff either."

"And next day?"

"By my faith! we did not tarry long, but we hied back to Bordeaux, where we came in safety with the King of France and also the feather-bed. I sold my spoil, mes garçons, for as many gold pieces as I could hold in my hufken, and for seven days I lit twelve wax candles upon the altar of Saint Andrew: for if you forget the blessed

when things are well with you, they are very likely to forget you when you have need of them. I have a score of one hundred and nineteen pounds of wax against the holy Andrew, and, as he was a very just man, I doubt not that I shall have full weight and measure when I have most need of it."

"Tell me, Master Aylward," cried a young, fresh-faced archer at the farther end of the room, "what was this great battle about?"

"Why, you jack-fool, what would it be about save who should wear the crown of France?"

"I thought that mayhap it might be as to who should have this feather-bed of thine."

"If I come down to you, Silas, I may lay my belt across your shoulders," Aylward answered, amid a general shout of laughter. "But it is time young chickens went to roost when they dare cackle against their elders. It is late, Simon."

"Nay, let us have another song."

"Here is Arnold of Sowley will troll as good a stave as any man in the Company."

"Nay, we have one here who is second to none," said Hawtayne, laying his hand upon big John's shoulder. "I have heard him on the cog with a voice like the wave upon the shore. I pray you, friend, to give us 'The Bells of Milton,' or, if you will, 'The Franklin's Maid.'"

Hordle John drew the back of his hand across his mouth, fixed his eyes upon the corner of the ceiling, and bellowed forth, in a voice which made the torches flicker, the southland ballad for which he had been asked:

The franklin he hath gone to roam,
The franklin's maid she bides at home.
But she is cold and coy and staid,
And who may win the franklin's maid?

There came a knight of high renown
In bassinet and ciclatoun;
On bended knee full long he prayed:
He might not win the franklin's maid.

There came a squire so debonair,
His dress was rich, his words were fair,
He sweetly sang, he deftly played :
He could not win the franklin's maid.

There came a mercer wonder-fine
With velvet cap and gaberdine :
For all his ships, for all his trade,
He could not buy the franklin's maid.

There came an archer bold and true,
With bracer guard and stave of yew ;
His purse was light, his jerkin frayed :
Haro, alas ! the franklin's maid !

Oh, some have laughed and some have cried,
And some have scoured the country-side ;
But off they ride through wood and glade,
The bowman and the franklin's maid.

A roar of delight from his audience, with stamping of feet and beating of black-jacks against the ground, showed how thoroughly the song was to their taste, while John modestly retired into a quart pot, which he drained in four giant gulps, " I sang that ditty in Hordle ale-house ere I ever thought to be an archer myself," quoth he.

" Fill up your stoups ! " cried Black Simon, thrusting his own goblet into the open hogshead in front of him. " Here is a last cup to the White Company, and every brave boy who walks behind the rose of Loring ! "

" To the wood, the flax, and the gander's wing ! " said an old grey-headed archer on the right.

" To a gentle loose, and the King of Spain for a mark at fourteen score ! " cried another.

" To a bloody war ! " shouted a fourth. " Many to go and few to come ! "

" With the most gold to the best steel ! " added a fifth.

" And a last cup to the maids of our heart ! " cried Aylward. " A steady hand and a true eye, boys ; so let two quarts be a bowman's portion." With shout and jest and snatch of song they streamed from the room, and all was peaceful once more in the " Rose de Guienne."

## 23. *How England held the Lists at Bordeaux*

SO used were the good burghers of Bordeaux to martial display and knightly sport, that an ordinary joust or tournament was an everyday matter with them. The fame and brilliancy of the prince's court had drawn the knights-errant and pursuivants-of-arms from every part of Europe. In the long lists by the Garonne on the landward side of the northern gate there had been many a strange combat, when the Teutonic knight, fresh from the conquest of the Prussian heathen, ran a course against the knight of Calatrava, hardened by continual struggle against the Moors, or cavaliers from Portugal broke a lance with Scandinavian warriors from the farther shore of the great Northern Ocean. Here fluttered many an outland pennon, bearing symbol and blazonry from the banks of the Danube, the wilds of Lithuania, and the mountain strongholds of Hungary : for chivalry was of no clime and of no race, nor was any land so wild that the fame and name of the prince had not sounded through it from border to border.

Great, however, was the excitement through town and district when it was learned that on the third Wednesday in Advent there would be held a passage-at-arms in which five knights of England would hold the lists against all comers. The great concourse of noblemen and famous soldiers, the national character of the contest, and the fact that this was a last trial of arms, before what promised to be an arduous and bloody war, all united to make the event one of the most notable and brilliant that Bordeaux had ever seen. On the eve of the contest the peasants flocked in from the whole district of the Médoc, and the fields beyond the walls were whitened with the tents of those who could find no warmer lodging. From the distant camp of Dax, too, and from Blaye, Bourg, Libourne, St. Emilion, Castillon, St. Macaire, Cardillac, Ryons, and all the cluster of flourishing towns which

looked upon Bordeaux as their mother, there thronged an unceasing stream of horsemen and of footmen, all converging upon the great city. By the morning of the day on which the courses were to be run, not less than eighty thousand people had assembled round the lists and along the low grassy ridge which looks down upon the scene of the encounter.

It was, as may well be imagined, no easy matter among so many noted cavaliers to choose out five on either side who should have precedence over their fellows. A score of secondary combats had nearly arisen from the rivalries and bad blood created by the selection, and it was only the influence of the prince and the efforts of the older barons which kept the peace among so many eager and fiery soldiers. Not till the day before the courses were the shields finally hung out for the inspection of the ladies and the heralds, so that all men might know the names of the champions and have the opportunity to prefer any charge against them should there be stain upon them which should disqualify them from taking part in so noble and honourable a ceremony.

Sir Hugh Calverley and Sir Robert Knolles had not yet returned from their raid into the marches of Navarre, so that the English party were deprived of two of their most famous lances. Yet there remained so many good names that Chandos and Felton, to whom the selection had been referred, had many an earnest consultation, in which every feat of arms and failure or success of each candidate was weighed and balanced against the rival claims of his companions. Lord Audley of Cheshire, the hero of Poictiers, and Loring of Hampshire, who was held to be the second lance in the army, were easily fixed upon. Then, of the younger men, Sir Thomas Percy of Northumberland, Sir Thomas Wake of Yorkshire, and Sir William Beauchamp of Gloucestershire, were finally selected to uphold the honour of England. On the other side were the veteran Captal de Buch and the brawny Olivier de Clisson, with the free companion Sir Perducas d'Albret, the valiant

Lord of Mucident and Sigismond von Altenstat, of the Teutonic order. The older soldiers among the English shook their heads as they looked upon the escutcheons of these famous warriors, for they were all men who had spent their lives upon the saddle, and bravery and strength can avail little against experience and wisdom of war.

"By my faith! Sir John," said the prince, as he rode through the winding streets on his way to the lists, "I should have been glad to have splintered a lance to-day. You have seen me hold a spear since I had strength to lift one, and should know best whether I do not merit a place among this honourable company."

"There is no better seat and no truer lance, sire," said Chandos; "but, if I may say so without fear of offence, it were not fitting that you should join in this debate."

"And why, Sir John?"

"Because, sire, it is not for you to take part with Gascons against English, or with English against Gascons, seeing that you are lord of both. We are not too well loved by the Gascons now, and it is but the golden link of your princely coronet which holds us together. If that be snapped I know not what would follow."

"Snapped, Sir John!" cried the prince, with an angry sparkle in his dark eyes. "What manner of talk is this? You speak as though the allegiance of our people were a thing which might be thrown off or on like a falcon's jessel.

"With a sorry hack one uses whip and spur, sire," said Chandos; "but with a horse of blood and spirit a good cavalier is gentle and soothing, coaxing rather than forcing. These folk are strange people, and you must hold their love, even as you have it now, for you will get from their kindness what all the pennons in your army could not wring from them."

"You are over-grave to-day, John," the prince answered. "We may keep such questions for our council chamber. But how now, my brothers of Spain and of Majorca, what think you of this challenge?"

"I look to see some handsome jousting," said Don

Pedro, who rode with the King of Majorca upon the right of the prince, while Chandos was on the left. "By St. James of Compostella! but these burghers would bear some taxing. See to the broadcloth and velvet that the rogues bear upon their backs. By my troth! if they were my subjects they would be glad enough to wear falding and leather ere I had done with them. But mayhap it is best to let the wool grow long ere you clip it."

"It is our pride," the prince answered coldly, "that we rule over freemen and not slaves."

"Every man to his own humour," said Pedro carelessly. "Carajo! there is a sweet face at yonder window! Don Fernando, I pray you to mark the house, and to have the maid brought to us at the abbey."

"Nay, brother, nay!" cried the prince impatiently. "I have had occasion to tell you more than once that things are not ordered in this way in Aquitaine."

"A thousand pardons, dear friend," the Spaniard answered quickly, for a flush of anger had sprung to the dark cheek of the English prince. "You make my exile so like a home that I forget at times that I am not in very truth back in Castile. Every land hath indeed its own ways and manners; but I promise you, Edward, that when you are my guest in Toledo or Madrid you shall not yearn in vain for any commoner's daughter on whom you may design to cast your eye."

"Your talk, sire," said the prince still more coldly, "is not such as I love to hear from your lips. I have no taste for such amours as you speak of, and I have sworn that my name shall be coupled with that of no woman save my ever dear wife."

"Ever the mirror of true chivalry!" exclaimed Pedro, while James of Majorca, frightened at the stern countenance of their all-powerful protector, plucked hard at the mantle of his brother-exile.

"Have a care, cousin," he whispered, "for the sake of the Virgin have a care, for you have angered him."

"Pshaw! fear not," the other answered, in the same

low tone. "If I miss one stoop I will strike him on the next. Mark me else. Fair cousin," he continued, turning to the prince, "these be rare men-at-arms, and lusty bowmen. It would be hard indeed to match them."

"They have journeyed far, sire, but they have never yet found their match."

"Nor ever will, I doubt not. I feel myself to be back upon my throne when I look at them. But tell me, dear coz, what shall we do next, when we have driven this bastard Henry from the kingdom which he hath filched?"

"We shall then compel the King of Aragon to place our good friend and brother James of Majorca upon the throne."

"Noble and generous prince!" cried the little monarch.

"That done," said King Pedro, glancing out of the corners of his eyes at the young conqueror, "we shall unite the forces of England, of Aquitaine, of Spain, and of Majorca. It would be shame to us if we did not do some great deed with such forces ready to our hand."

"You say truly, brother," cried the prince, his eyes kindling at the thought. "Methinks that we could not do anything more pleasing to Our Lady than to drive the heathen Moors out of the country."

"I am with you, Edward, as true as hilt to blade. But, by St. James! we shall not let these Moors make mock at us from over the sea. We must take ship and thrust them from Africa."

"By heaven, yes!" cried the prince. "And it is the dream of my heart that our English pennons shall wave upon the Mount of Olives, and the lions and lilies float over the holy city."

"And why not, dear coz? Your bowmen have cleared a path to Paris, and why not to Jerusalem? Once there, your arms might rest."

"Nay, there is more to be done," cried the prince, carried away by the ambitious dream. "There is still the city of Constantine to be taken, and war to be waged

against the Soldan of Damascus. And beyond him again there is tribute to be levied from the Cham of Tartary, and from the kingdom of Cathay. Ha! John, what say you? Can we not go as far eastward as Richard of the Lion Heart?"

"Old John will bide at home, sire," said the rugged soldier. "By my soul! as long as I am seneschal of Aquitaine I will find enough to do in guarding the marches which you have entrusted to me. It would be a blithe day for the king of France when he heard that the sea lay between him and us."

"By my soul! John," said the prince, "I have never known you turn laggard before."

"The babbling hound, sire, is not always the first at the mort," the old knight answered.

"Nay, my true-heart! I have tried you too often not to know. But, by my soul! I have not seen so dense a throng since the day that we brought King John down Cheapside."

It was, indeed, an enormous crowd which covered the whole vast plain from the line of vineyards to the river bank. From the northern gate the prince and his companions looked down at a dark sea of heads, brightened here and there by the coloured hoods of the women or by the sparkling head-pieces of archers and men-at-arms. In the centre of this vast assemblage the lists seemed but a narrow strip of green marked out with banners and streamers, while a gleam of white with a flutter of pennons at either end showed where the marquees were pitched, which served as the dressing-rooms of the combatants. A path had been staked off from the city gate to the stands, which had been erected for the court and the nobility. Down this, amid the shouts of the enormous multitude, the prince cantered with his two attendant kings, his high officers of state, and his long train of lords and ladies, courtiers, counsellors, and soldiers, with toss of plume and flash of jewel, sheen of silk and glint of gold—as rich and gallant a show as heart could wish. The head of the

cavalcade had reached the lists ere the rear had come clear of the city gate, for the fairest and the bravest had assembled from all the broad lands which are watered by the Dordogne and the Garonne. Here rode dark-browed cavaliers from the sunny south, fiery soldiers from Gascony, graceful courtiers of Limousin or Saintonge, and gallant young Englishmen from beyond the seas. Here, too, were the beautiful brunettes of the Gironde, with eyes which out-flashed their jewels, while beside them rode their blonde sisters of England clear cut and aquiline, swathed in swans'-down and in ermine, for the air was biting, though the sun was bright. Slowly the long and glittering train wound into the lists, until every horse had been tethered by the varlets in waiting, and every lord and lady seated in the long stands which stretched, rich in tapestry and velvet and blazoned arms, on either side of the centre of the arena.

The holders of the lists occupied the end which was nearest to the city gate. There, in front of their respective pavilions, flew the martlets of Audley, the roses of Loring, the scarlet bars of Wake, the lion of the Percys, and the silver wings of the Beauchamps, each supported by a squire clad in hanging green stuff to represent so many Tritons, and bearing a huge conch-shell in their left hands. Behind the tents the great war-horses, armed at all points, champed and reared, while their masters sat at the doors of their pavilions, with their helmets upon their knees, chatting as to the order of the day's doings. The English archers and men-at-arms had mustered at that end of the lists, but the vast majority of the spectators were in favour of the attacking party, for the English had declined in popularity ever since the bitter dispute as to the disposal of the royal captive after the battle of Poictiers. Hence the applause was by no means general when the herald-at-arms proclaimed, after a flourish of trumpets, the names and styles of the knights who were prepared, for the honour of their country and for the love of their ladies, to hold the field against all who might do them the

favour to run a course with them. On the other hand, a deafening burst of cheering greeted the rival herald, who, advancing from the other end of the lists, rolled forth the well-known titles of the five famous warriors who had accepted the defiance.

"Faith, John," said the prince, "it sounds as though you were right. Ha! my grace D'Armagnac, it seems that our friends on this side will not grieve if our English champions lose the day."

"It may be so, sire," the Gascon nobleman answered. "I have little doubt that in Smithfield or at Windsor an English crowd would favour their own countrymen."

"By my faith! that's easily seen," said the prince, laughing, "for a few score English archers at yonder end are bellowing as though they would outshout the mighty multitude. I fear that they will have little to shout over this tourney, for my gold vase has small prospect of crossing the water. What are the conditions, John?"

"They are to tilt singly not less than three courses, sire, and the victory to rest with that party which shall have won the greater number of courses, each pair continuing till one or other have the vantage. He who carries himself best of the victors hath the prize, and he who is judged best of the other party hath a jewelled clasp. Shall I order that the nakirs sound, sire?"

The prince nodded, and the trumpets rang out, while the champions rode forth one after the other, each meeting his opponent in the centre of the lists. Sir William Beauchamp went down before the practised lance of the Captal de Buch, Sir Thomas Percy won the vantage over the Lord of Mucident, and the Lord Audley struck Sir Perducas d'Albret from the saddle. The burly De Clisson, however, restored the hopes of the attackers by beating to the ground Sir Thomas Wake of Yorkshire. So far, there was little to choose betwixt challengers and challenged.

"By Saint James of Santiago!" cried Don Pedro, with a tinge of colour upon his pale cheeks, "win who will, this has been a most noble contest."

"Who comes next for England, John?" asked the prince, in a voice which quivered with excitement.

"Sir Nigel Loring of Hampshire, sire."

"Ha! he is a man of good courage, and skilled in the use of all weapons."

"He is indeed, sire. But his eyes, like my own, are the worse for the wars. Yet he can tilt or play his part at handstrokes as merrily as ever. It was he, sire, who won the golden crown which Queen Philippa, your royal mother, gave to be jousted for by all the knights of England after the harrying of Calais. I have heard that at Twynham Castle there is a buffet which groans beneath the weight of his prizes."

"I pray that my vase may join them," said the prince. "But here is the cavalier of Germany, and, by my soul! he looks like a man of great valour and hardiness. Let them run their full three courses, for the issue is overgreat to hang upon one."

As the prince spoke, amid a loud flourish of trumpets and the shouting of the Gascon party, the last of the assailants rode gallantly into the lists. He was a man of great size, clad in black armour without blazonry or ornament of any kind, for all worldly display was forbidden by the rules of the military brotherhood to which he belonged. No plume or nobloy fluttered from his plain tilting salade, and even his lance was devoid of the customary banderole. A white mantle fluttered behind him, upon the left side of which was marked the broad black cross picked out with silver which was the well-known badge of the Teutonic order. Mounted upon a horse as black and as forbidding as himself, he cantered slowly forward, with none of those prancings and gambades with which a cavalier was accustomed to show his command over his charger. Gravely and sternly he inclined his head to the prince, and took his place at the farther end of the arena.

He had scarce done so before Sir Nigel rode out from the holders' enclosure, and galloping at full speed down

the lists, drew his charger up before the prince's stand with a jerk which threw it back upon its haunches. With white armour, blazoned shield, and plume of ostrich-feathers from his helmet, he carried himself in so jaunty and joyous a fashion, with tossing pennon and curveting charger, that a shout of applause ran the full circle of the arena. With the air of a man who hastes to a joyous festival, he waved his lance in salute, and reining the pawing horse round without permitting its fore-feet to touch the ground, he hastened back to his station.

A great hush fell over the huge multitude as the last two champions faced each other. A double issue seemed to rest upon their contest, for their personal fame was at stake as well as their party's honour. Both were famous warriors, but as their exploits had been performed in widely sundered countries, they had never before been able to cross lances. A course between such men would have been enough in itself to cause the keenest interest, apart from its being the crisis which would decide who should be the victors of the day. For a moment they waited—the German sombre and collected, Sir Nigel quivering in every fibre with eagerness and fiery resolution. Then, amid a long-drawn breath from the spectators, the glove fell from the marshal's hand, and the two steel-clad horsemen met like a thunder-clap in front of the royal stand. The German, though he reeled for an instant before the thrust of the Englishman, struck his opponent so fairly upon the vizor that the laces burst, the plumed helmet flew to pieces, and Sir Nigel galloped on down the list with his bald head shimmering in the sunshine. A thousand waving scarves and tossing caps announced that the first bout had fallen to the popular party.

The Hampshire knight was not a man to be disheartened by a reverse. He spurred back to his pavilion, and was out in a few instants with another helmet. The second course was so equal that the keenest judges could not discern any vantage. Each struck fire from the other's

shield, and each endured the jarring shock as though welded to the horse beneath him. In the final bout, however, Sir Nigel struck his opponent with so true an aim that the point of the lance caught between the bars of his vizor and tore the front of his helmet out, while the German, aiming somewhat low, and half stunned by the shock, had the misfortune to strike his adversary upon the thigh, a breach of the rules of the tilting-yard, by which he not only sacrificed his chances of success, but would also have forfeited his horse and his armour, had the English knight chosen to claim them. A roar of applause from the English soldiers, with an ominous silence from the vast crowd who pressed round the barriers, announced that the balance of victory lay with the holders. Already the ten champions had assembled in front of the prince to receive his award, when a harsh bugle call from the farther end of the lists drew all eyes to a new and unexpected arrival.

## 24. *How a Champion came forth from the East*

THE Bordeaux lists were, as has already been explained, situated upon the plain near the river upon those great occasions when the tilting-ground in front of the Abbey of St. Andrew's was deemed to be too small to contain the crowd. On the eastern side of this plain the country-side sloped upwards, thick with vines in summer, but now ridged with the brown bare enclosures. Over the gently rising plain curved the white road which leads inland, usually flecked with travellers, but now with scarce a living form upon it, so completely had the lists drained all the district of its inhabitants. Strange it was to see so vast a concourse of people, and then to look upon that broad, white, empty highway which wound away, bleak and deserted, until it narrowed itself to a bare streak against the distant uplands.

Shortly after the contest had begun, anyone looking from the lists along this road might have remarked, far away in the extreme distance, two brilliant and sparkling points which glittered and twinkled in the bright shimmer of the winter sun. Within an hour these points had become clearer and nearer, until they might be seen to come from the reflection from the head-pieces of two horsemen who were riding at the top of their speed in the direction of Bordeaux. Another half-hour had brought them so close that every point of their bearing and equipment could be discerned. The first was a knight in full armour, mounted upon a brown horse with a white blaze upon breast and forehead. He was a short man of great breadth of shoulder, with vizor closed, and no blazonry upon his simple white surcoat or plain black shield. The other, who was evidently his squire and attendant, was unarmed save for the helmet upon his head, but bore in his right hand a very long and heavy oaken spear which belonged to his master. In his left hand the squire held not only the reins of his own horse but those of a great black war-horse fully harnessed, which trotted along at his side. Thus the three horses and their two riders rode swiftly to the lists, and it was the blare of the trumpet sounded by the squire as his lord rode into the arena which had broken in upon the prize-giving and drawn away the attention and interest of the spectators.

"Ha, John!" cried the prince, craning his neck, "who is this cavalier, and what is it that he desires?"

"On my word, sire," replied Chandos, with the utmost surprise upon his face, "it is my opinion that he is a Frenchman."

"A Frenchman!" repeated Don Pedro. "And how can you tell that, my Lord Chandos, when he has neither coat-armour, crest, nor blazonry?"

"By his armour, sire, which is rounder at elbow and at shoulder than any of Bordeaux or of England. Italian he might be were his bassinet more sloped, but I will swear that those plates were welded betwixt this and Rhine.

Here comes his squire, however, and we shall hear what strange fortune hath brought him over the marches."

As he spoke the attendant cantered up the grassy enclosure, and pulling up his steed in front of the royal stand, blew a second fanfare upon his bugle. He was a raw-boned, swarthy-cheeked man, with black bristling beard and a swaggering bearing. Having sounded his call, he thrust the bugle into his belt, and pushing his way betwixt the groups of English and of Gascon knights, he reined up within a spear's length of the royal party.

"I come," he shouted in a hoarse thick voice, with a strong Breton accent, "as squire and herald from my master, who is a very valiant pursuivant-of-arms, and a liegeman to the great and powerful monarch, Charles, king of the French. My master has heard that there is jousting here, and prospect of honourable advancement, so he has come to ask that some English cavalier will vouchsafe for the love of his lady to run a course with sharpened lances with him, or to meet him with sword, mace, battle-axe, or dagger. He bade me say, however, that he would fight only with a true Englishman, and not with any mongrel who is neither English nor French, but speaks with the tongue of the one, and fights under the banner of the other."

"Sir!" cried De Clisson, with a voice of thunder, while his countrymen clapped their hands to their swords. The squire, however, took no notice of their angry faces, but continued with his master's message.

"He is now ready, sire," he said, "albeit his destrier has travelled many miles this day, and fast, for we were in fear lest we come too late for the jousting.

"Ye have indeed come too late," said the prince, "seeing that the prize is about to be awarded; yet I doubt not that one of these gentlemen will run a course for the sake of honour with this cavalier of France."

"And as to the prize, sire," quoth Sir Nigel, "I am sure that I speak for all when I say this French knight

hath our leave to bear it away with him if he can fairly win it."

"Bear word of this to your master," said the prince, "and ask him which of these five Englishmen he would desire to meet. But stay; your master bears no coat-armour, and we have not yet heard his name."

"My master, sire, is under vow to the Virgin neither to reveal his name nor to open his vizor until he is back upon French ground once more."

"Yet what assurance have we," said the prince, "that this is not some varlet masquerading in his master's harness, or some caitiff knight, the very touch of whose lance might bring infamy upon an honourable gentleman?"

"It is not so, sire," cried the squire earnestly. "There is no man upon earth who would demean himself by breaking a lance with my master."

"You speak out boldly, squire," the prince answered; "but unless I have some further assurance of your master's noble birth and gentle name I cannot match the choicest lances of my court against him."

"You refuse, sire?"

"I do refuse."

"Then, sire, I was bidden to ask you from my master whether you would consent if Sir John Chandos, upon hearing my master's name, should assure you that he was indeed a man with whom you might yourself cross swords without indignity."

"I ask no better," said the prince.

"Then I must ask, Lord Chandos, that you will step forth. I have your pledge that the name shall remain ever a secret, and that you will neither say nor write one word which might betray it? The name is——" He stooped down from his horse and whispered something into the old knight's ear which made him start with surprise, and stare with much curiosity at the distant knight, who was sitting his charger at the farther end of the arena.

"Is this indeed sooth?" he exclaimed.

"It is, my lord, and I swear it by St. Ives of Brittany."

"I might have known it," said Chandos, twisting his moustache, and still looking thoughtfully at the cavalier.

"What then, Sir John?" asked the prince.

"Sire, this is a knight whom it is indeed great honour to meet, and I would that your grace would grant me leave to send my squire for my harness, for I would dearly love to run a course with him."

"Nay, nay, Sir John, you have gained as much honour as one man can bear, and it were hard if you could not rest now. But I pray you, squire, to tell your master that he is very welcome to our court, and that wines and spices will be served him if he would refresh himself before jousting."

"My master will not drink," said the squire.

"Let him then name the gentleman with whom he would break a spear."

"He would contend with these five knights, each to choose such weapons as suit him best."

"I perceive," said the prince, "that your master is a man of great heart and high of enterprise. But the sun already is low in the west, and there will scarce be light for these courses. I pray you, gentlemen, to take your places, that we may see whether this stranger's deeds are as bold as his words."

The unknown knight had sat like a statue of steel looking neither to the right nor to the left during these preliminaries. He had changed from the horse upon which he had ridden, and bestrode the black charger which his squire had led beside him. His immense breadth, his stern composed appearance, and the mode in which he handled his shield and his lance, were enough in themselves to convince the thousands of critical spectators that he was a dangerous opponent. Aylward, who stood in the front row of the archers with Simon, big John, and others of the Company, had been criticising the proceedings from the commencement with the ease and freedom of a man who had spent his life under arms and had

learned in a hard school to know at a glance the points of a horse and his rider. He stared now at the stranger with a wrinkled brow and the air of a man who is striving to stir his memory.

"By my hilt! I have seen the thick body of him before to-day. Yet I cannot call to mind where it could have been. At Nogent belike, or was it at Auray? Mark me, lads, this man will prove to be one of the best lances of France, and there are no better in the world."

"It is but child's play, this poking game," said John. "I would fain try my hand at it, for, by the black rood! I think that it might be amended."

"What, then, would you do, John?" asked several.

"There are many things which might be done," said the forester thoughtfully. "Methinks that I would begin by breaking my spear."

"So they all strive to do."

"Nay, but not upon another man's shield. I would break it over my own knee."

"And what the better for that, old beef and bones?" asked Black Simon.

"So I would turn what is but a lady's bodkin of a weapon into a very handsome club."

"And then, John?"

"Then I would take the other's spear into my arm or my leg, or where it pleased him best to put it, and I would dash out his brains with my club."

"By my ten finger-bones! old John," said Aylward. "I would give my feather-bed to see you at a spear-running. This is a most courtly and gentle sport which you have devised."

"So it seems to me," said John seriously. "Or, again, one might seize the other round the middle, pluck him off his horse and bear him to the pavilion, there to hold him to ransom."

"Good!" cried Simon, amid a roar of laughter from all the archers round. "By Thomas of Kent! we shall make a camp-marshal of thee, and thou shalt draw up

rules for our jousting. But, John, who is it that you would uphold in this knightly and pleasing fashion ? "

" What mean you ? "

" Why, John, so strong and strange a tilter must fight for the brightness of his lady's eyes or the curl of her eye-lash, even as Sir Nigel does for the Lady Loring."

" I know not about that," said the big archer, scratching his head in perplexity. " Since Mary hath played me false, I can scarce fight for her."

" Yet any woman will serve."

" There is my mother, then," said John. " She was at much pains at my upbringing, and, by my soul ! I will uphold the curve of her eye-lashes, for it tickleth my very heartroot to think of her. But who is here ? "

" It is Sir William Beauchamp. He is a valiant man, but I fear that he is scarce firm enough upon the saddle to bear the thrust of such a tilter as this stranger promises to be."

Aylward's words were speedily justified, for even as he spoke the two knights met in the centre of the lists. Beauchamp struck his opponent a shrewd blow upon the helmet, but was met with so frightful a thrust that he whirled out of his saddle and rolled over and over upon the ground. Sir Thomas Percy met with little better success, for his shield was split, his vambrace torn, and he himself wounded slightly in the side. Lord Audley and the unknown knight struck each other fairly upon the helmet ; but while the stranger sat as firm and rigid as ever upon his charger the Englishman was bent back to his horse's crupper by the weight of the blow and had galloped half-way down the lists ere he could recover himself. Sir Thomas Wake was beaten to the ground with a battle-axe—that being the weapon which he had selected—and had to be carried to his pavilion. These rapid successes, gained one after the other over four celebrated warriors, worked the crowd up to a pitch of wonder and admiration. Thunders of applause from the English soldiers, as well as from the citizens and peasants,

showed how far the love of brave and knightly deeds could rise above the rivalries of race.

"By my soul! John," cried the prince, with his cheek flushed and his eyes shining, "this is a man of good courage and great hardiness. I could not have thought that there was any single arm upon earth which could have overthrown these four champions."

"He is indeed, as I have said, sire, a knight from whom much honour is to be gained. But the lower edge of the sun is wet, and it will be beneath the sea ere long."

"Here is Sir Nigel Loring, on foot and with his sword," said the prince. "I have heard that he is a fine swordsman."

"The finest in your army, sire," Chandos answered. "Yet I doubt not that he will need all his skill this day."

As he spoke, the two combatants advanced from either end in full armour with their two-handed swords sloping over their shoulders. The stranger walked heavily and with a measured stride, while the English knight advanced as briskly as though there was no iron shell to weigh down the freedom of his limbs. At four paces distance they stopped, eyed each other for a moment, and then in an instant fell to work with a clatter and clang as though two sturdy smiths were busy upon their anvils. Up and down went the long shining blades, round and round they circled in curves of glimmering light, crossing, meeting, disengaging, with flash of sparks at every parry. Here and there bounded Sir Nigel, his head erect, his jaunty plume fluttering in the air, while his dark opponent sent in crashing blow upon blow, following fiercely up with cut and with thrust, but never once getting past the practised blade of the skilled swordsman. The crowd roared with delight as Sir Nigel would stoop his head to avoid a blow, or by some slight movement of his body allow some terrible thrust to glance harmlessly past him. Suddenly, however, his time came. The Frenchman, whirling up his sword, showed for an instant a chink betwixt his shoulder-piece and the rerebrace which

guarded his upper arm. In dashed Sir Nigel, and out again so swiftly that the eye could not follow the quick play of his blade, but a trickle of blood from the stranger's shoulder, and a rapidly widening red smudge upon his white surcoat, showed where the thrust had taken effect. The wound was, however, but a slight one, and the Frenchman was about to renew his onset, when, at a sign from the prince, Chandos threw down his bâton, and the marshals of the lists struck up the weapons and brought the contest to an end.

"It were time to check it," said the prince, smiling, "for Sir Nigel is too good a man for me to lose, and, by the five holy wounds! if one of those cuts came home I should have fears for our champion. What think you, Pedro?"

"I think, Edward, that the little man was very well able to take care of himself. For my part, I should wish to see so well matched a pair fight on while a drop of blood remained in their veins."

"We must have speech with him. Such a man must not go from my court without rest or sup. Bring him hither, Chandos, and, certes, if the Lord Loring hath resigned his claim upon this goblet, it is right and proper that this cavalier should carry it to France with him as a sign of the prowess that he has shown this day."

As he spoke, the knight-errant, who had remounted his war-horse, galloped forward to the royal stand, with a silken kerchief bound round his wounded arm. The setting sun cast a ruddy glare upon his burnished armour, and sent his long black shadow streaming behind him up the level clearing. Pulling up his steed, he slightly inclined his head, and sat in the stern and composed fashion with which he had borne himself throughout, heedless of the applauding shouts and the flutter of kerchiefs from the long lines of brave men and of fair women who were looking down upon him.

"Sir knight," said the prince, "we have all marvelled this day at the great skill and valour with which God has

been pleased to endow you. I would fain that you should tarry at our court, for a time at least, until your hurt is healed and your horses rested."

"My hurt is nothing, sire, nor are my horses weary," returned the stranger in a deep stern voice.

"Will you not at least hie back to Bordeaux with us, that you may drain a cup of muscadine and sup at our table?"

"I will neither drink your wine nor sit at your table," returned the other. "I bear no love for you or for your race, and there is nought that I wish at your hands until the day when I see the last sail which bears you back to your island vanishing away against the western sky."

"These are bitter words, sir knight," said Prince Edward, with an angry frown.

"And they come from a bitter heart," answered the unknown knight. "How long is it since there has been peace in my hapless country? Where are the steadings and orchards and vineyards which made France fair? Where are the cities which made her great? From Provence to Burgundy we are beset by all the prowling hirelings in Christendom, who rend and tear the country which you have left too weak to guard her own marches. Is it not a byword that a man may ride all day in that unhappy land without seeing thatch upon roof or hearing the crow of cock? Does not one fair kingdom content you, that you should strive so for this other one which has no love for you? Pardieu! a true Frenchman's words may well be bitter, for bitter is his lot, and bitter his thoughts as he rides through his thrice unhappy country."

"Sir knight," said the prince, "you speak like a brave man, and our cousin of France is happy in having a cavalier who is so fit to uphold his cause either with tongue or with sword. But if you think such evil of us, how comes it that you have trusted yourself to us without warranty of safe-conduct?"

"Because I knew that you would be here, sire. Had the man who sits upon your right been ruler of this land,

I had indeed thought twice before I looked to him for aught that was knightly or generous." With a soldierly salute, he wheeled round his horse, and, galloping down the lists, disappeared amid the dense crowd of footmen and of horsemen who were streaming away from the scene of the tournament.

"The insolent villain!" cried Pedro, glaring furiously after him. "I have seen a man's tongue torn from his jaws for less. Would it not be well, even now, Edward, to send horsemen to hale him back? Bethink you that it may be one of the royal house of France, or at least some knight whose loss would be a heavy blow to his master. Sir William Felton, you are well mounted, gallop after the caitiff, I pray you."

"Do so, Sir William," said the prince, "and give him this purse of a hundred nobles as a sign of the respect which I bear for him; for, by St. George! he has served his master this day even as I would wish liegemen of mine to serve me." So saying, the prince turned his back upon the king of Spain, and, springing upon his horse, rode slowly homewards to the Abbey of St. Andrew's.

## 25. *How Sir Nigel wrote to Twynham Castle*

ON the morning after the jousting, when Alleyne Edricson went, as was his custom, into his master's chamber to wait upon him in his dressing, and to curl his hair, he found him already up and very busily at work. He sat at a table by the window, a deer-hound on one side of him and a lurcher on the other, his feet tucked away under the trestle on which he sat, and his tongue in his cheek, with the air of a man who is much perplexed. A sheet of vellum lay upon the board in front of him, and he held a pen in his hand, with which he had been scribbling in a rude schoolboy hand. So many were the blots, however, and so numerous the scratches

and erasures, that he had at last given it up in despair, and sat with his single uncovered eye cocked upwards at the ceiling, as one who waits upon inspiration.

"By Saint Paul!" he cried, as Alleyne entered, "you are the man who will stand by me in this matter. I have been in sore need of you, Alleyne."

"God be with you, my fair lord!" the squire answered. "I trust that you have taken no hurt from all that you have gone through yesterday."

"Nay; I feel the fresher for it, Alleyne. It has eased my joints, which were somewhat stiff from these years of peace. I trust, Alleyne, that thou didst very carefully note and mark the bearing and carriage of this knight of France: for it is time, now when you are young, that you should see all that is best, and mould your own actions in accordance. This was a man from whom much honour might be gained, and I have seldom met anyone for whom I have conceived so much love and esteem. Could I but learn his name, I should send you to him with my cartel, that we might have further occasion to watch his goodly feats of arms."

"It is said, my fair lord, that none know his name, save only the Lord Chandos, and that he is under vow not to speak it. So ran the gossip at the squires' table."

"Be he who he might, he was a very hardy gentleman. But I have a task here, Alleyne, which is harder to me than aught that was set before me yesterday."

"Can I help you, my lord?"

"That indeed you can. I have been writing my greetings to my sweet wife; for I hear that a messenger goes from the prince to Southampton within the week, and he would gladly take a packet for me. I pray you, Alleyne, to cast your eyes upon what I have written, and see if they are such words as my lady will understand. My fingers, as you can see, are more used to iron and leather than to the drawing of strokes and turning of letters. What then? Is there aught amiss, that you should stare so?"

"It is this first word, my lord. In what tongue were you pleased to write?"

"In English; for my lady talks it more than she doth French."

"Yet this is no English word, my sweet lord. Here are four t's and never a letter betwixt them."

"By Saint Paul! it seemed strange to my eye when I wrote it," said Sir Nigel. "They bristle up together like a clump of lances. We must break their ranks and set them farther apart. The word is 'that.' Now I will read it to you, Alleyne, and you shall write it out fair; for we leave Bordeaux this day, and it would be great joy to me to think that the Lady Loring had word from me."

Alleyne sat down as ordered, with a pen in his hand and a fresh sheet of parchment before him, while Sir Nigel slowly spelled out his letter, running his forefinger on from word to word.

"That my heart is with thee, my dear sweeting, is what thine own heart will assure thee of. All is well with us here, save that Pepin hath the mange on his back, and Pommers hath scarce yet got clear of his stiffness from being four days on ship-board; and the more so because the sea was very high, and we were like to founder on account of a hole in her side, which was made by a stone cast at us by certain sea-rovers, who may the saints have in their keeping, for they have gone from amongst us, as has young Terlake and two score mariners and archers who would be the more welcome here, as there is like to be a very fine war, with much honour and all hopes of advancement; for which I go to gather my Company together, who are now at Montaubon, where they pillage and destroy; yet I hope that, by God's help, I may be able to show that I am their master, even as, my sweet lady, I am thy servant." "How of that, Alleyne?" continued Sir Nigel, blinking at his squire, with an expression of some pride upon his face. "Have I not told her all that hath befallen us?"

"You have said much, my fair lord; and yet, if I may

say so, it is somewhat crowded together, so that my Lady Loring can, mayhap, scarce follow it. Were it in shorter periods——"

"Nay, it boots not how you marshal them, as long as they are all there at the muster. Let my lady have the words, and she will place them in such order as pleases her best. But I would have you add what it would please her to know."

"That will I," said Alleyne, blithely, and bent to the task.

"My fair lady and mistress," he wrote, "God hath had us in His keeping, and my lord is well and in good cheer. He hath won much honour at the jousting before the prince, when he alone was able to make it good against a very valiant man from France. Touching the monies, there is enough and to spare until we reach Montaubon. Herewith, my fair lady, I send my humble regards, entreating you that you will give the same to your daughter, the Lady Maude. May the holy saints have you both in their keeping is ever the prayer of thy servant,

"ALLEYNE EDRICSON."

"That is very fairly set forth," said Sir Nigel, nodding his bald head as each sentence was read to him. "And for thyself, Alleyne, if there be any dear friend to whom you would fain give greeting, I can send it for thee within this packet."

"There is none," said Alleyne, sadly.

"Have you no kinsfolk, then?"

"None, save my brother."

"Ha! I had forgot that there was ill-blood betwixt you. But are there none in all England who love thee?"

"None that I dare say so."

"And none whom you love?"

"Nay, I will not say that," said Alleyne.

Sir Nigel shook his head and laughed softly to himself. "I see how it is with you," he said. "Have I not noted your frequent sighs, and vacant eye? Is she fair?"

"She is indeed," cried Alleyne from his heart, all tingling at this sudden turn of the talk.

"And good?"

"As an angel."

"And yet she loves you not?"

"Nay, I cannot say that she loves another."

"Then you have hopes?"

"I could not live else."

"Then must you strive to be worthy of her love. Be brave and pure, fearless to the strong and humble to the weak; and so, whether this love prosper or no, you will have fitted yourself to be honoured by a maiden's love, which is, in sooth, the highest guerdon which a true knight can hope for."

"Indeed, my lord, I do so strive," said Alleyne; "but she is so sweet, so dainty, and of so noble a spirit, that I fear me that I shall never be worthy of her."

"By thinking so you become worthy. Is she then of noble birth?"

"She is, my lord," faltered Alleyne.

"Of a knightly house?"

"Yes."

"Have a care, Alleyne, have a care!" said Sir Nigel kindly. "The higher the steed the greater the fall. Hawk not at that which may be beyond thy flight."

"My lord, I know little of the ways and usages of the world," cried Alleyne, "but I would fain ask your rede upon the matter. You have known my father and my kin: is not my family one of good standing and repute?"

"Beyond all question."

"And yet you warn me that I must not place my love too high."

"Were Minstead yours, Alleyne, then, by Saint Paul! I cannot think that any family in the land would not be proud to take you among them, seeing that you come of so old a strain. But while the Socman lives—— Ha, by my soul! if this is not Sir Oliver's step I am the more mistaken."

As he spoke, a heavy footfall was heard without, and the portly knight flung open the door and strode into the room.

"Why, my little coz," said he, "I have come across to tell you that I live above the barber's in the Rue de la Tour, and that there is a venison pasty in the oven and two flasks of the right vintage on the table. By St. James! a blind man might find the place, for one has but to get in the wind from it, and follow the savoury smell. Put on your cloak, then, and come, for Sir Walter Hewett and Sir Robert Briquet, with one or two others, are awaiting us."

"Nay, Oliver, I cannot be with you, for I must to Montaubon this day."

"To Montaubon? But I have heard that your Company is to come with my forty Winchester rascals to Dax."

"If you will take charge of them, Oliver. For I will go to Montaubon with none save my two squires and two archers. Then, when I have found the rest of my Company, I shall lead them to Dax. We set forth this morning."

"Then I must back to my pasty," said Sir Oliver. "You will find us at Dax, I doubt not, unless the prince throw me into prison, for he is very wroth against me."

"And why, Oliver?"

"Pardieu! because I have sent my cartel, gauntlet and defiance to Sir John Chandos and to Sir William Felton."

"To Chandos? In God's name, Oliver, why have you done this?"

"Because he and the other have used me despitefully."

"And how?"

"Because they have passed me over in choosing those who should joust for England. Yourself and Audley I could pass, coz, for you are mature men; but who are Wake, and Percy, and Beauchamp? By my soul! I was prodding for my food into a camp-kettle when they were howling for their pap. Is a man of my weight and

substance to be thrown aside for the first three half-grown lads who have learned the trick of the tilt-yard? But hark ye, coz, I think of sending my cartel also to the prince."

"Oliver! Oliver! You are mad!"

"Not I, i' faith! I care not a denier whether he be prince or no. By Saint James! I see that your squire's eyes are starting from his head like a trussed crab. Well, friend, we are all three men of Hampshire, and not lightly to be jeered at."

"Has he jeered at you then?"

"Pardieu! yes. 'Old Sir Oliver's heart is still stout,' said one of his court. 'Else had it been out of keeping with the rest of him,' quoth the prince. 'And his arm is strong,' said another. 'So is the backbone of his horse,' quoth the prince. This very day I will send him my cartel and defiance."

"Nay, nay, my dear Oliver," said Sir Nigel, laying his hand upon his angry friend's arm. "There is nought in this, for it was but saying that you were a strong and robust man, who had need of a good destrier. And as to Chandos and Felton, bethink you that if when you yourself were young the older lances had ever been preferred, how would you then have had the chance to earn the good name and fame which you now bear? You do not ride as light as you did, Oliver, and I ride lighter by the weight of my hair, but it would be an ill thing if in the evening of our lives we showed that our hearts were less true and loyal than of old. If such a knight as Sir Oliver Buttesthorn may turn against his own prince for the sake of a light word, then where are we to look for steadfast faith and constancy?"

"Ah! my dear little coz, it is easy to sit in the sunshine and preach to the man in the shadow. Yet you could ever win me over to your side with that soft voice of yours. Let us think no more of it then. But, Holy Mother! I had forgot the pasty, and it will be as scorched as Judas Iscariot! Come, Nigel, lest the foul fiend get the better of me again."

"For one hour, then; for we march at mid-day. Tell Aylward, Alleyne, that he is to come with me to Montaubon, and to choose one archer for his comrade. The rest will to Dax when the prince starts, which will be before the feast of the Epiphany. Have Pommers ready at mid-day with my sycamore lance, and place my harness on the sumpter mule."

With these brief directions, the two old soldiers strode off together, while Alleyne hastened to get all in order for their journey.

## 26. *How the Three Comrades gained a Mighty Treasure*

IT was a bright crisp winter's day when the little party set off from Bordeaux on their journey to Montaubon, where the missing half of their Company had last been heard of. Sir Nigel and Ford had ridden on in advance, the knight upon his hackney, while his great war-horse trotted beside his squire. Two hours later Alleyne Edricson followed; for he had the tavern reckoning to settle, and many other duties which fell to him as squire of the body. With him came Aylward and Hordle John, armed as of old, but mounted for their journey upon a pair of clumsy Landes horses, heavy-headed and shambling, but of great endurance, and capable of jogging along all day even when between the knees of the huge archer, who turned the scale at two hundred and seventy pounds. They took with them the sumpter mules which carried in panniers the wardrobe and table furniture of Sir Nigel; for the knight, though neither fop nor epicure, was very dainty in small matters and loved, however bare the board or hard the life, that his napery should still be white and his spoon of silver.

There had been frost during the night, and the white hard road rang loud under their horses' irons as they spurred through the east gate of the town, along the same

broad highway which the unknown French champion had traversed on the day of the jousts. The three rode abreast, Alleyne Edricson with his eyes cast down and his mind distrait, for his thoughts were busy with the conversation which he had had with Sir Nigel in the morning. Had he done well to say so much, or had he not done better to have said more? What would the knight have said had he confessed to his love for the Lady Maude? Would he cast him off in disgrace, or might he chide him as having abused the shelter of his roof? It had been ready upon his tongue to tell him all when Sir Oliver had broken in upon them. Perchance Sir Nigel, with his love of all the dying usages of chivalry, might have contrived some strange ordeal or feat of arms, by which his love should be put to the test. Alleyne smiled as he wondered what fantastic and wondrous deed would be exacted from him. Whatever it was, he was ready for it, whether it were to hold the lists in the court of the King of Tartary, to carry a cartel to the Sultan of Baghdad, or to serve a term against the wild heathen of Prussia. Sir Nigel had said that his birth was high enough for any lady, if his fortune could but be amended. Often had Alleyne curled his lip at the beggarly craving for land or for gold which blinded man to the higher and more lasting issues of life. Now it seemed as though it were only by this same land and gold that he might hope to reach his heart's desire. But then, again, the Socman of Minstead was no friend to the constable of Twynham Castle. It might happen that, should he amass riches by some happy fortune of war, this feud might hold the two families aloof. Even if Maude loved him, he knew her too well to think that she would wed him without the blessing of her father. Dark and murky was it all, but hope mounts high in youth, and it ever fluttered over all the turmoil of his thoughts like a white plume amid the shock of horsemen.

If Alleyne Edricson had enough to ponder over as he rode through the bare plains of Guienne, his two com-

panions were more busy with the present and less thoughtful of the future. Aylward rode for half a mile with his chin upon his shoulder, looking back at a white kerchief which fluttered out of the gable window of a high house which peeped over the corner of the battlements. When at last a dip of the road hid it from his view, he cocked his steel cap, shrugged his broad shoulders, and rode on with laughter in his eyes, and his weather-beaten face all ashine with pleasant memories. John also rode in silence, but his eyes wandered slowly from one side of the road to the other, and he stared and pondered and nodded his head like a traveller who makes his notes and saves them up for the re-telling.

"By the rood!" he broke out suddenly, slapping his thigh with his great red hand, "I knew that there was something a-missing, but I could not bring to my mind what it was."

"What was it then?" asked Alleyne, coming with a start out of his reverie.

"Why, it is the hedgerows," roared John, with a shout of laughter. "The country is all scraped as clear as a friar's poll. But indeed I cannot think much of the folk in these parts. Why do they not get to work and dig up these long rows of black and crooked stumps which I see on every hand? A franklin of Hampshire would think shame to have such litter upon his soil."

"Thou foolish old John!" quoth Aylward. "You should know better, since I have heard that the monks of Beaulieu could squeeze a good cup of wine from their own grapes. Know then that if these rows were dug up the wealth of the country would be gone, and mayhap there would be dry throats and gaping mouths in England, for in three months' time these black roots will blossom and shoot and burgeon, and from them will come many a good ship-load of Médoc and Gascony which will cross the narrow seas. But see the little church in the hollow, and the folk who cluster in the churchyard! By my hilt! it is a burial, and there is a passing bell!" He pulled off

his steel cap as he spoke and crossed himself, with a muttered prayer for the repose of the dead.

"There too," remarked Alleyne, as they rode on again, "that which seems to the eye to be dead is still full of the sap of life, even as the vines were. Thus God hath written Himself and His laws very broadly on all that is around us, if our poor dull eyes and duller souls could but read what He hath set before us."

"Ha! mon petit," cried the bowman, "you take me back to the days when you were new-fledged, as sweet a little chick as ever pecked his way out of a monkish egg. I had feared that in gaining our debonair young man-at-arms we had lost our soft-spoken clerk. In truth, I have noted much change in you since we came from Twynham Castle."

"Surely it would be strange else, seeing that I have lived in a world so new to me. Yet I trust that there are many things in which I have not changed. If I have turned to serve an earthly master, and to carry arms for an earthly king, it would be an ill thing if I were to lose all thought of the great high King and Master of all, whose humble and unworthy servant I was ere ever I left Beaulieu. You, John, are also from the cloisters, but I trow that you do not feel that you have deserted the old service in taking on the new."

"I am a slow-witted man," said John, "and, in sooth, when I try to think about such matters it casts a gloom upon me. Yet I do not look upon myself as a worse man in an archer's jerkin than I was in a white cowl, if that be what you mean."

"You have but changed from one white company to the other," quoth Aylward. "But, by these ten finger-bones! it is a passing strange thing to me to think that it was but in the last fall of the leaf that we walked from Lyndhurst together, he so gentle and maidenly, and you, John, like a great red-limbed over-grown mooncalf; and now here you are as sprack a squire and as lusty an archer as ever passed down the highway from Bordeaux, while

I am still the same old Samkin Aylward, with never a change, save that I have a few more sins on my soul, and a few less crowns in my pouch. But I never heard yet, John, what the reason was why you should come out of Beaulieu."

"There were seven reasons," said John, thoughtfully. "The first of them was that they threw me out."

"Ma foi! camarade, to the devil with the other six! That is enough for me and for thee also. I can see that they are very wise and discreet folk at Beaulieu. Ah! mon ange, what have you in the pipkin?"

"It is milk, worthy sir," answered the peasant-maid, who stood by the door of a cottage with a jug in her hand. "Would it please you, gentles, that I should bring you out three horns of it?"

"Nay, ma petite, but here is a two-sous piece for thy kindly tongue and for the sight of thy pretty face. Ma foi! but she has a bonne mine. I have a mind to bide and speak with her."

"Nay, nay, Aylward," cried Alleyne. "Sir Nigel will await us, and he in haste."

"True, true, camarade! Adieu, ma chérie! mon cœur est toujours à toi. Her mother is a well-grown woman also. See where she digs by the wayside. Ma foi! the riper fruit is ever the sweeter. Bon jour, ma belle dame! God have you in His keeping! Said Sir Nigel where he would await us?"

"At Marmande or Aiguillon. He said that we could not pass him, seeing that there is but the one road."

"Aye, and it is a road that I know as I know the Midhurst parish butts," quoth the bowman. "Thirty times have I journeyed it, forward and backward, and by the twang of string! I am wont to come back this way more laden than I went. I have carried all that I had into France in a wallet, and it hath taken four sumpter mules to carry it back again. God's benison on the man who first turned his hand to the making of war! But there, down in the dingle, is the church of Cardillac, and you

may see the inn where three poplars grow beyond the village. Let us on, for a stoup of wine would hearten us upon our way."

The highway had lain through the swelling vineyard country, which stretched away to the north and east in gentle curves, with many a peeping spire and feudal tower, and cluster of village houses, all clear cut and hard in the bright wintry air. To their right stretched the blue Garonne running swiftly seawards, with boats and barges dotted over its broad bosom. On the other side lay a strip of vineyard, and beyond it the desolate and sandy region of the Landes, all tangled with faded gorse and heath and broom, stretching away in unbroken gloom to the blue hills which lay low upon the farthest sky-line. Behind them might still be seen the broad estuary of the Gironde, with the high towers of Saint André and Saint Remi shooting up from the plain. In front, amid radiating lines of poplars, lay the riverside townlet of Cardillac —grey walls, white houses and a feather of blue smoke.

"This is the 'Mouton d'Or,'" said Aylward, as they pulled up their horses at a whitewashed straggling hostel. "What ho there!" he continued, beating upon the door with the hilt of his sword. "Tapster, ostler, varlet, hark hither, and a wannion on your lazy limbs! Ha! Michel, as red in the nose as ever! Three jacks of the wine of the country, Michel—for the air bites shrewdly. I pray you, Alleyne, to take note of this door, for I have a tale concerning it."

"Tell me, friend," said Alleyne to the portly, red-faced innkeeper, "have a knight and a squire passed this way within the hour?"

"Nay, sir, it would be two hours back. Was he a small man, weak in the eyes, with a want of hair, and speaks very quiet when he is most to be feared?"

"The same," the squire answered. "But I marvel how you should know how he speaks when he is in wrath, for he is very gentle-minded with those who are beneath him."

"Praise to the saints! it was not I who angered him," said the fat Michel.

"Who, then?"

"It was young Sieur de Brissac of Saintonge, who chanced to be here, and made game of the Englishman, seeing that he was but a small man and hath a face which is full of peace. But indeed this good knight was a very quiet and patient man, for he saw that the Sieur de Brissac was still young and spoke from an empty head, so he sat his horse and quaffed his wine, even as you are doing now, all heedless of his clacking tongue."

"And what then, Michel?"

"Well, messieurs, it chanced that the Sieur de Brissac, having said this and that, for the laughter of the varlets, cried out at last about the glove that the knight wore in his coif, asking if it was the custom in England for a man to wear a great archer's glove in his cap. Pardieu! I have never seen a man get off his horse as quick as did that stranger Englishman. Ere the words were past the other's lips he was beside him, his face nigh touching, and his breath hot upon his cheeks. 'I think, young sir,' quoth he softly, looking into the other's eyes, 'that now that I am nearer, you will very clearly see that the glove is not an archer's glove.' 'Perchance not,' said the Sieur de Brissac, with a twitching lip. 'Nor is it large, but very small,' quoth the Englishman. 'Less large than I had thought,' said the other, looking down, for the knight's gaze was heavy upon his eyelids. 'And in every way such a glove as might be warn by the fairest and sweetest lady in England,' quoth the Englishman. 'It may be so,' said the Sieur de Brissac, turning his face from him. 'I am myself weak in the eyes, and have often taken one thing for another,' quoth the knight, as he sprang back into his saddle and rode off, leaving the Sieur de Brissac biting his nails before my door. Ha! by the five wounds, many men of war have drunk my wine, but never one who was more to my fancy than this little Englishman."

"By my hilt! he is our master, Michel," quoth

Aylward, "and such men as we do not serve under a laggart. But here are four deniers, Michel, and God be with you! En avant, camarades! for we have a long road before us."

At a brisk trot the three friends left Cardillac and its wine-house behind them, riding without a halt, past St. Macaire, and on by ferry over the river Dorpt. At the farther side the road winds through La Réolle, Bazaille and Marmande, with the sunlit river still gleaming upon the right, and the bare poplars bristling up upon either side. John and Alleyne rode silent on either side, but every inn, farm-steading, or castle brought back to Aylward some remembrance of love, foray, or plunder, with which to beguile the way.

"There is the smoke from Bazas, on the further side of Garonne," quoth he. "There were three sisters yonder, the daughters of a farrier, and, by these ten finger-bones! a man might ride for a long June day and never set eyes upon such maidens. There was Marie, tall and grave, and Blanche, petite and gay, and the dark Agnes, with eyes that went through you like a waxed arrow. I lingered there as long as four days, and was betrothed to them all: for it seemed shame to set one above her sisters, and might cause ill blood in the family. Yet, for all my care, things were not merry in the house, and I thought it well to come away. There, too, is the mill of Le Souris. Old Le Pierre Carron, who owned it, was a right good comrade, and had ever a seat and a crust for a weary archer. He was a man who wrought hard at all that he turned his hand to; but he heated himself in grinding bones to mix with his flour, and so through over-diligence he brought a fever upon himself and died."

"Tell me, Aylward," said Alleyne, "what was amiss with the door of yonder inn that you should ask me to observe it."

"Pardieu! yes, I had well-nigh forgot. What saw you on yonder door?"

"I saw a square hole, through which doubtless the

host may peep when he is not too sure of those who knock."

"And you saw nought else?"

"I marked that beneath this hole there was a deep cut in the door, as though a great nail had been driven in."

"And nought else?"

"No."

"Had you looked more closely you might have seen that there was a stain upon the wood. The first time that I ever heard my comrade Black Simon laugh was in front of that door. I heard him once again when he slew a French squire with his teeth, he being unarmed and the Frenchman having a dagger."

"And why did Simon laugh in front of the inn-door?" asked John.

"Simon is a hard and perilous man when he hath the bitter drop in him; and, by my hilt! he was born for war, for there is little sweetness or rest in him. This inn, the 'Mouton d'Or,' was kept in the old days by one François Gourval, who had a hard fist and a harder heart. It was said that many and many an archer coming from the wars had been served with wine with simples in it, until he slept, and had then been stripped of all by this Gourval. Then on the morrow, if he made complaint this wicked Gourval would throw him out upon the road or beat him, for he was a very lusty man, and had many stout varlets in his service. This chanced to come to Simon's ears when we were at Bordeaux together, and he would have it that we should ride to Cardillac with a good hempen cord and give this Gourval such a scourging as he merited. Forth we rode then, but when we came to the 'Mouton d'Or,' Gourval had had word of our coming and its purpose, so that the door was barred, nor was there any way into the house. 'Let us in, good Master Gourval!' cried Simon, and 'Let us in, good Master Gourval!' cried I, but no word could we get through the hole in the door, save that he would draw an arrow upon us unless we went on our way. 'Well,

Master Gourval,' quoth Simon at last, ' this is but a sorry welcome, seeing that we have ridden so far just to shake you by the hand.' ' Canst shake me by the hand without coming in,' said Gourval. ' And how that ? ' asked Simon. ' By passing in your hand through the hole,' said he. ' Nay, my hand is wounded,' quoth Simon, ' and of such a size that I cannot pass it in.' ' That need not hinder,' said Gourval, who was hot to be rid of us ; ' pass in your left hand.' ' But I have something for thee, Gourval,' said Simon. ' What then ? ' he asked. ' There was an English archer who slept here last week of the name of Hugh of Nutbourne.' ' We have had many rogues here,' said Gourval. ' His conscience hath been heavy within him because he owes you a debt of fourteen deniers, having drunk wine for which he hath never paid. For the easing of his soul he asked me to pay the money to you as I passed.' Now this Gourval was very greedy for money, so he thrust forth his hand for the fourteen deniers, but Simon had his dagger ready and he pinned his hand to the door. ' I have paid the Englishman's debt, Gourval ! " quoth he, and so rode away, laughing so that he could scarce sit his horse, leaving mine host still nailed to his door. Such is the story of the hole which you have marked, and of the smudge upon the wood. I have heard that from that time English archers have been better treated in the auberge of Cardillac. But what have we here by the wayside ? "

" It appears to be a very holy man," said Alleyne.

" And, by the rood ! he hath some strange wares," cried John. " What are these bits of stone, and of wood, and rusted nails, which are set out in front of him ? "

The man whom they had remarked sat with his back against a cherry-tree, and his legs shooting out in front of him, like one who is greatly at his ease. Across his thighs was a wooden board, and scattered over it all manner of slips of wood and knobs of brick and stone, each laid separate from the other as a huckster places his wares. He was dressed in a long grey gown, and wore a

broad hat of the same colour, much weather-stained, with three scallop-shells dangling from the brim. As they approached, the travellers observed that he was advanced in years, and that his eyes were upturned and yellow.

"Dear knights and gentlemen," he cried in a high crackling voice, "worthy Christian cavaliers, will ye ride past and leave an aged pilgrim to die of hunger? The sight hath been burned from mine eyes by the sands of the Holy Land, and I have had neither crust of bread nor cup of wine these two days past."

"By my hilt! father," said Aylward, looking keenly at him, "it is a marvel to me that thy girdle should have so goodly a span and clip thee so closely, if you have in sooth had so little to place within it."

"Kind stranger," answered the pilgrim, "you have unwittingly spoken words which are very grievous to me to listen to. Yet I should be loth to blame you, for I doubt not that what you said was not meant to sadden me, nor to bring my sore affliction back to my mind. It ill becomes me to prate too much of what I have endured for the faith, and yet, since you have observed it, I must tell you that this sickness and roundness of the waist is caused by a dropsy brought on by over-haste in journeying from the house of Pilate to the Mount of Olives."

"There, Aylward," said Alleyne, with a reddened cheek, "let that curb your blunt tongue. How could you bring a fresh pang to this holy man, who hath endured so much and hath journeyed as far as Christ's own blessed tomb?"

"May the foul fiend strike me dumb!" cried the bowman in hot repentance; but both the palmer and Alleyne threw up their hands to stop him.

"I forgive thee from my heart, dear brother," piped the blind man. "But, oh, these wild words of thine are worse to mine ears than aught which you could say of me."

"Not another word shall I speak," said Aylward; "but here is a florin for thee and I crave thy blessing."

"And here is another," said Alleyne.

"And another," cried Hordle John.

But the blind palmer would have none of their alms. "Foolish, foolish pride!" he cried beating upon his chest with his large brown hand. "Foolish, foolish pride! How long then will it be ere I can scourge it forth? Am I then never to conquer it? Oh, strong, strong are the ties of flesh, and hard it is to subdue the spirit! I come, friends, of a noble house, and I cannot bring myself to touch this money, even though it be to save me from the grave."

"Alas! father," said Alleyne, "how then can we be of help to thee?"

"I had sat down here to die," quoth the palmer, "but for many years I have carried in my wallet these precious things which you see set forth now before me. It were sin, thought I, that my secret should perish with me. I shall therefore sell these things to the first worthy passers-by, and from them I shall have enough money to take me to the shrine of Our Lady at Rocamadour, where I hope to lay these old bones."

"What are the treasures, then, father?" asked Hordle John. "I can but see an old rusty nail, with bits of stone and slips of wood."

"My friend," answered the palmer, "not all the money that is in this country could pay a just price for these wares of mine. This nail," he continued, pulling off his hat and turning up his sightless orbs, "is one of those wherewith man's salvation was secured. I had it, together with this piece of the true rood, from the five-and-twentieth descendant of Joseph of Arimathea, who still lives in Jerusalem alive and well, though latterly much afflicted by boils. Aye, you may well cross yourselves, and I beg that you will not breathe upon it or touch it with your fingers."

"And the wood and stone, holy father?" asked Alleyne, with bated breath, as he stared awe-struck at his precious relics.

"This cantle of wood is from the true cross, this

other from Noah his ark, and the third is from the door-post of the temple of the wise King Solomon. This stone was thrown at the sainted Stephen, and the other two are from the Tower of Babel. Here, too, is part of Aaron's rod and a lock of hair from Elisha the prophet."

"But father," quoth Alleyne, "the holy Elisha was bald, which brought down upon him the revilements of the wicked children."

"It is very true that he had not much hair," said the palmer quickly, "and it is this which makes this relic so exceedingly precious. Take now your choice of these, my worthy gentlemen, and pay such a price as your consciences will suffer you to offer; for I am not a chapman nor a huckster, and I would never part with them, did I not know that I am very near to my reward."

"Aylward," said Alleyne excitedly, "this is such a chance as few folk have twice in one life. The nail I must have, and I will give it to the Abbey of Beaulieu, so that all the folk in England may go thither to wonder and to pray."

"And I will have the stone from the temple," cried Hordle John. "What would not my old mother give to have it hung over her bed?"

"And I will have Aaron's rod," quoth Aylward. "I have but five florins in the world, and here are four of them."

"Here are three more," said John.

"And here five more," added Alleyne. "Holy father, I hand you twelve florins, which is all that we can give, though we well know how poor a pay it is for the wondrous things which you sell us."

"Down, pride, down!" cried the pilgrim, still beating upon his chest. "Can I not bend myself then to take this sorry sum which is offered me for that which has cost me the labours of a life? Give me the dross! Here are the precious relics, and, oh, I pray you that you will handle them softly and with reverence, else had I rather left my unworthy bones here by the wayside."

With doffed caps and eager hands, the comrades took their new and precious possessions, and pressed onwards upon their journey, leaving the aged palmer still seated under the cherry-tree. They rode in silence, each with his treasure in his hand, glancing at it from time to time, and scarcely able to believe that chance had made them sole owners of relics of such holiness and worth that every abbey and church in Christendom would have bid eagerly for their possession. So they journeyed, full of this good fortune, until opposite the town of Le Mas, where John's horse cast a shoe, and they were glad to find a wayside smith who might set the matter to rights. To him Aylward narrated the good hap which had befallen them; but the smith, when his eyes lit upon the relics, leaned up against his anvil and laughed, with his hand to his side, until the tears hopped down his sooty cheeks.

"Why, masters," quoth he, "this man is a coquillart, or seller of false relics, and was here in this smithy not two hours ago. This nail that he hath sold you was taken from my nail box, and as to the wood and the stonet, you will see a heap of both outside from which he hath filled his scrip."

"Nay, nay," cried Alleyne, "this was a holy man who had journeyed to Jerusalem, and acquired a dropsy by running from the house of Pilate to the Mount of Olives."

"I know not about that," said the smith, "but I know that a man with a grey palmer's hat and gown was here no very long time ago, and that he sat on yonder stump and ate a cold pullet and drank a flask of wine. Then he begged from me one of my nails, and filling his scrip with stones, he went upon his way. Look at these nails, and see if they are not the same as that which he has sold you."

"Now may God save us!" cried Alleyne, all aghast. "Is there then no end to the wickedness of human kind? He so humble, so aged, so loth to take our money—and yet a villain and a cheat! Whom can we trust or believe in?"

"I will after him," said Aylward, flinging himself into the saddle. "Come, Alleyne, we may catch him ere John's horse be shod."

Away they galloped together, and ere long they saw the old grey palmer walking slowly along in front of them. He turned, however, at the sound of their hoofs, and it was clear that his blindness was a cheat like all the rest of him, for he ran swiftly through a field and so into a wood, where none could follow him. They hurled their relics after him, and so rode back to the blacksmith's the poorer both in pocket and in faith.

## 27. *How Roger Club-foot was passed into Paradise*

IT was evening before the three comrades came into Aiguillon. There they found Sir Nigel Loring and Ford safely lodged at the sign of the "Bâton Rouge," where they supped on good fare and slept between lavender-scented sheets. It chanced, however, that a knight of Poitou, Sir Gaston d'Estelle, was staying there on his way back from Lithuania, where he had served a term with the Teutonic knights under the land-master of the presbytery of Marienberg. He and Sir Nigel sat late in high converse as to bushments, outfalls, and the intaking of cities, with many tales of warlike men and valiant deeds. Then their talk turned to minstrelsy, and the stranger knight drew forth a cittern, upon which he played the minnelieder of the north, singing the while in a high cracked voice of Hildebrand and Brunhild and Siegfried, and all the strength and beauty of the land of Almain. To this Sir Nigel answered with the romances of Sir Eglamour and of Sir Isumbras, and so through the long winter night they sat by the crackling wood-fire answering each other's songs until the crowing cocks joined in their concert. Yet, with scarce an hour of rest, Sir Nigel was as blithe and bright as ever as they set forth after breakfast upon their way.

"This Sir Gaston is a very worthy man," said he to his squires as they rode from the "Bâton Rouge." "He hath a very strong desire to advance himself, and would have entered upon some small knightly debate with me, had he not chanced to have his arm-bone broken by the kick of a horse. I have conceived a great love for him, and I have promised him that when his bone is mended I will exchange thrusts with him. But we must keep to this road upon the left."

"Nay, my fair lord," quoth Aylward. "The road to Montabon is over the river, and so through Quercy and the Agenois."

"True, my good Aylward; but I have learned from this worthy knight, who hath come over the French marches, that there is a company of Englishmen who are burning and plundering in the country round Villefranche. I have little doubt, from what he says, that they are those whom we seek."

"By my hilt! it is like enough," said Aylward. "By all accounts they had been so long at Montaubon, that there would be little there worth the taking. Then, as they have already been in the south, they would come north to the country of the Aveyron."

"We shall follow the Lot until we come to Cahors, and then cross the marches into Villefranche," said Sir Nigel. "By Saint Paul! as we are but a small band, it is very likely that we may have some very honourable and pleasing adventure, for I hear that there is little peace upon the French border."

All morning they rode down a broad and winding road barred with the shadows of poplars. Sir Nigel rode in front with his squires, while the two archers followed behind with the sumpter mule between them. They had left Aiguillon and the Garonne far to the south, and rode now by the tranquil Lot, which curves blue and placid through a gently rolling country. Alleyne could not but mark that, whereas in Guienne there had been many townlets and few castles, there were now many castles and

few houses. On either hand grey walls and square grim keeps peeped out at every few miles from amid the forests, while the few villages which they passed were all ringed round with rude walls, which spoke of the constant fear and sudden foray of a wild frontier land. Twice during the morning there came bands of horsemen swooping down upon them from the black gateways of wayside strongholds, with short stern questions as to whence they came and what their errand. Bands of armed men clanked along the highway and the few lines of laden mules which carried the merchandise of the trader were guarded by armed varlets, or by archers hired for the service.

"The peace of Bretigny hath not made much change in these parts," quoth Sir Nigel, "for the country is overrun with free companies and masterless men. Yonder towers, between the wood and the hill, mark the town of Cahors and beyond it is the land of France. But here is a man by the wayside, and as he hath two horses and a squire I make little doubt that he is a knight. I pray you, Alleyne, to give him greeting from me, and to ask him for his titles and coat-armour. It may be that I can relieve him of some vow, or perchance he hath a lady whom he would wish to advance."

"Nay, my fair lord," said Alleyne, "these are not horses and a squire, but mules and a varlet. The man is a mercer, for he hath a great bundle beside him."

"Now, God's blessing on your honest English voice!" cried the stranger, pricking up his ears at the sound of Alleyne's words. "Never have I heard music that was so sweet to mine ear. Come, Watkin lad, throw the bales over Laura's back! My heart was nigh broke, for it seemed that I had left all that was English behind me, and that I would never set eyes upon Norwich market square again." He was a tall, lusty, middle-aged man with a ruddy face, a brown forked beard shot with grey, and a broad Flanders hat set at the back of his head. His servant, as tall as himself, but gaunt and raw-boned, had

swung the bales on the back of one mule, while the merchant mounted upon the other and rode to join the party. It was easy to see, as he approached, from the quality of his dress and the richness of his trappings, that he was a man of some wealth and position.

"Sir knight," said he, "my name is David Micheldene, and I am a burgher and alderman of the good town of Norwich, where I live five doors from the church of Our Lady, as all men know on the banks of Yare. I have here my bales of cloth which I carry to Cahors—woe worth the day that ever I started on such an errand! I crave your gracious protection upon the way for me, my servant, and my mercery; for I have already had many perilous passages, and have learned now that Roger Club-foot, the robber-knight of Quercy, is out upon the road in front of me. I hereby agree to give you one rose-noble if you bring me safe to the inn of the 'Angel' in Cahors, the same to be repaid to me or my heirs if any harm come to me or my goods."

"By Saint Paul!" answered Sir Nigel, "I should be a sorry knight if I asked pay for standing by a countryman in a strange land. You may ride with me and welcome, Master Micheldene, and your varlet may follow with my archers."

"God's benison upon thy bounty!" cried the stranger. "Should you come to Norwich you may have cause to remember that you have been of service to Alderman Micheldene. It is not very far to Cahors, for surely I see the cathedral towers against the sky-line; but I have heard much of this Roger Club-foot, and the more I hear the less do I wish to look upon his face. Oh, but I am sick and weary of it all, and I would give half that I am worth to see my good dame sitting in peace beside me, and to hear the bells of Norwich town."

"Your words are strange to me," quoth Sir Nigel, "for you have the appearance of a stout man, and I see that you wear a sword by your side."

"Yet it is not my trade," answered the merchant. "I

doubt not that if I set you down in my shop at Norwich you might scarce tell fustian from falding, and know little difference between the velvet of Genoa and the three-piled cloth of Bruges. There you might well turn to me for help. But here on a lone roadside, with thick woods and robber-knights, I turn to you, for it is the business to which you have been reared."

"There is sooth in what you say, Master Micheldene," said Sir Nigel, "and I trust that we may come upon this Roger Club-foot, for I have heard that he is a very stout and skilful soldier, and a man from whom much honour is to be gained."

"He is a bloody robber," said the trader, curtly, "and I wish I saw him kicking at the end of a halter."

"It is such men as he," Sir Nigel remarked, "who give the true knight honourable deeds to do, whereby he may advance himself."

"It is such men as he," retorted Micheldene, "who are like rats in a wheat-rick or moth in a woolfels, a harm and a hindrance to all peaceful and honest men."

"Yet if the dangers of the road weigh so heavily upon you, master alderman, it is a great marvel to me that you should venture so far from home."

"And, sometimes, sir knight, it is a marvel to myself. But I am a man who may grutch and grumble, but when I have set my face to do a thing I will not turn my back upon it until it be done. There is one François Villet, at Cahors, who will send me wine-casks for my cloth-bales, so to Cahors I will go, though all the robber-knights of Christendom were to line the roads like yonder poplars."

"Stoutly spoken, master alderman! But how have you fared hitherto?"

"As a lamb fares in a land of wolves. Five times we have had to beg and pray ere we could pass. Twice I have paid toll to the wardens of the road. Three times we have had to draw, and once at La Réolle we stood over our wool-bales, Watkin and I, and we laid about us for as long as a man might chant a litany, slaying one rogue and

wounding two others. By God's coif! we are men of peace, but we are free English burghers, not to be mishandled either in our country or abroad. Neither lord, baron, knight, nor commoner shall have as much as a strike of flax of mine whilst I have strength to wag this sword."

"And a passing strange sword it is," quoth Sir Nigel. "What make you, Alleyne, of these black lines which are drawn across the sheath?"

"I cannot tell what they are, my fair lord."

"Nor can I," said Ford.

The merchant chuckled to himself. "It was a thought of mine own," said he; "for the sword was made by Thomas Wilson, the armourer, who is betrothed to my second daughter Margery. Know then that the sheath is one cloth-yard in length, marked off according to feet and inches to serve me as a measuring wand. It is also of the exact weight of two pounds, so that I may use it in the balance."

"By Saint Paul!" quoth Sir Nigel, "it is very clear to me that the sword is like thyself, good alderman, apt either for war or for peace. But I doubt not that even in England you have had much to suffer from the hands of robbers and outlaws."

"It was only last Lammastide, sir knight, that I was left for dead near Reading as I journeyed to Winchester fair. Yet I had the rogues up at the court of pie-powder, and they will harm no more peaceful traders."

"You travel much, then?"

"To Winchester, Linn mart, Bristol fair, Stourbridge, and Bartholomew's in London Town. The rest of the year you may ever find me five doors from the church of Our Lady, where I would from my heart that I was at this moment, for there is no air like Norwich air, and no water like the Yare, nor can all the wines of France compare with the beer of old Sam Yelverton who keeps the 'Dun Cow.' But, out and alack, here is an evil fruit which hangs upon this chestnut-tree."

As he spoke they had ridden round a curve of the road

and come upon a great tree which shot one strong brown branch across their path. From the centre of this branch there hung a man, with his head at a horrid slant to his body and his toes just touching the ground. He was naked save for a linen under-shirt and pair of woollen drawers. Beside him on a green bank there sat a small man with a solemn face, and a great bundle of papers of all colours thrusting forth from the scrip which lay beside him. He was very richly dressed, with furred robes, a scarlet hood, and wide hanging sleeves lined with flame-coloured silk. A great gold chain hung round his neck, and rings glittered from every finger of his hands. On his lap he had a little pile of gold and of silver, which he was dropping, coin by coin, into a plump pouch which hung from his girdle.

"May the saints be with you, good travellers!" he shouted, as the party rode up. "May the four Evangelists watch over you! May the twelve Apostles bear you up! May the blessed army of martyrs direct your feet and lead you to eternal bliss!"

"Gramercy for these good wishes!" said Sir Nigel. "But I perceive, master alderman, that this man who hangs here is, by mark of foot, the very robber-knight of whom we have spoken. But there is a cartel pinned upon his breast, and I pray you, Alleyne, to read it to me."

The dead robber swung slowly to and fro in the wintry wind, a fixed smile upon his swarthy face, and his bulging eyes still glaring down the highway of which he had so long been the terror; on a sheet of parchment upon his breast was printed in rude characters:

ROGER PIED-BOT.

Par l'ordre du Sénéchal de
Castelnau, et de l'Échevin de
Cahors, servantes fidèles du
très vaillant et très puissant
Édouard, Prince de Galles et
d'Aquitaine.

Ne touchez pas,
Ne coupez pas,
Ne dépêchez pas.

"He took a sorry time in dying," said the man who sat beside him. "He could stretch one toe to the ground and bear himself up, so that I thought he would never have done. Now at last, however, he is safely in paradise, and so I may jog on upon my earthly way." He mounted, as he spoke, a white mule which had been grazing by the wayside, all gay with fustian of gold and silver bells, and rode onward with Sir Nigel's party.

"How know you then that he is in paradise?" asked Sir Nigel. "All things are possible to God, but, certes, without a miracle, I should scarce expect to find the soul of Roger Club-foot amongst the just."

"I know that he is there because I have just passed him in there," answered the stranger, rubbing his bejewelled hands together in placid satisfaction. "It is my holy mission to be a sompnour or pardoner. I am the unworthy servant and delegate of him who holds the keys. A contrite heart and ten nobles to holy Mother Church may stave off perdition; but he hath a pardon of the first degree, with a twenty-five livre benison, so that I doubt if he will so much as feel a twinge of purgatory. I came up even as the seneschal's archers were tying him up, and I gave him my foreword that I would bide with him until he had passed. There were two leaden crowns among the silver, but I would not for that stand in the way of his salvation."

"By Saint Paul!" said Sir Nigel, "if you have indeed this power to open and to shut the gates of hope, then indeed you stand high above mankind. But if you do but claim to have it, and yet have it not, then it seems to me, master clerk, that you may yourself find the gate barred when you shall ask admittance."

"Small of faith! Small of faith!" cried the sompnour. "Ah, Sir Didymus yet walks upon earth! And yet no words of doubt can bring anger to mine heart, or a bitter word to my lip, for am I not a poor unworthy worker in the cause of gentleness and peace? Of all these pardons which I bear every one is stamped and

signed by our holy father, the prop and centre of Christendom."

"Which of them?" asked Sir Nigel.

"Ha, ha!" cried the pardoner, shaking a jewelled forefinger. "Thou wouldst be deep in the secrets of Mother Church? Know then that I have both in my scrip. Those who hold with Urban shall have Urban's pardon, while I have Clement's for the Clementist—or he who is in doubt may have both, so that come what may he shall be secure. I pray you that you will buy one, for war is bloody work, and the end is sudden, with little time for thought or shrift. Or you, sir, for you seem to me a man who would do ill to trust to your own merits." This to the alderman of Norwich, who had listened to him with a frowning brow and a sneering lip.

"When I sell my cloth," quoth he, "he who buys may weigh and feel and handle. These goods which you sell are not to be seen, nor is there any proof that you hold them. Certes, if mortal man might control God's mercy, it would be one of a lofty and God-like life, and not one who is decked out with rings and chains and silks, like a pleasure-wench at a kermesse."

"Thou wicked and shameless man!" cried the clerk. "Dost thou dare to raise thy voice against the unworthy servant of Mother Church?"

"Unworthy enough!" quoth David Micheldene. "I would have you to know, clerk, that I am a free English burgher, and that I dare say my mind to our father the Pope himself, let alone such a lacquey's lacquey as you!"

"Base-born and foul-mouthed knave!" cried the sompnour. "You prate of holy things to which your hog's mind can never rise. Keep silence, lest I call a curse upon you!"

"Silence yourself!" roared the other. "Foul bird! we found thee by the gallows like a carrion-crow. A fine life thou hast of it with thy silks and thy baubles, cozening the last few shillings from the pouches of dying men. A fig for thy curse! Bide here, if you will take my rede, for

we will make England too hot for such as you when Master Wicliff has the ordering of it. Thou vile thief! it is you, and such as you, who bring an evil name upon the many churchmen who lead a pure and a holy life. Thou outside the door of heaven! Art more like to be inside the door of hell."

At this crowning insult the sompnour, with a face ashen with rage, raised up a quivering hand and began pouring Latin imprecations upon the angry alderman. The latter, however, was not a man to be quelled by words, for he caught up his ell-measure sword-sheath and belaboured the cursing clerk with it. The latter, unable to escape from the shower of blows, set spurs to his mule and rode for his life, with his enemy thundering behind him. At sight of his master's sudden departure, the varlet Watkin set off after him, with the pack-mule beside him, so that the four clattered away down the road together, until they swept round a curve, and their babble was but a drone in the distance. Sir Nigel and Alleyne gazed in astonishment at one another, while Ford burst out a-laughing.

"Pardieu!" said the knight, "this David Micheldene must be one of those Lollards about whom Father Christopher of the priory had so much to say. Yet he seemed to be no bad man from what I have seen of him."

"I have heard that Wicliff hath many followers in Norwich," answered Alleyne.

"By Saint Paul! I have no great love for them," quoth Sir Nigel. "I am a man who am slow to change; and, if you take away from me the faith that I have been taught, it would be long ere I could learn one to set in its place. It is but a chip here and a chip there, yet it may bring the tree down in time. Yet, on the other hand, I cannot but think it shame that a man should turn God's mercy on and off, as a cellarman doth wine with a spigot."

"Nor is it," said Alleyne, "part of the teachings of that Mother Church of which he had so much to say. There was sooth in what the alderman said of it."

"Then, by Saint Paul! they may settle it betwixt them," quoth Sir Nigel. "For me, I serve God, the king and my lady; and so long as I can keep the path of honour I am well content. My creed shall ever be that of Chandos:

'Fais ce que dois—adviegne que peut.
C'est commandé au chevalier.'"

## 28. *How the Comrades came over the Marches of France*

AFTER passing Cahors, the party branched away from the main road, and leaving the river to the north of them, followed a smaller track which wound over a vast and desolate plain. This path led them amid marshes and woods, until it brought them out into a glade with a broad stream swirling swiftly down the centre of it. Through this the horses splashed their way, and on the farther shore Sir Nigel announced to them that they were now within the borders of the land of France. For some miles they still followed the same lonely track, which led them through a dense wood, and then widening out, curved down to an open rolling country, such as they had traversed between Aiguillon and Cahors.

If it were grim and desolate upon the English border, however, what can describe the hideous barrenness of this ten times harried tract of France? The whole face of the country was scarred and disfigured, mottled over with the black blotches of burned farm-steadings, and the grey gaunt gable-ends of what had been châteaux. Broken fences, crumbling walls, vineyards littered with stones, the shattered arches of bridges—look where you might, the signs of ruin and rapine met the eye. Here and there only, on the farthest sky-line, the gnarled turrets of a castle, or the graceful pinnacles of church or of monastery, showed where the forces of the sword or of the spirit had preserved some small islet of security in this universal

flood of misery. Moodily and in silence the little party rode along the narrow and irregular track, their hearts weighed down by this far-stretching land of despair. It was indeed a stricken and a blighted country, and a man might have ridden from Auvergne in the north to the marches of Foix, nor ever seen a smiling village or a thriving homestead.

From time to time as they advanced they saw strange lean figures scraping and scratching amid the weeds and thistles, who, on sight of the band of horsemen, threw up their arms and dived in among the brushwood, as shy and as swift as wild animals. More than once, however, they came on families crouching by the wayside, who were too weak from hunger and disease to fly, so that they could but sit like hares on a tussock, with panting chests and terror in their eyes. So gaunt were these poor folk, so worn and spent—with bent and knotted frames, and sullen, hopeless, mutinous faces—that it made the young Englishmen heart-sick to look upon them. Indeed, it seemed as though all hope and light had gone so far from them that it was not to be brought back; for when Sir Nigel threw down a handful of silver among them there came no softening of their lined faces, but they clutched greedily at the coins, peering questioningly at him, and champing with their animal jaws. Here and there amid the brushwood the travellers saw the rude bundle of sticks which served them as a home—more like a fowl's nest than the dwelling-place of man. Yet why should they build and strive, when the first adventurer who passed would set torch to their thatch, and when their own feudal lord would wring from them with blows and curses the last fruits of their toil? They sat at the lowest depth of human misery, and hugged a bitter comfort to their souls as they realised that they could go no lower. Yet they still had the human gift of speech, and would take counsel among themselves in their brushwood hovels, glaring with bleared eyes and pointing with thin fingers at the great widespread châteaux which ate like a cancer

into the life of the country-side. When such men who are beyond hope and fear, begin in their dim minds to see the source of their woes, it may be an evil time for those who have wronged them. The weak man becomes strong when he has nothing, for then only can he feel the wild, mad thrill of despair. High and strong the châteaux, lowly and weak the brushwood hut; but God help the seigneur and his lady when the men of the brushwood set their hands to the work of revenge!

Through such country did the party ride for eight or it might be nine miles, until the sun began to slope down in the west and their shadows to stream down the road in front of them. Wary and careful they must be, with watchful eyes to the right and the left, for this was no man's land, and their only passports were those which hung from their belts. Frenchmen and Englishmen, Gascon and Provençal, Brabanter, Tardvenu, Scorcher, Flayer, and Free Companion, wandered and struggled over the whole of this accursed district. So bare and cheerless was the outlook, and so few and poor the dwellings, that Sir Nigel began to have fears as to whether he might find food and quarters for his little troop. It was a relief to him, therefore, when their narrow track opened out upon a larger road, and they saw some little way down it a square white house with a great bunch of holly hung out at the end of a stick from one of the upper windows.

"By Saint Paul!" said he, "I am right glad; for I had feared that we might have neither provant nor herbergage. Ride on, Alleyne, and tell this innkeeper that an English knight with his party will lodge with him this night."

Alleyne set spurs to his horse and reached the inn door a long bow-shot before his companions. Neither varlet nor ostler could be seen, so he pushed open the door and called loudly for the landlord. Three times he shouted, but, receiving no reply, he opened an inner door and advanced into the chief guest-room of the hostel.

A very cheerful wood-fire was sputtering and cracking

in an open grate at the farther end of the apartment. At one side of this fire, in a high-backed oak chair, sat a lady, her face turned towards the door. The firelight played over her features, and Alleyne thought that he had never seen such queenly power, such dignity and strength, upon a woman's face. She might have been five-and-thirty years of age, with aquiline nose, firm and yet sensitive mouth, dark curving brows, and deep-set eyes which shone and sparkled with a shifting brilliancy. Beautiful as she was, it was not her beauty which impressed itself upon the beholder; it was her strength, her power, the sense of wisdom which hung over the broad white brow, the decision which lay in the square jaw and delicately moulded chin. A chaplet of pearls sparkled amid her black hair, with a gauze of silver net-work flowing back from it over her shoulders; a black mantle was swathed round her, and she leaned back in her chair as one who is fresh from a journey.

In the opposite corner there sat a very burly and broad-shouldered man, clad in a black jerkin trimmed with sable, with a black velvet cap with curling white feather cocked upon the side of his head. A flask of red wine stood at his elbow, and he seemed to be very much at his ease, for his feet were stuck up on a stool, and between his thighs he held a dish full of nuts. These he cracked between his strong white teeth and chewed in a leisurely way, casting the shells into the blaze. As Alleyne gazed in at him he turned his face half round and cocked an eye at him over his shoulder. It seemed to the young Englishman that he had never seen so hideous a face, for the eyes were of the lightest green, the nose was broken and driven inwards, while the whole countenance was seared and puckered with wounds. The voice, too, when he spoke, was as deep and as fierce as the growl of a beast of prey.

"Young man," said he, "I know not who you may be, and I am not much inclined to bestir myself, but if it were not that I am bent upon taking my ease, I swear, by the sword of Joshua! that I would lay my dog-whip across

your shoulders for daring to fill the air with these discordant bellowings."

Taken aback at this ungentle speech, and scarce knowing how to answer it fitly in the presence of the lady, Alleyne stood with his hand upon the handle of the door while Sir Nigel and his companions dismounted. At the sound of these fresh voices, and of the tongue in which they spoke, the stranger crashed his dish of nuts down upon the floor, and began himself to call for the landlord until the whole house re-echoed with his roarings. With an ashen face the white-aproned host came running at his call, his hands shaking and his very hair bristling with apprehension, "For the sake of God, sirs," he whispered as he passed, "speak him fair and do not rouse him! For the love of the Virgin, be mild with him!"

"Who is this, then?" asked Sir Nigel.

Alleyne was about to explain, when a fresh roar from the stranger interrupted him.

"Thou villain innkeeper," he shouted, "did I not ask you when I brought my lady here whether your inn was clean?"

"You did, sire."

"Did I not very particularly ask you whether there were any vermin in it?"

"You did, sire."

"And you answered me?"

"That there were not, sire."

"And yet ere I have been here an hour I find Englishmen crawling about within it. Where are we to be free from this pestilent race? Can a Frenchman upon French land not sit down in a French auberge without having his ears pained by the clack of their hideous talk? Send them packing, innkeeper, or it may be the worse for them and for you."

"I will, sire, I will!" cried the frightened host, and bustled from the room, while the soft, soothing voice of the woman was heard remonstrating with her furious companion.

"Indeed, gentlemen, you had best go," said mine host. "It is but six miles to Villefranche, where there are very good quarters at the sign of the 'Lion Rouge.'"

"Nay," answered Sir Nigel, "I cannot go until I have seen more of this person, for he appears to be a man from whom much is to be hoped. What is his name and title?"

"It is not for my lips to name it unless by his desire. But I beg and pray you, gentlemen, that you will go from my house, for I know not what may come of it if his rage should gain the mastery of him."

"By Saint Paul!" lisped Sir Nigel, "this is certainly a man whom it is worth journeying far to know. Go tell him that a humble knight of England would make his further honourable acquaintance, not from any presumption, pride, or ill-will, but for the advancement of chivalry and the glory of our ladies. Give him greeting from Sir Nigel Loring, and say that the glove which I bear in my cap belongs to the most peerless and lovely of her sex, whom I am now ready to uphold against any lady whose claim he might be desirous of advancing."

The landlord was hesitating whether to carry this message or no, when the door of the inner room was flung open, and the stranger bounded out like a panther from his den, his hair bristling and his deformed face convulsed with anger.

"Still here!" he snarled. "Dogs of England, must ye be lashed hence? Tiphaine, my sword!" He turned to seize his weapon, but as he did so his gaze fell upon the blazonry of Sir Nigel's shield, and he stood staring while the fire in his strange green eyes softened into a sly and humorous twinkle.

"Mort Dieu!" cried he, "it is my little swordsman of Bordeaux. I should remember that coat-armour, seeing that it is but three days since I looked upon it in the lists by Garonne. Ah! Sir Nigel, Sir Nigel! you owe me a return for this," and he touched his right arm, which was girt round just under the shoulder with a silken kerchief.

But the surprise of the stranger at the sight of Sir Nigel

was as nothing compared with the astonishment and the delight which shone upon the face of the knight of Hampshire as he looked upon the strange face of the Frenchman. Twice he opened his mouth and twice he peered again, as though to assure himself that his eyes had not played him a trick.

"Bertrand!" he gasped at last. "Bertrand du Guesclin!"

"By Saint Ives!" shouted the French soldier, with a hoarse roar of laughter, "it is well that I should ride with my visor down, for he that has once seen my face does not need to be told my name. It is indeed I, Sir Nigel, and here is my hand! I give you my word that there are but three Englishmen in this world whom I would touch save with the sharp edge of the sword: the prince is one, Chandos the second, and you the third; for I have heard much that is good of you."

"I am growing aged and am somewhat spent in the wars," quoth Sir Nigel; "but I can lay by my sword now with an easy mind, for I can say that I have crossed swords with him who hath the bravest heart and the strongest arm of all this great kingdom of France. I have longed for it, I have dreamed of it, and now I can scarce bring my mind to understand that this great honour hath indeed been mine."

"By the Virgin of Tennes! you have given me cause to be very certain of it," said Du Guesclin, with a gleam of his broad white teeth.

"And perhaps, most honoured sir, it would please you to continue the debate. Perhaps you would condescend to go farther into the matter. God He knows that I am unworthy of such honour, yet I can show my four-and-sixty quarterings, and I have been present at some bickerings and scufflings during these twenty years."

"Your fame is very well known to me, and I shall ask my lady to enter your name upon my tablets," said Sir Bertrand. "There are many who wish to advance themselves, and who bide their turn, for I refuse no man who

comes on such an errand. At present it may not be, for mine arm is stiff from this small touch, and I would fain do you full honour when we cross swords again. Come in with me, and let your squires come also, that my sweet spouse, the Lady Tiphaine, may say that she hath seen so famed and gentle a knight."

Into the chamber they went in all peace and concord, where the Lady Tiphaine sat like queen on throne for each in turn to be presented to her. Sooth to say, the stout heart of Sir Nigel, which cared little for the wrath of her lion-like spouse, was somewhat shaken by the calm, cold face of this stately dame, for twenty years of camp-life had left him more at ease in the lists than in a lady's boudoir. He bethought him, too, as he looked at her set lips and deep-set questioning eyes, that he had heard strange tales of this same Lady Tiphaine du Guesclin. Was it not she who was said to lay hands upon the sick and raise them from their couches when the leeches had spent their last nostrums? Had she not forecast the future, and were there not times when in the loneliness of her chamber she was heard to hold converse with some being upon whom mortal eye never rested—some dark familiar who passed where doors were barred and windows high? Sir Nigel sunk his eye and marked a cross on the side of his leg as he greeted this dangerous dame, and yet ere five minutes had passed he was hers, and not he only but his two young squires as well. The mind had gone out of them, and they could but look at this woman and listen to the words which fell from her lips—words which thrilled through their nerves and stirred their souls like the battle-call of a bugle.

Often in peaceful after-days was Alleyne to think of that scene of the wayside inn of Auvergne. The shadows of evening had fallen, and the corners of the long, low, wood-panelled room were draped in darkness. The spluttering wood-fire threw out a circle of red flickering light which played over the little group of wayfarers, and showed up every line and shadow upon their faces. Sir Nigel

sat with elbows upon knees, and chin upon hands, his patch still covering one eye, but his other shining like a star, while the ruddy light gleamed upon his smooth white head. Ford was seated at his left, his lips parted, his eyes staring, and a fleck of deep colour on either cheek, his limbs all rigid as one who fears to move. On the other side the famous French captain leaned back in his chair, a litter of nut-shells upon his lap, his huge head half buried in a cushion, while his eyes wandered with an amused gleam from his dame to the staring, enraptured Englishmen. Then, last of all, that pale clear-cut face, that sweet clear voice, with its high thrilling talk of the deathlessness of glory, of the worthlessness of life, of the pain of ignoble joys, and of the joy which lies in all pains which lead to a noble end. Still, as the shadows deepened, she spoke of valour and virtue, of loyalty, honour and fame, and still they sat drinking in her words while the fire burned down and the red ash turned to grey.

"By the sainted Ives!" cried Du Guesclin at last, "it is time that we spoke of what we are to do this night, for I cannot think that in this wayside auberge there are fit quarters for an honourable company."

Sir Nigel gave a long sigh as he came back from the dreams of chivalry and hardihood into which this strange woman's words had wafted him. "I care not where I sleep," said he; "but these are indeed somewhat rude lodgings for this fair lady."

"What contents my lord contents me," quoth she. "I perceive, Sir Nigel, that you are under vow," she added, glancing at his covered eye.

"It is my purpose to attempt some small deed," he answered.

"And the glove—is it your lady's?"

"It is indeed my sweet wife's."

"Who is doubtless proud of you."

"Say rather I of her," quoth he quickly. "God He knows that I am not worthy to be her humble servant. It is easy, lady, for a man to ride forth in the light of day,

and do his devoir when all men have eyes for him. But in a woman's heart there is a strength and truth which asks no praise, and can but be known to him whose treasure it is."

The Lady Tiphaine smiled across at her husband. "You have often told me, Bertrand, that there were very gentle knights among the English," quoth she.

"Aye, aye," said he moodily. "But to horse, Sir Nigel, you and yours, and we shall seek the château of Sir Tristram de Rochefort, which is two miles on this side of Villefranche. He is Seneschal of Auvergne, and mine old war-companion."

"Certes, he would have a welcome for you," quoth Sir Nigel; "but indeed he might look askance at one who comes without permit over the marches."

"By the Virgin! when he learns that you have come to draw away these rascals he will be very blithe to look upon your face. Innkeeper, here are ten gold pieces. What is over and above your reckoning you may take off from your charges to the next needy knight who comes this way. Come then, for it grows late, and the horses are stamping in the roadway."

The Lady Tiphaine and her spouse sprang upon their steeds without setting feet to stirrup, and away they jingled down the white moonlit highway, with Sir Nigel at the lady's bridle-arm, and Ford a spear's length behind them. Alleyne had lingered for an instant in the passage, and as he did so there came a wild outcry from a chamber upon the left, and out there ran Aylward and John, laughing together like two schoolboys who are bent upon a prank. At sight of Alleyne they slunk past him with something of a shamefaced air, and springing upon their horses galloped after their party. The hubbub within the chamber did not cease, however, but rather increased with yells of: "À moi, mes amis! À moi, camarades! À moi, l'honorable champion de l'Évêque de Montaubon! À la recousse de l'église sainte!" So shrill was the outcry that both the innkeeper and Alleyne, with

every varlet within hearing, rushed wildly to the scene of the uproar.

It was indeed a singular scene which met their eyes. The room was a long and lofty one, stone floored and bare, with a fire at the farther end upon which a great pot was boiling. A deal table ran down the centre, with a wooden wine-pitcher upon it and two horn cups. Some way from it was a smaller table with a single beaker and a broken wine-bottle. From the heavy wooden rafters which formed the roof there hung rows of hooks which held up sides of bacon, joints of smoked beef, and strings of onions for winter use. In the very centre of all these upon the largest hook of all, there hung a fat little red-faced man with enormous whiskers, kicking madly in the air and clawing at rafters, hams, and all else that was within hand-grasp. The huge steel hook had been passed through the collar of his leather jerkin, and there he hung like a fish on a line, writhing, twisting, and screaming, but utterly unable to free himself from his extraordinary position. It was not until Alleyne and the landlord had mounted on the table that they were able to lift him down, when he sank gasping with rage into a seat, and rolled his eyes round in every direction.

"Has he gone?" quoth he.

"Gone? Who?"

"He, the man with the red head, the giant man."

"Yes," said Alleyne, "he hath gone."

"And comes not back?"

"No."

"The better for him!" cried the little man, with a long sigh of relief. "Mon Dieu! What! am I not the champion of the Bishop of Montaubon? Ah, could I have descended, could I have come down, ere he fled! Then you would have seen. You would have beheld a spectacle then. There would have been one rascal the less upon earth. Ma foi, yes!"

"Good master Pelligny," said the landlord, "these gentlemen have not gone very fast, and I have a horse

in the stable at your disposal, for I would rather have such bloody doings as you threaten outside the four walls of mine auberge."

"I hurt my leg and cannot ride," quoth the bishop's champion. "I strained a sinew on the day that I slew the three men at Castelnau."

"God save you, master Pelligny!" cried the landlord. "It must be an awesome thing to have so much blood upon one's soul. And yet I do not wish to see so valiant a man mishandled, and so I will, for friendship's sake, ride after this Englishman and bring him back to you."

"You shall not stir," cried the champion, seizing the innkeeper in a convulsive grasp. "I have a love for you, Gaston, and I would not bring your house into ill-repute, nor do such scath to these walls and chattels as must befall if two such men as this Englishman and I fall to work here."

"Nay, think not of me!" cried the innkeeper. "What are my walls when set against the honour of François Poursuivant d'Amour Pelligny, champion of the Bishop of Montaubon? My horse, André!"

"By the saints, no! Gaston, I will not have it! You have said truly that it is an awesome thing to have such rough work upon one's soul. I am but a rude soldier, yet I have a mind. Mon Dieu! I reflect, I weigh, I balance. Shall I not meet this man again? Shall I not bear him in mind? Shall I not know him by his great paws and his red head? Ma foi, yes!"

"And may I ask, sir," said Alleyne, "why it is that you call yourself champion of the Bishop of Montaubon?"

"You may ask aught which it is becoming to me to answer. The bishop hath need of a champion, because, if any cause be set to test of combat, it would scarce become his office to go down into the lists with leathern shield and cudgel to exchange blows with any varlet. He looks round him then for some tried fighting man, some honest smiter who can give a blow or take one. It is not for me to say how far he hath succeeded, but it is

sooth that he who thinks that he hath but to do with the Bishop of Montaubon finds himself face to face with François Poursuivant d'Amour Pelligny."

At this moment there was a clatter of hoofs upon the road, and a varlet by the door cried out that one of the Englishmen was coming back. The champion looked wildly about for some corner of safety, and was clambering up towards the window, when Ford's voice sounded from without, calling upon Alleyne to hasten, or he might scarce find his way. Bidding adieu to landlord and to champion, therefore, he set off at a gallop, and soon overtook the two archers.

"A pretty thing this, John," said he. "Thou wilt have holy Church upon you if you hang her champions upon iron hooks in an inn kitchen."

"It was done without thinking," he answered apologetically, while Aylward burst into a shout of laughter.

"By my hilt! mon petit," said he, "you would have laughed also could you have seen it. For this man was so swollen with pride that he would neither drink with us, nor sit at the same table with us, nor as much as answer a question, but must needs talk to the varlet all the time that it was well there was peace, and that he had slain more Englishmen than there were tags to his doublet. Our good old John could scarce lay his tongue to French enough to answer him, so he must needs reach out his great hand to him and place him very gently where you saw him. But we must on, for I can scarce hear their hoofs upon the road."

"I think that I can see them yet," said Ford, peering down the moonlit road.

"Pardieu! yes. Now they ride forth from the shadow. And yonder dark clump is the Castle of Villefranche. En avant, camarades! or Sir Nigel may reach the gates before us. But hark, mes amis, what sound is that?"

As he spoke the hoarse blast of a horn was heard from some woods upon the right. An answering call rung

forth upon their left, and hard upon it two others from behind them.

"They are the horns of swineherds," quoth Aylward. "Though why they blow them so late I cannot tell."

"Let us on, then," said Ford, and the whole party, setting their spurs to their horses, soon found themselves at the Castle of Villefranche, where the drawbridge had already been lowered and the portcullis raised in response to the summons of Du Guesclin.

## 29. *How the Blessed Hour of Sight came to the Lady Tiphaine*

SIR TRISTRAM DE ROCHEFORT, Seneschal of Auvergne and Lord of Villefranche, was a fierce and renowned soldier who had grown grey in the English wars. As lord of the marches and guardian of an exposed country-side there was little rest for him even in times of so-called peace, and his whole life was spent in raids and outfalls upon the Brabanters, late-comers, flayers, free companions, and roving archers who wandered over his province. At times he would come back in triumph, and a dozen corpses swinging from the summit of his keep would warn evil-doers that there was still a law in the land. At others his ventures were not so happy, and he and his troop would spur it over the drawbridge with clatter of hoofs hard at their heels and whistle of arrows about their ears. Hard he was of hand and harder of heart, hated by his foes, and yet not loved by those whom he protected, for twice he had been taken prisoner, and twice his ransom had been wrung by dint of blows and tortures out of the starving peasants and ruined farmers. Wolves or watch-dogs, it was hard to say from which the sheep had most to fear.

The Castle of Villefranche was harsh and stern as its master. A broad moat, a high outer wall turreted at the corners, with a great black keep towering above all—so it

lay before them in the moonlight. By the light of two flambeaux, protruded through the narrow slit-shaped openings at either side of the ponderous gate, they caught a glimpse of the glitter of fierce eyes and of the gleam of the weapons of the guard. The sight of the two-headed eagle of Du Guesclin, however, was a passport into any fortalice in France, and ere they had passed the gate the old border knight came running forward with hands outthrown to greet his famous countryman. Nor was he less glad to see Sir Nigel, when the Englishman's errand was explained to him, for these archers had been a sore thorn in his side, and had routed two expeditions which he had sent against them. A happy day it should be for the Seneschal of Auvergne when he should learn that the last yew bow was over the marches.

The material for a feast was ever at hand in days when, if there was grim want in the cottage, there was at least rude plenty in the castle. Within an hour the guests were seated around a board which creaked under the great pasties and joints of meat, varied by those more dainty dishes in which the French excelled, the spiced ortolan and the truffled beccaficoes. The Lady Rochefort, a bright and laughter-loving dame, sat upon the left of her warlike spouse, with the Lady Tiphaine upon the right. Beneath sat Du Guesclin and Sir Nigel, with Sir Amory Monticourt, of the order of the Hospitallers, and Sir Otto Harnit, a wandering knight from the kingdom of Bohemia. These, with Alleyne and Ford, four French squires, and the castle chaplain, made the company who sat together that night and made good cheer in the Castle of Villefranche. The great fire crackled in the grate, the hooded hawks slept upon their perches, the rough deer hounds with expectant eyes crouched upon the tiled floor; close at the elbows of the guests stood the dapper little lilac-coated pages; the laugh and jest circled round and all was harmony and comfort. Little they recked of the brushwood men who crouched in their rags along the fringe of the forest and looked up with wild and haggard

eyes at the rich warm glow which shot a golden bar of light from the high arched windows of the castle.

Supper over, the tables dormant were cleared away as by magic, and trestles and bancals arranged round the blazing fire, for there was a bitter nip in the air. The Lady Tiphaine had sunk back in her cushioned chair, and her long dark lashes drooped low over her sparkling eyes. Alleyne, glancing at her, noted that her breath came quick and short, and that her cheeks had blanched to a lily white. Du Guesclin eyed her keenly from time to time, and passed his broad brown fingers through his crisp, curly black hair with the air of a man who is perplexed in his mind.

"These folk here," said the knight of Bohemia, "they do not seem too well fed."

"Ah, canaille!" cried the Lord of Villefranche. "You would scarce credit it, and yet it is sooth that when I was taken at Poictiers it was all that my wife and my foster-brother could do to raise the money from them for my ransom. The sulky dogs would rather have three twists of a rack, or the thumbikins for an hour, than pay out a denier for their own feudal father and liege lord. Yet there is not one of them but hath an old stocking full of gold pieces hid away in a snug corner."

"Why do they not buy food then?" asked Sir Nigel. "By Saint Paul! it seemed to me that their bones were breaking through their skin."

"It is their grutching and grumbling which makes them thin. We have a saying here, Sir Nigel, that if you pummel Jacques Bonhomme he will pat you, but if you pat him he will pummel you. Doubtless you find it so in England."

"Ma foi, no!" said Sir Nigel. "I have two Englishmen of this class in my train, who are at this instant, I make little doubt, as full of your wine as any cask in your cellar. He who pummelled them might come by such a pat as he would be likely to remember."

"I cannot understand it," quoth the seneschal, "for

the English knights and nobles whom I have met were not men to brook the insolence of the baseborn."

"Perchance, my fair lord, the poor folk are sweeter and of a better countenance in England," laughed the Lady Rochefort. "Mon Dieu! you cannot conceive to yourself how ugly they are! Without hair, without teeth, all twisted and bent; for me, I cannot think how the good God ever came to make such people. I cannot bear it, I, and so my trusty Raoul goes ever before me with a cudgel to drive them from my path."

"Yet they have souls, fair lady, they have souls!" murmured the chaplain, a white-haired man, with a weary, patient face.

"So I have heard you tell them," said the lord of the castle; "and for myself, father, though I am a true son of holy Church, yet I think that you were better employed in saying your mass, and in teaching the children of my men-at-arms, than in going over the country-side to put ideas in these folks' heads which would never have been there but for you. I have heard that you have said to them that their souls are as good as ours, and that it is likely that in another life they may stand as high as the oldest blood of Auvergne. For my part, I believe that there are so many worthy knights and gallant gentlemen in heaven, who know how such things should be arranged, that there is little fear that we shall find ourselves mixed up with base roturiers and swineherds. Tell your beads, father, and con your psalter, but do not come between me and those whom the king has given to me."

"God help them!" cried the old priest. "A higher King that yours has given them to me, and I tell you here in your own castle hall, Sir Tristram de Rochefort, that you have sinned deeply in your dealings with these poor folk, and that the hour will come, and may even now be at hand, when God's hand will be heavy upon you for what you have done." He rose as he spoke, and walked slowly from the room.

"Pest take him!" cried the French knight. "Now

what is a man to do with a priest, Sir Bertrand?—for one can neither fight him like a man nor coax him like a woman."

"Ah, Sir Bertrand knows, the naughty one!" cried the Lady Rochefort. "Have we not all heard how he went to Avignon and squeezed fifty thousand crowns out of the Pope!"

"Ma foi!" said Sir Nigel, looking with a mixture of horror and admiration at Du Guesclin. "Did not your heart sink within you? Were you not smitten with fears? Have you not felt a curse hang over you?"

"I have not observed it," said the Frenchman carelessly. "But, by Saint Ives! Tristram, this chaplain of yours seems to me to be a worthy man, and you should give heed to his words, for though I care nothing for the curse of a bad Pope, it would be a grief to me to have aught but a blessing from a good priest."

"Hark to that, my fair lord," cried the Lady Rochefort. "Take heed, I pray thee, for I do not wish to have a blight cast over me, nor a palsy of the limbs. I remember that once before you angered Father Stephen, and my tirewoman said that I lost more hair in seven days than ever before in a month."

"If that be sign of sin, then, by Saint Paul! I have much upon my soul," said Sir Nigel, amid a general laugh. "But in very truth, Sir Tristram, if I may venture a word of counsel, I should advise that you make your peace with this good man."

"He shall have four silver candlesticks," said the seneschal moodily. "And yet I would that he would leave the folk alone. You cannot conceive in your mind how stubborn and brainless they are. Mules and pigs are full of reason beside them. God He knows that I have had great patience with them. It was but last week that, having to raise some money, I called up to the castle Jean Goubert, who, as all men know, has a casketful of gold pieces hidden away in some hollow tree. I give you my word that I did not so much as lay a stripe upon his

fool's back, but after speaking with him, and telling him how needful the money was to me, I left him for the night to think over the matter in my dungeon. What think you that the dog did ? Why, in the morning we found that he had made a rope from strips of his leather jerkin, and had hung himself to the bar of the window."

"For me, I cannot conceive such wickedness ! " cried the lady.

"And there was Gertrude Le Bœuf, as fair a maiden as eye could see, but as bad and bitter as the rest of them. When young Amory de Valance was here last Lammas-tide he looked kindly upon the girl, and even spoke of taking her into his service. What does she do, with her dog of a father ? Why, they tie themselves together and leap into the Linden Pool, where the water is five spears'-length deep. I give you my word that it was a great grief to young Amory, and it was days ere he could cast it from his mind. But how can one serve people who are so foolish and so ungrateful ? "

Whilst the Seneschal of Villefranche had been detailing the evil doings of his tenants, Alleyne had been unable to take his eyes from the face of the Lady Tiphaine. She had lain back in her chair, with drooping eye-lids and a blood-less face, so that he had feared at first that her journey had weighed heavily upon her, and that the strength was ebb-ing out of her. Of a sudden, however, there came a change, for a dash of bright colour flickered up on to either cheek, and her lids were slowly raised again upon eyes which sparkled with such a lustre as Alleyne had never seen in human eyes before, while their gaze was fixed intently, not upon the company, but on the dark tapestry which draped the wall. So transformed and so ethereal was her expression, that Alleyne, in his loftiest dream of archangel or of seraph, had never pictured so sweet, so womanly, and yet so wise a face. Glancing at Du Guesclin, Alleyne saw that he also was watching his wife closely, and from the twitching of his features, and the beads upon his brick-coloured brow, it was easy to see that

he was deeply agitated by the change which he marked in her.

"How is it with you, lady?" he asked at last, in a tremulous voice.

Her eyes remained fixed intently upon the wall, and there was a long pause ere she answered him. Her voice, too, which had been so clear and ringing, was now low and muffled as that of one who speaks from a distance.

"All is very well with me, Bertrand," said she. "The blessed hour of sight has come round to me again."

"I could see it come! I could see it come!" he exclaimed, passing his fingers through his hair with the same perplexed expression as before.

"This is untoward, Sir Tristram," he said at last. "And I scarce know in what words to make it clear to you, and to your fair wife, and to Sir Nigel Loring, and to these other stranger knights. My tongue is a blunt one, and fitter to shout word of command than to clear up such a matter as this, of which I can myself understand little. This, however, I know, that my wife is come of a very sainted race, whom God hath in His wisdom endowed with wondrous powers, so that Tiphaine Raquenel was known throughout Brittany ere ever I first saw her at Dinan. Yet these powers are ever used for good, and they are the gift of God and not of the devil, which is the difference betwixt white magic and black."

"Perchance it would be as well that we should send for Father Stephen," said Sir Tristram.

"It would be best that he should come," cried the Hospitaller.

"And bring with him a flask of holy water," added the knight of Bohemia.

"Not so, gentlemen," answered Sir Bertrand. "It is not needful that this priest should be called, and it is in my mind that in asking for this ye cast some slight shadow or slur upon the good name of my wife, as though it were still doubtful whether her power came to her from above or below. If ye have indeed such a doubt I pray that

you will say so, that we may discuss the matter in a fitting way."

"For myself," said Sir Nigel, "I have heard such words fall from the lips of this lady that I am of opinion that there is no woman, save only one, who can be in any way compared to her in beauty and in goodness. Should any gentleman think otherwise, I should deem it great honour to run a small course with him, or debate the matter in whatever way might be most pleasing to him."

"Nay, it would ill become me to cast a slur upon a lady who is both my guest and the wife of my comrade-in-arms," said the Seneschal of Villefranche. "I have perceived also that on her mantle there is marked a silver cross, which is surely sign enough that there is nought of evil in these strange powers which you say that she possesses."

This argument of the seneschal's appealed so powerfully to the Bohemian and to the Hospitaller that they at once intimated that their objections had been entirely overcome, while even the Lady Rochefort, who had sat shivering and crossing herself, ceased to cast glances at the door, and allowed her fears to turn to curiosity.

"Among the gifts which have been vouchsafed to my wife," said Du Guesclin, "there is the wondrous one of seeing into the future; but it comes very seldom upon her, and goes as quickly, for none can command it. The blessed hour of sight, as she hath named it, has come but thrice since I have known her, and I can vouch for it that all that she hath told me was true, for on the evening of the Battle of Auray she said that the morrow would be an ill day for me and for Charles of Blois. Ere the sun had sunk again he was dead, and I the prisoner of Sir John Chandos. Yet it is not every question that she can answer, but only those——"

"Bertrand, Bertrand!" cried the lady in the same muttering far-away voice, "the blessed hour passes. Use it, Bertrand, while you may."

"I will, my sweet. Tell me, then, what fortune comes upon me?"

"Danger, Bertrand—deadly, pressing danger—which creeps upon you and you know it not."

The French soldier burst into a thunderous laugh, and his green eyes twinkled with amusement. "At what time during these twenty years would not that have been a true word?" he cried. "Danger is the air that I breathe. But is this so very close, Tiphaine?"

"Here—now—close upon you!" The words came out in broken strenuous speech, while the lady's fair face was writhed and drawn like that of one who looks upon a horror which strikes the words from her lips. Du Guesclin gazed round the tapestried room, at the screens, the tables, the abace, the credence, the buffet with its silver salver, and the half-circle of friendly wondering faces. There was an utter stillness, save for the sharp breathing of the Lady Tiphaine and for the gentle soughing of the wind outside, which wafted to their ears the distant call upon a swineherd's horn.

"The danger may bide," said he, shrugging his broad shoulders. "And now, Tiphaine, tell us what will come of this war in Spain."

"I can see little," she answered, straining her eyes and puckering her brow, as one who would fain clear her sight. "There are mountains, and dry plains, and flash of arms, and shouting of battle-cries. Yet it is whispered to me that by failure you will succeed."

"Ha! Sir Nigel, how like you that?" quoth Bertrand, shaking his head. "It is like mead and vinegar, half sweet, half sour. And there is no question which you would ask my lady?"

"Certes there is. I would fain know, fair lady, how all things are at Twynham Castle, and above all how my sweet lady employs herself."

"To answer this I would fain lay hand upon one whose thoughts turn strongly to this castle which you have named. Nay, my Lord Loring, it is whispered to me that there is another here who hath thought more deeply of it than you."

"Thought more of mine own home?" cried Sir Nigel. "Lady, I fear that in this matter at least you are mistaken."

"Not so, Sir Nigel. Come hither, young man, young English squire with the grey eyes! Now give me your hand, and place it here across my brow, that I may see that which you have seen. What is this that rises before me? Mist, mist, rolling mist with a square black tower above it. See it shreds out, it thins, it rises, and there lies a castle in a green plain, with the sea beneath it, and a great church within a bow-shot. There are two rivers which run through the meadows, and between them lie the tents of the besiegers."

"The besiegers!" cried Alleyne, Ford, and Sir Nigel all three in a breath.

"Yes, truly, and they press hard upon the castle, for they are an exceeding multitude and full of courage. See how they storm and rage against the gate, while some rear ladders, and others, line after line, sweep the walls with their arrows. There are many leaders who shout and beckon, and one, a tall man with a golden beard, who stands before the gate stamping his foot and hallooing them on, as a pricker doth the hounds. But those in the castle fight bravely. There is a woman, two women, who stand upon the walls, and give heart to the men-at-arms. They shower down arrows, darts, and great stones. Ah! they have struck down the tall leader, and the others give back. The mist thickens and I can see no more."

"By Saint Paul!" said Sir Nigel, "I do not think that there can be any such doings at Christchurch, and I am very easy of the fortalice so long as my sweet wife hangs the key of the outer bailey at the head of her bed. Yet I will not deny that you have pictured the castle as well as I could have done myself, and I am full of wonderment at all that I have heard and seen."

"I would, Lady Tiphaine," cried the Lady Rochefort, "that you would use your power to tell me what hath befallen my golden bracelet which I wore when hawking

upon the second Sunday of Advent, and have never set eyes upon since."

"Nay, lady," said Du Guesclin, "it does not befit so great and wondrous a power to pry and search and play the varlet even to the beautiful châtelaine of Villefranche. Ask a worthy question, and, with the blessing of God, you shall have a worthy answer."

"Then I would fain ask," cried one of the French squires, "as to which may hope to conquer in these wars betwixt the English and ourselves."

"Both will conquer, and each will hold its own," answered the Lady Tiphaine.

"Then we shall still hold Gascony and Guienne?" cried Sir Nigel.

The lady shook her head. "French land, French blood, French speech," she answered. "They are French, and France shall have them."

"But not Bordeaux?" cried Sir Nigel excitedly.

"Bordeaux also is for France."

"But Calais?"

"Calais too."

"Woe worth me then, and ill hail to these evil words! If Bordeaux and Calais be gone, then what is left for England?"

"It seems indeed that there are evil times coming upon your country," said Du Guesclin. "In our fondest hopes we never thought to hold Bordeaux. By Saint Ives! this news hath warmed the heart within me. Our dear country will then be very great in the future, Tiphaine!"

"Great, and rich, and beautiful," she cried. "Far down the course of time I can see her still leading the nations, a wayward queen among the peoples, great in war, but greater in peace, quick in thought, deft in action, with her people's will for her sole monarch, from the sands of Calais to the blue seas of the south."

"Ha!" cried Du Guesclin, with his eyes flashing in triumph, "you hear her, Sir Nigel?—and she never yet said word which was not sooth."

The English knight shook his head moodily. "What of my own poor country?" said he. "I fear, lady, that what you have said bodes but small good for her."

The lady sat with parted lips, and her breath came quick and fast. "My God!" she cried, "what is this that is shown me? Whence come they, these peoples, these lordly nations, these mighty countries which rise up before me? I look beyond, and others rise, and yet others, far and farther to the shores of the uttermost waters. They crowd! They swarm! the world is given to them, and it resounds with the clang of their hammers and the ringing of their church bells. They call them many names, and they rule them this way or that, but they are all English, for I can hear the voices of the people. On I go, and onwards over seas where man hath never yet sailed, and I see a great land under new stars and a stranger sky, and still the land is England. Where have her children not gone? What have they not done? Her banner is planted on ice. Her banner is scorched in the sun. She lies athwart the lands, and her shadow is over the seas. Bertrand, Bertrand! we are undone, for the buds of her bud are even as our choicest flower!" Her voice rose into a wild cry, and throwing up her arms she sank back white and nerveless into the deep oaken chair.

"It is over," said Du Guesclin moodily, as he raised her drooping head with his strong brown hand. "Wine for the lady, squire! The blessed hour of sight hath passed."

## 30. *How the Brushwood Men came to the Château of Villefranche*

IT was late ere Alleyne Edricson, having carried Sir Nigel the goblet of spiced wine which it was his custom to drink after the curling of his hair, was able at last to seek his chamber. It was a stone-flagged room upon the second floor, with a bed in a recess for him, and two smaller

pallets on the other side, on which Aylward and Hordle John were already snoring. Alleyne had knelt down to his evening orisons, when there came a tap at his door, and Ford entered with a small lamp in his hand. His face was deadly pale, and his hand shook until the shadows flickered up and down the wall.

"What is it, Ford?" cried Alleyne, springing to his feet.

"I can scarce tell you," said he, sitting down on the side of the couch, and resting his chin upon his hand. "I know not what to say or what to think."

"Has aught befallen you, then?"

"Yes, or I have been slave to my own fancy. I tell you, lad, that I am all undone, like a fretted bow-string. Hark hither, Alleyne! it cannot be that you have forgotten little Tita, the daughter of the old glass-stainer at Bordeaux?"

"I remember her well."

"She and I, Alleyne, broke the luck groat together ere we parted, and she wears my ring upon her finger. 'Caro mio,' quoth she when last we parted, 'I shall be near thee in the wars, and thy danger will be my danger.' Alleyne, as God is my help, as I came up the stairs this night I saw her stand before me, her face in tears, her hands out as though in warning—I saw it, Alleyne, even as I see those two archers upon their couches. Our very finger-tips seemed to meet, ere she thinned away like a mist in the sunshine."

"I would not give overmuch thought to it," answered Alleyne. "Our minds will play us strange pranks, and bethink you that these words of the Lady Tiphaine du Guesclin have wrought upon us and shaken us."

Ford shook his head. "I saw little Tita as clearly as though I were back at the Rue de Apôtres at Bordeaux," said he. "But the hour is late, and I must go."

"Where do you sleep, then?"

"In the chamber above you. May the saints be with us all!" He rose from the couch and left the chamber,

while Alleyne could hear his feet sounding upon the winding stair. The young squire walked across to the window and gazed out at the moonlit landscape, his mind absorbed by the thought of the Lady Tiphaine, and of the strange words that she had spoken as to what was going forward at Castle Twynham. Leaning his elbows upon the stonework, he was deeply plunged in reverie, when in a moment his thoughts were brought back to Villefranche and to the scene before him.

The window at which he stood was in the second floor of that portion of the castle which was nearest to the keep. In front lay the broad moat with the moon lying upon its surface, now clear and round, now drawn lengthwise as the breeze stirred the waters. Beyond, the plain sloped down to a thick wood, while farther to the left a second wood shut out the view. Between the two an open glade stretched, silvered in the moonshine, with the river curving across the lower end of it.

As he gazed, he saw of a sudden a man steal forth from the wood into the open clearing. He walked with his head sunk, his shoulders curved, and his knees bent, as one who strives hard to remain unseen. Ten paces from the fringe of trees he glanced around, and waving his hand he crouched down, and was lost to sight among a belt of furze-bushes. After him there came a second man, and after him a third, a fourth, and a fifth, stealing across the narrow open space and darting into the shelter of the brushwood. Nine-and-seventy Alleyne counted of these dark figures flitting across the line of the moonlight. Many bore huge burdens upon their backs, though what it was that they carried he could not tell at the distance. Out of the one wood and into the other they passed, all with the same crouching, furtive gait, until the black bristle of trees had swallowed up the last of them.

For a moment Alleyne stood in the window, still staring down at the silent forest, uncertain as to what he should think of these midnight walkers. Then he bethought him that there was one beside him who was fitter to

judge on such a matter. His fingers had scarce rested upon Aylward's shoulder ere the bowman was on his feet, with his hand outstretched to his sword.

"Qui va?" he cried. "Holà! mon petit. By my hilt! I thought there had been a camisade. What then, mon gar?"

"Come hither by the window, Aylward," said Alleyne. "I have seen four-score men pass from yonder shaw across the glade, and nigh every man of them had a great burden on his back. What think you of it?"

"I think nothing of it, mon camarade! There are as many masterless folk in this country as there are rabbits on Cowdray Down, and there are many who show their faces by night, but would dance in a hempen collar if they stirred forth in the day. On all the French marches are droves of outcasts, rievers, spoilers, and draw-latches, of whom I judge that these are some, though I marvel that they should dare to come so nigh to the castle of the seneschal. All seems very quiet now," he added, peering out of the window.

"They are in the further wood," said Alleyne.

"And there they may bide. Back to rest, mon petit; for, by my hilt! each day now will bring its own work. Yet it would be well to shoot the bolt in yonder door when one is in strange quarters. So!" He threw himself down upon his pallet and in an instant was fast asleep.

It might have been about three o'clock in the morning when Alleyne was aroused from a troubled sleep by a low cry or exclamation. He listened, but, as he heard no more, he set it down as the challenge of the guard upon the walls, and dropped off to sleep once more. A few minutes later he was disturbed by a gentle creaking of his own door, as though someone were pushing cautiously against it, and immediately afterwards he heard the soft thud of cautious footsteps upon the stair which led to the room above, followed by a confused noise and a muffled groan. Alleyne sat up on his couch with all his nerves in a tingle, uncertain whether these sounds might come from a simple

cause—some sick archer and visiting leech perhaps—or whether they might have a more sinister meaning. But what danger could threaten them here in this strong castle, under the care of famous warriors, with high walls and a broad moat around them? Who was there that could injure them? He had well-nigh persuaded himself that his fears were a foolish fancy, when his eyes fell upon that which sent the blood cold to his heart and left him gasping, with hands clutching at the counterpane.

Right in front of him was the broad window of the chamber, with the moon shining brightly through it. For an instant something had obscured the light, and now a head was bobbing up and down outside, the face looking in at him, and swinging slowly from one side of the window to the other. Even in that dim light there could be no mistaking those features. Drawn, distorted and blood-stained, they were still those of the young fellow-squire who had sat so recently upon his own couch. With a cry of horror Alleyne sprang from his bed and rushed to the casement, while the two archers, aroused by the sound, seized their weapons and stared about them in bewilderment. One glance was enough to show Edricson that his fears were but too true. Foully murdered, with a score of wounds upon him and a rope round his neck, his poor friend had been cast from the upper window and swung slowly in the night wind, his body rasping against the wall and his disfigured face upon a level with the casement.

"My God!" cried Alleyne, shaking in every limb. "What has come upon us? What devil's deed is this?"

"Here is flint and steel," said John stolidly. "The lamp, Aylward! This moonshine softens a man's heart. Now we may use the eyes which God hath given us."

"By my hilt!" cried Aylward, as the yellow flame flickered up, "it is indeed young master Ford, and I think that this seneschal is a black villain, who dare not face us in the day, but would murther us in our sleep. By the twang of string! if I do not soak a goose's feather

with his heart's blood, it will be no fault of Samkin Aylward of the White Company."

"But, Aylward, think of the men whom I saw yesternight," said Alleyne. "It may not be the seneschal. It may be that others have come to the castle. I must to Sir Nigel ere it be too late. Let me go, Aylward, for my place is by his side."

"One moment, mon gar. Put that steel head-piece on the end of my yew-stave. So! I will put it first through the door; for it is ill to come out when you can neither see nor guard yourself. Now, camarades, out swords and stand ready! Holà, by my hilt! it is time that we were stirring!"

As he spoke, a sudden shouting broke forth in the castle, with the scream of a woman and the rush of many feet. Then came the sharp clink of clashing steel, and a roar like that of an angry lion—"Notre Dame Du Guesclin! Saint Ives! Saint Ives!" The bowman pulled back the bolt of the door, and thrust out the head-piece at the end of the bow. A crash, the clatter of the steel-cap upon the ground, and, ere the man who struck could heave up for another blow, the archer had passed his sword through his body. "On, camarades, on!" he cried; and, breaking fiercely past two men who threw themselves in his way, he sped down the broad corridor in the direction of the shouting.

A sharp turning, and then a second one, brought them to the head of a short stair, from which they looked straight down upon the scene of the uproar. A square oak-floored hall lay beneath them, from which opened the doors of the principal guest-chambers. This hall was as light as day, for torches burned in numerous sconces upon the walls, throwing strange shadows from the tusked or antlered heads which ornamented them. At the very foot of the stair, close to the open door of their chamber, lay the seneschal and his wife; she with her head shorn from her shoulders, he thrust through with a sharpened stake, which still protruded from either side of his body. Three

servants of the castle lay dead beside them, all torn and draggled, as though a pack of wolves had been upon them. In front of the central guest-chamber stood Du Guesclin and Sir Nigel, half-clad and unarmoured, with the mad joy of battle gleaming in their eyes. Their heads were thrown back, their lips compressed, their blood-stained swords poised over their right shoulders, and their left feet thrown out. Three dead men lay huddled together in front of them ; while a fourth, with the blood squirting from a severed vessel, lay back with updrawn knees, breathing in wheezy gasps. Farther back—all panting together like the wind in a tree—there stood a group of fierce wild creatures, bare-armed and bare-legged, gaunt, unshaven, with deep-set murderous eyes and wild-beast faces. With their flashing teeth, their bristling hair, their mad leapings and screamings, they seemed to Alleyne more like fiends from the pit than men of flesh and blood. Even as he looked, they broke into a hoarse yell and dashed once more upon the two knights, hurling themselves madly upon their sword-points ; clutching, scrambling, biting, tearing, careless of wounds if they could but drag the two soldiers to earth. Sir Nigel was thrown down by the sheer weight of them, and Sir Bertrand with his thunderous war-cry was swinging round his heavy sword to clear a space for him to rise, when the whistle of two long English arrows, and the rush of the squire and the two English archers down the stairs, turned the tide of the combat. The assailants gave back, the knights rushed forward, and in a very few moments the hall was cleared, and Hordle John had hurled the last of the wild men down the steep steps which led from the end of it.

" Do not follow them," cried Du Guesclin. " We are lost if we scatter. For myself I care not a denier, though it is a poor thing to meet one's end at the hands of such scum ; but I have my dear lady here, who must by no means be risked. We have breathing-space now, and I would ask you, Sir Nigel, what it is that you would counsel ? "

"By Saint Paul!" answered Sir Nigel, "I can by no means understand what hath befallen us, save that I have been woken up by your battle-cry, and, rushing forth, found myself in the midst of this small bickering. Harrow and alas for the lady and the seneschal! What dogs are they who have done this bloody deed?"

"They are the Jacks, the men of the brushwood. They have the castle, though I know not how it hath come to pass. Look from this window into the bailey."

"By heaven!" cried Sir Nigel, "it is as bright as day with the torches. The gates stand open, and there are three thousand of them within the walls. See how they rush and scream and wave! What is it that they thrust out through the postern door? My God! it is a man-at-arms, and they pluck him limb from limb, like hounds on a wolf. Now another, and yet another. They hold the whole castle, for I see their faces at the windows. See, there are some with great bundles on their backs."

"It is dried wood from the forest. They pile them against the walls and set them in a blaze. Who is this who tries to check them? By Saint Ives! it is the good priest who spake for them in the hall. He kneels, he prays, he implores! What! villains, would ye raise hands against those who have befriended you? Ah, the butcher has struck him! He is down! They stamp him under their feet! They tear off his gown and wave it in the air! See now, how the flames lick up the walls! Are there none left to rally round us? With a hundred men we might hold our own."

"Oh, for my Company!" cried Sir Nigel. "But where is Ford, Alleyne?"

"He is foully murdered, my fair lord."

"The saints receive him! May he rest in peace! But here come some at last who may give us counsel, for amid these passages it is ill to stir without a guide."

As he spoke, a French squire, and the Bohemian knight came rushing down the steps, the latter bleeding from a slash across his forehead.

"All is lost!" he cried. "The castle is taken and on fire, the seneschal is slain and there is nought left for us."

"On the contrary," quoth Sir Nigel, "there is much left to us, for there is a very honourable contention before us, and a fair lady for whom to give our lives. There are many ways in which a man might die, but none better than this."

"You can tell us, Godfrey," said Du Guesclin to the French squire: "how came these men into the castle, and what succours can we count upon? By Saint Ives! if we come not quickly to some counsel we shall be burned like young rooks in a nest."

The squire, a dark slender stripling, spoke firmly and quickly, as one who was trained to swift action. "There is a passage under the earth into the castle," said he, "and through it some of the Jacks made their way, casting open the gates for the others. They have had help from within the walls and the men-at-arms were heavy with wine: they must have been slain in their beds, for these devils crept from room to room with soft step and ready knife. Sir Amory the Hospitaller was struck down with an axe as he rushed before us from his sleeping chamber. Save only ourselves, I do not think there are any left alive."

"What, then, would you counsel?"

"That we make for the keep. It is unused, save in time of war, and the key hangs from my poor lord and master's belt."

"There are two keys there."

"It is the larger. Once there, we might hold the narrow stair; and at least, as the walls are of a greater thickness, it would be longer ere they could burn them. Could we but carry the lady across the bailey, all might be well with us."

"Nay; the lady hath seen something of the work of war," said Tiphaine, coming forth, as white, as grave, and as unmoved as ever. "I would not be a hamper to you, my dear spouse and gallant friends. Rest assured of this, that if all else fail I have always a safeguard here"—

drawing a small silver-hilted poniard from her bosom—" which sets me beyond the fear of these vile and blood-stained wretches."

" Tiphaine," cried Du Guesclin, " I have always loved you, and now, by Our Lady of Rennes ! I love you more than ever. Did I not know that your hand will be as ready as your words, I would myself turn my last blow upon you, ere you should fall into their hands. Lead on, Godfrey ! A new golden pyx shall shine in the Minster of Dinan if we come through with it."

The attention of the insurgents had been drawn away from murder to plunder, and all over the castle might be heard their cries and whoops of delight as they dragged forth the rich tapestries, the silver flagons, and the carved furniture. Down in the courtyard half-clad wretches, their bare limbs all mottled with bloodstains, strutted about with plumed helmets upon their heads, or with the Lady Rochefort's silken gowns girt round their loins and trailing on the ground behind them. Casks of choice wine had been rolled out from the cellars, and starving peasants squatted, goblet in hand, draining off vintages which De Rochefort had set aside for noble and royal guests. Others, with slabs of bacon and joints of dried meat upon the ends of their pikes, held them up to the blaze or tore at them ravenously with their teeth. Yet all order had not been lost amongst them, for some hundreds of the better armed stood together in a silent group, leaning upon their rude weapons and looking up at the fire, which had spread so rapidly as to involve one whole side of the castle. Already Alleyne could hear the crackling and roaring of the flames, while the air was heavy with heat and full of the pungent whiff of burning wood.

## 31. *How Five Men held the Keep of Villefranche*

UNDER the guidance of the French squire the party passed down two narrow corridors. The first was empty, but at the head of the second stood a peasant sentry, who started off at the sight of them, yelling loudly to his comrades. "Stop him or we are undone!" cried Du Guesclin, and had started to run, when Aylward's great war-bow twanged like a harp-string, and the man fell forward upon his face, with twitching limbs and clutching fingers. Within five paces of where he lay a narrow and little-used door led out into the bailey. From beyond it came such a babel of hooting and screaming, horrible oaths and yet more horrible laughter, that the stoutest heart might have shrunk from casting down the frail barrier which faced them.

"Make straight for the keep!" said Du Guesclin, in a sharp stern whisper. "The two archers in front, the lady in the centre, a squire on either side, while we three knights shall bide behind and beat back those who press upon us. So! Now open the door, and God have us in His holy keeping!"

For a few moments it seemed that their object would be attained without danger, so swift and so silent had been their movements. They were half-way across the bailey ere the frantic howling peasants made a movement to stop them. The few who threw themselves in their way were overpowered or brushed aside, while the pursuers were beaten back by the ready weapons of the three cavaliers. Unscathed they fought their way to the door of the keep, and faced round upon the swarming mob, while the squire thrust the great key into the lock.

"My God!" he cried, "it is the wrong key!"

"The wrong key!"

"Dolt, fool that I am! This is the key of the castle gate; the other opens the keep. I must back for it!"

He turned, with some wild intention of retracing his steps, but at the instant a great jagged rock, hurled by a brawny peasant, struck him full upon the ear, and he dropped senseless to the ground.

"This is key enough for me!" quoth Hordle John, picking up the huge stone, and hurling it against the door with all the strength of his enormous body. The lock shivered, the wood smashed, the stone flew into five pieces, but the iron clamps still held the door in its position. Bending down, he thrust his great fingers under it, and with a heave raised the whole mass of wood and iron from its hinges. For a moment it tottered and swayed, and then, falling outward, buried him in its ruin, while his comrades rushed into the dark archway which led to safety.

"Up the steps, Tiphaine!" cried Du Guesclin. "Now round, friends, and beat them back." The mob of peasants had surged in upon their heels, but the two trustiest blades in Europe gleamed upon that narrow stair, and four of their number dropped upon the threshold. The others gave back and gathered in a half-circle round the open door, gnashing their teeth and shaking their clenched hands at the defenders. The body of the French squire had been dragged out by them and hacked to pieces. Three or four others had pulled John from under the door, when he suddenly bounded to his feet, and clutching one in either hand dashed them together with such force that they fell senseless across each other upon the ground. With a kick and a blow he freed himself from two others who clung to him, and in a moment he was within the portal with his comrades.

Yet their position was a desperate one. The peasants from far and near had been assembled for this deed of vengeance, and not less than six thousand were within or around the walls of the Château of Villefranche. Ill armed and half starved, they were still desperate men, to whom danger had lost all fears: for what was death that they should shun it to cling to such a life as theirs? The castle was theirs, and the roaring flames were spurting

through the windows and flickering high above the turrets on two sides of the quadrangle. From either side they were sweeping down from room to room and from bastion to bastion in the direction of the keep. Faced by an army, and girt in by fire, were six men and one woman; but some of them were men so trained to danger and so wise in war that even now the combat was less unequal than it seemed. Courage and resource were penned in by desperation and numbers, while the great yellow sheets of flame threw their lurid glare over the scene of death.

"There is but space for two upon a step to give free play to our sword-arms," said Du Guesclin. "Do you stand with me, Nigel, upon the lowest. France and England will fight together this night. Sir Otto, I pray you to stand behind us with this young squire. The archers may go higher yet and shoot over our heads. I would that we had our harness, Nigel!"

"Often have I heard my dear Sir John Chandos say that a knight should never, even when a guest, be parted from it. Yet it will be more honour to us if we come well out of it. We have a vantage, since we see them against the light and they can scarce see us. It seems to me that they muster for an onslaught."

"If we can but keep them in play," said the Bohemian, "it is likely that these flames may bring us succour if there be any true men in the country."

"Bethink you, my fair lord," said Alleyne to Sir Nigel, "that we have never injured these men, nor have we cause of quarrel against them. Would it not be well, if but for the lady's sake, to speak them fair, and see if we may not come to honourable terms with them?"

"Not so, by Saint Paul!" cried Sir Nigel. "It does not accord with mine honour, nor shall it ever be said that I, a knight of England, was ready to hold parley with men who have a slain a fair lady and a holy priest."

"As well hold parley with a pack of ravening wolves," said the French captain. "Ha! Notre Dame Du Guesclin! Saint Ives! Saint Ives!"

As he thundered forth his war-cry, the Jacks who had been gathering before the black arch of the gateway rushed in madly in a desperate effort to carry the staircase. Their leaders were a small man, dark in the face, with his beard done up in two plaits, and another larger man, very bowed in the shoulders, with a huge club studded with nails in his hand. The first had not taken three steps ere an arrow from Aylward's bow struck him full in the chest, and he fell coughing and spluttering across the threshold. The other rushed onwards, and breaking between Du Guesclin and Sir Nigel, he dashed out the brains of the Bohemian with a single blow of his clumsy weapon. With three swords through him he still struggled on, and had almost won his way through them ere he fell dead upon the stair. Close at his heels came a hundred furious peasants, who flung themselves again and again against the five swords which confronted them. It was cut and parry and stab as quick as eye could see or hand act. The door was piled with bodies, and the stone floor was slippery with blood. The deep shout of Du Guesclin, the hard hissing breath of the pressing multitude, the clatter of steel, the thud of falling bodies, and the screams of the stricken, made up such a medley as came often in after years to break upon Alleyne's sleep. Slowly and sullenly at last the throng drew off, with many a fierce backward glance, while eleven of their number lay huddled in front of the stair which they had failed to win.

"The dogs have had enough," said Du Guesclin.

"By Saint Paul! there appear to be some very worthy and valiant persons among them," observed Sir Nigel. "They are men from whom, had they been of better birth, much honour and advancement might be gained. Even as it is, it is a great pleasure to have seen them. But what is this that they are bringing forward?"

"It is as I feared," growled Du Guesclin. "They will burn us out, since they cannot win their way past us. Shoot straight and hard, archers; for, by Saint Ives! our good swords are of little use to us."

As he spoke, a dozen men rushed forward, each screening himself behind a huge fardel of brushwood. Hurling their burdens in one vast heap within the portal, they threw burning torches upon the top of it. The wood had been soaked in oil, for in an instant it was ablaze, and a long hissing yellow flame licked over the heads of the defenders, and drove them farther up to the first floor of the keep. They had scarce reached it, however, ere they found that the wooden joists and planks of the flooring were already on fire. Dry and worm-eaten, a spark upon them became a smoulder, and a smoulder a blaze. A choking smoke filled the air, and the five could scarce grope their way to the staircase which led up to the very summit of the square tower.

Strange was the scene which met their eyes from this eminence. Beneath them on every side stretched the long sweep of peaceful country, rolling plain, and tangled wood, all softened and mellowed in the silver moonshine. No light nor movement, nor any sign of human aid could be seen, but far away the hoarse clangour of a heavy bell rose and fell upon the wintry air. Beneath and around them blazed the huge fire, roaring and crackling on every side of the bailey, and even as they looked the two corner turrets fell in with a deafening crash, and the whole castle was but a shapeless mass, spouting flames and smoke from every window and embrasure. The great black tower upon which they stood rose like a last island of refuge amid this sea of fire ; but the ominous crackling and roaring below showed that it would not be long ere it was engulfed also in the common ruin. At their very feet was the square courtyard, crowded with the howling and dancing peasants, their fierce faces upturned, their clenched hands waving, all drunk with bloodshed and with vengeance. A yell of execrations and a scream of hideous laughter burst from the vast throng, as they saw the faces of the last survivors of their enemies peering down at them from the height of the keep. They still piled the brushwood round the base of the tower, and gambolled hand in hand around the

blaze, screaming out the doggerel lines which had long been the watchword of the Jacquerie :

Cessez, cessez, gens d'armes et piétons,
De piller et manger le bonhomme,
Qui de longtemps Jacques Bonhomme
Se nomme.

Their thin shrill voices rose high above the roar of the flames and the crash of the masonry, like the yelping of a pack of wolves who see their quarry before them and know that they have well-nigh run him down.

"By my hilt!" said Aylward to John, "it is in my mind that we shall not see Spain this journey. It is a great joy to me that I have placed my feather-bed and other things of price with that worthy woman at Lyndhurst, who will now have the use of them. I have thirteen arrows yet, and if one of them fly unfleshed, then, by the twang of string! I shall deserve my doom. First at him who flaunts with my lady's silken frock. Clap in the clout, by God! though a hand's-breath lower than I had meant. Now for the rogue with the head upon his pike. Ha! to the inch, John. When my eye is true, I am better at rovers than at long-butts or hoyles. A good shoot for you also, John! The villain hath fallen forward into the fire. But I pray you, John, to loose gently, and not to pluck with the drawing-hand, for it is a trick that hath marred many a fine bowman."

Whilst the two archers were keeping up a brisk fire upon the mob beneath them, Du Guesclin and his lady were consulting with Sir Nigel upon their desperate situation.

"'Tis a strange end for one who has seen so many stricken fields," said the French chieftain. "For me one death is as another, but it is the thought of my sweet lady which goes to my heart."

"Nay, Bertrand, I fear it as little as you," said she. "Had I my dearest wish, it would be that we should go together."

"Well answered, fair lady!" cried Sir Nigel. "And very sure I am that my own sweet wife would have said

the same. If the end be now come, I have had great good fortune in having lived in times when so much glory was to be won, and in knowing so many valiant gentlemen and knights. But why do you pluck my sleeve, Alleyne ? "

" If it please you, my fair lord, there are in this corner two great tubes of iron, with many heavy balls, which may perchance be those bombards and shot of which I have heard."

" By Saint Ives ! it is true," cried Sir Bertrand, striding across to the recess where the ungainly, funnel-shaped, thick-ribbed engines were standing. " Bombards they are, and of good size. We may shoot down upon them."

" Shoot with them, quotha ? " cried Aylward in high disdain, for pressing danger is the great leveller of classes. " How is a man to take aim with these fool's toys, and how can he hope to do scath with them ? "

" I will show you," answered Sir Nigel ; " for here is the great box of powder, and if you will raise it for me, John, I will show you how it may be used. Come hither, where the folk are thickest round the fire. Now, Aylward, crane thy neck and see what would have been deemed an old wife's tale when we first turned our faces to the wars. Throw back the lid, John, and drop the box into the fire."

A deafening roar, a fluff of bluish light, and the great square tower rocked and trembled from its very foundations, swaying this way and that like a reed in the wind. Amazed and dizzy, the defenders, clutching at the cracking parapets for support, saw great stones, burning beams of wood and mangled bodies hurtling past them through the air. When they staggered to their feet once more, the whole keep had settled down upon one side, so that they could scarce keep their footing upon the sloping platform. Gazing over the edge, they looked down upon the horrible destruction which had been caused by the explosion. For forty yards round the portal the ground was black with writhing, screaming figures, who struggled up and hurled themselves down again, tossing this way and that, sight-

less, scorched, with fire bursting from their tattered clothing. Beyond this circle of death, their comrades, bewildered and amazed, cowered away from this black tower and from these invincible men, who were most to be dreaded when hope was furthest from their hearts.

"A sally, Du Guesclin, a sally!" cried Sir Nigel. "By Saint Paul! they are in two minds, and a bold rush may turn them." He drew his sword as he spoke and darted down the winding stairs, closely followed by his four comrades. Ere he was at the first floor, however, he threw up his arms and stopped. "Mon Dieu!" he said, "we are lost men!"

"What then?" cried those behind him.

"The wall hath fallen in, the stair is blocked, and the fire still rages below. By Saint Paul! friends, we have fought a very honourable fight, and may say in all humbleness that we have done our devoir, but I think that we may now go back to the Lady Tiphaine and say our orisons, for we have played our parts in this world, and it is time that we made ready for another."

The narrow pass was blocked by huge stones littered in wild confusion over each other, with the blue choking smoke reeking up through the crevices. The explosion had blown in the wall and cut off the only path by which they could descend. Pent in, a hundred feet from earth, with a furnace raging under them and a ravening multitude all round who thirsted for their blood, it seemed indeed as though no men had ever come through such peril with their lives. Slowly they made their way back to the summit, but as they came out upon it, the Lady Tiphaine darted forward and caught her husband by the wrist.

"Bertrand," said she, "hush and listen! I have heard the voices of men all singing together in a strange tongue."

Breathless, they stood and silent, but no sound came up to them, save the roar of the flames and the clamour of their enemies.

"It cannot be, lady," said Du Guesclin. "This night hath overwrought you, and your senses play you false.

What men are there in this country who would sing in a strange tongue ? "

" Holà ! " yelled Aylward, leaping suddenly into the air with waving hands and joyous face. " I thought I heard it ere we went down and now I hear it again. We are saved, comrades ! By these ten finger-bones, we are saved ! It is the marching song of the White Company. Hush ! "

With upraised forefinger and slanting head, he stood listening. Suddenly there came swelling up a deep-voiced rollicking chorus from somewhere out of the darkness. Never did choice or dainty ditty of Provence or Languedoc sound more sweetly in the ears than did the rough-tongued Saxon to the six who strained their ears from the blazing keep :

We'll drink all together
To the grey goose feather
And the land where the grey goose flew.

" Ha, by my hilt ! " shouted Aylward, " it is the dear old bow song of the Company. Here come two hundred as tight lads as ever twirled a shaft over their thumb-nails. Hark to the dogs, how lustily they sing ! "

Nearer and clearer, swelling up out of the night, came the gay marching lilt :

What of the bow ?
The bow was made in England,
Of true wood, of yew wood,
The wood of English bows ;
For men who are free
Love the old yew-tree
And the land where the yew-tree grows.

What of the men ?
The men were bred in England,
The bowmen, the yeomen,
The lads of dale and fell.
Here's to you and to you,
To the hearts that are true,
And the land where the true hearts dwell.

" They sing very joyfully," said Du Guesclin, " as though they were going to a festival."

" It is their wont when there is work to be done."

" By Saint Paul ! " quoth Sir Nigel, " it is in my mind that they come too late, for I cannot see how we are to come down from this tower."

" There they come, the hearts of gold ! " cried Aylward. " See, they move out from the shadow. Now they cross the meadow. They are on the further side of the moat. Holà, camarades, holà ! Johnston, Eccles, Cooke, Harward, Bligh ! Would ye see a fair lady and two gallant knights done foully to death ? "

" Who is there ? " shouted a deep voice from below. " Who is this who speaks with an English tongue ? "

" It is I, old lad. It is Sam Aylward of the Company ; and here is your captain, Sir Nigel Loring, and four others, all laid out to be grilled like an Easterling's herrings."

" Curse me if I did not think that it was the style of speech from old Samkin Aylward," said the voice, amid a buzz from the ranks. " Wherever there are knocks going there is Sammy in the heart of it. But who are these ill-faced rogues who block the path ? To your kennels, canaille ! What ! you dare look us in the eyes ? Out swords, lads, and give them the flat of them ! Waste not your shafts upon such runagate knaves."

There was little fight left in the peasants, however, still dazed by the explosion, amazed at their own losses, and disheartened by the arrival of the disciplined archers. In a very few minutes they were in full flight for their brush-wood homes, leaving the morning sun to rise upon a blackened and blood-stained ruin, where it had left the night before the magnificent castle of the Seneschal of Auvergne. Already the white lines in the east were deepening into pink as the archers gathered round the keep and took counsel how to rescue the survivors.

" Had we a rope," said Alleyne, " there is one side which is not yet on fire, down which we might slip."

" But how to get a rope ? "

" It is an old trick," quoth Aylward. " Holà ! Johnston, cast me up a rope, even as you did at Maupertius in the war time."

The grizzled archer thus addressed took several lengths of rope from his comrades, and knotting them firmly together, he stretched them out in the long shadow which the rising sun threw from the frowning keep. Then he fixed the yew-stave of his bow upon end and measured the long thin black line which it threw upon the turf.

"A six-foot stave throws a twelve-foot shadow," he muttered. "The keep throws a shadow of sixty paces. Thirty paces of rope will be enow and to spare. Another strand, Watkin! Now pull at the end that all may be safe. So! It is ready for them."

"But how are they to reach it?" asked the young archer beside him.

"Watch and see, young fool's-head," growled the old bowman. He took a long string from his pouch and fastened one end to an arrow.

"All ready, Samkin?"

"Ready, camarade."

"Close to your hand then." With an easy pull he sent the shaft flickering gently up, falling upon the stonework within a foot of where Aylward was standing. The other end was secured to the rope, so that in a minute a good strong cord was dangling from the only sound side of the blazing and shattered tower. The Lady Tiphaine was lowered with a noose drawn fast under the arms, and the other five slid swiftly down amid the cheers and joyous outcry of their rescuers.

## 32. *How the Company took Counsel Round the Fallen Tree*

"WHERE is Sir Claude Latour?" asked Sir Nigel, as his feet touched the ground.

"He is in camp, near Montpezat, two hours' march from here, my fair lord," said Johnston, the grizzled bowman who commanded the archers.

"Then we shall march thither, for I would fain have

you all back at Dax in time to be in the prince's vanguard."

"My lord," cried Alleyne, joyfully, "here are our chargers in the field, and I see your harness amid the plunder which these rogues have left behind them."

"By Saint Ives! you speak sooth, young squire," said Du Guesclin. "There is my horse and my lady's jennet. The knaves led them from the stables, but fled without them. Now, Nigel, it is great joy to me to have seen one of whom I have often heard. Yet we must leave you now, for I must be with the King of Spain ere your army crosses the mountains."

"I had thought that you were in Spain with the valiant Henry of Trastamare."

"I have been there, but I came to France to raise succour for him. I shall ride back, Nigel, with four thousand of the best lances of France at my back, so that your prince may find he hath a task which is worthy of him. God be with you, friend, and may we meet again in better times."

"I do not think," said Sir Nigel, as he stood by Alleyne's side, looking after the French knight and his lady, "that in all Christendom you will meet with a more stout-hearted man or a fairer and sweeter dame. But your face is pale and sad, Alleyne. Have you perchance met with some hurt during the ruffle?"

"Nay, my fair lord, I was but thinking of my friend, Ford, and how he sat upon my couch no later than yesternight."

Sir Nigel shook his head sadly. "Two brave squires have I lost," said he. "I know not why the young shoots should be plucked and an old weed left standing, yet certes there must be some good reason, since God hath so planned it. Did you not note, Alleyne, that the Lady Tiphaine did give us warning last night that danger was coming upon us?"

"She did, my lord."

"By Saint Paul! my mind misgives me as to what she

saw at Twynham Castle. And yet I cannot think that any Scottish or French rovers could land in such force as to beleaguer the fortalice. Call the Company together, Aylward ; and let us on, for it will be shame to us if we are not at Dax upon the trysting day."

The archers had spread themselves over the ruins, but a blast upon a bugle brought them all back to the muster with such booty as they could bear with them stuffed into their pouches or slung over their shoulders. As they formed into ranks, each man dropping silently into his place, Sir Nigel ran a questioning eye over them, and a smile of pleasure played over his face. Tall and sinewy and brown, clear-eyed, hard-featured, with the stern and prompt bearing of experienced soldiers, it would be hard indeed for a leader to seek for a choicer following. Here and there in the ranks were old soldiers of the French wars, grizzled and lean, with fierce puckered features and shaggy bristling brows. The most, however, were young and dandy archers, with fresh English faces, their beards combed out, their hair curling from under their close steel hufkens, with gold or jewelled ear-rings gleaming in their ears, while their gold-spangled baldrics, their silken belts, and the chains which many of them wore round their thick brown necks, all spoke of the brave times which they had had as free companions. Each had a yew or hazel stave slung over his shoulder, plain and serviceable with the older men, but gaudily painted and carved at either end with the others. Steel caps, mail brigandines, white surcoats with the red lion of St. George, and sword or battle-axe swinging from their belts, completed this equipment, while in some cases the murderous maule or five-foot mallet was hung across the bow-stave, being fastened to their leathern shoulder-belt by a hook in the centre of the handle. Sir Nigel's heart beat high as he looked upon their free bearing and fearless faces.

For two hours they marched through forest and marsh-land, along the left bank of the river Aveyron ; Sir Nigel riding behind his Company, with Alleyne at his right hand,

and Johnston, the old master bowman, walking by his left stirrup. Ere they had reached their journey's end the knight had learned all that he would know of his men, their doings and their intentions. Once as they marched they saw upon the farther bank of the river a body of French men-at-arms, riding very swiftly in the direction of Villefranche.

"It is the Seneschal of Toulouse, with his following," said Johnston, shading his eyes with his hand. "Had he been on this side of the water he might have attempted something upon us."

"I think that it would be well that we should cross," said Sir Nigel. "It were pity to balk this worthy seneschal, should he desire to try some small feat of arms."

"Nay, there is no ford nearer than Tourville," answered the old archer. "He is on his way to Villefranche, and short will be the shrift of any Jacks who come into his hands, for he is a man of short speech. It was he and the Seneschal of Beaucaire who hung Peter Wilkins, of the Company, last Lammastide; for which by the black rood of Waltham! they shall hang themselves if ever they come into our power. But here are our comrades, Sir Nigel, and here is our camp."

As he spoke, the forest pathway along which they marched opened out into a green glade, which sloped down towards the river. High leafless trees girt it in on three sides, with a thick undergrowth of holly between their trunks. At the farther end of this forest clearing there stood forty or fifty huts, built very neatly from wood and clay, with the blue smoke curling out from the roofs. A dozen tethered horses and mules grazed around the encampment, while a number of archers lounged about: some shooting at marks, while others built up great wooden fires in the open, and hung their cooking kettles above them. At the sight of their returning comrades there was a shout of welcome, and a horseman, who had been exercising his charger behind the camp, came cantering down to them. He was a dapper, brisk man, very

richly clad, with a round clean-shaven face, and very bright black eyes, which danced and sparkled with excitement.

"Sir Nigel!" he cried. "Sir Nigel Loring, at last! By my soul! we have awaited you this month past. Right welcome, Sir Nigel! You have had my letter?"

"It was that which brought me here," said Sir Nigel. "But indeed, Sir Claude Latour, it is a great wonder to me that you did not yourself lead these bowmen, for surely they could have found no better leader."

"None, none, by the Virgin of L'Esparre!" he cried, speaking in the strange thick Gascon speech which turns every *v* into a *b*. "But you know what these islanders of yours are, Sir Nigel. They will not be led by any save their own blood and race. There is no persuading them. Not even I, Claude Latour, Seigneur of Montchâteau, master of the high justice, the middle and the low, could gain their favour. They must needs hold a council and put their two hundred thick heads together, and then there comes this fellow Aylward and another, as their spokesmen, to say that they will disband unless an Englishman of good name be set over them. There are many of them, as I understand, who come from some great forest which lies in Hampi, or Hampti—I cannot lay my tongue to the name. Your dwelling is in those parts, and so their thoughts turned to you as their leader. But we had hoped that you would bring a hundred men with you."

"They are already at Dax, where we shall join them," said Sir Nigel. "But let the men break their fast, and we shall then take counsel what to do."

"Come into my hut," said Sir Claude. "It is but poor fare that I can lay before you—milk, cheese, wine and bacon—yet your squire and yourself will doubtless excuse it. This is my house where the pennon flies before the door—a small residence to contain the Lord of Montchâteau."

Sir Nigel sat silent and distrait at his meal, while Alleyne hearkened to the chattering tongue of the Gascon,

and to his talk of the glories of his own estate, his successes in love, and his triumphs in war.

"And now that you are here, Sir Nigel," he said at last, "I have many fine ventures all ready for us. I have heard that Montpezat is of no great strength, and that there are two hundred thousand crowns in the castle. At Castlenau there also is a cobbler who is in my pay, and who will throw us a rope any dark night from his house by the town wall. I promise you that you shall thrust your arms elbow deep among good silver pieces ere the nights are moonless again; for on every hand of us are fair women, rich wine and good plunder, as much as heart could wish."

"I have other plans," answered Sir Nigel curtly; "for I have come hither to lead these bowmen to the help of the prince, our master, who may have sore need of them ere he set Pedro upon the throne of Spain. It is my purpose to start this very day for Dax upon the Adour, where he hath now pitched his camp."

The face of the Gascon darkened, and his eyes flashed with resentment. "For me," he said, "I care little for this war, and I find the life which I lead a very joyous and pleasant one. I will not go to Dax."

"Nay, think again, Sir Claude," said Sir Nigel gently; "for you have ever had the name of a true and loyal knight. Surely you will not hold back now when your master hath need of you."

"I will not go to Dax," the other shouted.

"But your devoir—your oath of fealty?"

"I say that I will not go."

"Then, Sir Claude, I must lead the Company without you."

"If they will follow," cried the Gascon, with a sneer. "These are not hired slaves, but free companions, who will do nothing save by their own good wills. In very sooth, my Lord Loring, they are ill men to trifle with, and it were easier to pluck a bone from a hungry bear than to lead a bowman out of a land of plenty and of pleasure."

"Then I pray you to gather them together," said Sir Nigel, "and I will tell them what is in my mind; for if I am their leader they must go to Dax, and if I am not, then I know not what I am doing in Auvergne. Have my horse ready, Alleyne; for, by Saint Paul! come what may, I must be upon the homeward road ere midday."

A blast upon the bugle summoned the bowmen to counsel, and they gathered in little knots and groups around a great fallen tree, which lay athwart the glade. Sir Nigel sprang lightly upon the trunk, and stood with blinking eye and firm lips looking down at the ring of upturned warlike faces.

"They tell me, bowmen," said he, "that ye have grown so fond of ease and plunder and high living that ye are not to be moved from this pleasant country. But, by Saint Paul! I will believe no such thing of you, for I can readily see that you are all very valiant men, who would scorn to live here in peace when your prince hath so great a venture before him. Ye have chosen me as a leader, and a leader I will be if ye come with me to Spain; and I vow to you that my pennon of the five roses shall, if God give me strength and life, be ever where there is most honour to be gained. But if it be your wish to loll and loiter in these glades, bartering glory and renown for vile gold and ill-gotten riches, then ye must find another leader; for I have lived in honour, and in honour I trust that I shall die. If there be forest men or Hampshire men amongst ye, I call upon them to say whether they will follow the banner of Loring."

"Here's a Romsey man for you!" cried a young bowman with a sprig of evergreen set in his helmet.

"And a lad from Alresford!" shouted another.

"And from Milton!"

"And from Burley!"

"And from Lymington!"

"And a little one from Brockenhurst!" shouted a huge-limbed fellow who sprawled beneath a tree.

"By my hilt! lads," cried Aylward, jumping upon the

fallen trunk, " I think that we could not look the girls in the eyes if we let the prince cross the mountains and did not pull string to clear a path for him. It is very well in time of peace to lead such a life as we have had together, but now the war-banner is in the wind once more, and, by these ten finger-bones ! if he go alone, old Samkin Aylward will walk beside it."

These words from a man so popular as Aylward decided many of the waverers, and a shout of approval burst from his audience.

" Far be it from me," said Sir Claude Latour suavely, " to persuade you against this worthy archer, or against Sir Nigel Loring ; yet we have been together in many ventures, and perchance it may not be amiss if I say to you what I think upon the matter."

" Peace for the little Gascon ! " cried the archers. " Let every man have his word. Shoot straight for the mark, lad, and fair play for all."

" Bethink you, then," said Sir Claude, " that you go under a hard rule, with neither freedom nor pleasure—and for what ? For sixpence a day, at the most ; while now you may walk across the country and stretch out either hand to gather in whatever you have a mind for. What do we not hear of our comrades who have gone with Sir John Hawkwood to Italy ? In one night they have held to ransom six hundred of the richest noblemen of Mantua. They camp before a great city, and the base burghers come forth with the keys, and then they make great spoil ; or, if it please them better, they take so many horse-loads of silver as a composition ; and so they journey on from state to state, rich and free and feared by all. Now, is not that the proper life for a soldier ? "

" The proper life for a robber ! " roared Hordle John, in his thundering voice.

" And yet there is much in what the Gascon says," said a swarthy fellow in a weather-stained doublet ; " and I for one would rather prosper in Italy than starve in Spain."

" You were always a cur and a traitor, Mark Shaw,"

cried Aylward. "By my hilt! if you will stand forth and draw your sword I will warrant you that you will see neither one nor the other."

"Nay, Aylward," said Sir Nigel, "we cannot mend the matter by broiling. Sir Claude, I think that what you have said does you little honour, and if my words aggrieve you, I am ever ready to go deeper into the matter with you. But you shall have such men as will follow you, and you may go where you will, so that you come not with us. Let all who love their prince and country stand fast, while those who think more of a well-lined purse step forth upon the farther side."

Thirteen bowmen, with hung heads and sheepish faces, stepped forward with Mark Shaw and ranged themselves behind Sir Claude. Amid the hootings and hissings of their comrades, they marched off together to the Gascon's hut, while the main body broke up their meeting and set cheerily to work packing their possessions, furbishing their weapons, and preparing for the march which lay before them. Over the Tarn and the Garonne, through the vast quagmires of Armagnac, past the swift-flowing Losse, and so down the long valley of the Adour, there was many a long league to be crossed ere they could join themselves to that dark war-cloud which was drifting slowly southwards to the line of snowy peaks, beyond which the banner of England had never yet been seen.

## 33. *How the Army made the Passage of Roncesvalles*

THE whole vast plain of Gascony and of Languedoc is an arid and profitless expanse in winter, save where the swift-flowing Adour and her snow-fed tributaries, the Louts, the Oloron, and the Pau, run down to the sea of Biscay. South of the Adour the jagged line of mountains which fringe the sky-line send out long granite claws, running down into the lowlands and divid-

ing them into " gaves " or stretches of valley. Hillocks grow into hills, and hills into mountains, each range overlying its neighbour, until they soar up in the giant chain which raises its spotless and untrodden peaks, white and dazzling, against the pale blue wintry sky.

A quiet land is this—a land where the slow-moving Basque, with his flat biretta-cap, his red sash and his hempen sandals, tills his scanty farm or drives his lean flock to their hill-side pastures. It is the country of the wolf and the isard, of the brown bear and the mountain-goat, a land of bare rock and of rushing water. Yet here it was that the will of a great prince had now assembled a gallant army ; so that from the Ardour to the passes of Navarre the barren valleys and wind-swept wastes were populous with soldiers and loud with the shouting of orders and the neighing of horses. For the banners of war had been flung to the wind once more, and over those glistening peaks was the highway along which Honour pointed in an age when men had chosen her as their guide.

And now all was ready for the enterprise. From Dax to St. Jean Pied-du-Port the country was mottled with the white tents of Gascons, Aquitanians, and English, all eager for the advance. From all sides the free companions had trooped in, until not less than twelve thousand of these veteran troops were cantoned along the frontiers of Navarre. From England had arrived the prince's brother, the Duke of Lancaster, with four hundred knights in his train and a strong company of archers. Above all, an heir to the throne had been born in Bordeaux, and the prince might leave his spouse with an easy mind, for all was well with mother and with child.

The keys of the mountain passes still lay in the hands of the shifty and ignoble Charles of Navarre, who had chaffered and bargained both with the English and with the Spanish, taking money from the one side to hold them open and from the other to keep them sealed. The mallet hand of Edward, however, had shattered all the schemes and wiles of the plotter. Neither entreaty nor courtly

remonstrance came from the English prince; but Sir Hugh Calverley passed silently over the border with his company, and the blazing walls of the two cities of Miranda and Puenta de la Reyna warned the unfaithful monarch that there were other metals besides gold, and that he was dealing with a man to whom it was unsafe to lie. His price was paid, his objections silenced, and the mountain gorges lay open to the invaders. From the Feast of the Epiphany there was mustering and massing, until, in the first weeks of February—three days after the White Company joined the army—the word was given for a general advance through the defile of Roncesvalles. At five in the cold winter's morning the bugles were blowing in the hamlet of St. Jean Pied-du-Port, and by six Sir Nigel's Company, three hundred strong, were on their way for the defile, pushing swiftly in the dim light up the steep curving road; for it was the prince's order that they should be the first to pass through, and that they should remain on guard at the farther end until the whole army had emerged from the mountains. Day was already breaking in the east, and the summits of the great peaks had turned rosy red, while the valleys still lay in the shadow, when they found themselves with the cliff on either hand and the long rugged pass stretching away before them.

Sir Nigel rode his great black war-horse at the head of his archers, dressed in full armour, with Black Simon bearing his banner behind him, while Alleyne at his bridle-arm carried his blazoned shield and his well-steeled ashen spear. A proud and happy man was the knight, and many a time he turned in his saddle to look at the long column of bowmen who swung swiftly along behind him.

"By Saint Paul! Alleyne," said he, "this pass is a very perilous place, and I would that the King of Navarre had held it against us, for it would have been a very honourable venture had it fallen to us to win a passage. I have heard the minstrels sing of one Sir Roland who was slain by the infidels in these very parts."

"If it please you, my fair lord," said Black Simon, "I know something of these parts, for I have twice served a term with the King of Navarre. There is a hospice of monks yonder, where you may see the roof among the trees, and there it was that Sir Roland was slain. The village upon the left is Orbaiceta, and I know a house therein where the right wine of Jurançon is to be bought, if it would please you to quaff a morning cup."

"There is smoke yonder upon the right."

"That is a village named Les Aldudes, and I know a hostel there also where the wine is of the best. It is said that the innkeeper hath a buried treasure, and I doubt not, my fair lord, that if you grant me leave I could prevail upon him to tell us where he hath hid it."

"Nay, nay, Simon," said Sir Nigel curtly, "I pray you to forget these free-companion tricks. Ha! Edricson, I see that you stare about you, and in good sooth these mountains must seem wondrous indeed to one who hath but seen Butser or the Portsdown Hill."

The broken and rugged road had wound along the crests of low hills, with wooded ridges on either side of it, over which peeped the loftier mountains, the distant Peak of the South and the vast Altabisca, which towered high above them and cast its black shadow from left to right across the valley. From where they now stood they could look forward down a long vista of beech woods and jagged rock-strewn wilderness, all white with snow, to where the pass opened out upon the uplands beyond. Behind them they could still catch a glimpse of the grey plains of Gascony, and could see her rivers gleaming like coils of silver in the sunshine. As far as eye could see from among the rocky gorges and the bristles of the pine woods there came the quick twinkle and glitter of steel, while the wind brought with it sudden distant bursts of martial music from the great host which rolled by every road and by-path towards the narrow pass of Roncesvalles. On the cliffs on either side might also be seen the flash of arms and the waving of pennons where the force of Navarre

looked down upon the army of strangers who passed through their territories.

"By Saint Paul!" said Sir Nigel, blinking up at them, "I think that we have much to hope for from these cavaliers, for they cluster very thickly upon our flanks. Pass word to the men, Aylward, that they unsling their bows, for I have no doubt that there are some very worthy gentlemen yonder who may give us some opportunity for honourable advancement."

"I hear that the prince hath the King of Navarre as hostage," said Alleyne, "and it is said that he hath sworn to put him to death if there be any attack upon us."

"It was not so that war was made when good King Edward first turned his hand to it," said Sir Nigel sadly. "Ah! Alleyne, I fear that you will never live to see such things, for the minds of men are more set upon money and gain than of old. By Saint Paul! it was a noble sight when two great armies would draw together upon a certain day, and all who had a vow would ride forth to discharge themselves of it. What noble spear-runnings have I not seen, and even in a humble way had a part in, when cavaliers would run a course for the easing of their souls and for the love of their ladies! Never a bad word have I for the French, for, though I have ridden twenty times up to their array, I have never yet failed to find some very gentle and worthy knight or squire who was willing to do what he might to enable me to attempt some small feat of arms. Then, when all cavaliers had been satisfied, the two armies would come to hand-strokes, and fight right merrily until one or other had the vantage. By Saint Paul! it was not our wont in those days to pay gold for the opening of passes, nor would we hold a king as hostage lest his people come to thrusts with us. In good sooth, if the war is to be carried out in such a fashion, then it is grief to me that I ever came away from Castle Twynham, for I would not have left my sweet lady had I not thought that there were deeds of arms to be done."

"But surely, my fair lord," said Alleyne, "you have

done some great feats of arms since we left the Lady Loring."

"I cannot call any to mind," answered Sir Nigel.

"There was the taking of the sea-rovers and the holding of the keep against the Jacks."

"Nay, nay," said the knight, "these were not feats of arms, but mere wayside ventures and the chances of travel. By Saint Paul! if it were not that these hills are over steep for Pommers, I would ride to these cavaliers of Navarre and see if there were not some among them who would help me to take this patch from mine eye. It is a sad sight to me to see this very fine pass, which my own Company here could hold against an army, and yet to ride through it with as little profit as though it were the lane from my kennels to the Avon."

All morning Sir Nigel rode in a very ill-humour, with his Company tramping behind him. It was a toilsome march over broken ground and through snow, which came often as high as the knee, yet ere the sun had begun to sink they had reached the spot where the gorge opens out on to the uplands of Navarre, and could see the towers of Pampeluna jutting up against the Southern sky-line. Here the Company were quartered in a scattered mountain hamlet, and Alleyne spent the day looking down upon the swarming army which poured with gleam of spears and flaunt of standards through the narrow pass.

"Holà! mon gar," said Aylward, seating himself upon a boulder by his side. "This is indeed a sight upon which it is good to look, and a man might go far ere he would see so many brave men and fine horses. By my hilt! our little lord is wroth because we have come peacefully through the passes, but I will warrant him that we have fighting enow ere we turn our faces northward again. It is said that there are fourscore thousand men behind the King of Spain, with Du Guesclin and all the best lances of France, who have sworn to shed their heart's blood ere this Pedro come again to the throne."

"Yet our own army is a great one," said Alleyne.

"Nay, there are but seven-and-twenty thousand men. Chandos hath persuaded the prince to leave many behind, and indeed I think that he is right, for there is little food and less water in these parts for which we are bound. A man without his meat or a horse without his fodder is like a wet bow-string, fit for little. But voilà, mon petit, here come Chandos and his company, and there is many a pensil and banderole among yonder squadrons which show that the best blood of England is riding under his banners."

Whilst Aylward had been speaking, a strong column of archers had defiled through the pass beneath them. They were followed by a banner-bearer who held high the scarlet wedge upon a silver field which proclaimed the presence of the famous warrior. He rode himself within a spear's-length of his standard, clad from neck to foot in steel, but draped in the long linen gown or parement which was destined to be the cause of his death. His plumed hat was carried behind him by his body-squire and his head was covered by a small purple cap, from under which his snow-white hair curled downwards to his shoulders. With his long beak-like nose and his single gleaming eye, which shone brightly from under a thick tuft of grizzled brow, he seemed to Alleyne to have something of the look of some fierce old bird of prey. For a moment he smiled, as his eye lit upon the banner of the five roses waving from the hamlet; but his course lay for Pampeluna and he rode after the archers.

Close at his heels came sixteen squires, all chosen from the highest families, and behind them rode twelve hundred English knights, with gleam of steel and tossing of plumes, their harness jingling, their long straight swords clanking against their stirrup-irons, and the beat of their chargers' hoofs like the low deep roar of the sea upon the shore. Behind them marched six hundred Cheshire and Lancashire archers, bearing the badge of the Audleys, followed by the famous Lord Audley himself, with the four valiant squires, Dutton of Dutton, Delves of Doddington, Fowlehurst of Crewe, and Hawkestone of

Wainehill, who had all won such glory at Poictiers. Two hundred heavily armed cavalry rode behind the Audley standard, while close at their heels came the Duke of Lancaster with a glittering train, heralds tabarded with the royal arms riding three deep upon cream-coloured chargers in front of him. On either side of the young prince rode the two Seneschals of Aquitaine, Sir Guiscard d'Angle and Sir Stephen Cossington, the one bearing the banner of the province and the other that of Saint George. Away behind him as far as eye could reach rolled the far-stretching, unbroken river of steel—rank after rank and column after column, with waving of plumes, glitter of arms, tossing of guidons, and flash and flutter of countless armorial devices. All day Alleyne looked down upon the changing scene, and all day the old bowman stood by his elbow, pointing out the crests of famous warriors and the arms of noble houses. Here were the gold mullets of the Pakingtons, the sable and ermine of the Mackworths, the scarlet bars of the Wakes, the gold and blue of the Grosvenors, the cinque-foils of the Cliftons, the annulets of the Musgraves, the silver pinions of the Beauchamps, the crosses of the Molineaux, the bloody chevron of the Woodhouses, the red and silver of the Worsleys, the swords of the Clarks, the boars'-heads of the Lucies, the crescents of the Boyntons, and the wolf and dagger of the Lipscombs. So through the sunny winter day the chivalry of England poured down through the dark pass of Roncesvalles to the plains of Spain.

It was on a Monday that the Duke of Lancaster's division passed safely through the Pyrenees. On the Tuesday there was a bitter frost, and the ground rung like iron beneath the feet of the horses ; yet ere evening the prince himself, with the main battle of his army, had passed the gorge and united with his vanguard at Pampeluna. With him rode the King of Majorca, the hostage King of Navarre, and the fierce Don Pedro of Spain, whose pale blue eyes gleamed with a sinister light as they rested once more upon the distant peaks of the land which had

disowned him. Under the royal banners rode many a bold Gascon baron and many a hot-blooded islander. Here were the high stewards of Aquitaine, of Saintonge, of La Rochelle, of Quercy, of Limousin, of Agenois, of Poitou, and of Bigorre, with the banners and musters of their provinces. Here also were the valiant Earl of Angus, Sir Thomas Banaster with his garter over his greave, Sir Nele Loring, second cousin to Sir Nigel, and a long column of Welsh footmen who marched under the red banner of Merlin. From dawn to sundown the long train wound through the pass, their breath reeking up upon the frosty air like the steam from a caldron.

The weather was less keen upon the Wednesday, and the rearguard made good their passage, with the bombards and the waggon-train. Free companions and Gascons made up this portion of the army to the number of ten thousand men. The fierce Sir Hugh Calverley with his yellow mane, and the rugged Sir Robert Knolles, with their war-hardened and veteran companies of English bowmen, headed the long column, while behind them came the turbulent band of the Bastard of Breteuil, Nandon de Bagerant, one-eyed Camus, Black Ortingo, La Nuit, and others whose very names seem to smack of hard hands and ruthless deeds. With them also were the pick of the Gascon chivalry—the old Duc d'Armagnac, his nephew Lord d'Albret, brooding and scowling over his wrongs, the giant Oliver de Clisson, the Captal de Buch, pink of knighthood, the sprightly Sir Perducas d'Albret, the red-bearded Lord d'Esparre, and a long train of needy and grasping border nobles, with long pedigrees and short purses, who had come down from their hill-side strongholds, all hungering for the spoils and the ransoms of Spain. By the Thursday morning the whole army was encamped in the Vale of Pampeluna, and the prince had called his council to meet him in the old palace of the ancient city of Navarre.

## 34. *How the Company made Sport in the Vale of Pampeluna*

WHILST the council was sitting in Pampeluna the White Company, having encamped in a neighbouring valley, close to the companies of La Nuit and Black Ortingo, were amusing themselves at sword-play, wrestling, and shooting at the shields, which they had placed upon the hill-side to serve them as butts. The younger archers, with their coats of mail thrown aside, their brown or flaxen hair tossing in the wind, and their jerkins turned back to give free play to their brawny chests and arms, stood in lines, each loosing his shaft in turn, while Johnston, Aylward, Black Simon, and half a score of the elders lounged up and down with critical eyes, and a word of rough praise or of curt censure for the marksmen. Behind stood knots of Gascon and Brabant crossbowmen from the companies of Ortingo and of La Nuit, leaning upon their unsightly weapons and watching the practice of the Englishmen.

"A good shot, Hewett, a good shot!" said old Johnston to a young bowman who stood with his bow in his left hand, gazing with parted lips after his flying shaft. "You see, she finds the ring, as I knew she would from the moment that your string twanged."

"Loose it easy, steady, and yet sharp," said Aylward. "By my hilt! mon gar, it is very well when you do but shoot at a shield, but when there is a man behind the shield and he rides at you with wave of sword and glint of eyes from behind his vizor, you may find him a less easy mark."

"It is a mark that I have found before now," answered the young bowman.

"And shall again, camarade, I doubt not. But holà! Johnston, who is this who holds his bow like a crow-keeper?"

"It is Silas Peterson, of Horsham. Do not wink with

one eye and look with the other, Silas, and do not hop and dance after you shoot, with your tongue out, for that will not speed it upon its way. Stand straight and firm, as God made you. Move not the bow-arm, and steady with the drawing hand."

"I' faith," said Black Simon, "I am a spearman myself and am more fitted for hand-strokes than for such work as this. Yet I have spent my days among bowmen, and I have seen many a brave shaft sped. I will not say but that we have some good marksmen here, and that this Company would be accounted a fine body of archers at any time or place. Yet I do not see any men who bend so strong a bow or shoot as true a shaft as those whom I have known."

"You say sooth," said Johnston, turning his seamed and grizzled face upon the man-at-arms. "See yonder," he added, pointing to a bombard which lay within the camp: "there is what hath done scath to good bowmanship, with its filthy soot and foolish roaring mouth. I wonder that a true knight, like our prince, should carry such a scurvy thing in his train. Robin, thou red-headed lurden, how oft must I tell thee not to shoot straight with a quarter wind blowing across the mark?"

"By these ten finger-bones! there were some fine bowmen at the intaking of Calais," said Aylward. "I well remember that, on occasion of an outfall, a Genoan raised his arm over his mantlet and shook it at us, a hundred paces from our line. There were twenty who loosed shafts at him, and when the man was afterwards slain, it was found that he had taken eighteen through his forearm."

"And I can call to mind," remarked Johnston, "that when the great cog 'Christopher,' which the French had taken from us, was moored two hundred paces from the shore, two archers, little Robin Withstaff and Elias Baddlesmere, in four shots each cut every strand of her hempen anchor-cord, so that she well-nigh came upon the rocks."

"Good shooting, i' faith, rare shooting," said Black

Simon. "But I have seen you, Johnston, and you, Samkin Aylward, and one or two others who are still with us, shoot as well as the best. Was it not you, Johnston, who took the fat ox at Finsbury butts against the pick of London town?"

A sunburnt and black-eyed Brabanter had stood near the old archers, leaning upon a large crossbow and listening to their talk, which had been carried on in that hybrid camp dialect which both nations could understand. He was a squat, bull-necked man, clad in the iron helmet, mail tunic, and woollen gambesson of his class. A jacket with hanging sleeves, slashed with velvet at the neck and wrists, showed that he was a man of some consideration, an under-officer, or file-leader of his company.

"I cannot think," said he, "why you English should be so fond of your six-foot stick. If it amuse you to bend it, well and good; but why should I strain and pull, when my little moulinet will do all for me, and better than I can do it for myself?"

"I have seen good shooting with the prod and with the latch," said Aylward, "but, by my hilt! camarade, with all respect to you and to your bow, I think that is but a woman's weapon, which a woman can point and loose as easily as a man."

"I know not about that," answered the Brabanter, "but this I know, that though I have served for fourteen years, I have never yet seen an Englishman do aught with the long-bow which I could not do better with my arbalest. By the three kings! I would even go further, and say that I have done things with my arbalest which no Englishman could do with his long-bow."

"Well said, mon gar," cried Aylward. "A good cock has ever a brave call. Now, I have shot little of late, but there is Johnston here who will try a round with you for the honour of the Company."

"And I will lay a gallon of Jurançon wine upon the long-bow," said Black Simon, "though I had rather, for my own drinking, that it were a quart of Twynham ale."

"I take both your challenge and your wager," said the man of Brabant, throwing off his jacket, and glancing keenly about him with his black twinkling eyes. "I cannot see any fitting mark, for I care not to waste a bolt on these shields, which a drunken boor could not miss at a village kermesse."

"This is a perilous man," whispered an English man-at-arms, plucking at Aylward's sleeve. "He is the best marksman of all the crossbow companies, and it was he who brought down the Constable de Bourbon at Brignais. I fear that your man will come by little honour with him."

"Yet I have seen Johnston shoot this twenty years, and I will not flinch from it. How say you, old war-hound, will you not have a flight shot or two with this springald?"

"Tut, tut, Aylward," said the old bowman. "My day is past, and it is for the younger ones to hold what we have gained. I take it unkindly of thee, Samkin, that thou shouldst call all eyes thus upon a broken bowman who could once shoot a fair shaft. Let me feel that bow, Wilkins! It is a Scotch bow, I see, for the upper neck is without and the lower within. By the black rood! it is a good piece of yew, well nocked, well strung, well waxed, and very joyful to the feel. I think even now that I might hit any large and goodly mark with a bow like this. Turn thy quiver to me, Aylward. I love an ash arrow pierced with cornel-wood for a roving shaft."

"By my hilt! and so do I," cried Aylward. "These three gander-winged shafts are such."

"So I see, comrade. It has been my wont to choose a saddle-backed feather for a dead shaft, and a swine-backed for a smooth flier. I will take the two of them. Ah! Samkin, lad, the eye grows dim and the hand less firm as the years pass."

"Come then, are you not ready?" said the Brabanter, who had watched with ill-concealed impatience the slow and methodic movements of his antagonist.

"I will venture a rover with you, or try long-butts or hoyles," said old Johnston. "To my mind the long-

bow is a better weapon than the arbalest, but it may be ill for me to prove it."

"So I think," quoth the other with a sneer. He drew his moulinet from his girdle, and, fixing it to the windlass, he drew back the powerful double cord until it had clicked into the catch. Then from his quiver he drew a short thick quarrel, which he placed with the utmost care upon the groove. Word had spread of what was going forward, and the rivals were already surrounded, not only by the English archers of the Company, but by hundreds of arbalestiers and men-at-arms from the bands of Ortingo and La Nuit, to the latter of which the Brabanter belonged.

"There is a mark yonder on the hill," said he; "mayhap you can discern it."

"I see something," answered Johnston, shading his eyes with his hand; "but it is a very long shoot."

"A fair shoot—a fair shoot! Stand aside, Arnaud, lest you find a bolt through your gizzard. Now, comrade, I take no flight shot, and I give you the vantage of watching my shaft."

As he spoke he raised his arbalest to his shoulder and was about to pull the trigger, when a large grey stork flapped heavily into view, skimming over the brow of the hill, and then soaring up into the air to pass the valley. Its shrill and piercing cries drew all eyes upon it, and, as it came nearer, a dark spot which circled above it resolved itself into a peregrine falcon, which hovered over its head, poising itself from time to time, and watching its chance of closing with its clumsy quarry. Nearer and nearer came the two birds, all absorbed in their own contest, the stork wheeling upwards, the hawk still fluttering above it, until they were not a hundred paces from the camp. The Brabanter raised his weapon to the sky, and there came the short deep twang of his powerful string. His bolt struck the stork just where its wing meets the body, and the bird whirled aloft in a last convulsive flutter before falling wounded and flapping to the

earth. A roar of applause burst from the cross-bowmen ; but at the instant that the bolt struck its mark old Johnston, who had stood listlessly with arrow on string, bent his bow and sped a shaft through the body of the falcon. Whipping the other from his belt, he set it skimming some few feet from the earth with so true an aim that it struck and transfixed the stork for the second time ere it could reach the ground. A deep-chested shout of delight burst from the archers at the sight of this double feat, and Aylward, dancing with joy, threw his arms round the old marksman and embraced him with such vigour that their mail tunics clanged again.

" Ah ! camarade," he cried, " you shall have a stoup with me for this ! What then, old dog, would not the hawk please thee, but thou must have the stork as well ? Oh, to my heart again ! "

" It is a pretty piece of yew, and well strung," said Johnston with a twinkle in his deep-set grey eyes. " Even an old broken bowman might find the clout with a bow like this."

" You have done very well," remarked the Brabanter in a surly voice. " But it seems to me that you have not yet shown yourself to be a better marksman than I, for I have struck that at which I aimed, and, by the three kings ! no man can do more."

" It would ill beseem me to claim to be a better marksman," answered Johnston, " for I have heard great things of your skill. I did but wish to show that the long-bow could do that which an arbalest could not do, for you could not with your moulinet have your string ready to speed another shaft ere the bird drop to the earth."

" In that you have vantage," said the crossbowman. " By Saint James ! it is now my turn to show you where my weapon has the better of you. I pray you to draw a flight shaft with all your strength down the valley, that we may see the length of your shoot."

" That is a very strong prod of yours," said Johnston, shaking his grizzled head as he glanced at the thick arch

and powerful strings of his rival's arbalest. "I have little doubt that you can overshoot me, and yet I have seen bowmen who could send a cloth-yard arrow further than you could speed a quarrel."

"So I have heard," remarked the Brabanter; "and yet it is a strange thing that these wondrous bowmen are never where I chance to be. Pace out the distances with a wand, at every five-score, and do you, Arnaud, stand at the fifth wand to carry back my bolts to me."

A line was measured down the valley, and Johnston, drawing an arrow to the very head, sent it whistling over the row of wands.

"Bravely drawn! A rare shoot!" shouted the by-standers. "It is well up to the fourth mark."

"By my hilt! it is over it," cried Aylward. "I can see where they have stooped to gather up the shaft."

"We shall hear anon," said Johnston quietly, and presently a young archer came running to say that the arrow had fallen twenty paces beyond the fourth wand.

"Four hundred paces and a score," cried Black Simon. "I' faith it is a very long flight. Yet wood and steel may do more than flesh and blood."

The Brabanter stepped forward with a smile of conscious triumph, and loosed the cord of his weapon. A shout burst from his comrades as they watched the swift and lofty flight of the heavy bolt.

"Over the fourth!" groaned Aylward. "By my hilt! I think that it is well up to the fifth."

"It is over the fifth!" cried a Gascon loudly, and a comrade came running with waving arms to say that the bolt had pitched eight paces beyond the mark of the five hundred.

"Which weapon hath the vantage now?" cried the Brabanter, strutting proudly about with shouldered arbalest, amid the applause of his companions.

"You can overshoot me," said Johnston, gently.

"Or any other man who ever bent a long-bow," cried his victorious adversary.

"Nay, not so fast," said a huge archer, whose mighty shoulders and red head towered high above the throng of his comrades. "I must have a word with you ere you crow so loudly. Where is my little popper? By sainted Dick of Hampole! it will be a strange thing if I cannot outshoot that thing of thine, which to my eyes is more like a rat-trap than a bow. Will you try another flight, or do you stand by your last?"

"Five hundred and eight paces will serve my turn," answered the Brabanter, looking askance at this new opponent.

"Tut, John," whispered Aylward, "you never were a marksman. Why must you thrust your spoon into this dish?"

"Easy and slow, Aylward. There are very many things which I cannot do, but there are also one or two which I have the trick of. It is in my mind that I can beat this shoot, if my bow will but hold together."

"Go on, old babe of the woods! Have at it, Hampshire!" cried the archers, laughing.

"By my soul! you may grin," cried John. "But I learned how to make the long shoot from old Hob Miller of Milford."

He took up a great black bow as he spoke, and sitting down upon the ground he placed his two feet on either end of the stave. With an arrow fitted, he then pulled the string towards him with both hands until the head of the shaft was level with the wood. The great bow creaked and groaned and the cord vibrated with the tension.

"Who is this fool's-head who stands in the way of my shoot?" said he, craning up his neck from the ground.

"He stands on the further side of my mark," answered the Brabanter, "so he has little to fear from you."

"Well, the saints assoil him!" cried John. "Though I think he is over near to be scathed." As he spoke he raised his two feet, with the bow-stave upon their soles, and his cord twanged with a deep rich hum which might be heard across the valley. The measurer in the distance

fell flat upon his face, and then, jumping up again, began to run in the opposite direction.

"Well shot, old lad! It is indeed over his head," cried the bowmen.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the Brabanter, "who ever saw such a shoot!"

"It is but a trick," quoth John. "Many a time have I won a gallon of ale by covering a mile in three flights down Wilverley Chase."

"It fell a hundred and thirty paces beyond the fifth mark," shouted an archer in the distance.

"Six hundred and thirty paces! Mon Dieu! but that is a shoot! And yet it says nothing for your weapon, mon gros camarade, for it was by turning yourself into a cross-bow that you did it."

"By my hilt! there is truth in that," cried Aylward. "And now, friend, I will myself show you a vantage of the longbow. I pray you to speed a bolt against yonder shield with all your force. It is an inch of elm with bull's hide over it."

"I scarce shot as many shafts at Brignais," growled the man of Brabant; "though I found a better mark there than a cantle of bull's hide. But what is this, English-man? The shield hangs not one hundred paces from me, and a blind man could strike it." He screwed up his string to the farthest pitch, and shot his quarrel at the dangling shield. Aylward, who had drawn an arrow from his quiver, carefully greased the head of it, and sped it at the same mark.

"Run, Wilkins," quoth he, "and fetch me the shield."

Long were the faces of the Englishmen and broad the laugh of the crossbowmen as the heavy mantlet was carried towards them, for there in the centre was the thick Brabant bolt driven deeply into the wood, while there was neither sign nor trace of the cloth-yard shaft.

"By the three kings!" cried the Brabanter, "this time at least there is no gainsaying which is the better weapon,

or which the truer hand that held it. You have missed the shield, Englishman."

"Tarry a bit! Tarry a bit, mon gar!" quoth Aylward, and turning round the shield he showed a round clear hole in the wood at the back of it. "My shaft has passed through it, camarade, and I trow the one which goes through is more to be feared than that which bides on the way."

The Brabanter stamped his foot with mortification, and was about to make some angry reply, when Alleyne Edricson came riding up to the crowds of archers.

"Sir Nigel will be here anon," said he, "and it is his wish to speak with the Company."

In an instant order and method took the place of general confusion. Bows, steel caps, and jacks were caught up from the grass. A long cordon cleared the camp of all strangers, while the main body fell into four lines with under-officers and file-leaders in front and on either flank. So they stood, silent and motionless, when their leader came riding towards them, his face shining and his whole small figure swelling with the news which he bore.

"Great honour has been done to us, men," cried he: "for of all the army, the prince has chosen us out that we should ride onwards into the lands of Spain to spy upon our enemies. Yet, as there are many of us, and as the service may not be to the liking of all, I pray that those will step forward from the ranks who have the will to follow me."

There was a rustle among the bowmen, but when Sir Nigel looked up at them no man stood forward from his fellows, but the four lines of men stretched unbroken as before. Sir Nigel blinked at them in amazement, and a look of the deepest sorrow shadowed his face.

"That I should have lived to see the day!" he cried. "What! not one——"

"My fair lord," whispered Alleyne, "they have all stepped forward."

"Ah, by Saint Paul! I see how it is with them. I

could not think that they would desert me. We start at dawn to-morrow, and ye are to have the horses of Sir Robert Cheney's company. Be ready, I pray ye, at early cock-crow."

A buzz of delight burst from the archers, as they broke their ranks and ran hither and thither, whooping and cheering like boys who have news of a holiday. Sir Nigel gazed after them with a smiling face, when a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder.

"What ho! my knight-errant of Twynham!" said a voice. "You are off to Ebro, I hear; and, by the holy fish of Tobias! you must take me under your banner."

"What! Sir Oliver Buttesthorn!" cried Sir Nigel. "I had heard that you were come into camp, and had hoped to see you. Glad and proud shall I be to have you with me."

"I have a most particular and weighty reason for wishing to go," said the sturdy knight.

"I can well believe it," returned Sir Nigel; "I have met no man who is quicker to follow where honour leads."

"Nay, it is not for honour that I go, Nigel."

"For what then?"

"For pullets."

"Pullets?"

"Yes, for the rascal vanguard have cleared every hen from the country-side. It was this very morning that Norbury, my squire, lamed his horse in riding round in quest of one, for we have a bag of truffles, and nought to eat with them. Never have I seen such locusts as this vanguard of ours. Not a pullet shall we see until we are in front of them; so I shall leave my Winchester runagates to the care of the provost-marshal, and I shall hie south with you, Nigel, with my truffles at my saddle-bow."

"Oliver, Oliver, I know you over well," said Sir Nigel, shaking his head, and the two old soldiers rode off together to their pavilion.

## 35. *How Sir Nigel Hawked at an Eagle*

TO the south of Pampeluna in the kingdom of Navarre there stretched a high table-land, rising into bare, sterile hills, brown or grey in colour, and strewn with huge boulders of granite. On the Gascon side of the great mountains there had been running streams, meadows, forests, and little nestling villages. Here, on the contrary, were nothing but naked rocks, poor pasture, and savage stone-strewn wastes. Gloomy defiles or barrancas intersected this wild country with mountain torrents dashing and foaming between their rugged sides. The clatter of waters, the scream of the eagle, and the howling of wolves, were the only sounds which broke upon the silence in that dreary and inhospitable region.

Through this wild country it was that Sir Nigel and his Company pushed their way, riding at times through vast defiles where the brown gnarled cliffs shot up on either side of them, and the sky was but a long winding blue slit between the clustering lines of box which fringed the lips of the precipices; or again leading their horses along the narrow and rocky paths worn by the muleteers upon the edges of the chasm, where under their very elbows they could see the white streak which marked the *gave* which foamed a thousand feet below them. So for two days they pushed their way through the wild places of Navarre, past Fuente, over the rapid Ega, through Estella, until upon a winter's evening the mountains fell away from in front of them, and they saw the broad blue Ebro curving betwixt its double line of homesteads and of villages. The fishers of Viana were aroused that night by rough voices speaking in a strange tongue, and ere morning Sir Nigel and his men had ferried the river and were safe upon the land of Spain.

All the next day they lay in a pine wood near to the town of Logrono, resting their horses and taking counsel

as to what they should do. Sir Nigel had with him Sir William Felton, Sir Oliver Buttesthorn, stout old Sir Simon Burley, the Scotch knight-errant, the Earl of Angus, and Sir Richard Causton, all accounted among the bravest knights in the army, together with sixty veteran men-at-arms, and three hundred and twenty archers. Spies had been sent out in the morning, and returned after nightfall to say that the King of Spain was encamped some fourteen miles off in the direction of Burgos, having with him twenty thousand horse and forty-five thousand foot.

A dry-wood fire had been lit, and round this the leaders crouched, the glare beating upon their rugged faces, while the hardy archers lounged and chattered amid the tethered horses, while they munched their scanty provisions.

"For my part," said Sir Simon Burley, "I am of opinion that we have already done that which we have come for. For do we not now know where the king is, and how great a following he hath, which was the end of our journey?"

"True," answered Sir William Felton, "but I have come on this venture because it is a long time since I have broken a spear in war, and, certes, I shall not go back until I have run a course with some cavalier of Spain. Let those go back who will, but I must see more of these Spaniards ere I turn."

"I will not leave you, Sir William," returned Sir Simon Burley; "and yet, as an old soldier and one who hath seen much of war, I cannot but think that it is an ill thing for four hundred men to find themselves between an army of sixty thousand on the one side and a broad river on the other."

"Yet," said Sir Richard Causton, "we cannot for the honour of England go back without a blow struck."

"Nor for the honour of Scotland either," cried the Earl of Angus. "By Saint Andrew! I wish that I may never set eyes upon the water of Leith again, if I pluck my horse's bridle ere I have seen this camp of theirs."

"By Saint Paul! you have spoken very well," said Sir

Nigel, " and I have always heard that there were very worthy gentlemen among the Scots, and fine skirmishing to be had upon their border. Bethink you, Sir Simon, that we have this news from the lips of common spies, who can scarce tell us as much of the enemy and of his forces as the prince would wish to hear."

" You are the leader in this venture, Sir Nigel," the other answered, " and I do but ride under your banner."

" Yet I would fain have your rede and counsel, Sir Simon. But, touching what you say of the river, we can take heed that we shall not have it at the back of us, for the prince hath now advanced to Salvatierra, and thence to Vittoria, so that if we come upon their camp from the further side we can make good our retreat."

" What then would you propose ? " asked Sir Simon, shaking his grizzled head as one who is but half convinced.

" That we ride forward ere the news reach them that we have crossed the river. In this way we may have sight of their army, and perchance even find occasion for some small deed against them."

" So be it, then," said Sir Simon Burley ; and the rest of the council having approved, a scanty meal was hurriedly snatched, and the advance resumed under the cover of the darkness. All night they led their horses, stumbling and groping through wild defiles and rugged valleys, following the guidance of a frightened peasant who was strapped by the wrist to Black Simon's stirrup-leather. With the early dawn they found themselves in a black ravine, with others sloping away from it on either side, and the bare brown crags rising in long bleak terraces all round them.

" If it please you, fair lord," said Black Simon, " this man hath misled us, and since there is no tree upon which we may hang him, it might be well to hurl him over yonder cliff."

The peasant, reading the soldier's meaning in his fierce eyes and harsh accents, dropped upon his knees, screaming loudly for mercy.

"How comes it, dog?" asked Sir William Felton in Spanish. "Where is this camp to which you swore that you would lead us?"

"By the sweet Virgin! By the blessed Mother of God!" cried the trembling peasant, "I swear to you that in the darkness I have myself lost the path."

"Over the cliff with him!" shouted half a dozen voices; but ere the archers could drag him from the rocks to which he clung Sir Nigel had ridden up and called upon them to stop.

"How is this, sirs?" said he. "As long as the prince doth me the honour to entrust this venture to me, it is for me only to give orders; and, by Saint Paul! I shall be right blithe to go very deeply into the matter with anyone to whom my words may give offence. How say you, Sir William? Or you, my Lord of Angus? Or you, Sir Richard?"

"Nay, nay, Nigel!" cried Sir William. "This base peasant is too small a matter for old comrades to quarrel over. But he hath betrayed us, and certes he hath merited a dog's death."

"Hark ye, fellow," said Sir Nigel. "We give you one more chance to find the path. We are about to gain much honour, Sir William, in this enterprise, and it would be a sorry thing if the first blood shed were that of an unworthy boor. Let us say our morning orisons, and it may chance that ere we finish he may strike upon the track."

With bowed heads and steel caps in hand the archers stood at their horses' heads, while Sir Simon Burley repeated the Pater, the Ave, and the Credo. Long did Alleyne bear the scene in mind—the knot of knights in their dull leaden-hued armour, the ruddy visage of Sir Oliver, the craggy features of the Scottish earl, the shining scalp of Sir Nigel, with the dense ring of hard bearded faces and the long brown heads of the horses, all topped and circled by the beetling cliffs. Scarce had the last deep "Amen" broken from the Company, when, in an instant, there rose the scream of a hundred bugles, with

the deep rolling of drums and the clashing of cymbals, all sounding together in one deafening uproar. Knights and archers sprang to arms, convinced that some great host was upon them; but the guide dropped upon his knees and thanked heaven for its mercies.

"We have found them, caballeros!" he cried. "This is their morning call. If ye will but deign to follow me, I will set them before you ere a man might tell his beads."

As he spoke he scrambled down one of the narrow ravines, and, climbing over a low ridge at the farther end, he led them into a short valley with a stream purling down the centre of it and a very thick growth of elder and of box upon either side. Pushing their way through the dense brushwood, they looked out upon a scene which made their hears beat harder and their breath come faster.

In front of them there lay a broad plain watered by two winding streams and covered with grass, stretching away to where, in the farthest distance, the towers of Burgos bristled up against the light blue morning sky. Over all this vast meadow there lay a great city of tents—thousands upon thousands of them laid out in streets and in squares like a well-ordered town. High silken pavilions or coloured marquees, shooting up from among the crowd of meaner dwellings, marked where the great lords and barons of Leon and Castile displayed their standards, while over the white roofs, as far as eye could reach, the waving of ancients, pavons, pensils, and banderoles, with flash of gold and glow of colours, proclaimed that all the chivalry of Iberia were mustered in the plain beneath them. Far off, in the centre of the camp, a huge palace of red and white silk with the royal arms of Castile waving from the summit, announced that the gallant Henry lay there in the midst of his warriors.

As the English adventurers, peeping out from behind their brushwood screen, looked down upon this wondrous sight, they could see that the vast army in front of them was already afoot. The first pink light of the rising sun

glittered upon the steel caps and breastplates of dense masses of slingers and of crossbowmen, who drilled and marched in the spaces which had been left for their exercise. A thousand columns of smoke reeked up into the pure morning air where the faggots were piled and the camp-kettles already simmering. In the open plain clouds of light horse galloped and swooped with swaying bodies and waving javelins, after the fashion which the Spanish had adopted from their Moorish enemies. All along by the sedgy banks of the rivers long lines of pages led their masters' chargers down to water, while the knights themselves lounged in gaily dressed groups about the doors of their pavilions, or rode out, with their falcons upon their wrists and their greyhounds behind them, in quest of quail or of leveret.

"By my hilt! mon gar!" whispered Aylward to Alleyne, as the young squire stood with parted lips and wondering eyes gazing down at the novel scene before him, "we have been seeking them all night, but now that we have found them I know not what we are to do with them."

"You say sooth, Samkin," quoth old Johnston. "I would that we were upon the far side of Ebro again, for there is neither honour nor profit to be gained here. What say you, Simon?"

"By the rood!" cried the fierce man-at-arms, "I will see the colour of their blood ere I turn my mare's head for the mountains. Am I a child that I should ride for three days and nought but words at the end of it?"

"Well said, my sweet honeysuckle!" cried Hordle John. "I am with you, like hilt to blade. Could I but lay hands upon one of those gay prancers yonder, I doubt not that I should have ransom enough from him to buy my mother a new cow."

"A cow!" said Aylward. "Say rather ten acres and a homestead on the banks of Avon."

"Say you so? Then, by Our Lady! here is for yonder one in the red jerkin."

He was about to push recklessly forward into the open, when Sir Nigel himself darted in front of him, with his hand upon his breast.

"Back!" said he. "Our time is not yet come, and we must lie here until evening. Throw off your jacks and headpieces, lest their eyes catch the shine, and tether the horses among the rocks."

The order was swiftly obeyed, and in ten minutes the archers were stretched along by the side of the brook, munching the bread and the bacon which they had brought in their bags, and craning their necks to watch the ever-changing scene beneath them. Very quiet and still they lay, save for a muttered jest or whispered order, for twice during the long morning they heard bugle-calls from amid the hills on either side of them, which showed that they had thrust themselves in beween the outposts of the enemy. The leaders sat amongst the box-wood, and took counsel together as to what they should do; while from below there surged up the buzz of voices, the shouting, the neighing of horses and all the uproar of a great camp.

"What boots it to wait?" said Sir William Felton. "Let us ride down upon their camp ere they discover us."

"And so say I," cried the Scottish earl; "for they do not know that there is any enemy within thirty long leagues of them."

"For my part," said Sir Simon Burley, "I think that it is madness, for you cannot hope to rout this great army; and where are you to go and what are you to do when they have turned upon you? How say you, Sir Oliver Buttesthorn?"

"By the apple of Eve!" cried the fat knight, "it appears to me that this wind brings a very savoury smell of garlic and of onions from their cooking-kettles. I am in favour of riding down upon them at once, if my old friend and comrade here is of the same mind."

"Nay," said Sir Nigel, "I have a plan by which we may attempt some small deed upon them, and yet, by the help

of God, may be able to draw off again; which, as Sir Simon Burley hath said, would be scarce possible in any other way."

"How then, Sir Nigel?" asked several voices.

"We shall lie here all day; for amid this brushwood it is ill for them to see us. Then, when evening comes, we shall sally out upon them and see if we may not gain some honourable advancement from them."

"But why then rather than now?"

"Because we shall have nightfall to cover us when we draw off, so that we may make our way back through the mountains. I would station a score of archers here in the pass, with all our pennons jutting forth from the rocks, and as many nakirs and drums and bugles as we have with us, so that those who follow us in the fading light may think that the whole army of the prince is upon them, and fear to go further. What think you of my plan, Sir Simon?"

"By my troth! I think very well of it," cried the prudent old commander. "If four hundred men must needs run a tilt against sixty thousand, I cannot see how they can do it better or more safely."

"And so say I," cried Felton, heartily. "But I wish the day were over, for it will be an ill thing for us if they chance to light upon us."

The words were scarce out of his mouth when there came a clatter of loose stones, the sharp clink of trotting hoofs, and a dark-faced cavalier, mounted upon a white horse, burst through the bushes and rode swiftly down the valley from the end which was farthest from the Spanish camp. Lightly armed, with his vizor open and a hawk perched upon his left wrist, he looked about him with the careless air of a man who is bent wholly upon pleasure, and unconscious of the possibility of danger. Suddenly, however, his eyes lit upon the fierce faces which glared out at him from the brushwood. With a cry of terror, he thrust his spurs into his horse's sides and dashed for the narrow opening of the gorge. For a moment it seemed as though he would have reached it, for he had

trampled over or dashed aside the archers who threw themselves in his way ; but Hordle John seized him by the foot in his grasp of iron and dragged him from the saddle, while two others caught the frightened horse.

" Ho, ho ! " roared the great archer. " How many cows wilt buy my mother, if I set thee free ? "

" Hush that bull's bellowing ! " cried Sir Nigel impatiently. " Bring the man here. By Saint Paul ! it is not the first time that we have met ; for, if I mistake not, it is Don Diego Alvarez, who was once at the prince's court."

" It is indeed I," said the Spanish knight, speaking in the French tongue, " and I pray you to pass your sword through my heart ; for how can I live—I, a caballero of Castile—after being dragged from my horse by the base hands of a common archer ? "

" Fret not for that," answered Sir Nigel. " For, in sooth, had he not pulled you down, a dozen cloth-yard shafts had crossed each other in your body."

" By Saint James ! it were better so than to be polluted by his touch," answered the Spaniard, with his black eyes sparkling with rage and hatred. " I trust that I am now the prisoner of some honourable knight or gentleman."

" You are the prisoner of the man who took you, Sir Diego," answered Sir Nigel. " And I may tell you that better men than either you or I have found themselves before now prisoners in the hands of archers of England."

" What ransom, then, does he demand ? " asked the Spaniard.

Big John scratched his red head and grinned in high delight when the question was propounded to him. " Tell him," said he, " that I shall have ten cows and a bull too, if it be but a little one. Also a dress of blue sendall for mother and a red one for Joan ; with five acres of pasture-land, two scythes, and a fine new grindstone. Likewise a small house, with stalls for the cows, and thirty-six gallons of beer for the thirsty weather."

" Tut, tut ! " cried Sir Nigel, laughing. " All these

things may be had for money ; and I think, Don Diego, that five thousand crowns is not too much for so renowned a knight."

" It shall be duly paid him."

" For some days we must keep you with us ; and I must crave leave also to use your shield, your armour and your horse."

" My harness is yours by the law of arms," said the Spaniard, gloomily.

" I do but ask the loan of it. I have need of it this day, but it shall be duly returned to you. Set guards, Aylward, with arrow on string, at either end of the pass ; for it may happen that some other cavaliers may visit us ere the time be come." All day the little band of Englishmen lay in the sheltered gorge, looking down upon the vast host of their unconscious enemies. Shortly after midday, a great uproar of shouting and cheering broke out in the camp, with mustering of men and calling of bugles. Clambering up among the rocks, the companions saw a long rolling cloud of dust along the whole eastern sky-line, with the glint of spears and the flutter of pennons, which announced the approach of a large body of cavalry. For a moment a wild hope came upon them that perhaps the prince had moved more swiftly than had been planned, that he had crossed the Ebro, and that this was his vanguard sweeping to the attack.

" Surely I see the red pile of Chandos at the head of yonder squadron ! " cried Sir Richard Causton, shading his eyes with his hand.

" Not so," answered Sir Simon Burley, who had watched the approaching host with a darkening face. " It is even as I feared. That is the double eagle of Du Guesclin."

" You say very truly," cried the Earl of Angus. " These are the levies of France, for I can see the ensign of the Marshal d'Andreghen, with that of the Lord of Antoing and of Briseuil, and of many another from Brittany and Anjou."

"By Saint Paul! I am very glad of it," said Sir Nigel. "Of these Spaniards I know nothing; but the French are very worthy gentlemen, and will do what they can for our advancement."

"There are at the least four thousand of them, and all men-at-arms," cried Sir William Felton. "See, there is Bertrand himself, beside his banner, and there is King Henry, who rides to welcome him. Now they all turn and come into the camp together."

As he spoke, the vast throng of Spaniards and of Frenchmen trooped across the plain, with brandished arms and tossing banners. All day long the sound of revelry and of rejoicing from the crowded camp swelled up to the ears of the Englishmen, and they could see the soldiers of the two nations throwing themselves into each other's arms and dancing hand-in-hand round the blazing fires. The sun had sunk behind a cloud-bank in the west before Sir Nigel at last gave word that the men should resume their arms and have their horses ready. He had himself thrown off his armour, and had dressed himself from head to foot in the harness of the captured Spaniard.

"Sir William," said he, "it is my intention to attempt a small deed, and I ask you therefore that you will lead this outfall upon the camp. For me, I will ride into their camp with my squire and two archers. I pray you to watch me, and to ride forth when I am come among the tents. You will leave twenty men behind here, as we planned this morning, and you will ride back here after you have ventured as far as seems good to you."

"I will do as you order, Nigel; but what is it that you propose to do?"

"You will see anon, and indeed it is but a trifling matter. Alleyne, you will come with me, and lead a spare horse by the bridle. I will have the two archers who rode with us through France, for they are trusty men and of stout heart. Let them ride behind us, and let them leave their bows here among the bushes, for it is not my wish that they should know that we are Englishmen. Say

no word to any whom we may meet, and, if any speak to you, pass on as though you heard them not. Are you ready ? "

" I am ready, my fair lord," said Alleyne.

" And I," " And I," cried Aylward and John.

" Then the rest I leave to your wisdom, Sir William ; and if God sends us fortune we shall meet you again in this gorge ere it be dark."

So saying, Sir Nigel mounted the white horse of the Spanish cavalier, and rode quietly forth from his concealment with his three companions behind him, Alleyne leading his master's own steed by the bridle. So many small parties of French and Spanish horse were sweeping hither and thither that the small band attracted little notice, and making its way at a gentle trot across the plain they came as far as the camp without challenge or hindrance. On and on they pushed past the endless lines of tents, amid the dense swarms of horsemen and of footmen, until the huge royal pavilion stretched in front of them. They were close upon it when of a sudden there broke out a wild hubbub from a distant portion of the camp, with screams and war-cries and all the wild tumult of battle. At the sound the soldiers came rushing from their tents, knights shouted loudly for their squires, and there was mad turmoil on every hand of bewildered men and plunging horses. At the royal tent a crowd of gorgeously dressed servants ran hither and thither in helpless panic, for the guard of soldiers who were stationed there had already ridden off in the direction of the alarm. A man-at-arms on either side of the doorway were the sole protectors of the royal dwelling.

" I have come for the king," whispered Sir Nigel ; " and, by Saint Paul ! he must back with us or I must bide here."

Alleyne and Aylward sprang from their horses and flew at the two sentries, who were disarmed and beaten down in an instant by so furious and unexpected an attack. Sir Nigel dashed into the royal tent, and was followed by

Hordle John as soon as the horses had been secured. From within came wild screamings and the clash of steel, and then the two emerged once more, their swords and forearms reddened with blood, while John bore over his shoulder the senseless body of a man whose gay surcoat, adorned with the lions and towers of Castile, proclaimed him to belong to the royal house. A crowd of white-faced sewers and pages swarmed at their heels, those behind pushing forwards, while the foremost shrank back from the fierce faces and reeking weapons of the adventurers. The senseless body was thrown across the spare horse, the four sprang to their saddles, and away they thundered with loose reins and busy spurs through the swarming camp.

But confusion and disorder still reigned among the Spaniards, for Sir William Felton and his men had swept through half their camp, leaving a long litter of the dead and the dying to mark their course. Uncertain who were their attackers, and unable to tell their English enemies from their newly arrived Breton allies, the Spanish knights rode wildly hither and thither in aimless fury. The mad turmoil, the mixture of races, and the fading light, were all in favour of the four who alone knew their own purpose among the vast uncertain multitude. Twice ere they reached open ground they had to break their way through small bodies of horse, and once there came a whistle of arrows and singing of stones about their ears; but, still dashing onwards, they shot out from among the tents and found their own comrades retreating for the mountains at no very great distance from them. Another five minutes of wild galloping over the plain, and they were all back in their gorge, while their pursuers fell back before the rolling of drums and blare of trumpets, which seemed to proclaim that the whole army of the prince was about to emerge from the mountain passes.

"By my soul! Nigel," cried Sir Oliver, waving a great boiled ham over his head, "I have come by something which I may eat with my truffles! I had a hard fight for it

for there were three of them with their mouths open and the knives in their hands, all sitting agape round the table when I rushed in upon them. How say you, Sir William, will you not try the smack of the famed Spanish swine though we have but the brook water to wash it down ? "

" Later, Sir Oliver," answered the old soldier, wiping his grimed face. " We must further into the mountains ere we be in safety. But what have we here, Nigel ? "

" It is a prisoner whom I have taken, and in sooth, as he came from the royal tent and wears the royal arms upon his jupon, I trust that he is the King of Spain."

" The King of Spain ! " cried the companions, crowding round in amazement.

" Nay, Sir Nigel," said Felton, peering at the prisoner through the uncertain light. " I have twice seen Henry of Trastamare, and certes this man in no way resembles him."

" Then, by the light of heaven ! I will ride back for him," said Sir Nigel.

" Nay, nay, the camp is in arms, and it would be rank madness. Who are you, fellow ? " he added in Spanish, " and how is it that you dare to wear the arms of Castile ? "

The prisoner was but recovering the consciousness which had been squeezed from him by the grip of Hordle John. " If it please you," he answered, " I and nine others are the body-squires of the King, and must ever wear his arms, so as to shield him from even such perils as have threatened him this night. The king is at the tent of the brave Du Guesclin, where he will sup to-night. But I am a caballero of Aragon, Don Sancho Penelosa, and, though I be no king, I am yet ready to pay a fitting price for my ransom."

" By Saint Paul ! I will not touch your gold," cried Sir Nigel. " Go back to your master and give him greeting from Sir Nigel Loring of Twynham Castle, telling him that I had hoped to make his better acquaintance this night, and that, if I have disordered his tent, it was but in my eagerness to know so famed and courteous a knight.

Spur on, comrades ! for we must cover many a league ere we can venture to light fire or to loosen girth. I had hoped to ride without this patch to-night, but it seems that I must carry it yet a little longer."

## 36. *How Sir Nigel took the Patch from his Eye*

IT was a cold bleak morning in the beginning of March, and the mist was drifting in dense rolling clouds through the passes of the Cantabrian mountains. The Company, who had passed the night in a sheltered gully, were already astir, some crowding round the blazing fires and others romping or leaping over each other's backs, for their limbs were chilled and the air biting. Here and there, through the dense haze which surrounded them, there loomed out huge pinnacles and jutting boulders of rock ; while high above the sea of vapour there towered up one gigantic peak, with the pink glow of the early sunshine upon its snow-capped head. The ground was wet, the rocks dripping, the grass and evergreens sparkling with beads of moisture ; yet the camp was loud with laughter and merriment, for a messenger had ridden in from the prince with words of heart-stirring praise for what they had done, and with orders that they should still bide in the forefront of the army.

Round one of the fires were clustered four or five of the leading men of the archers, cleaning the rust from their weapons and glancing impatiently from time to time at a great pot which smoked over the blaze. There was Aylward squatting cross-legged in his shirt, while he scrubbed away at his chain-mail brigandine, whistling loudly the while. On one side of him sat old Johnston, who was busy in trimming the feathers of some arrows to his liking ; and on the other Hordle John, who lay with his great limbs all asprawl, and his headpiece balanced upon

his uplifted foot. Black Simon of Norwich crouched amid the rocks, crooning an Eastland ballad to himself, while he whetted his sword upon a flat stone which lay across his knees ; while beside him sat Alleyne Edricson, and Norbury, the silent squire of Sir Oliver, holding out their chilled hands towards the crackling faggots.

" Cast on another culpon, John, and stir the broth with thy sword-sheath," growled Johnston, looking anxiously for the twentieth time at the reeking pot.

" By my hilt ! " cried Aylward, " now that John hath come by this great ransom, he will scarce abide the fare of poor archer lads. How say you, camarade ? When you see Hordle once more, there will be no penny ale and fat bacon, but Gascon wines and baked meats every day of the seven."

" I know not about that," said John, kicking his helmet up into the air and catching it in his hand. " I do but know that whether the broth be ready or no, I am about to dip this into it."

" It simmers and it boils," cried Johnston, pushing his hard-lined face through the smoke. In an instant the pot had been plucked from the blaze, and its contents had been scooped up in half a dozen steel headpieces which were balanced betwixt their owners' knees, while, with spoon and with gobbet of bread, they devoured their morning meal.

" It is ill weather for bows," remarked John at last, when, with a long sigh, he had drained the last drop from his helmet. " My strings are as limp as a cow's tail this morning."

" You should rub them with water glue," quoth Johnston. " You remember, Samkin, that it was wetter than this on the morning of Crécy, and yet I cannot call to mind that there was aught amiss with our strings."

" It is in my thoughts," said Black Simon, still pensively grinding his sword, " that we may have need of your strings ere sundown. I dreamed of the red cow last night."

"And what is this red cow, Simon?" asked Alleyne.

"I know not, young sir; but I can only say that on the eve of Cadsand, and on the eve of Crécy, and on the eve of Nogent, I dreamed of a red cow; and now the dream has come upon me again, so I am now setting a very keen edge to my blade."

"Well said, old war-dog!" cried Aylward. "By my hilt! I pray that your dream may come true, for the prince hath not set us out here to drink broth or to gather whortleberries. One more fight, and I am ready to hang up my bow, marry a wife, and take to the fire corner. But how now, Robin? Whom is it that you seek?"

"The Lord Loring craves your attendance in his tent," said a young archer to Alleyne.

The squire rose and proceeded to the pavilion, where he found the knight seated upon a cushion, with his legs crossed in front of him and a broad ribbon of parchment laid across his knees, over which he was poring with frowning brows and pursed lips.

"It came this morning by the prince's messenger," said he, "and was brought from England by Sir John Fallislee, who is new come from Sussex. What make you of this upon the outer side?"

"It is fairly and clearly written," Alleyne answered, "and it signifies 'To Sir Nigel Loring, Knight, Constable of Twynham Castle, by the hand of Christopher, the servant of God at the priory of Christchurch.'"

"So I read it," said Sir Nigel. "Now I pray you to read what is set forth within."

Alleyne turned to the letter, and, as his eyes rested upon it, his face turned pale, and a cry of surprise and grief burst from his lips.

"What then?" asked the knight, peering at him anxiously. "There is nought amiss with the Lady Mary or with the Lady Maude?"

"It is my brother—my poor unhappy brother!" cried Alleyne, with his hand to his brow. "He is dead."

"By Saint Paul! I have never heard that he had shown so much love for you that you should mourn him so."

"Yet he was my brother—the only kith or kin that I had upon earth. Mayhap he had cause to be bitter against me, for his land was given to the Abbey for my upbringing. Alas! alas! and I raised my staff against him when last we met! he has been slain—and slain, I fear, amidst crime and violence."

"Ha!" said Sir Nigel. "Read on, I pray you."

"'God be with thee, my honoured lord, and have thee in His holy keeping. The Lady Loring hath asked me to set down in writing what hath befallen at Twynham, and all that concerns the death of thy ill neighbour, the Socman of Minstead. For when ye had left us, this evil man gathered around him all outlaws, villeins and masterless men, until they were come to such a force that they slew and scattered the king's men who went against them. Then, coming forth from the woods, they laid siege to thy castle, and for two days they girt us in and shot hard against us, with such numbers as were a marvel to see. Yet the Lady Loring held the place stoutly, and on the second day the Socman was slain—by his own men, as some think—so that we were delivered from their hands; for which praise be to all the saints, and more especially to the holy Anselm, upon whose feast it came to pass. The Lady Loring, and the Lady Maude, thy fair daughter, are in good health; and so also am I, save for an imposthume of the toe-joint, which hath been sent me for my sins. May all the saints preserve thee!'"

"It was the vision of the Lady Tiphaine," said Sir Nigel after a pause. "Marked you not how she said that the leader was one with a yellow beard, and how he fell before the gate? But how came it, Alleyne, that this woman, to whom all things are as crystal, and who hath not said one word which has not come to pass, was yet so led astray as to say that your thoughts turned to Twynham Castle even more than mine own?"

"My fair lord," said Alleyne, with a flush on his

weather-stained cheeks, " the Lady Tiphaine may have spoken sooth when she said it ; for Twynham Castle is in my heart by day and in my dreams by night."

" Ha ! " cried Sir Nigel, with a sidelong glance.

" Yes, my fair lord ; for, indeed, I love your daughter, the Lady Maude ; and, unworthy as I am, I would yet give my heart's blood to serve her."

" By Saint Paul ! Edricson," said the knight coldly, arching his eyebrows, " you aim high in this matter. Our blood is very old."

" And mine also is very old," answered the squire.

" And the Lady Maude is our single child. All our name and lands centre upon her."

" Alas ! that I should say it, but I also am now the only Edricson."

" And why have I not heard this from you before, Alleyne ? In sooth, I think that you have used me ill."

" Nay, my fair lord, say not so ; for I know not whether your daughter loves me, and there is no pledge between us."

Sir Nigel pondered for a few moments, and then burst out a-laughing. " By Saint Paul ! " said he, " I know not why I should mix in the matter, for I have ever found that the Lady Maude was very well able to look to her own affairs. Since first she could stamp her little foot, she hath ever been able to get that for which she craved ; and if she set her heart on thee, Alleyne, and thou on her, I do not think that this Spanish king, with his threescore thousand men, could hold you apart. Yet this I will say, that I would see you a full knight ere you go to my daughter with words of love. I have ever said that a brave lance should wed her ; and, by my soul ! Edricson, if God spare you, I think that you will acquit yourself well. But enough of such trifles, for we have our work before us, and it will be time to speak of this matter when we see the white cliffs of England once more. Go to Sir William Felton, I pray you, and ask him to come hither, for it is time that we were marching. There is no pass

at the further end of the valley, and it is a perilous place should the enemy come upon us."

Alleyne delivered his message, and then wandered forth from the camp, for his mind was all in a whirl with this unexpected news, and with his talk with Sir Nigel. Sitting upon a rock, with his burning brow resting upon his hands, he thought of his brother, of their quarrel, of the Lady Maude in her bedraggled riding-dress, of the grey old castle, of the proud pale face in the armoury, and of the last fiery words with which she had sped him on his way. Then he was but a penniless monk-bred lad, unknown and unfriended. Now he was himself Socman of Minstead, the head of an old stock, and the lord of an estate which, if reduced from its former size, was still ample to preserve the dignity of his family. Further, he had become a man of experience, was counted brave among brave men, had won the esteem and confidence of her father, and above all, had been listened to by him when he told him the secret of his love. As to the gaining of knighthood, in such stirring times it was no great matter for a brave squire of gentle birth to aspire to that honour. He would leave his bones among these Spanish ravines, or he would do some deed which would call the eyes of men upon him.

Alleyne was still seated on the rock, his griefs and his joys drifting swiftly over his mind like the shadow of clouds upon a sunlit meadow, when of a sudden he became conscious of a low, deep sound which came booming up to him through the fog. Close behind him he could hear the murmur of the bowmen, the occasional bursts of hoarse laughter, and the champing and stamping of their horses. Behind it all, however, came that low-pitched, deep-toned hum, which seemed to come from every quarter and to fill the whole air. In the old monastic days he remembered to have heard such a sound when he had walked out one windy night at Bucklershard, and had listened to the long waves breaking upon the shingly shore. Here, however, was neither wind nor sea, and yet

the dull murmur arose ever louder and stronger out of the heart of the rolling sea of vapour. He turned and ran to the camp, shouting an alarm at the top of his voice.

It was but a hundred paces, and yet ere he had crossed it every bowman was ready at his horse's head, and the group of knights were out and listening intently to the ominous sound.

"It is a great body of horse," said Sir William Felton, "and they are riding very swiftly hitherwards."

"Yet they must be from the prince's army," remarked Sir Richard Causton, "for they come from the north."

"Nay," said the Earl of Angus, "it is not so certain; for the peasant with whom we spoke last night said that it was rumoured that Don Tello, the Spanish king's brother, had ridden with six thousand chosen men to beat up the prince's camp. It may be that on their backward road they have come this way."

"By Saint Paul!" cried Sir Nigel, "I think that it is even as you say, for that same peasant had a sour face and a shifting eye, as one who bore us little goodwill. I doubt not that he has brought these cavaliers upon us."

"But the mist covers us," said Sir Simon Burley. "We have yet time to ride through the further end of the pass."

"Were we a troop of mountain goats we might do so," answered Sir William Felton, "but it is not to be passed by a company of horsemen. If these be indeed Don Tello and his men, then we must bide where we are, and do what we may to make them rue the day that they found us in their path."

"Well spoken, William!" cried Sir Nigel, in high delight. "If there be so many as has been said, then there will be much honour to be gained from them and every hope of advancement. But the sound has ceased, and I fear that they have gone some other way."

"Or mayhap they have come to the mouth of the gorge, and are marshalling their ranks. Hush and hearken! for they are no great way from us."

The Company stood peering into the dense fog-wreath amidst a silence so profound that the dripping of the water from the rocks and the breathing of the horses grew loud upon the ear. Suddenly from out the sea of mist came the shrill sound of a neigh, followed by a long blast upon a bugle.

"It is a Spanish call, my fair lord," said Black Simon. "It is used by their prickers and huntsmen when the beast hath not fled, but is still in its lair."

"By my faith," said Sir Nigel, smiling, "if they are in a humour for venerie we may promise them some sport ere they sound the mort over us. But there is a hill in the centre of the gorge on which we might make our stand."

"I marked it yester-night," said Felton, "and no better spot could be found for our purpose, for it is very steep at the back. It is but a bow shot to the left, and, indeed, I can see the shadow of it."

The whole Company, leading their horses, passed across to the small hill which loomed in front of them out of the mist. It was, indeed, admirably designed for defence, for it sloped down in front, all jagged and boulder-strewn, while it fell away behind in a sheer cliff of a hundred feet or more. On the summit was a small, uneven plateau, with a stretch across of a hundred paces, and a depth of half as much again.

"Unloose the horses!" said Sir Nigel. "We have no space for them, and if we hold our own we shall have horses and to spare when this day's work is done. Nay, keep yours, my fair sirs, for we may have work for them. Aylward, Johnston, let your men form a harrow on either side of the ridge. Sir Oliver and you, my Lord Angus, I give you the right wing, and the left to you, Sir Simon, and to you, Sir Richard Causton. I and Sir William Felton will hold the centre with our men-at-arms. Now order the ranks, and fling wide the banners, for our souls are God's and our bodies the king's, and our swords for Saint George and for England!"

Sir Nigel had scarcely spoken when the mist seemed to

thin in the valley, and to shred away into long ragged clouds which trailed from the edges of the cliffs. The gorge in which they had camped was a mere wedge-shaped cleft among the hills, three-quarters of a mile deep, with a small rugged rising upon which they stood at the farther end, and the brown crags walling it in on three sides. As the mist parted and the sun broke through it gleamed and shimmered with dazzling brightness upon the armour and head-pieces of a vast body of horsemen who stretched across the barranca from one cliff to the other, and extended backwards until their rearguard were far out upon the plain beyond. Line after line, and rank after rank, they choked the neck of the valley with a long vista of tossing pennons, twinkling lances, waving plumes and streaming banderoles, while the curvets and gambades of the chargers lent a constant motion and shimmer to the glittering many-coloured mass. A yell of exultation, and a forest of waving steel through the length and breadth of their column announced that they could at last see their entrapped enemies, while the swelling notes of a hundred bugles and drums, mixed with the clash of Moorish cymbals, broke forth into a proud peal of martial triumph. Strange it was to these gallant and sparkling cavaliers of Spain to look upon this handful of men upon the hill, the thin lines of bowmen, the knot of knights and men-at-arms with armour rusted and discoloured from long service, and to learn that these were indeed the soldiers whose fame and prowess had been the camp-fire talk of every army in Christendom. Very still and silent they stood, leaning upon their bows, while their leaders took counsel together in front of them. No clang of bugle rose from their stern ranks, but in the centre waved the leopards of England, on the right the ensign of the Company with the roses of Loring, and on the left, over threescore of Welsh bowmen, there floated the red banner of Merlin with the boars' heads of the Buttesthorns. Gravely and sedately they stood beneath the morning sun waiting for the onslaught of their foemen.

"By Saint Paul!" said Sir Nigel, gazing with puckered eye down the valley, "there appear to be some very worthy people among them. What is this golden banner which waves upon the left?"

"It is the ensign of the Knights of Calatrava," answered Felton.

"And the other upon the right?"

"It marks the Knights of Santiago, and I see by his flag that their grand-master rides at their head. There, too, is the banner of Castile amid yonder sparkling squadron which heads the main battle. There are six thousand men-at-arms with ten squadrons of slingers, as far as I may judge their numbers."

"There are Frenchmen among them, my fair lord," remarked Black Simon. "I can see the pennons of De Couvette, De Brieux, Saint Pol and many others who struck in against us for Charles of Blois."

"You are right," said Sir William, "for I can also see them. There is much Spanish blazonry also, if I could but read it. Don Diego, you know the arms of your own land. Who are they who have done us this honour?"

The Spanish prisoner looked with exultant eyes upon the deep and serried ranks of his countrymen.

"By Saint James!" said he, "if ye fall this day ye fall by no mean hands, for the flower of the knighthood of Castile ride under the banner of Don Tello, with the chivalry of Asturias, Toledo, Leon, Cordova, Galicia and Seville. I see the guidons of Albornez, Caçorla, Rodriguez, Tavora, with the two great orders, and the knights of France and of Aragon. If you will take my rede you will come to a composition with them, for they will give you such terms as you have given me."

"Nay, by Saint Paul! it were pity if so many brave men were drawn together, and no little deed of arms to come of it. Ha! William, they advance upon us; and, by my soul! it is a sight that is worth coming over the seas to see."

As he spoke, the two wings of the Spanish host, con-

sisting of the Knights of Calatrava on the one side and of Santiago upon the other, came swooping swiftly down the valley, while the main body followed more slowly behind. Five hundred paces from the English the two great bodies of horse crossed each other, and sweeping round in a curve, retired in feigned confusion towards their centre. Often in bygone days had the Moors tempted the hot-blooded Spaniards from their places of strength by such pretended flights, but there were men upon the hill to whom every ruse and trick of war were as their daily trade and practice. Again and ever nearer came the rallying Spaniards, and again with cry of fear and stooping bodies they swerved off to right and left, but the English still stood stolid and observant among their rocks. The vanguard halted a long bow-shot from the hill, and with waving spears and vaunting shouts challenged their enemies to come forth, while two cavaliers, pricking forward from the glittering ranks, walked their horses slowly between the two arrays with targets braced and lances in rest like the challengers in a tourney.

"By Saint Paul!" cried Sir Nigel, with his one eye glowing like an ember, "these appear to be two very worthy and debonair gentlemen. I do not call to mind when I have seen any people who seemed of so great a heart and so high of enterprise. We have our horses, Sir William: shall we not relieve them of any vow which they may have upon their souls?"

Felton's reply was to bound upon his charger, and to urge it down the slope, while Sir Nigel followed not three spears' lengths behind him. It was a rugged course, rocky and uneven; yet the two knights, choosing their men, dashed onwards at the top of their speed, while the gallant Spaniards flew as swiftly to meet them. The one to whom Felton found himself opposed was a tall stripling with a stag's head upon his shield, while Sir Nigel's man was broad and squat, with plain steel harness, and a pink and white torse bound round his helmet. The first struck Felton on the target with such force as to split it

from side to side, but Sir William's lance crashed through the camail which shielded the Spaniard's throat, and he fell, screaming hoarsely, to the ground. Carried away by the heat and madness of fight, the English knight never drew rein, but charged straight on into the array of the Knights of Calatrava. Long time the silent ranks upon the hill could see a swirl and eddy deep down in the heart of the Spanish column, with a circle of rearing chargers and flashing blades. Here and there tossed the white plume of the English helmet, rising and falling like the foam upon a wave, with the fierce gleam and sparkle ever circling round it, until at last it had sunk from view, and another brave man had turned from war to peace.

Sir Nigel, meanwhile, had found a foeman worthy of his steel, for his opponent was none other than an Sebastian Gomez, the picked lance of the monkish Knights of Santiago, who had won fame in a hundred bloody combats with the Moors of Andalusia. So fierce was their meeting that their spears shivered up to the very grasp, and the horses reared backwards until it seemed that they must crash down upon their riders. Yet with consummate horsemanship they both swung round in a long curvet, and then, plucking out their swords, they lashed at each other like two lusty smiths hammering upon an anvil. The chargers spun round each other, biting and striking, while the two blades wheeled and whizzled and circled in gleams of dazzling light. Cut, parry and thrust followed so swiftly upon each other that the eye could not follow them, until at last, coming thigh to thigh, they cast their arms round each other and rolled off their saddles to the ground. The heavier Spaniard threw himself upon his enemy, and pinning him down beneath him raised his sword to slay him, while a shout of triumph rose from the ranks of his countrymen. But the fatal blow never fell, for even as his arm quivered, before descending, the Spaniard gave a shudder, and, stiffening himself, rolled heavily over upon his side, with the blood gushing from his armpit and from the slit of his vizor. Sir Nigel

sprang to his feet with his bloody dagger in his left hand and gazed down upon his adversary, but that fatal and sudden stab in the vital spot, which the Spaniard had exposed by raising his arm, had proved instantly mortal. The Englishman leaped upon his horse and made for the hill, at the very instant that a yell of rage from a thousand voices and the clang of a score of bugles announced the Spanish onset.

But the islanders were ready and eager for the encounter. With feet firmly planted, their sleeves rolled back to give free play to their muscles, their long yellow bow-staves in their left hands, and their quivers slung to the front, they had waited in the four-deep harrow formation which gave strength to their array, and yet permitted every man to draw his arrow freely without harm to those in front. Aylward and Johnston had been engaged in throwing light tufts of grass into the air to gauge the wind force, and a hoarse whisper passed down the ranks from the file-leaders to the men, with scraps of advice and admonition.

"Do not shoot outside the fifteen-score paces," cried Johnston. "We may need all our shafts ere we have done with them."

"Better to overshoot than to undershoot," added Aylward. "Better to strike the rearguard than to feather a shaft in the earth."

"Loose quick and sharp when they come," added another. "Let it be the eye to the string, the string to the shaft, and the shaft to the mark. By Our Lady! their banners advance, and we must hold our ground now if ever we are to see Southampton Water again."

Alleyne, standing with his sword drawn amidst the archers, saw a long toss and heave of the glittering squadrons. Then the front ranks began to surge slowly forward, to trot, to canter, to gallop, and in an instant the whole vast array was hurtling onward, line after line, the air full of the thunder of their cries, the ground shaking with the beat of their hoofs, the valley choked with the

rushing torrent of steel, topped by the waving plumes, the slanting spears and the fluttering banderoles. On they swept over the level and up to the slope, ere they met the blinding storm of the English arrows. Down went whole ranks in a whirl of mad confusion, horses plunging and kicking, bewildered men falling, rising, staggering on or back, while ever new lines of horsemen came spurring through the gaps and urged their chargers up the fatal slope. All around him Alleyne could hear the stern short orders of the master-bowmen, while the air was filled with the keen twanging of the strings and the swish and patter of the shafts. Right across the foot of the hill there had sprung up a long wall of struggling horses and stricken men, which ever grew and heightened as fresh squadrons poured on the attack. One young knight on a grey jennet leaped over his fallen comrades and galloped swiftly up the hill shrieking loudly upon Saint James, ere he fell within a spear-length of the English line, with the feathers of arrows thrusting out from every crevice and joint of his armour. So for five long minutes the gallant horsemen of Spain and France strove ever and again to force a passage until the wailing note of a bugle called them back, and they rode slowly out of bow-shot, leaving their best and their bravest in the ghastly blood-mottled heap behind them.

But there was little rest for the victors. Whilst the knights had charged them in front the slingers had crept round upon either flank and had gained a footing upon the cliffs and behind the outlying rocks. A storm of stones broke suddenly upon the defenders, who, drawn up in lines upon the exposed summit, offered a fair mark to their hidden foes. Johnston, the old archer, was struck upon the temple and fell dead without a groan, while fifteen of his bowmen and six of the men-at-arms were struck down at the same moment. The others lay on their faces to avoid the deadly hail, while at each side of the plateau a fringe of bowmen exchanged shots with the slingers and cross-bowmen among the rocks, aiming

mainly at those who had swarmed up the cliffs, and bursting into laughter and cheers when a well-aimed shaft brought one of their opponents toppling down from his lofty perch.

"I think, Nigel," said Sir Oliver, striding across to the little knight, "that we should all acquit ourselves better had we our none-meat, for the sun is high in the heaven."

"By Saint Paul!" quoth Sir Nigel, plucking the patch from his eye, "I think that I am now clear of my vow, for this Spanish knight was a person from whom much honour might be won. Indeed, he was a very worthy gentleman, of good courage, and great hardiness, and it grieves me that he should have come by such a hurt. As to what you say of food, Oliver, it is not to be thought of, for we have nothing with us upon the hill."

"Nigel!" cried Sir Simon Burley, hurrying up with consternation upon his face, "Aylward tells me that there are not ten-score arrows left in all their sheaves. See! they are springing from their horses, and cutting their sollerets that they may rush upon us. Might we not even now make a retreat?"

"My soul will retreat from my body first!" cried the little knight. "Here I am, and here I abide, while God gives me strength to lift a sword."

"And so say I!" shouted Sir Oliver, throwing his mace high into the air and catching it again by the handle.

"To your arms, men!" roared Sir Nigel. "Shoot while you may, and then out sword, and let us live or die together!"

## 37. *How the White Company came to be Disbanded*

THEN up rose from the hill in the rugged Cantabrian valley a sound such as had not been heard in those parts before, nor was again, until the streams which rippled amid the rocks had been frozen by over four hundred

winters and thawed by as many returning springs. Deep and full and strong it thundered down the ravine, the fierce battle-call of a warrior race, the last stern welcome to whoso should join with them in that world-old game where the stake is death. Thrice it swelled forth and thrice it sank away, echoing and reverberating amidst the crags. Then, with set faces, the Company rose up among the storm of stones, and looked down upon the thousands who sped swiftly up the slope against them. Horse and spear had been set aside, but on foot, with sword and battle-axe, their broad shields slung in front of them, the chivalry of Spain rushed to the attack.

And now arose a struggle so fell, so long, so evenly sustained, that even now the memory of it is handed down amonst the Cantabrian mountaineers, and the ill-omened knoll is still pointed out by fathers to their children as the "Altura de los Ingleses," where the men from across the sea fought the great fight with the knights of the south. The last arrow was quickly shot, nor could the slingers hurl their stones, so close were friend and foe. From side to side stretched the thin line of the English, lightly armed and quick-footed, while against it stormed and raged the pressing throng of fiery Spaniards and of gallant Bretons. The clink of crossing sword-blades, the dull thudding of heavy blows, the panting and gasping of weary and wounded men, all rose together in a wild long-drawn note, which swelled upwards to the ears of the wondering peasants who looked down from the edges of the cliffs upon the swaying turmoil of the battle beneath them. Back and forward reeled the leopard banner, now borne up the slope by the rush and weight of the onslaught, now pushing downwards again as Sir Nigel, Burley and Black Simon, with their veteran men-at-arms flung themselves madly into the fray. Alleyne, at his lord's right hand, found himself swept hither and thither in the desperate struggle, exchanging savage thrusts one instant with a Spanish cavalier, and the next torn away by the whirl of men and dashed up against some new antagonist.

To the right Sir Oliver, Aylward, Hordle John and the bowmen of the Company fought furiously against the monkish Knights of Santiago, who were led up the hill by their prior—a great deep-chested man, who wore a brown monastic habit over his suit of mail. Three archers he slew in three giant strokes, but Sir Oliver flung his arms round him, and the two, staggering and straining, reeled backwards and fell, locked in each other's grasp, over the edge of the steep cliff which flanked the hill. In vain his knights stormed and raved against the thin line which barred their path; the sword of Aylward and the great axe of John gleamed in the forefront of the battle, and the huge jagged pieces of rock, hurled by the strong arms of the bowmen, crashed and hurtled amid their ranks. Slowly they gave back down the hill, the archers still hanging upon their skirts, with a long litter of writhing and twisted figures to mark the course which they had taken. At the same instant the Welshmen upon the left, led on by the Scotch earl, had charged out from among the rocks which sheltered them, and by the fury of their outfall had driven the Spaniards in front of them in headlong flight down the hill. In the centre only things seemed to be going ill with the defenders. Black Simon was down—dying, as he would wish to have died, like a grim old wolf in its lair—with a ring of his slain around him. Twice Sir Nigel had been overborne, and twice Alleyne had fought over him until he had staggered to his feet once more. Burley lay senseless, stunned by a blow from a mace, and half of the men-at-arms lay littered upon the ground around him. Sir Nigel's shield was broken, his crest shorn, his armour cut and smashed, and the vizor torn from his helmet; yet he sprang hither and thither with light foot and ready hand, engaging two Bretons and a Spaniard at the same instant—thrusting, stooping, dashing in, springing out—while Alleyne still fought by his side, stemming with a handful of men the fierce tide which surged up against them. Yet it would have fared ill with them had not the archers from either

side closed in upon the flanks of the attackers, and pressed them very slowly and foot by foot down the long slope, until they were on the plain once more, where their fellows were already rallying for a fresh assault.

But terrible indeed was the cost at which the last had been repelled. Of the three hundred and seventy men who had held the crest, one hundred and seventy-two were left standing, many of whom were sorely wounded and weak from loss of blood. Sir Oliver Buttesthorn, Sir Richard Causton, Sir Simon Burley, Black Simon, Johnston, a hundred and fifty archers and forty-seven men-at-arms had fallen, while the pitiless hail of stones was already whizzing and piping once more about their ears, threatening every instant to further reduce their numbers.

Sir Nigel looked about him at his shattered ranks, and his face flushed with a soldier's pride.

"By Saint Paul!" he cried, "I have fought in many a little bickering, but never one that I would be more loth to have missed than this. But you are wounded, Alleyne?"

"It is nought," answered his squire, staunching the blood which dripped from a sword-cut across his forehead.

"These gentlemen of Spain seem to be most courteous and worthy people. I see that they are already forming to continue this debate with us. Form up the bowmen two deep instead of four. By my faith! some very brave men have gone from among us. Aylward, you are a trusty soldier, for all that your shoulder has never felt accolade, nor your heels worn the gold spurs. Do you take charge of the right; I will hold the centre, and you, my Lord of Angus, the left."

"Ho! for Sir Samkin Aylward!" cried a rough voice among the archers, and a roar of laughter greeted their new leader.

"By my hilt!" cried the old bowman, "I never thought to lead a wing in a stricken field. Stand close, camarades, for, by these finger-bones! we must play the man this day."

"Come hither, Alleyne," said Sir Nigel, walking back to the edge of the cliff which formed the rear of their position. "And you, Norbury," he continued, beckoning to the squire of Sir Oliver, "do you also come here."

The two squires hurried across to him, and the three stood looking down into the rocky ravine which lay a hundred and fifty feet beneath them.

"The prince must hear of how things are with us," said the knight. "Another onfall we may withstand, but they are many and we are few, so that the time must come when we can no longer form line across the hill. Yet if help were brought us we might hold the crest until it comes. See yonder horses which stray among the rocks beneath us?"

"I see them, fair lord."

"And see yonder path which winds along the hill upon the further end of the valley?"

"I see it."

"Were you on those horses, and riding up yonder track, steep and rough as it is, I think that ye might gain the valley beyond. Then on to the prince, and tell him how we fare."

"But, my fair lord, how can we hope to reach the horses?" asked Norbury.

"Ye cannot go round to them, for they would be upon ye ere ye could come to them. Think ye that ye have heart enough to clamber down this cliff?"

"Had we but a rope."

"There is one here. It is but one hundred feet long, and for the rest ye must trust God and to your fingers. Can you try it, Alleyne?"

"With all my heart, my dear lord, but how can I leave you in such a strait?"

"Nay, it is to serve me that ye go. And you, Norbury?"

The silent squire said nothing, but he took up the rope, and, having examined it, he tied one end firmly round a projecting rock. Then he cast off his breastplate, thigh-

pieces and greaves, while Alleyne followed his example.

"Tell Chandos, or Calverley, or Knolles, should the prince have gone forward," cried Sir Nigel. "Now may God speed ye, for ye are brave and worthy men."

It was, indeed, a task which might make the heart of the bravest sink within him. The thin cord, dangling down the face of the brown cliff, seemed from above to reach little more than halfway down it. Beyond stretched the rugged rock, wet and shiny, with a green tuft here and there thrusting out from it, but little sign of ridge or foothold. Far below the jagged points of the boulders bristled up, dark and menacing. Norbury tugged thrice with all his strength upon the cord, and then lowered himself over the edge, while a hundred anxious faces peered over at him as he slowly clambered downwards to the end of the rope. Twice he stretched out his foot, and twice he failed to reach the point at which he aimed, but even as he swung himself for a third effort a stone from a sling buzzed like a wasp from amid the rocks and struck him full upon the side of his head. His grasp relaxed, his feet slipped, and in an instant he was a crushed and mangled corpse upon the sharp ridges beneath him.

"If I have no better fortune," said Alleyne, leading Sir Nigel aside, "I pray you, my dear lord, that you will give my humble service to the Lady Maude, and say to her that I was ever her true servant and most unworthy cavalier."

The old knight said no word, but he put a hand on either shoulder, and kissed his squire, with the tears shining in his eyes. Alleyne sprang to the rope, and sliding down swiftly, soon found himself at its extremity. From above it seemed as though rope and cliff were well-nigh touching, but now, when swinging a hundred feet down, the squire found that he could scarce reach the face of the rock with his foot, and that it was as smooth as glass, with no resting-place where a mouse could stand. Some three feet lower, however, his eye lit on a long jagged crack which slanted downwards, and this he must reach

if he would save not only his own poor life but that of the eight score men above him. Yet it were madness to spring for that narrow slit with nought but the wet smooth rock to cling to. He swung for a moment, full of thought, and even as he hung there another of the hellish stones sang though his curls, and struck a chip from the face of the cliff. Up he clambered a few feet, drew up the loose end after him, unslung his belt, held on with knee and with elbow while he spliced the long tough leathern belt to the end of the cord ; then lowering himself as far as he could go, he swung backwards and forwards until his hand reached the crack, when he left the rope and clung to the face of the cliff. Another stone struck him on the side, and he heard a sound like a breaking stick, with a keen stabbing pain which shot through his chest. Yet it was no time now to think of pain or ache. There was his lord and his eight score comrades, and they must be plucked from the jaws of death. On he clambered, with his hands shuffling down the long sloping crack, sometimes bearing all his weight upon his arms, at others finding some small shelf or tuft on which to rest his foot. Would he never pass over that fifty feet? He dared not look down, and could but grope slowly onwards, his face to the cliff, his fingers clutching, his feet scraping and feeling for a support. Every vein and crack and mottling of that face of rock remained for ever stamped upon his memory. At last, however, his foot came upon a broad resting-place, and he ventured to cast a glance downwards. Thank God! he had reached the highest of those fatal pinnacles upon which his comrade had fallen. Quickly now he sprang from rock to rock until his feet were on the ground, and he had his hand stretched out for the horse's rein, when a sling-stone struck him on the head, and he dropped senseless upon the ground.

An evil blow it was for Alleyne, but a worse one still for him who struck it. The Spanish slinger, seeing the youth lie slain, and judging from his dress that he was no common man, rushed forward to plunder him, knowing well

that the bowmen above him had expended their last shaft. He was still three paces, however, from his victim's side when John upon the cliff above plucked up a huge boulder and, poising it for an instant, dropped it with fatal aim upon the slinger beneath him. It struck upon his shoulder and hurled him, crushed and screaming, to the ground, while Alleyne, recalled to his senses by these shrill cries in his very ear, staggered on to his feet, and gazed wildly about him. His eyes fell upon the horses grazing upon the scanty pasture, and in an instant all had come back to him—his mission, his comrades, the need for haste. He was dizzy, sick, faint, but he must not die, and he must not tarry, for his life meant many lives that day. In an instant he was in his saddle and spurring down the valley.

Loud rang the swift charger's hoofs over rock and reef, while the fire flew from the stroke of iron, and the loose stones showered up behind him. But his head was whirling round, the blood was gushing from his brow, his temple, his mouth. Ever keener and sharper was the deadly pain which shot like a red-hot arrow through his side. He felt that his eye was glazing, his senses slipping from him, his grasp upon the reins relaxing. Then, with one mighty effort, he called up all his strength for a single minute. Stooping down he loosened the stirrup-straps, bound his knees tightly to his saddle flaps, twisted his hands in the bridle, and then, putting the gallant horse's head for the mountain path, he dashed the spurs in and fell forward fainting, with his face buried in the coarse black mane.

Little could he ever remember of that wild ride. Half conscious, but ever with one thought beating in his mind, he goaded the horse onwards, rushing swiftly down steep ravines, over huge boulders, along the edges of black abysses. Dim memories he had of beetling cliffs, of a group of huts with wondering faces at the doors, of foaming, clattering water, and of a bristle of mountain beeches. Once, ere he had ridden far, he heard behind him three deep sullen shouts, which told him that his comrades

had set their faces to the foe once more. Then all was blank, until he woke to find kindly blue English eyes peering down upon him and to hear the blessed sound of his country's speech.

They were but a foraging party—a hundred archers and as many men-at-arms—but their leader was Sir Hugh Calverley, and he was not a man to bide idle when good blows were to be had not three leagues from him. A scout was sent flying with a message to the camp, and Sir Hugh, with his two hundred men, thundered off to the rescue. With them went Alleyne, still bound to his saddle, still dripping with blood, and swooning and recovering, and swooning once again. On they rode, and on, until at last, topping a ridge, they looked down upon the fateful valley. Alas! and alas! for the sight that met their eyes.

There, beneath them, was the blood-bathed hill, and from the highest pinnacle there flaunted the yellow and white banner with the lions and the towers of the royal house of Castile. Up the long slop rushed ranks and ranks of men—exultant, shouting, with waving pennons and brandished arms. Over the whole summit were dense throngs of knights, with no enemy that could be seen to face them save only that at one corner of the plateau an eddy and swirl amid the crowded mass seemed to show that all resistance was not yet at an end. At the sight a deep groan of rage and of despair went up from the baffled rescuers, and, spurring on their horses, they clattered down the long and winding path which led to the valley beneath.

But they were too late to avenge, as they had been too late to save. Long ere they could gain the level ground, the Spaniards, seeing them riding swiftly amid the rocks, and being ignorant of their numbers, drew off from the captured hill, and, having secured their few prisoners, rode slowly in a long column, with drum-beating and cymbal-clashing, out of the valley. Their rear ranks were already passing out of sight ere the new comers

were urging their panting, foaming horses up the slope which had been the scene of that long-drawn and bloody fight.

And a fearsome sight it was that met their eyes ! Across the lower end lay the dense heap of men and horses where the first arrowstorm had burst. Above, the bodies of the dead and the dying—French, Spanish and Aragonese—lay thick and thicker, until they covered the whole ground two and three deep in one dreadful tangle of slaughter. Above them lay the Englishmen in their lines, even as they had stood, and higher yet upon the plateau, a wild medley of the dead of all nations, where the last deadly grapple had left them. In the farther corner, under the shadow of a great rock, there crouched seven bowmen, with great John in the centre of them—all wounded, weary and in sorry case, but still unconquered, with their blood-stained weapons waving and their voices ringing a welcome to their countrymen. Alleyne rode across to John, while Sir Hugh Calverley followed close behind him.

" By Saint George ! " cried Sir Hugh, " I have never seen signs of so stern a fight, and I am right glad that we have been in time to save you."

" You have saved more than us," said John, pointing to the banner which leaned against the rock behind him.

" You have done nobly," cried the old Free Companion, gazing with a soldier's admiration at the huge frame and bold face of the archer. " But why is it, my good fellow, that you sit upon this man ? "

" By the rood ! I had forgot him," John answered, rising and dragging from under him no less a person than the Spanish caballero, Don Diego Alvarez. " This man, my fair lord, means to me a new house, ten cows, one bull —if it be but a little one—a grindstone, and I know not what beside ; so that I thought it well to sit upon him, lest he should take a fancy to leave me."

" Tell me, John," cried Alleyne, faintly, " where is my dear lord, Sir Nigel Loring ? "

" He is dead, I fear. I saw them throw his body across

a horse and ride away with it, but I fear the life had gone from him."

"Now woe worth me! And where is Aylward?"

"He sprang upon a riderless horse and rode after Sir Nigel to save him. I saw them throng around him, and he is either taken or slain."

"Blow the bugles!" cried Sir Hugh, with a scowling brow. "We must back to camp, and ere three days I trust that we may see these Spaniards again. I would fain have ye all in my company."

"We are of the White Company, my fair lord," said John.

"Nay, the White Company is here disbanded," answered Sir Hugh solemnly, looking round him at the lines of silent figures. "Look to the brave squire, for I fear that he will never see the sun rise again."

## 38. *Of the Home-coming to Hampshire*

IT was a bright July morning four months after that fatal fight in the Spanish barranca. A blue heaven stretched above, a green rolling plain undulated below, intersected with hedgerows and flecked with grazing sheep. The sun was yet low in the heaven, and the red cows stood in the long shadow of the elms, chewing the cud and gazing with great vacant eyes at two horsemen who were spurring it down the long white road which dipped and curved away back to where the towers and pinnacles beneath the flat-topped hill marked the old town of Winchester.

Of the riders, one was young, graceful and fair, clad in plain doublet and hosen of blue Brussels cloth, which served to show his active and well-knit figure. A flat velvet cap was drawn forward to keep the glare from his eyes, and he rode with lips compressed and anxious face, as one who has much care upon his mind. Young as he was, and peaceful as was his dress, the dainty golden spurs

which twinkled upon his heels proclaimed his knighthood, while a long seam upon his brow and a scar upon his temple gave a manly grace to his refined and delicate countenance. His comrade was a large red-headed man upon a great black horse, with a huge canvas bag slung from his saddle-bow, which jingled and clinked with every movement of his steed. His broad brown face was lighted up by a continual smile, and he looked slowly from side to side with eyes which twinkled and shone with delight. Well might John rejoice, for was he not back in his native Hampshire, had he not Don Diego's five thousand crowns rasping against his knee, and above all was he not himself squire now to Sir Alleyne Edricson, the young Socman of Minstead, lately knighted by the sword of the Black Prince himself, and esteemed by the whole army as one of the most rising of the soldiers of England?

For the last stand of the Company had been told throughout Christendom wherever a brave deed of arms was loved, and honours had flowed in upon the few who had survived it. For two months Alleyne had wavered betwixt death and life, with a broken rib and a shattered head, yet youth and strength and a cleanly life were all upon his side, and he awoke from his long delirium to find that the war was over, that the Spaniards and their allies had been crushed at Navaretta, and that the prince himself had heard the tale of his ride for succour, and had come in person to his bedside to touch his shoulder with his sword, and to ensure that so brave and true a man should die, if he could not live, within the order of chivalry. The instant that he could set foot to ground, Alleyne had started in search of his lord, but no word could he hear of him, dead or alive, and he had come home now sad-hearted in the hope of raising money upon his estates and so starting upon his quest once more. Landing at London he had hurried on with a mind full of care, for he had heard no word from Hampshire since the short note which had announced his brother's death.

"By the rood!" cried John, looking around him exul-

tantly, "where have we seen since we left such noble cows, such fleecy sheep, grass so green, or a man so drunk as yonder rogue who lies in the gap of the hedge?"

"Ah, John," Alleyne answered wearily, "it is well for you, but I never thought that my home-coming would be so sad a one. My heart is heavy for my dear lord and for Aylward, and I know not how I may break the news to the Lady Mary and to the Lady Maude, if they have not yet had tidings of it."

John gave a groan which made the horses shy. "It is indeed a black business," said he. "But be not sad, for I shall give half these crowns to my old mother, and half will I add to the money which you may have, and so we shall buy that yellow cog wherein we sail to Bordeaux, and in it we shall go forth and seek Sir Nigel."

Alleyne smiled, but shook his head. "Were he alive we should have had word of him ere now," said he. "But what is this town before us?"

"Why, it is Romsey!" cried John. "See the tower of the old grey church, and the long stretch of the nunnery. But here sits a very holy man, and I shall give him a crown for his prayers."

Three large stones formed a rough cot by the roadside, and beside it, basking in the sun, sat the hermit, with clay-coloured face, dull eyes and long withered hands. With crossed ankles and sunken head, he sat as though all his life had passed out of him, with the beads slipping slowly through his thin yellow fingers. Behind him lay the narrow cell, clay floored and damp, comfortless, profitless and sordid. Beyond it there lay amid the trees the wattle-and-daub hut of a labourer, the door open, and the single room exposed to the view. The man, ruddy and yellow-haired, stood leaning upon the spade wherewith he had been at work upon the garden patch. From behind him came the ripple of a happy woman's laughter, and two young urchins darted forth from the hut, bare-legged and towsy, while the mother, stepping out, laid her hand upon her husband's arm and watched the gam-

bols of the children. The hermit frowned at the untoward noise which broke upon his prayers, but his brow relaxed as he looked upon the broad silver piece which John held out to him.

"There lies the image of our past and of our future," cried Alleyne, as they rode on upon their way. "Now, which is better, to till God's earth, to have happy faces round one's knee, and to love and be loved, or to sit for ever moaning over one's soul, like a mother over a sick babe?"

"I know not about that," said John, "for it casts a great cloud over me when I think of such matters. But I know that my crown was well spent, for the man had the look of a very holy person. As to the other, there was nought holy about him that I could see, and it would be cheaper for me to pray for myself than to give a crown to one who spent his days in digging for lettuces."

Ere Alleyne could answer there swung round the curve of the road a lady's carriage drawn by three horses abreast with a postilion upon the outer one. Very fine and rich it was, with beams painted and gilt, wheels and spokes carved in strange figures, and over all an arched cover of red and white tapestry. Beneath its shade there sat a stout and elderly lady in a pink *côte-hardie*, leaning back among a pile of cushions, and plucking out her eyebrows with a small pair of silver tweezers. None could seem more safe and secure and at her ease than this lady, yet here also was a symbol of human life, for in an instant, even as Alleyne reined aside to let the carriage pass, a wheel flew out from among its fellows, and over it all toppled—carving, tapestry and gilt—in one wild heap, with the horses plunging, the postilion shouting and the lady screaming from within. In an instant Alleyne and John were on foot, and had lifted her forth all in a shake with fear, but little the worse for her mischance.

"Now woe worth me!" she cried, "and ill fall on Michael Easover of Romsey! for I told him that the pin was loose, and yet he must needs gainsay me, like the foolish daffe that he is."

"I trust that you have taken no hurt, my fair lady," said Alleyne, conducting her to the bank, upon which John had already placed a cushion.

"Nay, I have had no scath, though I have lost my silver tweezers. Now, lack-a-day! did God ever put breath into such a fool as Michael Easover of Romsey? But I am much beholden to you, gentle sirs. Soldiers ye are, as one may readily see. I am myself a soldier's daughter," she added, casting a somewhat languishing glance at John, "and my heart ever goes out to a brave man."

"We are indeed fresh from Spain," quoth Alleyne.

"From Spain, say you? Ah! it was an ill and sorry thing that so many should throw away the lives that Heaven gave them. In sooth, it is bad for those who fall, but worse for those who bide behind. I have but now bid farewell to one who hath lost all in this cruel war."

"And how that, lady?"

"She is a young damsel of these parts, and she goes now into a nunnery. Alack! it is not a year since she was the fairest maid from Avon to Itchen, and now it was more than I could abide to wait at Romsey Nunnery to see her put the white veil upon her face, for she was made for a wife and not for the cloister. Did you ever, gentle sir, hear of a body of men called 'The White Company' over yonder?"

"Surely so," cried both the comrades.

"Her father was the leader of it, and her lover served under him as squire. News hath come that not one of the Company was left alive, and so, poor lamb, she hath——"

"Lady!" cried Alleyne, with catching breath, "is it the Lady Maude Loring of whom you speak?"

"It is, in sooth."

"Maude! And in a nunnery! Did, then, the thought of her father's death so move her?"

"Her father!" cried the lady, smiling. "Nay; Maude is a good daughter, but I think it was this young golden-haired squire of whom I have heard who has made her turn her back upon the world."

"And I stand talking here!" cried Alleyne wildly. "Come, John, come!"

Rushing to his horse, he swung himself into the saddle, and was off down the road in a rolling cloud of dust as fast as his good steed could bear him.

Great had been the rejoicing amid the Romsey nuns when the Lady Maude Loring had craved admission into their order—for was she not sole child and heiress of the old knight, with farms and fiefs which she could bring to the great nunnery? Long and earnest had been the talks of the gaunt lady abbess, in which she had conjured the young novice to turn for ever from the world, and to rest her bruised heart under the broad and peaceful shelter of the Church. And now, when all was settled, and when abbess and lady superior had had their will, it was but fitting that some pomp and show should mark the glad occasion. Hence it was that the good burghers of Romsey were all in the streets, that gay flags and flowers brightened the path from the nunnery to the church, and that a long procession wound up to the old arch door, leading up the bride to these spiritual nuptials. There was lay-sister Agatha with the high gold crucifix, and the three incense-bearers, and the two-and-twenty garbed in white, who cast flowers upon either side of them and sang sweetly the while. Then, with four attendants, came the novice, her drooping head wreathed with white blossoms, and, behind, the abbess and her council of older nuns, who were already counting in their minds whether their own bailiff could manage the farms of Twynham, or whether a reeve would be needed beneath him to draw the utmost from these new possessions which this young novice was about to bring them.

But alas! for plots and plans when love and youth and nature, and, above all, fortune are arrayed against them. Who is this travel-stained youth who dares to ride so madly through the lines of staring burghers? Why does he fling himself from his horse and stare so strangely about him? See how he has rushed through the incense-

bearers, thrust aside lay-sister Agatha, scattered the two-and-twenty damosels who sang so sweetly—and he stands before the novice with his hands outstretched, and his face shining, and the light of love in his grey eyes. Her foot is on the very threshold of the church, and yet he bars the way—and she, she thinks no more of the wise words and holy rede of the lady abbess, but she hath given a sobbing cry and hath fallen forward with his arms around her drooping body and her wet cheek upon his breast. A sorry sight this for the gaunt abbess, an ill lesson, too, for the stainless two-and-twenty who have ever been taught that the way of nature is the way of sin. But Maude and Alleyne care little for this. A dank cold air comes out from the black arch before them. Without, the sun shines bright and the birds are singing amid the ivy on the drooping beeches. Their choice is made, and they turn away hand-in-hand, with their backs to the darkness and their faces to the light.

Very quiet was the wedding in the old priory church at Christchurch, where Father Christopher read the service, and there were few to see save the Lady Loring and John, and a dozen bowmen from the castle. The Lady of Twynham had drooped and pined for weary months, so that her face was harsher and less comely than before, yet she still hoped on, for her lord had come through so many dangers that she could scarce believe that he might be stricken down at last. It had been her wish to start for Spain and to search for him, but Alleyne had persuaded her to let him go in her place. There was much to look after, now that the lands of Minstead were joined to those of Twynham, and Alleyne had promised her that if she would but bide with his wife he would never come back to Hampshire again until he had gained some news, good or ill, of her lord and lover.

The yellow cog had been engaged, with Goodwin Hawtayne in command, and a month after the wedding Alleyne rode down to Bucklershard to see if she had come round yet from Southampton. On the way he passed

the fishing village of Pitt's Deep, and marked that a little creyer or brig was tacking off the land, as though about to anchor there. On his way back, as he rode towards the village, he saw that she had indeed anchored and that many boats were round her, bearing cargo to the shore.

A bow-shot from Pitt's Deep there was an inn a little back from the road, very large and widespread, with a great green bush hung upon a pole from one of the upper windows. At this window he marked, as he rode up, that a man was seated who appeared to be craning his neck in his direction. Alleyne was still looking up at him, when a woman came rushing from the open door of the inn, and made as though she would climb a tree, looking back the while with a laughing face. Wondering what these doings might mean, Alleyne tied his horse to a tree, and was walking amid the trunks towards the inn, when there shot from the entrance a second woman who made also for the trees. Close at her heels came a burly, brown-faced man, who leaned against the door-post and laughed loudly with his hand to his side.

"Ah, mes belles!" he cried, "and is it thus you treat me? Ah, mes petites! I swear by these finger-bones that I would not hurt a hair of your pretty heads; but I have been among the black paynim, and, by my hilt! it does me good to look at your English cheeks. Come, drink a stoup of muscadine with me, mes anges, for my heart is warm to be among ye again."

At the sight of the man Alleyne had stood staring, but at the sound of his voice such a thrill of joy bubbled up in his heart that he had to bite his lip to keep himself from shouting outright. But a deeper pleasure yet was in store. Even as he looked, the window above was pushed outwards, and the voice of the man whom he had seen there came out from it.

"Aylward," cried the voice, "I have seen just now a very worthy person come down the road, though my eyes could scarce discern whether he carried coat-armour. I pray you to wait upon him and tell him that a very humble

knight of England abides here, so that if he be in need of advancement, or have any small vow upon his soul, or desire to exalt his lady, I may help him to accomplish it."

Aylward at this order came shuffling forward amid the trees, and in an instant the two men were clinging in each other's arms, laughing and shouting and patting each other in their delight; while old Sir Nigel came running with his sword, under the impression that some small bickering had broken out, only to embrace and be embraced himself, until all three were hoarse with their questions and outcries and congratulations.

On their journey home through the woods Alleyne learnt their wondrous story, how when Sir Nigel came to his senses, he with his fellow-captive had been hurried to the coast, and conveyed by sea to their captor's castle; how upon the way they had been taken by a Barbary rover, and how they exchanged their light captivity for a seat on a galley bench and hard labour at the pirate's oars; how, in the port of Barbary, Sir Nigel had slain the Moorish captain, and had swum, with Aylward, to a small coaster which they had taken and so made their way to England with a rich cargo to reward them for their toils. All this Alleyne listened to, until the dark keep of Twynham towered above them in the gloaming, and they saw the red sun lying athwart the rippling Avon. No need to speak of the glad hearts at Twynham Castle that night, nor of the rich offerings from out of that Moorish cargo which found their way to the chapel of Father Christopher.

Sir Nigel Loring lived for many years, full of honour and laden with every blessing. He rode no more to the wars, but he found his way to every jousting within thirty miles; and the Hampshire youth treasured it as the highest honour when a word of praise fell from him as to their management of their horses, or their breaking of their lances. So he lived and so he died, the most revered and the happiest man in all his native shire.

For Sir Alleyne Edricson and for his beautiful bride the future had also nought but what was good. Twice

he fought in France, and came back each time laden with honours. A high place at court was given to him, and he spent many years at Windsor under the second Richard and the fourth Henry—where he received the honour of the Garter, and won the name of being a brave soldier, a true-hearted gentleman and a great lover and patron of every art and science which refines or ennobles life.

As to John, he took unto himself a village maid, and settled in Lyndhurst, where his five thousand crowns made him the richest franklin for many miles around. For many years he drank his ale every night at the "Pied Merlin," which was now kept by his friend Aylward, who had wedded the good widow to whom he had committed his plunder. The strong men and the bowmen of the country round used to drop in there of an evening to wrestle a fall with John or to shoot a round with Aylward; but though a silver shilling was to be the prize of the victor, it has never been reported that any man earned much money in that fashion. So they lived, these men, in their own lusty, cheery fashion—rude and rough, but honest, kindly and true. Let us thank God if we have outgrown their vices. Let us pray to God that we may ever hold their virtues. The sky may darken, and the clouds may gather, and again the day may come when Britain may have sore need of her children, on whatever shore of the sea they be found. Shall they not muster at her call?

# SIR NIGEL

# 1. *The House of Loring*

IN the month of July of the year 1348, between the feasts of St. Benedict and of St. Swithin, a strange thing came upon England, for out of the east there drifted a monstrous cloud, purple and piled, heavy with evil, climbing slowly up the hushed heaven. In the shadow of that strange cloud the leaves drooped in the trees, the birds ceased their calling, and the cattle and the sheep gathered cowering under the hedges. A gloom fell upon all the land, and men stood with their eyes upon the strange cloud and a heaviness upon their hearts. They crept into the churches, where the trembling people were blessed and shriven by the trembling priests. Outside no bird flew, and there came no rustling from the woods, nor any of the homely sounds of Nature. All was still, and nothing moved, save only the great cloud which rolled up and onward, with fold on fold from the black horizon. To the west was the light summer sky, to the east this brooding cloud-bank, creeping ever slowly across, until the last thin blue gleam faded away and the whole vast sweep of the heavens was one great leaden arch.

Then the rain began to fall. All day it rained, and all the night and all the week and all the month, until folk had forgotten the blue heavens and the gleam of the sunshine. It was not heavy, but it was steady and cold and unceasing, so that the people were weary of its hissing and its splashing, with the slow drip from the eaves. Always the same thick evil cloud flowed from east to west with the rain beneath it. None could see for more than a bow-shot from their dwellings for the drifting veil of the rain-storms. Every morning the folk looked upward for a

break, but their eyes rested always upon the same endless cloud, until at last they ceased to look up, and their hearts despaired of ever seeing the change. It was raining at Lammas-tide and raining at the Feast of the Assumption and still raining at Michaelmas. The crops and the hay, sodden and black, had rotted in the fields, for they were not worth the garnering. The sheep had died, and the calves also, so there was little to kill when Martinmas came and it was time to salt the meat for winter. They feared a famine, but it was worse than famine which was in store for them.

For the rain had ceased at last, and a sickly autumn sun shone upon a land which was soaked and sodden with water. Wet and rotten leaves reeked and festered under the foul haze which rose from the woods. The fields were spotted with monstrous fungi of a size and colour never matched before—scarlet and mauve and liver and black. It was as though the sick earth had burst into foul pustules ; mildew and lichen mottled the walls, and with that filthy crop Death sprang also from the water-soaked earth. Men died, and women and children, the baron of the castle, the franklin on the farm, the monk in the abbey, and the villein in his wattle-and-daub cottage. All breathed the same polluted reek and all died the same death of corruption. Of those who were stricken none recovered, and the illness was ever the same—gross boils, raving, and the black blotches which gave its name to the disease. All through the winter the dead rotted by the wayside for want of someone to bury them. In many a village no single man was left alive. Then at last the spring came, with sunshine and health and lightness and laughter—the greenest, sweetest, tenderest spring that England had ever known. But only half of England could know it—the other half had passed away with the great purple cloud.

Yet it was there, in that steam of death, in that reek of corruption, that the brighter and freer England was born. There in that dark hour the first streak of the new

dawn was seen. For in no way save by a great upheaval and change could the nation break away from that iron feudal system which held her limbs. But now it was a new country which came out from that year of death. The barons were dead in swaths. No high turret nor cunning moat could keep out that black commoner who struck them down. Oppressive laws slackened for want of those who could enforce them, and once slackened could never be enforced again. The labourer would be a slave no longer. The bondsman snapped his shackles. There was much to do and few left to do it. Therefore the few should be free men, name their own price, and work where and for whom they would. It was the black death which cleared the way for the great rising thirty years later which left the English peasant the freest of his class in Europe.

But there were few so far-sighted that they could see that here as ever good was coming out of evil. At the moment misery and ruin were brought into every family. The dead cattle, the ungarnered crops, the untilled lands —every spring of wealth had dried up at the same moment. Those who were rich became poor ; but those who were poor already, and especially those who were poor with the burden of gentility upon their shoulders, found themselves in a perilous state. All through England the smaller gentry were ruined, for they had no trade save war, and they drew their living from the work of others. On many a manor-house there came evil times, and on none more than on the Man or of Tilford, where for many generations the noble family of the Lorings had held their home.

There was a time when the Lorings had held the country from the North Downs to the Lakes of Frensham, and when their grim castle-keep rising above the green meadows which border the River Wey had been the strongest fortalice betwixt Guildford Castle in the east and Winchester in the west. But there came that Barons' War, in which the King used his Saxon subjects as a whip with which to scourge his Norman barons, and Castle

Loring, like so many other great strongholds, was swept from the face of the land. From that time the Lorings, with estates sadly curtailed, lived in what had been the dower-house, with enough for their needs, but shorn of all their splendour.

And then came their lawsuit with Waverley Abbey, when the Cistercians laid claim to their richest land, with peccary, turbary, and feudal rights over the remainder. It straggled on for years, this great lawsuit, and when it was finished the men of the Church and the men of the Law had divided all that was richest of the estate between them. There was still left the old manor-house, from which with each generation there came a soldier to uphold the credit of the name, and to show the five scarlet roses on the silver shield where it had always been shown—in the van. There were twelve bronzes in the little chapel, where Mathew the priest said mass every morning, all of men of the House of Loring. Two lay with their legs crossed, as being from the Crusades. Six others rested their feet upon lions, as having died in war. Four only lay with the effigy of their hounds to show that they had passed in peace.

Of this famous but impoverished family, doubly impoverished by law and by pestilence, two members were living in the year of grace 1349—Lady Ermyntrude Loring and her grandson Nigel. Lady Ermyntrude's husband had fallen before the Scottish spearmen at Stirling, and her son Eustace, Nigel's father, had found a glorious death, nine years before this chronicle opens, upon the poop of a Norman galley at the sea-fight of Sluys. The lonely old woman, fierce and brooding like the falcon mewed in her chamber, was soft only toward the lad whom she had brought up. All the tenderness and love of her nature, so hidden from others that they could not imagine their existence, were lavished upon him. She could not bear him away from her, and he, with that respect for authority which the age demanded, would not go without her blessing and consent.

So it came about that Nigel, with his lion heart and with the blood of a hundred soldiers thrilling in his veins, still at the age of two-and-twenty, wasted the weary days reclaiming his hawks with leash and lure or training the alans and spaniels who shared with the family the big earthen-floored hall of the manor-house.

Day by day the aged Lady Ermyntrude had seen him wax in strength and in manhood, small of stature, it is true, but with muscles of steel and a soul of fire. From all parts, from the warden of Guildford Castle, from the tilt-yard of Farnham, tales of his prowess were brought back to her, of his daring as a rider, of his debonair courage, of his skill with all weapons ; but still she, who had both husband and son torn from her by a bloody death, could not bear that this, the last of the Lorings, the final bud of so famous an old tree, should share the same fate. With a weary heart, but with a smiling face, he bore with his uneventful days, while she would ever put off the evil time, until the harvest was better, until the monks of Waverley should give up what they had taken, until his uncle should die and leave money for his outfit, or any other excuse with which she could hold him to her side.

And, indeed, there was need for a man at Tilford, for the strife betwixt the Abbey and the manor-house had never been appeased, and still on one pretext or another the monks would clip off yet one more slice of their neighbour's land. Over the winding river, across the green meadows, rose the short square tower and the high grey walls of the grim Abbey, with its bell tolling by day and night, a voice of menace and of dread to the little household.

It is in the heart of the great Cistercian monastery that this chronicle of old days must take its start, as we trace the feud betwixt the monks and the House of Loring with those events to which it gave birth, ending with the coming of Chandos, the strange spear-running of Tilford Bridge, and the deeds with which Nigel won fame in the

wars. Elsewhere, in the chronicle of the White Company, it has been set forth what manner of man was Nigel Loring. Those who love him may read herein the things which went to his making. Let us go back together and gaze upon this green stage of England, the scenery, hill, plain and river even as now, the actors in much our very selves, in much also so changed in thought and act that they might be dwellers in another world to ours.

## 2. *How the Devil came to Waverley*

THE day was the first of May, which was the Festival of the Blessed Apostles Philip and James. The year was the 1349th from man's salvation.

From tierce to sext, and then again from sext to nones, Abbot John of the House of Waverley had been seated in his study while he conducted the many high duties of his office. All round for many a mile on every side stretched the fertile and flourishing estate of which he was the master. In the centre lay the broad Abbey buildings, with church and cloisters, hospitium, chapter-house and frater-house, all buzzing with a busy life. Through the open window came the low hum of the voices of the brethren as they walked in pious converse in the ambulatory below. From across the cloister there rolled the distant rise and fall of a Gregorian chant, where the precentor was hard at work upon the choir, while down in the chapter-house sounded the strident voice of Brother Peter, expounding the rule of Saint Bernard to the novices.

Abbot John rose to stretch his cramped limbs. He looked out at the greensward of the cloister, and at the graceful line of open Gothic arches which skirted a covered walk for the brethren within. Two and two in their black and-white garb, with slow step and heads inclined, they paced round and round. Several of the more studious had brought their illuminating work from the scriptorium, and sat in the warm sunshine, with their little platters of pigments and packets of gold-leaf before them, their shoulders

rounded and their faces sunk low over the white sheets of vellum. There, too, was the copper-worker with his burin and graver. Learning and art were not traditions with the Cistercians as with the parent Order of the Benedictines, and yet the library of Waverley was well filled both with precious books and with pious students.

But the true glory of the Cistercian lay in his outdoor work, and so ever and anon there passed through the cloister some sun-burned monk, soiled mattock or shovel in hand, with his gown looped to his knee, fresh from the fields or the garden. The lush green water-meadows speckled with the heavy-fleeced sheep, the acres of corn-land reclaimed from heather and bracken, the vineyards on the southern slope of Crooksbury Hill, the rows of Hankley fish-ponds, the Frensham marshes drained and sown with vegetables, the spacious pigeon-cotes, all circled the great Abbey round with the visible labours of the Order.

The Abbot's full and florid face shone with a quiet content as he looked out at his huge but well-ordered household. Like every head of a prosperous Abbey, Abbot John, the fourth of the name, was a man of varied accomplishment. Through his own chosen instruments he had to minister a great estate, and to keep order and decorum among a large body of men living a celibate life. He was a rigid disciplinarian toward all beneath him, a supple diplomatist to all above. He held high debate with neighbouring abbots and lords, with bishops, with papal legates, and even on occasion with the King's majesty himself. Many were the subjects with which he must be conversant. Questions of doctrine, questions of building, points of forestry, of agriculture, of drainage, of feudal law, all came to the Abbot for settlement. He held the scales of Justice in all the Abbey banlieue which stretched over many a mile of Hampshire and of Surrey. To the monks his displeasure might mean fasting, exile to some sterner community, or even imprisonment in chains. Over the laymen also he could hold any punishment save

only corporeal death, instead of which he had in hand the far more dreadful weapon of spiritual excommunication.

Such were the powers of the Abbot, and it is no wonder that there were masterful lines in the ruddy features of Abbot John, or that the brethren, glancing up, should put on an even meeker carriage and more demure expression as they saw the watchful face in the window above them.

A knock at the door of his study recalled the Abbot to his immediate duties, and he returned to his desk. Already he had spoken with his cellarer and prior, almoner, chaplain, and lector, but now in the tall and gaunt monk who obeyed his summons to enter he recognised the most important and also the most importunate of his agents, Brother Samuel the sacrist, whose office, corresponding to that of the layman's bailiff, placed the material interests of the monastery and its dealings with the outer world entirely under his control, subject only to the check of the Abbot. Brother Samuel was a gnarled and stringy old monk, whose stern and sharp-featured face reflected no light from above, but only that sordid workaday world toward which it was for ever turned. A huge book of accounts was tucked under one of his arms, while a great bunch of keys hung from the other hand, a badge of his office, and also, on occasion of impatience, a weapon of offence, as many a scarred head among rustics and lay brothers could testify.

The Abbot sighed wearily, for he suffered much at the hands of his strenuous agent.

"Well, Brother Samuel, what is your will?" he asked.

"Holy father, I have to report that I have sold the wool to Master Baldwin of Winchester at two shillings a bale more than it fetched last year, for the murrain among the sheep has raised the price."

"You have done well, brother."

"I have also to tell you that I have distrained Wat the warrener from his cottage; for his Christmas rent is still unpaid, nor the hen-rents of last year."

"He has a wife and four children, brother." He was a good, easy man, the Abbot, though liable to be overborne by his sterner subordinate.

"It is true, holy father; but if I should pass him, then how am I to ask the rent of the foresters of Puttenham, or the hinds in the village? Such a thing spreads from house to house, and where then is the wealth of Waverley?"

"What else, Brother Samuel?"

"There is the matter of the fish-ponds."

The Abbot's face brightened. It was a subject upon which he was an authority. If the rule of his Order had robbed him of the softer joys of life, he had the keener zest for those which remained.

"How have the char prospered, brother?"

"They have done well, holy father; but the carp have died in the Abbot's pond."

"Carp prosper only upon a gravel bottom. They must be put in also in their due proportion, three milters to one spawner, brother sacrist, and the spot must be free from wind, stony and sandy, an ell deep, with willows and grass upon the banks. Mud for tench, brother, gravel for carp."

The sacrist leaned forward with the face of one who bears tidings of woe.

"There are pike in the Abbot's pond," said he.

"Pike!" cried the Abbot, in horror. "As well shut up a wolf in our sheepfold. How came a pike in the pond? There were no pike last year, and a pike does not fall with the rain nor rise in the springs. The pond must be drained, or we shall spend next Lent upon stock-fish, and have the brethren down with the great sickness ere Easter Sunday has come to absolve us from our abstinence."

"The pond shall be drained, holy father; I have already ordered it. Then we shall plant pot-herbs on the mud bottom, and after we have gathered them in, return the fish and water once more from the lower pond, so that they may fatten among the rich stubble."

"Good!" cried the Abbot. "I would have three fish-stews in every well-ordered house—one dry for herbs, one

shallow for the fry and the yearlings, and one deep for the breeders and the table-fish. But still, I have not heard you say how the pike came in the Abbot's pond ? "

A spasm of anger passed over the fierce face of the sacrist, and his keys rattled as his bony hand clasped them more tightly.

" Young Nigel Loring ! " said he. " He swore that he would do us scath, and in this way he has done it."

" How know you this ? "

" Six weeks ago he was seen day by day fishing for pike at the great Lake of Frensham. Twice at night he has been met with a bundle of straw under his arm on the Hankley Down. Well I wot that the straw was wet and that a live pike lay within it."

The Abbot shook his head. " I have heard much of this youth's wild ways ; but now, indeed, he has passed all bounds, if what you say be truth. It was bad enough when it was said that he slew the king's deer in Woolmer Chase, or broke the head of Hobbs the chapman, so that he lay for seven days betwixt life and death in our infirmary, saved only by Brother Peter's skill in the pharmacies of herbs ; but to put pike in the Abbot's pond—why should he play such a devil's prank ? "

" Because he hates the House of Waverley, holy father ; because he swears that we hold his father's land."

" In which there is surely some truth."

" But, holy father, we hold no more than the law has allowed."

" True, brother, and yet, between ourselves, we may admit that the heavier purse may weigh down the scales of Justice. When I have passed the old house and have seen that aged woman with her ruddled cheeks and her baleful eyes look the curses she dare not speak, I have many a time wished that we had other neighbours."

" That we can soon bring about, holy father. Indeed, it is of it that I wished to speak to you. Surely it is not hard for us to drive them from the country-side. There are thirty years' claims of escuage unsettled, and there is

Sergeant Wilkins, the lawyer of Guildford, whom I will warrant to draw up such arrears of dues and rents and issues of hidage and fodder-corn that these folk, who are as beggarly as they are proud, will have to sell the roof-tree over them ere they can meet them. Within three days I will have them at our mercy."

"They are an ancient family and of good repute. I would not treat them too harshly, brother."

"Bethink you of the pike in the carp pond!"

The Abbot hardened his heart at the thought. "It was indeed a devil's deed—when we had but newly stocked it with char and with carp. Well, well, the law is the law, and if you can use it to their hurt it is still lawful to do so. Have these claims been advanced?"

"Deacon, the bailiff, with his two varlets went down to the Hall yesternight on the matter of the escuage, and came screaming back with this young hot-head raging at their heels. He is small and slight, yet he has the strength of many men in the hour of his wrath. The bailiff swears that he will go no more, save with half a score of archers to uphold him."

The Abbot was red with anger at this new offence. "I will teach him that the servants of Holy Church, even though we of the rule of Saint Bernard be the lowliest and humblest of her children, can still defend their own against the froward and the violent! Go, cite this man before the Abbey court. Let him appear in the chapter-house after tierce to-morrow."

But the wary sacrist shook his head. "Nay, holy father, the times are not yet ripe. Give me three days, I pray you, that my case against him may be complete. Bear in mind that the father and the grandfather of this unruly squire were both famous men of their day and the foremost knights in the king's own service, living in high honour and dying in their knightly duty. The Lady Ermyntrude Loring was first lady to the king's mother. Roger FitzAlan of Farnham and Sir Hugh Walcott of Guildford Castle were each old comrades-in-arms of

Nigel's father, and sib to him on the distaff side. Already there has been talk that we have dealt harshly with them. Therefore, my rede is that we be wise and wary and wait until his cup be indeed full."

The Abbot had opened his mouth to reply, when the consultation was interrupted by a most unwonted buzz of excitement from among the monks in the cloister below. Questions and answers in excited voices sounded from one side of the ambulatory to the other. Sacrist and Abbot were gazing at each other in amazement at such a breach of the discipline and decorum of their well-trained flock, when there came a swift step upon the stair, and a white-faced brother flung open the door and rushed into the room.

"Father Abbot!" he cried. "Alas, alas! Brother John is dead, and the holy sub-prior is dead, and the Devil is loose in the five-virgate field!"

## 3. *The Yellow Horse of Crooksbury*

IN those simple times there was a great wonder and mystery in life. Man walked in fear and solemnity, with Heaven very close above his head, and Hell below his very feet. God's visible hand was everywhere, in the rainbow and the comet, in the thunder and the wind. The Devil, too, raged openly upon the earth; he skulked behind the hedgerows in the gloaming; he laughed loudly in the night-time; he clawed the dying sinner, pounced on the unbaptized babe, and twisted the limbs of the epileptic. A foul fiend slunk ever by a man's side and whispered villainies in his ear, while above him there hovered an angel of grace who pointed to the steep and narrow track. How could one doubt these things, when Pope and priest and scholar and king were all united in believing them, with no single voice of question in the whole wide world?

Every book read, every picture seen, every tale heard from nurse or mother, all taught the same lesson. And as a man travelled through the world his faith would grow the

firmer, for go where he would there were the endless shrines of the saints, each with its holy relic in the centre, and around it the tradition of incessant miracles, with stacks of deserted crutches and silver votive hearts to prove them. At every turn he was made to feel how thin was the veil, and how easily rent, which screened him from the awful denizens of the unseen world.

Hence the wild announcement of the frightened monk seemed terrible rather than incredible to those whom he addressed. The Abbot's ruddy face paled for a moment, it is true, but he plucked the crucifix from his desk and rose valiantly to his feet.

"Lead me to him!" said he. "Show me the foul fiend who dares to lay his grip upon brethren of the holy house of Saint Bernard! Run down to my chaplain, brother! Bid him bring the exorcist with him, and also the blessed box of relics, and the bones of Saint James from under the altar! With these and a contrite and humble heart we may show front to all the powers of darkness."

But the sacrist was of a more critical turn of mind. He clutched the monk's arm with a grip which left its five purple spots for many a day to come.

"Is this the way to enter the Abbot's own chamber without knock or reverence, or so much as a '*Pax vobiscum*'?" said he, sternly. "You were wont to be our gentlest novice, of lowly carriage in chapter, devout in psalmody, and strict in the cloister. Pull your wits together and answer me straightly. In what form has the foul fiend appeared, and how has he done this grievous scathe to our brethren? Have you seen him with your own eyes, or do you repeat from hearsay? Speak, man, or you stand on the penance-stool in the chapter-house this very hour!"

Thus adjured, the frightened monk grew calmer in his bearing, though his white lips and his startled eyes, with the gasping of his breath, told of his inward tremors.

"If it please you, holy father, and you, reverend sacrist, it came about in this way. James the sub-prior,

and Brother John and I had spent our day from sext onward on Hankley cutting bracken for the cow-houses. We were coming back over the five-virgate field, and the holy sub-prior was telling us a saintly tale from the life of Saint Gregory, when there came a sudden sound like a rushing torrent, and the foul fiend sprang over the high wall which skirts the water-meadow and rushed upon us with the speed of the wind. The lay brother he struck to the ground and trampled into the mire. Then, seizing the good sub-prior in his teeth, he rushed round the field, swinging him as though he were a fardel of old clothes.

" Amazed at such a sight, I stood without movement, and had said a credo and three aves, when the Devil dropped the sub-prior and sprang upon me. With the help of St. Bernard I clambered over the wall, but not before his teeth had found my leg, and he had torn away the whole back skirt of my gown."

As he spoke he turned and gave corroboration to his story by the hanging ruins of his long trailing garment.

" In what shape, then, did Satan appear ? " the Abbot demanded.

" As a great yellow horse, holy father—a monster horse, with eyes of fire and the teeth of a griffin."

" A yellow horse ! " The sacrist glared at the scared monk. " You foolish brother ! how will you behave when you have indeed to face the King of Terrors himself if you can be so frightened by the sight of a yellow horse ? It is the horse of Franklin Aylward, my father, which has been distrained by us because he owes the Abbey fifty good shillings, and can never hope to pay it. Such a horse, they say, is not to be found betwixt this and the king's stables at Windsor, for his sire was a Spanish destrier, and his dam an Arab mare of the very breed which Saladin kept for his own use, and even, it has been said, under the shelter of his own tent. I took him in discharge of the debt, and I ordered the varlets who had haltered him to leave him alone in the water-

meadow, for I have heard that the beast has indeed a most evil spirit, and has killed more men than one."

"It was an ill day for Waverley that you brought such a monster within its bounds," said the Abbot. "If the sub-prior and brother John be indeed dead, then it would seem that if the horse be not the devil, he is at least the devil's instrument."

"Horse or devil, holy father, I heard him shout with joy as he trampled upon brother John, and had you seen him tossing the sub-prior as a dog shakes a rat, you would perchance have felt even as I did."

"Come, then," cried the Abbot, "let us see with our own eyes what evil has been done."

And the three monks hurried down the stair which led to the cloisters.

They had no sooner descended than their more pressing fears were set at rest, for at that very moment, limping, dishevelled and mud-stained, the two sufferers were being led in amid a crowd of sympathising brethren. Shouts and cries from outside showed, however, that some further drama was in progress, and both Abbot and sacrist hastened onward as fast as the dignity of their office would permit, until they had passed the gates and gained the wall of the meadow. Looking over it, a remarkable sight presented itself to their eyes.

Fetlock deep in the lush grass there stood a magnificent horse, such a horse as a sculptor or a soldier might thrill to see. His colour was a light chestnut, with mane and tail of a more tawny tint. Seventeen hands high, with a barrel and haunches which bespoke tremendous strength, he fined down to the most delicate lines of dainty breed in neck and crest and shoulder. He was indeed a glorious sight as he stood there, his beautiful body leaning back from his widespread and propped forelegs, his head craned high, his ears erect, his mane bristling, his red nostrils opening and shutting with wrath, and his flashing eyes turning from side to side in haughty menace and defiance.

Scattered round in a respectful circle, six of the Abbey lay servants and foresters, each holding a halter, were creeping toward him. Every now and then, with a beautiful toss and swerve and plunge, the great creature would turn upon one of his would-be captors, and with outstretched head, flying mane and flashing teeth, would chase him screaming to the safety of the wall, while the others would close swiftly in behind, and cast their ropes in the hope of catching neck or leg, but only in their turn to be chased to the nearest refuge.

Had two of these ropes settled upon the horse, and had their throwers found some purchase of stump or boulder by which they could hold them, then the man's brain might have won its wonted victory over swiftness and strength. But the brains were themselves at fault which imagined that one such rope would serve any purpose save to endanger the thrower.

Yet so it was, and what might have been foreseen occurred at the very moment of the arrival of the monks. The horse, having chased one of his enemies to the wall, remained so long snorting his contempt over the coping that the others were able to creep upon him from behind. Several ropes were flung, and one noose settled over the proud crest and lost itself in the waving mane. In an instant the creature had turned, and the men were flying for their lives ; but he who had cast the rope lingered, uncertain what use to make of his own success. That moment of doubt was fatal. With a yell of dismay, the man saw the great creature rear above him. Then with a crash the fore-feet fell upon him and dashed him to the ground. He rose screaming, was hurled over once more, and lay a quivering, bleeding heap, while the savage horse, the most cruel and terrible in its anger of all creatures on earth, bit and shook and trampled the writhing body.

A loud wail of horror rose from the lines of tonsured heads which skirted the high wall—a wail which suddenly died away into a long, hushed silence, broken at last by a rapturous cry of thanksgiving and of joy.

On the road which led to the old dark manor-house upon the side of the hill a youth had been riding. His mount was a sorry one, a weedy, shambling, long-haired colt, and his patched tunic of faded purple with stained leather belt presented no very smart appearance ; yet in the bearing of the man, in the poise of his head, in his easy, graceful carriage, and in the bold glance of his large blue eyes, there was that stamp of distinction and of breed which would have given him a place of his own in any assembly. He was of small stature, but his frame was singularly elegant and graceful. His face, though tanned with the weather, was delicate in features, and most eager and alert in expression. A thick fringe of crisp yellow curls broke from under the dark flat cap which he was wearing, and a short golden beard hid the outline of his strong, square chin. One white osprey feather thrust through a gold brooch in the front of his cap gave a touch of grace to his sombre garb. This and other points of his attire, the short hanging mantle, the leather-sheathed hunting-knife, the cross-belt which sustained a brazen horn, the soft doe-skin boots and the prick spurs, would all disclose themselves to an observer ; but at the first glance the brown face set in gold, and the dancing light of the quick, reckless, laughing eyes, were the one strong memory left behind.

Such was the youth who, cracking his whip joyously, and followed by half a score of dogs, cantered on his rude pony down the Tilford Lane, and thence it was that, with a smile of amused contempt upon his face, he observed the comedy in the field and the impotent efforts of the servants of Waverley.

Suddenly, however, as the comedy turned swiftly to black tragedy, this passive spectator leaped into quick strenuous life. With a spring he was off his pony, and with another he was over the stone wall and flying swiftly across the field. Looking up from his victim, the great yellow horse saw this other enemy approach, and spurning

the prostrate but still writhing body with his heels, dashed at the newcomer.

But this time there was no hasty flight, no rapturous pursuit to the wall. The little man braced himself straight, flung up his metal-headed whip, and met the horse with a crashing blow upon the head, repeated again and again with every attack. In vain the horse reared and tried to overthrow its enemy with swooping shoulders and pawing hoofs. Cool, swift, and alert, the man sprang swiftly aside from under the very shadow of death, and then again came the swish and thud of the unerring blow from the heavy handle.

The horse drew off, glared with wonder and fury at this masterful man, and then trotted round in a circle, with mane bristling, tail streaming, and ears on end, snorting in its rage and pain. The man, hardly deigning to glance at his fell neighbour, passed on to the wounded forester, raised him in his arms, with a strength which could not have been expected in so slight a body and carried him, groaning, to the wall, where a dozen hands were outstretched to help him over. Then, at his leisure, the young man also climbed the wall, smiling back with cool contempt at the yellow horse, which had come raging after him once more.

As he sprang down, a dozen monks surrounded him to thank him or to praise him ; but he would have turned sullenly away without a word had he not been stopped by Abbot John in person.

" Nay, Squire Loring," said he, " if you be a bad friend to our Abbey, yet we must needs own that you have played the part of a good Christian this day, for if there be breath left in our servant's body it is to you next to our blessed patron Saint Bernard that we owe it."

" By Saint Paul ! I owe you no good-will, Abbot John," said the young man. " The shadow of your Abbey has ever fallen across the house of Loring. As to any small deed that I may have done this day, I ask no thanks for it. It is not for you nor for your house that I

have done it, but only because it was my pleasure so to do."

The Abbot flushed at the bold words, and bit his lip with vexation.

It was the sacrist, however, who answered : " It would be more fitting and more gracious," said he, " if you were to speak to the holy Father Abbot in a manner suited to his high rank and to the respect which is due to a Prince of the Church."

The youth turned his bold blue eyes upon the monk, and his sunburned face darkened with anger.

" Were it not for the gown upon your back, and for your silvering hair, I would answer you in another fashion," said he. " You are the lean wolf which growls ever at our door, greedy for the little which hath been left to us. Say and do what you will with me, but by Saint Paul ! if I find that Dame Ermyntrude is bated by your ravenous pack I will beat them off with this whip from the little patch which still remains of all the acres of my fathers."

" Have a care, Nigel Loring, have a care ! " cried the Abbot, with finger upraised. " Have you no fears of the law of England ? "

" A just law I fear and obey."

" Have you no respect for Holy Church ? "

" I respect all that is holy in her. I do not respect those who grind the poor or steal their neighbour's land."

" Rash man, many a one has been blighted by her ban for less than you have now said ! And yet it is not for us to judge you harshly this day. You are young, and hot words come easily to your lips. How fares the forester ? "

" His hurt is grievous, Father Abbot, but he will live," said a brother, looking up from the prostrate form. " With a blood-letting and an electuary, I will warrant him sound within a month."

" Then bear him to the hospital. And now, brother, about this terrible beast who still gazes and snorts at us over the top of the wall as though his thoughts of Holy

Church were as uncouth as those of Squire Nigel himself, what are we to do with him ? "

" Here is Franklin Aylward," said one of the brethren. " The horse was his, and doubtless he will take it back to his farm."

But the stout red-faced farmer shook his head at the proposal. " Not I, in faith ! " said he. " The beast hath chased me twice round the paddock ; it has nigh slain my boy Samkin. He would never be happy till he had ridden it, nor has he ever been happy since. There is not a hind in my employ who will enter his stall. Ill fare the day that ever I took the beast from the Castle stud at Guildford, where they could do nothing with it and no rider could be found bold enough to mount it ! When the sacrist here took it for a fifty-shilling debt he made his own bargain and must abide by it. He comes no more to the Crooksbury farm."

" And he stays no more here," said the Abbot. " Brother sacrist, you have raised the Devil, and it is for you to lay it again."

" That I will most readily," cried the sacrist. " The pittance-master can stop the fifty shillings from my very own weekly dole, and so the Abbey be none the poorer. In the meantime here is Wat with his arbalist and a bolt in his girdle. Let him drive it to the head through this cursed creature, for his hide and his hoofs are of more value than his wicked self."

A hard brown old woodman who had been shooting vermin in the Abbey groves stepped forward with a grin of pleasure. After a lifetime of stoats and foxes, this was indeed a noble quarry which was to fall before him. Fitting a bolt on the nut of his taut crossbow, he had raised it to his shoulder and levelled it at the fierce, proud, dishevelled head which tossed in savage freedom at the other side of the wall. His finger was crooked on the spring, when a blow from a whip struck the bow upward and the bolt flew harmless over the Abbey orchard, while the woodman shrank abashed from Nigel Loring's angry eyes.

"Keep your bolts for your weasels," said he. "Would you take life from a creature whose only fault is that its spirit is so high that it has met none yet who dare control it? You would slay such a horse as a king might be proud to mount, and all because a country franklin, or a monk, or a monk's varlet, has not the wit nor the hands to master him?"

The sacrist turned swiftly on the Squire. "The Abbey owes you an offering for this day's work, however rude your words may be," said he. "If you think so much of the horse, you may desire to own it. If I am to pay for it, then with the holy Abbot's permission it is in my gift, and I bestow it freely upon you."

The Abbot plucked at his subordinate's sleeve. "Bethink you, brother sacrist," he whispered, "shall we not have this man's blood upon our heads?"

"His pride is as stubborn as the horse's, holy father," the sacrist answered, his gaunt face breaking into a malicious smile. "Man or beast, one will break the other, and the world will be the better for it. If you forbid me——"

"Nay, brother, you have bought the horse, and you may have the bestowal of it."

"Then I give it—hide and hoofs, tail and temper—to Nigel Loring, and may it be as sweet and as gentle to him as he hath been to the Abbot of Waverley!"

The sacrist spoke aloud amid the tittering of the monks, for the man concerned was out of earshot. At the first words which had shown him the turn which affairs had taken he had run swiftly to the spot where he had left his pony. From its mouth he removed the bit and the stout bridle which held it. Then leaving the creature to nibble the grass by the wayside, he sped back whence he came.

"I take your gift, monk," said he, "though I know well why it is that you give it. Yet I thank you, for there are two things upon earth for which I have ever yearned, and which my thin purse could never buy. The one is a noble horse, such a horse as my father's son should have betwixt his thighs, and here is the one of all

others which I would have chosen, since some small deed is to be done in the winning of him, and some honourable advancement to be gained. How is the horse called ? "

" Its name," said the franklin, " is Pommers. I warn you, young sir, that none may ride him, for many have tried, and the luckiest is he who has only a staved rib to show for it."

" I thank you for your rede," said Nigel, " and now I see that this is indeed a horse which I would journey far to meet. I am your man, Pommers, and you are my horse, and this night you shall own it, or I will never need horse again. My spirit against thine, and God hold thy spirit high, Pommers, so that the greater be the adventure, and the more hope of honour gained ! "

While he spoke the young Squire had climbed on to the top of the wall and stood there balanced, the very image of grace and spirit and gallantry, his bridle hanging from one hand and his whip grasped in the other. With a fierce snort, the horse made for him instantly, and his white teeth flashed as he snapped ; but again a heavy blow from the loaded whip caused him to swerve, and even at the instant of the swerve, measuring the distance with steady eyes, and bending his supple body for the spring, Nigel bounded into the air and fell with his legs astride the broad back of the yellow horse. For a minute, with neither saddle nor stirrups to help him, and the beast ramping and rearing like a mad thing beneath him, he was hard pressed to hold his own. His legs were like two bands of steel welded on to the swelling arches of the great horse's ribs, and his left hand was buried deep in the tawny mane.

Never had the dull round of the lives of the gentle brethren of Waverley been broken by so fiery a scene. Springing to right and swooping to left, now with its tangled wicked head betwixt its fore-feet, and now pawing eight feet high in the air, with scarlet, furious nostrils and maddened eyes, the yellow horse was a thing of terror

and of beauty. But the lithe figure on his back, bending like a reed in the wind to every movement, firm below, pliant above, with calm inexorable face, and eyes which danced and gleamed with the joy of contest, still held its masterful place for all that the fiery heart and the iron muscles of the great beast could do.

Once a long drone of dismay rose from the monks, as, rearing higher and higher yet, a last mad effort sent the creature toppling over backward upon its rider. But, swift and cool, he had writhed from under it ere it fell, spurned it with his foot as it rolled upon the earth, and then seizing its mane as it rose, swung himself lightly on to its back once more. Even the grim sacrist could not but join the cheer, as Pommers, amazed to find the rider still upon his back, plunged and curveted down the field.

But the wild horse only swelled into a greater fury. In the sullen gloom of its untamed heart there rose the furious resolve to dash the life from this clinging rider, even if it meant destruction to beast and man. With red, blazing eyes it looked round for death. On three sides the five-virgate field was bounded by a high wall, broken only at one spot by a heavy four-foot wooden gate. But on the fourth side was a low grey building, one of the granges of the Abbey, presenting a long flank unbroken by door or window. The horse stretched itself into a gallop, and headed straight for that craggy thirty-foot wall. He would break in red ruin at the base of it if he could but dash for ever the life of this man, who claimed mastery over that which had never found its master yet.

The great haunches gathered under it, the eager hoofs drummed the grass, as faster and still more fast the frantic horse bore himself and his rider toward the wall. Would Nigel spring off ? To do so would be to bend his will to that of the beast beneath him. There was a better way than that. Cool, quick and decided, the man swiftly passed both whip and bridle into the left hand which still held the mane. Then with the right he slipped his short mantle from his shoulders, and lying forward along the creature's

strenuous, rippling back, he cast the flapping cloth over the horse's eyes.

The result was but too successful, for it nearly brought about the downfall of the rider. When those red eyes, straining for death, were suddenly shrouded in unexpected darkness, the amazed horse propped on its fore-feet and came to so dead a stop that Nigel was shot forward on to its neck, and hardly held himself by his hair-entwined hand. Ere he had slid back into position the moment of danger had passed, for the horse, its purpose all blurred in its mind by this strange thing which had befallen, wheeled round once more, trembling in every fibre, and tossing its petulant head until at last the mantle had been slipped from its eyes and the chilling darkness had melted into the homely circle of sunlit grass once more.

But what was this new outrage which had been inflicted upon it? What was this defiling bar of iron which was locked hard against its mouth? What were these straps which galled the tossing neck, this band which spanned its brow? In those instants of stillness ere the mantle had been plucked away Nigel had lain forward, had slipped the snaffle between the champing teeth, and had deftly secured it.

Blind, frantic fury surged in the yellow horse's heart once more at this new degradation, this badge of serfdom and infamy. His spirit rose high and menacing at the touch. He loathed this place, these people, all and everything which threatened his freedom. He would have done with them for ever; he would see them no more! Let him away to the uttermost parts of the earth, to the great plains where freedom is! Anywhere over the far horizon where he could get away from the defiling bit and the insufferable mastery of man!

He turned with a rush, and one magnificent deer-like bound carried him over the four-foot gate. Nigel's hat had flown off, and his yellow curls streamed behind him as he rose and fell in the leap. They were in the water-meadow now, and the rippling stream twenty feet wide

gleamed in front of them, running down to the main current of the Wey. The yellow horse gathered his haunches under him and flew over like an arrow. He took off from behind a boulder and cleared a furze-bush on the farther side. Two stones still mark the leap from hoof-mark to hoof-mark, and they are eleven good paces apart. Under the hanging branch of the great oak tree on the farther side (that *Quercus Tilfordiensis* still shown as the bound of the Abbey's immediate precincts) the great horse passed. He had hoped to sweep off his rider, but Nigel sank low on the heaving back, with his face buried in the flying mane. The rough bough rasped him rudely, but never shook his spirit nor his grip. Rearing, plunging, and struggling, Pommers broke through the sapling grove and was out on the broad stretch of Hankley Down.

And now came such a ride as still lingers in the gossip of the lowly country folk, and forms the rude jingle of that old Surrey ballad, now nearly forgotten, save for the refrain—

The Doe that sped on Hinde Head,
The Kestril on the winde,
And Nigel on the Yellow Horse
Can leave the world behinde.

Before them lay a rolling ocean of dark heather, knee-deep, swelling in billow on billow up to the clear-cut hill before them. Above stretched one unbroken arch of peaceful blue, with a sun which was sinking down towards the Hampshire hills. Through the deep heather, down the gullies, over the watercourses, up the broken slopes, Pommers flew, his great heart bursting with rage, and every fibre quivering at the indignities which he had endured.

And still, do what he would, the man clung fast to his heaving sides and to his flying mane, silent, motionless, inexorable, letting him do what he would, but fixed as Fate upon his purpose. Over Hankley Down, through Thursley March, with the reeds up to his mud-splashed

withers, onward up the long slope of the Headland of the Hinds, down by the Nutcombe Gorge, slipping, blundering, bounding, but never slackening his fearful speed, on went the great yellow horse. The villagers of Shottermill heard the wild clatter of hoofs, but ere they could swing the oxhide curtains of their cottage doors, horse and rider were lost amid the high bracken of the Haslemere Valley. On he went, and on, tossing the miles behind his flying hoofs. No marsh-land could clog him, no hill could hold him back. Up the slope of Linchmere and the long ascent of Fernhurst he thundered as on the level, and it was not until he had flown down the incline of Henley Hill, and the grey castle tower of Midhurst rose over the coppice in front, that at last the eager outstretched neck sank a little on the breast, and the breath came quick and fast. Look where he would, in woodland and on Down, his straining eyes could catch no sign of those plains of freedom which he sought.

And yet another outrage ! It was bad that this creature should still cling so tight upon his back, but now he would even go to the intolerable length of checking him and guiding him on the way that he would have him go. There was a sharp pluck at his mouth and his head was turned north once more. As well go that way as another ; but the man was mad indeed if he thought that such a horse as Pommers was at the end of his spirit or his strength. He would soon show him that he was unconquered, if it strained his sinews or broke his heart to do so. Back, then, he flew up the long, long ascent. Would he ever get to the end of it ? Yet he would not own that he could go no farther while the man still kept his grip. He was white with foam and caked with mud. His eyes were gorged with blood, his mouth open and gasping, his nostrils expanded, his coat stark and reeking. On he flew down the long Sunday Hill, until he reached the deep Kingsley Marsh at the bottom. No, it was too much ! Flesh and blood could go no farther. As he struggled out from the reedy slime, with the heavy

black mud still clinging to his fetlocks, he at last eased down with sobbing breath, and slowed the tumultuous gallop to a canter.

Oh, crowning infamy ! Was there no limit to these degradations ? He was no longer even to choose his own pace. Since he had chosen to gallop so far at his own will he must now gallop farther still at the will of another. A spur struck home on either flank. A stinging whip-lash fell across his shoulder. He bounded his own height in the air at the pain and the shame of it. Then, forgetting his weary limbs, forgetting his panting, reeking sides, forgetting everything save this intolerable insult and the burning spirit within, he plunged off once more upon his furious gallop. He was out on the heather slopes again, and heading for Weydown Common. On he flew and on. But again his brain failed him, and again his limbs trembled beneath him, and yet again he strove to ease his pace, only to be driven onward by the cruel spur and the falling lash. He was blind and giddy with fatigue.

He saw no longer where he placed his feet, he cared no longer whither he went, but his one mad longing was to get away from this dreadful thing, this torture which clung to him and would not let him go. Through Thursley village he passed, his eyes straining in his agony, his heart bursting within him, and he had won his way to the crest of Thursley Down, still stung forward by stab and blow, when his spirit weakened, his giant strength ebbed out of him, and with one deep sob of agony the yellow horse sank among the heather. So sudden was the fall that Nigel flew forward over his shoulder, and beast and man lay prostrate and gasping, while the last red rim of the sun sank behind Butser and the first stars gleamed in a violet sky.

The young Squire was the first to recover, and kneeling by the panting, overwrought horse, he passed his hand gently over the tangled mane and down the foam-flecked face. The red eye rolled up at him ; but it was wonder, not hatred, a prayer and not a threat, which he could

read in it. As he stroked the reeking muzzle, the horse whinnied gently and thrust his nose into the hollow of his hand. It was enough. It was the end of the contest, the acceptance of new conditions by a chivalrous foe from a chivalrous victor.

"You are my horse, Pommers," Nigel whispered, and he laid his cheek against the craning head. "I know you, Pommers, and you know me, and with the help of Saint Paul we shall teach some other folk to know us both. Now let us walk together as far as this moorland pond, for indeed I wot not whether it is you or I who need the water most."

And so it was that some belated monks of Waverley, passing homeward from the outer farms, saw a strange sight, which they carried on with them so that it reached that very night the ears both of sacrist and of Abbot. For, as they passed through Tilford, they had seen horse and man walking side by side and head by head up the manor-house lane. And when they had raised their lanterns on the pair, it was none other than the young Squire himself who was leading home, as a shepherd leads a lamb, the fearsome yellow horse of Crooksbury.

## 4. *How the Summoner came to the Manor-house of Tilford*

BY the date of this chronicle, the ascetic sternness of the old Norman castles had been humanised and refined, so that the new dwellings of the nobility, if less imposing in appearance, were much more comfortable as places of residence. A gentle race had built their houses rather for peace than for war. He who compares the savage bareness of Pevensey or Guildford with the piled grandeur of Bodmin or Windsor cannot fail to understand the change in manners which they represent.

The earlier castles had a set purpose, for they were built that the invaders might hold down the country; but

when the Conquest was once firmly established, a castle had lost its meaning, save as a refuge from justice or as a centre for civil strife. On the marches of Wales and of Scotland the castle might continue to be a bulwark to the kingdom, and there still grew and flourished ; but in all other places they were rather a menace to the King's majesty, and as such were discouraged and destroyed. By the reign of the third Edward the greater part of the old fighting castles had been converted into dwelling-houses or had been ruined in the civil wars, and left where their grim grey bones are still littered upon the brows of our hills. The new buildings were either great country-houses, capable of defence, but mainly residential, or they were manor-houses with no military significance at all.

Such was the Tilford Manor-house, where the last survivors of the old and magnificent house of Loring still struggled hard to keep a footing and to hold off the monks and the lawyers from the few acres which were left to them. The mansion was a two-storied one, framed in heavy beams of wood, the interstices filled with rude blocks of stone. An outside staircase led up to several sleeping-rooms above. Below, there were only two apartments, the smaller of which was the bower of the aged Lady Ermyntrude. The other was the hall, a very large room, which served as the living-room of the family and as the common dining-room of themselves and of their little group of servants and retainers. The dwellings of these servants, the kitchens, the offices, and the stables were all represented by a row of penthouses and sheds behind the main building. Here lived Charles, the page ; Peter, the old falconer ; Red Swire, who had followed Nigel's grandfather to the Scottish wars ; Weathercote, the broken minstrel ; John, the cook, and other survivors of more prosperous days, who still clung to the old house as the barnacles to some wrecked and stranded vessel.

One evening, about a week after the breaking of the yellow horse, Nigel and his grandmother sat on either side of the large empty fireplace in this spacious apartment.

The supper had been removed, and so had the trestle tables upon which it had been served, so that the room seemed bare and empty. The stone floor was strewed with a thick layer of green rushes, which was swept out every Saturday, and carried with it all the dirt and *débris* of the week. Several dogs were now crouched among these rushes, gnawing and cracking the bones which had been thrown from the table. A long wooden buffet loaded with plates and dishes filled one end of the room, but there was little other furniture, save some benches against the walls, two dorseret chairs, one small table littered with chessmen, and a great iron coffer. In one corner was a high wickerwork stand, and on it two stately falcons were perched, silent and motionless, save for an occasional twinkle of their fierce yellow eyes.

But if the actual fittings of the room would have appeared scanty to one who had lived in a more luxurious age, he would have been surprised on looking up to see the multitude of objects which were suspended above his head. Over the fireplace were the coats-of-arms of a number of houses allied by blood or by marriage to the Lorings. The two cresset-lights which flared upon each side gleamed upon the blue lion of the Percies, the red birds of de Valence, the black engrailed cross of de Mohun, the silver star of de Vere, and the ruddy bars of FitzAlan, all grouped round the famous red roses on the silver shield which the Lorings had borne to glory upon many a bloody field. Then from side to side the room was spanned by heavy oaken beams, from which a great number of objects were hanging. There were mail-shirts of obsolete pattern, several shields, one or two rusted and battered helmets, bow-staves, lances, otter-spears, harness, fishing-rods, and other implements of war or of the chase, while higher still amid the black shadows could be seen rows of hams, flitches of bacon, salted geese, and those other forms of preserved meat which played so great a part in the house-keeping of the Middle Ages.

Dame Ermyntrude Loring, daughter, wife, and mother

of warriors, was herself a formidable figure. Tall and gaunt, with hard craggy features and intolerant dark eyes, even her snow-white hair and stooping back could not entirely remove the sense of fear which she inspired in those around her. Her thoughts and memories went back to harsher times, and she looked upon the England around her as a degenerate and effeminate land which had fallen away from the old standard of knightly courtesy and valour.

The rising power of the people, the growing wealth of the Church, the increasing luxury in life and manners, and the gentler tone of the age were all equally abhorrent to her, so that the dread of her fierce face, and even of the heavy oak staff with which she supported her failing limbs, was widespread through all the country round.

Yet if she was feared she was also respected, for in days when books were few and readers scarce, a long memory and a ready tongue were of the more value ; and where, save from Dame Ermyntrude, could the young unlettered Squires of Surrey and Hampshire hear of their grandfathers and their battles, or learn that lore of heraldry and chivalry which she handed down from a ruder but a more martial age ? Poor as she was, there was no one in Surrey whose guidance would be more readily sought upon a question of precedence or of conduct than the Dame Ermyntrude Loring.

She sat now with bowed back by the empty fireplace, and looked across at Nigel with all the harsh lines of her old ruddled face softening into love and pride. The young Squire was busy cutting bird-bolts for his crossbow, and whistling softly as he worked. Suddenly he looked up and caught the dark eyes which were fixed upon him. He leaned forward and patted the bony hand.

" What hath pleased you, dear dame ? I read pleasure in your eyes."

" I have heard to-day, Nigel, how you came to win that great war-horse which stamps in our stable."

" Nay, dame ; I had told you that the monks had given it to me."

"You said so, fair son, but never a word more. Yet the horse which you brought home was a very different horse, I wot, to that which was given you. Why did you not tell me?"

"I should think it shame to talk of such a thing."

"So would your father before you, and his father no less. They would sit silent among the knights when the wine went round and listen to every man's deeds; but if perchance there was anyone who spoke louder than the rest and seemed to be eager for honour, then afterwards your father would pluck him softly by the sleeve and whisper in his ear to learn if there was any small vow of which he could relieve him, or if he would deign to perform some noble deed of arms upon his person. And if the man were a braggart and would go no further, your father would be silent and none would know it. But if he bore himself well, your father would spread his fame far and wide, but never make mention of himself."

Nigel looked at the old woman with shining eyes. "I love to hear you speak of him," said he. "I pray you to tell me once more of the manner of his death."

"He died as he had lived, a very courtly gentleman. It was at the great sea-battle upon the Norman coast, and your father was in command of the after-guard in the King's own ship. Now the French had taken a great English ship the year before, when they came over and held the narrow seas and burned the town of Southampton. This ship was the *Christopher*, and they placed it in the front of their battle; but the English closed upon it and stormed over its side, and slew all who were upon it.

"But your father and Sir Lorredan of Genoa, who commanded the *Christopher*, fought upon the high poop, so that all the fleet stopped to watch it, and the King himself cried aloud at the sight, for Sir Lorredan was a famous man-at-arms and bore himself very stoutly that day, and many a knight envied your father that he should have chanced upon so excellent a person. But your father bore him back and struck him such a blow with a mace that

he turned the helmet half round on his head, so that he could no longer see through the eyeholes, and Sir Lorredan threw down his sword and gave himself to ransom. But your father took him by the helmet and twisted it until he had it straight upon his head. Then, when he could see once again, he handed him his sword, and prayed him that he would rest himself and then continue, for it was great profit and joy to see any gentleman carry himself so well. So they sat together and rested by the rail of the poop ; but even as they raised their hands again your father was struck by a stone from a mangonel and so died."

" And this Sir Lorredan," cried Nigel, " he died also, as I understand ? "

" I fear that he was slain by the archers, for they loved your father, and they do not see these things with our eyes."

" It was a pity," said Nigel ; " for it is clear that he was a good knight and bore himself very bravely."

" Time was, when I was young, when commoners dared not have laid their grimy hands upon such a man. Men of gentle blood and coat-armour made war upon each other, and the others, spearmen or archers, could scramble amongst themselves. But now all are of a level, and only here and there one like yourself, fair son, who reminds me of the men who are gone."

Nigel leaned forward and took her hands in his. " What I am you have made me," said he.

" It is true, Nigel. I have indeed watched over you as the gardener watches his most precious blossom, for in you alone are all the hopes of our ancient house, and soon —very soon—you will be alone."

" Nay, dear lady, say not that."

" I am very old, Nigel, and I feel the shadow closing in upon me. My heart yearns to go, for all whom I have known and loved have gone before me. And you—it will be a blessed day for you, since I have held you back from that world into which your brave spirit longs to plunge."

"Nay, nay, I have been happy here with you at Tilford."

"We are very poor, Nigel. I do not know where we may find the money to fit you for the wars. Yet we have good friends. There is Sir John Chandos, who has won such credit in the French wars, and who rides ever by the King's bridle-arm. He was your father's friend, and they were squires together. If I sent you to court with a message to him he would do what he could."

Nigel's fair face flushed. "Nay, Dame Ermyntrude, I must find my own gear, even as I have found my own horse, for I had rather ride into battle in this tunic than owe my suit to another."

"I feared that you would say so, Nigel; but indeed I know not how else we may get the money," said the old woman, sadly. "It was different in the days of my father. I can remember that a suit of mail was but a small matter in those days, for in every English town such things could be made. But year by year, since men have come to take more care of their bodies, there have been added a plate of proof here and a cunning joint there, and all must be from Toledo or Milan, so that a knight must have much metal in his purse ere he puts any on his limbs."

Nigel looked up wistfully at the old armour which was slung on the beams above him. "The ash spear is good," said he, "and so is the oaken shield with facings of steel. Sir Roger FitzAlan handled them and said that he had never seen better. But the armour——"

Lady Ermyntrude shook her old head and laughed. "You have your father's great soul, Nigel, but you have not his mighty breadth of shoulder and length of limb. There was not in all the King's great host a taller or a stronger man. His harness would be little use to you. No, fair son, I rede you that when the time comes you sell this crumbling house and the few acres which are still left, and so go forth to the wars in the hope that with your own right hand you will plant the fortunes of a new House of Loring."

A shadow of anger passed over Nigel's fresh young

face. "I know not if we may hold off these monks and their lawyers much longer. This very day there came a man from Guildford with claims from the Abbey extending back before my father's death."

"Where are they, fair son?"

"They are flapping on the furze-bushes of Hankley, for I sent his papers and parchments down wind as fast as ever falcon flew."

"Nay! you were mad to do that, Nigel. And the man, where is he?"

"Red Swire and old George the Archer threw him into the Thursley bog."

"Alas! I fear me such things cannot be done in these days, though my father or my husband would have sent the rascal back to Guildford without his ears. But the Church and the Law are too strong now for us who are of gentler blood. Trouble will come of it, Nigel, for the Abbot of Waverley is not one who will hold back the shield of the Church from those who are her servants."

"The Abbot would not hurt us. It is that grey lean wolf of a sacrist who hungers for our land. Let him do his worst. I fear him not."

"He has such an engine at his back, Nigel, that even the bravest must fear him. The ban which blasts a man's soul is in the keeping of his Church, and what have we to place against it? I pray you to speak him fair, Nigel."

"Nay, dear lady, it is both my duty and my pleasure to do what you bid me; but I would die ere I ask as a favour that which we can claim as a right. Never can I cast my eyes from yonder window that I do not see the swelling down-lands and the rich meadows, glade and dingle, copse and wood, which have been ours since Norman William gave them to that Loring who bore his shield at Senlac. Now by trick and fraud they have passed away from us, and many a franklin is a richer man than I; but never shall it be said that I saved the rest by bending my neck to their yoke. Let them do their worst, and let me endure it or fight it as best I may."

The old lady sighed and shook her head. "You speak as a Loring should, and yet I fear that some great trouble will befall us. But let us talk no more of such matters, since we cannot mend them. Where is your citole, Nigel? Will you not play and sing to me?"

The gentleman of those days could scarce read and write; but he spoke in two languages, played at least one musical instrument as a matter of course, and possessed a number of other accomplishments, from the imping of hawk's feathers, to the mystery of venery, with knowledge of every beast and bird, its time of grace and when it was seasonable. As far as physical feats went, to vault barebacked upon a horse, to hit a running hare with a crossbow-bolt, or to climb the angle of a castle courtyard, were feats which had come by nature to the young Squire; but it was very different with music, which had called for many a weary hour of irksome work. Now at last he could master the strings, but both his ear and his voice were not of the best, so that it was well, perhaps, that there was so small and so prejudiced an audience to the Norman-French chanson, which he sang in a high reedy voice with great earnestness of feeling, but with many a slip and quaver, waving his yellow head in cadence to the music—

"A sword! A sword! Ah, give me a sword!
For the world is all to win.
Though the way be hard and the door be barred,
The strong man enters in.
If Chance and Fate still hold the gate,
Give me the iron key,
And turret high my plume shall fly,
Or you may weep for me!

"A horse! A horse! Ah, give me a horse!
To bear me out afar,
Where blackest need and grimmest deed
And sweetest perils are.
Hold thou my ways from glutted days
Where poisoned leisure lies,
And point the path of tears and wrath
Which mounts to high emprise!

" A heart ! A heart ! Ah, give me a heart
To rise to circumstance !
Serene and high and bold to try
The hazard of the chance,
With strength to wait, but fixed as fate
To plan and dare and do,
The peer of all, and only thrall,
Sweet lady mine, to you ! "

It may have been that the sentiment went for more than the music, or it may have been the nicety of her own ears had been dulled by age, but old Dame Ermyntrude clapped her lean hands together and cried out in shrill applause.

" Weathercote has indeed had an apt pupil ! " she said. " I pray you that you will sing again."

" Nay, dear dame, it is turn and turn betwixt you and me. I beg that you will recite a romance, you who know them all. For all the years that I have listened I have never yet come to the end of them, and I dare swear that there are more in your head than in all the great books which they showed me at Guildford Castle. I would fain hear ' Doon of Mayence,' or ' The Song of Roland,' or ' Sir Isumbras.' "

So the old dame broke into a long poem, slow and dull in the inception, but quickening as the interest grew, until with darting hands and glowing face she poured forth the verses which told of the emptiness of sordid life, the beauty of heroic death, the high sacredness of love and the bondage of honour. Nigel, with set, still features and brooding eyes, drank in the fiery words, until at last they died upon the old woman's lips and she sank back weary in her chair. Nigel stooped over her and kissed her brow.

" Your words will ever be as a star upon my path," said he. Then carrying over the small table and the chessmen, he proposed that they should play their usual game before they sought their rooms for the night.

But a sudden and rude interruption broke in upon their gentle contest. A dog pricked its ears and barked. The others ran growling to the door. And then there came a

sharp clash of arms, a dull heavy blow as from a club or sword pommel, and a deep voice from without summoned them to open in the king's name. The old dame and Nigel had both sprung to their feet, their table overturned and their chessmen scattered among the rushes. Nigel's hand had sought his crossbow, but the Lady Ermyntrude grasped his arm.

"Nay, fair son! Have you not heard that it is in the king's name?" said she. "Down, Talbot! Down, Bayard! Open the door and let his messenger in!"

Nigel undid the bolt, and the heavy wooden door swung outward upon its hinges. The light from the flaring cressets beat upon steel caps and fierce bearded faces, with the glimmer of drawn swords and the yellow gleam of bowstaves. A dozen armed archers forced their way into the room. At their head were the gaunt sacrist of Waverley and a stout elderly man clad in a red-velvet doublet and breeches, much stained and mottled with mud and clay. He bore a great sheet of parchment with a fringe of dangling seals, which he held aloft as he entered.

"I call on Nigel Loring!" he cried. "I, the officer of the king's law and the lay summoner of Waverley, call upon the man named Nigel Loring!"

"I am he."

"Yes, it is he!" cried the sacrist. "Archers, do as you were ordered!"

In an instant the band threw themselves upon him like the hounds on a stag. Desperately Nigel strove to gain his sword, which lay upon the iron coffer. With the convulsive strength which comes from the spirit rather than from the body, he bore them all in that direction, but the sacrist snatched the weapon from its place, and the rest dragged the writhing Squire to the ground and swathed him in a cord.

"Hold him fast, good archers! Keep a stout grip on him!" cried the summoner. "I pray you, one of you, prick off these great dogs which snarl at my heels. Stand off, I say, in the name of the king! Watkin, come betwixt

me and these creatures, who have as little regard for the law as their master."

One of the archers kicked off the faithful dogs. But there were others of the household who were equally ready to show their teeth in defence of the old house of Loring. From the door which led to their quarters there emerged the pitiful muster of Nigel's threadbare retainers. There was a time when ten knights, forty men-at-arms, and two hundred archers would march behind the scarlet roses. Now at this last rally, when the young head of the house lay bound in his own hall, there mustered at his call the page Charles with a cudgel, John the cook with his longest spit, Red Swire the aged man-at-arms with a formidable axe swung over his snowy head, and Weathercote the minstrel with a boar-spear. Yet this motley array was fired with the spirit of the house, and under the lead of the fierce old soldier they would certainly have flung themselves upon the ready swords of the archers, had the Lady Ermyntrude not swept between them.

"Stand back, Swire!" she cried. "Back, Weathercote! Charles, put a leash on Talbot, and hold Bayard back!" Her black eyes blazed upon the invaders until they shrank from that baleful gaze. "Who are you, you rascal robbers, who dare to misuse the king's name and to lay hands upon one whose smallest drop of blood has more worth than all your thrall and caitiff bodies?"

"Nay, not so fast, dame, not so fast, I pray you!" cried the stout summoner, whose face had resumed its natural colour, now that he had a woman to deal with. "There is a law of England, mark you, and there are those who serve and uphold it, who are the true men and the king's own lieges. Such a one am I. Then, again, there are those who take such as me and transfer, carry or convey us into a bog or morass. Such a one is this graceless old man with the axe, whom I have seen already this day. There are also those who tear, destroy, or scatter the papers of the law, of which this young man is the chief. Therefore I would rede you, dame, not to rail against us, but to under-

stand that we are the king's men on the king's own service."

"What, then, is your errand in this house at this hour of the night?"

The summoner cleared his throat pompously, and turning his parchment to the light of the cressets he read out a long document in Norman-French, couched in such a style and such a language that the most involved and foolish of our forms were simplicity itself compared to those by which the men of the long gown made a mystery of that which of all things on earth should be the plainest and the most simple. Despair fell cold upon Nigel's heart and blanched the face of the old dame as they listened to the dread catalogue of claims and suits and issues, questions of peccary and turbary, of house-bote and fire-bote, which ended by a demand for all the lands, hereditaments, tenements, messuages and curtilages, which made up their worldly all.

Nigel, still bound, had been placed with his back against the iron coffer, whence he heard with dry lips and moist brow this doom of his house. Now he broke in on the recital with a vehemence which made the summoner jump:

"You shall rue what you have done this night!" he cried. "Poor as we are, we have our friends who will not see us wronged, and I will plead my cause before the king's own majesty at Windsor, that he, who saw the father die, may know what things are done in his royal name against the son. But these matters are to be settled in course of law in the king's courts, and how will you excuse yourself for this assault upon my house and person?"

"Nay, that is another matter," said the sacrist. "The question of debt may indeed be an affair of a civil court. But it is a crime against the law and an act of the Devil which comes within the jurisdiction of the Abbey Court of Waverley when you dare to lay hands upon the summoner or his papers."

"Indeed, he speaks truth," cried the official. "I know no blacker sin."

"Therefore," said the stern monk, "it is the order of the holy father Abbot that you sleep this night in the Abbey cell, and that to-morrow you be brought before him at the court held in the chapter-house so that you receive the fit punishment for this and the many other violent and froward deeds which you have wrought upon the servants of Holy Church. Enough is now said, worthy master summoner. Archers, remove your prisoner!"

As Nigel was lifted up by four stout archers, the Dame Ermyntrude would have rushed to his aid, but the sacrist thrust her back.

"Stand off, proud woman! Let the law take its course, and learn to humble your heart before the power of Holy Church. Has your life not taught its lesson, you, whose horn was exalted among the highest and will soon not have a roof above your grey hairs? Stand back, I say, lest I lay a curse upon you!"

The old dame flamed suddenly into white wrath as she stood before the angry monk.

"Listen to me while I lay a curse upon you and yours!" she cried, as she raised her shrivelled arms and blighted him with her flashing eyes: "As you have done to the House of Loring, so may God do to you, until your power is swept from the land of England, and of your great Abbey of Waverley there is nothing left but a pile of grey stones in a green meadow! I see it! I see it! With my old eyes I see it! From scullion to abbot and from cellar to tower, may Waverley and all within it droop and wither from this night on!"

The monk, hard as he was, quailed before the frantic figure and the bitter, burning words. Already the summoner and the archers with their prisoner were clear of the house. He turned, and with a clang he shut the heavy door behind him.

## 5. *How Nigel was Tried by the Abbot of Waverley*

THE law of the Middle Ages, shrouded as it was in old Norman-French dialect, and abounding in uncouth and incomprehensible terms, in deodands and heriots, in infang and outfang, was a fearsome weapon in the hands of those who knew how to use it. It was not for nothing that the first act of the rebel commoners was to hew off the head of the Lord Chancellor. In an age when few knew how to read or to write, these mystic phrases and intricate forms, with the parchments and seals which were their outward expression, struck cold terror into hearts which were steeled against mere physical danger.

Even young Nigel Loring's blithe and elastic spirit was chilled as he lay that night in the penal cell of Waverley, and pondered over the absolute ruin which threatened his house from a source against which all his courage was of no avail. As well take up sword and shield to defend himself against the black death, as against this blight of Holy Church. He was powerless in the grip of the Abbey. Already they had shorn off a field here and a grove there, and now in one sweep they would take in the rest, and where then was the home of the Lorings, and where should Lady Ermyntrude lay her aged head, or his old retainers, broken and spent, eke out the balance of their days? He shivered as he thought of it.

It was very well for him to threaten to carry the matter before the king, but it was years since Royal Edward had heard the name of Loring, and Nigel knew that the memory of princes was a short one. Besides, the Church was the ruling power in the palace as well as in the cottage, and it was only for very good cause that a king could be expected to cross the purposes of so high a prelate as the Abbot of Waverley, as long as they came within the scope of the law. Where, then, was he to look for help? With

the simple and practical piety of the age, he prayed for the aid of his own particular saints : of Saint Paul, whose adventures by land and sea had always endeared him ; of Saint George, who had gained much honourable advancement from the Dragon ; and of Saint Thomas, who was a gentleman of coat-armour, who would understand and help a person of gentle blood. Then, much comforted by his naïve orisons, he enjoyed the sleep of youth and health until the entrance of the lay brother with the bread and small beer, which served as breakfast in the morning.

The Abbey court sat in the chapter-house at the canonical hour of tierce, which was nine in the forenoon. At all times the function was a solemn one, even when the culprit might be a villein who was taken poaching on the Abbey estate, or a chapman who had given false measure from his biased scales. But now, when a man of noble birth was to be tried, the whole legal and ecclesiastical ceremony was carried out with every detail, grotesque or impressive, which the full ritual prescribed. Mid the distant roll of church music and the slow tolling of the Abbey bell, the white-robed brethren, two and two, walked thrice round the hall singing the *Benedicite* and the *Veni, Creator* before they settled in their places at the desks on either side. Then in turn each high officer of the Abbey from below upward, the almoner, the lector, the chaplain, the sub-prior and the prior, swept to their wonted places.

Finally there came the grim sacrist, with demure triumph upon his downcast features, and at his heels Abbot John himself, slow and dignified, with pompous walk and solemn, composed face, his iron-beaded rosary swinging from his waist, his breviary in his hand, and his lips muttering as he hurried through his office for the day. He knelt at his high prie-dieu ; the brethren, at a signal from the prior, prostrated themselves upon the floor, and the low deep voices rolled in prayer, echoed back from the arched and vaulted roof like the wash of waves from an ocean cavern. Finally the monks resumed their seats ;

there entered clerks in seemly black with pens and parchment ; the red-velveted summoner appeared to tell his tale ; Nigel was led in with archers pressing close around him ; and then, with much calling of old French and much legal incantation and mystery, the court of the Abbey was open for business.

It was the sacrist who first advanced to the oaken desk reserved for the witnesses and expounded in hard, dry, mechanical fashion the many claims which the House of Waverley had against the family of Loring. Some generations back, in return for money advanced or for spiritual favour received, the Loring of the day had admitted that his estate had certain feudal duties toward the Abbey. The sacrist held up the crackling yellow parchment with swinging leaden seals on which the claim was based. Amid the obligations was that of escuage, by which the price of a knight's fee should be paid every year. No such price had been paid, nor had any service been done. The accumulated years came now to a greater sum than the fee-simple of the estate. There were other claims also. The sacrist called for his books, and with thin, eager forefinger he tracked them down ; dues for this, and tallage for that, so many shillings this year, and so many nobles that one. Some of it occurred before Nigel was born ; some of it when he was but a child. The accounts had been checked and certified by the sergeant of the law.

Nigel listened to the dread recital, and felt like some young stag who stands at bay with brave pose and heart of fire, but who sees himself compassed round and knows clearly that there is no escape. With his bold young face, his steady blue eyes, and the proud poise of his head, he was a worthy scion of the old house, and the sun, shining through the high oriel window, and showing up the stained and threadbare condition of his once rich doublet, seemed to illuminate the fallen fortunes of his family.

The sacrist had finished his exposition, and the sergeant-at-law was about to conclude a case which Nigel could in

no way controvert, when help came to him from an unexpected quarter. It may have been a certain malignity with which the sacrist urged his suit, it may have been a diplomatic dislike to driving matters to extremes, or it may have been some genuine impulse of kindliness, for Abbot John was choleric but easily appeased. Whatever the cause, the result was that a white plump hand, raised in the air with a gesture of authority, showed that the case was at an end.

"Our brother sacrist hath done his duty in urging this suit," said he, "for the worldly wealth of this Abbey is placed in his pious keeping, and it is to him that we should look if we suffered in such ways, for we are but the trustees of those who come after us. But to my keeping has been consigned that which is more precious still, the inner spirit and high repute of those who follow the rule of Saint Bernard. Now, it has ever been our endeavour, since first our saintly founder went down into the valley of Clairvaux and built himself a cell there, that we should set an example to all men in gentleness and humility. For this reason it is that we build our houses in lowly places, that we have no tower to our Abbey churches, and that no finery and no metal, save only iron or lead, come within our walls. A brother shall eat from a wooden platter, drink from an iron cup, and light himself from a leaden sconce. Surely it is not for such an order, who await the exaltation which is promised to the humble, to judge their own case and so acquire the lands of their neighbour! If our cause be just, as indeed I believe that it is, then it were better that it be judged at the king's assizes at Guildford, and so I decree that the case be now dismissed from the Abbey court so that it can be heard elsewhere."

Nigel breathed a prayer to the three sturdy saints who had stood by him so manfully and well in the hour of his need.

"Abbot John," said he, "I never thought that any man of my name would utter thanks to a Cistercian of

Waverley ; but, by Saint Paul ! you have spoken like a man this day, for it would indeed be to play with cogged dice if the Abbey's case is to be tried in the Abbey court."

The eighty white-clad brethren looked with half-resentful, half-amused eyes as they listened to this frank address to one who, in their small lives, seemed to be the direct viceregent of Heaven. The archers had stood back from Nigel, as though he were at liberty to go, when the loud voice of the summoner broke in upon the silence.

" If it please you, holy father Abbot," cried the voice, " this decision of yours is indeed *secundum legem* and *intra vires* so far as the civil suit is concerned which lies between this person and the Abbey. That is your affair ; but it is I, Joseph the summoner, who have been grievously and criminally mishandled, my writs, papers, and indentures destroyed, my authority flouted, and my person dragged through a bog, quagmire or morass, so that my velvet gabardine and silver badge of office were lost and are, as I verily believe, in the morass, quagmire or bog aforementioned, which is the same bog, morass——"

" Enough ! " cried the Abbot, sternly. " Lay aside this foolish fashion of speech, and say straitly what you desire."

" Holy father, I have been the officer of the king's law no less than the servant of Holy Church, and I have been let, hindered, and assaulted in the performance of my lawful and proper duties, whilst my papers, drawn in the king's name, have been shended and rended and cast to the wind. Therefore I demand justice upon this man in the Abbey court, the said assault having been committed within the banlieue of the Abbey's jurisdiction."

" What have you to say to this, brother sacrist ? " asked the Abbot in some perplexity.

" I would say, father, that it is within our power to deal gently and charitably with all that concerns ourselves, but that where the king's officer is concerned, we are wanting in our duty if we give him less than the protection that he demands. I would remind you also,

holy father, that this is not the first of this man's violence, but that he has before now beaten our servants, defied our authority, and put pike in the Abbot's own fish-pond."

The prelate's heavy cheeks flushed with anger as this old grievance came fresh into his mind. His eyes hardened as he looked at the prisoner. "Tell me, Squire Nigel, did you indeed put pike in the pond?"

The young man drew himself proudly up. "Ere I answer such a question, father Abbot, do you answer one from me, and tell me what the monks of Waverley have ever done for me that I should hold my hand when I could injure them?"

A low murmur ran round the room, partly wonder at his frankness, and partly anger at his boldness.

The Abbot settled down in his seat as one who has made up his mind. "Let the case of the summoner be laid before me," said he. "Justice shall be done, and the offender shall be punished, be he noble or simple. Let the plaint be brought before the court."

The tale of the summoner, though rambling and filled with endless legal reiteration, was only too clear in its essence. Red Swire, with his angry face framed in white bristles, was led in, and confessed to his ill-treatment of the official. A second culprit, a little wiry, nut-brown archer from Churt, had aided and abetted in the deed. Both of them were ready to declare that young Squire Nigel Loring knew nothing of the matter. But then there was the awkward incident of the tearing of the writs. Nigel, to whom a lie was an impossibility, had to admit that with his own hands he had shredded those august documents. As to an excuse or an explanation, he was too proud to advance any. A cloud gathered over the brow of the Abbot, and the sacrist gazed with an ironical smile at the prisoner, while a solemn hush fell over the chapter-house as the case ended and only judgment remained.

"Squire Nigel," said the Abbot, "it was for you, who are, as all men know, of ancient lineage in this land, to

give a fair example by which others should set their conduct. Instead of this, your manor-house has ever been a centre for the stirring up of strife, and now not content with your harsh showing toward us, the Cistercian monks of Waverley, you have even marked your contempt for the king's law, and through your servants have mishandled the person of his messenger. For such offences it is in my power to call the spiritual terrors of the Church upon your head, and yet I would not be harsh with you, seeing that you are young, and that even last week you saved the life of a servant of the Abbey when in peril. Therefore it is by temporal and carnal means that I will use my power to tame your overbold spirit, and to chasten that headstrong and violent humour which has caused such scandal in your dealings with our Abbey. Bread and water for six weeks from now to the Feast of Saint Benedict, with a daily exhortation from our chaplain, the pious Father Ambrose, may still avail to bend the stiff neck and to soften the hard heart."

At this ignominious sentence, by which the proud heir of the House of Loring would share the fate of the meanest village poacher, the hot blood of Nigel rushed to his face, and his eye glanced round him with a gleam which said more plainly than words that there could be no tame acceptance of such a doom. Twice he tried to speak, and twice his anger and his shame held the words in his throat.

"I am no subject of yours, proud Abbot!" he cried at last. "My house has ever been vavasor to the king. I deny the power of you and your court to lay sentence upon me. Punish these your own monks, who whimper at your frown, but do not dare to lay your hand upon him who fears you not, for he is a free man, and the peer of any save only the king himself."

The Abbot seemed for an instant taken aback by these bold words, and by the high and strenuous voice in which they were uttered. But the sterner sacrist came as ever to stiffen his will. He held up the old parchment in his hand.

"The Lorings were indeed vavasors to the king," said he; "but here is the very seal of Eustace Loring, which shows that he made himself vassal to the Abbey, and held his land from it."

"Because he was gentle," cried Nigel, "because he had no thought of trick or guile."

"Nay!" said the summoner. "If my voice may be heard, father Abbot, upon a point of the law, it is of no weight what the causes may have been why a deed is subscribed, signed or confirmed, but a court is concerned only with the terms, articles, covenants, and contracts of the said deed."

"Besides," said the sacrist, "sentence is passed by the Abbey court, and there is an end of its honour and good name if it be not upheld."

"Brother sacrist," said the Abbot, angrily, "methinks you show overmuch zeal in this case, and certes, we are well able to uphold the dignity and honour of the Abbey court without any rede of thine. As to you, worthy summoner, you will give your opinion when we crave for it, and not before, or you may yourself get some touch of the power of our tribunal. But your case hath been tried, Squire Loring, and judgment given. I have no more to say."

He motioned with his hand, and an archer laid his grip upon the shoulder of the prisoner. But that rough plebeian touch woke every passion of revolt in Nigel's spirit. Of all his high line of ancestors, was there one who had been subjected to such ignominy as this? Would they not have preferred death? And should he be the first to lower their spirit or their traditions? With a quick, lithe movement, he slipped under the arm of the archer, and plucked the short, straight sword from the soldier's side as he did so. The next instant he had wedged himself into the recess of one of the narrow windows, and there were his pale, set face, his burning eyes, and his ready blade turned upon the assembly.

"By Saint Paul!" said he, "I never thought to find

honourable advancement under the roof of an abbey, but, perchance, there may be some room for it ere you hale me to your prison."

The chapter-house was in an uproar. Never in the long and decorous history of the Abbey had such a scene been witnessed within its walls. The monks themselves seemed for an instant to be affected by this spirit of daring revolt. Their own lifelong fetters hung more loosely as they viewed this unheard-of defiance of authority. They broke from their seats on either side, and huddled half-scared, half-fascinated, in a large half-circle round the defiant captive, chattering, pointing, grimacing, a scandal for all time. Scourges should fall and penance be done for many a long week before the shadow of that day should pass from Waverley. But meanwhile there was no effort to bring them back to their rule. Everything was chaos and disorder. The Abbot had left his seat of justice and hurried angrily forward, to be engulfed and hustled in the crowd of his own monks like a sheep-dog who finds himself entangled amid a flock.

Only the sacrist stood clear. He had taken shelter behind the half-dozen archers, who looked with some approval and a good deal of indecision at this bold fugitive from justice.

"On him!" cried the sacrist. "Shall he defy the authority of the court, or shall one man hold six of you at bay? Close in upon him and seize him. You, Baddlesmere, why do you hold back?"

The man in question, a tall, bushy-bearded fellow, clad like the others in green jerkin and breeches, with high brown boots, advanced slowly, sword in hand, against Nigel. His heart was not in the business, for these clerical courts were not popular, and everyone had a tender heart for the fallen fortunes of the House of Loring and wished well to its young heir.

"Come, young sir, you have caused scathe enough," said he. "Stand forth and give yourself up!"

"Come and fetch me, good fellow," said Nigel, with a dangerous smile.

The archer ran in. There was a rasp of steel, a blade flickered like a swift dart of flame, and the man staggered back, with blood running down his forearm and dripping from his fingers. He wrung them and growled a Saxon oath.

" By the black rood of Bromeholm ! " he cried, " I had as soon put my hand down a fox's earth to drag up a vixen from her cubs."

" Stand off ! " said Nigel, curtly. " I would not hurt you ; but, by Saint Paul ! I will not be handled, or someone will be hurt in the handling."

So fierce was his eye and so menacing his blade as he crouched in the narrow bay of the window that the little knot of archers were at a loss what to do. The Abbot had forced his way through the crowd, and stood, purple with outraged dignity, at their side.

" He is outside the law," said he. " He hath shed blood in a court of justice, and for such a sin there is no forgiveness. I will not have my court so flouted and set at nought. He who draws the sword, by the sword also let him perish. Forester Hugh, lay a shaft to your bow ! "

The man, who was one of the Abbey's lay servants, put his weight upon his long bow and slipped the loose end of the string into the upper notch. Then, drawing one of the terrible three-foot arrows, steel-tipped and gaudily winged, from his waist, he laid it to the string.

" Now draw your bow and hold it ready ! " cried the furious Abbot. " Squire Nigel, it is not for Holy Church to shed blood, but there is nought but violence which will prevail against the violent, and on your head be the sin. Cast down the sword which you hold in your hand ! "

" Will you give me freedom to leave your Abbey ? "

" When you have abided your sentence and purged your sin."

" Then I had rather die where I stand than give up my sword."

A dangerous flame lit in the Abbot's eyes. He came of a fighting Norman stock, like so many of those fierce

prelates who, bearing a mace lest they should be guilty of effusion of blood, led their troops into battle, ever remembering that it was one of their own cloth and dignity who, crosier in hand, had turned the long-drawn bloody day of Hastings. The soft accent of the churchman was gone, and it was the hard voice of the soldier which said—

"One minute I give you, and no more. Then when I cry 'Loose!' drive me an arrow through his body."

The shaft was fitted, the bow was bent, and the stern eyes of the woodman were fixed on his mark. Slowly the minute passed, while Nigel breathed a prayer to his three soldier saints, not that they should save his body in this life, but that they should have a kindly care for his soul in the next. Some thought of a fierce wildcat sally crossed his mind, but once out of his corner he was lost indeed. Yet at the last he would have rushed among his enemies, and his body was bent for the spring, when with a deep sonorous hum, like a breaking harp-string, the cord of the bow was cloven in twain, and the arrow tinkled upon the tiled floor. At the same moment a young curly-headed bowman, whose broad shoulders and deep chest told of immense strength, as clearly as his frank, laughing face and honest hazel eyes did of good humour and courage, sprang forward, sword in hand, and took his place by Nigel's side.

"Nay, comrades!" said he. "Samkin Aylward cannot stand by and see a gallant man shot down like a bull at the end of a baiting. Five against one is long odds, but two against four is better; and, by my finger-bones! Squire Nigel and I leave this room together, be it on our feet or no."

The formidable appearance of this ally and his high reputation among his fellows gave a further chill to the lukewarm ardour of the attack. Aylward's left arm was passed through his strung bow, and he was known from Woolmer Forest to the Weald as the quickest, surest archer that ever dropped a running deer at ten-score paces.

"Nay, Baddlesmere, hold your fingers from your string-

case, or I may chance to give your drawing hand a two months' rest," said Aylward. "Swords, if you will, comrades, but no man strings his bow till I have loosed mine."

Yet the angry hearts of both Abbot and sacrist rose higher with a fresh obstacle.

"This is an ill day for your father, Franklin Aylward, who holds the tenancy of Crooksbury," said the sacrist. "He will rue it that ever he begot a son who will lose him his acres and his steading."

"My father is a bold yeoman, and would rue it even more that ever his son should stand by while foul work was afoot," said Aylward, stoutly. "Fall on, comrades! We are waiting."

Encouraged by promises of reward if they should fall in the service of the Abbey, and by threats of penalties if they should hold back, the four archers were about to close, when a singular interruption gave an entirely new turn to the proceedings.

At the door of the chapter-house, while these fiery doings had been afoot, there had assembled a mixed crowd of lay brothers, servants, and varlets who had watched the development of the drama with the interest and delight with which men hail a sudden break in a dull routine. Suddenly there was an agitation at the back of this group, then a swirl in the centre, and finally the front rank was violently thrust aside, and through the gap there emerged a strange and whimsical figure, who from the instant of his appearance dominated both chapter-house and Abbey, monks, prelates, and archers, as if he were their owner and their master.

He was a man somewhat above middle age, with thin, lemon-coloured hair, a curling moustache, a tufted chin of the same hue, and a high craggy face, all running to a great hook of the nose, like the beak of an eagle. His skin was tanned a brown-red by much exposure to the wind and sun. In height he was tall, and his figure was thin and loose-jointed, but stringy and hard-bitten. One eye was entirely covered by its lid, which lay flat over an empty

socket, but the other danced and sparkled with a most roguish light, darting here and there with a twinkle of humour and criticism and intelligence, the whole fire of his soul bursting through that one narrow cranny.

His dress was as noteworthy as his person. A rich purple doublet and cloak was marked on the lapels with a strange scarlet device shaped like a wedge. Costly lace hung round his shoulders, and amid its soft folds there smouldered the dull red of a heavy golden chain. A knight's belt at his waist and a knight's golden spurs twinkling from his doeskin riding-boots proclaimed his rank, and on the wrist of his left gauntlet there sat a demure little hooded falcon of a breed which in itself was a mark of the dignity of the owner. Of weapons he had none, but a mandoline was slung by a black silken band over his back, and the high brown end projected above his shoulder. Such was the man, quaint, critical, masterful, with a touch of what is formidable behind it, who now surveyed the opposing groups of armed men and angry monks with an eye which commanded their attention.

"*Excusez*!" said he, in a lisping French. "*Excusez, mes amis*! I had thought to arouse you from prayer or meditation, but never have I seen such a holy exercise as this under an abbey's roof, with swords for breviaries and archers for acolytes. I fear that I have come amiss, and yet I ride on an errand from one who permits no delay."

The Abbot, and possibly the sacrist also, had begun to realise that events had gone a great deal farther than they had intended, and that without an extreme scandal it was no easy matter for them to save their dignity and the good name of Waverley. Therefore, in spite of the debonair, not to say disrespectful, bearing of the newcomer, they rejoiced at his appearance and intervention.

"I am the Abbot of Waverley, fair son," said the prelate. "If your message deal with a public matter it may be fitly repeated in the chapter-house; if not I will give you audience in my own chamber; for it is clear to me that you are a gentleman of blood and coat-armour

who would not lightly break in upon the business of our court—a business which, as you have remarked, is little welcome to men of peace like myself and the brethren of the rule of Saint Bernard."

"*Pardieu*! Father Abbot," said the stranger. "One had but to glance at you and your men to see that the business was indeed little to your taste, and it may be even less so when I say that rather than see this young person in the window, who hath a noble bearing, further molested by these archers, I will adventure my person on his behalf."

The Abbot's smile turned to a frown at these frank words. "It would become you better, sir, to deliver the message of which you say that you are the bearer, than to uphold a prisoner against the rightful judgment of a court."

The stranger swept the court with his questioning eye. "The message is not for you, good father Abbot. It is for one I know not. I have been to his house, and they have sent me hither. The name is Nigel Loring."

"It is for me, fair sir."

"I had thought as much. I knew your father, Eustace Loring, and though he would have made two of you, yet he has left his stamp plain enough upon your face."

"You know not the truth of this matter," said the Abbot. "If you are a loyal man, you will stand aside, for this young man hath grievously offended against the law, and it is for the king's lieges to give us their support."

"And you have haled him up for judgment," cried the stranger, with much amusement. "It is as though a rookery sat in judgment upon a falcon. I warrant that you have found it easier to judge than to punish. Let me tell you, father Abbot, that this standeth not aright. When powers such as these were given to the like of you, they were given that you might check a brawling underling or correct a drunken woodman, and not that you might drag the best blood in England to your bar and set your archers on him if he questioned your findings."

The Abbot was little used to hear such words of reproof uttered in so stern a voice under his own abbey roof and before his listening monks.

"You may perchance find that an Abbey court has more powers than you wot of, Sir Knight," said he, "if knight indeed you be who are so uncourteous and short in your speech. Ere we go further, I would ask your name and style?"

The stranger laughed. "It is easy to see that you are indeed men of peace," said he proudly. "Had I shown this sign," and he touched the token upon his lapels, "whether on shield or pennon, in the marches of France or Scotland, there is not a cavalier but would have known the red pile of Chandos."

Chandos, John Chandos, the flower of English chivalry, the pink of knight-errantry, the hero already of fifty desperate enterprises, a man known and honoured from end to end of Europe! Nigel gazed at him as one who sees a vision. The archers stood back abashed, while the monks crowded closer to stare at the famous soldier of the French wars. The Abbot abated his tone, and a smile came to his angry face.

"We are indeed men of peace, Sir John, and little skilled in warlike blazonry," said he; "yet stout as are our Abbey walls, they are not so thick that the fame of your exploits has not passed through them and reached our ears. If it be your pleasure to take an interest in this young and misguided squire, it is not for us to thwart your kind intention or to withhold such grace as you request. I am glad indeed that he hath one who can set him so fair an example for a friend."

"I thank you for your courtesy, good father Abbot," said Chandos, carelessly. "This young squire has, however, a better friend than myself, one who is kinder to those he loves and more terrible to those he hates. It is from him I bear a message."

"I pray you, fair and honoured sir," said Nigel, "that you will tell me what is the message that you bear."

"The message, *mon ami*, is that your friend comes into these parts and would have a night's lodging at the Manor-house of Tilford for the love and respect that he bears your family."

"Nay, he is most welcome," said Nigel, "and yet I hope that he is one who can relish a soldier's fare and sleep under a humble roof, for indeed we can but give our best, poor as it is."

"He is indeed a soldier and a good one," Chandos answered, laughing, "and I warrant he has slept in rougher quarters than Tilford Manor-house."

"I have few friends, fair sir," said Nigel, with a puzzled face. "I pray you give me this gentleman's name."

"His name is Edward."

"Sir Edward Mortimer of Kent, perchance, or is it Sir Edward Brocas of whom the Lady Ermyntrude talks?"

"Nay, he is known as Edward only, and if you ask a second name it is Plantagenet, for he who comes to seek the shelter of your roof is your liege lord and mine, the King's high majesty, Edward of England."

## 6. *In which Lady Ermyntrude Opens the Iron Coffer*

AS in a dream Nigel heard these stupendous and incredible words. As in a dream also he had a vision of a smiling and conciliatory Abbot, of an obsequious sacrist, and of a band of archers who cleared a path for him and for the king's messenger through the motley crowd who had choked the entrance of the Abbey court. A minute later he was walking by the side of Chandos through the peaceful cloister, and in front, in the open archway of the great gate, was the broad yellow road between its borders of green meadow-land. The spring air was the sweeter and the more fragrant for that chill dread of dishonour and captivity which had so recently frozen

his ardent heart. He had already passed the portal when a hand plucked at his sleeve, and he turned to find himself confronted by the brown honest face and hazel eyes of the archer who had interfered in his behalf.

"Well," said Aylward, "what have you to say to me, young sir?"

"What can I say, my good fellow, save that I thank you with all my heart? By Saint Paul! if you had been my blood brother you could not have stood by me more stoutly."

"Nay! but this is not enough."

Nigel coloured with vexation, and the more so as Chandos was listening with his critical smile to their conversation.

"If you had heard what was said in the court," said he, "you will understand that I am not blessed at this moment with much of this world's gear. The black death and the monks have between them been heavy upon our estate. Willingly would I give you a handful of gold for your assistance, since that is what you seem to crave; but indeed I have it not, and so once more I say that you must be satisfied with my thanks."

"Your gold is nothing to me," said Aylward shortly, "nor would you buy my loyalty if you filled my wallet with rose nobles so long as you were not a man after my own heart. But I have seen you back the yellow horse, and I have seen you face the Abbot of Waverley and you are such a master as I would very gladly serve if you have by chance a place for such a man. I have seen your following, and I doubt not that they were stout fellows in your grandfather's time; but which of them now would draw a bow-string to his ear? Through you I have left the service of the Abbey of Waverley, and where can I look now for a post? If I stay here I am all undone like a fretted bow-string."

"Nay, there can be no difficulty there," said Chandos. "*Pardieu!* a roistering, swaggering dare-devil archer is worth his price on the French border. There are two

hundred such who march behind my own person, and I would ask nothing better than to see you among them."

"I thank you, noble sir, for your offer," said Aylward, "and I had rather follow your banner than many another one, for it is well known that it goes ever forward, and I have heard enough of the wars to know that there are small pickings for the man who lags behind. Yet, if the squire will have me, I would choose to fight under the five roses of Loring, for though I was born in the hundred of Easebourne and the rape of Chichester, yet I have grown up and learned to use the longbow in these parts, and as the free son of a free franklin I had rather serve my own neighbour than a stranger."

"My good fellow," said Nigel, "I have told you that I could in no wise reward you for such service."

"If you will but take me to the wars I will see to my own reward," said Aylward. "Till then I ask for none, save a corner of your table and six feet of your floor, for it is certain that the only reward I would get from the Abbey for this day's work would be the scourge for my back and the stocks for my ankles. Samkin Aylward is your man, Squire Nigel, from this hour on, and by these ten finger-bones he trusts the Devil will fly away with him if ever he gives you cause to regret it!" So saying he raised his hand to his steel cap in salute, slung his great yellow bow over his back, and followed on some paces in the rear of his new master.

"*Pardieu!* I have arrived *à la bonne heure*," said Chandos. "I rode from Windsor and came to your manor-house, to find it empty save for a fine old dame, who told me of your troubles. From her I walked across to the Abbey, and none too soon, for what with cloth-yard shafts for your body, and bell, book, and candle for your soul, it was no very cheerful outlook. But here is the very dame herself, I if mistake not."

It was indeed the formidable figure of the Lady Ermyntrude, gaunt, bowed, and leaning on her staff, which had emerged from the door of the manor-house and advanced

to greet them. She croaked with laughter, and shook her stick at the great building as she heard of the discomfiture of the Abbey court. Then she led the way into the hall, where the best which she could provide had been laid out for their illustrious guest. There was Chandos blood in her own veins, traceable back through the de Greys, de Multons, de Valences, de Montagues, and other high and noble strains, so that the meal had been eaten and cleared before she had done tracing the network of intermarriages and connections, with quarterings, impalements, lozenges and augmentations by which the blazonry of the two families might be made to show a common origin. Back to the Conquest and before it there was not a noble family-tree every twig and bud of which was not familiar to the Dame Ermyntrude.

And now, when the trestles were cleared and the three were left alone in the hall, Chandos broke his message to the lady. "King Edward hath ever borne in mind that noble knight, your son, Sir Eustace," said he. "He will journey to Southampton next week, and I am his harbinger. He bade me say, noble and honoured lady, that he would come from Guildford in an easy stage so that he might spend one night under your roof."

The old dame flushed with pleasure, and then turned white with vexation at the words.

"It is in truth great honour to the House of Loring," said she, "yet our roof is now humble and, as you have seen, our fare is plain. The king knows not that we are so poor. I fear lest we seem churlish and niggard in his eyes."

But Chandos reasoned away her fears. The king's retinue would journey on to Farnham Castle. There were no ladies in his party. Though he was king, still he was a hardy soldier, and cared little for his ease. In any case, since he had declared his coming, they must make the best of it. Finally, with all delicacy, Chandos offered his own purse if it would help in the matter. But already the Lady Ermyntrude had recovered her composure.

"Nay, fair kinsman, that may not be," said she. "I will make such preparations as I may for the king. He will bear in mind that if the House of Loring can give nothing else, they have always held their blood and their lives at his disposal."

Chandos was to ride on to Farnham Castle and beyond, but he expressed his desire to have a warm bath ere he left Tilford, for, like most of his fellow-knights, he was much addicted to simmering in the hottest water that he could possibly endure. The bath therefore, a high hooped arrangement like a broader but shorter churn, was carried into the privacy of the guest-chamber, and thither it was that Nigel was summoned to hold him company while he stewed and sweltered in his tub.

Nigel perched himself upon the side of the high bed, swinging his legs over the edge and gazing with wonder and amusement at the quaint face, the ruffled yellow hair, and the sinewy shoulders of the famous warrior, dimly seen amid a pillar of steam. He was in a mood for talk; so Nigel, with eager lips, plied him with a thousand questions about the wars, hanging upon every word which came back to him, like those of the ancient oracles, out of the mist and the cloud. To Chandos himself, the old soldier for whom war had lost its freshness, it was a renewal of his own ardent youth to listen to Nigel's rapid questions and to mark the rapt attention with which he listened.

"Tell me of the Welsh, honoured sir?" asked the squire. "What manner of soldiers are the Welsh?"

"They are very valiant men of war," said Chandos, splashing about in his tub. "There is good skirmishing to be had in their valleys if you ride with a small following. They flare up like a furze-bush in the flames, but if for a short space you may abide the heat of it, then there is a chance that it may be cooler."

"And the Scotch?" asked Nigel. "You have made war upon them also, as I understand."

"The Scotch knights have no masters in the world, and

he who can hold his own with the best of them, be it a Douglas, a Murray, or a Seaton, has nothing more to learn. Though you be a hard man, you will always meet as hard a one if you ride northward. If the Welsh be like the furze-fire, then, *pardieu !* the Scotch are the peat, for they will smoulder and you will never come to the end of them. I have had many happy hours on the marches of Scotland, for even if there be no war the Percies of Alnwick or the Governor of Carlisle can still raise a little bickering with the border clans."

"I bear in mind that my father was wont to say that they were very stout spearmen."

"No better in the world, for their spears are twelve foot long and they hold them in very thick array ; but their archers are weak, save only the men of Ettrick and Selkirk who come from the forest. I pray you to open the lattice, Nigel, for the steam is overthick. Now, in Wales it is the spearmen who are weak, and there are no archers in these islands like the men of Gwent with their bows of elm, which shoot with such power that I have known a cavalier to have his horse killed when the shaft had passed through his mail breeches, his thigh, and his saddle. And yet, what is the most strongly shot arrow to these new balls of iron driven by the fire-powder which will crush a man's armour as an egg is crushed by a stone ? Our fathers knew them not."

"Then the better for us," cried Nigel, "since there is at least one honourable venture which is all our own."

Chandos chuckled and turned upon the flushed youth a twinkling and sympathetic eye. "You have a fashion of speech which carries me back to the old men whom I met in my boyhood," said he. "There were some of the real old knight-errants left in those days and they spoke as you do. Young as you are, you belong to another age. Where got you that trick of thought and word ? "

"I have had only one to teach me, the Lady Ermyntrude."

"*Pardieu !* she has trained a proper young hawk ready

to stoop at a lordly quarry," said Chandos. "I would that I had the first unhooding of you. Will you not ride with me to the wars?"

The tears brimmed over from Nigel's eyes, and he wrung the gaunt hand extended from the bath. "By Saint Paul! what could I ask better in the world? I fear to leave her, for she has none other to care for her. But if it can in any way be arranged——"

"The king's hand may smooth it out. Say no more until he is here. But if you wish to ride with me——"

"What could man wish for more? Is there a squire in England who would not serve under the banner of Chandos! Whither do you go, fair sir? And when do you go? Is it to Scotland? Is it to Ireland? Is it to France? But alas, alas!"

The eager face had clouded. For the instant he had forgotten that a suit of armour was as much beyond his means as a service of gold plate. Down in a twinkling came all his high hopes to the ground. Oh, these sordid material things, which come between our dreams and their fulfilment! The squire of such a knight must dress with the best. Yet all the fee-simple of Tilford would scarce suffice for one suit of plate.

Chandos with his quick wit and knowledge of the world had guessed the cause of this sudden change.

"If you fight under my banner it is for me to find the weapons," said he. "Nay, I will not be denied."

But Nigel shook his head sadly. "It may not be. The Lady Ermyntrude would sell this old house and every acre round it, ere she would permit me to accept this gracious bounty which you offer. Yet do I not despair, for only last week I won for myself a noble war-horse for which I paid not a penny, so perchance a suit of armour may also come my way."

"And how won you the horse?"

"It was given me by the monks of Waverley."

"This is wonderful. *Pardieu!* I should have ex-

pected, from what I have seen, that they would have given you little save their malediction."

"They had no use for the horse, and they gave it to me."

"Then we have only to find someone who has no use for a suit of armour and will give it to you. Yet I trust that you will think better of it and let me, since that good lady proves that I am your kinsman, fit you for the wars."

"I thank you, noble sir, and if I should turn to anyone it would indeed be to you; but there are other ways which I would try first. But I pray you, good Sir John, to tell me of some of your noble spear-runnings against the French, for the whole land rings with the tale of your deeds, and I have heard that in one morning three champions have fallen before your lance. Was it not so?"

"That it was indeed so these scars upon my body will prove; but these were the follies of my youth."

"How can you call them follies? Are they not the means by which honourable advancement may be gained and one's lady exalted?"

"It is right that you should think so, Nigel. At your age a man should have a hot head and a high heart. I also had both, and fought for my lady's glove or for my vow or for the love of fighting. But as one grows older and commands men one has other things to think of. One thinks less of one's own honour and more of the safety of the army. It is not your own spear, your own sword, your own arm, which will turn the tide of fight; but a cool head may save a stricken field. He who knows when his horsemen should charge and when they should fight on foot, he who can mix his archers with his men-at-arms in such a fashion that each can support the other, he who can hold up his reserve and pour it into the battle when it may turn the tide, he who has a quick eye for boggy land and broken ground—that is the man who is of more worth to an army than Roland, Oliver, and all the paladins."

"Yet if his knights fail him, honoured sir, all his head-work will not prevail."

"True enough, Nigel; so may every squire ride to the wars with his soul on fire, as yours is now. But I must linger no longer, for the king's service must be done. I will dress, and when I have bid farewell to the noble Dame Ermyntrude I will on to Farnham; but you will see me here again on the day that the king comes."

So Chandos went his way that evening, walking his horse through the peaceful lanes and twanging his citole as he went, for he loved music and was famous for his merry songs. The cottagers came from their huts and laughed and clapped as the rich full voice swelled and sank to the cheery tinkling of the strings. There were few who saw him pass that would have guessed that the quaint one-eyed man with the yellow hair was the toughest fighter and craftiest man of war in Europe. Once only, as he entered Farnham, an old broken man-at-arms ran out in his rags and clutched at his horse as a dog gambols round his master. Chandos threw him a kind word and a gold coin as he passed on to the castle.

In the meanwhile young Nigel and the Lady Ermyntrude, left alone with their difficulties, looked blankly in each other's faces.

"The cellar is well-nigh empty," said Nigel. "There are two firkins of small beer and a tun of canary. How can we set such drink before the king and his court?"

"We must have some wine of Bordeaux. With that and the mottled cow's calf and the fowls and a goose, we can set forth a sufficient repast if he stays only for the one night. How many will be with him?"

"A dozen, at the least."

The old dame wrung her hands in despair.

"Nay, take it not to heart, dear lady!" said Nigel. "We have but to say the word and the king would stop at Waverley, where he and his court would find all that they could wish."

"Never!" cried the Lady Ermyntrude. "It would be

shame and disgrace to us for ever if the king were to pass our door when he has graciously said that he was fain to enter in. Nay, I will do it. Never did I think that I would be forced to this, but I know that he would wish it, and I will do it."

She went to the old iron coffer, and taking a small key from her girdle she unlocked it. The rusty hinges, screaming shrilly as she threw back the lid, proclaimed how seldom it was that she had penetrated into the sacred recesses of her treasure-chest. At the top were some relics of old finery : a silken cloak spangled with gold stars, a coif of silver filigree, a roll of Venetian lace. Beneath were little packets tied in silk which the old lady handled with tender care ; a man's hunting-glove, a child's shoe, a love-knot done in faded green ribbon, some letters in rude rough script, and a vernicle of Saint Thomas. Then from the very bottom of the box she drew three objects, swathed in silken cloth, which she uncovered and laid upon the table. The one was a bracelet of rough gold studded with uncut rubies, the second was a gold salver, and the third was a high goblet of the same metal.

" You have heard me speak of these, Nigel, but never before have you seen them, for indeed I have not opened the hutch for fear that we might be tempted in our great need to turn them into money. I have kept them out of my sight and even out of my thoughts. But now it is the honour of the house which calls, and even these must go. This goblet was that which my husband, Sir Nele Loring, won after the intaking of Belgrade, when he and his comrades held the lists from matins to vespers against the flower of the French chivalry. The salver was given him by the Earl of Pembroke in memory of his valour upon the field of Falkirk."

" And the bracelet, dear lady ? "

" You will not laugh, Nigel ? "

" Nay, why should I laugh ? "

" The bracelet was the prize for the Queen of Beauty which was given to me before all the high-born ladies of

England by Sir Nele Loring a month before our marriage. The Queen of Beauty, Nigel—I, old and twisted, as you see me. Five strong men went down before his lance ere he won that trinket for me. And now in my last years——"

"Nay, dear and honoured lady, we will not part with it."

"Yes, Nigel, he would have it so. I can hear his whisper in my ear. Honour to him was everything—the rest nothing. Take it from me, Nigel, ere my heart weakens. To-morrow you will ride with it to Guildford; you will see Thorold the goldsmith; and you will raise enough money to pay for all that we shall need for the king's coming."

She turned her face away to hide the quivering of her wrinkled features, and the crash of the iron lid covered the sob which burst from her overwrought soul.

## 7. *How Nigel went Marketing to Guildford*

IT was on a bright June morning that young Nigel, with youth and springtime to make his heart light, rode upon his errand from Tilford to Guildford town. Beneath him was his great yellow war-horse, caracoling and curveting as he went, as blithe and free of spirit as his master. In all England one would scarce have found upon that morning so high-mettled and so debonair a pair. The sandy road wound through groves of fir, where the breeze came soft and fragrant with resinous gums, or over heathery downs, which rolled away to north and to south, vast and untenanted, for on the uplands the soil was poor and water scarce. Over Crooksbury Common he passed, and then across the great Heath of Puttenham, following a sandy path which wound amid the bracken and the heather, for he meant to strike the Pilgrim's Way where it turned eastward from Farnham and from Seale. As he rode he continually felt his saddle-bag with his hand, for in it, securely strapped, he had placed the precious treasures of

the Lady Ermyntrude. As he saw the grand tawny neck tossing before him, and felt the easy heave of the great horse and heard the muffled drumming of his hoofs, he could have sung and shouted with the joy of living.

Behind him upon the little brown pony which had been Nigel's former mount, rode Samkin Aylward, the bowman, who had taken upon himself the duties of personal attendant and body-guard. His great shoulders and breadth of frame seemed dangerously top-heavy upon the tiny steed, but he ambled along, whistling a merry lilt, and as lighthearted as his master. There was no countryman who had not a nod and no woman who had not a smile for the jovial bowman, who rode for the most part with his face over his shoulder, staring at the last petticoat which had passed him. Once only he met with a harsher greeting. It was from a tall, white-headed, red-faced man whom they met upon the moor.

"Good morrow, dear father!" cried Aylward. "How is it with you at Crooksbury? And how are the new black cow and the ewes from Alton, and Mary the dairy-maid, and all your gear?"

"It ill becomes you to ask, you ne'er-do-weel," said the old man. "You have angered the monks of Waverley, whose tenant I am, and they would drive me out of my farm. Yet there are three more years to run, and do what they may I will bide till then. But little did I think that I should lose my homestead through you, Samkin, and big as you are I would knock the dust out of that green jerkin with a good hazel switch if I had you at Crooksbury."

"Then you shall do it to-morrow morning, good father, for I will come and see you then. But indeed I did not do more at Waverley than you would have done yourself. Look me in the eye, old hot-head, and tell me if you would have stood by while the last Loring—look at him as he rides with his head in the air and his soul in the clouds—was shot down before your very eyes at the bidding of that fat monk! If you would, then I disown you as my father."

"Nay, Samkin, if it was like that, then perhaps what you did was not so far amiss. But it is hard to lose the old farm when my heart is buried deep in the good brown soil."

"Tut, man! there are three years to run, and what may not happen in three years? Before that time I shall have gone to the wars, and when I have opened a French strong box or two you can buy the good brown soil and snap your fingers at Abbot John and his bailiffs. Am I not as proper a man as Tom Withstaff of Churt? And yet he came back after six months with his pockets full of rose nobles and a French wench on either arm."

"God preserve us from the wenches, Samkin! But indeed I think that if there is money to be gathered you are as likely to get your fist full as any man who goes to the war. But hasten, lad, hasten! Already your young master is over the brow."

Thus admonished, the archer waved his gauntleted hand to his father, and digging his heels into the sides of his little pony soon drew up with the squire. Nigel glanced over his shoulder and slackened speed until the pony's head was up to his saddle.

"Have I not heard, archer," said he, "that an outlaw has been loose in these parts?"

"It is true, fair sir. He was villein to Sir Peter Mandeville, but he broke his bonds and fled into the forests. Men call him the 'Wild Man of Puttenham.'"

"How comes it that he has not been hunted down? If the man be a draw-latch and a robber it would be an honourable deed to clear the country of such an evil."

"Twice the sergeants-at-arms from Guildford have come out against him, but the fox has many earths, and it would puzzle you to get him out of them."

"By Saint Paul! were my errand not a pressing one I would be tempted to turn aside and seek him. Where lives he, then?"

"There is a great morass beyond Puttenham, and across it there are caves in which he and his people lurk."

"His people? He hath a band?"

"There are several with him."

"It sounds a most honourable enterprise," said Nigel. "When the king hath come and gone we will spare a day for the outlaws of Puttenham. I fear there is little chance for us to see them on this journey."

"They prey upon the pilgrims who pass along the Winchester Road, and they are well loved by the folk in these parts, for they rob none of them and have an open hand for all who will help them."

"It is right easy to have an open hand with the money that you have stolen," said Nigel; "but I fear that they will not try to rob two men with swords at their girdles like you and me, so we shall have no profit from them."

They had passed over the wild moors and had come down now into the main road by which the pilgrims from the west of England made their way to the national shrine of Canterbury. It passed from Winchester, and up the beautiful valley of the Itchen until it reached Farnham, where it forked into two branches, one of which ran along the Hog's Back, while the second wound to the south and came out at St. Catherine's Hill, where stands the Pilgrim's shrine, a grey old ruin now, but once so august, so crowded, and so affluent. It was this second branch upon which Nigel and Aylward found themselves as they rode to Guildford.

No one, as it chanced, was going the same way as themselves, but they met one large drove of pilgrims returning from their journey, with pictures of Saint Thomas and snails' shells or little leaden ampullæ in their hats and bundles of purchases over their shoulders. They were a grimy, ragged, travel-stained crew, the men walking, the women borne on asses. Man and beast, they limped along as if it would be a glad day when they saw their homes once more. These and a few beggars or minstrels, who crouched among the heather on either side of the track in the hope of receiving an occasional farthing from the passer-by, were the only folk they met until they had reached the village of Puttenham. Already there was

a hot sun and just breeze enough to send the dust flying down the road, so they were glad to clear their throats with a glass of beer at the ale-stake in the village, where the fair alewife gave Nigel a cold farewell because he had no attentions for her, and Aylward a box on the ears because he had too many.

On the farther side of Puttenham the road runs through thick woods of oak and beech, with a tangled undergrowth of fern and bramble. Here they met a patrol of sergeants-at-arms, tall fellows, well mounted, clad in studded-leather caps and tunics, with lances and swords. They walked their horses slowly on the shady side of the road, and stopped as the travellers came up, to ask if they had been molested on the way.

" Have a care," they added, " for the ' Wild Man ' and his wife are out. Only yesterday they slew a merchant from the west and took a hundred crowns."

" His wife, you say ? "

" Yes, she is ever at his side, and has saved him many a time, for if he has the strength it is she who has the wit. I hope to see their heads together upon the green grass one of these mornings."

The patrol passed downward toward Farnham, and so, as it proved, away from the robbers, who had doubtless watched them closely from the dense brushwood which skirted the road. Coming round a curve, Nigel and Aylward were aware of a tall and graceful woman who sat, wringing her hands and weeping bitterly upon the bank by the side of the track. At such a sight of beauty in distress Nigel pricked Pommers with the spur and in three bounds was at the side of the unhappy lady.

" What ails you, fair dame ? " he asked. " Is there any small matter in which I may stand your friend, or is it possible that anyone hath so hard a heart as to do you an injury ? "

She rose and turned upon him a face full of hope and entreaty.

" Oh, save my poor, poor father ! " she cried. " Have

you perchance seen the way-wardens ? They passed us, and I fear they are beyond call."

"Yes, they have ridden onward, but we may serve as well."

"Then, hasten, hasten, I pray you ! Even now they may be doing him to death. They have dragged him into yonder grove and I have heard his voice growing ever weaker in the distance. Hasten, I implore you !"

Nigel sprang from his horse and tossed the rein to Aylward.

"Nay, let us go together. How many robbers were there, lady ?"

"Two stout fellows."

"Then I come also."

"Nay, it is not possible," said Nigel. "The wood is too thick for horses, and we cannot leave them in the road."

"I will guard them," cried the lady.

"Pommers is not so easily held. Do you bide here, Aylward, until you hear from me. Stir not, I command you !"

So saying, Nigel, with the light of adventure gleaming in his joyous eyes, drew his sword and plunged swiftly into the forest.

Far and fast he ran, from glade to glade, breaking through the bushes, springing over the brambles, light as a young deer, peering this way and that, straining his ears for a sound, and catching only the cry of the wood-pigeons. Still on he went, with the constant thought of the weeping woman behind and of the captured man in front. It was not until he was footsore and out of breath that he stopped with his hand to his side, and considered that his own business had still to be done, and that it was time once more that he should seek the road to Guildford.

Meantime Aylward had found his own rough means of consoling the woman in the road, who stood sobbing with her face against the side of Pommers' saddle.

"Nay, weep not, my pretty one," said he. "It brings the tears to my own eyes to see them stream from thine."

"Alas! good archer, he was the best of fathers, so gentle and so kind! Had you but known him, you must have loved him."

"Tut, tut! he will suffer no scathe. Squire Nigel will bring him back to you anon."

"No, no, I shall never see him more. Hold me, archer, or I fall!"

Aylward pressed his ready arm round the supple waist. The fainting woman leaned with her hand upon his shoulder. Her pale face looked past him, and it was some new light in her eyes, a flash of expectancy, of triumph, of wicked joy, which gave him sudden warning of his danger.

He shook her off and sprang to one side, but only just in time to avoid a crashing blow from a great club in the hands of a man even taller and stronger than himself. He had one quick vision of great white teeth clinched in grim ferocity, a wild flying beard and blazing wild-beast eyes. The next instant he had closed, ducking his head beneath another swing of that murderous cudgel.

With his arms round the robber's burly body and his face buried in his bushy beard, Aylward gasped and strained and heaved. Back and forward in the dusty road the two men stamped and staggered, a grim wrestling match, with life for the prize. Twice the great strength of the outlaw had Aylward nearly down, and twice with his greater youth and skill the archer restored his grip and his balance. Then at last his turn came. He slipped his leg behind the other's knee, and giving a mighty wrench, tore him across it. With a hoarse shout the outlaw toppled backward, and had hardly reached the ground before Aylward had his knee upon his chest and his short sword deep in his beard and pointed to his throat.

"By these ten finger-bones!" he gasped, "one more struggle and it is your last!"

The man lay still enough, for he was half-stunned by the crashing fall. Aylward looked round him, but the woman had disappeared. At the first blow struck she

had vanished into the forest. He began to have fears for his master, thinking that he perhaps had been lured into some death-trap ; but his forebodings were soon at rest, for Nigel himself came hastening down the road, which he had struck some distance from the spot where he left it.

" By Saint Paul ! " he cried, " who is this man on whom you are perched, and where is the lady who has honoured us so far as to crave our help ! Alas, that I have been unable to find her father ! "

" As well for you, fair sir," said Aylward, " for I am of opinion that her father was the Devil. This woman is, as I believe, the wife of the ' Wild Man of Puttenham,' and this is the ' Wild Man ' himself who set upon me and tried to brain me with his club."

The outlaw, who had opened his eyes, looked with a scowl from his captor to the newcomer.

" You are in luck, archer," said he, " for I have come to grips with many a man, but I cannot call to mind any who have had the better of me."

" You have indeed the grip of a bear," said Aylward ; " but it was a coward deed that your wife should hold me while you dashed out my brains with a stick. It is also a most villainous thing to lay a snare for wayfarers by asking for their pity and assistance, so that it was our own soft hearts which brought us into such danger. The next who hath real need of our help may suffer for your sins."

" When the hand of the whole world is against you," said the outlaw, in a surly voice, " you must fight as best you can."

" You well deserve to be hanged, if only because you have brought this woman, who is fair and gentle-spoken, to such a life," said Nigel. " Let us tie him by the wrist to my stirrup leather, Aylward, and we will lead him into Guildford."

The archer drew a spare bowstring from his case and had bound the prisoner as directed, when Nigel gave a sudden start and cry of alarm.

"Holy Mary!" he cried. "Where is the saddle-bag!"

It had been cut away by a sharp knife. Only the two ends of a strap remained. Aylward and Nigel stared at each other in blank dismay. Then the young squire shook his clenched hands and pulled at his yellow curls in his despair.

"The Lady Ermyntrude's bracelet! My grandfather's cup!" he cried. "I would have died ere I lost them! What can I say to her? I dare not return until I have found them. Oh, Aylward, Aylward! how came you to let them be taken?"

The honest archer had pushed back his steel cap and was scratching his tangled head.

"Nay, I know nothing of it. You never said that there was aught of price in the bag, else had I kept a better eye upon it. Certes! it was not this fellow who took it, since I have never had my hands from him. It can only be the woman who fled with it while we fought."

Nigel stamped about the road in his perplexity. "I would follow her to the world's end if I knew where I could find her, but to search these woods for her is to look for a mouse in a wheat-field. Good Saint George, thou who didst overcome the Dragon, I pray you by that most honourable and knightly achievement that you will be with me now! And you also, great Saint Julian, patron of all wayfarers in distress! Two candles shall burn before your shrine at Godalming, if you will but bring me back my saddle-bag. What would I not give to have it back?"

"Will you give me my life?" asked the outlaw. "Promise that I go free, and you shall have it back, if it be indeed true that my wife has taken it."

"Nay, I cannot do that," said Nigel. "My honour would surely be concerned, since my loss is a private one; but it would be to the public scathe that you should go free. By Saint Paul! it would be an ungentle deed if in

order to save my own I let you loose upon the gear of a hundred others."

"I will not ask you to let me loose," said the "Wild Man." "If you will promise that my life be spared I will restore your bag."

"I cannot give such a promise, for it will lie with the sheriff and reeves of Guildford."

"Shall I have your word in my favour?"

"That I could promise you, if you will give back the bag, though I know not how far my word may avail. But your words are vain, for you cannot think that we will be so fond as to let you go in the hope that you return?"

"I would not ask it," said the "Wild Man," "for I can get your bag and yet never stir from the spot where I stand. Have I your promise upon your honour and all that you hold dear that you will ask for grace?"

"You have."

"And that my wife shall be unharmed?"

"I promise it."

The outlaw laid back his head and uttered a long shrill cry like the howl of a wolf. There was a silent pause, and then, clear and shrill, there rose the same cry no great distance away in the forest. Again the "Wild Man" called, and again his mate replied. A third time he summoned, as the deer bells to the doe in the greenwood. Then with a rustle of brushwood and snapping of twigs the woman was before them once more, tall, pale, graceful, wonderful. She glanced neither at Aylward nor Nigel, but ran to the side of her husband.

"Dear and sweet lord," she cried, "I trust they have done you no hurt. I waited by the old ash, and my heart sank when you came not."

"I have been taken at last, wife."

"Oh, cursed, cursed day! Let him go, kind, gentle sirs, do not take him from me!"

"They will speak for me at Guildford," said the "Wild Man." "They have sworn it. But hand them first the bag that you have taken."

She drew it out from under her loose cloak. "Here it is, gentle sir. Indeed it went to my heart to take it, for you had mercy upon me in my trouble. But now I am, as you see, in real and very sore distress. Will you not have mercy now? Take ruth on us, fair sir! On my knees I beg it of you, most gentle and kindly squire!"

Nigel had clutched his bag, and right glad he was to feel that the treasures were all safe within it.

"My promise is given," said he. "I will say what I can; but the issue rests with others. I pray you to stand up, for indeed I cannot promise more."

"Then I must be content," said she, rising, with a composed face. "I have prayed you to take ruth, and indeed I can do no more; but ere I go back to the forest I would rede you to be on your guard lest you lose your bag once more. Wot you how I took it, archer? Nay, it was simple enough, and may happen again, so I make it clear to you. I had this knife in my sleeve, and though it is small it is very sharp. I slipped it down like this. Then, when I seemed to weep with my face against the saddle, I cut down like this——"

In an instant she had shorn through the stirrup leather which bound her man, and he, diving under the belly of the horse, had slipped like a snake into the brushwood. In passing he had struck Pommers from beneath, and the great horse, enraged and insulted, was rearing high, with two men hanging on his bridle. When at last he had calmed there was no sign left of the "Wild Man" or of his wife. In vain did Aylward, an arrow on his string, run here and there among the great trees and peer down the shadowy glades. When he returned he and his master cast a shame-faced glance at each other.

"I trust that we are better soldiers than jailers," said Aylward, as he climbed on his pony.

But Nigel's frown relaxed into a smile. "At least we have gained back what we lost," said he. "Here I place it on the pommel of my saddle, and I shall not take my eyes from it until we are safe in Guildford town."

So they jogged on together until passing Saint Catharine's shrine they crossed the winding Wey once more, and so found themselves in the steep high street with its heavy-eaved gabled houses, its monkish hospitium upon the left, where good ale may still be quaffed, and its great square-keeped castle upon the right, no grey and grim skeleton of ruin, but very quick and alert, with blazoned banner flying free, and steel caps twinkling from the battlement. A row of booths extended from the castle gate to the high street, and two doors from the Church of the Trinity was that of Thorold the goldsmith, a rich burgess and Mayor of the town.

He looked long and lovingly at the rich rubies and at the fine work upon the goblet. Then he stroked his flowing grey beard as he pondered whether he should offer fifty nobles or sixty, for he knew well that he could sell them again for two hundred. If he offered too much his profit would be reduced. If he offered too little the youth might go as far as London with them, for they were rare and of great worth. The young man was ill-clad, and his eyes were anxious. Perchance he was hard pressed and was ignorant of the value of what he bore. He would sound him.

"These things are old and out of fashion, fair sir," said he. "Of the stones I can scarce say if they are of good quality or not, but they are dull and rough. Yet, if your price be low I may add them to my stock, though indeed this booth was made to sell and not to buy. What do you ask?"

Nigel bent his brows in perplexity. Here was a game in which neither his bold heart nor his active limbs could help him. It was the new force mastering the old: the man of commerce conquering the man of war—wearing him down and weakening him through the centuries until he had him as his bond-servant and his thrall.

"I know not what to ask, good sir," said Nigel. "It is not for me, nor for any man who bears my name, to chaffer and to haggle. You know the worth of these

things, for it is your trade to do so. The Lady Ermyntrude lacks money, and we must have it against the king's coming, so give me that which is right and just, and we will say no more."

The goldsmith smiled. The business was growing more simple and more profitable. He had intended to offer fifty, but surely it would be sinful waste to give more than twenty-five.

"I shall scarce know what to do with them when I have them," said he. "Yet I should not grudge twenty nobles if it is a matter in which the king is concerned."

Nigel's heart turned to lead. This sum would not buy one-half what was needful. It was clear that the Lady Ermyntrude had overvalued her treasures. Yet he could not return empty-handed, so if twenty nobles was the real worth, as this good old man assured him, then he must be thankful and take it.

"I am concerned by what you say," said he. "You know more of these things than I can do. However, I will take——"

"A hundred and fifty," whispered Aylward's voice in his ear.

"A hundred and fifty," said Nigel, only too relieved to have found the humblest guide upon these unwonted paths.

The goldsmith started. This youth was not the simple soldier that he had seemed. That frank face, those blue eyes, were traps for the unwary. Never had he been more taken aback in a bargain.

"This is fond talk and can lead to nothing, fair sir," said he, turning away and fiddling with the keys of his strong boxes. "Yet I have no wish to be hard on you. Take my outside price, which is fifty nobles."

"And a hundred," whispered Aylward.

"And a hundred," said Nigel, blushing at his own greed.

"Well, well, take a hundred!" cried the merchant. "Fleece me, skin me, leave me a loser, and take for your wares the full hundred!"

"I should be shamed for ever if I were to treat you so badly," said Nigel. "You have spoken me fair, and I would not grind you down. Therefore, I will gladly take one hundred——"

"And fifty," whispered Aylward.

"And fifty," said Nigel.

"By Saint John of Beverley!" cried the merchant. "I came hither from the North Country, and they are said to be shrewd at a deal in those parts; but I had rather bargain with a synagogue full of Jews than with you, for all your gentle ways. Will you indeed take no less than a hundred and fifty? Alas! you pluck from me my profits of a month. It is a fell morning's work for me. I would I had never seen you!" With groans and lamentations he paid the gold pieces across the counter, and Nigel, hardly able to credit his own good fortune, gathered them into the leather saddle-bag.

A moment later with flushed face he was in the street and pouring out his thanks to Aylward.

"Alas, my fair lord! the man has robbed us now," said the archer. "We could have had another twenty had we stood fast."

"How know you that, good Aylward?"

"By his eyes, Squire Loring. I wot I have little store of reading where the parchment of a book or the pricking of a blazon is concerned, but I can read men's eyes, and I never doubted that he would give what he has given."

The two travellers had dinner at the monks' hospitium, Nigel at the high table and Aylward among the commonalty. Then again they roamed the high street on business intent. Nigel bought taffeta for hangings, wine, preserves, fruit, damask table-linen, and many other articles of need. At last he halted before the armourer's shop at the castle-yard, staring at the fine suits of plate, the engraved pectorals, the plumed helmets, the cunningly jointed gorgets, as a child at a sweet-shop.

"Well, Squire Loring," said Wat the armourer, looking

sidewise from the furnace where he was tempering a sword-blade, " what can I sell you this morning? I swear to you by Tubal Cain, the father of all workers in metal, that you might go from end to end of Cheapside and never see a better suit than that which hangs from yonder hook ! "

" And the price, armourer ? "

" To anyone else, two hundred and fifty rose nobles, To you two hundred."

" And why cheaper to me, good fellow ? "

" Because I fitted your father also for the wars, and a finer suit never went out of my shop. I warrant that it turned many an edge before he laid it aside. We worked in mail in those days, and I had as soon have a well-made thick-meshed mail as any plates ; but a young knight will be in the fashion like any dame of the court, and so it must be plate now, even though the price be trebled."

" Your rede is that the mail is as good ? "

" I am well sure of it."

" Hearken then, armourer ! I cannot at this moment buy a suit of plate, and yet I sorely need steel harness on account of a small deed which it is in my mind to do. Now I have at my home at Tilford that very suit of mail of which you speak, with which my father first rode to the wars. Could you not so alter it that it should guard my limbs also ! "

The armourer looked at Nigel's small upright figure and burst out laughing.

" You jest, Squire Loring ! The suit was made for one who was far above the common stature of man."

" Nay, I jest not. If it will but carry me through one spear-running it will have served its purpose."

The armourer leaned back on his anvil and pondered, while Nigel stared anxiously at his sooty face.

" Right gladly would I lend you a suit of plate for this one venture, Squire Loring, but I know well that if you should be overthrown your harness becomes prize to the victor. I am a poor man with many children, and I dare

not risk the loss of it. But as to what you say of the old suit of mail, is it indeed in good condition ? "

" Most excellent, save only at the neck, which is much frayed."

" To shorten the limbs is easy. It is but to cut out a length of the mail and then loop up the links. But to shorten the body—nay, that is beyond the armourer's art."

" It was my last hope. Nay, good armourer, if you have indeed served and loved my gallant father, then I beg you by his memory that you will help me now."

The armourer threw down his heavy hammer with a crash upon the floor.

" It is not only that I loved your father, Squire Loring, but it is that I have seen you, half armed as you were, ride against the best of them at the Castle tilt-yard. Last Martinmas my heart bled for you when I saw how sorry was your harness, and yet you held your own against the stout Sir Oliver with his Milan suit. When go you to Tilford ? "

" Even now."

" Heh, Jenkin, fetch out the cob ! " cried the worthy Wat. " May my right hand lose its cunning if I do not send you into battle in your father's suit ! To-morrow I must be back in my booth, but to-day I give to you without fee and for the sake of the good-will which I bear to your house. I will ride with you to Tilford, and before night you shall see what Wat can do."

So it came about that there was a busy evening at the old Tilford Manor-house, where the Lady Ermyntrude planned and cut and hung the curtains for the hall, and stocked her cupboards with the good things which Nigel had brought from Guildford.

Meanwhile the squire and the armourer sat with their heads touching and the old suit of mail with its gorget of overlapping plates laid out across their knees. Again and again old Wat shrugged his shoulders, as one who has been asked to do more than can be demanded from mortal man. At last, at a suggestion from the squire, he leaned

back in his chair and laughed long and loudly in his bushy beard, while the Lady Ermyntrude glared her black displeasure at such plebeian merriment. Then taking his fine chisel and his hammer from his pouch of tools, the armourer, still chuckling at his own thoughts, began to drive a hole through the centre of the steel tunic.

## 8. *How the King Hawked on Crooksbury Heath*

THE king and his attendants had shaken off the crowd who had followed them from Guildford along the Pilgrim's Way, and now, the mounted archers having beaten off the more persistent of the spectators, they rode at their ease in a long, straggling, glittering train over the dark undulating plain of heather.

In the van was the king himself, for his hawks were with him and he had some hope of sport. Edward at that time was a well-grown, vigorous man in the very prime of his years, a keen sportsman, an ardent gallant and a chivalrous soldier. He was a scholar too, speaking Latin, French, German, Spanish, and even a little English.

So much had long been patent to the world, but only of recent years had he shown other and more formidable characteristics: a restless ambition which coveted his neighbour's throne, and a wise foresight in matters of commerce, which engaged him now in transplanting Flemish weavers and sowing the seeds of what for many years was the staple trade of England. Each of these varied qualities might have been read upon his face. The brow, shaded by a crimson cap of maintenance, was broad and lofty. The large brown eyes were ardent and bold. His chin was clean-shaven, and the close-cropped dark moustache did not conceal the strong mouth, firm, proud, and kindly, but capable of setting tight in merciless ferocity. His complexion was tanned to copper by a life spent in field sports or in war, and he rode his magnificent

black horse carelessly and easily, as one who has grown up in the saddle. His own colour was black also, for his active, sinewy figure was set off by close-fitting velvet of that hue, broken only by a belt of gold, and by a golden border of open pods of the broom-plant.

With his high and noble bearing, his simple yet rich attire and his splendid mount, he looked every inch a king. The picture of gallant man on gallant horse was completed by the noble Falcon of the Isles which fluttered along some twelve feet above his head, " waiting on," as it was termed, for any quarry which might arise. The second bird of the cast was borne upon the gauntleted wrist of Raoul, the chief falconer, in the rear.

At the right side of the monarch and a little behind him rode a youth some twenty years of age, tall, slim, and dark, with noble aquiline features and keen penetrating eyes which sparkled with vivacity and affection as he answered the remarks of the king. He was clad in deep crimson diapered with gold, and the trappings of his white palfrey were of a magnificence which proclaimed the rank of its rider. On his face, still free from moustache or beard, there sat a certain gravity and majesty of expression which showed that, young as he was, great affairs had been in his keeping, and that his thoughts and interests were those of the statesman and the warrior. That great day when, little more than a schoolboy, he had led the van of the victorious army which had crushed the power of France at Crécy had left its stamp upon his features ; but stern as they were they had not assumed that tinge of fierceness which in after-years was to make " The Black Prince " a name of terror on the marches of France. Not yet had the first shadow of fell disease come to poison his nature ere it struck at his life, as he rode that spring day, light and debonair, upon the heath of Crooksbury.

On the left of the king, and so near to him that great intimacy was implied, rode a man about his own age, with the broad face, the projecting jaw, and the flattish nose which are often the outward indications of a pugnacious

nature. His complexion was crimson, his large blue eyes somewhat prominent, and his whole appearance full-blooded and choleric. He was short, but massively built, and evidently possessed of immense strength. His voice, however, when he spoke was gentle and lisping, while his manner was quiet and courteous. Unlike the king or the prince, he was clad in light armour and carried a sword by his side and a mace at his saddle-bow, for he was acting as captain of the king's guard, and a dozen other knights in steel followed in the escort. No hardier soldier could Edward have at his side, if, as was always possible in those lawless times, sudden danger were to threaten, for this was the famous knight of Hainault, now naturalised as an Englishman, Sir Walter Manny, who bore as high a reputation for chivalrous valour and for gallant temerity as Chandos himself.

Behind the knights, who were forbidden to scatter and must always follow the king's person, there was a body of twenty or thirty hobelers or mounted bowmen, together with several squires, unarmed themselves but leading spare horses upon which the heavier part of their knights' equipment was carried. A straggling tail of falconers, harbingers, varlets, body-servants and huntsmen holding hounds in leash completed the long and many-coloured train which rose and dipped on the low undulations of the moor.

Many weighty things were on the mind of Edward the king. There was truce for the moment with France, but it was a truce broken by many small deeds of arms, raids, surprises, and ambushes upon either side, and it was certain that it would soon dissolve again into open war. Money must be raised, and it was no light matter to raise it, now that the Commons had once already voted the tenth lamb and the tenth sheaf. Besides, the Black Death had ruined the country, the arable land was all turned to pasture, the labourer, laughing at statutes, would not work under fourpence a day, and all society was chaos. In addition, the Scotch were growling over

the border, there was the perennial trouble in half-conquered Ireland, and his allies abroad in Flanders and in Brabant were clamouring for the arrears of their subsidies.

All this was enough to make even a victorious monarch full of care; but now Edward had thrown it all to the winds and was as light-hearted as a boy upon a holiday. No thought had he for the dunning of Florentine bankers or the vexatious conditions of those busybodies at Westminster. He was out with his hawks, and his thoughts and his talk should be of nothing else. The varlets beat the heather and bushes as they passed, and whooped loudly as the birds flew out.

"A magpie! A magpie!" cried the falconer.

"Nay, nay, it is not worthy of your talons, my brown-eyed queen," said the king, looking up at the great bird which flapped from side to side above his head, waiting for the whistle which should give her the signal. "The tercels, falconer—a cast of tercels! Quick, man, quick! Ha! the rascal makes for wood! He puts in! Well flown, brave peregrine! He makes his point. Drive him out to thy comrade. Serve him, varlets! Beat the bushes! He breaks! He breaks! Nay, come away then! You will see master magpie no more."

The bird had indeed, with the cunning of its race, flapped its way through brushwood and bushes to the thicker woods beyond, so that neither the hawk amid the cover nor its partner above nor the clamorous beaters could harm it. The king laughed at the mischance and rode on. Continually birds of various sorts were flushed, and each was pursued by the appropriate hawk, the snipe by the tercel, the partridge by the goshawk, even the lark by the little merlin. But the king soon tired of this petty sport and went slowly on his way, still with the magnificent silent attendant flapping above his head.

"Is she not a noble bird, fair son?" he asked, glancing up as her shadow fell upon him.

"She is indeed, sire. Surely no finer ever came from the isles of the north."

"Perhaps not, and yet I have had a hawk from Barbary as good a footer and a swifter flyer. An Eastern bird in yarak has no peer."

"I had one once from the Holy Land," said de Manny. "It was fierce and keen and swift as the Saracens themselves. They say of old Saladin that in his day his breed of birds, of hounds, and of horses had no equal on earth."

"I trust, dear father, that the day may come when we shall lay our hands on all three," said the prince, looking with shining eyes upon the king. "Is the Holy Land to lie for ever in the grasp of these unbelieving savages, or the Holy Temple to be defiled by their foul presence? Ah! my dear and most sweet lord, give to me a thousand lances with ten thousand bowmen like those I led at Crécy, and I swear to you by God's soul that within a year I will have done homage to you for the Kingdom of Jerusalem!"

The king laughed as he turned to Walter Manny. "Boys will still be boys," said he.

"The French do not count me such!" cried the young prince, flushing with anger.

"Nay, fair son, there is no one sets you at a higher rate than your father. But you have the nimble mind and quick fancy of youth, turning over from the thing that is half done to a further task beyond. How would we fare in Brittany and Normandy while my young paladin, with his lances and his bowmen, was besieging Ascalon or battering at Jerusalem?"

"Heaven would help in Heaven's work."

"From what I have heard of the past," said the king, dryly, "I cannot see that Heaven has counted for much as an ally in these wars of the East. I speak with reverence, and yet it is but sooth to say that Richard of the Lion Heart, or Louis of France, might have found the smallest earthly principality of greater service to him than all the celestial hosts. How say you to that, my lord bishop?"

A stout churchman, who had ridden behind the king

on a solid, bay cob, well suited to his weight and dignity, jogged up to the monarch's elbow.

"How say you, sire? I was watching the goshawk on the partridge, and heard you not."

"Had I said that I would add two manors to the see of Chichester, I warrant that you would have heard me, my lord bishop."

"Nay, fair lord, test the matter by saying so," cried the jovial bishop.

The king laughed aloud. "A fair counter, your reverence. By the rood! you broke your lance that passage. But the question I debated was this: How is it that since the Crusades have manifestly been fought in God's quarrel, we Christians have had so little comfort or support in fighting them? After all our efforts and the loss of more men than could be counted, we are at last driven from the country, and even the military orders, which were formed only for that one purpose, can scarce hold a footing in the islands of the Greek sea. There is not one seaport nor one fortress in Palestine over which the flag of the Cross still waves. Where, then, was our ally?"

"Nay, sire, you open a great debate which extends far beyond this question of the Holy Land, though that may, indeed, be chosen as a fair example. It is the question of all sin, of all suffering, of all injustice—why it should pass without the rain of fire and the lightnings of Sinai. The wisdom of God is beyond our understanding."

The king shrugged his shoulders. "This is an easy answer, my lord bishop. You are a prince of the Church. It would fare ill with an earthly prince who could give no better answer to the affairs which concerned his realm."

"There are other considerations which might be urged, most gracious sire. It is true that the Crusades were a holy enterprise which might well expect the immediate blessing of God; but the Crusaders—is it certain that they deserved such a blessing? Have I not heard that their camp was the most dissolute ever seen?"

"Camps are camps all the world over, and you cannot

in a moment change a bowman into a saint. But the holy Louis was a crusader after your own heart. Yet his men perished at Mansurah, and he himself at Tunis."

"Bethink you also that this world is but the ante-chamber of the next," said the prelate. "By suffering and tribulation the soul is cleansed, and the true victor may be he who, by the patient endurance of misfortune, merits the happiness to come."

"If that be the true meaning of the Church's blessing, then I hope that it will be long before it rests upon our banners in France," said the king. "But methinks that when one is out with a brave horse and a good hawk, one might find some other subject that theology. Back to the birds, bishop, or Raoul, the falconer, will come to interrupt thee in thy cathedral."

Straightway the conversation came back to the mystery of the woods and the mystery of the rivers, to the dark-eyed hawks and the yellow-eyed, to hawks of the lure and hawks of the fist. The bishop was as steeped in the lore of falconry as the king, and the others smiled as the two wrangled hard over disputed and technical questions: if an eyas trained in the mews can ever emulate the passage hawk taken wild, or how long the young hawks should be placed at hack, and how long weathered before they are fully reclaimed.

Monarch and prelate were still deep in this learned discussion, the bishop speaking with a freedom and assurance which he would never have dared to use in affairs of Church and State, for in all ages there is no such leveller as sport. Suddenly, however, the prince, whose keen eyes had swept from time to time over the great blue heaven, uttered a peculiar call and reined up his palfrey, pointing at the same time into the air.

"A heron!" he cried. "A heron on passage!"

To gain the full sport of hawking, a heron must not be put up from its feeding-ground, where it is heavy with its meal, and has no time to get its pace on before it is pounced upon by the more active hawk, but it must be

aloft, travelling from point to point, probably from the fish-stream to the heronry. Thus, to catch the bird on passage was the prelude of all good sport. The object to which the prince had pointed was but a black dot in the southern sky, but his strained eyes had not deceived him, and both bishop and king agreed that it was indeed a heron, which grew larger every instant as it flew in their direction.

"Whistle him off, sire! Whistle off the gerfalcon!" cried the bishop.

"Nay, nay, he is overfar. She would fly at check."

"Now, sire, now!" cried the prince, as the great bird, with the breeze behind him, came sweeping down the sky.

The king gave the shrill whistle, and the well-trained hawk raked out to the right and to the left to make sure which quarry she was to follow. Then, spying the heron, she shot up in a swift, ascending curve to meet him.

"Well flown, Margot! Good bird!" cried the king, clapping his hands to encourage the hawk, while the falconers broke into the shrill whoop peculiar to the sport.

Going on her curve, the hawk would soon have crossed the path of the heron; but the latter, seeing the danger in his front, and confident in his own great strength of wing and lightness of body, proceeded to mount higher in the air, flying in such small rings that, to the spectators, it almost seemed as if the bird was going perpendicularly upward.

"He takes the air!" cried the king. "But strong as he flies, he cannot outfly Margot. Bishop, I lay you ten gold pieces to one that the heron is mine."

"I cover your wager, sire," said the bishop. "I may not take gold so won, and yet I warrant that there is an altar-cloth somewhere in need of repairs."

"You have good store of altar-cloths, bishop, if all the gold I have seen you win at tables goes to the mending of them," said the king. "Ah! by the rood, rascal, rascal! See how she flies at check!"

The quick eyes of the bishop had perceived a drift of rooks which on their evening flight to the rookery were

passing along the very line which divided the hawk from the heron. A rook is a hard temptation for a hawk to resist. In an instant the inconstant bird had forgotten all about the great heron above her, and was circling over the rooks, flying westward with them as she singled out the plumpest for her stoop.

"There is yet time, sire! Shall I cast off her mate?" cried the falconer.

"Or shall I show you, sire, how a peregrine may win where a gerfalcon fails?" said the bishop. "Ten golden pieces to one upon my bird."

"Done with you, bishop!" cried the king, his brow dark with vexation. "By the rood! if you were as learned in the fathers as you are in hawks, you would win to the throne of Saint Peter! Cast off your peregrine, and make your boasting good."

Smaller than the royal gerfalcon, the bishop's bird was none the less a swift and beautiful creature. From her perch upon his wrist she had watched with fierce, keen eyes the birds in the heaven, mantling herself from time to time in her eagerness. Now, when the button was undone, and the leash uncast, the peregrine dashed off with a whir of her sharp-pointed wings, whizzing round in a great ascending circle which mounted swiftly upward, growing ever smaller as she approached that lofty point where, a mere speck in the sky, the heron sought escape from its enemies. Still higher and higher the two birds mounted, while the horsemen, their faces upturned, strained their eyes in their efforts to follow them.

"She rings! She still rings!" cried the bishop. "She is above him! She has gained her pitch."

"Nay, nay, she is far below," said the king.

"By my soul, my lord bishop is right!" cried the prince. "I believe she is above. See! See! She swoops!"

"She binds! She binds!" cried a dozen voices as the two dots blended suddenly into one.

There could be no doubt that they were falling rapidly. Already they grew larger to the eye. Presently the heron

disengaged himself and flapped heavily away, the worse for that deadly embrace, while the peregrine, shaking her plumage, ringed once more so as to get high above the quarry and deal it a second and more fatal blow. The bishop smiled, for nothing, as it seemed, could hinder his victory.

"Thy gold pieces shall be well spent, sire," said he. "What is lost to the Church is gained by the loser."

But a most unlooked-for chance deprived the bishop's altar-cloth of its costly mending. The king's gerfalcon, having struck down a rook, and finding the sport but tame, bethought herself suddenly of that noble heron, which she still perceived fluttering over Crooksbury Heath. How could she have been so weak as to allow these silly, chattering rooks to entice her away from that lordly bird? Even now it was not too late to atone for her mistake. In a great spiral she shot upwards until she was over the heron. But what was this? Every fibre of her, from her crest to her deck feathers, quivered with jealousy and rage at the sight of this creature, a mere peregrine, who had dared to come between a royal gerfalcon and her quarry. With one sweep of her great wings she shot up until she was above her rival. The next instant——

"They crab! They crab!" cried the king, with a roar of laughter, following them with his eyes as they hurtled down through the air.

"Mend thy own altar-cloths, bishop. Not a groat shall you have from me this journey. Pull them apart, falconer, lest they do each other an injury. And now, masters, let us on, for the sun sinks towards the west."

The two hawks, which had come to the ground interlocked with clutching talons and ruffled plumes, were torn apart and brought back bleeding and panting to their perches, while the heron, after its perilous adventure, flapped its way heavily onward to settle safely in the heronry of Waverley. The *cortège*, who had scattered in the excitement of the chase, came together again, and the journey was once more resumed.

A horseman who had been riding toward them across the moor now quickened his pace and closed swiftly upon them. As he came nearer, the king and the prince cried out joyously and waved their hands in greeting.

"It is good John Chandos!" cried the king. "By the rood, John, I have missed your merry songs this week or more! Glad I am to see that you have your citole slung to your back. Whence come you, then?"

"I come from Tilford, sire, in the hope that I should meet your majesty."

"It was well thought of. Come, ride here between the prince and me, and we will believe that we are back in France with our war harness on our backs once more. What is your news, Master John?"

Chandos's quaint face, quivered with suppressed amusement and his one eye twinkled like a star.

"Have you had sport, my liege?"

"Poor sport, John. We flew two hawks on the same heron. They crabbed, and the bird got free. But why do you smile so?"

"Because I hope to show you better sport ere you come to Tilford."

"For the hawk? For the hound?"

"A nobler sport than either."

"Is this a riddle, John? What mean you?"

"Nay, to tell all would be to spoil all. I say again that there is rare sport betwixt here and Tilford, and I beg you, dear lord, to mend your pace that we make the most of the daylight."

Thus adjured, the king set spurs to his horse, and the whole cavalcade cantered over the heath in the direction which Chandos showed. Presently as they came over a slope they saw beneath them a winding river with an old high-backed bridge across it. On the farther side was a village-green with a fringe of cottages and one dark manor-house upon the side of the hill.

"This is Tilford," said Chandos. "Yonder is the house of the Lorings."

The king's expectations had been aroused and his face showed his disappointment.

"Is this the sport that you have promised us, Sir John? How can you make good your words?"

"I will make them good, my liege."

"Where, then, is the sport?"

On the high crown of the bridge a rider in armour was seated, lance in hand, upon a great yellow steed. Chandos touched the king's arm and pointed.

"That is the sport," said he.

## 9. *How Nigel Held the Bridge at Tilford*

THE king looked at the motionless figure, at the little crowd of hushed expectant rustics beyond the bridge, and finally at the face of Chandos, which shone with amusement.

"What is this, John?" he asked.

"You remember Sir Eustace Loring, sire?"

"Indeed I could never forget him nor the manner of his death."

"He was a knight-errant in his day."

"That indeed he was—none better have I known."

"So is his son Nigel, as fierce a young war-hawk as ever yearned to use beak and claw; but held fast in the mews up to now. This is his trial flight. There he stands at the bridge-head, as was the wont in our fathers' time, ready to measure himself against all comers."

Of all Englishmen there was no greater knight-errant than the king himself, and none so steeped in every quaint usage of chivalry; so that the situation was after his own heart.

"He is not yet a knight?"

"No, sire, only a squire."

"Then he must bear himself bravely this day if he is to make good what he has done. Is it fitting that a young untried squire should venture to couch his lance against the best in England?"

"He hath given me his cartel and challenge," said Chandos, drawing a paper from his tunic. "Have I your permission, sire, to issue it?"

"Surely, John, we have no cavalier more versed in the laws of chivalry than yourself. You know this young man, and you are aware how far he is worthy of the high honour which he asks. Let us hear his defiance."

The knights and squires of the escort, most of whom were veterans of the French war, had been gazing with interest and some surprise at the steel-clad figure in front of them. Now at a call from Sir Walter Manny they assembled round the spot where the king and Chandos had halted. Chandos cleared his throat and read from his paper—

"'*A tous seigneurs, chevaliers et escuyers*,' so it is headed, gentlemen. It is a message from the good Squire Nigel Loring of Tilford, son of Sir Eustace Loring, of honourable memory. Squire Loring awaits you in arms, gentlemen, yonder upon the crown of the old bridge. Thus says he: 'For the great desire that I, a most humble and unworthy squire, entertain, that I may come to the knowledge of the noble gentlemen who ride with my royal master, I now wait on the Bridge of the Way in the hope that some of them may condescend to do some small deed of arms upon me, or that I may deliver them from any vow which they may have taken. This I say out of no esteem for myself, but solely that I may witness the noble bearing of these famous cavaliers and admire their skill in the handling of arms. Therefore, with the help of Saint George, I will hold the bridge with sharpened lances against any or all who may deign to present themselves while daylight lasts.'"

"What say you to this, gentlemen?" asked the king, looking round with laughing eyes.

"Truly it is issued in very good form," said the prince. "Neither Claricieux nor Red Dragon nor any herald that ever wore tabard could better it. Did he draw it of his own hand?"

"He hath a grim old grandmother who is one of the ancient breed," said Chandos. "I doubt not that the Dame Ermyntrude hath drawn a challenge or two before now. But hark ye, sire, I would have a word in your ear—and yours too, most noble prince."

Leading them aside, Chandos whispered some explanations, which ended by them all three bursting into a shout of laughter.

"By the rood! no honourable gentleman should be reduced to such straits," said the king. "It behoves me to look to it. But how now, gentlemen? This worthy cavalier still waits his answer."

The soldiers had all been buzzing together; but now Walter Manny turned to the king with the result of their counsel.

"If it please your majesty," said he, "we are of opinion that this squire hath exceeded all bounds in desiring to break a spear with a belted knight ere he has given his proofs. We do him sufficient honour if a squire ride against him, and with your consent I have chosen my own body-squire, John Widdicombe, to clear the path for us across the bridge."

"What you say, Walter, is right and fair," said the king. "Master Chandos, you will tell our champion yonder what hath been arranged. You will advise him also that it is our royal will that this contest be not fought upon the bridge, since it is very clear that it must end in one or both going over into the river, but that he advance to the end of the bridge and fight upon the plain. You will tell him also that a blunted lance is sufficient for such an encounter, but that a hand-stroke or two with sword or mace may well be exchanged, if both riders should keep their saddles. A blast upon Raoul's horn shall be the signal to close."

Such ventures as these where an aspirant for fame would wait for days at a cross-road, a ford, or a bridge, until some worthy antagonist should ride that way, were very common in the old days of adventurous knight

errantry, and were still familiar to the minds of all men, because the stories of the romancers and the songs of the trouvères were full of such incidents. Their actual occurrence, however, had become rare. There was the more curiosity, not unmixed with amusement, in the thoughts of the courtiers as they watched Chandos ride down to the bridge and commented upon the somewhat singular figure of the challenger. His build was strange, and so also was his figure, for the limbs were short for so tall a man. His head also was sunk forward as if he were lost in thought or overcome with deep dejection.

"This is surely the Cavalier of the Heavy Heart," said Manny. "What trouble has he, that he should hang his head?"

"Perchance he hath a weak neck," said the king.

"At least he hath no weak voice," the prince remarked, as Nigel's answer to Chandos came to their ears. "By our lady, he booms like a bittern."

As Chandos rode back again to the king, Nigel exchanged the old ash spear which had been his father's for one of the blunted tournament lances which he took from the hands of a stout archer in attendance. He then rode down to the end of the bridge where a hundred-yard stretch of greensward lay in front of him. At the same moment the squire of Sir Walter Manny, who had been hastily armed by his comrades, spurred forward and took up his position.

The king raised his hand; there was a clang from the falconer's horn, and the two riders, with a thrust of their heels and a shake of their bridles, dashed furiously at each other. In the centre the green strip of marshy meadow land, with the water squirting from the galloping hoofs, and the two crouching men, gleaming bright in the evening sun; on one side the half circle of motionless horsemen, some in steel, some in velvet, silent and attentive, dogs, hawks, and horses, all turned to stone; on the other the old peaked bridge, the blue lazy river, the group of open-mouthed rustics, and the dark old manor-house

with one grim face which peered from the upper window.

A good man was John Widdicombe, but he had met a better that day. Before that yellow whirlwind of a horse and that rider who was welded and riveted to his saddle his knees could not hold their grip. Nigel and Pommers were one flying missile, with all their weight and strength and energy centred on the steady end of the lance. Had Widdicombe been struck by a thunderbolt he could not have flown faster or farther from his saddle. Two full somersaults did he make, his plates clanging like cymbals, ere he lay flat upon his back.

For a moment the king looked grave at that prodigious fall. Then smiling once more as Widdicombe staggered to his feet, he clapped his hands loudly in applause. "A fair course and fairly run!" he cried. "The five scarlet roses bear themselves in peace even as I have seen them in war. How now, my good Walter? Have you another squire, or will you clear a path for us yourself?"

Manny's choleric face had turned darker as he observed the mischance of his representative. He beckoned now to a tall knight, whose gaunt and savage face looked out from his open bassinet as an eagle might from a cage of steel.

"Sir Hubert," said he, "I bear in mind the day when you overbore the Frenchman at Caen. Will you not be our champion now?"

"When I fought the Frenchman, Walter, it was with naked weapons," said the knight, sternly. "I am a soldier and I love a soldier's work, but I care not for these tilt-yard tricks which were invented for nothing but to tickle the fancies of foolish women."

"Oh, most ungalliant speech!" cried the king. "Had my good consort heard you she would have arraigned you to appear at a Court of Love with a jury of virgins to answer for your sins. But I pray you to take a tilting spear, good Sir Hubert!"

"I had as soon take a peacock's feather, my fair lord;

but I will do it, if you ask me. Here, page, hand me one of those sticks, and let me see what I can do."

But Sir Hubert de Burgh was not destined to test either his skill or his luck. The great bay horse which he rode was as unused to this warlike play as was its master, and had none of its master's stoutness of heart; so that when it saw the levelled lance, the gleaming figure and the frenzied yellow horse rushing down upon it, it swerved, turned and galloped furiously down the river-bank. Amid roars of laughter from the rustics on the one side and from the courtiers on the other, Sir Hubert was seen tugging vainly at his bridle, and bounding onward, clearing gorse-bushes and heather clumps, until he was but a shimmering, quivering gleam upon the dark hillside. Nigel, who had pulled Pommers on to his very haunches at the instant that his opponent turned, saluted with his lance and trotted back to the bridge-head, where he awaited his next assailant.

"The ladies would say that a judgment hath fallen upon our good Sir Hubert for his impious words," said the king.

"Let us hope that his charger may be broken in ere he venture to ride out between two armies," remarked the prince. "They might mistake the hardness of his horse's mouth for a softness of the rider's heart. See where he rides, still clearing every bush upon his path."

"By the rood!" said the king, "if the bold Hubert has not increased his repute as a jouster he has gained great honour as a horseman. But the bridge is still closed, Walter. How say you now? Is this young squire never to be unhorsed, or is your king himself to lay lance in rest ere the way can be cleared? By the head of Saint Thomas! I am in the very mood to run a course with this gentle youth."

"Nay, nay, sire, too much honour hath already been done him!" said Manny, looking angrily at the motionless horseman. "That this untried boy should be able to say that in one evening he has unhorsed my squire, and seen the back of one of the bravest knights in England, is

surely enough to turn his foolish head. Fetch me a spear, Robert ! I will see what I can make of him."

The famous knight took the spear when it was brought to him as a master-workman takes a tool. He balanced it, shook it once or twice in the air, ran his eyes down it for a flaw in the wood, and then finally, having made sure of its poise and weight, laid it carefully in rest under his arm. Then gathering up his bridle so as to have his horse under perfect command, and covering himself with the shield, which was slung round his neck, he rode out to do battle.

Now, Nigel, young and inexperienced, all Nature's aid will not help you against the mixed craft and strength of such a warrior. The day will come when neither Manny nor even Chandos could sweep you from your saddle ; but now, even had you some less cumbrous armour, your chance were small. Your downfall is near ; but as you see the famous black chevrons on a golden ground, your gallant heart, which never knew fear, is only filled with joy and amazement at the honour done you. Your downfall is near, and yet in your wildest dreams you would never guess how strange your downfall is to be.

Again, with a dull thunder of hoofs, the horses gallop over the soft water-meadow. Again, with a clash of metal, the two riders meet. It is Nigel now, taken clean in the face of his helmet with the blunted spear, who flies backward off his horse and falls clanging on the grass.

But, good heavens ! what is this ? Manny has thrown up his hands in horror, and the lance has dropped from his nerveless fingers. From all sides, with cries of dismay, with oaths and shouts and ejaculations to the saints, the horsemen ride wildly in. Was ever so dreadful, so sudden, so complete, an end to a gentle passage-at-arms ? Surely their eyes must be at fault ? Some wizard's trick has been played upon them to deceive their senses. But no, it was only too clear. There on the greensward lay the trunk of the stricken cavalier, and there, a good dozen yards beyond, lay his helmeted head.

"By the Virgin!" cried Manny, wildly, as he jumped from his horse, "I would give my last gold piece that the work of this evening should be undone! How came it? What does it mean? Hither, my lord bishop, for surely it smacks of witchcraft and the Devil."

With a white face the bishop had sprung down beside the prostrate body, pushing through the knot of horrified knights and squires.

"I fear that the last offices of the Holy Church come too late," said he, in a quivering voice. "Most unfortunate young man! How sudden an end! *In medio vitæ*, as the Holy Book has it—one moment in the pride of his youth, the next his head torn from his body. Now God and his saints have mercy upon me and guard me from evil."

The last prayer was shot out of the bishop with an energy and earnestness unusual in his orisons. It was caused by the sudden outcry of one of the squires, who, having lifted the helmet from the ground, cast it down again with a scream of horror.

"It is empty!" he cried. "It weighs as light as a feather."

"'Fore God, it is true!" cried Manny, laying his hand on it. "There is no one in it. With what have I fought, father bishop? Is it of this world or of the next?"

The bishop had clambered on his horse the better to consider the point.

"If the foul fiend is abroad," said he, "my place is over yonder by the king's side. Certes, that sulphur-coloured horse hath a very devilish look. I could have sworn that I saw both smoke and flame from its nostrils. The beast is fit to bear a suit of armour which rides and fights, and yet hath no man within it."

"Nay, not too fast, father bishop," said one of the knights. "It may be all that you say and yet come from a human workshop. When I made a campaign in South Germany I have seen at Nuremberg a cunning figure, devised by an armourer, which could both ride and wield a sword. If this be such a one——"

"I thank you all for your very gentle courtesy," said a booming voice from the figure upon the ground.

At the words even the valiant Manny sprang into his saddle. Some rode madly away from the horrid trunk. A few of the boldest lingered.

"Most of all," said the voice, "would I thank the most noble knight, Sir Walter Manny, that he should deign to lay aside his greatness and condescend to do a deed of arms upon so humble a squire."

"'Fore God!" said Manny, "if this be the Devil, then the Devil hath a very courtly tongue. I will have him out of his armour, if he blast me!"

So saying, he sprang once more from his horse and plunging his hand down the slit in the collapsed gorget, he closed it tightly upon a fistful of Nigel's yellow curls. The groan that came forth was enough to convince him that it was indeed a man who lurked within. At the same time his eyes fell upon the hole in the mail corselet which had served the squire as a visor, and he burst into deep-chested mirth. The king, the prince, and Chandos, who had watched the scene from a distance, too much amused by it to explain or interfere, rode up weary with laughter, now that all was discovered.

"Let him out!" said the king, with his hand to his side. "I pray you to unlace him and let him out! I have shared in many a spear-running, but never have I been nearer falling from my horse than as I watched this one. I feared the fall had struck him senseless, since he lay so still."

Nigel had indeed lain with all the breath shaken from his body, and as he was unaware that his helmet had been carried off, he had not understood either the alarm or the amusement that he had caused. Now, freed from the great hauberk in which he had been shut like a pea in a pod, he stood blinking in the light, blushing deeply with shame that the shifts to which his poverty had reduced him should be exposed to all these laughing courtiers. It was the king who brought him comfort.

"You have shown that you can use your father's weapons," said he, "and you have proved also that you are the worthy bearer of his name and his arms, for you have within you that spirit for which he was famous. But I wot that neither he nor you would suffer a train of hungry men to starve before your door; so lead on, I pray you, and if the meat be as good as this grace before it, then it will be a feast indeed."

## 10. *How the King Greeted His Seneschal of Calais*

IT would have fared ill with the good name of Tilford Manor-house and with the housekeeping of the aged Dame Ermyntrude had the king's whole retinue, with his outer and inner marshal, his justiciar, his chamberlain, and his guard, all gathered under the one roof. But by the foresight and the gentle management of Chandos this calamity was avoided, so that some were quartered at the great Abbey and others passed on to enjoy the hospitality of Sir Roger FitzAlan at Farnham Castle. Only the king himself, the prince, Manny, Chandos, Sir Hubert de Burgh, the bishop, and two or three more remained behind as the guests of the Lorings.

But small as was the party, and humble the surroundings, the king in no way relaxed that love of ceremony, of elaborate form and of brilliant colouring which was one of his characteristics. The sumpter-mules were unpacked, squires ran hither and thither, baths smoked in the bed-chambers, silks and satins were unfolded, gold chains gleamed and clinked, so that when, at last, to the long blast of two court trumpeters, the company took their seats at the board, it was the brightest, fairest scene which those old black rafters had ever spanned.

The great influx of foreign knights who had come in their splendour from all parts of Christendom to take part in the opening of the Round Tower of Windsor six years

before, and to try their luck and their skill at the tournament connected with it, had deeply modified the English fashions of dress. The old tunic, over-tunic, and cyclas were too sad and simple for the new fashions, so now strange and brilliant cote-hardies, pourpoints, courtepies, paltocks, hanselines, and many other wondrous garments, parti-coloured, or diapered, with looped, embroidered or escalloped edges, flamed and glittered round the king. He himself, in black velvet and gold, formed a dark right centre to the finery around him. On his right sat the prince, on his left the bishop, while Dame Ermyntrude marshalled the forces of the household outside, alert and watchful, pouring in her dishes and her flagons at the right moment, rallying her tired servants, encouraging the van, hurrying the rear, hastening up her reserves, the tapping of her oak stick heard wherever the pressure was the greatest.

Behind the king, clad in his best, but looking drab and sorry amid the brilliant costumes round him, Nigel himself, regardless of an aching body and a twisted knee, waited upon his royal guests, who threw many a merry jest at him over their shoulders as they still chuckled at the adventure of the bridge.

"By the rood!" said King Edward, leaning back, with a chicken-bone held daintily between the courtesy fingers of his left hand, "the play is too good for this country stage. You must to Windsor with me, Nigel, and bring with you this great suit of harness in which you lurk. There you shall hold the lists with your eyes in your midriff, and unless someone cleave you to the waist I see not how any harm can befall you. Never have I seen so small a nut in so great a shell."

The prince, looking back with laughing eyes, saw by Nigel's flushed and embarrassed face that his poverty hung heavily upon him.

"Nay," said he kindly, "such a workman is surely worthy of better tools."

"And it is for his master to see that he has them,"

added the king. "The court armourer will look to it that the next time your helmet is carried away, Nigel, your head shall be inside it."

Nigel, red to the roots of his flaxen hair, stammered out some words of thanks.

John Chandos, however, had a fresh suggestion, and he cocked a roguish eye as he made it—

"Surely, my liege, your bounty is little needed in this case. It is the ancient law of arms that if two cavaliers start to joust, and one either by maladdress or misadventure fail to meet the shock, then his arms become the property of him who still holds the lists. This being so, methinks, Sir Hubert de Burgh, that the fine hauberk of Milan and the helmet of Bordeaux steel in which you rode to Tilford should remain with our young host as some small remembrance of your visit."

The suggestion raised a general chorus of approval and laughter, in which all joined, save only Sir Hubert himself, who, flushed with anger, fixed his baleful eyes upon Chandos's mischievous and smiling face.

"I said that I did not play that foolish game, and I know nothing of its laws," said he; "but you know well, John, that if you would have a bout with sharpened spear or sword, where two ride to the ground, and only one away from it, you have not far to go to find it."

"Nay, nay, would you ride to the ground? Surely you had best walk, Hubert," said Chandos. "On your feet I know well that I should not see your back as we have seen it to-day. Say what you will, your horse has played you false, and I claim your suit of harness for Nigel Loring."

"Your tongue is overlong, John, and I am weary of its endless clack!" said Sir Hubert, his yellow moustache bristling from a scarlet face. "If you claim my harness, do you yourself come and take it. If there is a moon in the sky you may try this very night when the board is cleared."

"Nay, fair sirs," cried the king, smiling from one to the other, "this matter must be followed no further. Do

you fill a bumper of Gascony, John, and you also, Hubert. Now pledge each other, I pray you, as good and loyal comrades who would scorn to fight save in your king's quarrel. We can spare neither of you while there is so much work for brave hearts over the sea. As to this matter of the harness, John Chandos speaks truly where it concerns a joust in the lists, but we hold that such a law is scarce binding in this, which was but a wayside passage and a gentle trial of arms. On the other hand, in the case of your squire, Master Manny, there can be no doubt that his suit is forfeit."

"It is a grievous hearing for him, my liege," said Walter Manny; "for he is a poor man, and hath been at sore pains to fit himself for the wars. Yet what you say shall be done, fair sire. So, if you will come to me in the morning, Squire Loring, John Widdicombe's suit will be handed over to you."

"Then, with the king's leave, I will hand it back to him," said Nigel, troubled and stammering; "for indeed I had rather never ride to the wars than take from a brave man his only suit of plate."

"There spoke your father's spirit!" cried the king. "By the rood! Nigel, I like you full well. Let the matter bide in my hands. But I marvel much that Sir Aymery the Lombard hath not come to us yet from Windsor."

From the moment of his arrival at Tilford, again and again King Edward had asked most eagerly whether Sir Aymery had come, and whether there was any news of him, so that the courtiers glanced at each other in wonder. For Aymery was known to all of them as a famous mercenary of Italy, lately appointed Governor of Calais, and this sudden and urgent summons from the king might well mean some renewal of the war with France, which was the dearest wish of every soldier. Twice the king had stopped his meal and sat with sidelong head, his wine-cup in his hand, listening attentively when some sound like the clatter of hoofs was heard from outside; but the

third time there could be no mistake. The tramp and jingle of the horses broke loud upon the ear, and ended in hoarse voices calling out of the darkness, which were answered by the archers posted as sentries without the door.

"Some traveller has indeed arrived, my liege," said Nigel. "What is your royal will?"

"It can be but Aymery," the king answered, "for it was only to him that I left the message that he should follow me hither. Bid him come in, I pray you, and make him very welcome at your board."

Nigel cast open the door, plucking a torch from its bracket as he did so. Half a dozen men-at-arms sat on their horses outside, but one had dismounted, a short, squat, swarthy man with a rat face and quick, restless brown eyes, which peered eagerly past Nigel into the red glare of the well-lit hall.

"I am Sir Aymery of Pavia," he whispered. "For God's sake, tell me! is the king within?"

"He is at table, fair sir, and he bids you to enter."

"One moment, young man, one moment, and a secret word in your ear. Wot you why it is that the king has sent for me?"

Nigel read terror in the dark cunning eyes which glanced in sidelong fashion into his.

"Nay, I know not."

"I would I knew—I would I was sure ere I sought his presence."

"You have but to cross the threshold, fair sir, and doubtless you will learn from the king's own lips."

Sir Aymery seemed to gather himself as one who braces for a spring into ice-cold water. Then he crossed with a quick stride from the darkness into the light. The king stood up and held out his hand, with a smile upon his long handsome face, and yet it seemed to the Italian that it was the lips which smiled but not the eyes.

"Welcome!" cried Edward. "Welcome to our worthy and faithful Seneschal of Calais! Come, sit here before

me at the board, for I have sent for you that I may hear your news from over the sea, and thank you for the care that you have taken of that which is as dear to me as wife or child. Set a place for Sir Aymery there, and give him food and drink, for he has ridden fast and far in our service to-day."

Throughout the long feast which the skill of the Lady Ermyntrude had arranged, Edward chatted lightly with the Italian as well as with the barons near him. Finally, when the last dish was removed and the gravy-soaked rounds of coarse bread which served as plates had been cast to the dogs, the wine-flagons were passed round, and old Weathercote the minstrel entered timidly with his harp in the hope that he might be allowed to play before the king's majesty. But Edward had other sport afoot.

"I pray you, Nigel, to send out the servants so that we may be alone. I would have two men-at-arms at every door lest we be disturbed in our debate, for it is a matter of privacy. And now, Sir Aymery, these noble lords as well as I, your master, would fain hear from your own lips how all goes forward in France."

The Italian's face was calm, but he looked restlessly from one to another along the line of his listeners.

"So far as I know, my liege, all is quiet on the French marches," said he.

"You have not heard, then, that they have mustered or gathered to a head with the intention of breaking the truce and making some attempt upon our dominions?"

"Nay, sire, I have heard nothing of it."

"You set my mind much at ease, Aymery," said the king; "for if nothing has come to your ears, then surely it cannot be. It was said that the wild Knight de Chargny had come down to St. Omer with his eyes upon my precious jewel and his mailed hands ready to grasp it."

"Nay, sire, let him come. He will find the jewel safe in its strong box, with a goodly guard over it."

"You are the guard over my jewel, Aymery."

"Yes, sire, I am the guard."

"And you are a faithful guard and one whom I can trust, are you not? You would not barter away that which is so dear to me when I have chosen you out of all my army to hold it for me?"

"Nay, sire, what reasons can there be for such questions? They touch my honour very nearly. You know that I would part with Calais only when I parted with my soul."

"Then you know nothing of de Chargny's attempt?"

"Nothing, sire."

"Liar and villain!" yelled the king, springing to his feet and dashing his fist upon the table until the glasses rattled again. "Seize him, archers! Seize him this instant! Stand close by either elbow, lest he do himself a mischief! Now do you dare to tell me to my face, you perjured Lombard, that you know nothing of de Chargny and his plans?"

"As God is my witness, I know nothing of him!"

The man's lips were white, and he spoke in a thin, sighing, reedy voice, his eyes wincing away from the fell gaze of the angry king.

Edward laughed bitterly, and drew a paper from his breast.

"You are the judges in this case, you, my fair son, and you, Chandos, and you, Manny, and you, Sir Hubert, and you also, my lord bishop. By my sovereign power I make you a court that you may deal justice upon this man, for by God's eyes I will not stir from this room until I have sifted the matter to the bottom. And first I would read you this letter. It is superscribed to Sir Aymery of Pavia, *nommé* Le Lombard, Château de Calais. Is not that your name and style, you rogue?"

"It is my name, sire; but no such letter has come to me."

"Else had your villainy never been disclosed. It is signed 'Isadore de Chargny.' What says my enemy de Chargny to my trusted servant? Listen! 'We could not come with the last moon, for we have not gathered sufficient strength, nor have we been able to collect the

twenty thousand crowns which are your price. But with the next turn of the moon in the darkest hour, we will come, and you will be paid your money at the small postern gate with the rowan bush beside it.' Well, rogue, what say you now ? "

" It is a forgery ! " gasped the Italian.

" I pray you that you will let me see it, sire," said Chandos. " De Chargny was my prisoner, and so many letters passed ere his ransom was paid that his script is well known to me. Yes, yes, I will swear that this is indeed his. If my salvation were at stake I could swear it."

" If it were indeed written by de Chargny it was to dishonour me," cried Sir Aymery.

" Nay, nay ! " said the young prince. " We all know de Chargny and have fought against him. Many faults he has, a boaster and a brawler, but a braver man and one of greater heart and higher of enterprise does not ride beneath the lilies of France. Such a man would never stoop to write a letter for the sake of putting dishonour upon one of knightly rank. I for one, will never believe it."

A gruff murmur from the others showed that they were of one mind with the prince. The light of the torches from the walls beat upon the line of stern faces at the high table. They had sat like flint, and the Italian shrank from their inexorable eyes. He looked swiftly round, but armed men choked every entrance. The shadow of death had fallen athwart his soul.

" This letter," said the king, " was given by de Chargny to one Dom Beauvais, a priest of St. Omer, to carry into Calais. The said priest, smelling a reward, brought it to one who is my faithful servant, and so it came to me. Straightway I sent for this man that he should come to me. Meanwhile the priest has returned so that de Chargny may think that his message is indeed delivered."

" I know nothing of it," said the Italian, doggedly, licking his dry lips.

A dark flush mounted to the king's forehead, and his eyes were gorged with his wrath.

"No more of this, for God's dignity!" he cried. "Had we this fellow at the Tower, a few turns of the rack would tear a confession from his craven soul. But why should we need his word for his own guilt? You have seen, my lords, you have heard? How say you, fair son? Is the man guilty?"

"Sire, he is guilty."

"And you, John? And you, Walter? And you, Hubert? And you, my lord bishop? You are all of one mind, then. He is guilty of the betrayal of his trust. And the punishment?"

"It can only be death," said the prince, and each in turn the others nodded their agreement.

"Aymery of Pavia, you have heard your doom," said Edward, leaning his chin upon his hand and glooming at the cowering Italian. "Step forward, you archer at the door—you with the black beard. Draw your sword! Nay, you white-faced rogue, I would not dishonour this roof-tree by your blood. It is your heels, not your head, that we want. Hack off these golden spurs of knighthood with your sword, archer! 'Twas I who gave them, and I who take them back. Ha! they fly across the hall, and with them every bond betwixt you and the worshipful order whose sign and badge they are! Now lead him out on the heath afar from the house where his carrion can best lie, and hew his scheming head from his body as a warning to all such traitors!"

The Italian, who had slipped from his chair to his knees, uttered a cry of despair, as an archer seized him by either shoulder. Writhing out of their grip, he threw himself upon the floor and clutched at the king's feet.

"Spare me, my most dread lord, spare me, I beseech you! In the name of Christ's passion, I implore your grace and pardon! Bethink you, my good and dear lord, how many years I have served under your banners and how many services I have rendered. Was it not I who found the ford upon the Seine two days before the great battle? Was it not I also who marshalled the

attack at the intaking of Calais? I have a wife and four children in Italy, great king, and it was the thought of them which led me to fall from my duty, for this money would have allowed me to leave the wars and to see them once again. Mercy, my liege, mercy, I implore!"

The English are a rough race, but not a cruel one. The king sat with a face of doom; but the others looked askance and fidgeted in their seats.

"Indeed, my fair liege," said Chandos, "I pray you that you will abate somewhat of your anger."

Edward shook his head curtly. "Be silent, John. It shall be as I have said."

"I pray you, my dear and honoured liege, not to act with overmuch haste in the matter," said Manny. "Bind him and hold him until the morning, for other counsels may prevail."

"Nay, I have spoken. Lead him out!"

But the trembling man clung to the king's knees in such a fashion that the archers could not disengage his convulsive grip.

"Listen to me a moment, I implore you! Give me but one minute to plead with you, and then do what you will."

The king leaned back in his chair. "Speak and have done," said he.

"You must spare me, my noble liege. For your own sake I say that you must spare me, for I can set you in the way of such a knightly adventure as will gladden your heart. Bethink you, sire, that this de Chargny and his comrades know nothing of their plans having gone awry. If I do but send them a message they will surely come to the postern gate. Then, if we have placed our bushment with skill, we shall have such a capture and such a ransom as will fill your coffers. He and his comrades should be worth a good hundred thousand crowns."

Edward spurned the Italian away from him with his foot until he sprawled among the rushes, but even as he lay there like a wounded snake his dark eyes never left the king's face.

"You double traitor! You would sell Calais to de Chargny, and then in turn you would sell de Chargny to me. How dare you suppose that I or any noble knight had such a huckster's soul as to think only of ransoms where honour is to be won? Could I or any true man be so caitiff and so thrall? You have sealed your own doom. Lead him out!"

"One instant, I pray you, my fair and most sweet lord," cried the prince. "Assuage your wrath yet a little while, for this man's rede deserves, perhaps, more thought than we have given it. He has turned your noble soul sick with his talk of ransoms; but look at it, I pray you, from the side of honour, and where could we find such hope of worshipfully winning worship? I pray you to let me put my body in this adventure, for it is one from which, if rightly handled, much advancement is to be gained."

Edward looked with sparkling eyes at the noble youth at his side.

"Never was hound more keen on the track of a stricken hart than you on the hope of honour, fair son," said he. "How do you conceive the matter in your mind?"

"De Chargny and his men will be such as are worth going far to meet, for he will have the pick of France under his banner that night. If we did as this man says and awaited him with the same number of lances, then I cannot think that there is any spot in Christendom where one would rather be than in Calais that night."

"By the rood, fair son, you are right!" cried the king, his face shining with the thought. "Now, which of you, John Chandos or Walter Manny, will take the thing in charge?" He looked mischievously from one to the other, like a master who dangles a bone between two fierce old hounds. All they had to say was in their burning, longing eyes. "Nay, John, you must not take it amiss; but it is Walter's turn and he shall have it."

"Shall we not all go under your banner, sire, or that of the prince?"

"Nay, it is not fitting that the royal banners of England

should be advanced in so small an adventure. And yet, if you have space in your ranks for two more cavaliers, both the prince and I would ride with you that night."

The young man stooped and kissed his father's hand.

"Take this man in your charge, Walter, and do with him as you will. Guard well, lest he betray us once again. Take him from my sight, for his breath poisons the room. And now, Nigel, if that worthy greybeard of thine would fain twang his harp or sing to us—but what in God's name would you have?"

He had turned, to find his young host upon his knee and his flaxen head bent in entreaty.

"What is it, man? What do you crave?"

"A boon, fair liege!"

"Well, well, am I to have no peace to-night, with a traitor kneeling to me in front, and a true man on his knees behind? Out with it, Nigel. What would you have?"

"To come with you to Calais."

"By the rood! your request is fair enough, seeing that our plot is hatched beneath your very roof. How say you, Walter? Will you take him, armour and all?" asked King Edward.

"Say rather will you take me?" said Chandos. "We are two rivals in honour, Walter, but I am very sure that you would not hold me back."

"Nay, John, I will be proud to have the best lance in Christendom beneath my banner."

"And I to follow so knightly a leader. But Nigel Loring is my squire, and so he comes with us also."

"Then that is settled," said the king, "and now there is no need for hurry, since there can be no move until the moon has changed. So I pray you to pass the flagon once again, and to drink with me to the good knights of France. May they be of great heart and high of enterprise when we all meet once more within the castle wall of Calais!"

## II. *In the Hall of the Knight of Dupplin*

THE king had come and had gone. Tilford Manor-house stood once more dark and silent, but joy and contentment reigned within its walls. In one night every trouble had fallen away like some dark curtain which had shut out the sun. A princely sum of money had come from the king's treasurer, given in such fashion that there could be no refusal. With a bag of gold pieces at his saddle-bow, Nigel rode once more into Guildford, and not a beggar on the way who had not cause to bless his name.

There he had gone first to the goldsmith and had bought back cup and salver and bracelet, mourning with the merchant over the evil chance that gold and gold-work had for certain reasons which only those in the trade could fully understand gone up in value during the last week, so that already fifty gold pieces had to be paid more than the price which Nigel had received. In vain the faithful Aylward fretted and fumed and muttered a prayer that the day would come when he might feather a shaft in the merchant's portly paunch. The money had to be paid.

Thence Nigel hurried to Wat the armourer's, and there he bought that very suit for which he had yearned so short a time before. Then and there he tried it on in the booth, Wat and his boy walking round him with spanner and wrench, fixing bolts and twisting rivets.

"How is that, my fair sir?" cried the armourer, as he drew the bassinet over the head and fastened it to the camail which extended to the shoulders. "I swear by Tubal Cain that it fits you as the shell fits the crab! A finer suit never came from Italy or Spain."

Nigel stood in front of a burnished shield which served as a mirror, and he turned this way and that, preening himself like a little shining bird. His smooth breastplate, his wondrous joints with their deft protection by the disks at knee and elbow and shoulder, the beautifully flexible gauntlets and sollerets, the shirt of mail and the close-

fitting greave-plates were all things of joy and of beauty in his eyes. He sprang about the shop to show his lightness, and then, running out, he placed his hand on the pommel and vaulted into Pommers' saddle, while Wat and his boy applauded in the doorway.

Then, springing off and running into the shop again, he clashed down upon his knees before the image of the Virgin upon the smithy wall. There from his heart he prayed that no shadow or stain should come upon his soul or his honour while these arms encased his body, and that he might be strengthened to use them for noble and godly ends. A strange turn this to a religion of peace, and yet for many a century the sword and the faith had upheld each other, and in a darkened world the best ideal of the soldier had turned in some dim groping fashion towards the light. "*Benedictus dominus deus meus qui docet manus meas ad Prælium et digitos meos ad bellum!*" There spoke the soul of the knightly soldier.

So the armour was trussed upon the armourer's mule and went back with them to Tilford, where Nigel put it on once more for the pleasure of the Lady Ermyntrude, who clapped her skinny hands and shed tears of mingled pain and joy—pain that she should lose him, joy that he should go so bravely to the wars. As to her own future, it had been made easy for her, since it was arranged that a steward should look to the Tilford estate while she had at her disposal a suite of rooms in royal Windsor, where, with other venerable dames of her own age and standing, she could spend the twilight of her days discussing long-forgotten scandals and whispering sad things about the grandfathers and grandmothers of the young courtiers all around them. There Nigel might leave her with an easy mind when he turned his face to France.

But there was one more visit to be paid, and one more farewell to be spoken ere Nigel could leave the moorlands where he had dwelt so long. That evening he donned his brightest tunic, dark purple velvet of Genoa, with trimming of miniver, his hat with the snow-white feather

curling round the front, and his belt of embossed silver round his loins. Mounted on lordly Pommers, with his hawk upon wrist and his sword by his side, never did fairer young gallant or one more modest in mind set forth upon such an errand. It was but the old Knight of Dupplin to whom he would say farewell ; but the Knight of Dupplin had two daughters, Edith and Mary, and Edith was the fairest maid in all the heather-country.

Sir John Buttesthorn, the Knight of Dupplin, was so called because he had been present at that strange battle, some eighteen years before, when the full power of Scotland had been for a moment beaten to the ground by a handful of adventurers and mercenaries, marching under the banner of no nation, but fighting in their own private quarrel. Their exploit fills no pages of history, for it is to the interest of no nation to record it, and yet the rumour and fame of the great fight bulked large in those times, for it was on that day when the flower of Scotland was left dead upon the field, that the world first understood that a new force had arisen in war, and that the English archer, with his robust courage and his skill with the weapon which he had wielded from his boyhood, was a power with which even the mailed chivalry of Europe had seriously to reckon.

Sir John after his return from Scotland had become the king's own head huntsman, famous through all England for his knowledge of venery, until at last, getting overheavy for his horses, he had settled in modest comfort into the old house of Cosford upon the eastern slope of the Hindhead hill. Here, as his face grew redder, and his beard more white, he spent the evening of his days amid hawks and hounds, a flagon of spiced wine ever at his elbow, and his swollen foot perched upon a stool before him. There it was that many an old comrade broke his journey as he passed down the rude road which led from London to Portsmouth, and thither also came the young gallants of the country to hear the stout knight's tales of old wars, or to learn from him that lore of the forest and the chase which none could teach so well as he.

But sooth to say, whatever the old knight might think, it was not merely his old tales and older wine which drew the young men to Cosford, but rather the fair face of his younger daughter, or the strong soul and wise counsel of the elder. Never had two more different branches sprung from the same trunk. Both were tall and of a queenly graceful figure. But there all resemblance began and ended.

Edith was yellow as the ripe corn, blue-eyed, winning, mischievous, with a chattering tongue, a merry laugh, and a smile which a dozen of young gallants, Nigel of Tilford at their head, could share equally among them. Like a young kitten she played with all the things that she found in life, and some there were who thought that already the claws could be felt amid the patting of her velvet touch.

Mary was dark as night, grave-featured, plain-visaged, with steady brown eyes looking bravely at the world from under a strong black arch of brows. None could call her beautiful, and when her fair sister cast her arm around her and placed her cheek against hers, as was her wont when company was there, the fairness of the one and the plainness of the other leaped visibly to the eyes of all, each the clearer for that hard contrast. And yet, here and there, there was one who, looking at her strange strong face, and at the passing gleams far down in her dark eyes, felt that this silent woman, with her proud bearing and her queenly grace, had in her something of strength, of reserve, and of mystery which was more to them than all the dainty glitter of her sister.

Such were the ladies of Cosford towards whom Nigel Loring rode that night with doublet of Genoan velvet and the new white feather in his cap.

He had ridden over Thursley Ridge past that old stone where in days gone by at the place of Thor the wild Saxons worshipped their war-god. Nigel looked at it with a wary eye and spurred Pommers onward as he passed it, for still it was said that wild fires danced round it on the moonless nights, and they who had ears for such things could hear

the scream and sob of those whose lives had been ripped from them that the fiend might be honoured. Thor's Stone, Thor's Jumps, Thor's Punch-bowl—the whole countryside was one grim monument to the God of Battles, though the pious monks had changed his uncouth name for that of the Devil his father, so that it was the Devil's Jumps and the Devil's Punch-bowl of which they spoke. Nigel glanced back at the old grey boulder, and he felt for an instant a shudder pass through his stout heart. Was it the chill of the evening air, or was it that some inner voice had whispered to him of the day when he also might lie bound on such a rock and have such a bloodstained pagan crew howling around him ?

An instant later the rock and his vague fear and all things else had passed from his mind, for there, down the yellow sandy path, the setting sun gleaming on her golden hair, her lithe figure bending and swaying with every heave of the cantering horse, was none other than the same fair Edith, whose face had come so often between him and his sleep. His blood rushed hot to his face at the sight, for fearless of all else, his spirit was attracted and yet daunted by the delicate mystery of woman. To his pure and knightly soul not Edith alone, but every woman, sat high and aloof, enthroned and exalted, with a thousand mystic excellencies and virtues which raised her far above the rude world of man. There was joy in contact with them ; and yet there was fear, fear lest his own unworthiness, his untrained tongue or rougher ways should in some way break rudely upon this delicate and tender thing. Such was his thought as the white horse cantered towards him ; but a moment later his vague doubts were set at rest by the frank voice of the young girl, who waved her whip in merry greeting.

" Hail and well met, Nigel ! " she cried. " Whither away this evening ? Sure I am that it is not to see your friends of Cosford, for when did you ever don so brave a doublet for us ? Come, Nigel, her name, that I may hate her for ever ! "

"Nay, Edith," said the young squire, laughing back at the laughing girl. "I was indeed coming to Cosford."

"Then we shall ride back together, for I will go no farther. How think you that I am looking?"

Nigel's answer was in his eyes as he glanced at the fair flushed face, the golden hair, the sparkling eyes, and the daintily graceful figure set off in a scarlet-and-black riding-dress.

"You are as fair as ever, Edith."

"Oh, cold of speech! Surely you were bred for the cloisters and not for a lady's bower, Nigel. Had I asked such a question from young Sir George Brocas or the Squire of Fernhurst, he would have raved from here to Cosford. They are both more to my taste than you are, Nigel."

"It is the worse for me, Edith," said Nigel ruefully.

"Nay, but you must not lose heart."

"Have I not already lost it?" said he.

"That is better," she cried, laughing. "You can be quick enough when you choose, Master Malapert. But you are more fit to speak of high and weary matters with my sister Mary. She will have none of the prattle and courtesy of Sir George, and yet I love them well. But tell me, Nigel, why do you come to Cosford to-night?"

"To bid you farewell."

"Me alone?"

"Nay, Edith, you and your sister Mary and the good knight, your father."

"Sir George would have said that he had come for me alone. Indeed you are but a poor courtier beside him. But is it true, Nigel, that you go to France?"

"Yes, Edith."

"It was so rumoured after the king had been to Tilford. The story goes that the king goes to France and you in his train. Is that true?"

"Yes, Edith, it is true."

"Tell me, then, to what part you go, and when?"

"That, alas! I may not say."

"Oh, in sooth!" She tossed her fair head and rode onward in silence, with compressed lips and angry eyes.

Nigel glanced at her in surprise and dismay. "Surely, Edith," said he, at last, "you have overmuch regard for my honour that you should wish me to break the word that I have given?"

"Your honour belongs to you, and my likings belong to me," said she. "You hold fast to the one, and I will do the same by the other."

They rode in silence through Thursley village. Then a thought came to her mind, and in an instant her anger was forgotten and she was hot on a new scent.

"What would you do if I were injured, Nigel? I have heard my father say that, small as you are, there is no man in these parts could stand against you. Would you be my champion if I suffered wrong?"

"Surely I or any man of gentle blood would be the champion of any woman who had suffered wrong."

"You or any and I or any—what sort of speech is that? Is it a compliment, think you, to be mixed with a drove in that fashion? My question was of you and me. If I were wronged would you be my man?"

"Try me and see, Edith!"

"Then I will do so, Nigel. Either Sir George Brocas or the Squire of Fernhurst would gladly do what I ask, and yet I am of a mind, Nigel, to turn to you."

"I pray you to tell me what it is."

"You know Paul de la Fosse of Shalford?"

"You mean the small man with the twisted back?"

"He is no smaller than yourself, Nigel, and as to his back there are many folk that I know who would be glad to have his face."

"Nay, I am no judge of that, and I spoke out of no discourtesy. What of the man?"

"He has flouted me, Nigel, and I would have revenge."

"What—on that poor twisted creature?"

"I tell you that he has flouted me!"

"But how?"

"I should have thought that a true cavalier would have flown to my aid, withouten all these questions. But I will tell you, since I needs must. Know then that he was one of those who came around me and professed to be my own. Then, merely because he thought that there were others who were as dear to me as himself he left me, and now he pays court to Maude Twynham, the little freckle-faced hussy in his village."

"But how has this hurt you, since he was no man of thine?"

"He was one of my men, was he not? And he has made game of me to his wench. He has told her things about me. He has made me foolish in her eyes. Yes, yes, I can read it in her saffron face and in her watery gaze when we meet at the church door on Sundays. She smiles—yes, smiles at me! Nigel, go to him! Do not slay him, or even wound him, but lay his face open with thy riding-whip, and then come back to me and tell me how I can serve you."

Nigel's face was haggard with the strife within, for desire ran hot in every vein, and yet reason shrank with horror.

"By Saint Paul! Edith," he cried, "I see no honour nor advancement of any sort in this thing which you have asked me to do. Is it for me to strike one who is no better than a cripple? For my manhood I could not do such a deed, and I pray you, dear lady, that you will set me some other task."

Her eyes flashed at him in contempt. "And you are a man-at-arms!" she cried, laughing in bitter scorn. "You are afraid of a little man who can scarce walk. Yes, yes, say what you will, I shall ever believe that you have heard of his skill at fence, and of his great spirit, and that your heart has failed you! You are right, Nigel. He is indeed a perilous man. Had you done what I asked he would have slain you, and so you have shown your wisdom."

Nigel flushed and winced under the words, but he said no more, for his mind was fighting hard within him,

striving to keep that high image of woman which seemed for a moment to totter on the edge of a fall. Together in silence, side by side, the little man and the stately woman, the yellow charger and the white jennet, passed up the sandy winding track with the gorse and the bracken head-high on either side. Soon a path branched off through a gateway marked with the boar-heads of the Buttesthorns, and there was the low widespread house heavily timbered, loud with the barking of dogs. The ruddy knight limped forth with outstretched hand and roaring voice—

"What how, Nigel! Good welcome and all hail! I had thought that you had given over poor friends like us, now that the king had made so much of you. The horses, varlets, or my crutch will be across you! Hush, Lydiard! Down, Pelamon! I can scarce hear my voice for your yelping. Mary, a cup of wine for young Squire Loring!"

She stood framed in the doorway, tall, mystic, silent, with strange, wistful face and deep soul shining in her dark questioning eyes. Nigel kissed the hand that she held out, and all his faith in woman and his reverence came back to him as he looked at her. Her sister had slipped behind her, and her fair elfish face smiled her forgiveness of Nigel over Mary's shoulder.

The Knight of Dupplin leaned his weight upon the young man's arm and limped his way across the great high-roofed hall to his capacious oaken chair.

"Come, come, the stool, Edith!" he cried. "As God is my help, that girl's mind swarms with gallants as a granary with rats. Well, Nigel, I hear strange tales of your spear-running at Tilford and of the visit of the king. How seemed he? And my old friend Chandos—many happy hours in the woodlands have we had together—and Manny too, he was ever a bold and a hard rider—what news of them all?"

Nigel told the old knight all that had occurred, saying little of his own success and much of his own failure, yet the eyes of the dark woman burned the brighter as she sat at her tapestry and listened.

Sir John followed the story with a running fire of oaths, prayers, thumps with his great fist, and flourishes of his crutch.

"Well, well, lad, you could scarce expect to hold your saddle against Manny, and you have carried yourself well. We are proud of you, Nigel, for you are our own man, reared in the heather-country. But indeed I take shame that you are not more skilled in the mystery of the woods, seeing that I have had the teaching of you, and that no one in broad England is my master at the craft. I pray you to fill your cup again whilst I make use of the little time that is left to us."

And straightway the old knight began a long and weary lecture upon the times of grace and when each beast and bird was seasonable, with many anecdotes, illustrations, warnings and exceptions, drawn from his own great experience. He spoke also of the several ranks and grades of the chase: how the hare, hart, and boar must ever take precedence over the buck, the doe, the fox, the marten and the roe, even as a knight banneret does over a knight, while these in turn are of a higher class to the badger, the wildcat, or the otter, who are but the common populace of the world of beasts. Of bloodstains also he spoke—how the skilled hunter may see at a glance if blood be dark and frothy, which means a mortal hurt, or thin and clear, which means that the arrow has struck a bone.

"By such signs," said he, "you will surely know whether to lay on the hounds and cast down the blinks which hinder the stricken deer in its flight. But above all I pray you, Nigel, to have a care in the use of the terms of the craft, lest you should make some blunder at table, so that those who are wiser may have the laugh of you, and we who love you may be shamed."

"Nay, Sir John," said Nigel. "I think that after your teaching I can hold my place with the others."

The old knight shook his white head doubtfully. "There is so much to be learned that there is no one who

can be said to know it all," said he. "For example, Nigel, it is sooth that for every collection of beasts of the forest, and for every gathering of birds of the air, there is their own private name so that none may be confused with another."

"I know it, fair sir."

"You know it, Nigel, but you do not know each separate name, else you are a wiser man than I had thought you. In truth none can say that they know all, though I have myself pricked off eighty and six for a wager at court, and it is said that the chief huntsman of the Duke of Burgundy has counted over a hundred—but it is in my mind that he may have found them as he went, for there was none to say him nay. Answer me now, lad, how would you say if you saw ten badgers together in the forest?"

"A cete of badgers, fair sir."

"Good, Nigel—good, by my faith! And if you walk in Woolmer Forest and see a swarm of foxes, how would you call it?"

"A skulk of foxes."

"And if they be lions?"

"Nay, fair sir, I am not like to meet several lions in Woolmer Forest."

"Aye, lad, but there are other forests besides Woolmer, and other lands besides England, and who can tell how far afield such a knight-errant as Nigel of Tilford may go, when he sees worship to be won? We will say that you were in the deserts of Nubia, and that afterwards at the court of the great Sultan you wished to say that you had seen several lions, which is the first beast of the chase, being the king of all animals. How then would you say it?"

Nigel scratched his head. "Surely, fair sir, I would be content to say that I had seen a number of lions, if indeed I could say aught after so wondrous an adventure."

"Nay, Nigel, a huntsman would have said that he had

seen a pride of lions, and so proved that he knew the language of the chase. Now, had it been boars instead of lions ? "

" One says a singular of boars."

" And if they be swine ? "

" Surely it is a herd of swine."

" Nay, nay, lad, it is indeed sad to see how little you know. Your hands, Nigel, were always better than your head. No man of gentle birth would speak of a herd of swine ; that is the peasant speech. If you drive them it is a herd. If you hunt them it is other. What call you them, then, Edith ? "

" Nay, I know not," said the girl, listlessly. A crumpled note brought in by a varlet was clinched in her right hand and her blue eyes looked afar into the deep shadows of the roof.

" But you can tell us, Mary ? "

" Surely, sweet sir, one talks of a sounder of swine."

The old knight laughed exultantly. " Here is a pupil who never brings me shame ! " he cried. " Be it lore of chivalry or heraldry or woodcraft or what you will, I can always turn to Mary. Many a man can she put to the blush."

" Myself among them," said Nigel.

" Ah, lad, you are a Solomon to some of them. Hark ye ! only last week that jack-fool, the young Lord of Brocas, was here talking of having seen a covey of pheasants in the wood. One such speech would have been the ruin of a young squire at the court. How would you have said it, Nigel ? "

" Surely, fair sir, it should be a nye of pheasants."

" Good, Nigel—a nye of pheasants, even as it is a gaggle of geese or a badling of ducks, a fall of woodcock or a wisp of snipe. But a covey of pheasants ! What sort of talk is that ? I made him sit even where you are sitting, Nigel, and I saw the bottom of two pots of Rhenish ere I let him up. Even then I fear that he had no great profit from his lesson, for he was casting his foolish eyes at Edith

when he should have been turning his ears to her father. But where is the wench ? '

" She hath gone forth, father."

" She ever doth go forth when there is a chance of learning aught that is useful indoors. But supper will soon be ready, and there is a boar's ham fresh from the forest with which I would ask your help, Nigel, and a side of venison from the king's own chase. The tineman and verderers have not forgotten me yet, and my larder is ever full. Blow three moots on the horn, Mary, that the varlets may set the table, for the growing shadow and my loosening belt warn me that it is time."

## 12. *How Nigel fought the Twisted Man of Shalford*

IN the days of which you read all classes, save perhaps the very poor, fared better in meat and in drink than they have ever done since. The country was covered with woodlands—there were seventy separate forests in England alone, some of them covering half a shire. Within these forests the great beasts of the chase were strictly preserved, but the smaller game, the hares, the rabbits, the birds, which swarmed round the coverts, found their way readily into the poor man's pot. Ale was very cheap, and cheaper still was the mead which every peasant could make for himself out of the wild honey in the tree trunks. There were many tea-like drinks also, which were brewed by the poor at no expense : mallow tea, tansy tea, and others the secret of which has passed.

Amid the richer classes there was rude profusion, great joints ever on the sideboard, huge pies, beasts of the field and beasts of the chase, with ale and rough French or Rhenish wines to wash them down. But the very rich had attained to a high pitch of luxury in their food, and cookery was a science in which the ornamentation of the dish was almost as important as the dressing of the food.

It was gilded, it was silvered, it was painted, it was surrounded with flame. From the boar and the peacock down to such strange food as the porpoise and the hedgehog, every dish had its own setting and its own sauce, very strange and very complex, with flavourings of dates, currants, cloves, vinegar, sugar and honey, of cinnamon, ground ginger, sandalwood, saffron, brawn and pines. It was the Norman tradition to eat in moderation, but to have a great profusion of the best and of the most delicate from which to choose. From them came this complex cookery, so unlike the rude and often guttonous simplicity of the old Teutonic stock.

Sir John Butteshorn was of that middle class who fared in the old fashion, and his great oak supper-table groaned beneath the generous pasties, the mighty joints and the great flagons. Below were the household, above on a raised dais the family table, with places ever ready for those frequent guests who dropped in from the high road outside. Such a one had just come, an old priest, journeying from the Abbey of Chertsey to the Priory of Saint John at Midhurst. He passed often that way, and never without breaking his journey at the hospitable board of Cosford.

"Welcome again, good Father Athanasius!" cried the burly knight. "Come sit here on my right and give me the news of the countryside, for there is never a scandal but the priests are the first to know it."

The priest, a kindly, quiet man, glanced at an empty place upon the farther side of his host.

"Mistress Edith?" said he.

"Aye, aye, where is the hussy?" cried her father, impatiently. "Mary, I beg you to have the horn blown again, that she may know that the supper is on the table. What can the little owlet do abroad at this hour of the night?"

There was trouble in the priest's gentle eyes as he touched the knight upon the sleeve. "I have seen Mistress Edith within this hour," said he. "I fear that

she will hear no horn that you may blow, for she must be at Milford ere now."

"At Milford? What does she there?"

"I pray you, good Sir John, to abate your voice somewhat, for indeed this matter is for our private discourse, since it touches the honour of a lady."

"Her honour?" Sir John's ruddy face had turned redder still, as he stared at the troubled features of the priest. "Her honour, say you—the honour of my daughter? Make good those words, or never set your foot over the threshold of Cosford again!"

"I trust that I have done no wrong, Sir John, but indeed I must say what I have seen, else would I be a false friend and an unworthy priest."

"Haste, man, haste! What in the Devil's name have you seen?"

"Know you a little man, partly misshapen, named Paul de la Fosse?"

"I know him well. He is a man of noble family and coat-armour, being the younger brother of Sir Eustace de la Fosse of Shalford. Time was when I had thought that I might call him son, for there was never a day that he did not pass with my girls, but I fear that his crooked back sped him ill in his wooing."

"Alas, Sir John! It is his mind that is more crooked than his back. He is a perilous man with women, for the Devil hath given him such a tongue and such an eye that he charms them even as the basilisk. Marriage may be in their mind, but never in his, so that I could count a dozen and more whom he has led to their undoing. It is his pride and his boast over the whole countryside."

"Well, well, and what is this to me or mine?"

"Even now, Sir John, as I rode my mule up the road I met this man speeding towards his home. A woman rode by his side, and though her face was hooded I heard her laugh as she passed me. That laugh I have heard before, and it was under this very roof, from the lips of Mistress Edith."

The knight's knife dropped from his hand. But the debate had been such that neither Mary nor Nigel could fail to have heard it. Mid the rough laughter and clatter of voices from below the little group at the high table had a privacy of their own.

"Fear not, father," said the girl—"indeed, the good Father Athanasius hath fallen into error, and Edith will be with us anon. I have heard her speak of this man many times of late, and always with bitter words."

"It is true, sir," cried Nigel, eagerly. "It was only this very evening as we rode over Thursley Moor that Mistress Edith told me that she counted him not a fly, and that she would be glad if he were beaten for his evil deeds."

But the wise priest shook his silvery locks. "Nay, there is ever danger when a woman speaks like that. Hot hate is twin brother to hot love. Why should she speak so if there were not some bond between them?"

"And yet," said Nigel, "what can have changed her thoughts in three short hours? She was here in the hall with us since I came. By Saint Paul, I will not believe it!"

Mary's face darkened. "I call to mind," said she, "that a note was brought her by Hannekin the stable varlet when you were talking to us, fair sir, of the terms of the chase. She read it and went forth."

Sir John sprang to his feet, but sank into his chair again with a groan.

"Would that I were dead," he cried, "ere I saw dishonour come upon my house, and am so tied with this accursed foot, that I can neither examine if it be true, nor yet avenge it! If my son Oliver were here, then all would be well. Send me this stable varlet that I may question him."

"I pray you, fair and honoured sir," said Nigel, "that you will take me for your son this night, that I may handle this matter in the way which seems best. On jeopardy of my honour I will do all that a man may."

"Nigel, I thank you. There is no man in Christendom to whom I would sooner turn."

" But I would learn your mind in one matter, fair sir. This man, Paul de la Fosse, owns broad acres, as I understand, and comes of noble blood. There is no reason, if things be as we fear, that he should not marry your daughter ? "

" Nay, she could not wish for better."

" It is well. And first I would question this Hannekin ; but it shall be done in such a fashion that none shall know, for indeed it is not a matter for the gossip of servants. But if you will show me the man, Mistress Mary, I will take him out to tend my own horse, and so I shall learn all that he has to tell."

Nigel was absent for some time, and when he returned the shadow upon his face brought little hope to the anxious hearts at the high table.

" I have locked him in the stable-loft, lest he talk too much," said he, " for my questions must have shown him whence the wind blew. It was indeed from this man that the note came, and he had brought with him a spare horse for the lady."

The old knight groaned, and his face sank upon his hands.

" Nay, father, they watch you ! " whispered Mary. " For the honour of our house let us keep a bold face to all." Then, raising her young clear voice, so that it sounded through the room : " If you ride eastward, Nigel, I would fain go with you, that my sister may not come back alone."

" We will ride together, Mary," said Nigel, rising ; then, in a lower voice : " But we cannot go alone, and if we take a servant all is known. I pray you to stay at home and leave the matter with me."

" Nay, Nigel, she may sorely need a woman's aid, and what woman should it be save her own sister ? I can take my tire-woman with us."

" Nay, I shall ride with you myself if your impatience can keep within the powers of my mule," said the old priest.

"But it is not your road, father?"

"The only road of a true priest is that which leads to the good of others. Come, my children, and we will go together."

And so it was that stout Sir John Buttesthorn, the aged Knight of Dupplin, was left alone at his own high table, pretending to eat, pretending to drink, fidgeting in his seat, trying hard to seem unconcerned with his mind and body in a fever, while below him his varlets and handmaids laughed and jested, clattering their cups and clearing their trenchers, all unconscious of the dark shadow which threw its gloom over the lonely man upon the dais above.

Meantime the Lady Mary upon the white jennet which her sister had ridden on the same evening, Nigel on his war-horse, and the priest on the mule, clattered down the rude winding road which led to London. The country on either side was a wilderness of heather moors and of morasses from which came the strange crying of night-fowl. A half-moon shone in the sky between the rifts of hurrying clouds. The lady rode in silence, absorbed in the thought of the task before them, the danger and the shame.

Nigel chatted in a low tone with the priest. From him he learned more of the evil name of this man whom they followed. His house at Shalford was a den of profligacy and vice. No woman could cross that threshold and depart unstained. In some strange fashion, inexplicable and yet common, the man, with all his evil soul and his twisted body, had yet some strange fascination for women, some mastery over them which compelled them to his will. Again and again he had brought ruin to a household, again and again his adroit tongue and his cunning wit had in some fashion saved him from the punishment of his deeds. His family was great in the county, and his kinsmen held favour with the king, so that his neighbours feared to push things too far against him. Such was the man, malignant and ravenous, who had stooped like some

foul night-hawk and borne away to his evil nest the golden beauty of Cosford. Nigel said little as he listened, but he raised his hunting-dagger to his tightened lips, and thrice he kissed the cross of its handle.

They had passed over the moors, and through the village of Milford and the little township of Godalming, until their path turned southward over the Pease marsh, and crossed the meadows of Shalford. There on the dark hillside glowed the red points of light which marked the windows of the house which they sought. A sombre, arched avenue of oak trees led up to it, and then they were in the moon-silvered clearing in front.

From the shadow of the arched door there sprang two rough serving-men, bearded and gruff, great cudgels in their hands, to ask them who they were and what their errand. The Lady Mary had slipped from her horse, and was advancing to the door, but they rudely barred her way.

"Nay, nay, our master needs no more!" cried one with a hoarse laugh. "Stand back, mistress, whoever you be! The house is shut, and our lord sees no guests to-night."

"Fellow," said Nigel, speaking low and clear, "stand back from us! Our errand is with your master."

"Bethink you, my children," cried the old priest, "would it not be best, perchance, that I go in to him, and see whether the voice of the Church may not soften this hard heart? I fear bloodshed if you enter."

"Nay, father, I pray you to stay here for the nonce," said Nigel. "And you, Mary, do you bide with the good priest, for we know not what may be within."

Again he turned to the door, and again the two men barred his passage.

"Stand back, I say, back for your lives!" said Nigel. "By Saint Paul! I should think it shame to soil my sword with such as you, but my soul is set, and no man shall bar my path this night."

The men shrank from the deadly menace of that gentle voice.

"Hold!" said one of them, peering through the darkness, "is it not Squire Loring of Tilford?"

"That is indeed my name."

"Had you spoken it, I for one would not have stopped your way. Put down your staff, Wat, for this is no stranger, but the Squire of Tilford."

"As well for him," grumbled the other, lowering his cudgel with an inward prayer of thanksgiving. "Had it been otherwise I should have had blood upon my soul to-night. But our master said nothing of neighbours when he ordered us to hold the door. I will enter and ask him what is his will."

But already Nigel was past them, and had pushed open the outer door. Swift as he was, the Lady Mary was at his very heels, and the two passed together into the hall beyond.

It was a great room, draped and curtained with black shadows, with one vivid circle of light in the centre, where two oil lamps shone upon a small table. A meal was laid upon the table, but only two were seated at it, and there were no servants in the room. At the near end was Edith, her golden hair loose and streaming down over the scarlet and black of her riding-dress.

At the farther end the light beat strongly upon the harsh face and the high-drawn misshapen shoulders of the lord of the house. A tangle of black hair surmounted a high, rounded forehead, the forehead of a thinker, with two deep-set, cold grey eyes twinkling sharply from under tufted brows. His nose was curved and sharp, like the beak of some cruel bird, but below the whole of his clean-shaven, powerful face was marred by the loose, slabbing mouth and the round folds of the heavy chin. His knife in one hand and a half-gnawed bone in the other, he looked fiercely up, like some beast disturbed in his den, as the two intruders broke in upon his hall.

Nigel stopped midway between the door and the table. His eyes and those of Paul de la Fosse were riveted upon each other. But Mary, with her woman's soul flooded over with love and pity, had rushed forward and cast her

arms round her younger sister. Edith had sprung up from her chair, and with averted face tried to push the other away from her.

"Edith, Edith! By the Virgin, I implore you to come back with us, and to leave this wicked man!" cried Mary. "Dear sister, you would not break our father's heart, nor bring his grey head in dishonour to the grave! Come back! Edith, come back and all is well."

But Edith pushed her away, and her fair cheeks were flushed with her anger.

"What right have you over me, Mary, you who are but two years older, that you should follow me over the countryside as though I were a runagate villein and you my mistress? Do you yourself go back, and leave me to do that which seems best in my own eyes."

But Mary still held her in her arms, and still strove to soften the hard and angry heart.

"Our mother is dead, Edith. I thank God that she died ere she saw you under this roof! But I stand for her, as I have done all my life, since I am indeed your elder. It is with her voice that I beg and pray you that you will not trust this man further, and that you will come back ere it be too late!"

Edith writhed from her grasp, and stood flushed and defiant, with gleaming, angry eyes fixed upon her sister.

"You may speak evil of him now," said she, "but there was a time when Paul de la Fosse came to Cosford, and who so gentle and soft-spoken to him then as wise, grave sister Mary? But he has learned to love another; so now he is the wicked man, and it is shame to be seen under his roof! From what I see of my good, pious sister and her cavalier, it is sin for another to ride at night with a man at your side, but it comes easy enough to you. Look at your own eye, good sister, ere you would take the speck from that of another."

Mary stood irresolute and greatly troubled, holding down her pride and her anger, but uncertain how best to deal with this strong, wayward spirit.

"It is not a time for bitter words, dear sister," said she, and again she laid her hand upon her sister's sleeve. "All that you say may be true. There was, indeed, a time when this man was friend to us both, and I know even as you do the power which he may have to win a woman's heart. But I know him now, and you do not. I know the evil that he has wrought, the dishonour that he has brought, the perjury that lies upon his soul, the confidence betrayed, the promise unfulfilled—all this I know. Am I to see my own sister caught in the same well-used trap? Has it shut upon you, child? Am I, indeed, already too late? For God's sake, tell me, Edith, that it is not so!"

Edith plucked her sleeve from her sister, and made two swift steps to the head of the table. Paul de la Fosse still sat silent with his eyes upon Nigel. Edith laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"This is the man I love, and the only man that I have ever loved. This is my husband," said she.

At the word Mary gave a cry of joy.

"And is it so?" she cried. "Nay, then all is in honour, and God will see to the rest. If you are man and wife before the altar, then, indeed, why should I, or any other, stand between you? Tell me that it is indeed so, and I return this moment to make your father a happy man."

Edith pouted like a naughty child. "We are man and wife in the eyes of God. Soon also we shall be wedded before all the world. We do but wait until next Monday, when Paul's brother, who is a priest at Saint Albans, will come to wed us. Already a messenger has sped for him, and he will come, will he not, dear love?"

"He will come," said the master of Shalford, still with his eyes fixed upon the silent Nigel.

"It is a lie; he will not come," said a voice from the door.

It was the old priest, who had followed the others as far as the threshold.

"He will not come," he repeated, as he advanced into the room. "Daughter, my daughter, hearken to the words of one who is indeed old enough to be your earthly father. This lie has served before. He has ruined others before you with it. The man has no brother at Saint Albans. I know his brothers well, and there is no priest among them. Before Monday, when it is all too late, you will have found the truth as others have done before you. Trust him not, but come with us!"

Paul de la Fosse looked up at her with a quick smile and patted the hand upon his shoulder.

"Do you speak to them, Edith," said he.

Her eyes flashed with scorn as she surveyed them each in turn, the woman, the youth, and the priest.

"I have but one word to say to them," said she. "It is that they go hence and trouble us no more. Am I not a free woman? Have I not said that this is the only man I ever loved? I have loved him long. He did not know it, and in despair he turned to another. Now he knows all, and never again can doubt come between us. Therefore I will stay here at Shalford and come to Cosford no more save upon the arm of my husband. Am I so weak that I would believe the tales you tell against him? Is it hard for a jealous woman and a wandering priest to agree upon a lie? No, no, Mary, you can go hence and take your cavalier and your priest with you, for here I stay, true to my love and safe in my trust upon his honour!"

"Well spoken, on my faith, my golden bird!" said the little master of Shalford. "Let me add my own word to that which has been said. You would not grant me any virtue in your unkindly speech, good Lady Mary, and yet you must needs confess that at least I have good store of patience, since I have not set my dogs upon your friends who have come between me and my ease. But even to the most virtuous there comes at last a time when poor human frailty may prevail, and so I pray you to remove both yourself, your priest, and your valiant knight-errant, lest perhaps there be more haste and less dignity when

at last you do take your leave. Sit down, my fair love, and let us turn once more to our supper." He motioned her to her chair, and he filled her wine-cup as well as his own.

Nigel had said no word since he had entered the room, but his look had never lost its set purpose, nor had his brooding eyes ever wandered from the sneering face of the deformed master of Shalford. Now he turned with swift decision to Mary and to the priest.

"That is over," said he, in a low voice. "You have done all that you could, and now it is for me to play my part as well as I am able. I pray you, Mary, and you, good father, that you will await me outside."

"Nay, Nigel, if there is danger——"

"It is easier for me, Mary, if you are not there. I pray you to go. I can speak to this man more at my ease."

She looked at him with questioning eyes and then obeyed.

Nigel plucked at the priest's gown. "I pray you, father, have you your book of offices with you?"

"Surely, Nigel, it is ever in my breast."

"Have it ready, father!"

"For what, my son?"

"There are two places you may mark: there is the service of marriage, and there is the prayer for the dying. Go with her, father, and be ready at my call."

He closed the door behind them and was alone with this ill-matched couple. They both turned in their chairs to look at him, Edith with a defiant face, the man with a bitter smile upon his lips and malignant hatred in his eyes.

"What," said he, "the knight-errant still lingers? Have we not heard of his thirst for glory? What new venture does he see that he should tarry here?"

Nigel walked to the table. "There is no glory and little venture," said he; "but I have come for a purpose and I must do it. I learn from your own lips, Edith, that you will not leave this man."

"If you have ears you have heard it."

"You are, as you have said, a free woman, and who can gainsay you? But I have known you, Edith, since we played as boy and girl on the heather-hills together. I will save you from this man's cunning and from your own foolish weakness."

"What would you do?"

"There is a priest without. He will marry you now. I will see you married ere I leave this hall."

"Or else?" sneered the man.

"Or else you never leave this hall alive. Nay, call not for your servants or your dogs! By Saint Paul! I swear to you that this matter lies between us three, and that if any fourth comes at your call, you, at least, shall never live to see what comes of it! Speak then, Paul of Shalford! Will you wed this woman now, or will you not?"

Edith was on her feet with outstretched arms between them.

"Stand back, Nigel! He is small and weak. You would not do him a hurt! Did you not say so this very day? For God's sake, Nigel, do not look at him so! There is death in your eyes."

"A snake may be small and weak, Edith, yet every honest man would place his heel upon it. Do you stand back yourself, for my purpose is set."

"Paul!" She turned her eyes to the pale, sneering face. "Bethink you, Paul! Why should you not do what he asks? What matter to you whether it be now or on Monday? I pray you, dear Paul, for my sake let him have his way! Your brother can read the service again if it so please him. Let us wed now, Paul, and then all is well."

He had risen from his chair, and he dashed aside her appealing hands.

"You foolish woman," he snarled, "and you, my saviour of fair damsels, who are so bold against a cripple, you have both to learn that if my body be weak, there is the soul of my breed within it! To marry because a boasting, ranting, country squire would have me do so—no,

by the soul of God, I will die first ! On Monday I will marry, and no day sooner, so let that be your answer."

"It is the answer that I wished," said Nigel, "for indeed I see no happiness in this marriage, and the other may well be the better way. Stand aside, Edith !" He gently forced her to one side and drew his sword.

De la Fosse cried aloud at the sight. "I have no sword. You would not murder me ?" said he, leaning back with haggard face and burning eyes aginst his chair. The bright steel shone in the lamplight. Edith shrank back, her hand over her face.

"Take this sword !" said Nigel, and he turned the hilt to the cripple. "Now !" he added, as he drew his hunting-knife. "Kill me if you can, Paul de la Fosse, for as God is my help I will do as much for you !"

The woman, half swooning and yet spellbound and fascinated, looked on at that strange combat. For a moment the cripple stood with an air of doubt, the sword grasped in his nerveless fingers. Then, as he saw the tiny blade in Nigel's hand, the greatness of the advantage came home to him, and a cruel smile tightened his loose lips. Slowly, step by step he advanced, his chin sunk upon his chest, his eyes glaring from under the thick tangle of his brows like fires through the brushwood. Nigel waited for him, his left hand forward, his knife down by his hip, his face grave, still, and watchful.

Nearer and nearer yet, with stealthy step, and then with a bound and a cry of hatred and rage, Paul de la Fosse had sped his blow. It was well judged and well swung, but point would have been wiser than edge against that supple body and those active feet. Quick as a flash, Nigel had sprung inside the sweep of the blade, taking a flesh wound on his left forearm, as he pressed it under the hilt. The next instant the cripple was on the ground and Nigel's dagger was at his throat.

"You dog !" he whispered. "I have you at my mercy ! Quick ere I strike, and for the last time ! Will you marry or no ?"

The crash of the fall and the sharp point upon his throat had cowed the man's spirit. He looked up with a white face, and the sweat gleamed upon his forehead. There was terror in his eyes.

"Nay, take your knife from me!" he cried. "I cannot die like a calf in the shambles."

"Will you marry?"

"Yes, yes; I will wed her! After all, she is a good wench, and I might do worse. Let me up! I tell you I will marry her! What more would you have?"

Nigel stood above him with his foot upon the misshapen body. He had picked up his sword, and the point rested upon the cripple's breast.

"Nay, you will bide where you are! If you are to live—and my conscience cries loud against it—at least your wedding will be such as your sins have deserved. Lie there, like the crushed worm that you are!" Then he raised his voice. "Father Athanasius!" he cried. "What ho! Father Athanasius!"

The old priest ran to the cry, and so did the Lady Mary. A strange sight it was that met them now in the circle of light, the frightened girl, half-unconscious against the table, the prostrate cripple, and Nigel with foot and sword upon his body.

"Your book, father!" cried Nigel. "I know not if what we do is good or ill; but we must wed them, for there is no way out."

But the girl by the table had given a great cry, and she was clinging and sobbing with her arms round her sister's neck.

"Oh, Mary, I thank the Virgin that you have come! I thank the Virgin that it is not too late! What did he say? He said that he was a de la Fosse, and that he would not be married at the sword-point. My heart went out to him when he said it. But I, am I not a Buttesthorn, and shall it be said that I would marry a man who could be led to the altar with a knife at his throat? No, no; I see him as he is! I know him now, the mean spirit, the

lying tongue ! Can I not read in his eyes that he has indeed deceived me, that he would have left me as you say that he has left others ? Take me home, Mary, my sister, for you have plucked me back this night from the very mouth of Hell ! ”

And so it was that the master of Shalford, livid and brooding, was left with his wine at his lonely table, while the golden beauty of Cosford, hot with shame and anger, her fair face wet with tears, passed out safe from the house of infamy into the great calm and peace of the starry night.

## 13. *How the Comrades journeyed down the Old, Old Road*

AND now the season of the moonless nights was drawing nigh and the king's design was ripe. Very secretly his preparations were made. Already the garrison of Calais, which consisted of five hundred archers and two hundred men-at-arms, could, if forewarned, resist any attack made upon it. But it was the king's design not merely to resist the attack, but to capture the attackers. Above all it was his wish to find the occasion for one of those adventurous passages of arms which had made his name famous throughout Christendom as the very pattern and leader of knight-errant chivalry.

But the affair wanted careful handling. The arrival of any reinforcements, or even the crossing of any famous soldier, would have alarmed the French, and warned them that their plot had been discovered. Therefore it was in twos and threes in the creyers and provision ships which were continually passing from shore to shore that the chosen warriors and their squires were brought to Calais. There they were passed at night through the water-gate into the castle where they could lie hidden, unknown to the townsfolk, until the hour for action had come.

Nigel had received word from Chandos to join him at “ The Sign of the Broom-Pod ” in Winchelsea. Three

days beforehand he and Aylward rode from Tilford all armed and ready for the wars. Nigel was in hunting-costume, blithe and gay, with his precious armour and his small baggage trussed upon the back of a spare horse which Aylward led by the bridle. The archer had himself a good black mare, heavy and slow, but strong enough to be fit to carry his powerful frame. In his brigandine of chain mail and his steel cap, with straight strong sword by his side, his yellow long-bow jutting over his shoulder, and his quiver of arrows supported by a scarlet baldric, he was such a warrior as any knight might well be proud to have in his train. All Tilford trailed behind them, as they rode slowly over the long slope of heath land which skirts the flank of Crooksbury Hill.

At the summit of the rise Nigel reined in Pommers and looked back at the little village behind him. There was the old dark manor-house, with one bent figure leaning upon a stick and gazing dimly after him from beside the door. He looked at the high-pitched roof, the timbered walls, the long trail of swirling blue smoke which rose from the single chimney, and the group of downcast old servants who lingered at the gate—John the cook, Weathercote the minstrel, and Red Swire the broken soldier. Over the river amid the trees he could see the grim, grey tower of Waverley, and even as he looked, the iron bell, which had so often seemed to be the hoarse threatening cry of an enemy, clanged out its call to prayer. Nigel doffed his velvet cap and prayed also—prayed that peace might remain at home, and good warfare, in which honour and fame should await him, might still be found abroad. Then, waving his hand to the people, he turned his horse's head and rode slowly eastward. A moment later Aylward broke from the group of archers and laughing girls who clung to his bridle and his stirrup straps, and rode on, blowing kisses over his shoulder. So at last the two comrades, gentle and simple, were fairly started on their venture.

There are two seasons of colour in those parts: the

yellow, when the countryside is flaming with the gorse-blossoms, and the crimson, when all the long slopes are smouldering with the heather. So it was now. Nigel looked back from time to time, as he rode along the narrow track where the ferns and the ling brushed his feet on either side, and as he looked it seemed to him that, wander where he might, he would never see a fairer scene than that of his own home. Far to the westward, glowing in the morning light, rolled billow after billow of ruddy heather land, until they merged into the dark shadows of Woolmer Forest and the pale clear green of the Butser chalk downs. Never in his life had Nigel wandered far beyond these limits, and the woodlands, the down, and the heather were dear to his soul. It gave him a pang in his heart now as he turned his face away from them ; but if home lay to the westward, out there to the east and south was the great world of adventure, the noble stage where each of his kinsmen in turn had played his manly part and left a proud name behind.

How often he had longed for this day ! And now it had come with no shadow cast behind it. Dame Ermyntrude was under the king's protection. The old servants had their future assured. The strife with the monks of Waverley had been assuaged. He had a noble horse under him, the best of weapons, and a stout follower at his back. Above all he was bound on a gallant errand with the bravest knight in England as his leader. All these thoughts surged together in his mind, and he whistled and sang, as he rode, out of the joy of his heart, while Pommers sidled and curveted in sympathy with the mood of his master. Presently, glancing back, he saw from Aylward's downcast eyes and puckered brow that the archer was clouded with trouble. He reined his horse to let him come abreast of him.

" How now, Aylward ? " said he. " Surely of all men in England you and I should be the most blithe this morning, since we ride forward with all hopes of honourable advancement. By Saint Paul ! ere we see these

heather hills once more we shall either worshipfully win worship, or we shall venture our persons in the attempt. These be glad thoughts, and why should you be downcast ? "

Aylward shrugged his broad shoulders, and a wry smile dawned upon his rugged face.

" I am indeed as limp as a wetted bowstring," said he. " It is the nature of a man that he should be sad when he leaves the woman he loves."

" In truth, yes ! " cried Nigel, and in a flash the dark eyes of Mary Buttesthorn rose before him, and he heard her low, sweet, earnest voice as he had heard it that night when they brought her frailer sister back from Shalford Manor, a voice which made all that was best and noblest in a man thrill within his soul. " Yet, bethink you, archer, that what a woman loves in man is not his gross body, but rather his soul, his honour, his fame, the deeds with which he has made his life beautiful. Therefore you are winning love as well as glory when you turn to the wars."

" It may be so," said Aylward ; " but indeed it goes to my heart to see the pretty dears weep, and I would fain weep as well to keep them company. When Mary—or was it Dolly ?—nay, it was Martha, the red-headed girl from the Mill—when she held tight to my baldric it was like snapping my heart-string to pluck myself loose."

" You speak of one name and then of another," said Nigel. " How is she called, then, this maid whom you love ? "

Aylward pushed back his steel cap and scratched his bristling head with some embarrassment.

" Her name," said he, " is Mary Dolly Martha Susan Jane Cicely Theodosia Agnes Johanna Kate."

Nigel laughed as Aylward rolled out this prodigious title.

" I had no right to take you to the wars," said he ; " for by Saint Paul ! it is very clear that I have widowed half the parish. But I saw your aged father the franklin. Bethink you of the joy that will fill his heart when he

hears that you have done some small deed in France, and so won honour in the eyes of all."

"I fear that honour will not help him to pay his arrears of rent to the sacrist of Waverley," said Aylward. "Out he will go on the roadside, honour and all, if he does not find ten nobles by next Epiphany. But if I could win a ransom or be at the storming of a rich city, then indeed the old man would be proud of me. 'Thy sword must help my spade, Samkin,' said he as he kissed me good-bye. Ah! it would indeed be a happy day for him and for all if I could ride back with a saddle-bag full of gold pieces, and please God, I shall dip my hand in somebody's pocket before I see Crooksbury Hill once more!"

Nigel shook his head, for indeed it seemed hopeless to try to bridge the gulf between them. Already they had made such good progress along the bridle-path through the heather that the little hill of Saint Catharine and the ancient shrine upon its summit loomed up before them. Here they crossed the road from the south to London, and at the crossing two wayfarers were waiting who waved their hands in greeting, the one a tall, slender, dark woman upon a white jennet, the other a very thick and red-faced old man, whose weight seemed to curve the back of the stout grey cob which he bestrode.

"What how, Nigel!" he cried. "Mary has told me that you make a start this morning, and we have waited here this hour and more on the chance of seeing you pass. Come, lad, and have a last stoup of English ale, for many a time amid the sour French wines you will long for the white foam under your nose, and the good homely twang of it."

Nigel had to decline the draught, for it meant riding into Guildford town, a mile out of his course, but very gladly he agreed with Mary that they should climb the path to the old shrine and offer a last orison together. The knight and Aylward waited below with the horses; and so it came about that Nigel and Mary found themselves alone under the solemn old Gothic arches, in front

of the dark shadowed recess in which gleamed the golden reliquary of the saint. In silence they knelt side by side in prayer, and then came forth once more out of the gloom and the shadow into the fresh sunlit summer morning. They stopped ere they descended the path, and looked to right and left at the fair meadows and the blue Wey curling down the valley.

"What have you prayed for, Nigel?" said she.

"I have prayed that God and His saints will hold my spirit high and will send me back from France in such a fashion that I may dare to come to you and to claim you for my own."

"Bethink you well what it is that you say, Nigel," said she. "What you are to me only my own heart can tell; but I would never set eyes upon your face again rather than abate by one inch that height of honour and worshipful achievement to which you may attain."

"Nay, my dear and most sweet lady, how should you abate it, since it is the thought of you which will serve my arm and uphold my heart?"

"Think once more, my fair lord, and hold yourself bound by no word which you have said. Let it be as the breeze which blows past our faces and is heard of no more. Your soul yearns for honour. To that has it ever turned. Is there room in it for love also? or is it possible that both shall live at their highest in one mind? Do you not call to mind that Galahad and other great knights of old have put women out of their lives that they might ever give their whole soul and strength to the winning of honour? May it not be that I shall be a drag upon you, that your heart may shrink from some honourable task, lest it should bring risk and pain to me? Think well before you answer, my fair lord, for indeed my very heart would break if it should ever happen that through love of me your high hopes and great promise should miss fulfilment."

Nigel looked at her with sparkling eyes. The soul which shone through her dark face had transformed it for

the moment into a beauty, more lofty and more rare than that of her shallow sister. He bowed before the majesty of the woman, and pressed his lips to her hand.

"You are like a star upon my path which guides me on the upward way," said he. "Our souls are set together upon the finding of honour, and how shall we hold each other back when our purpose is the same?"

She shook her proud head. "So it seems to you now, fair lord, but it may be otherwise as the years pass. How shall you prove that I am indeed a help and not a hindrance?"

"I will prove it by my deeds, fair and dear lady," said Nigel. "Here at the shrine of the holy Catharine, on this, the Feast of Saint Margaret, I take my oath that I will do three deeds in your honour as a proof of my high love before I set eyes upon your face again, and these three deeds shall stand as a proof to you that if I love you dearly, still I will not let the thought of you stand betwixt me and honourable achievement!"

Her face shone with her love and her pride. "I also make my oath," said she, "and I do it in the name of the holy Catharine whose shrine is hard by. I swear that I will hold myself for you until these three deeds be done and we meet once more; also that if—which may dear Christ forfend!—you fall in doing them then I shall take the veil in Shalford nunnery and look upon no man's face again! Give me your hand, Nigel."

She had taken a little bangle of gold filigree work from her arm and fastened it upon his sunburnt wirst, reading aloud to him the engraved motto in old French: "*Fais ce que dois, adviegne que pourra—c'est commandé au chevalier.*" Then for one moment they fell into each other's arms and with kiss upon kiss, a loving man and a tender woman, they swore their troth to each other But the old knight was calling impatiently from below, and together they hurried down the winding path to where the horses waited under the sandy bluff.

As far as the Shalford crossing Sir John rode by

Nigel's arm, and many were the last injunctions which he gave him concerning woodcraft, and great his anxiety lest he confuse a spay with a brocket, or either with a hind. At last, when they came to the reedy edge of the Wey, the old knight and his daughter reined up their horses. Nigel looked back at them ere he entered the dark Chantry woods, and saw them still gazing after him and waving their hands. Then the path wound among the trees and they were lost to sight; but long afterwards when a clearing exposed once more the Shalford meadows Nigel saw that the old man upon the grey cob was riding slowly toward Saint Catharine's Hill, but that the girl was still where he had seen her last, leaning forward in her saddle and straining her eyes to pierce the dark forest which screened her lover from her view. It was but a fleeting glance through a break in the foliage, and yet in after days of stress and toil in far distant lands it was that one little picture—the green meadow, the reeds, the slow blue winding river, and the eager bending graceful figure upon the white horse—which was the clearest and the dearest image of that England which he had left behind him.

But if Nigel's friends had learned that this was the morning of his leaving, his enemies too were on the alert. The two comrades had just emerged from the Chantry woods and were beginning the ascent of that curving path which leads upward to the old Chapel of the Martyr when, with a hiss like an angry snake, a long white arrow streaked under Pommers and struck quivering in the grassy turf. A second whizzed past Nigel's ear, as he tried to turn, but Aylward struck the great war-horse a sharp blow over the haunches, and it had galloped some hundreds of yards before its rider could pull it up. Aylward followed as hard as he could ride, bending low over his horse's neck, while arrows whizzed all around him.

"By Saint Paul!" said Nigel, tugging at his bridle and white with anger, "they shall not chase me across the

country as though I were a frighted doe. Archer, how dare you to lash my horse when I would have turned and ridden in upon them ? "

" It is well that I did so," said Aylward, " or by these ten finger-bones ! our journey would have begun and ended on the same day. As I glanced round I saw a dozen of them at the least amongst the brushwood. See now how the light glimmers upon their steel caps yonder in the bracken under the great beech-tree. Nay, I pray you, my fair lord, do not ride forward. What chance has a man in the open against all these who lie at their ease in the underwood ? If you will not think of yourself, then consider your horse, which would have a cloth-yard shaft feathered in its hide ere it could reach the wood."

Nigel chafed in impotent anger. " Am I to be shot at like a popinjay at a fair, by any reaver or outlaw that seeks a mark for his bow ? " he cried. " By Saint Paul ! Aylward, I will put on my harness and go further into the matter. Help me to untruss, I pray you ! "

" Nay, my fair lord, I will not help you to your own downfall. It is a match with cogged dice betwixt a horseman on the moor and archers amid the forest. But these men are no outlaws, or they would not dare to draw their bows within a league of the sheriff of Guildford."

" Indeed, Aylward, I think that you speak truth," said Nigel. " It may be that these are the men of Paul de la Fosse of Shalford, whom I have given little cause to love me. Ah ! there is indeed the very man himself."

They sat their horses with their backs to the long slope which leads up to the old chapel on the hill. In front of them was the dark ragged edge of the wood, with a sharp twinkle of steel here and there in its shadows which spoke of these lurking foes. But now there was a long moot upon a horn, and at once a score of russet-clad bowmen ran forward from amid the trees, spreading out into a scattered line and closing swiftly in upon the travellers. In the midst of them, upon a great grey horse, sat a small misshapen man waving and cheering as one sets hounds on

a badger, turning his head this way and that as he whooped and pointed, urging his bowmen onward up the slope.

"Draw them on, my fair lord! Draw them on until we have them out on the down!" cried Aylward, his eyes shining with joy. "Five hundred paces more, and then we may be on terms with them. Nay, linger not, but keep them always just clear of arrow-shot until our turn has come."

Nigel shook and trembled with eagerness, as with his hand on his sword-hilt he looked at the line of eager hurrying men. But it flashed through his mind what Chandos had said of the cool head which is better for the warrior than the hot heart. Aylward's words were true and wise. He turned Pommers' head therefore, and amid a cry of derision from behind them the comrades trotted over the down. The bowmen broke into a run, while their leader screamed and waved more madly than before. Aylward cast many a glance at them over his shoulder.

"Yet a little farther! Yet a little farther still!" he muttered. "The wind is toward them and the fools have forgot that I can overshoot them by fifty paces. Now, my good lord, I pray you for one instant to hold the horses, for my weapon is of more avail this day than thine can be. They may make sorry cheer ere they gain the shelter of the wood once more."

He had sprung from his horse, and with a downward wrench of his arm and a push with his knee he slipped the string into the upper nock of his mighty war-bow. Then in a flash he notched his shaft and drew it to the pile, his keen blue eyes glowing fiercely behind it from under his knotted brows. With thick legs planted sturdily apart, his body laid to the bow, his left arm motionless as wood, his right bunched into a double curve of swelling muscles as he stretched the white well-waxed string, he looked so keen and fierce a fighter that the advancing line stopped for an instant at the sight of him. Two or three loosed off their arrows, but the shafts flew heavily against the head wind, and snaked along the hard turf some score

of paces short of the mark. One only, a short bandy-legged man, whose squat figure spoke of enormous muscular strength, ran swiftly in and then drew so strong a bow that the arrow quivered in the ground at Aylward's very feet.

"It is Black Will of Lynchmere," said the bowman. "Many a match have I shot with him, and I know well that no other man on the Surrey marches could have sped such a shaft. I trust that you are houseled and shriven, Will, for I have known you so long that I would not have your damnation upon my soul."

He raised his bow as he spoke, and the string twanged with a rich, deep musical note. Aylward leaned upon his bow-stave as he keenly watched the long swift flight of his shaft, skinning smoothly down the wind.

"On him, on him! No, over him, by my hilt!" he cried. "There is more wind than I had thought. Nay, nay, friend, now that I have the length of you, you can scarce hope to loose again."

Black Will had notched an arrow and was raising his bow when Aylward's second shaft passed through the shoulder of his drawing arm. With a shout of anger and pain he dropped his weapon, and dancing in his fury he shook his fist and roared curses at his rival.

"I could slay him; but I will not, for good bowmen are not so common," said Aylward. "And now, fair sir, we must on, for they are spreading round on either side, and if once they get behind us, then indeed our journey has come to a sudden end. But ere we go I would send a shaft through yonder horseman who leads them on."

"Nay, Aylward, I pray you to leave him," said Nigel. "Villain as he is, he is none the less a gentleman of coat-armour, and should die by some other weapon than thine."

"As you will," said Aylward, with a clouded brow. "I have been told that in the late wars many a French prince and baron has not been too proud to take his death-wound from an English yeoman's shaft, and that nobles of

England have been glad enough to stand by and see it done."

Nigel shook his head sadly. "It is sooth you say, archer, and indeed it is no new thing, for that good knight Richard of the Lion Heart met his end in such a lowly fashion, and so also did Harold the Saxon. But this is a private matter, and I would not have you draw your bow against him. Neither can I ride at him myself, for he is weak in body, though dangerous in spirit. Therefore, we will go upon our way, since there is neither profit nor honour to be gained, nor any hope of advancement."

Aylward, having unstrung his bow, had remounted his horse during this conversation, and the two rode swiftly past the little squat Chapel of the Martyr and over the brow of the hill. From the summit they looked back. The injured archer lay upon the ground, with several of his comrades gathered in a knot around him. Others ran aimlessly up the hill, but were already far behind. The leader sat motionless upon his horse, and as he saw them look back he raised his hand and shrieked his curses at them. An instant later the curve of the ground had hid them from view. So, amid love and hate, Nigel bade adieu to the home of his youth.

And now the comrades were journeying upon that old, old road which runs across the south of England and yet never turns towards London, for the good reason that the place was a poor hamlet when first the road was laid. From Winchester, the Saxon capital, to Canterbury, the holy city of Kent, ran that ancient highway, and on from Canterbury to the narrow straits where, on a clear day, the farther shore can be seen. Along this track as far back as history can trace the metals of the west have been carried, and passed the pack-horses bearing the goods which Gaul sent in exchange. Older than the Christian faith, and older than the Romans, is the old road. North and south are the woods and the marshes, so that only on the high dry turf of the chalk land could a clear track be found. The Pilgrim's Way, it still is called; but the pilgrims

were the last who ever trod it, for it was already of immemorial age before the death of Thomas à Becket gave a new reason why folk should journey to the scene of his murder.

From the hill of Western Wood the travellers could see the long white band which dipped and curved and rose over the green downland, its course marked even in the hollows by the line of the old yew-trees which flanked it. Neither Nigel nor Aylward had wandered far from their own country, and now they rode with light hearts and eager eyes taking note of all the varied pictures of nature and of man which passed before them. To their left was a hilly country, a land of rolling heaths and woods, broken here and there into open spaces round the occasional farmhouse of a franklin. Hackhurst Down, Dunley Hill, and Ranmore Common swelled and sank, each merging into the other. But on the right, after passing the village of Shere and the old church of Gomshall, the whole south country lay like a map at their feet. There was the huge wood of the Weald, one unbroken forest of oak-trees stretching away to the South Downs, which rose olive-green against the deep blue sky. Under this great canopy of trees strange folk lived and evil deeds were done. In its recesses were wild tribes, little changed from their heathen ancestors, who danced round the altar of Thor, and well was it for the peaceful traveller that he could tread the high open road of the chalk land with no need to wander into so dangerous a tract, where soft clay, tangled forest, and wild men all barred his progress.

But apart from the rolling country upon the left and the great forest-hidden plain upon the right, there was much upon the road itself to engage the attention of the wayfarers. It was crowded with people. As far as their eyes could carry they could see the black dots scattered thickly upon the thin white band, sometimes single, sometimes several abreast, sometimes in moving crowds, where a drove of pilgrims held together for mutual protection, or a nobleman showed his greatness by the number of retainers who trailed at his heels. At that time the main

roads were very crowded, for there were many wandering people in the land. Of all sorts and kinds, they passed in an unbroken stream before the eyes of Nigel and of Aylward, alike only in the fact that one and all were powdered from their hair to their shoes with the grey dust of the chalk.

There were monks journeying from one cell to another, Benedictines with their black gowns looped up to show their white skirts. Carthusians in white, and pied Cistercians. Friars also of the three wandering orders—Dominicans in black, Carmelites in white, and Franciscans in grey. There was no love lost between the cloistered monks and the free friars, each looking on the other as a rival who took from him the oblations of the faithful; so they passed on the high road as cat passes dog, with eyes askance and angry faces.

Then, besides the men of the Church, there were the men of trade, the merchant in dusty broadcloth and Flanders hat, riding at the head of his line of pack-horses. He carried Cornish tin, West-country wool, or Sussex iron if he traded eastward, or if his head should be turned westward then he bore with him the velvets of Genoa, the ware of Venice, the wine of France, or the armour of Italy and Spain. Pilgrims were everywhere, poor people for the most part, plodding wearily along with trailing feet and bowed heads, thick staves in their hands and bundles over their shoulders. Here and there on a gaily caparisoned palfrey, or in the greater luxury of a horse-litter, some West-country lady might be seen making her easy way to the shrine of Saint Thomas.

Besides all these a constant stream of strange vagabonds drifted along the road; minstrels who wandered from fair to fair, a foul and pestilent crew; jugglers and acrobats, quack doctors and tooth-drawers, students and beggars, free workmen in search of better wages, and escaped bondsmen who would welcome any wages at all. Such was the throng which set the old road smoking in a haze of white dust from Winchester to the narrow sea.

But all of the wayfarers those which interested Nigel most were the soldiers. Several times they passed little knots of archers or men-at-arms, veterans from France, who had received their discharge and were now making their way to their southland homes. They were half drunk all of them, for the wayfarers treated them to beer at the frequent inns and ale-stakes which lined the road, so that they cheered and sang lustily as they passed. They roared rude pleasantries at Aylward, who turned in his saddle and shouted his opinion of them until they were out of hearing.

Once, late in the afternoon, they overtook a body of a hundred archers all marching together with two knights riding at their head. They were passing from Guildford Castle to Reigate Castle, where they were in garrison. Nigel rode with the knights for some distance, and hinted that if either was in search of honourable advancement, or wished to do some small deed, or to relieve himself of any vow, it might be possible to find some means of achieving it. They were both, however, grave and elderly men, intent upon their business and with no mind for fond way-side adventures, so Nigel quickened his pace and left them behind.

They had left Boxhill and Headley Heath upon the left, and the towers of Reigate were rising amid the trees in front of them when they overtook a large, cheery, red-faced man, with a forked beard, riding upon a good horse and exchanging a nod or a merry word with all who passed him. With him they rode nearly as far as Bletchingley, and Nigel laughed much to hear him talk; but always under the raillery there was much earnestness and much wisdom in all his words. He rode at his ease about the country, he said, having sufficient money to keep him from want and to furnish him for the road. He could speak all the three languages of England, the north, the middle, and the south, so that he was at home with the people of every shire and could hear their troubles and their joys. In all parts in town and in country, there was unrest, he said; for

the poor folk were weary of their masters both of the Church and State, and soon there would be such doings in England as had never been seen before.

But above all this man was earnest against the Church: its enormous wealth, its possession of nearly one-third of the whole land of the country, its insatiable greed for more at the very time when it claimed to be poor and lowly. The monks and friars, too, he lashed with his tongue: their roguish ways, their laziness, and their cunning. He showed how their wealth and that of the haughty lord must always be founded upon the toil of poor humble Peter the Plowman, who worked and strove in rain and cold out in the fields, the butt and laughing-stock of everyone, and still bearing up the whole world upon his weary shoulders. He had set it all out in a fair parable; so now as he rode he repeated some of the verses, chanting them and marking time with his forefinger, while Nigel and Aylward on either side of him with their heads inclined inward listened with the same attention but with very different feelings—Nigel shocked at such an attack upon authority, and Aylward chuckling as he heard the sentiments of his class so shrewdly expressed. At last the stranger halted his horse outside the "Five Angels" at Gatton.

"It is a good inn, and I know the ale of old," said he. "When I had finished that 'Dream of Piers the Plowman,' which I have recited to you, the last verses were thus:

> "'Now have I brought my little booke to an ende
> God's blessing be on him who a drinke will me sende'—

I pray you come in with me and share it."

"Nay," said Nigel, "we must on our way, for we have far to go. But give me your name, my friend, for indeed we have passed a merry hour listening to your words."

"Have a care!" the stranger answered, shaking his head. "You and your class will not spend a merry hour when these words are turned into deeds, and Peter the Plowman grows weary of swinking in the fields and takes up his bow and his staff in order to set this land in order."

"By Saint Paul! I expect that we shall bring Peter to reason, and also those who have put such evil thoughts into his head," said Nigel. "So once more I ask your name, that I may know it if ever I chance to hear that you have been hanged?"

The stranger laughed good-humouredly. "You can call me Thomas Lackland," said he. "I should be Thomas Lack-brain if I were indeed to give my true name, since a good many robbers, some in black gowns and some in steel, would be glad to help me upward in the way you speak of. So good-day to you, squire, and to you also, archer; and may you find your way back with whole bones from the wars!"

That night the comrades slept in Godstone Priory, and early next morning they were well upon their road down the Pilgrim's Way. At Titsey it was said that a band of villains were out in Westerham Wood and had murdered three men the day before; so that Nigel had high hopes of an encounter; but the brigands showed no sign, though the travellers went out of their way to ride their horses along the edges of the forest. Farther on they found traces of their work, for the path ran along the hillside at the base of a chalk quarry, and there in the cutting a man was lying dead. From his twisted limbs and shattered frame it was easy to see that he had been thrown over from above, while his pockets turned outward showed the reason for his murder. The comrades rode past without too close a survey, for dead men were no very uncommon objects on the king's highway, and if sheriff or bailiff should chance upon you near the body you might find yourself caught in the meshes of the law.

Near Sevenoaks their road turned out of the old Canterbury way and pointed south towards the coast, leaving the chalk lands and coming down into the clay of the Weald. It was a wretched, rutted mule-track running through thick forests with occasional clearings in which lay the small Kentish villages, where rude shock-headed peasants with smocks and galligaskins stared with bold,

greedy eyes at the travellers. Once on the right they caught a distant view of the Towers of Penshurst, and once they heard the deep tolling of the bells of Bayham Abbey, but for the rest of their day's journey savage peasants and squalid cottages were all that met their eyes, with endless droves of pigs who fed upon the litter of acorns. The throng of travellers who crowded the old road were all gone, and only here and there did they meet or overtake some occasional merchant or messenger bound for Battle Abbey, Pevensey Castle or the towns of the south.

That night they slept in a sordid inn, overrun with rats and with fleas, one mile south of the hamlet of Mayfield. Aylward scratched vigorously and cursed with fervour. Nigel lay without movement or sound. To the man who had learned the old rule of chivalry there were no small ills in life. It was beneath the dignity of his soul to stoop to observe them. Cold and heat, hunger and thirst, such things did not exist for the gentleman. The armour of his soul was so complete that it was proof not only against the great ills of life but even against the small ones; so the flea-bitten Nigel lay grimly still while Aylward writhed upon his couch.

They were now but a short distance from their destination; but they had hardly started on their journey through the forest next morning, when an adventure befell them which filled Nigel with the wildest hopes.

Along the narrow winding path between the great oak-trees there rode a dark, sallow man in a scarlet tabard who blew so loudly upon a silver trumpet that they heard the clanging call long before they set eyes on him. Slowly he advanced, pulling up every fifty paces to make the forest ring with another warlike blast. The comrades rode forward to meet him.

"I pray you," said Nigel, "to tell me who you are and why you blow upon this trumpet."

The fellow shook his head, so Nigel repeated the question in French, the common language of chivalry,

spoken at that age by every gentleman in Western Europe.

The man put his lips to the trumpet and blew another long note before he answered.

"I am Gaston de Castrier," said he, "the humble squire of the most worthy and valiant knight Raoul de Tubiers, de Pestels, de Grimsard, de Mersac, de Leoy, de Bastanac, who also writes himself Lord of Pons. It is his order that I ride always a mile in front of him to prepare all to receive him, and he desires me to blow upon a trumpet not out of vainglory, but out of greatness of spirit, so that none may be ignorant of his coming should they desire to encounter him."

Nigel sprang from his horse with a cry of joy, and began to unbutton his doublet.

"Quick, Aylward, quick!" he said. "He comes, a knight-errant comes! Was there ever such a chance of worshipfully winning worship? Untruss the harness whilst I loose my clothes! Good sir, I beg you to warn your noble and valiant master that a poor squire of England would implore him to take notice of him and to do some small deed upon him as he passes."

But already the Lord of Pons had come in sight. He was a huge man upon an enormous horse, so that together they seemed to fill up the whole long dark archway under the oaks. He was clad in full armour of a brazen hue, with only his face exposed, and of this face there was little visible save a pair of arrogant eyes and a great black beard, which flowed through the open visor and down over his breastplate. To the crest of his helmet was tied a small brown glove, nodding and swinging above him. He bore a long lance with a red square banner at the end, charged with a black boar's head, and the same symbol was engraved upon his shield. Slowly he rode through the forest, ponderous, menacing, with dull thudding of his charger's hoofs and constant clank of metal, while always in front of him came the distant peal of the silver trumpet calling all men to admit his majesty and to clear his path ere they be cleared from it.

Never in his dreams had so perfect a vision come to cheer Nigel's heart, and as he struggled with his clothes, glancing up continually at this wondrous traveller, he pattered forth prayers of thanksgiving to the good Saint Paul who had shown such loving-kindness to his unworthy servant and thrown him in the path of so excellent and debonair a gentleman.

But alas! how often at the last instant the cup is dashed from the lips! This joyful chance was destined to change suddenly to unexpected and grotesque disaster—disaster so strange and so complete that through all his life Nigel flushed crimson when he thought of it. He was busily stripping his hunting-costume, and with feverish haste he had doffed boots, hat, hose, doublet and cloak, so that nothing remained save a pink jupon and pair of silken drawers. At the same time Aylward was hastily unbuckling the load with the intention of handing his master his armour piece by piece, when the squire gave one last challenging peal from his silver trumpet into the very ear of the spare horse.

In an instant it had taken to its heels, the precious armour upon its back, and thundered away down the road which they had traversed. Aylward jumped upon his mare, drove his prick spurs into her sides, and galloped after the runaway as hard as he could ride. Thus it came about that in an instant Nigel was shorn of all his little dignity, had lost his two horses, his attendant, and his outfit, and found himself a lonely and unarmed man standing in his shirt and drawers upon the pathway down which the burly figure of the Lord of Pons was slowly advancing.

The knight-errant, whose mind had been filled by the thought of the maiden whom he had left behind at St. Jean—the same whose glove dangled from his helmet—had observed nothing that had occurred. Hence, all that met his eyes was a noble yellow horse, which was tethered by the track, and a small young man, who appeared to be a lunatic, since he had undressed hastily in the heart of the forest, and stood now with an eager anxious face clad

in his underlinen amid the scattered *débris* of his garments. Of such a person the high Lord of Pons could take no notice, and so he pursued his inexorable way, his arrogant eyes looking out into the distance and his thoughts set intently upon the maiden of St. Jean. He was dimly aware that the little crazy man in the undershirt ran a long way beside him in his stockings, begging, imploring, and arguing.

"Just one hour, most fair sir, just one hour at the longest, and a poor squire of England shall ever hold himself your debtor! Do but condescend to rein your horse until my harness comes back to me! Will you not stoop to show me some small deed of arms? I implore you, fair sir, to spare me a little of your time and a handstroke or two ere you go upon your way!"

Lord de Pons motioned impatiently with his gauntleted hand, as one might brush away an importunate fly, but when at last Nigel became desperate in his clamour he thrust his spurs into his great war-horse, and, clashing like a pair of cymbals, he thundered off through the forest. So he rode upon his majestic way, until two days later he was slain by Lord Reginald Cobham in a field near Weybridge.

When after a long chase Aylward secured the spare horse and brought it back, he found his master seated upon a fallen tree, his face buried in his hands and his mind clouded with humiliation and grief. Nothing was said, for the matter was beyond words, and so in moody silence they rode upon their way.

But soon they came upon a scene which drew Nigel's thoughts away from his bitter trouble, for in front of them there rose the towers of a great building with a small grey sloping village around it, and they learned from a passing hind that this was the hamlet and Abbey of Battle. Together they drew rein upon the low ridge and looked down into that valley of death from which even now the reek of blood seems to rise. Down beside that sinister lake and amid those scattered bushes sprinkled over the naked flank of the long ridge was fought that long-drawn

struggle between two most noble foes with broad England as the prize of victory. Here, up and down the low hill, hour by hour the grim struggle had waxed and waned, until the Saxon army had died where it stood, king, court, house-carl, and fyrdsman, each in their ranks even as they had fought. And now, after all the stress and toil, the tyranny, the savage revolt, the fierce suppression, God had made His purpose complete, for here were Nigel the Norman and Aylward the Saxon with good-fellowship in their hearts and a common respect in their minds, with the same banner and the same cause, riding forth to do battle for their old mother England.

And now the long ride drew to an end. In front of them was the blue sea, flecked with the white sails of ships. Once more the road passed upwards from the heavy-wooded plain to the springy turf of the chalk downs. Far to the right rose the grim fortalice of Pevensey, squat and powerful, like one great block of rugged stone, the parapet twinkling with steel caps and crowned by the royal banner of England. A flat expanse of reeded marshland lay before them, out of which rose a single wooded hill, crowned with towers, with a bristle of masts rising out of the green plain some distance to the south of it. Nigel looked at it with his hand shading his eyes, and then urged Pommers to a trot. The town was Winchelsea, and there amid that cluster of houses on the hill the gallant Chandos must be awaiting him.

## 14. *How Nigel chased the Red Ferret*

THEY passed a ferry, wound upward by a curving path, and then, having satisfied a guard of men-at-arms, were admitted through the frowning arch of the Pipewell Gate. There waiting for them, in the middle of the main street, the sun gleaming upon his lemon-coloured beard, and puckering his single eye, stood Chandos himself, his legs apart, his hands behind his back, and

a welcoming smile upon his quaint high-nosed face. Behind him a crowd of little boys were gazing with reverent eyes at the famous soldier.

"Welcome, Nigel!" said he, "and you also, good archer! I chanced to be walking on the city wall, and I thought from the colour of your horse that it was indeed you upon the Udimore Road. How have you fared, young squire-errant? Have you held bridges or rescued damsels or slain oppressors on your way from Tilford?"

"Nay, my fair lord, I have accomplished nothing; but I once had hopes——" Nigel flushed at the remembrance.

"I will give you more than hopes, Nigel. I will put you where you can dip both arms to the elbows into danger and honour, where peril will sleep with you at night and rise with you in the morning, and the very air you breathe be laden with it. Are you ready for that, young sir?"

"I can but pray, fair lord, that my spirit will rise to it."

Chandos smiled his approval and laid his thin brown hand on the youth's shoulder.

"Good!" said he. "It is the mute hound which bites the hardest. The babbler is ever the hang-back. Bide with me here, Nigel, and walk upon the ramparts. Archer, do you lead the horses to the Sign of the Broom Pod in the high street, and tell my varlets to see them aboard the cog *Thomas* before nightfall. We sail at the second hour after curfew. Come hither, Nigel, to the crest of the corner turret, for from it I will show you what you have never seen."

It was but a dim and distant white cloud upon the blue water seen far off over the Dungeness Point, and yet the sight of it flushed the young squire's cheeks and sent the blood hot through his veins. It was the fringe of France, that land of chivalry and glory, the stage where name and fame were to be won. With burning eyes he gazed across at it, his heart rejoicing to think that the hour was at hand when he might tread that sacred soil. Then his gaze crossed the immense stretch of the blue sea, dotted over with the sails of fishing-boats, until it rested

upon the double harbour beneath packed with vessels of every size and shape, from the pessoners and creyers which plied up and down the coast to the great cogs and galleys which were used either as war-ships or merchantmen as the occasion served. One of them was at that instant passing out to sea, a huge galleass, with trumpets blowing and nakers banging, the flag of Saint George flaunting over the broad purple sail, and the decks sparkling from end to end with steel. Nigel gave a cry of pleasure at the splendour of the sight.

"Aye, lad," said Chandos, "it is the *Trinity of Rye*, the very ship on which I fought at Sluys. Her deck ran blood from stem to stern that day. But turn your eyes this way, I beg you, and tell me if you see aught strange about this town."

Nigel looked down at the noble straight street, at the Roundel Tower, at the fine church of Saint Thomas, and the other fair buildings of Winchelsea.

"It is all new," said he—"church, castle, houses, all are new."

"You are right, fair son. My grandfather can call to mind the time when only the conies lived upon this rock. The town was down yonder by the sea, until one night the waves rose upon it and not a house was left. See, yonder is Rye, huddling also on a hill, the two towns like poor sheep when the waters are out. But down there under the blue water and below the Camber Sand lies the true Winchelsea—tower, cathedral, walls and all, even as my grandfather knew it, when the first Edward was young upon the throne."

For an hour or more Chandos paced upon the ramparts with his young squire at his elbow, and talked to him of his duties and of the secrets and craft of warfare, Nigel drinking in and storing in his memory every word from so revered a teacher. Many a time in after-life, in stress and in danger, he strengthened himself by the memory of that slow walk with the blue sea on one side and the fair town on the other, when the wise soldier and noble-hearted

knight poured forth his precept and advice as the master-workman to the apprentice.

"Perhaps, fair son," said he, "you are like so many other lads who ride to the wars, and know so much already that it is waste of breath to advise them?"

"Nay, my fair lord, I know nothing save that I would fain do my duty and either win honourable advancement or die worshipful on the field."

"You are wise to be humble," said Chandos; "for indeed he who knows most of war knows best that there is much to learn. As there is a mystery of the rivers and a mystery of woodcraft, even so there is a mystery of warfare by which battles may be lost and gained; for all nations are brave, and where the brave meets the brave, it is he who is crafty and war-wise who will win the day. The best hound will run at fault if he be ill laid on, and the best hawk will fly at check if he be badly loosed, and even so the bravest army may go awry if it be ill handled. There are not in Christendom better knights and squires than those of the French, and yet we have had the better of them, for in our Scottish wars and elsewhere we have learned more of this same mystery of which I speak."

"And wherein lies our wisdom, honoured sir?" asked Nigel. "I also would fain be war-wise, and learn to fight with my wits as well as with my sword."

Chandos shook his head and smiled. "It is in the forest and on the down that you learn to fly the hawk and loose the hound," said he. "So also it is in camp and on the field that the mystery of war can be learned. There only has every great captain come to be its master. To start he must have a cool head, quick to think, soft as wax before his purpose is formed, hard as steel when once he sees it before him. Ever alert he must be, and cautious also, but with judgment to turn his caution into rashness where a large gain may be put against a small stake. An eye for country also, for the trend of the rivers, the slope of the hills, the cover of the woods, and the light green of the bog-land."

Poor Nigel, who had trusted to his lance and to Pommers to break his path to glory, stood aghast at this list of needs.

"Alas!" he cried. "How am I to gain all this?—I, who could scarce learn to read or write, though the good Father Matthew broke a hazel stick a day across my shoulders?"

"You will gain it, fair son, where others have gained it before you. You have that which is the first thing of all, a heart of fire from which other colder hearts may catch a spark. But you must have knowledge also of that which warfare has taught us in olden times. We know, par exemple, that horsemen alone cannot hope to win against good foot-soldiers. Has it not been tried at Courtrai, at Stirling, and again under my own eyes at Crécy, where the chivalry of France went down before our bowmen?"

Nigel stared at him with a perplexed brow. "Fair sir, my heart grows heavy as I hear you. Do you then say that our chivalry can make no head against archers, billmen, and the like?"

"Nay, Nigel, for it has also been very clearly shown that the best foot-soldiers unsupported cannot hold their own against the mailed horsemen."

"To whom, then, is the victory?" asked Nigel.

"To him who can mix his horse and foot, using each to strengthen the other. Apart they are weak. Together they are strong. The archer who can weaken the enemy's line, the horseman who can break it when it is weakened, as was done at Falkirk and Dupplin, there is the secret of our strength. Now, touching this same battle of Falkirk, I pray you for one instant to give it your attention."

With his whip he began to trace a plan of the Scottish battle upon the dust, and Nigel, with knitted brows, was trying hard to muster his small stock of brains, and to profit by the lecture, when their conversation was interrupted by a strange, new arrival.

It was a very stout little man, wheezy and purple with

haste, who scudded down the rampart as if he were blown by the wind, his grizzled hair flying, and his long black gown floating behind him. He was clad in the dress of a respectable citizen, a black jerkin trimmed with sable, a black velvet beaver hat and a white feather. At the sight of Chandos he gave a cry of joy, and quickened his pace, so that when he did at last reach him he could only stand gasping and waving his hands.

"Give yourself time, good Master Wintersole, give yourself time!" said Chandos, in a soothing voice.

"The papers!" gasped the little man. "Oh, my Lord Chandos, the papers!"

"What of the papers, my worthy sir?"

"I swear by our good patron Saint Leonard, it is no fault of mine! I had locked them in my coffer. But the lock was forced and the coffer rifled."

A shadow of anger passed over the soldier's keen face.

"How now, Master Mayor? Pull your wits together, and do not stand there babbling like a three-year child. Do you say that someone hath taken the papers?"

"It is sooth, fair sir! Thrice I have been mayor of the town, and fifteen years burgess and jurat, but never once has any public matter gone awry through me. Only last month there came an order from Windsor on a Tuesday for a Friday banquet, a thousand soles, four thousand plaice, two thousand mackerel, five hundred crabs, a thousand lobsters, five thousand whiting——"

"I doubt not, Master Mayor, that you are an excellent fishmonger; but the matter concerns the papers I gave into your keeping. Where are they?"

"Taken, fair sir—gone!"

"And who hath dared to take them?"

"Alas! I know not. It was but for as long as you would say an angelus that I left the chamber, and when I came back there was the coffer, broken and empty, upon my table."

"Do you suspect no one?"

"There was a varlet who hath come with the last few days into my employ. He is not to be found, and I have sent horsemen along both the Udimore Road and that to Rye, that they may seize him. By the help of Saint Leonard they can scarce miss him, for one can tell him a bow-shot off by his hair."

"Is it red?" asked Chandos, eagerly. "Is it fox-red, and the man a small man pocked with sun spots, and very quick in his movements?"

"It is the man himself."

Chandos shook his clinched hand with annoyance, and then set off swiftly down the street.

"It is Peter the Red Ferret once more!" said he. "I knew him of old in France, where he has done us more harm than a company of men-at-arms. He speaks English as he speaks French, and he is of such daring and cunning that nothing is secret from him. In all France there is no more dangerous man, for though he is a gentleman of blood and coat armour, he takes the part of a spy, because it hath the more danger and therefore the more honour."

"But, my fair lord," cried the mayor, as he hurried along, keeping pace with the long strides of the soldier, "I knew that you warned me to take all care of the papers; but surely there was no matter of great import in it? It was but to say what stores were to be sent after you to Calais?"

"Is that not everything?" cried Chandos, impatiently. "Can you not see, oh foolish Master Wintersole, that the French suspect we are about to make some attempt, and that they have sent Peter the Ferret, as they have sent him many times before, to get tidings of whither we are bound? Now that he knows that the stores are for Calais, then the French near Calais will take his warning, and so the king's whole plan came to nothing."

"Then he will fly by water. We can stop him yet. He has not an hour's start."

"It may be that a boat awaits him at Rye or Hythe; but it is more like that he has all ready to depart from

here. Ah, see yonder! I'll warrant that the Red Ferret is on board!"

Chandos had halted in front of his inn, and now he pointed down to the outer harbour, which lay two miles off across the green plain. It was connected by a long winding canal with the inner dock at the base of the hill, upon which the town was built. Between the two horns formed by the short curving piers a small schooner was running out to sea, dipping and rising before a sharp southerly breeze.

"It is no Winchelsea boat," said the mayor. "She is longer and broader in the beam than ours."

"Horses! bring horses!" cried Chandos. "Come, Nigel, let us go farther into the matter."

A busy crowd of varlets, archers, and men-at-arms swarmed round the gateway of the Sign of the Broom Pod, singing, shouting, and jostling in rough good-fellowship. The sight of the tall thin figure of Chandos brought order among them, and a few minutes later the horses were ready and saddled. A breakneck ride down a steep declivity, and then a gallop of two miles over the sedgy plain carried them to the outer harbour. A dozen vessels were lying there, ready to start for Bordeaux or Rochelle, and the quay was thick with sailors, labourers, and townsmen, and heaped with wine-barrels and wool-packs.

"Who is warden here?" asked Chandos, springing from his horse.

"Badding! Where is Cock Badding? Badding is warden!" shouted the crowd.

A moment later a short swarthy man, bull-necked and deep-chested, pushed through the people. He was clad in rough russet wool with a scarlet cloth tied round his black curly head. His sleeves were rolled up to his shoulders, and his brown arms, all stained with grease and tar, were like two thick gnarled branches from an oaken stump. His savage brown face was fierce and frowning, and was split from chin to temple with the long white wale of an ill-healed wound.

"How now, gentles, will you never wait your turn?" he rumbled, in a deep angry voice. "Can you not see that we are warping the *Rose of Guienne* into midstream for the ebb-tide? Is this a time to break in upon us? Your goods will go aboard in due season, I promise you; so ride back into the town and find such pleasure as you may, while I and my mates do our work without let or hindrance."

"It is the gentle Chandos!" cried someone in the crowd. "It is the good Sir John."

The rough harbour-master changed his gruffness to smiles in an instant.

"Nay, Sir John, what would you? I pray you to hold me excused if I was short of speech, but we port-wardens are sore plagued with foolish young lordlings, who get betwixt us and our work and blame us because we do not turn an ebb-tide into a flood, or a south wind into a north. I pray you to tell me how I can serve you."

"That boat!" said Chandos, pointing to the already distant sail rising and falling on the waves. "What is it?"

Cock Badding shaded his keen eyes with his strong brown hand.

"She has but just gone out," said he. "She is *La Pucelle*, a small wine-sloop from Gascony, home-bound and laden with barrel-staves."

"I pray you did any man join at her the last?"

"Nay, I know not. I saw none."

"But I know," cried a seaman in the crowd. "I was standing at the wharf-side and was nigh knocked into the water by a little red-headed fellow, who breathed as though he had run from the town. Ere I had time to give him a cuff he had jumped aboard, the ropes were cast off, and her nose was seaward."

In a few words Chandos made all clear to Badding, the crowd pressing eagerly round.

"Aye, aye!" cried a seaman, "the good Sir John is right. See how she points. It is Picardy and not Gascony that she will fetch this journey in spite of her wine-staves."

"Then we must lay her aboard!" cried Cock Badding. "Come, lads, here is my own *Marie Rose* ready to cast off. Who's for a trip with a fight at the end of it?"

There was a rush for the boat; but the stout little seaman picked his men. "Go back, Jerry! Your heart is good, but you are overfat for the work. You, Luke, and you, Thomas, and the two Deedes, and William of Sandgate. You will work the boat. And now we need a few men of their hands. Do you come, little sir?"

"I pray you, my dear lord, to let me go!" cried Nigel.

"Yes, Nigel, you can go, and I will bring your gear over to Calais this night."

"I will join you there, fair sir, and with the help of Saint Paul I will bring this Red Ferret with me."

"Aboard, aboard! Time passes!" cried Badding, impatiently, while already his seamen were hauling on the line and raising the mainsail. "Now then, sirrah! who are you?"

It was Aylward who had followed Nigel and was pushing his way aboard.

"Where my master goes I go also," cried Aylward, "so stand clear, master-shipman, or you may come by a hurt."

"By Saint Leonard! archer," said Cock Badding, "had I more time I would give you a lesson ere I leave land. Stand back and give place to others!"

"Nay, stand back and give place to me!" cried Aylward, and seizing Badding round the waist he slung him into the dock.

There was a cry of anger from the crowd, for Badding was the hero of all the Cinque Ports and had never yet met his match in manhood. The epitaph still lingers in which it was said that he "could never rest until he had foughten his fill." When, therefore, swimming like a duck, he reached a rope and pulled himself hand over hand up to the quay, all stood aghast to see what fell fate would befall this bold stranger. But Badding laughed loudly, dashing the salt water from his eyes and hair.

"You have fairly won your place, archer," said he. "You are the very man for our work. Where is Black Simon of Norwich?"

A tall dark young man with a long, stern, lean face came forward. "I am with you, Cock," said he, "and I thank you for my place."

"You can come, Hugh Baddlesmere, and you, Hal Masters, and you, Dicon of Rye. That is enough. Now off, in God's name, or it will be night ere we can come up with them!"

Already the head-sails and the mainsail had been raised, while a hundred willing hands poled her off from the wharf. Now the wind caught her; heeling over, and quivering with eagerness like an unleashed hound, she flew through the opening and out into the channel. She was a famous little schooner, the *Marie Rose* of Winchelsea, and under her daring owner Cock Badding, half trader and half pirate, had brought back into port many a rich cargo taken in mid-channel, and paid for in blood rather than money. Small as she was, her great speed and the fierce character of her master had made her a name of terror along the French coast, and many a bulky Eastlander or Fleming as he passed the narrow seas had scanned the distant Kentish shore, fearing lest that ill-omened purple sail with a gold Christopher upon it should shoot out suddenly from the dim grey cliffs. Now she was clear of the land, with the wind on her larboard quarter, every inch of canvas set, and her high sharp bows smothered in foam, as she dug through the waves.

Cock Badding trod the deck with head erect and jaunty bearing, glancing up at the swelling sails and then ahead at the little tilted white triangle, which stood out clear and hard against the bright blue sky. Behind was the lowland of the Camber marshes, with the bluffs of Rye and Winchelsea, and the line of cliffs behind them. On the larboard rose the great white walls of Folkestone and of Dover, and far on the distant sky-line the grey shimmer of those French cliffs for which the fugitives were making.

" By Saint Paul ! " cried Nigel, looking with eager eyes over the tossing waters, " it seems to me, Master Badding, that already we draw in upon them."

The master measured the distance with his keen steady gaze, and then looked up at the sinking sun. " We have still four hours of daylight," said he ; " but if we do not lay her aboard ere darkness falls she will save herself, for the nights are as black as a wolf's mouth, and if she alter her course I know not how we may follow her."

" Unless, indeed, you might guess to which port she was bound and reach it before her."

" Well thought of, little master ! " cried Badding. " If the news be for the French outside Calais, then Ambleteuse would be nearest to Saint Omer. But, my sweeting sails three paces to that lubber's two, and if the wind holds we shall have time and to spare. How now, archer? You do not seem so eager as when you made your way aboard this boat by slinging me into the sea."

Aylward sat on the upturned keel of a skiff which lay upon the deck. He groaned sadly and held his green face between his two hands.

" I would gladly sling you into the sea once more, master-shipman," said he, " if by so doing I could get off this most accursed vessel of thine. Or if you would wish to have your turn, then I would thank you if you would lend me a hand over the side, for indeed, I am but a useless weight upon your deck. Little did I think that Samkin Aylward could be turned into a weakling by an hour of salt water. Alas the day that ever my foot wandered from the good red heather of Crooksbury ! "

Cock Badding laughed loud and long. " Nay, take it not to heart, archer," he cried ; " for better men than you or I have groaned upon this deck. The prince himself with ten of his chosen knights crossed with me once, and eleven sadder faces I never saw. Yet within a month they had shown at Crécy that they were no weaklings, as you will do also, I dare swear, when the time comes. Keep that thick head of thine down upon the planks, and

all will be well anon. But we raise her, we raise her with every blast of the wind ! ”

It was indeed evident, even to the inexperienced eyes of Nigel, that the *Marie Rose* was closing in swiftly upon the stranger. She was a heavy, bluff-bowed, broad-sterned vessel which laboured clumsily through the seas. The swift, fierce little Winchelsea boat swooping and hissing through the waters behind her was like some keen hawk whizzing down wind at the back of a flapping heavy-bodied duck. Half an hour before *La Pucelle* had been a distant patch of canvas. Now they could see the black hull, and soon the cut of her sails and the lines of her bulwarks. There were at least a dozen men upon her deck, and the twinkle of weapons from among them showed that they were preparing to resist. Cock Badding began to muster his own forces.

He had a crew of seven rough, hardy mariners, who had been at his back in many a skirmish. They were armed with short swords, but Cock Badding carried a weapon peculiar to himself, a twenty-pound blacksmith's hammer, the memory of which, as “ Badding's cracker,” still lingers in the Cinque Ports. Then there were the eager Nigel, the melancholy Aylward, Black Simon, who was a tried swordsman, and three archers, Baddlesmere, Masters, and Dicon of Rye, all veterans of the French War. The numbers in the two vessels might be about equal ; but Badding as he glanced at the bold harsh faces which looked to him for orders had little fear for the result.

Glancing round, however, he saw something which was more dangerous to his plans than the resistance of the enemy, The wind, which had become more fitful and feebler, now fell suddenly away, until the sails hung limp and straight above them. A belt of calm lay along the horizon, and the waves around had smoothed down into a long oily swell on which the two little vessels rose and fell. The great boom of the *Marie Rose* rattled and jarred with every lurch, and the high thin prow pointed skyward

one instant and seaward the next in a way that drew fresh groans from the unhappy Aylward. In vain Cock Badding pulled on his sheets and tried hard to husband every little wandering gust which ruffled for an instant the sleek rollers. The French master was as adroit a sailor, and his boom swung round also as each breath of wind came up from astern.

At last even these fitful puffs died finally away, and a cloudless sky overhung a glassy sea. The sun was almost upon the horizon behind Dungeness Point, and the whole western heaven was bright with the glory of the sunset, which blended sea and sky in one blaze of ruddy light. Like rollers of molten gold, the long swell heaved up Channel from the great ocean beyond. In the midst of the immense beauty and peace of nature the two little dark specks with the white sail and the purple rose and fell, so small upon the vast shining bosom of the waters, and yet so charged with all the unrest and the passion of life.

The experienced eye of the seaman told him that it was hopeless to expect a breeze before nightfall. He looked across at the Frenchman, which lay less than a quarter of a mile ahead, and shook his gnarled fist at the line of heads which could be seen looking back over her stern. One of them waved a white kerchief in derision, and Cock Badding swore a bitter oath at the sight.

"By Saint Leonard of Winchelsea," he cried, "I will rub my side up against her yet! Out with the skiff, lads, and two of you to the oars. Make fast the line to the mast, Will. Do you go in the boat, Hugh, and I'll make the second. Now, if we bend our backs to it we may have them ere yet night cover them."

The little skiff was swiftly lowered over the side and the slack end of the cable fastened to the after thwart. Cock Badding and his comrades pulled as if they would snap their oars, and the little vessel began slowly to lurch forward over the rollers. But the next moment a larger skiff had splashed over the side of the Frenchman, and no

less than four seamen were hard at work under her bows. If the *Marie Rose* advanced a yard the Frenchman was going two. Again Cock Badding raved and shook his fist. He clambered aboard, his face wet with sweat and dark with anger.

"Curse them! they have the best of us!" he cried. "I can do no more. Sir John has lost his papers, for indeed now that night is at hand I can see no way in which we can gain them."

Nigel had leaned against the bulwark during these events, watching with keen attention the doings of the sailors, and praying alternately to Saint Paul, Saint George and Saint Thomas for a slant of wind which would put them alongside their enemy. He was silent; but his hot heart was simmering within him. His spirit had risen even above the discomfort of the sea, and his mind was too absorbed in his mission to have a thought for that which had laid Aylward flat upon the deck. He had never doubted that Cock Badding in one way or another would accomplish his end, but when he heard this speech of despair he bounded off the bulwark and stood before the seaman with his face flushed and all his soul afire.

"By Saint Paul! master-shipman," he cried, "we should never hold up our heads in honour if we did not go farther into the matter! Let us do some small deed this night upon the water, or let us never see land again, for indeed we could not wish fairer prospect of winning honourable advancement."

"With your leave, little master, you speak like a fool," said the gruff seaman. "You and all your kind are as children when once the blue water is beneath you. Can you not see that there is no wind, and that the Frenchman can warp her as swiftly as we? What then would you do?"

Nigel pointed to the boat which towed astern. "Let us venture forth in her," said he, "and let us take this ship or die worshipful in the attempt."

His bold and fiery words found their echo in the brave

rough hearts around him. There was a deep-chested shout from both archers and seamen. Even Aylward sat up, with a wan smile upon his green face.

But Cock Badding shook his head. "I have never met the man who could lead where I would not follow," said he; "but by Saint Leonard! this is a mad business, and I should be a fool if I were to risk my men and my ship. Bethink you, little master, that the skiff can hold only five, though you load her to the water's edge. If there is a man yonder, there are fourteen, and you have to climb their side from the boat. What chance would you have? Your boat stove in and you in the water—there is the end of it. No man of mine goes on such a fool's errand, and so I swear!"

"Then, Master Badding, I must crave the loan of your skiff, for by Saint Paul! the good Lord Chandos' papers are not to be so lightly lost. If no one else will come, then I will go alone."

The shipman smiled at the words; but the smile died away from his lips when Nigel, with features set like ivory and eyes as hard as steel, pulled on the rope so as to bring the skiff under the counter. It was very clear that he would do even as he said. At the same time Aylward raised his bulky form from the deck, leaned for a moment against the bulwarks, and then tottered aft to his master's side.

"Here is one that will go with you," said he, "or he would never dare show his face to the girls of Tilford again. Come, archers, let us leave these salt herrings in their pickle tub and try our luck out on the water."

The three archers at once ranged themselves on the same side as their comrade. They were bronzed, bearded men, short in stature, as were most Englishmen of that day, but hardy, strong, and skilled with their weapons. Each drew his string from its waterproof case and bent the huge arc of his war-bow as he fitted it into the nocks.

"Now, master, we are at your back," said they, as they pulled and tightened their sword-belts.

But already Cock Badding had been carried away by the hot lust of battle, and had thrown aside every fear and doubt which had clouded him. To see a fight and not to be in it was more than he could bear.

"Nay, have it your own way!" he cried, "and may Saint Leonard help us, for a madder venture I have never seen! And yet it may be worth a trial. But if it be done let me have the handling of it, little master, for you know no more of a boat than I do of a war-horse. The skiff can bear five and not a man more. Now, who will come?"

They had all caught fire, and there was not one who would be left out.

Badding picked up his hammer. "I will come myself," said he, "and you also, little master, since it is your hot head that has planned it. Then there is Black Simon, the best sword of the Cinque Ports. Two archers can pull on the oars, and it may be that they can pick off two or three of these Frenchmen before we close with them. Hugh Baddlesmere, and you, Dicon of Rye—into the boat with you!"

"What?" cried Aylward. "Am I to be left behind? I, who am the squire's own man? Ill fare the bowman who comes betwixt me and yonder boat!"

"Nay, Aylward," said his master, "I order that you stay, for indeed you are a sick man."

"But now that the waves have sunk I am myself again. Nay, fair sir, I pray that you will not leave me behind."

"You must needs take the space of a better man; for what do you know of the handling of a boat," said Badding, shortly. "No more fool's talk, I pray you, for the night will soon fail. Stand aside!"

Aylward looked hard at the French boat. "I could swim ten times up and down Frensham pond," said he, "and it will be strange if I cannot go as far as that. By these finger-bones, Samkin Aylward may be there as soon as you!"

The little boat with its five occupants pushed off from the side of the schooner, and dipping and rising, made its slow way towards the Frenchman. Badding and one archer had single oars, the second archer was in the prow, while Black Simon and Nigel huddled into the stern with the water lapping and hissing at their very elbows. A shout of defiance rose from the Frenchman, and they stood in a line along the side of their vessel shaking their fists and waving their weapons. Already the sun was level with Dungeness, and the grey of evening was blurring sky and water into one dim haze. A great silence hung over the broad expanse of nature, and no sound broke it save the dip and splash of the oars and the slow deep surge of the boat upon the swell. Behind them their comrades of the *Marie Rose* stood motionless and silent, watching their progress with eager eyes.

They were near enough now to have a good look at the Frenchmen. One was a big swarthy man with a long black beard. He had a red cap and an axe over his shoulder. There were ten other hardy-looking fellows, all of them well armed, and there were three who seemed to be boys.

"Shall we try a shaft upon them?" asked Hugh Baddlesmere. "They are well within our bowshot."

"Only one of you can shoot at a time, for you have no footing," said Badding. "With one foot in the prow and one over the thwart you will get your stance. Do what you may, and then we will close in upon them."

The archer balanced himself in the rolling boat with the deftness of a man who has been trained upon the sea, for he was born and bred in the Cinque Ports. Carefully he nocked his arrow, strongly he drew it, steadily he loosed it, but the boat swooped at the instant, and it buried itself in the waves. The second passed over the little ship, and the third stuck in her black side. Then in quick succession—so quick that two shafts were often in the air at the same instant—he discharged a dozen arrows, most of which just cleared the bulwarks and dropped upon the

deck. There was a cry on the Frenchman, and the heads vanished from the side.

"Enough!" cried Badding. "One is down, and it may be two. Close in, close in, in God's name, before they rally!"

He and the other bent to their oars; but at the same instant there was a sharp zip in the air and a hard clear sound like a stone striking a wall. Baddlesmere clapped his hand to his head, groaned and fell forward out of the boat, leaving a swirl of blood upon the surface. A moment later the same fierce hiss ended in a loud wooden crash, and a short, thick crossbow-bolt was buried deep in the boat.

"Close in, close in!" roared Badding, tugging at his oar. "Saint George for England! Saint Leonard for Winchelsea! Close in!"

But again that fatal crossbow twanged. Dicon of Rye fell back with a shaft through his shoulder. "God help me, I can no more!" said he.

Badding seized the oar from his hand; but it was only to sweep the boat's head round and pull her back to the *Marie Rose*. The attack had failed.

"What now, master-shipman?" cried Nigel. "What has befallen to stop us? Surely the matter does not end here?"

"Two down out of five," said Badding, "and twelve at the least against us. The odds are too long, little master. Let us go back at least, fill up once more, and raise a mantelet against the bolts, for they have an arbalest which shoots both straight and hard. But what we do we must do quickly, for the darkness falls apace."

Their repulse had been hailed by wild yells of delight from the Frenchmen, who danced with joy and waved their weapons madly over their heads. But before their rejoicings had finished they saw the little boat creeping out once more from the shadow of the *Marie Rose*, a great wooden screen in her bows to protect her from the arrows. Without a pause she came straight and fast for her enemy.

The wounded archer had been put on board, and Aylward would have had his place had Nigel been able to see him upon the deck. The third archer, Hal Masters, had sprung in, and one of the seamen, Wat Finnis of Hythe. With their hearts hardened to conquer or to die, the five ran alongside the Frenchman and sprang upon her deck. At the same instant a great iron weight crashed through the bottom of their skiff, and their feet had hardly left her before she was gone. There was no hope and no escape save victory.

The crossbowman stood under the mast, his terrible weapon at his shoulder, the steel string stretched taut, the heavy bolt shining upon the nut. One life at least he would claim out of this little band. Just for one instant too long did he dwell upon his aim, shifting from the seaman to Cock Badding, whose formidable appearance showed him to be the better prize. In that second of time Hal Masters' string twanged and his long arrow sped through the arbalester's throat. He dropped on the deck, with blood pouring from his mouth.

A moment later Nigel's sword and Badding's hammer had each claimed a victim and driven back the rush of assailants. The five were safe upon the deck, but it was hard for them to keep a footing there. The French seamen, Bretons and Normans, were stout, powerful fellows, armed with axes and swords, fierce fighters and brave men. They swarmed round the little band, attacking them from all sides. Black Simon felled the black-bearded French captain, and at the same instant was cut over the head and lay with his scalp open upon the deck. The seaman Wat of Hythe was killed by a crushing blow from an axe. Nigel was struck down, but was up again like a flash, and drove his sword through the man who had felled him.

But Badding, Masters the archer, and he had been hustled back to the bulwark and were barely holding their own from minute to minute against the fierce crowd who assailed them, when an arrow coming apparently from the

sea struck the foremost Frenchman to the heart. A moment later a boat dashed up alongside and four more men from the *Marie Rose* scrambled on to the blood-stained deck. With one fierce rush the remaining Frenchmen were struck down or were seized by their assailants. Nine prostrate men upon the deck showed how fierce had been the attack, how desperate the resistance.

Badding leaned panting upon his blood-clotted hammer. "By Saint Leonard!" he cried. "I thought that this little master had been the death of us all. God wot you were but just in time, and how you came I know not. This archer has had a hand in it, by the look of him."

Aylward, still pale from his sea-sickness and dripping from head to foot with water, had been the first man in the rescue party.

Nigel looked at him in amazement. "I sought you aboard the ship, Aylward, but I could not lay eyes on you," said he.

"It was because I was in the water, fair sir, and by my hilt! it suits my stomach better than being on it," he answered. "When you first set forth I swam behind you, for I saw that the Frenchman's boat hung by a rope, and I thought that while you kept him in play I might gain it. I had reached it when you were driven back, so I hid behind it in the water and said my prayers as I have not said them for many a day. Then you came again, and no one had an eye for me, so I clambered into it, cut the rope, took the oars which I found there, and brought her back for more men."

"By Saint Paul! you have acted very wisely and well," said Nigel, "and I think that of all of us it is you who have won most honour this day. But of all these men dead and alive I see none who resembles that Red Ferret whom my Lord Chandos has described and who has worked such despite upon us in the past. It would indeed be an evil chance if he has, in spite of all our pains, made his way to France in some other boat."

"That we shall soon find out," said Badding. "Come

with me, and we will search the ship from truck to keel ere he escapes us."

There was a scuttle at the base of the mast which led down into the body of the vessel, and the Englishmen were approaching this when a strange sight brought them to a stand. A round brazen head had appeared in the square dark opening. An instant afterward a pair of shining shoulders followed. Then slowly the whole figure of a man in complete plate-armour emerged on the deck. In his gauntleted hand he carried a heavy steel mace. With this uplifted he moved towards his enemies, silent save for the ponderous clank of his footfall. It was an inhuman, machine-like figure, menacing and terrible, devoid of all expression, slow-moving, inexorable, and awesome.

A sudden wave of terror passed over the English seamen. One of them tried to pass and get behind the brazen man, but he was pinned against the side by a quick movement and his brains dashed out by a smashing blow from the heavy mace. Wild panic seized the others, and they rushed back to the boat. Aylward strung an arrow, but his bowstring was damp and the shaft rang loudly upon the shining breastplate and glanced off into the sea. Masters struck the brazen head with a sword, but the blade snapped without injuring the helmet, and an instant later the bowman was stretched senseless on the deck. The seamen shrank from this terrible silent creature and huddled in the stern, all the fight gone out of them.

Again he raised his mace and was advancing on the helpless crowd where the brave were encumbered and hampered by the weaklings, when Nigel shook himself clear and bounded forward into the open, his sword in his hand and a smile of welcome upon his lips.

The sun had set, and one long pink gash across the western Channel was closing swiftly into the dull greys of early night. Above, a few stars began to faintly twinkle ; yet the twilight was still bright enough for an observer to see every detail of the scene ; the *Marie Rose*, dipping and

rising on the long rollers astern ; the broad French boat with its white deck blotched with blood and littered with bodies ; the group of men in the stern, some trying to advance and some seeking to escape—all a confused, disorderly, struggling rabble.

Then between them and the mast the two figures : the armed shining man of metal, with hand upraised, watchful, silent, motionless, and Nigel, bareheaded and crouching, with quick foot, eager eyes, and fearless, happy face, moving this way and that, in and out, his sword flashing like a gleam of light as he sought at all points for some opening in the brazen shell before him.

It was clear to the man in armour that if he could but pen his antagonist in a corner he would beat him down without fail. But it was not to be done. The unhampered man had the advantage of speed. With a few quick steps he could always glide to either side and escape the clumsy rush. Aylward and Badding had sprung out to Nigel's assistance ; but he shouted to them to stand back, with such authority and anger in his voice that their weapons dropped to their sides. With staring eyes and set features they stood watching that unequal fight.

Once it seemed that all was over with the squire, for in springing back from his enemy he tripped over one of the bodies which strewed the deck and fell flat upon his back, but with a swift wriggle he escaped the heavy blow which thundered down upon him, and springing to his feet he bit deeply into the Frenchman's helmet with a sweeping cut in return. Again the mace fell, and this time Nigel had not quite cleared himself. His sword was beaten down and the blow fell partly upon his left shoulder. He staggered, and once more the iron club whirled upward to dash him to the ground.

Quick as a flash it passed through his mind that he could not leap beyond its reach. But he might get within it. In an instant he had dropped his sword, and springing in he had seized the brazen man round the waist. The mace was shortened and the handle jobbed down once

upon the bare flaxen head. Then, with a sonorous clang, and a yell of delight from the spectators, Nigel, with one mighty wrench, tore his enemy from the deck and hurled him down upon his back. His own head was whirling and he felt that his senses were slipping away, but already his hunting knife was out and pointing through the slit in the brazen helmet.

"Give yourself up, fair sir!" said he.

"Never to fishermen and to archers. I am a gentleman of coat-armour. Kill me!"

"I also am a gentleman of coat-armour. I promise you quarter."

"Then, sir, I surrender myself to you."

The dagger tinkled down upon the deck. Seamen and archers ran forward, to find Nigel half senseless upon his face. They drew him off, and a few deft blows struck off the helmet of his enemy. A head, sharp-featured, freckled and foxy-red, disclosed itself beneath it. Nigel raised himself on his elbow for an instant.

"You are the Red Ferret?" said he.

"So my enemies call me," said the Frenchman, with a smile. "I rejoice, sir, that I have fallen to so valiant and honourable a gentleman."

"I thank you, fair sir," said Nigel, feebly. "I also rejoice that I have encountered so debonair a person, and I shall ever bear in mind the pleasure which I have had from our meeting."

So saying he laid his bleeding head upon his enemy's brazen front and sank into a dead faint.

## 15. *How the Red Ferret came to Cosford*

THE old chronicler in his *Gestes du Sieur Nigel* has bewailed his broken narrative, which rose from the fact that out of thirty-one years of warfare no less than seven were spent by his hero at one time or another in the recovery from his wounds or from those

illnesses which arose from privation and fatigue. Here at the very threshold of his career, on the eve of a great enterprise, this very fate befell him.

Stretched upon a couch in a low-roofed and ill-furnished chamber, which looks down from under the machicolated corner turret upon the inner court of the Castle of Calais, he lay half-unconscious and impotent, while great deeds were doing under his window. Wounded in three places, and with his head splintered by the sharp pommel of the Ferret's mace, he hovered between life and death, his shattered body drawing him downward, his youthful spirit plucking him up.

As in some strange dream he was aware of that deed of arms within the courtyard below. Dimly it came back to his memory afterwards, the sudden startled shout, the crash of metal, the slamming of great gates, the roar of many voices, the clang, clang, clang, as of fifty lusty smiths upon their anvils, and then at last the dwindling of the hubbub, the low groans and sudden shrill cries to the saints, the measured murmur of many voices, the heavy clanking of armoured feet.

Sometime in that fell struggle he must have drawn his weakened body as far as the narrow window, and hanging to the iron bars have looked down on the wild scene beneath him. In the red glare of torches held from windows and from roof he saw the rush and swirl of men below, the ruddy light showing back from glowing brass and gleaming steel. As a wild vision it came to him afterwards, the beauty and the splendour, the flying lambrequins, the jewelled crests, the blazonry and richness of surcoat and of shield, where sable and gules, argent and vair, in every pattern of saltire, bend or chevron, glowed beneath him like a drift of many-coloured blossoms, tossing, sinking, stooping into shadow, springing into light. There glared the blood-red gules of Chandos, and he saw the tall figure of his master, a thunderbolt of war, raging in the van. There too were the three black chevrons on the golden shield which marked the noble Manny.

That strong swordsman must surely be the royal Edward himself, since only he and the black-armoured swift-footed youth at his side were marked by no symbol of heraldry.

"Manny! Manny! George for England!" rose the deep-throated bay, and ever the gallant counter-cry: "A Chargny! A Chargny! Saint Denis for France!" thundered amid the clash and thudding of the battle.

Such was the vague whirling memory still lingering in Nigel's mind when at last the mists cleared away from it and he found himself weak but clear on the low couch in the corner turret. Beside him, crushing lavender between his rough fingers and strewing it over floor and sheets, was Aylward the archer. His longbow leaned at the foot of the bed, and his steel cap was balanced on the top of it, while he himself, sitting in his shirt-sleeves, fanned off the flies and scattered the fragrant herbs over his helpless master.

"By my hilt!" he cried, with a sudden shout, every tooth in his head gleaming with joy, "I thank the Virgin and all the saints for this blessed sight! I had not dared to go back to Tilford had I lost you. Three weeks have you lain there and babbled like a babe, but now I see in your eyes that you are your own man again."

"I have indeed had some small hurt," said Nigel, feebly; "but it is shame and sorrow that I should lie here if there is work for my hands. Whither go you, archer?"

"To tell the good Sir John that you are mending."

"Nay, bide with me a little longer, Aylward. I can call to mind all that has passed. There was a bickering of small boats, was there not, and I chanced upon a most worthy person and exchanged handstrokes with him? He was my prisoner, was he not?"

"He was, fair sir."

"And where is he now?"

"Below in the castle."

A smile stole over Nigel's pale face. "I know what I will do with him," said he.

"I pray you to rest, fair sir," said Aylward, anxiously. "The king's own leech saw you this morning, and he said that if the bandage was torn from your head you would surely die."

"Nay, good archer, I will not move. But tell me what befell upon the boat?"

"There is little to tell, fair sir. Had this Ferret not been his own squire and taken so long a time to don his harness it is likely that they would have had the better of us. He did not reach the battle till his comrades were on their backs. Him we took to the *Marie Rose*, because he was your man. The others were of no worth, so we threw them into the sea."

"The quick and the dead?"

"Every man of them."

"It was an evil deed."

Aylward shrugged his shoulders. "I tried to save one boy," said he; "but Cock Badding would not have it, and he had Black Simon and the others at his back. 'It is the custom of the Narrow Seas,' said they: 'To-day for them; to-morrow for us.' Then they tore him from his hold and cast him screaming over the side. By my hilt! I have no love for the sea and its customs, so I care not if I never set foot on it again when it has once borne me back to England."

"Nay, there are great happenings upon the sea, and many worthy people to be found upon ships," said Nigel. "In all parts, if one goes far enough upon the water, one would find those whom it would be joy to meet. If one crosses over the Narrow Sea, as we have done, we come on the French who are so needful to us; for how else would we win worship? Or if you go south, then in time one may hope to come to the land of the unbelievers, where there is fine skirmishing and much honour for him who will venture his person. Bethink you, archer, how fair a life it must be when one can ride forth in search of advancement with some hope of finding many debonair cavaliers upon the same quest, and then if one be over-

borne one has died for the faith, and the gates of heaven are open before you. So also the sea to the north is a help to him who seeks honour, for it leads to the country of the Eastlanders and to those parts where the heathen still dwell who turn their faces from the blessed Gospel. There also a man might find some small deeds to do, and by Saint Paul ! Aylward, if the French hold the truce and the good Sir John permits us, I would fain go down into those parts. The sea is a good friend to the cavalier, for it takes him where he may fulfil his vows."

Aylward shook his head, for his memories were too recent ; but he said nothing, because at this instant the door opened and Chandos entered. With joy in his face he stepped forward to the couch and took Nigel's hand in his. Then he whispered a word in Aylward's ear, who hurried from the room.

" *Pardieu !* this is a good sight," said the knight. " I trust that you will soon be on your feet again."

" I crave your pardon, my honoured lord, that I have been absent from your side," said Nigel.

" In truth my heart was sore for you, Nigel ; for you have missed such a night as comes seldom in any man's life. All went even as we had planned. The postern gate was opened, and a party made their way in ; but we awaited them, and all were taken or slain. But the greater part of the French had remained without upon the plain of Nieullet, so we took horse and went out against them. When we drew near them they were surprised, but they made good cheer among themselves, calling out to each other : ' If we fly we lose all. It is better to fight on, in the hopes that the day may be ours.' This was heard by our people in the van, who cried out to them : ' By Saint George ! you speak truth. Evil befall him who thinks of flying ! ' So they held their ground like worthy people for the space of an hour, and there were many there whom it is always good to meet : Sir Geoffrey himself, and Sir Pepin de Werre, with Sir John de Landas, old Ballieul of the Yellow Tooth, and his brother Hector

the Leopard. But above all Sir Eustace de Ribeaumont was at great pains to meet us worthily, and he was at handstrokes with the king for a long time. Then, when we had slain or taken them all, the prisoners were brought to a feast which was ready for them, and the knights of England waited upon them at the table and made good cheer with them. And all this, Nigel, we owe to you."

The squire flushed with pleasure at the words. "Nay, most honoured lord, it was but a small thing which I have been able to do. But I thank God and our Lady that I have done some service, since it has pleased you to take me with you to the wars. Should it chance——"

But the words were cut short upon Nigel's lips, and he lay back with amazed eyes staring from his pallid face. The door of his little chamber had opened, and who was this, the tall, stately man with the noble presence, the high forehead, the long, handsome face, the dark, brooding eyes —who but the noble Edward of England ?

"Ha, my little cock of Tilford Bridge, I still bear you in mind," said he. "Right glad I was to hear that you had found your wits again, and I trust that I have not helped to make you take leave of them once more."

Nigel's stare of astonishment had brought a smile to the king's lips. Now the squire stammered forth some halting words of gratitude at the honour done to him.

"Nay, not a word," said the king. "But in sooth it is a joy to my heart to see the son of my old comrade Eustace Loring carrying himself so bravely. Had this boat got before us with news of our coming, then all our labour had been in vain, and no Frenchman ventured to Calais that night. But, above all, I thank you for that you have delivered into my hands one whom I had vowed to punish in that he has caused us more scathe by fouler means than any living man. Twice have I sworn that Peter the Red Ferret shall hang, for all his noble blood and coat-armour, if ever he should fall into my hands. Now at last his time has come ; but I would not put him to death until you, who had taken him, could be there to

see it done. Nay, thank me not, for I could do no less, seeing that it is to you that I owe him."

But it was not thanks which Nigel was trying to utter. It was hard to frame his words, and yet they must be said.

"Sire," he murmured, "it ill becomes me to cross your royal will——"

The dark Plantagenet wrath gathered upon the king's high brow and gloomed in his fierce, deep-set eyes.

"By God's dignity! no man has ever crossed it yet and lived unscathed. How now, young sir, what mean such words, to which we are little wont? Have a care, for this is no light thing which you venture."

"Sire," said Nigel, "in all matters in which I am a free man I am ever your faithful liege, but some things there are which may not be done."

"How?" cried the king. "In spite of my will?"

"In spite of your will, sire," said Nigel, sitting up on his couch, with white face and blazing eyes.

"By the Virgin!" the angry king thundered, "we are come to a pretty pass! You have been held too long at home, young man. The overstabled horse will kick. The unweathered hawk will fly at check. See to it, Master Chandos! He is thine to break, and I hold you to it that you break him. And what is it that Edward of England may not do, Master Loring?"

Nigel faced the king with a face as grim as his own. "You may not put to death the Red Ferret."

"*Pardieu!* And why?"

"Because he is not thine to slay, sire. Because he is mine. Because I promised him his life, and it is not for you, king though you be, to constrain a man of gentle blood to break his plighted word and lose his honour."

Chandos laid his soothing hand upon his squire's shoulder.

"Excuse him, sire; he is weak from his wounds," said he. "Perhaps we have stayed over-long, for the leech has ordered repose."

But the angry king was not easily to be appeased. "I

am not wont to be so browbeat," said he, hotly. "This is your squire, Master John. How comes it that you can stand there and listen to his pert talk, and say no word to chide him? Is this how you guide your household? Have you not taught him that every promise given is subject to the king's consent, and that with him only lie the springs of life and death? If he is sick, you, at least, are hale. Why stand you there in silence?"

"My liege," said Chandos, gravely, "I have served you for over a score of years, and have shed my blood through as many wounds in your cause, so that you should not take my words amiss. But indeed, I should feel myself to be no true man if I did not tell you that my Squire Nigel, though perchance he has spoken more bluntly than becomes him, is none the less right in this matter, and that you are wrong. For bethink you, sire——"

"Enough!" cried the king, more furious than ever. "Like master, like man, and I might have known why it is that this saucy squire dares to bandy words with his sovereign lord. He does but give out what he hath taken in. John, John, you grow overbold. But this I tell you, and you also, young man, that as God is my help, ere the sun has set this night the Red Ferret will hang as a warning to all spies and traitors from the highest tower of Calais, that every ship upon the Narrow Seas, and every man for ten miles round may see him as he swings and know how heavy is the hand of the English king. Do you bear it in mind, lest you also may feel its weight!" With a glare like an angry lion he walked from the room, and the iron-clamped door clanged loudly behind him.

Chandos and Nigel looked ruefully at each other. Then the knight patted his squire upon his bandaged head.

"You have carried yourself right well, Nigel. I could not wish for better. Fear not. All will be well."

"My fair and honoured lord," cried Nigel, "I am heavy at heart, for indeed I could do no other, and yet I have brought trouble upon you."

"Nay, the clouds will soon pass. If he does indeed

slay this Frenchman, you have done all that lay within your power, and your mind may rest easy."

"I pray that it will rest easy in Paradise," said Nigel; "for at the hour that I hear that I am dishonoured and my prisoner slain, I tear this bandage from my head and so end all things. I will not live when once my word is broken."

"Nay, fair son, you take this thing too heavily," said Chandos, with a grave face. "When a man has done all he may there remains no dishonour; but the king hath a kind heart for all his hot head, and it may be that if I see him I will prevail upon him. Bethink you how he swore to hang the six burghers of this very town, and yet he pardoned them. So keep a high heart, fair son, and I will come with good news ere evening."

For three hours, as the sinking sun traced the shadow higher and ever higher upon the chamber wall, Nigel tossed feverishly upon his couch, his ears straining for the foot-fall of Aylward or of Chandos, bringing news of the fate of the prisoner. At last the door flew open, and there before him stood the one man whom he least expected, and yet would most gladly have seen. It was the Red Ferret himself, free and joyous.

With swift furtive steps he was across the room and on his knees beside the couch, kissing the pendent hand.

"You have saved me, most noble sir!" he cried. "The gallows was fixed and the rope slung, when the good Lord Chandos told the king that you would die by your own hand if I were slain. 'Curse this mule-headed squire!' he cried. 'In God's name let him have his prisoner, and let him do what he will with him so long as he troubles me no more!' So here I have come, fair sir, to ask you what I shall do."

"I pray you to sit beside me and be at your ease," said Nigel. "In a few words I will tell you what I would have you do. Your armour I will keep that I may have some remembrance of my good fortune in meeting so valiant a gentleman. We are of a size, and I make little

doubt that I can wear it. Of ransom I would ask a thousand crowns."

"Nay, nay!" cried the Ferret. "It would be a sad thing if a man of my position was worth less than five thousand."

"A thousand will suffice, fair sir, to pay my charges for the war. You will not again play the spy, nor do us harm until the truce is broken."

"That I will swear."

"And lastly there is a journey that you shall make."

The Frenchman's face lengthened. "Where you order I must go," said he; "but I pray you that it is not to the Holy Land."

"Nay," said Nigel; "but it is to a land which is holy to me. You will make your way back to Southampton."

"I know it well. I helped to burn it down some years ago."

"I rede you to say nothing of that matter when you get there. You will then journey as though to London until you come to a fair town named Guildford."

"I have heard of it. The king hath a hunt there."

"The same. You will then ask for a house named Cosford, two leagues from the town on the side of a long hill."

"I will bear it in mind."

"At Cosford you will see a good knight named Sir John Buttesthorn, and you will ask to have speech with his daughter, the Lady Mary."

"I will do so; and what shall I say to the Lady Mary, who lives at Cosford on the slope of a long hill two leagues from the fair town of Guildford?"

"Say only that I sent my greeting, and that Saint Catharine has been my friend—only that and nothing more. And now leave me, I pray you, for my head is weary and I would fain have sleep."

Thus it came about that a month later on the eve of the Feast of Saint Matthew, the Lady Mary, as she walked from Cosford gates, met with a strange horseman, richly clad, a serving-man behind him, looking shrewdly

about him with quick blue eyes, which twinkled from a red and freckled face. At sight of her he doffed his hat and reined his horse.

"This house should be Cosford," said he. "Are you by chance the Lady Mary who dwells there?"

The lady bowed her proud dark head.

"Then," said he, "Squire Nigel Loring sends you greeting and tells you that Saint Catharine has been his friend." Then, turning to his servant, he cried: "Heh, Raoul, our task is done! Your master is a free man once more. Come, lad, come, the nearest port to France! Holà! Holà! Holà! And so without a word more the two, master and man, set spurs to their horses and galloped like madmen down the long slope of Hindhead, until as she looked after them they were but two dark dots in the distance, waist high in the ling and the bracken.

She turned back to the house, a smile upon her face. Nigel had sent her greeting. A Frenchman had brought it. His bringing it had made him a free man. And Saint Catharine had been Nigel's friend. It was at her shrine that he had sworn that three deeds should be done ere he should set eyes upon her again. In the privacy of her room the Lady Mary sank upon her prie-dieu and poured forth the thanks of her heart to the Virgin that one deed was accomplished; but even as she did so her joy was overcast by the thought of those two others which lay before him.

## 16. *How the King's Court feasted in Calais Castle*

IT was a bright sunshiny morning when Nigel found himself at last able to leave his turret chamber and to walk upon the rampart of the castle. There was a brisk northern wind, heavy and wet with the salt of the sea, and he felt, as he turned his face to it, fresh life and strength surging in his blood and bracing his limbs. He took his

hand from Aylward's supporting arm and stood with his cap off, leaning on the rampart and breathing in the cool strong air. Far off upon the distant sky-line, half hidden by the heave of the waves, was the low white fringe of cliffs which skirted England. Between him and them lay the broad blue Channel, seamed and flecked with flashing foam, for a sharp sea was running and the few ships in sight were labouring heavily. Nigel's eyes traversed the widespread view, rejoicing in the change from the grey wall of his cramped chamber. Finally they settled upon a strange object at his very feet.

It was a long trumpet-shaped engine of leather and iron bolted into a rude wooden stand and fitted with wheels. Beside it lay a heap of metal slugs and lumps of stone. The end of the machine was raised and pointed over the battlement. Behind it stood an iron box which Nigel opened. It was filled with a black coarse powder, like gritty charcoal.

"By Saint Paul!" said he, passing his hands over the engine, "I have heard men talk of these things, but never before have I seen one. It is none other than one of those wondrous new-made bombards."

"In sooth it is even as you say," Aylward answered, looking at it with contempt and dislike in his face. "I have seen them here upon the ramparts, and have also exchanged a buffet or two with him who had charge of them. He was jack-fool enough to think that with this leather pipe he could outshoot the best archer in Christendom. I lent him a cuff on the ear that laid him across his foolish engine."

"It is a fearsome thing," said Nigel, who had stooped to examine it. "We live in strange times when such things can be made. It is loosed by fire, is it not, which springs from the black dust?"

"By my hilt! fair sir, I know not. And yet I call to mind that ere we fell out this foolish bombardman did say something of the matter. The fire-dust is within and so also is the ball. Then you take more dust from this iron

box and place it in the hole at the farther end—so. It is now ready. I have never seen one fired, but I wot that this one could be fired now."

"It makes a strange sound, archer, does it not?" said Nigel, wistfully.

"So I have heard, fair sir—even as the bow twangs, so it also has a sound when you loose it."

"There is no one to hear, since we are alone upon the rampart, nor can it do scathe since it points to sea. I pray you to loose it and I will listen to the sound." He bent over the bombard with an attentive ear, while Aylward, stooping his earnest brown face over the touch-hole, scraped away diligently with a flint and steel. A moment later both he and Nigel were seated some distance off upon the ground, while amid the roar of the discharge and the thick cloud of smoke they had a vision of the long black snake-like engine shooting back upon the recoil. For a minute or more they were struck motionless with astonishment, while the reverberations died away and the smoke-wreaths curled slowly up to the blue heavens.

"Good lack!" cried Nigel at last, picking himself up and looking round him. "Good lack, and Heaven be my aid! I thank the Virgin that all stands as it did before. I thought that the castle had fallen."

"Such a bull's bellow I have never heard," cried Aylward, rubbing his injured limbs. "One could hear it from Frensham pond to Guildford Castle. I would not touch one again—not for a hide of the best land in Puttenham!"

"It may fare ill with your own hide, archer, if you do," said an angry voice behind them. Chandos had stepped from the open door of the corner turret and stood looking at them with a harsh gaze. Presently, as the matter was made clear to him, his face relaxed into a smile.

"Hasten to the warden, archer, and tell him how it befell. You will have the castle and the town in arms. I know not what the king may think of so sudden an alarm. And you, Nigel, how in the name of the saints came you to play the child like this?"

"I knew not its power, fair lord."

"By my soul, Nigel, I think that none of us know its power. I can see the day when all that we delight in, the splendour and glory of war, may all go down before that which beats through the plate of steel as easily as the leathern jacket. I have bestrode my war-horse in my armour and have looked down at the sooty, smoky bombardman beside me, and I have thought that perhaps I was the last of the old and he the first of the new; that there would come a time when he and his engines would sweep you and me and the rest of us from the field."

"But not yet, I trust, honoured sir?"

"No, not yet, Nigel. You are still in time to win your spurs even as your fathers did. How is your strength?"

"I am ready for any task, my good and honoured lord."

"It is well, for work awaits us—good work, pressing work, work of peril and of honour. Your eyes shine and your face flushes, Nigel. I live my own youth over again as I look at you. Know then that though there is truce with the French here, there is not truce in Brittany, where the houses of Blois and of Montfort still struggle for the dukedom. Half Brittany fights for one, and half for the other. The French have taken up the cause of Blois, and we of Montfort, and it is such a war that many a great leader, such as Sir Walter Manny, has first earned his name there. Of late the war has gone against us, and the bloody hands of the Rohans, of Gap-tooth Beaumanoir, of Oliver the Flesher and others have been heavy upon our people. The last tidings have been of disaster, and the king's soul is dark with wrath for that his friend and comrade Gilles de St. Pol has been done to death in the castle of La Brohinière. He will send succours to the country, and we go at their head. How like you that, Nigel?"

"My honoured lord, what could I ask for better?"

"Then have your harness ready, for we start within the week. Our path by land is blocked by the French, and we go by sea. This night the king gives a banquet ere he

returns to England, and your place is behind my chair. Be in my chamber that you may help me to dress, and so we will go the hall together."

With satin and samite, with velvet and with fur, the noble Chandos was dressed for the king's feast, and Nigel too had donned his best silk jupon, faced with the five scarlet roses, that he might wait upon him. In the great hall of Calais Castle the tables were set, a high table for the lords, a second one for the less distinguished knights, and a third at which the squires might feast when their masters were seated.

Never had Nigel in his simple life at Tilford pictured a scene of such pomp and wondrous luxury. The grim grey walls were covered from ceiling to floor with priceless tapestry of Arras, where hart, hounds and huntsmen circled the great hall with one long living image of the chase. Over the principal table drooped a line of banners, and beneath them rows of emblazoned shields upon the wall carried the arms of the high noblemen who sat beneath. The red light of cressets and of torches burned upon the badges of the great captains of England. The lions and lilies shone over the high dorseret chair in the centre, and the same august device marked with the cadency label indicated the seat of the prince, while glowing to right and to left were the long lines of noble insignia honoured in peace and terrible in war. There shone the gold and sable of Manny, the engrailed cross of Suffolk, the red chevron of Stafford, the scarlet and gold of Audley, the blue lion rampant of the Percies, the silver swallows of Arundel, the red roebuck of the Montacutes, the star of the de Veres, the silver scallops of Russell, the purple lion of de Lacy, and the black crosses of Clinton.

A friendly squire at Nigel's elbow whispered the names of the famous warriors beneath.

"You are young Loring of Tilford, the squire of Chandos, are you not?" said he. "My name is Delves, and I come from Doddington in Cheshire. I am the squire of Sir James Audley, yonder round-backed man

with the dark face and close-cropped beard, who hath the Saracen head as a crest above him."

"I have heard of him as a man of great valour," said Nigel, gazing at him with interest.

"Indeed, you may well say so, Master Loring. He is the bravest knight in England, and in Christendom also, as I believe. No man hath done such deeds of valour."

Nigel looked at his new acquaintance with hope in his eyes.

"You speak as it becomes you to speak when you uphold your own master," said he. "For the same reason, Master Delves, and in no spirit of ill-will to you, it behoves me to tell you that he is not to be compared in name or fame with the noble knight on whom I wait. Should you hold otherwise, then surely we can debate the matter in whatever way or time may please you best."

Delves smiled good-humouredly. "Nay, be not so hot," said he. "Had you upheld any other knight, save perhaps Sir Walter Manny, I had taken you at your word, and your master or mine would have had place for a new squire. But indeed it is only truth that no knight is second to Chandos, nor would I draw my sword to lower his pride of place. Ha, Sir James' cup is low! I must see to it!" He darted off, a flagon of Gascony in his hand. "The king hath had good news to-night," he continued when he returned. "I have not seen him in so merry a mind since the night when we took the French-men and he laid his pearl chaplet upon the head of de Ribeaumont. See how he laughs, and the prince also. That laugh bodes someone little good, or I am the more mistaken. Have a care! Sir John's plate is empty."

It was Nigel's turn to dart away; but ever in the intervals he returned to the corner whence he could look down the hall and listen to the words of the older squire. Delves was a short, thick-set man past middle age, weather-beaten and scarred, with a rough manner and bearing which showed that he was more at his ease in a

tent than a hall. But ten years of service had taught him much, and Nigel listened eagerly to his talk.

"Indeed the king hath some good tidings," he continued. "See now, he has whispered it to Chandos and to Manny. Manny spreads it on to Sir Reginald Cobham, and he to Robert Knolles, each smiling like the devil over a friar."

"Which is Sir Robert Knolles?" asked Nigel, with interest. "I have heard much of him and his deeds."

"He is the tall hard-faced man in yellow silk, he with the hairless cheeks and the split lip. He is little older than yourself, and his father was a cobbler in Chester, yet he has already won the golden spurs. See how he dabs his great hand in the dish and hands forth the gobbets. He is more used to a camp-kettle than a silver plate. The big man with the black beard is Sir Bartholomew Berghersh, whose brother is the Abbot of Beaulieu. Haste, haste! for the boar's head is come and the plates to be cleaned."

The table manners of our ancestors at this period would have furnished to the modern eye the strangest mixture of luxury and barbarism. Forks were still unknown, and the courtesy fingers, the index and the middle of the left hand, took their place. To use any others was accounted the worst of manners. A crowd of dogs lay among the rushes growling at each other and quarrelling over the gnawed bones which were thrown to them by the feasters. A slice of coarse bread served usually as a plate, but the king's own high table was provided with silver platters, which were wiped by the squire or page after each course. On the other hand, the table-linen was costly, and the courses, served with a pomp and dignity now unknown, comprised such a variety of dishes and such complex marvels of cookery as no modern banquet could show. Besides all our domestic animals and every kind of game, such strange delicacies as hedgehogs, bustards, porpoises, squirrels, bitterns, and cranes lent variety to the feast.

Each new course, heralded by a flourish of silver

trumpets, was borne in by liveried servants walking two and two, with rubicund marshals strutting in front and behind bearing white wands in their hands, not only as badges of their office, but also as weapons with which to repel any impertinent inroad upon the dishes in the journey from the kitchen to the hall. Boars' heads, enarmed and endored with gilt tusks and flaming mouths, were followed by wondrous pasties moulded to the shape of ships, castles and other devices, with sugar seamen or soldiers who lost their own bodies in their fruitless defence against the hungry attack. Finally came the great nef, a silver vessel upon wheels laden with fruit and sweetmeats which rolled with its luscious cargo down the line of guests. Flagons of Gascony, of Rhine wine, of Canary and of Rochelle were held in readiness by the attendants; but the age, though luxurious, was not drunken, and the sober habits of the Norman had happily prevailed over the licence of those Saxon banquets where no guest might walk from the table without a slur upon his host. Honour and hardihood go ill with a shaking hand or a blurred eye.

While wine, fruit, and spices were handed round the high tables the squires had been served in turn at the farther end of the hall. Meanwhile round the king there had gathered a group of statesmen and soldiers, talking eagerly among themselves. The Earl of Stafford, the Earl of Warwick, the Earl of Arundel, Lord Beauchamp and Lord Neville were assembled at the back of his chair, with Lord Percy and Lord Mowbray at either side. The little group blazed with golden chains and jewelled chaplets, flame-coloured paltocks and purple tunics.

Of a sudden the king said something over his shoulder to Sir William de Pakyngton the herald, who advanced and stood by the royal chair. He was a tall and noble-featured man, with long grizzled beard which rippled down to the gold-linked belt girdling his many-coloured tabard. On his head he had placed the heraldic barret-cap which bespoke his dignity, and he slowly raised his white wand high in the air, while a great hush fell upon the hall.

"My lords of England," said he, "knight bannerets, knights, squires, and all others here present of gentle birth and coat-armour, know that your dread and sovereign lord, Edward, King of England and of France, bids me give you greeting and commands you to come hither that he may have speech with you."

In an instant the tables were deserted and the whole company had clustered in front of the king's chair. Those who had sat on either side of him crowded inward, so that his tall dark figure upreared itself amid the dense circle of his guests.

With a flush upon his olive cheeks and with pride smouldering in his dark eyes, he looked round him at the eager faces of the men who had been his comrades from Sluys and Cadsand to Crécy and Calais. They caught fire from that warlike gleam in his masterful gaze, and a sudden wild, fierce shout pealed up to the vaulted ceiling, a soldierly thanks for what was passed and a promise for what was to come. The king's teeth gleamed in a quick smile, and his large white hand played with the jewelled dagger in his belt.

"By the splendour of God!" said he, in a loud clear voice, "I have little doubt that you will rejoice with me this night, for such tidings have come to my ears as may well bring joy to every one of you. You know well that our ships have suffered great scathe from the Spaniards, who for many years have slain without grace or ruth all of my people who have fallen into their cruel hands. Of late they have sent their ships into Flanders, and thirty great cogs and galleys lie now at Sluys well-filled with archers and men-at-arms and ready in all ways for battle. I have it to-day from a sure hand that, having taken their merchandise aboard, these ships will sail upon the next Sunday, and will make their way through our Narrow Sea. We have for a great time been long-suffering to these people, for which they have done us many contraries and despites, growing ever more arrogant as we grow more patient. It is in my mind therefore that we hie us to-

morrow to Winchelsea, where we have twenty ships, and make ready to sally out upon them as they pass. May God and Saint George defend the right!"

A second shout, far louder and fiercer than the first, came like a thunderclap after the king's words. It was the bay of a fierce pack to their trusted huntsman.

Edward laughed again as he looked round at the gleaming eyes, the waving arms, and the flushed joyful faces of his liegemen.

"Who hath fought against these Spaniards?" he asked. "Is there anyone here who can tell us what manner of men they be?"

A dozen hands went up into the air; but the king turned to the Earl of Suffolk at his elbow.

"You have fought them, Thomas?" said he.

"Yes, sire, I was in the great sea-fight eight years ago at the Island of Guernsey, when Lord Lewis of Spain held the sea against the Earl of Pembroke."

"How found you them, Thomas?"

"Very excellent people, sire, and no man could ask for better. On every ship they have a hundred crossbowmen of Genoa, the best in the world, and their spearmen also are very hardy men. They would throw great cantles of iron from the tops of the masts, and many of our people met their death through it. If we can bar their way in the Narrow Sea, then there will be much hope of honour for all of us."

"Your words are very welcome, Thomas," said the king, "and I make no doubt that they will show themselves to be very worthy of what we prepare for them. To you I give a ship, that you may have the handling of it. You also, my dear son, shall have a ship, that ever more honour may be thine."

"I thank you, my fair and sweet father," said the prince, with joy flushing his handsome boyish face.

"The leading ship shall be mine. But you shall have one, Walter Manny, and you, Stafford, and you, Arundel, and you, Audley, and you, Sir Thomas Holland, and you,

Brocas, and you, Berkeley, and you, Reginald. The rest shall be awarded at Winchelsea, whither we sail to-morrow. Nay, John, why do you pluck so at my sleeve ? "

Chandos was leaning forward, with an anxious face. " Surely, my honoured lord, I have not served you so long and so faithfully that you should forget me now. Is there, then, no ship for me ? "

The king smiled, but shook his head. " Nay, John, have I not given you two hundred archers and a hundred men-at-arms to take with you into Brittany ? I trust that your ships will be lying in Saint Malo Bay ere the Spaniards are abreast of Winchelsea. What more would you have, old war-dog ? Wouldst be in two battles at once ? "

" I would be at your side, my liege, when the lion banner is in the wind once more. I have ever been there. Why should you cast me now ? I ask little, dear lord—a galley, a balinger, even a pinnace, so that I may only be there."

" Nay, John, you shall come. I cannot find it in my heart to say you nay. I will find you place in my own ship, that you may indeed be by my side."

Chandos stooped and kissed the king's hand. " My squire ? " he asked.

The king's brows knotted into a frown. " Nay, let him go to Brittany with the others," said he, harshly. " I wonder, John, that you should bring back to my memory this youth whose pertness is too fresh that I should forget it. But someone must go to Brittany in your stead, for the matter presses and our people are hard put to it to hold their own." He cast his eyes over the assembly, and they rested upon the stern features of Sir Robert Knolles.

" Sir Robert," he said, " though you are young in years you are already old in war, and I have heard that you are as prudent in council as you are valiant in the field. To you I commit the charge of this venture to Brittany in place of Sir John Chandos, who will follow thither when

our work has been done upon the waters. Three ships lie in Calais port and three hundred men are ready to your hand. Sir John will tell you what our mind is in the matter. And now, my friends and good comrades, you will haste you each to his own quarters, and you will make swiftly such preparations as are needful, for, as God is my aid, I will sail with you to Winchelsea to-morrow!"

Beckoning to Chandos, Manny and a few of his chosen leaders, the king led them away to an inner chamber, where they might discuss the plans for the future. At the same time the assembly broke up, the knights in silence and dignity, the squires in mirth and noise, but all joyful at heart for the thought of the great days which lay before them.

## 17. *The Spaniards on the Sea*

MORNING had not yet dawned when Nigel was in the chamber of Chandos preparing him for his departure and listening to the last cheery words of advice and direction from his noble master. That same morning, before the sun was halfway up the heaven, the king's great nef *Philippa*, bearing within it the most of those present at his banquet the night before, set its huge sail, adorned with the lions and the lilies, and turned its brazen beak for England. Behind it went five smaller cogs crammed with squires, archers, and men-at-arms.

Nigel and his companions lined the ramparts of the castle and waved their caps as the bluff, burly vessels, with drums beating and trumpets clanging, a hundred knightly pennons streaming from their decks and the red cross of England over all, rolled slowly out to the open sea. Then, when they had watched them until they were hull down, they turned, with hearts heavy at being left behind, to make ready for their own more distant venture.

It took them four days of hard wo k ere their preparations were complete, for many were the needs of a small

force sailing to a strange country. Three ships had been left to them—the cog *Thomas* of Romney, the *Grace Dieu* of Hythe, and the *Basilisk* of Southampton, into each of which one hundred men were stowed, besides the thirty seamen who formed the crew. In the hold were forty horses, among them Pommers, much wearied by his long idleness, and homesick for the slopes of Surrey, where his great limbs might find the work he craved. Then the food and the water, the bow-staves and the sheaves of arrows, the horseshoes, the nails, the hammers, the knives, the axes, the ropes, the vats of hay, the green fodder, and a score of other things were packed aboard. Always by the side of the ships stood the stern young knight Sir Robert, checking, testing, watching, and controlling, saying little, for he was a man of few words, but with his eyes, his hands, and if need be his heavy dog-whip, wherever they were wanted.

The seamen of the *Basilisk*, being from a free port, had the old feud against the men of the Cinque Ports, who were looked upon by the other mariners of England as being unduly favoured by the king. A ship of the West Country could scarce meet with one from the Narrow Seas without blood flowing. Hence sprang sudden broils on the quay side, when with yell and blow the *Thomases* and *Grace Dieus*, Saint Leonard on their lips and murder in their hearts, would fall upon the *Basilisks*. Then amid the whirl of cudgels and the clash of knives would spring the tiger figure of the young leader, lashing mercilessly to right and left like a tamer among his wolves, until he had beaten them howling back to their work. Upon the morning of the fourth day all was ready, and the ropes being cast off, the three little ships were warped down the harbour by their own pinnaces until they were swallowed up in the swirling folds of a Channel mist.

Though small in numbers it was no mean force which Edward had despatched to succour the hard-pressed English garrisons in Brittany. There was scarce a man among them who was not an old soldier, and their leaders

were men of note in council and in war. Knolles flew his flag of the black raven aboard the *Basilisk*. With him were Nigel and his own squire, John Hawthorn. Of his hundred men, forty were Yorkshire dalesmen and forty were men of Lincoln, all noted archers, with old Wat of Carlisle, a grizzled veteran of border warfare, to lead them.

Already Aylward by his skill and strength had won his way to an under-officership among them, and shared with Long Ned Widdington, a huge North Countryman, the reputation of coming next to famous Wat Carlisle in all that makes an archer. The men-at-arms, too, were war-hardened soldiers, with Black Simon of Norwich, the same who had sailed from Winchelsea, to lead them. With his heart filled with hatred for the French who had slain all who were dear to him, he followed like a bloodhound over land and sea to any spot where he might glut his vengeance. Such also were the men who sailed in the other ships—Cheshire men from the Welsh borders in the cog *Thomas*, and Cumberland men, used to Scottish warfare, in the *Grace Dieu*.

Sir James Astley hung his shield of cinquefoil ermine over the quarter of the *Thomas*. Lord Thomas Percy, a cadet of Alnwick, famous already for the high spirit of that house which for ages was the bar upon the landward gate of England, showed his blue lion rampant as leader of the *Grace Dieu*. Such was the goodly company Saint Malo bound, who warped from Calais harbour to plunge into the thick reek of a Channel mist.

A slight breeze blew from the eastward, and the high-ended, round-bodied craft rolled slowly down the Channel. The mist rose a little at times, so that they had sight of each other dipping and rising upon a sleek, oily sea, but again it would sink down, settling over the top, shrouding the great yard, and finally frothing over the deck until even the water alongside had vanished from their view and they were afloat on a little raft in an ocean of vapour. A thin cold rain was falling, and the archers were crowded

under the shelter of the overhanging poop and forecastle, where some spent the hours at dice, some in sleep, and many in trimming their arrows or polishing their weapons.

At the farther end, seated on a barrel as a throne of honour, with trays and boxes of feathers around him, was Bartholomew the bowyer and fletcher, a fat, bald-headed man, whose task it was to see that every man's tackle was as it should be, and who had the privilege of selling such extras as they might need. A group of archers with their staves and quivers filed before him with complaints or requests, while half a dozen of the seniors gathered at his back and listened with grinning faces to his comments and rebukes.

"Canst not string it?" he was saying to a young bowman. "Then surely the string is overshort or the stave overlong. It could not by chance be the fault of thy own baby arms more fit to draw on thy hosen than to dress a warbow. Thou lazy lurdan, thus is it strung!" He seized the stave by the centre in his right hand, leaned the end on the inside of his right foot, and then, pulling the upper nock down with the left hand, slid the eye of the string easily into place. "Now I pray thee to unstring it again," handing it to the bowman.

The youth, with an effort, did so; but he was too slow in disengaging his fingers, and the string sliding down with a snap from the upper nock caught and pinched them sorely against the stave. A roar of laughter, like the clap of a wave, swept down the deck as the luckless bowman danced and wrung his hand.

"Serve thee well right, thou redeless fool!" growled the old bowyer. "So fine a bow is wasted in such hands. How now, Samkin? I can teach you little of your trade, I trow. Here is a bow dressed as it should be; but it would, as you say, be the better for a white band to mark the true nocking point in the centre of this red wrapping of silk. Leave it and I will tend to it anon. And you, Wat? A fresh head on yonder stele? Lord, that a man should carry four trades under one hat, and be bowyer,

fletcher, stringer, and head-maker ! Four men's work for old Bartholomew and one man's pay ! "

" Nay, say no more about that," growled an old wizened bowman, with a brown parchment skin and little beady eyes. " It is better in these days to mend a bow than to bend one. You who never looked a Frenchman in the face are pricked off for ninepence a day, and I who have fought five stricken fields, can earn but fourpence."

" It is in my mind, John of Tuxford, that you have looked in the face more pots of mead than Frenchmen," said the old bowyer. " I am swinking from dawn to night, while you are guzzling in an ale-stake. How now, youngster ? Overbowed ? Put your bow in the tiller. It draws at sixty pounds—not a pennyweight too much for a man of your inches. Lay more body to it, lad, and it will come to you. If your bow be not stiff, how can you hope for a twenty-score flight ? Feathers ? Aye, plenty, and of the best. Here are peacock at a groat each. Surely a dandy archer like you, Tom Beverley, with gold earrings in your ears, would have no feathering but peacocks ? "

" So the shaft fly straight, I care not of the feather," said the bowman, a tall young Yorkshireman, counting out pennies on the palm of his horny hand.

" Grey goose-feathers are but a farthing. These on the left are a halfpenny, for they are of the wild-goose, and the second feather of a fenny goose is worth more than the pinion of a tame one. These in the brass tray are dropped feathers, and a dropped feather is better than a plucked one. Buy a score of these, lad, and cut them saddle-backed or swine-backed, the one for a dead shaft and the other for a smooth flyer, and no man in the company will swing a better-fletched quiver over his shoulder."

It chanced that the opinion of the bowyer on this and other points differed from that of Long Ned of Widdington, a surly straw-bearded Yorkshireman, who had listened with a sneering face to his counsel. Now he broke in suddenly upon the bowyer's talk.

" You would do better to sell bows than to try to teach

others how to use them," said he ; " for indeed, Bartholomew, that head of thine has no more sense within it than it has hairs without. If you had drawn string for as many months as I have years you would know that a straight-cut feather flies smoother than a swine-backed, and pity it is that these young bowmen have none to teach them better ! "

This attack upon his professional knowledge touched the old bowyer on the raw. His fat face became suffused with blood and his eyes glared with fury as he turned upon the archer.

" You seven-foot barrel of lies ! " he cried. " All-hallows be my aid, and I will teach you to open your slabbing mouth against me ! Pluck forth your sword and stand out on yonder deck, that we may see who is the man of us twain. May I never twirl a shaft over my thumb-nail if I do not put Bartholomew's mark upon your thick head ! "

A score of rough voices joined at once in the quarrel, some upholding the bowyer and others taking the part of the North Countryman. A red-headed Dalesman snatched up a sword, but was felled by a blow from the fist of his neighbour. Instantly, with a buzz like a swarm of angry hornets, the bowmen were out on the deck ; but ere a blow was struck Knolles was among them with granite face and eyes of fire.

" Stand apart, I say ! I will warrant you enough fighting to cool your blood ere you see England once more. Loring, Hawthorn, cut any man down who raises his hand. Have you aught to say, you fox-haired rascal ? " He thrust his face within two inches of that of the red man who had first seized his sword. The fellow shrank back, cowed, from his fierce eyes. " Now stint your noise, all of you, and stretch your long ears. Trumpeter, blow once more ! "

A bugle call had been sounded every quarter of an hour, so as to keep in touch with the other two vessels, who were invisible in the fog. Now the high clear note rang out once more, the call of a fierce sea-creature to its mates,

but no answer came back from the thick wall which pent them in. Again and again they called, and again and again with bated breath they waited for an answer.

"Where is the shipman?" asked Knolles. "What is your name, fellow? Do you dare call yourself master-mariner?"

"My name is Nat Dennis, fair sir," said the grey-bearded old seaman. "It is thirty years since first I showed my cartel and blew trumpet for a crew at the water-gate of Southampton. If any man may call himself master-mariner, it is surely I."

"Where are our two ships?"

"Nay, sir, who can say in this fog?"

"Fellow, it was your place to hold them together."

"I have but the eyes God gave me, fair sir, and they cannot see through a cloud."

"Had it been fair, I who am a soldier could have kept them in company. Since it was foul, we looked to you, who are called a mariner, to do so. You have not done it. You have lost two of my ships ere the venture is begun."

"Nay, fair sir, I pray you to consider——"

"Enough words!" said Knolles sternly. "Words will not give me back my two hundred men. Unless I find them before I come to Saint Malo, I swear by Saint Wilfrid of Ripon that it will be an evil day for you! Enough! Go forth, and do what you may!"

For five hours, with a light breeze behind them, they lurched through the heavy fog, the cold rain still matting their beards and shining on their faces. Sometimes they could see a circle of tossing water for a bow-shot or so in each direction, and then the wreaths would crawl in upon them once more and bank them thickly round. They had long ceased to blow the trumpet for their missing comrades, but had hopes when clear weather came to find them still in sight. By the shipman's reckoning they were now about midway between the two shores.

Nigel was leaning against the bulwarks, his thoughts

away in the dingle at Cosford and out on the heather-clad slopes of Hindhead, when something struck his ear. It was a thin clear clang of metal, pealing out high above the dull murmur of the sea, the creak of the boom, and the flap of the sail. He listened, and again it was borne to his ear.

"Hark, my lord!" said he to Sir Robert. "Is there not a sound in the fog?"

They both listened together with sidelong heads. Then it rang clearly forth once more, but this time in another direction. It had been on the bow; now it was on the quarter. Again it sounded, and again. Now it had moved to the other bow; now back to the quarter again; now it was near; and now so far that it was but a faint tinkle on the ear. By this time every man on board, seamen, archers, and men-at-arms, were crowding the sides of the vessel. All round them there were noises in the darkness, and yet the wall of fog lay wet against their very faces. And the noises were such as were strange to their ears, always the same high musical clashing.

The old shipman shook his head and crossed himself. "In thirty years upon the waters I have never heard the like," said he. "The Devil is ever loose in a fog. Well is he named the Prince of Darkness."

A wave of panic passed over the vessel, and these rough and hardy men, who feared no mortal foe, shook with terror at the shadows of their own minds. They stared into the cloud with blanched faces and fixed eyes, as though each instant some fearsome shape might break in upon them. And as they stared there came a gust of wind. For a moment the fog-bank rose and a circle of ocean lay before them.

It was covered with vessels. On all sides they lay thick upon its surface. They were huge caracks, high-ended and portly, with red sides and bulwarks carved and crusted with gold. Each had one great sail set, and was driving down channel on the same course as the *Basilisk*. Their decks were thick with men, and from their high

poops came the weird clashing which filled the air. For one moment they lay there, this wondrous fleet, surging slowly forward, framed in grey vapour. The next the clouds closed in and they had vanished from view. There was a long hush, and then a buzz of excited voices.

"The Spaniards!" cried a dozen bowmen and sailors.

"I should have known it," said the shipman. "I call to mind on the Biscay coast how they would clash their cymbals after the fashion of the heathen Moor with whom they fight; but what would you have me do, fair sir? If the fog rises we are all dead men."

"There were thirty ships at the least," said Knolles with a moody brow. "If we have seen them I trow that they have also seen us. They will lay us aboard."

"Nay, fair sir, it is in my mind that our ship is lighter and faster than theirs. If the fog hold another hour, we should be through them."

"Stand to your arms!" yelled Knolles. "Stand to your arms! They are on us!"

The *Basilisk* had indeed been spied from the Spanish Admiral's ship before the fog closed down. With so light a breeze, and such a fog, he could not hope to find her under sail. But by an evil chance not a bowshot from the great Spanish carack was a low galley, thin and swift, with oars which could speed her against wind or tide. She also had seen the *Basilisk*, and it was to her that the Spanish leader shouted his orders. For a few minutes she hunted through the fog, and then sprang out of it like a lean and stealthy beast upon its prey. It was the sight of the long dark shadow gliding after them which had brought that wild shout of alarm from the lips of the English knight. In another instant the starboard oars of the galley had been shipped, the sides of the two vessels grated together, and a stream of swarthy, red-capped Spaniards were swarming up the sides of the *Basilisk* and dropped with yells of triumph upon her deck.

For a moment it seemed as if the vessel was captured without a blow being struck, for the men of the English

ship had run wildly in all directions to look for their arms. Scores of archers might be seen under the shadow of the forecastle and the poop bending their bowstaves to string them with the cords from their leathern cases. Others were scrambling over saddles, barrels, and cases in wild search of their quivers. Each as he came upon his arrows pulled out a few to lend to his less fortunate comrades. In mad haste the men-at-arms also were feeling and grasping in the dark corners, picking up steel caps which would not fit them, hurling them down on the deck, and snatching eagerly at any swords or spears that came their way.

The centre of the ship was held by the Spaniards, and having slain all who stood before them, they were pressing up to either end before they were made to understand that it was no fat sheep but a most fierce old wolf which they had taken by the ears.

If the lesson was late, it was the more thorough. Attacked on both sides and hopelessly outnumbered, the Spaniards, who had never doubted that this little craft was a merchant-ship, were cut off to the last man. It was no fight, but a butchery. In vain the survivors ran screaming prayers to the saints and threw themselves down into the galley alongside. It also had been riddled with arrows from the poop of the *Basilisk*, and both the crew on the deck and the galley-slaves in the outriggers at either side lay dead in rows under the overwhelming shower from above. From stem to rudder every foot of her was furred with arrows. It was but a floating coffin piled with dead and dying men, which wallowed in the waves behind them as the *Basilisk* lurched onward and left her in the fog.

In the first rush on to the *Basilisk*, the Spaniards had seized six of the crew and four unarmed archers. Their throats had been cut and their bodies tossed overboard. Now the Spaniards who littered the deck, wounded and dead, were thrust over the side in the same fashion. One ran down into the hold and had to be hunted and killed squealing under the blows like a rat in the darkness.

Within half an hour no sign was left of this grim meeting in the fog save for the crimson splashes upon bulwarks and deck. The archers, flushed and merry, were unstringing their bows once more, for in spite of the water glue the damp air took the strength from the cords. Some were hunting about for arrows which might have stuck inboard, and some tying up small injuries received in the scuffle. But an anxious shadow still lingered upon the face of Sir Robert, and he peered fixedly about him through the fog.

"Go among the archers, Hawthorn," said he to his squire. "Charge them on their lives to make no sound! You also, Loring. Go to the afterguard and say the same to them. We are lost if one of these great ships should spy us."

For an hour with bated breath they stole through the fleet, still hearing the cymbals clashing all round them, for in this way the Spaniards held themselves together. Once the wild music came from above their very prow, and so warned them to change their course. Once also a huge vessel loomed for an instant upon their quarter, but they turned two points away from her, and she blurred and vanished. Soon the cymbals were but a distant tinkling, and at last they died gradually away.

"It is none too soon," said the old shipman, pointing to a yellowish tint in the haze above them. "See yonder! It is the sun which wins through. It will be here anon. Ah! said I not so?"

A sickly sun, no larger and far dimmer than the moon, had indeed shown its face, with cloud-wreaths smoking across it. As they looked up it waxed larger and brighter before their eyes—a yellow halo spread around it, one ray broke through, and then a funnel of golden light poured down upon them, widening swiftly at the base. A minute later they were sailing on a clear blue sea with an azure cloud-flecked sky above their heads, and such a scene beneath it as each of them would carry in his memory while memory remained.

They were in mid-channel. The white and green

coasts of Picardy and of Kent lay clear upon either side of them. The wide channel stretched in front, deepening from the light blue beneath their prow to purple on the far skyline. Behind them was that thick bank of cloud from which they had just burst. It lay like a grey wall from east to west, and through it were breaking the high shadowy forms of the ships of Spain. Four of them had already emerged, their red bodies, gilded sides and painted sails shining gloriously in the evening sun. Every instant a fresh golden spot grew out of the fog, which blazed like a star for an instant, and then surged forward to show itself as the brazen beak of the great red vessel which bore it. Looking back, the whole bank of cloud was broken by the widespread line of noble ships which were bursting through it. The *Basilisk* lay a mile or more in front of them and two miles clear of their wing. Five miles farther off, in the direction of the French coast, two other small ships were running down Channel. A cry of joy from Robert Knolles and a hearty prayer for gratitude to the saints from the old shipman hailed them as their missing comrades, the cog *Thomas* and the *Grace Dieu*.

But fair as was the view of their lost friends, and wondrous the appearance of the Spanish ships, it was not on those that the eyes of the men of the *Basilisk* were chiefly bent. A greater sight lay before them—a sight which brought them clustering to the forecastle with eager eyes and pointing fingers. The English fleet was coming forth from the Winchelsea Coast. Already before the fog lifted a fast galleass had brought the news down Channel that the Spanish were on the sea, and the king's fleet was under way. Now their long array of sails, gay with the coats and colours of the towns which had furnished them, lay bright against the Kentish coast from Dungeness Point to Rye. Nine and twenty ships were there from Southampton, Shoreham, Winchelsea, Hastings, Rye, Hythe, Romney, Folkstone, Deal, Dover, and Sandwich. With their great sails slued round to catch the wind they ran out, while the Spanish, like the gallant foes that they

have ever been, turned their heads landward to meet them. With flaunting banners and painted sails, blaring trumpets and clashing cymbals, the two glittering fleets, dipping and rising on the long Channel swell, drew slowly together.

King Edward had been lying all day in his great ship the *Philippa*, a mile out from the Camber Sands, waiting for the coming of the Spaniards. Above the huge sail which bore the royal arms flew the red cross of England. Along the bulwarks were shown the shields of forty knights, the flower of English chivalry, and as many pennons floated from the deck. The high ends of the ship glittered with the weapons of the men-at-arms, and the waist was crammed with the archers. From time to time a crash of nakers and blare of trumpets burst from the royal ship, and was answered by her great neighbours, the *Lion* on which the Black Prince flew his flag, the *Christopher* with the Earl of Suffolk, the *Salle du Roi* of Robert of Namur, and the *Grace Marie* of Sir Thomas Holland. Farther off lay the *White Swan*, bearing the arms of Mowbray, the *Palmer of Deal*, flying the black head of Audley, and the *Kentish Man* under the Lord Beauchamp. The rest lay, anchored but ready, at the mouth of Winchelsea Creek.

The king sat upon a keg in the fore part of his ship, with little John of Richmond, who was no more than a schoolboy, perched upon his knee. Edward was clad in the black velvet jacket which was his favourite garb, and wore a small brown beaver hat with a white plume at the side. A rich cloak of fur turned up with miniver drooped from his shoulders. Behind him were a score of his knights, brilliant in silks and sarcenets, some seated on an upturned boat and some swinging their legs from the bulwark.

In front stood John Chandos in a parti-coloured jupon, one foot raised upon the anchor-stock, picking at the strings of his guitar and singing a song which he had learned at Marienburg when last he helped the Teutonic

knights against the heathen. The king, his knights, and even the archers in the waist below them, laughed at the merry lilt and joined lustily in the chorus, while the men of the neighbouring ships leaned over the side to hearken to the deep chant rolling over the waters.

But there came a sudden interruption to the song. A sharp, harsh shout came down from the look-out stationed in the circular top at the end of the mast.

"I spy a sail—two sails!" he cried.

John Bunce, the king's shipman, shaded his eyes and stared at the long fog-bank which shrouded the northern channel. Chandos, with his fingers over the strings of his guitar, the king, the knights, all gazed in the same direction. Two small, dark shapes had burst forth, and then, after some minutes, a third.

"Surely they are the Spaniards?" said the king.

"Nay, sire," the seaman answered, "the Spaniards are greater ships and are painted red. I know not what these may be."

"But I could hazard a guess!" cried Chandos. "Surely they are the three ships with my own men on their way to Brittany."

"You have hit it, John," said the king. "But, look, I pray you! What in the name of the Virgin is that?"

Four brilliant stars of flashing light had shone out from different points of the cloud-bank. The next instant as many tall ships had swooped forth into the sunshine. A fierce shout rang from the king's ship, and was taken up all down the line, until the whole coast from Dungeness to Winchelsea echoed the warlike greeting. The king sprang up with a joyous face.

"The game is afoot, my friends!" said he. "Dress, John! Dress, Walter! Quick, all of you! Squires, bring the harness! Let each tend to himself, for the time is short."

A strange sight it was to see these forty nobles tearing off their clothes, and littering the deck with velvets and satins, while the squire of each, as busy as an ostler before

a race, stooped and pulled, and strained and riveted, fastening the bassinets, the leg-pieces, the front and the back plates, until the silken courtier had become the man of steel. When their work was finished, there stood a stern group of warriors where the light dandies had sung and jested round Sir John's guitar. Below in orderly silence the archers were mustering under their officers, and taking their allotted stations. A dozen had swarmed up to their hazardous post in the little tower in the tops.

"Bring wine, Nicholas!" cried the king. "Gentlemen, ere you close your visors I pray you to take a last rouse with me. You will be dry enough, I promise you, before your lips are free once more. To what shall we drink, John?"

"To the men of Spain," said Chandos, his sharp face peering like a gaunt bird through the gap in his helmet. "May their hearts be stout and their spirits high this day!"

"Well said, John!" cried the king; and the knights laughed joyously as they drank. "Now, fair sirs, let each to his post! I am warden here on the forecastle. Do you, John, take charge of the afterguard. Walter, James, William, FitzAlan, Goldesborough, Reginald—you will stay with me! John, you may pick whom you will, and the others will bide with the archers. Now, bear straight at the centre, master shipman. Ere yonder sun sets we will bring a red ship back as a gift to our ladies, or never look upon a lady's face again."

The art of sailing into a wind had not yet been invented, nor was there any fore-and-aft canvas, save for small head sails with which a vessel could be turned. Hence the English fleet had to take a long slant down channel to meet their enemies; but as the Spaniards coming before the wind were equally anxious to engage there was the less delay. With stately pomp and dignity the two great fleets approached.

It chanced that one fine carack had outstripped its consorts and came sweeping along, all red and gold, with

a fringe of twinkling steel, a good half-mile before the fleet. Edward looked at her with a kindling eye, for indeed she was a noble sight, with the blue water creaming under her gilded prow.

"This is a most worthy and debonair vessel, Master Bunce," said he to the shipman beside him. "I would fain have a tilt with her. I pray you to hold us straight that we may bear her down."

"If I hold her straight, then one or other must sink, and it may be both," the seaman answered.

"I doubt not that with the help of Our Lady we shall do our part," said the king. "Hold her straight, mastershipman, as I have told you."

Now the two vessels were within arrow flight, and the bolts from the crossbowmen pattered upon the English ship. These short, thick, devil's darts were everywhere humming like great wasps through the air, crashing against the bulwarks, beating upon the deck, ringing loudly on the armour of the knights, or with a soft, muffled thud sinking to the socket in a victim.

The bowmen along either side of the *Philippa* had stood motionless waiting for their orders, but now there was a sharp shout from their leader, and every string twanged together. The air was full of their harping, together with the swish of the arrows, the long-drawn keening of the bowmen, and the short, deep bark of the under-officers. "Steady, steady! Loose steady! Shoot wholly together! Twelve score paces! Ten score! Now eight! Shoot wholly together!" Their gruff shouts broke through the high shrill cry like the deep roar of a wave through the howl of the wind.

As the two great ships hurtled together the Spaniard turned away a few points so that the blow should be a glancing one. None the less it was terrific. A dozen men in the tops of the carack were balancing a huge stone with the intention of dropping it over on the English deck. With a scream of horror they saw the mast cracking beneath them. Over it went, slowly at first, then

faster, until with a crash it came down on its side, sending them flying like stones from a sling far out into the sea. A swath of crushed bodies lay across the deck where the mast had fallen. But the English ship had not escaped unscathed. Her mast held, it is true, but the mighty shock not only stretched every man flat upon the deck, but had shaken a score of those who lined her sides into the sea. One bowman was hurled from the top, and his body fell with a dreadful crash at the very side of the prostrate king upon the forecastle. Many were thrown down with broken arms and legs from the high castles at either end into the waist of the ship. Worst of all, the seams had been opened by the crash, and the water was gushing in at a dozen places.

But these were men of experience and discipline, men who had already fought together by sea and by land, so that each knew his place and his duty. Those who could staggered to their feet, and helped up a score or more of knights who were rolling and clashing in the scuppers, unable to rise for the weight of their armour. The bowmen formed up as before. The seamen ran to the gaping seams with oakum and with tar. In ten minutes order had been restored, and the *Philippa*, though shaken and weakened, was ready for battle once more. The king was glaring round him like a wounded boar.

"Grapple my ship with that," he cried, pointing to the crippled Spaniard, "for I would have possession of her!"

But already the breeze had carried them past it, and a dozen Spanish ships were bearing down full upon them.

"We cannot win back to her, lest we show our flank to these others," said the shipman.

"Let her go her way!" cried the knights. "You shall have better than her."

"By Saint George! you speak the truth," said the king, "for she is ours when we have time to take her. These also seem very worthy ships which are drawing up to us, and I pray you, master-shipman, that you will have a tilt with the nearest."

A great carack was within a bowshot of them and crossing their bows. Bunce looked up at his mast, and he saw that already it was shaken and drooping. Another blow and it would be over the side, and his ship a helpless log upon the water. He jammed his helm round, therefore, and ran his ship alongside the Spaniard, throwing out his hooks and iron chains as he did so.

They, no less eager, grappled the *Philippa* both fore and aft, and the two vessels, linked tightly together, surged slowly over the long blue rollers. Over their bulwarks hung a cloud of men locked together in a desperate struggle, sometimes surging forward on to the deck of the Spaniard, sometimes recoiling back on to the king's ship, reeling this way and that, with the swords flickering like silver flames above them, while the long-drawn cry of rage and agony swelled up like a wolf's howl to the calm, blue heaven above them.

But now ship after ship of the English had come up, each throwing its iron over the nearest Spaniard and striving to board her high red sides. Twenty ships were drifting in furious single combat after the manner of the *Philippa*, until the whole surface of the sea was covered with a succession of these desperate duels. The dismasted carack, which the king's ship had left behind it, had been carried by the Earl of Suffolk's *Christopher*, and the water was dotted with the heads of her crew. An English ship had been sunk by a huge stone discharged from an engine, and her men also were struggling in the waves, none having leisure to lend them a hand. A second English ship was caught between two of the Spanish vessels and overwhelmed by a rush of boarders, so that not a man of her was left alive. On the other hand, Mowbray and Audley had each taken the caracks which were opposed to them, and the battle in the centre, after swaying this way and that, was turning now in favour of the Islanders.

The Black Prince, with the *Lion*, the *Grace Marie*, and four other ships, had swept round to turn the Spanish flank ; but the movement was seen, and the Spaniards had

ten ships with which to meet it, one of them their great carack, the *St. Iago di Compostella*. To this ship the prince had attached his little cog, and strove desperately to board her ; but her side was so high and the defence so desperate that his men could never get beyond her bulwarks, but were hurled down again and again with a clang and clash to the deck beneath. Her side bristled with crossbowmen, who shot straight down on to the packed waist of the *Lion*, so that the dead lay there in heaps. But the most dangerous of all was a swarthy, black-bearded giant in the tops, who crouched so that none could see him, but rising every now and then with a huge lump of iron between his hands, hurled it down with such force that nothing could stop it. Again and again these ponderous bolts crashed through the deck and hurtled down into the bottom of the ship, starting the planks and shattering all that came in their way.

The prince, clad in the dark armour which gave him his name, was directing the attack from the poop when the shipman rushed wildly up to him with fear on his face.

" Sire ! " he cried. " The ship may not stand against these blows. A few more will sink her ! Already the water floods inboard ! "

The prince looked up, and as he did so the shaggy beard showed once more, and two brawny arms swept downward. A great slug, whizzing down, beat a gaping hole in the deck, and fell rending and riving into the hold below. The master-mariner tore his grizzled hair.

" Another leak ! " he cried. " I pray to Saint Leonard to bear us up this day ! Twenty of my shipmen are bailing with buckets, but the water rises on them fast. The vessel may not float another hour."

The prince had snatched a crossbow from one of his attendants and levelled it at the Spaniard's tops. At the very instant when the seaman stood erect with a fresh bar in his hands, the bolt took him full in the face, and his body fell forward over the parapet, hanging there head downward. A howl of exultation burst from the English

at the sight, answered by a wild roar of anger from the Spaniards. A seaman had run from the *Lion's* hold and whispered in the ear of the shipman. He turned an ashen face upon the prince.

"It is even as I say, sire. The ship is sinking beneath our feet!" he cried.

"The more need that we should gain another," said he. "Sir Henry Stokes, Sir Thomas Stourton, William, John of Clifton, here lies our road! Advance my banner, Thomas de Mohun! On, and the day is ours!"

By a desperate scramble, a dozen men, the prince at their head, gained a footing on the edge of the Spaniard's deck. Some slashed furiously to clear a space, others hung over, clutching the rail with one hand and pulling up their comrades from below. Every instant that they could hold their own their strength increased, till twenty had become thirty, and thirty forty, when of a sudden the newcomers, still reaching forth to their comrades below, saw the deck beneath them reel and vanish in a swirling sheet of foam. The prince's ship had foundered.

A yell went up from the Spaniards as they turned furiously upon the small band who had reached their deck. Already the prince and his men had carried the poop, and from that high station they beat back their swarming enemies. But crossbow darts pelted and thudded among their ranks, till a third of their number were stretched upon the planks. Lined across the deck, they could hardly keep an unbroken front to the leaping, surging crowd who pressed upon them. Another rush, or another after that, must assuredly break them, for these dark men of Spain, hardened by an endless struggle with the Moors, were fierce and stubborn fighters. But hark to this sudden roar upon the farther side of them!

"Saint George! Saint George! A Knolles to the rescue!"

A small craft had run alongside, and sixty men had swarmed on the deck of the *St. Iago*. Caught between two fires, the Spaniards wavered and broke. The fight

became a massacre. Down from the poop sprang the prince's men. Up from the waist rushed the newcomers. They were five dreadful minutes of blows and screams and prayers, with struggling figures clinging to the bulwarks and sullen splashes into the water below. Then it was over, and a crowd of weary, overstrained men leaned panting upon their weapons, or lay breathless and exhausted upon the deck of the captured carack.

The prince had pulled up his visor and lowered his beaver. He smiled proudly as he gazed around him and wiped his streaming face.

"Where is the shipman?" he asked. "Let him lead us against another ship."

"Nay, sire; the shipman and all his men have sunk in the *Lion*," said Thomas de Mohun, a young knight of the west country, who carried the standard. "We have lost our ship and the half of our following. I fear that we can fight no more."

"It matters the less since the day is already ours," said the prince, looking over the sea. "My noble father's royal banner flies upon yonder Spaniard. Mowbray, Audley, Suffolk, Beauchamp, Namur, Tracey, Stafford, Arundel, each has his flag over a scarlet carack, even as mine floats over this. See, yonder squadron is already far beyond our reach. But surely we owe thanks to you who came at so perilous a moment to our aid. Your face I have seen, and your coat-armour also, young sir, though I cannot lay my tongue to your name. Let me know it, that I may thank you."

He had turned to Nigel, who stood flushed and joyous at the head of the boarders from the *Basilisk*.

"I am but a squire, sire, and can claim no thanks, for there is nothing that I have done. Here is our leader."

The prince's eyes fell upon the shield charged with the Black Raven and the stern young face of him who bore it.

"Sir Robert Knolles," said he. "I had thought you were on your way to Brittany."

"I was so, sire, when I had the fortune to see this battle as I passed."

The prince laughed. "It would indeed be to ask too much, Robert, that you should keep on your course when much honour was to be gathered so close to you. But now I pray you that you will come back with us to Winchelsea, for well I know that my father would fain thank you for what you have done this day."

But Robert Knolles shook his head. "I have your father's command, sire, and without his order I may not go against it. Our people are hard-pressed in Brittany, and it is not for me to linger on the way. I pray you, sire, if you must needs mention me to the king, to crave his pardon that I should have broken my journey thus."

"You are right, Robert. God-speed you on your way! And I would that I were sailing under your banner, for I see clearly that you will take your people where they may worshipfully win worship. Perchance I also may be in Brittany before the year is past."

The prince turned to the task of gathering his weary people together, and the Basilisks passed over the side once more and dropped down on to their own little ship. They poled her off from the captured Spaniard, and set their sail with their prow for the south. Far ahead of them were their two consorts, beating towards them in the hope of giving help, while down Channel were a score of Spanish ships, with a few of the English vessels hanging upon their skirts. The sun lay low on the water, and its level beams glowed upon the scarlet and gold of fourteen great caracks, each flying the cross of Saint George, and towering high above the cluster of English ships which, with brave waving of flags and blaring of music, were moving slowly towards the Kentish coast.

## 18. *How Black Simon claimed Forfeit from the King of Sark*

FOR a day and a half the small fleet made good progress, but on the second morning, after sighting Cape de la Hague, there came a brisk land wind which blew them out to sea. It grew into a squall with rain and fog so that they were two more days beating back. Next morning they found themselves in a dangerous rock-studded sea with a small island upon their starboard quarter. It was girdled with high granite cliffs of a reddish hue, and slopes of bright green grassland lay above them. A second smaller island lay beside it. Dennis the shipman shook his head as he looked.

"That is Brechou," said he, "and the larger one is the Island of Sark. If ever I be cast away I pray the saints that I may not be upon yonder coast!"

Knolles gazed across at it. "You say well, master-shipman," said he. "It does appear to be a rocky and perilous spot."

"Nay, it is the rocky hearts of those who dwell upon it that I had in my mind," the old sailor answered. "We are well safe in three goodly vessels, but had we been here in a small craft I make no doubt that they would have already had their boats out against us."

"Who, then, are these people, and how do they live upon so small and windswept an island?" asked the soldier.

"They do not live from the island, fair sir, but from what they can gather upon the sea around it. They are broken folk from all countries, justice-fliers, prison-breakers, reavers, escaped bondsmen, murderers and staff-strikers who have made their way to this outland place and hold it against all comers. There is one here who could tell you of them and of their ways, for he was long time prisoner amongst them." The seaman pointed to Black Simon, the dark man from Norwich, who was

leaning against the side lost in moody thought and staring with a brooding eye at the distant shore.

"How now, fellow?" asked Knolles. "What is this I hear? Is it indeed sooth that you have been a captive upon this island?"

"It is true, fair sir. For eight months I have been servant to the man whom they call their king. His name is La Muette, and he comes from Jersey, nor is there under God's sky a man whom I have more desire to see."

"Has he, then, mishandled you?"

Black Simon gave a wry smile and pulled off his jerkin. He lean sinewy back was waled and puckered with white scars.

"He has left his sign of hand upon me," said he. "He swore that he would break me to his will, and thus he tried to do it. But most I desire to see him because he hath lost a wager to me and I would fain be paid."

"This is a strange saying," said Knolles. "What is this wager, and why should he pay you?"

"It is but a small matter," Simon answered; "but I am a poor man and the payment would be welcome. Should it have chanced that we stopped at this island I should have craved your leave that I go ashore and ask for that which I have fairly won."

Sir Robert Knolles laughed. "This business tickleth my fancy," said he. "As to stopping at the island, this shipman tells me that we must needs wait a day and a night, for that we have strained our planks. But if you should go ashore, how will you be sure that you will be free to depart, or that you will see this king of whom you speak?"

Black Simon's dark face was shining with a fierce joy. "Fair sir, I will ever be your debtor if you will let me go. Concerning what you ask, I know this island even as I know the streets of Norwich, as you may well believe, seeing that it is but a small place and I upon it for near a year. Should I land after dark, I could win my way to

the king's house, and if he be not dead or distraught with drink I could have speech with him alone, for I know his ways and his hours and how he may be found. I would ask only that Aylward the archer may go with me, that I may have one friend at my side if things should chance to go awry."

Knolles thought awhile. "It is much that you ask," said he, "for by God's truth I reckon that you and this friend of yours are two of my men whom I would be least ready to lose. I have seen you both at grips with the Spaniards and I know you. But I trust you, and if we must indeed stop at this accursed place, then you may do as you will. If you have deceived me, or if this is a trick by which you design to leave me, then God be your friend when next we meet, for man will be of small avail!"

It proved that not only the seams had to be calked but that the cog *Thomas* was out of fresh water. The ships moored therefore near the Isle of Brechou, where springs were to be found. There were no people upon this little patch, but over on the farther island many figures could be seen watching them, and the twinkle of steel from among them showed that they were armed men. One boat had ventured forth and taken a good look at them, but had hurried back with the warning that they were too strong to be touched.

Black Simon found Aylward seated under the poop with his back against Bartholomew the bowyer. He was whistling merrily as he carved a girl's face upon the horn of his bow.

"My friend," said Simon, "will you come ashore to night—for I have need of your help?"

Aylward crowed lustily. "Will I come, Simon? By my hilt, I shall be right glad to put my foot on the good brown earth once more. All my life I have trod it, and yet I would never have learned its worth had I not journeyed in these cursed ships. We will go on shore together, Simon, and we will seek out the women, if there

be any there, for it seems a long year since I heard their gentle voices, and my eyes are weary of such faces as Bartholomew's or thine."

Simon's grim features relaxed into a smile. "The only face that you will see ashore, Samkin, will bring you small comfort," said he, "and I warn you that this is no easy errand, but one which may be neither sweet nor fair, for if these people take us our end will be a cruel one."

"By my hilt," said Aylward, "I am with you, gossip, wherever you may go! Say no more, therefore, for I am weary of living like a cony in a hole, and I shall be right glad to stand by you in your venture."

That night, two hours after dark, a small boat put forth from the *Basilisk*. It contained Simon, Aylward, and two seamen. The soldiers carried their swords, and Black Simon bore a brown biscuit-bag over his shoulder. Under his direction the rowers skirted the dangerous surf which beat against the cliffs until they came to a spot where an outlying reef formed a breakwater. Within was a belt of calm water and a shallow cover with a sloping beach. Here the boat was dragged up and the seamen were ordered to wait, while Simon and Aylward started on their errand.

With the assured air of a man who knows exactly where he is and whither he is going, the man-at-arms began to clamber up a narrow fern-lined cleft among the rocks. It was no easy ascent in the darkness, but Simon climbed on like an old dog hot upon a scent, and the panting Aylward struggled after as best he might. At last they were at the summit and the archer threw himself down upon the grass.

"Nay, Simon, I have not enough breath to blow out a candle," said he. "Stint your haste for a minute, since we have a long night before us. Surely this man is a friend indeed, if you hasten so to see him."

"Such a friend," Simon answered, "that I have often dreamed of our next meeting. Now before that moon has set it will have come."

"Had it been a wench I could have understood it," said Aylward. "By these ten finger-bones, if Mary of the mill or little Kate of Compton had waited me on the brow of this cliff, I should have come up it and never known it was there. But surely I see houses and hear voices over yonder in the shadow?"

"It is their town," whispered Simon. "There are a hundred as bloody-minded cut-throats as are to be found in Christendom beneath those roofs. Hark to that!"

A fierce burst of laughter came out of the darkness, followed by a long cry of pain.

"All-hallows be with us!" cried Aylward. "What is that?"

"As like as not some poor devil has fallen into their clutches, even as I did. Come this way, Samkin, for there is a peat-cutting where we may hide. Aye, here it is, but deeper and broader than of old. Now, follow me close, for if we keep within it we shall find ourselves a stone cast off the king's house."

Together they crept along the dark cutting. Suddenly Simon seized Aylward by the shoulder and pushed him into the shadow of the bank. Crouching in the darkness, they heard footsteps and voices upon the farther side of the trench. Two men sauntered along it and stopped almost at the very spot where the comrades were lying. Aylward could see their dark figures outlined against the starry sky.

"Why should you scold, Jacques," said one of them, speaking a strange half-French, half-English lingo. "*Le diable t'emporte* for a grumbling rascal. You won a woman and I got nothing. What more would you have?"

"You will have your chance off the next ship, *mon garçon*, but mine is passed. A woman, it is true—an old peasant out of the fields, with a face as yellow as a kite's claw. But Gaston, who threw a nine against my eight, got as fair a little Normandy lass as ever your eyes have seen. Curse the dice, I say! And as to my woman, I will sell her to you for a firkin of Gascony."

"I have no wine to spare, but I will give you a keg of apples," said the other. "I had it out of the *Peter and Paul*, the Falmouth boat that struck in Creux Bay."

"Well, well, your apples may be the worse for keeping, but so is old Marie, and we can cry quits on that. Come round and drink a cup over the bargain."

They shuffled onward in the darkness.

"Heard you ever such villainy?" cried Aylward, breathing fierce and hard. "Did you hear them, Simon? A woman for a keg of apples! And my heart's root is sad for the other one, the girl of Normandy. Surely we can land to-morrow and burn all these water-rats out of their nest."

"Nay, Sir Robert will not waste time or strength ere he reach Brittany."

"Sure I am that if my little master Squire Loring had the handling of it, every woman on this island would be free ere another day had passed."

"I doubt it not," said Simon. "He is one who makes an idol of woman, after the manner of those crazy knight-errants. But Sir Robert is a true soldier and hath only his purpose in view."

"Simon," said Aylward, "the light is not overgood and the place is cramped for sword-play, but if you will step out into the open I will teach you whether my master is a true soldier or not."

"Tut, man! you are as foolish yourself," said Simon. "Here we are with our work in hand, and yet you must needs fall out with me on our way to it. I say nothing against your master save that he hath the way of his fellows, who follow dreams and fancies. But Knolles looks neither to right nor left, and walks forward to his mark. Now, let us on, for the time passes."

"Simon, your words are neither good nor fair. When we are back on shipboard we will speak further of this matter. Now lead on, I pray you, and let us see some more of this ten-devil island."

For half a mile Simon led the way until they came to

a large house which stood by itself. Peering at it from the edge of the cutting, Aylward could see that it was made from the wreckage of many vessels, for at each corner a prow was thrust out. Lights blazed within, and there came the sound of a strong voice singing a gay song which was taken up by a dozen others in the chorus.

"All is well, lad!" whispered Simon, in great delight. "That is the voice of the king. It is the very song he used to sing. '*Les deux filles de Pierre.*' 'Fore God, my back tingles at the very sound of it. Here we will wait until his company take their leave."

Hour after hour they crouched in the peat-cutting, listening to the noisy songs of the revellers within, some French, some English, and all growing fouler and less articular as the night wore on. Once a quarrel broke out and the clamour was like a cageful of wild beasts at feeding-time. Then a health was drunk and there was much stamping and cheering.

Only once was the long vigil broken. A woman came forth from the house and walked up and down, with her face sunk upon her breast. She was tall and slender, but her features could not be seen for a wimple over her head. Weary sadness could be read in her bowed back and dragging steps. Once only they saw her throw her two hands up to Heaven as one who is beyond human aid. Then she passed slowly into the house again. A moment later the door of the hall was flung open, and a shouting, stumbling throng came crowding forth, with whoop and yell, into the silent night. Linking arms and striking up a chorus, they marched past the peat-cutting, their voices dwindling slowly away as they made for their homes.

"Now, Samkin, now!" cried Simon, and jumping out from the hiding-place, he made for the door. It had not yet been fastened. The two comrades sprang inside. Then Simon drew the bolts so that none might interrupt them.

A long table littered with flagons and beakers lay

before them. It was lit up by a line of torches, which flickered and smoked in their iron sconces. At the farther end a solitary man was seated. His head rested upon his two hands, as if he were befuddled with wine, but at the harsh sound of the snapping bolts he raised his face and looked angrily around him. It was a strange, powerful head, tawny and shaggy like a lion's, with a tangled beard and a large, harsh face, bloated and blotched with vice. He laughed as the newcomers entered, thinking that two of his boon companions had returned to finish a flagon. Then he stared hard, and he passed his hand over his eyes like one who thinks he may be dreaming.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he cried. "Who are you, and whence come you at this hour of the night? Is this the way to break into our royal presence?"

Simon approached up one side of the table and Aylward up the other. When they were close to the king, the man-at-arms plucked a torch from its socket and held it to his own face. The king staggered back with a cry, as he gazed at that grim visage.

"*Le diable noir!*" he cried. "Simon, the Englishman! What make you here?"

Simon put his hand upon his shoulder. "Sit here!" said he, and he forced the king into his seat. "Do you sit on the farther side of him, Aylward. We make a merry group, do we not? Often have I served at this table, but never did I hope to drink at it. Fill your cup, Samkin, and pass the flagon."

The king looked from one to the other with terror in his bloodshot eyes.

"What would you do?" asked. "Are you mad, that you should come here? One shout and you are at my mercy."

"Nay, my friend, I have lived too long in your house not to know the ways of it. No man-servant ever slept beneath your roof, for you feared lest your throat would be cut in the night-time. You may shout and shout, if it so please you. It chanced that I was passing on my

way from England in those ships which lie off La Brechou, and I thought I would come in and have speech with you."

"Indeed, Simon, I am right glad to see you," said the king, cringing away from the fierce eyes of the soldier. "We were good friends in the past, were we not, and I cannot call to mind that I have ever done you injury. When you made your way to England by swimming to the Levantine there was none more glad in heart than I."

"If I cared to doff my doublet I could show you the marks of what your friendship has done for me in the past," said Simon. "It is printed on my back as clearly as on my memory. Why, you foul dog, there are the very rings upon the wall to which my hands were fastened, and there the stains upon the boards on which my blood has dripped! Is it not so, you king of butchers?"

The pirate chief turned whiter still. "It may be that life here was somewhat rough, Simon, but if I have wronged you in any way, I will surely make amends. What do you ask?"

"I ask only one thing, and I have come hither that I may get it. It is that you pay me forfeit for that you have lost your wager."

"My wager, Simon! I call to mind no wager."

"But I will call it to your mind, and then I will take my payment. Often have you sworn that you would break my courage. 'By my head!' you have cried to me. 'You will crawl at my feet!' and again: 'I will wager my head that I will tame you!' Yes, yes, a score of times you have said so. In my heart, as I listened, I have taken up your gage. And now, dog, you have lost, and I am here to claim the forfeit."

His long heavy sword flew from its sheath. The king, with a howl of despair, flung his arms round him, and they rolled together under the table. There was a sound like the worrying of dogs ending in a scream. Aylward sat with a ghastly face, and his toes curled with horror at the sight, for he was still new to scenes of strife and his

blood was too cold for such a deed. When Simon rose he tossed something into his bag and sheathed his bloody sword.

"Come, Samkin, our work is well done," said he.

"By my hilt, if I had known what it was I would have been less ready to come with you" said the archer. "Could you not have clapped a sword in his fist and let him take his chance in the hall?"

"Nay, Samkin, if you had such memories as I, you would have wished that he should die like a sheep and not like a man. What chance did he give me when he had the power? And why should I treat him better? But, Holy Virgin, what have we here?"

At the farther end of the table a woman was standing. An open door behind her showed that she had come from the inner room of the house. By her tall figure the comrades knew that she was the same that they had already seen. Her face had once been fair, but now was white and haggard, with wild dark eyes full of a hopeless terror and despair. Slowly she paced up the room, her gaze fixed not upon the comrades, but upon the dreadful thing beneath the table. Then, as she stooped and was sure, she burst into loud laughter and clapped her hands.

"Who shall say there is no God?" she cried. "Who shall say that prayer is unavailing? Great sir, brave sir, let me kiss that conquering hand!"

"Nay, nay, dame, stand back! Well, if you must needs have one of them, take this which is the clean one."

"It is the other I crave—that which is red with his blood! Oh! joyful night when my lips have been wet with it! Now I can die in peace!"

"We must go, Aylward," said Simon. "In another hour the dawn will have broken. In daytime a rat could not cross this island and pass unseen. Come, man, and at once!"

But Aylward was at the woman's side. "Come with us, fair dame," said he. "Surely we can, at least, take you from this island, and no such change can be for the worse."

"Nay," said she, "the saints in Heaven cannot help me now until they take me to my rest. There is no place for me in the world beyond, and all my friends were slain on the day I was taken. Leave me, brave men, and let me care for myself. Already it lightens in the east, and black will be your fate if you are taken. Go, and may the blessing of one who was once a holy nun go with you and guard you from danger!"

Sir Robert Knolles was pacing the deck in the early morning, when he heard the sound of oars, and there were his two night-birds climbing up the side.

"So, fellow," said he, "have you had speech with the king of Sark?"

"Fair sir, I have seen him."

"And he has paid his forfeit?"

"He has paid it, sir!"

Knolles looked with curiosity at the bag which Simon bore.

"What carry you there?" he asked.

"The stake that he has lost."

"What was it, then? A goblet? A silver plate?"

For answer Simon opened his bag and shook it out on the deck.

Sir Robert turned away with a whistle. "'Fore God!" said he, "it is in my mind that I carry some hard men with me to Brittany."

## 19. *How a Squire of England met a Squire of France*

SIR ROBERT KNOLLES with his little fleet had sighted the Breton coast near Cancale; they had rounded the Point du Grouin, and finally had sailed past the port of St. Malo and down the long narrow estuary of the Rance until they were close to the old walled city of Dinan, which was held by that Montfort faction whose cause the English had espoused. Here the horses

had been disembarked, the stores were unloaded, and the whole force encamped outside the city, while the leaders waited for news as to the present state of affairs, and where there was most hope of honour and profit.

The whole of France was feeling the effects of that war with England which had already lasted some ten years, but no province was in so dreadful a condition as this unhappy land of Brittany. In Normandy or Picardy the inroads of the English were periodical with intervals of rest between ; but Brittany was torn asunder by constant civil war apart from the grapple of the two great combatants, so that there was no surcease of her sufferings. The struggle had begun in 1341 through the rival claims of Montfort and of Blois to the vacant dukedom. England had taken the part of Montfort, France that of Blois. Neither faction was strong enough to destroy the other, and so after ten years of continual fighting, history recorded a long ineffectual list of surprises and ambushes, of raids and skirmishes, of towns taken and retaken, of alternate victory and defeat, in which neither party could claim a supremacy. It mattered nothing that Montfort and Blois had both disappeared from the scene, the one dead and the other taken by the English. Their wives caught up the red swords which had dropped from the hands of their lords, and the long struggle went on even more savagely than before.

In the south and east the Blois faction held the country, and Nantes the capital was garrisoned and occupied by a strong French army. In the north and west the Montfort party prevailed, for the island kingdom was at their back, and always fresh sails broke the northern sky-line bearing adventurers from over the channel.

Between these two there lay a broad zone comprising all the centre of the country which was a land of blood and violence, where no law prevailed save that of the sword. From end to end it was dotted with castles, some held for one side, some for the other, and many mere robber strongholds, the scenes of gross and monstrous

deeds, whose brute owners, knowing that they could never be called to account, made war upon all mankind, and wrung with rack and with flame the last shilling from all who fell into their savage hands. The fields had long been untilled. Commerce was dead. From Rennes in that east to Hennebon in the west, and from Dinan in the north to Nantes in the south, there was no spot where a man's life or a woman's honour was safe. Such was the land, full of darkness and blood, the saddest, blackest spot in Christendom, into which Knolles and his men were now advancing.

But there was no sadness in the young heart of Nigel, as he rode by the side of Knolles at the head of a clump of spears, nor did it seem to him that Fate had led him into an unduly arduous path. On the contrary, he blessed the good fortune which had sent him into so delightful a country, and it seemed to him as he listened to dreadful stories of robber barons, and looked round at the black scars of war which lay branded upon the fair faces of the hills, that no hero or romancer or trouveur had ever journeyed through such a land of promise, with so fair a chance of knightly venture and honourable advancement.

The Red Ferret was one deed toward his vow. Surely a second, and perhaps a better, was to be found somewhere upon this glorious countryside. He had borne himself as the others had in the sea-fight, and could not count it to his credit where he had done no more than mere duty. Something beyond this was needed for such a deed as could be laid at the feet of the Lady Mary. But surely it was to be found here in fermenting war-distracted Brittany. Then with two done it would be strange if he could not find occasion for that third one, which would complete his service and set him free to look her in the face once more. With the great yellow horse curveting beneath him, his Guildford armour gleaming in the sun, his sword clanking against his stirrup-iron, and his father's tough ash-spear in his hand, he rode with a

light heart and a smiling face, looking eagerly to right and to left for any chance which his good Fate might send.

The road from Dinan to Caulnes, along which the small army was moving, rose and dipped over undulating ground, with a bare marshy plain upon the left where the river Rance ran down to the sea, while upon the right lay a wooded country with a few wretched villages, so poor and sordid that they had nothing with which to tempt the spoiler. The peasants had left them at the first twinkle of a steel cap, and lurked at the edges of the woods, ready in an instant to dive into those secret recesses known only to themselves. These creatures suffered sorely at the hands of both parties, but when the chance came they revenged their wrongs on either in a savage way which brought fresh brutalities upon their heads.

The newcomers soon had a chance of seeing to what lengths they would go, for in the roadway near to Caulnes they came upon an English man-at-arms who had been waylaid and slain by them. How they had overcome him could not be told, but how they had slain him within his armour was horribly apparent, for they had carried such a rock as eight men could lift, and had dropped it upon him as he lay, so that he was spread out in his shattered case like a crab beneath a stone. Many a fist was shaken at the distant woods and many a curse hurled at those who haunted them, as the column of scowling soldiers passed the murdered man whose badge of the Molene cross showed him to have been a follower of that House of Bentley, whose head, Sir Walter, was at the time leader of the British forces in the country.

Sir Robert Knolles had served in Brittany before, and he marshalled his men on the march with the skill and caution of the veteran soldier, the man who leaves as little as possible to chance, having too steadfast a mind to heed the fool who may think him over-cautious. He had recruited a number of bowmen and men-at-arms at Dinan; so that his following was now close upon five hundred men. In front under his own leadership were fifty

mounted lancers, fully armed and ready for any sudden attack. Behind them on foot came the archers, and a second body of mounted men closed up the rear. Out upon either flank moved small bodies of cavalry, and a dozen scouts, spread fanwise, probed every gorge and dingle in front of the column. So for three days he moved slowly down the Southern Road.

Sir Thomas Percy and Sir James Astley had ridden to the head of the column, and Knolles conferred with them as they marched concerning the plan of their campaign. Percy and Astley were young and hot-headed, with wild visions of dashing deeds and knight-errantry, but Knolles, with cold, clear brain and purpose of iron, held ever his object in view.

"By the holy Dunstan and all the saints of Lindisfarne!" cried the fiery borderer, "it goes to my heart to ride forward when there are such honourable chances on either side of us. Have I not heard that the French are at Evran beyond the river, and is it not sooth that yonder castle, the towers of which I see above the woods, is in the hands of a traitor, who is false to his liege lord of Montford. There is little profit to be gained upon this road, for the folk seem to have no heart for war. Had we ventured as far over the marches of Scotland as we now are in Brittany, we should not have lacked some honourable venture or chance of winning worship."

"You say truth, Thomas," cried Astley, a red-faced and choleric young man. "It is well certain that the French will not come to us, and surely it is the more needful that we go to them. In sooth, any soldier who sees us would smile that we should creep for three days along this road as though a thousand dangers lay before us, when we have but poor broken peasants to deal with."

But Robert Knolles shook his head. "We know not what are in these woods, or behind these hills," said he, "and when I know nothing it is my wont to prepare for the worst which may befall. It is but prudence so to do."

"Your enemies might find some harsher name for it," said Astley, with a sneer. "Nay, you need not think to scare me by glaring at me, Sir Robert, nor will your ill-pleasure change my thoughts. I have faced fiercer eyes than thine, and I have not feared."

"Your speech, Sir James, is neither courteous nor good," said Knolles, "and if I were a free man I would cram your words down your throat with the point of my dagger. But I am here to lead these men in profit and honour, not to quarrel with every fool who has not the wit to understand how soldiers should be led. Can you not see that if I make attempts here and there, as you would have me do, I shall have weakened my strength before I come to that part where it can best be spent?"

"And where is that?" asked Percy. "'Fore God, Astley, it is in my mind that we ride with one who knows more of war than you or I, and that we would be wise to be guided by his rede. Tell us then what is in your mind."

"Thirty miles from here," said Knolles, "there is, as I am told, a fortalice named Ploermel, and within it is one Bambro', an Englishman, with a good garrison. No great distance from him is the Castle of Josselin, where dwells Robert of Beaumanoir with a great following of Bretons. It is my intention that we should join Bambro', and so be in such strength that we may throw ourselves upon Josselin, and by taking it become the masters of all mid-Brittany, and able to make head against the Frenchmen in the south."

"Indeed I think that you can do no better," said Percy, heartily, "and I swear to you on jeopardy of my soul that I will stand by you in the matter! I doubt not that when we come deep into their land they will draw together and do what they may to make head against us; but up to now I swear by all the saints of Lindisfarne that I should have seen more war in a summer's day in Liddesdale or at the Forest of Jedburgh than any that Brittany has shown us. But see, yonder horsemen are riding in.

They are our own hobbellers, are they not ? And who are these who are lashed to their stirrups ? ”

A small troop of mounted bowmen had ridden out of an oak grove upon the left of the road. They trotted up to where the three knights had halted. Two wretched peasants whose wrists had been tied to their leathers came leaping and straining beside the horses in their effort not to be dragged off their feet. One was a tall, gaunt, yellow-haired man, the other short and swarthy, but both so crusted with dirt, so matted and tangled and ragged, that they were more like beasts of the wood than human beings.

“ What is this ? ” asked Knolles. “ Have I not ordered you to leave the countryfolk at peace ? ”

The leader of the archers, old Wat of Carlisle, held up a sword, a girdle and a dagger. “ If it please you, fair sir,” said he, “ I saw the glint of these, and I thought them no fit tools for hands which were made for the spade and the plough. But when we had ridden them down and taken them, there was the Bentley cross upon each, and we knew that they had belonged to yonder dead Englishman upon the road. Surely then, these are two of the villains who have slain him, and it is right that we do justice upon them.”

Sure enough, upon sword, girdle and dagger shone the silver Molene cross which had gleamed on the dead man’s armour. Knolles looked at them and then at the prisoners with a face of stone. At the sight of those fell eyes they had dropped with inarticulate howls upon their knees, screaming out their protests in a tongue which none could understand.

“ We must have the roads safe for wandering Englishmen,” said Knolles. “ These men must surely die. Hang them to yonder tree.”

He pointed to a live oak by the roadside, and rode onward upon his way in converse with his fellow-knights. But the old bowman had ridden after him.

“ If it please you, Sir Robert, the bowmen would fain put these men to death in their own fashion,” said he.

"So that they die, I care not how," Knolles answered carelessly, and looked back no more.

Human life was cheap in those stern days, when the footmen of a stricken army or the crew of a captured ship were slain without any question or thought of mercy by the victors. War was a rude game, with death for the stake, and the forfeit was always claimed on the one side and paid on the other without doubt or hesitation. Only the knight might be spared, since his ransom made him worth more alive than dead. To men trained in such a school, with death for ever hanging over their own heads, it may well be believed that the slaying of two peasant murderers was a small matter.

And yet there was special reason why upon this occasion the bowmen wished to keep the deed in their own hands. Ever since their dispute aboard the *Basilisk*, there had been ill-feeling between Bartholomew, the old bald-headed bowyer, and long Ned Widdington the dalesman, which had ended in a conflict at Dinan, in which not only they, but a dozen of their friends, had been laid upon the cobble-stones. The dispute raged round their respective knowledge and skill with the bow, and now some quick wit among the soldiers had suggested a grim fashion in which it should be put to the proof, once for all, which could draw the surer shaft.

A thick wood lay two hundred paces from the road upon which the archers stood. A stretch of smooth grassy sward lay between. The two peasants were led out fifty yards from the road, with their faces towards the wood. There they stood, held on a leash, and casting many a wondering, frightened glance over their shoulders at the preparations which were being made behind them.

Old Bartholomew and the big Yorkshireman had stepped out of the ranks and stood side by side, each with his strung bow in his left hand and a single arrow in his right. With care they had drawn on and greased their shooting-gloves and fastened their bracers. They plucked and cast up a few blades of grass to measure the wind,

examined every small point of their tackle, turned their sides to the mark, and widened their feet in a firmer stance. From all sides came chaff and counsel from their comrades.

"A three-quarter wind, bowyer!" cried one "Aim a body's breadth to the right!"

"But not thy body's breadth, bowyer," laughed another. "Else may you be overwide."

"Nay, this wind will scarce turn a well-drawn shaft," said a third. "Shoot dead upon him and you will be clap in the clout."

"Steady, Ned, for the good name of the dales," cried a Yorkshireman. "Loose easy and pluck not, or I am five crowns the poorer man."

"A week's pay on Bartholomew!" shouted another. "Now, old fat-pate, fail me not!"

"Enough, enough! Stint your talk!" cried the old bowman, Wat of Carlisle. "Were your shafts as quick as your tongues there would be no facing you. Do you shoot upon the little one, Bartholomew, and you, Ned, upon the other. Give them law until I cry the word, then loose in your own fashion and at your own time. Are you ready! Holà, there, Hayward, Beddington, let them run!"

The leashes were torn away, and the two men, stooping their heads, ran madly for the shelter of the wood amid such a howl from the archers as beaters may give when the hare starts from its form. The two bowmen, each with his arrow drawn to the pile, stood like russet statues, menacing, motionless, their eager eyes fixed upon the fugitives, their bow-staves rising slowly as the distance between them lengthened. The Bretons were halfway to the wood, and still old Wat was silent. It may have been mercy or it may have been mischief, but at least the chase should have a fair chance of life. At six score paces he turned his grizzled head at last.

"Loose!" he cried.

At the word the Yorkshireman's bowstring twanged. It was not for nothing that he had earned the name of

being one of the deadliest archers of the North, and had twice borne away the silver arrow of Selby. Swift and true flew the fatal shaft and buried itself to the feather in the curved back of the long yellow-haired peasant. Without a sound he fell upon his face and lay stone-dead upon the grass, the one short white plume between his dark shoulders to mark where Death had smote him.

The Yorkshireman threw his bowstave into the air and danced in triumph, while his comrades roared their fierce delight in a shout of applause, which changed suddenly into a tempest of hooting and of laughter.

The smaller peasant, more cunning than his comrade, had run more slowly, but with many a backward glance. He had marked his companion's fate and had waited with keen eyes until he saw the bowyer loose his string. At the moment he had thrown himself flat upon the grass and had heard the arrow scream above him, and seen it quiver in the turf beyond. Instantly he had sprung to his feet again, and amid wild whoops and halloos from the bowmen had made for the shelter of the wood. Now he had reached it, and ten score good spaces separated him from the nearest of his persecutors. Surely they could not reach him here. With the tangled brushwood behind him he was as safe as a rabbit at the mouth of his burrow. In the joy of his heart he must needs dance in derision and snap his fingers at the foolish men who had let him slip. He threw back his head, howling at them like a dog, and at the instant an arrow struck him full in the throat and laid him dead among the bracken. There was a hush of surprised silence and then a loud cheer burst from the archers.

"By the rood of Beverley!" cried old Wat, "I have not seen a finer roving shaft this many a year. In my own best day I could not have bettered it. Which of you loosed it?"

"It was Aylward of Tilford—Samkin Aylward," cried a score of voices, and the bowman, flushed at his own fame, was pushed to the front.

"Indeed I would that it had been at a nobler mark," said he. "He might have gone free for me, but I could not keep my fingers from the string when he turned to jeer at us."

"I see well that you are indeed a master-bowman," said old Wat, "and it is comfort to my soul to think that if I fall I leave such a man behind me to hold high the credit of our craft. Now gather your shafts and on, for Sir Robert awaits us on the brow of the hill."

All day Knolles and his men marched through the same wild and deserted country, inhabited only by these furtive creatures, hares to the strong and wolves to the weak, who hovered in the shadows of the wood. Ever and anon upon the tops of the hills they caught a glimpse of horsemen who watched them from a distance and vanished when approached. Sometimes bells rang an alarm from villages among the hills, and twice they passed castles which drew up their drawbridges at their approach, and lined their walls with hooting soldiers as they passed. The Englishmen gathered a few oxen and sheep from the pastures of each, but Knolles had no mind to break his strength upon stone walls, and so he went upon his way.

Once at St. Meen they passed a great nunnery, girt with a high grey lichened wall, an oasis of peace in this desert of war, the black-robed nuns basking in the sun or working in the gardens, with the strong gentle hand of Holy Church shielding them ever from evil. The archers doffed caps to them as they passed, for the boldest and roughest dared not cross that line guarded by the dire ban and blight which was the one only force in the whole steel-ridden earth which could stand between the weakling and the spoiler.

The little army halted at St. Meen and cooked its midday meal. It had gathered into its ranks again and was about to start, when Knolles drew Nigel to one side.

"Nigel," said he, "it seems to me that I have seldom set eyes upon a horse which hath more power and promise of speed than this great beast of thine."

"It is indeed a noble steed, fair sir," said Nigel. Between him and his young leader there had sprung up great affection and respect since the day that they set foot in the *Basilisk*.

"It will be the better if you stretch his limbs, for he grows overheavy," said the knight. "Now, mark me, Nigel! Yonder betwixt the ash-tree and the rock what do you see on the side of the far hill?"

"There is a white dot upon it. Surely it is a horse."

"I have marked it all morning, Nigel. This horseman has kept ever upon our flank, spying upon us or waiting to make some attempt upon us. Now I should be right glad to have a prisoner, for it is my wish to know something of this countryside, and these peasants can speak neither French nor English. I would have you linger here in hiding when we go forward. This man will still follow us. When he does so, yonder wood will lie betwixt you and him. Do you ride round it and come upon him from behind. There is broad plain upon his left, and we will cut him off upon the right. If your horse be indeed the swifter, then you cannot fail to take him."

Nigel had already sprung down and was tightening Pommers' girth.

"Nay, there is no need of haste, for you cannot start until we are two miles upon our way. And above all I pray you, Nigel, none of your knight-errant ways. It is this man that I want, him and the news that he can bring me. Think little of your own advancement and much of the needs of the army. When you get him, ride westwards upon the sun, and you cannot fail to find the road."

Nigel waited with Pommers under the shadow of the nunnery wall, horse and man chafing with impatience, while above them six round-eyed, innocent nun-faces looked down on this strange and disturbing vision from the outer world. At last the long column wound itself out of sight round a curve of the road, and the white dot was gone from the bare green flank of the hill. Nigel bowed his steel head to the nuns, gave his bridle a shake,

and bounded off upon his welcome mission. The round-eyed sisters saw yellow horse and twinkling man sweep round the skirt of the wood, caught a last glimmer of him through the tree-trunks, and paced slowly back to their pruning and their planting, their minds filled with the beauty and the terror of that outer world beyond the high grey lichen-mottled wall.

Everything fell out even as Knolles had planned. As Nigel rounded the oak forest, there upon the farther side of it, with only good greensward between, was the rider upon the white horse. Already he was so near that Nigel could see him clearly, a young cavalier, proud in his bearing, clad in purple silk tunic with a red curling feather in his low black cap. He wore no armour, but his sword gleamed at his side. He rode easily and carelessly, as one who cares for no man, and his eyes were for ever fixed upon the English soldiers on the road. So intent was he upon them that he gave no thought to his own safety, and it was only when the low thunder of the great horse's hoofs broke upon his ears that he turned in his saddle, looked very coolly and steadily at Nigel, then gave his own bridle a shake and darted off, swift as a hawk, towards the hills upon the left.

Pommers had met his match that day. The white horse, two parts Arab, bore the lighter weight, since Nigel was clad in full armour. For five miles over the open neither gained a hundred yards upon the other. They had topped the hill and flew down the farther side, the stranger continually turning in his saddle to have a look at his pursuer. There was no panic in his flight, but rather the amused rivalry with which a good horseman who is proud of his mount contends with one who has challenged him. Below the hill was a marshy plain, studded with great Druidic stones, some prostrate, some erect, some bearing others across their tops like the huge doors of some vanished building. A path ran through the marsh, with green rushes as a danger signal on either side of it. Across this path many of the huge stones were lying, but

the white horse cleared them in its stride, and Pommers followed close upon his heels. Then came a mile of soft ground where the lighter weight again drew to the front, but it ended in a dry upland, and once again Nigel gained. A sunken road crossed it, but the white cleared it with a mighty spring, and again the yellow followed. Two small hills lay before them with a narrow gorge of deep bushes between. Nigel saw the white horse bounding chest-deep amid the underwood.

Next instant its hind legs were high in the air, and the rider had been shot from its back. A howl of triumph rose from amid the bushes, and a dozen wild figures, armed with club and with spear, rushed upon the prostrate man.

"*A moi, Anglais, moi!*" cried a voice, and Nigel saw the young rider stagger to his feet, strike round him with his sword, and then fall once more before the rush of his assailants.

There was a comradeship among men of gentle blood and bearing which banded them together against all ruffianly or unchivalrous attack. These rude fellows were no soldiers. Their dress and arms, their uncouth cries and wild assault, marked them as banditti—such men as had slain the Englishman upon the road. Waiting in narrow gorges with a hidden rope across the path, they watched for the lonely horseman as a fowler waits by his bird-trap, trusting that they could overthrow the steed and then slay the rider ere he had recovered from his fall.

Such would have been the fate of the stranger, as of so many cavaliers before him, had Nigel not chanced to be close upon his heels. In an instant Pommers had burst through the group who struck at the prostrate man, and in another two of the robbers had fallen before Nigel's sword. A spear rang on his breastplate, but one blow shore off its head, and a second that of the man who held it. In vain they thrust at the steel-girt man. His sword played round them like lightning, and the fierce horse ramped and swooped above them with pawing iron-shod hoofs and eyes of fire. With cries and shrieks they flew off to right

and left amid the bushes, springing over boulders and darting under branches where no horseman could follow them. The foul crew had gone as swiftly and suddenly as it had come, and save for four ragged figures littered among the trampled bushes, no sign remained of their passing.

Nigel tethered Pommers to a thorn-bush and then turned his attention to the injured man. The white horse had regained his feet, and stood whinnying gently as he looked down on his prostrate master. A heavy blow, half broken by his sword, had beaten him down and left a great raw bruise upon his forehead. But a stream gurgled through the gorge, and a capful of water dashed over his face brought the senses back to the injured man. He was a mere stripling, with the delicate features of a woman, and a pair of great violet-blue eyes, which looked up presently with a puzzled stare into Nigel's face.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Ah yes! I call you to mind. You are the young Englishman who chased me on the great yellow horse. By our Lady of Rocamadour, whose vernicle is round my neck! I could not have believed that any horse could have kept at the heels of Charlemagne so long. But I will wager you a hundred crowns, Englishman, that I lead you over a five-mile course."

"Nay," said Nigel, "we will wait till you can back a horse ere we talk of racing it. I am Nigel of Tilford, of the family of Loring, a squire by rank, and the son of a knight. How are you called, young sir?"

"I also am a squire by rank and the son of a knight. I am Raoul de la Roche Pierre de Bras, whose father writes himself Lord of Grosbois, a free vavasor of the noble Count of Toulouse, with the right of fossa and of furca, the high justice, the middle and the low. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. "Englishman, you have saved my life, as I would have saved yours, had I seen such yelping dogs set upon a man of blood and of coat-armour. But now I am yours, and what is your sweet will?"

"When you are fit to ride, you will come back with me to my people."

"Alas! I feared that you would say so. Had I taken you, Nigel—that is your name, is it not?—had I taken you, I would not have acted thus?"

"How, then, would you have ordered things?" asked Nigel, much taken with the frank and debonair manner of his captive.

"I would not have taken advantage of such a mischance as has befallen me which has put me in your power. I would give you a sword and beat you in fair fight, so that I might send you to give greeting to my dear lady and show her the deeds which I do for her fair sake."

"Indeed, your words are both good and fair," said Nigel. "By Saint Paul! I cannot call to mind that I have ever met a man who bore himself better. But since I am in my armour and you without, I see not how we can debate the matter."

"Surely, gentle Nigel, you could doff your armour."

"Then have I only my underclothes."

"Nay, there shall be no unfairness there, for I also will very gladly strip to my underclothes."

Nigel looked wistfully at the Frenchman; but he shook his head. "Alas! it may not be," said he. "The last words that Sir Robert said to me were that I was to bring you to his side, for he would have speech with you. Would that I could do what you ask, for I also have a fair lady to whom I would fain send you. What use are you to me, Raoul, since I have gained no honour in the taking of you? How is it with you now?"

The young Frenchman had risen to his feet. "Do not take my sword," he said. "I am yours, rescue or no rescue. I think now that I could mount my horse, though indeed my head still rings like a cracked bell."

Nigel had lost all traces of his comrades; but he remembered Sir Robert's words that he should ride upon the sun with the certainty that sooner or later he would strike upon the road. As they jogged slowly along over

undulating hills, the Frenchman shook off his hurt, and the two chatted merrily together.

"I had but just come from France," said he, "and I had hoped to win honour in this country, for I have ever heard that the English are very hardy men and excellent people to fight with. My mules and my baggage are at Evran; but I rode forth to see what I could see, and I chanced upon your army moving down the road, so I coasted it in the hopes of some profit or adventure. Then you came after me, and I would have given all the golden goblets upon my father's table if I had my harness so that I could have turned upon you. I have promised the Countess Beatrice that I will send her an Englishman or two to kiss her hands."

"One might perchance have a worse fate," said Nigel. "Is this fair dame your betrothed?"

"She is my love," answered the Frenchman. "We are but waiting for the Count to be slain in the wars, and then we mean to marry. And this lady of thine, Nigel? I would that I could see her."

"Perchance you shall, fair sir," said Nigel, "for all that I have seen of you fills me with desire to go further with you. It is in my mind that we might turn this thing to profit and to honour, for when Sir Robert has spoken with you, I am free to do with you as I will."

"And what will you do, Nigel?"

"We shall surely try some small deed upon each other, so that either I shall see the Lady Beatrice, or you the Lady Mary. Nay, thank me not, for like yourself, I have come to this country in search of honour, and I know not where I may better find it than at the end of your sword-point. My good lord and master, Sir John Chandos, has told me many times that never yet did he meet French knight nor squire that he did not find great pleasure and profit from their company, and now I very clearly see that he has spoken the truth."

For an hour these two friends rode together, the Frenchman pouring forth the praises of his lady, whose glove he

produced from one pocket, her garter from his vest, and her shoe from his saddle-bag. She was blonde, and when he heard that Mary was dark, he would fain stop then and there to fight the question of colour. He talked too of his great château at Lauta, by the head waters of the pleasant Garonne ; of the hundred horses in the stables, the seventy hounds in the kennels, the fifty hawks in the mews. His English friend should come there when the wars were over, and what golden days would be theirs ! Nigel too, with his English coldness thawing before this young sunbeam of the South, found himself talking of the heather slopes of Surrey, of the forest of Woolmer, even of the sacred chambers of Cosford.

But as they rode onward toward the sinking sun, their thoughts far away in their distant homes, their horses striding together, there came that which brought their minds back in an instant to the perilous hillsides of Brittany.

It was the long blast of a trumpet blown from somewhere on the farther side of a ridge toward which they were riding. A second long-drawn note from a distance answered it.

" It is your camp," said the Frenchman.

" Nay," said Nigel ; " we have pipes with us and a naker or two, but I have heard no trumpet-call from our ranks. It behoves us to take heed, for we know not what may be before us. Ride this way, I pray you, that we may look over and yet be ourselves unseen."

Some scattered boulders crowned the height, and from behind them the two young squires could see the long rocky valley beyond. Upon a knoll was a small square building with a battlement round it. Some distance from it towered a great dark castle, as massive as the rocks on which it stood, with one strong keep at the corner, and four long lines of machicolated walls. Above, a great banner flew proudly in the wind, with some device which glowed red in the setting sun. Nigel shaded his eyes and stared with wrinkled brow.

" It is not the arms of England, nor yet the lilies of France, nor is it the ermine of Brittany," said he. " He

who holds this castle fights for his own hand, since his own device flies above it. Surely it is a head gules on an argent field."

"The bloody head on a silver tray!" cried the Frenchman. "Was I not warned against him? This is not a man, friend Nigel. It is a monster who wars upon English, French, and all Christendom. Have you not heard of the butcher of La Brohinière?"

"Nay, I have not heard of him."

"His name is accursed in France. Have I not been told also that he put to death this very year Giles de St. Pol, a friend of the English King?"

"Yes, in very truth it comes back to my mind now that I heard something of this matter in Calais before we started."

"Then there he dwells, and God guard you if ever you pass under yonder portal, for no prisoner has ever come forth alive! Since these wars began he hath been a king to himself, and the plunder of eleven years lies in yonder cellars. How can justice come to him, when no man knows who owns the land? But when we have packed you all back to your island, by the Blessed Mother of God, we have a heavy debt to pay to the man who dwells in yonder pile!"

But even as they watched, the trumpet-call burst forth once more. It came not from the castle but from the farther end of the valley. It was answered by a second call from the walls. Then in a long, straggling line there came a wild troop of marauders streaming homeward from some foray. In the van, at the head of a body of spearmen, rode a tall and burly man, clad in brazen armour, so that he shone like a golden image in the slanting rays of the sun. His helmet had been loosened from his gorget and was held before him on his horse's neck. A great tangled beard flowed over his breastplate, and his hair hung down as far behind. A squire at his elbow bore high the banner of the bleeding head. Behind the spearmen were a line of heavily laden mules, and on either side of them a drove of poor country folk, who were being herded into the

castle. Lastly came a second strong troop of mounted spearmen, who conducted a score or more of prisoners who marched together in a solid body.

Nigel stared at them, and then springing on his horse, he urged it along the shelter of the ridge so as to reach unseen a spot which was close to the castle gate. He had scarce taken up his new position when the cavalcade reached the drawbridge, and amid yells of welcome from those upon the wall, filed in a thin line across it. Nigel stared hard once more at the prisoners in the rear, and so absorbed was he by the sight that he had passed the rocks and was standing sheer upon the summit.

"By Saint Paul!" he cried, "it must indeed be so. I see their russet jackets. They are English archers!"

As he spoke, the hindmost one, a strongly built, broad-shouldered man, looked round and saw the gleaming figure above him upon the hill, with open helmet, and the five roses glowing upon his breast. With a sweep of his hands he had thrust his guardians aside, and for a moment was clear of the throng.

"Squire Loring! Squire Loring!" he cried. "It is I, Aylward the archer! It is I, Samkin Aylward!" The next minute a dozen hands had seized him, his cries were muffled with a gag, and he was hurled, the last of the band, through the black and threatening archway of the gate. Then with a clang the two iron wings came together, the portcullis swung upward, and captives and captors, robbers and booty, were all swallowed up within the grim and silent fortress.

## 20. *How the English attempted the Castle of La Brohinière*

FOR some minutes Nigel remained motionless upon the crest of the hill, his heart like lead within him, and his eyes fixed upon the huge grey walls which contained his unhappy henchman. He was roused by a

sympathetic hand upon his shoulder, and the voice of his young prisoner in his ear.

"*Peste!*" said he. "They have some of your birds in their cage, have they not? What, then, my friend? Keep your heart high! Is it not the chance of war, to-day to them, to-morrow to thee, and death at last for us all? And yet I had rather they were in any hands than those of Oliver the Butcher."

"By Saint Paul, we cannot suffer it!" cried Nigel, distractedly. "This man has come with me from my own home. He has stood between me and death before now. It goes to my very heart that he should call upon me in vain. I pray you, Raoul, to use your wits, for mine are all curdled in my head. Tell me what I should do, and how I may bring him help."

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. "As easy to get a lamb unscathed out of a wolves' lair as a prisoner safe from La Brohinière. Nay, Nigel, whither do you go? Have you, indeed, taken leave of your wits?"

The squire had spurred his horse down the hillside, and never halted until he was within a bowshot of the gate. The French prisoner followed hard behind him with a buzz of reproaches and expostulations.

"You are mad, Nigel!" he cried. "What do you hope to do, then? Would you carry the castle with your own hands? Halt, man, halt, in the name of the Virgin!"

But Nigel had no plan in his head, and only obeyed the fevered impulse to do something to ease his thoughts. He paced his horse up and down, waving his spear, and shouting insults and challenges to the garrison. Over the high wall a hundred jeering faces looked down upon him. So rash and wild was his action that it seemed to those within to mean some trap, so the drawbridge was still held high, and none ventured forth to seize him. A few long-range arrows pattered on the rocks, and then, with a deep, booming sound, a huge stone, hurled from a mangonel, sang over the heads of the two squires, and crashed into splinters among the boulders behind them. The French-

man seized Nigel's bridle, and forced him farther from the gateway.

"By the dear Virgin!" he cried, "I care not to have those pebbles about my ears, yet I cannot go back alone, so it is very clear, my crazy comrade, that you must come also. Now we are beyond their reach! But see, my friend Nigel, who are those who crown the height?"

The sun had sunk behind the western ridge, but the glowing sky was fringed at its lower edge by a score of ruddy, twinkling points. A body of horsemen showed hard and black upon the bare hill. Then they dipped down the slope into the valley, while a band of footmen followed behind.

"They are my people," cried Nigel, joyously. "Come, my friend, hasten, that we may take counsel what we shall do."

Sir Robert Knolles rode a bowshot in front of his men, and his brow was as black as night. Beside him, with crestfallen face, his horse bleeding, his armour dinted and soiled, was the hot-headed knight, Sir James Astley. A fierce discussion raged between them.

"I have done my devoir as best I might," said Astley. "Alone I had ten of them at my sword point. I know not how I have lived to tell it."

"What is your devoir to me? Where are my thirty bowmen?" cried Knolles, in bitter wrath. "Ten lie dead upon the ground, and twenty are worse than dead in yonder castle. And all because you must needs show all men how bold you are, and ride into a bushment such as a child could see. Alas for my own folly that ever I should have trusted such a one as you with the handling of men!"

"By God, Sir Robert, you shall answer to me for those words!" cried Astley, with a choking voice. "Never has a man dared to speak to me as you have done this day."

"As long as I hold the king's order I shall be master, and by the Lord I will hang you, James, on a near tree if I have further cause of offence! How now, Nigel? I see

by yonder white horse that you, at least, have not failed me. I will speak with you anon. Percy, bring up your men, and let us gather round this castle, for, as I hope for my soul's salvation, I will not leave it until I have my archers, or the head of him who holds them."

That night the English lay thick round the fortress of La Brohinière, so that none might come forth from it. But if none could come forth it was hard to see how any could win their way in, for it was full of men, the walls were high and strong, and a deep, dry ditch girt it round. But the hatred and fear which its master had raised over the whole countryside could now be plainly seen, for during the night the brushwood men and the villagers came in from all parts with offers of such help as they could give for the intaking of the castle. Knolles set them cutting bushes and tying them into faggots. When morning came he rode out before the wall, and he held counsel with his knights and squires as to how he should enter in.

" By noon," said he, " we shall have so many faggots that we may make our way over the ditch. Then we will beat in the gates and so win a footing."

The young Frenchman had come with Nigel to the conference, and now, amid the silence which followed the leader's proposal, he asked if he might be heard. He was clad in the brazen armour which Nigel had taken from the Red Ferret.

" It may be that it is not for me to join in your counsel," said he, " seeing that I am a prisoner and a Frenchman. But this man is the enemy of all, and we of France owe him a debt even as you do, since many a good Frenchman has died in his cellars. For this reason I crave to be heard."

" We will hear you," said Knolles.

" I have come from Evran yesterday," said he. " Sir Henry Spinnefort, Sir Peter La Roye, and many other brave knights and squires lie there, with a good company of men, all of whom would very gladly join with you to

destroy this butcher and his castle, for it is well known amongst us that his deeds are neither good nor fair. There are also bombards which we could drag over the hills, and so beat down this iron gate. If you so order it, I will ride to Evran and bring my companions back with me."

"Indeed, Robert," said Percy, "it is in my mind that this Frenchman speaks very wisely and well."

"And when we have taken the castle—what then?" asked Knolles.

"Then you could go upon your way, fair sir, and we upon ours. Or if it please you better you could draw together on yonder hill, and we on this one, so that the valley lies between us. Then, if any cavalier wished to advance himself, or to shed a vow and exalt his lady, an opening might be found for him. Surely it would be shame if so many brave men drew together, and no small deed were to come of it."

Nigel clasped his captive's hand to show his admiration and esteem, but Knolles shook his head.

"Things are not ordered thus, save in the tales of the minstrels," said he. "I have no wish that your people at Evran should know our numbers or our plans. I am not in this land for knight-errantry, but I am here to make head against the king's enemies. Has no one aught else to say?"

Percy pointed to the small outlying fortalice upon the knoll, on which also flew the flag of the bloody head.

"This smaller castle, Robert, is of no great strength, and cannot hold more than fifty men. It is built, as I conceive it, that no one should seize the high ground, and shoot down into the other. Why should we not turn all our strength upon it, since it is the weaker of the twain?"

But again the young leader shook his head. "If I should take it," said he, "I am still no nearer to my desire, nor will it avail me in getting my bowmen. It may cost a score of men, and what profit shall I have

from it ? Had I bombards, I might place them on yonder hill, but having none it is of little use to me."

" It may be," said Nigel, " that they have scant food or water, and so must come forth to fight us."

" I have made inquiry of the peasants," Knolles answered, " and they are of one mind that there is a well within the castle, and good store of food. Nay, gentlemen, there is no way before us save to take it by arms, and no spot where we can attempt it save through the great gate. Soon we will have so many faggots that we can cast them down into the ditch, and so win our way across. I have ordered them to cut a pine-tree on the hill and shear the branches, so that we may beat down the gate with it. But what is now amiss, and why do they run forward to the castle ? "

A buzz had risen from the soldiers in the camp, and they all crowded in one direction, rushing towards the castle wall. The knights and squires rode after them, and when in view of the main gate, the cause of the disturbance lay before them. On the tower above the portal three men were standing in the garb of English archers, ropes round their necks and their hands bound behind them. Their comrades surged below them with cries of recognition and of pity.

" It is Ambrose ! " cried one. " Surely it is Ambrose of Ingleton."

" Yes, in truth, I see his yellow hair. And the other, him with the beard, it is Lockwood of Skipton. Alas for his wife who keeps the booth by the bridge-head of Ribble ! I wot not who the third may be."

" It is little Johnny Alspaye, the youngest man in the company," cried old Wat, with the tears running down his cheeks. " 'Twas I who brought him from his home. Alas ! alas ! Foul fare the day that ever I coaxed him from his mother's side that he might perish in a far land."

There was a sudden flourish of a trumpet, and the drawbridge fell. Across it strode a portly man with a

faded herald's coat. He halted warily upon the farther side, and his voice boomed like a drum.

"I would speak with your leader," he cried.

Knolles rode forward.

"Have I your knightly word that I may advance unscathed with all courteous entreaty as befits a herald?"

Knolles nodded his head.

The man came slowly and pompously forward. "I am the messenger and liege servant," said he, "of the high baron, Oliver de St. Yvon, Lord of La Brohinière. He bids me to say that if you continue your journey and molest him no further, he will engage upon his part to make no further attack upon you. As to the men whom he holds, he will enrol them in his own honourable service, for he has need of longbowmen, and has heard much of their skill. But if you constrain him or cause him further displeasure by remaining before his castle, he hereby gives you warning that he will hang these three men over his gateway, and every morning another three, until all have been slain. This he has sworn upon the rood of Calvary, and as he has said so he will do upon jeopardy of his soul."

Robert Knolles looked grimly at the messenger. "You may thank the saints that you have had my promise," said he, "else would I have stripped that lying tabard from thy back and the skin beneath it from thy bones, that thy master might have a fitting answer to his message. Tell him that I hold him and all that are within his castle as hostage for the lives of my men, and that should he dare to do them scathe, he and every man that is with him shall hang upon his battlements. Go, and go quickly, lest my patience fail."

There was that in Knolles' cold grey eyes and in his manner of speaking those last words which sent the portly envoy back at a quicker gait than he had come. As he vanished into the gloomy arch of the gateway, the drawbridge swung up with creak and rattle behind him.

A few minutes later a rough-bearded fellow stepped

out over the portal where the condemned archers stood, and seizing the first by the shoulders he thrust him over the wall. A cry burst from the man's lips, and a deep groan from those of his comrades below, as he fell with a jerk which sent him halfway up to the parapet again, and then, after dancing like a child's toy, swung slowly, backward and forward, with limp limbs and twisted neck.

The hangman turned and bowed in mock reverence to the spectators beneath him. He had not yet learned in a land of puny archers how sure and how strong is the English bow. Half a dozen men, old Wat among them, had run forward toward the wall. They were too late to save their comrades, but at least their deaths were speedily avenged. The man was in the act of pushing off the second prisoner when an arrow crashed through his head, and he fell stone dead upon the parapet. But even in falling he had given the fatal thrust, and a second russet figure swung beside the first against the dark background of the castle wall.

There only remained the young lad, Johnny Alspaye, who stood shaking with fear, an abyss below him, and the voices of those who would hurl him over it behind. There was a long pause before anyone would come forth to dare those deadly arrows. Then a fellow, crouching double, ran forward from the shelter, keeping the young archer's body as a shield between him and danger.

"Aside, John! Aside!" cried his comrades from below.

The youth sprang as far as the rope would allow him, and slipped it half over his face in the effort. Three arrows flashed past his side, and two of them buried themselves in the body of the man behind. A howl of delight burst from the spectators as he dropped first upon his knees and then upon his face. A life for a life was no bad bargain.

But it was only a short respite which the skill of his comrades had given to the young archer. Over the parapet there appeared a ball of brass, then a pair of great brazen

shoulders, and lastly the full figure of an armoured man. He walked to the edge, and they heard his hoarse guffaw of laughter as the arrows clanged and clattered against his impenetrable mail. He slapped his breastplate as he jeered at them. Well he knew that at the distance no dart ever sped by mortal hands could cleave through his plates of metal. So he stood, the great burly Butcher of La Brohinière, with head uptossed, laughing insolently at his foes. Then, with slow and ponderous tread, he walked toward his boy victim, seized him by the ear, and dragged him across so that the rope might be straight. Seeing that the noose had slipped across the face, he tried to push it down, but the mail glove hampering him, he pulled it off, and grasped the rope above the lad's head with his naked hand.

Quick as a flash old Wat's arrow had sped, and the Butcher sprang back with a howl of pain, his hand skewered by a cloth-yard shaft. As he shook it furiously at his enemies a second grazed his knuckles. With a brutal kick of his metal-shod feet he hurled young Alspaye over the edge, looked down for a few moments at his death agonies, and then walked slowly from the parapet, nursing his dripping hand, the arrows still ringing loudly upon his backpiece as he went.

The archers below, enraged at the death of their comrades, leaped and howled like a pack of ravening wolves.

"By Saint Dunstan," said Percy, looking round at their flushed faces, "if ever we are to carry it, now is the moment, for these men will not be stopped if hate can take them forward."

"You are right, Thomas!" cried Knolles. "Gather together twenty man-at-arms, each with his shield to cover him. Astley, do you place the bowmen so that no head may show at window or parapet. Nigel, I pray you to order the countryfolk forward with their fardels of faggots. Let the others bring up the lopped pine-tree, which lies yonder behind the horse-lines. Ten men-at-arms can bear it on the right, and ten on the left, having shields over

their heads. The gate once down, let every man rush in. And God help the better cause!"

Swiftly, and yet quietly, the dispositions were made, for these were old soldiers whose daily trade was war. In little groups the archers formed in front of each slit or crevice in the walls, while others scanned the battlements with wary eyes, and sped an arrow at every face which gleamed for an instant above them. The garrison shot forth a shower of crossbow bolts and an occasional stone from their engine, but so deadly was the hail which rained upon them that they had no time to dwell upon their aim, and their discharges were wild and harmless. Under cover of the shafts of the bowmen, a line of peasants ran unscathed to the edge of the ditch, each hurling in the bundle which he bore in his arms, and then hurrying back for another one. In twenty minutes a broad pathway of faggots lay level with the ground upon one side and the gate upon the other. With the loss of two peasants slain by bolts and one archer crushed by a stone, the ditch had been filled up. All was ready for the battering-ram.

With a shout, twenty picked men rushed forward with the pine-tree under their arms, the heavy end turned toward the gate. The arbalesters on the tower leaned over and shot into the midst of them, but could not stop their advance. Two dropped, but the others raising their shields ran onward still shouting, crossed the bridge of faggots, and came with a thundering crash against the door. It splintered from base to arch, but kept its place.

Swinging their mighty weapon, the storming party thudded and crashed upon the gate, every blow loosening and widening the cracks which rent it from end to end. The three knights, with Nigel, the Frenchman Raoul, and the other squires, stood beside the ram, cheering on the men, and chanting to the rhythm of the swing with a loud "Ha!" at every blow. A great stone loosened from the parapet roared through the air and struck Sir James Astley and another of the attackers, but Nigel and the Frenchman had taken their places in an instant, and the

ram thudded and smashed with greater energy than ever. Another blow and another! the lower part was staving inward, but the great central bar still held firm. Surely another minute would beat it from its sockets.

But suddenly from above there came a great deluge of liquid. A hogshead of it had been tilted from the battlement until soldiers, bridge, and ram were equally drenched in yellow slime. Knolles rubbed his gauntlet in it, held it to his visor, and smelled it.

"Back, back!" he cried. "Back before it is too late!"

There was a small barred window above their heads at the side of the gate. A ruddy glare shone through it, and then a blazing torch was tossed down upon them. In a moment the oil had caught and the whole place was a sheet of flame. The fir-tree that they carried, the faggots beneath them, their very weapons, were all in a blaze.

To right and left the men sprang down into the dry ditch, rolling with screams upon the ground in their endeavour to extinguish the flames. The knights and squires protected by their armour strove hard, stamping and slapping, to help those who had but leather jacks to shield their bodies. From above a ceaseless shower of darts and of stones were poured down upon them, while on the other hand the archers, seeing the greatness of the danger, ran up to the edge of the ditch, and shot fast and true at every face which showed above the wall.

Scorched, wearied and bedraggled, the remains of the storming party clambered out of the ditch as best they could, clutching at the friendly hands held down to them, and so limped their way back amid the taunts and howls of their enemies. A long pile of smouldering cinders was all that remainded of their bridge, and on it lay Astley and six other red-hot men glowing in their armour.

Knolles clinched his hands as he looked back at the ruin that was wrought, and then surveyed the group of men who stood or lay around him nursing their burned limbs and scowling up at the exultant figures who waved on the castle wall. Badly scorched himself, the young leader

had no thought for his own injuries in the rage and grief which racked his soul.

"We will build another bridge," he cried. "Set the peasants binding faggots once more."

But a thought had flashed through Nigel's mind. "See, fair sir," said he. "The nails of yonder door are red-hot and the wood as white as ashes. Surely we can break our way through it."

"By the Virgin, you speak truly!" cried the French squire. "If we can cross the ditch the gate will not stop us. Come, Nigel, for our fair ladies' sakes, I will race you who will reach it first, England or France."

Alas for all the wise words of the good Chandos! Alas for all the lessons in order and discipline learned from the wary Knolles. In an instant, forgetful of all things but this noble challenge, Nigel was running at the top of his speed for the burning gate. Close at his heels was the Frenchman, blowing and gasping, as he rushed along in his brazen armour. Behind came a stream of howling archers and men-at-arms, like a flood which has broken its dam. Down they slipped into the ditch, rushed across it, and clambered on each other's backs up the opposite side. Nigel, Raoul, and two archers gained a foothold in front of the burning gate at the same moment. With blows and kicks they burst it to pieces, and dashed with a yell of triumph through the dark archway beyond. For a moment they thought with mad rapture that the castle was carried. A dark tunnel lay before them, down which they rushed. But alas! at the farther end it was blocked by a second gateway as strong as that which had been burned. In vain they beat upon it with their swords and axes. On each side the tunnel was pierced with slits, and the crossbow bolts discharged at only a few yards' distance crashed through armour as if it were cloth, and laid man after man upon the stones. They raged and leaped before the great iron-clamped barrier, but the wall itself was as easy to tear down.

It was bitter to draw back; but it was madness to

remain. Nigel looked round and saw that half his men were down. At the same moment Raoul sank with a gasp at his feet, a bolt driven to its socket through the links of the camail which guarded his neck. Some of the archers, seeing that certain death awaited them, were already running back to escape from the fatal passage.

"By Saint Paul!" cried Nigel, hotly. "Would you leave our wounded where this butcher may lay his hands upon them? Let the archers shoot inwards and hold them back from the slits. Now let each man raise one of our comrades, lest we leave our honour in the gate of this castle."

With a mighty effort he had raised Raoul upon his shoulders and staggered with him to the edge of the ditch. Several men were waiting below where the steep bank shielded them from the arrows, and to them Nigel handed down his wounded friend, and each archer in turn did the same. Again and again Nigel went back, until no one lay in the tunnel save seven who had died there. Thirteen wounded were laid in the shelter of the ditch, and there they must remain until night came to cover them. Meanwhile the bowmen on the farther side protected them from attack, and also prevented the enemy from all attempts to build up the outer gate. The gaping smoke-blackened arch was all that they could show for a loss of thirty men, but that at least Knolles was determined to keep.

Burned and bruised, but unconscious of either pain or fatigue for the turmoil of his spirit within him, Nigel knelt by the Frenchman and loosened his helmet. The girlish face of the young squire was white as chalk, and the haze of death was gathering over his violet eyes, but a faint smile played round his lips as he looked up at his English comrade.

"I shall never see Beatrice again," he whispered. "I pray you, Nigel, that when there is a truce you will journey as far as my father's château and tell him how his son died. Young Gaston will rejoice, for to him come the land and the coat, the war-cry and the profit. See

them, Nigel, and tell them that I was as forward as the others."

"Indeed, Raoul, no man could have carried himself with more honour or won more worship than you have done this day. I will do your behest when the time comes."

"Surely you are happy, Nigel," the dying squire murmured, "for this day has given you one more deed which you may lay at the feet of your lady-love."

"It might have been so had we carried the gate," Nigel answered sadly; "but, by Saint Paul! I cannot count it a deed where I have come back with my purpose unfulfilled. But this is no time, Raoul, to talk of my small affairs. If we take the castle, and I bear a good part in it, then perchance all this may indeed avail."

The Frenchman sat up with that strange energy which comes often as the harbinger of death.

"You will win your Lady Mary, Nigel, and your great deeds will be not three but a score, so that in all Christendom there shall be no man of blood and coat-armour who has not heard your name and your fame. This I tell you—I, Raoul de la Roche Pierre de Bras, dying upon the field of honour. And now kiss me, sweet friend, and lay me back, for the mists close round me and I am gone!"

With tender hands the squire lowered his comrade's head, but even as he did so there came a choking rush of blood, and the soul had passed. So died a gallant cavalier of France, and Nigel, as he knelt in the ditch beside him, prayed that his own end might be as noble and as debonair.

## 21. *How the Second Messenger went to Cosford*

UNDER cover of night the wounded men were lifted from the ditch and carried back, while pickets of archers were advanced to the very gate so that none should rebuild it. Nigel, sick at heart over

his own failure, the death of his prisoner, and his fears for Aylward, crept back into the camp, but his cup was not yet full, for Knolles was waiting for him with a tongue which cut like a whip-lash. Who was he, a raw squire, that he should lead an attack without orders? See what his crazy knight-errantry had brought about. Twenty men had been destroyed by it and nothing gained. Their blood was on his head. Chandos should hear of his conduct. He should be sent back to England when the castle had fallen.

Such were the bitter words of Knolles, the more bitter because Nigel felt in his heart that he had indeed done wrong, and that Chandos would have said the same, though, perchance, in kinder words. He listened in silent respect, as his duty was, and then, having saluted his leader, he withdrew apart, threw himself down among the bushes, and wept the hottest tears of his life, sobbing bitterly, with his face between his hands. He had striven hard, and yet everything had gone wrong with him. He was bruised, burned, and aching from head to foot. Yet so high is the spirit above the body that all was nothing compared to the sorrow and shame which racked his soul.

But a little thing changed the current of his thoughts and brought some peace to his mind. He had slipped off his mail gauntlets, and as he did so his fingers lighted upon the tiny bangle which Mary had fastened there when they stood together upon St. Catharine's Hill on the Guildford Road. He remembered the motto curiously worked in filigree of gold. It ran: "*Fais ce que dois, adviegne que pourra—c'est commandé au chevalier.*"

The words rang in his weary brain. He had done what seemed right, corne what might. It had gone awry, it is true; but all things human may do that. If he had carried the castle, he felt that Knolles would have forgiven and forgotten all else. If he had not carried it, it was no fault of his. No man could have done more. If Mary could see she would surely have approved. Dropping into sleep, he saw her dark face, shining with pride and

with pity, stooping over him as he lay. She stretched out her hand in his dream and touched him on the shoulder. He sprang up and rubbed his eyes, for fact had woven itself into dream in the strange way that it does, and someone was indeed leaning over him in the gloom, and shaking him from his slumbers. But the gentle voice and soft touch of the Lady Mary had changed suddenly to the harsh accents and rough grip of Black Simon, the fierce Norfolk man-at-arms.

"Surely you are the Squire Loring," he said, peering close to his face in the darkness.

"I am he. What then?"

"I have searched through the camp for you, but when I saw the great horse tethered near these bushes, I thought you would be found hard by. I would have a word with you."

"Speak on."

"This man Aylward the bowman was my friend, and it is the nature that God has given me to love my friends even as I hate my foes. He is also thy servant, and it has seemed to me that you love him also."

"I have good cause so to do."

"Then you and I, Squire Loring, have more reason to strive on his behalf than any of these others, who think more of taking the castle than of saving those who are captives within. Do you not see that such a man as this robber lord would, when all else had failed him, most surely cut the throats of his prisoners at the last instant before the castle fell, knowing well that, come what might, he would have short shrift himself? Is that not certain?"

"By Saint Paul! I had not thought of it."

"I was with you, hammering at the inner gate," said Simon, "and yet once when I thought that it was giving way, I said in my heart, 'Good-bye, Samkin! I shall never see you more.' This Baron has gall in his soul, even as I have myself, and do you think that I would give up my prisoners alive, if I were constrained so to do? No,

no ; had we won our way this day, it would have been the death-stroke for them all."

"It may be that you are right, Simon," said Nigel, "and the thought of it should assuage our grief. But if we cannot save them by taking the castle, then surely they are lost indeed."

"It may be so, or it may not," Simon answered slowly. "It is in my mind that if the castle were taken very suddenly, and in such a fashion that they could not foresee it, then perchance we might get the prisoners before they could do them scathe."

Nigel bent forward eagerly, his hand on the soldier's arm.

"You have some plan in your mind, Simon. Tell me what it is."

"I had wished to tell Sir Robert, but he is preparing the assault for to-morrow, and will not be turned from his purpose. I have indeed a plan, but whether it be good or not I cannot say until I have tried it. But first I will tell you what put it into my thoughts. Know, then, that this morning when I was in yonder ditch I marked one of their men upon the wall. He was a big man with a white face, red hair, and a touch of Saint Anthony's fire upon the cheek."

"But what has this to do with Aylward ?"

"I will show you. This evening, after the assault, I chanced to walk with some of my fellows round yonder small fort upon the knoll to see if we could spy a weak spot in it. Some of them came to the wall to curse us, and among them whom should I see but a big man with a white face, red hair, and a touch of Anthony's fire upon his cheek ! What make you of that, Squire Nigel ?"

"That this man had crossed from the castle to the fort."

"In good sooth, it must indeed be so. There are not two such ken-speckled men in the world. But if he crossed from the castle to the fort, it was not above the ground, for our own people were between."

"By Saint Paul ! I see your meaning !" cried Nigel.

"It is in your mind that there is a passage under the earth from one to the other."

"I am well sure of it."

"Then if we should take the small fort we may pass down this tunnel, and so carry the great castle also."

"Such a thing might happen," said Simon, "and yet it is dangerous also, for surely those in the castle would hear our assault upon the fort and so be warned to bar the passage against us, and to slay the prisoners before we could come."

"What, then, is your rede?"

"Could we find where the tunnel lay, Squire Nigel, I know not what is to prevent us from digging down upon it and breaking into it so that both fort and castle are at our mercy before either knows that we are there."

Nigel clapped his hands with joy. "'Fore God!" he cried. "It is a most noble plan! But alas! Simon, I see not how we can tell the course of this passage or where we should dig."

"I have peasants yonder with spades," said Simon. "There are two of my friends, Harding of Barnstable and West-country John, who are waiting for us with their gear. If you will come to lead us, Squire Nigel, we are ready to venture our bodies in the attempt."

What would Knolles say in case they failed? The thought flashed through Nigel's mind, but another came swiftly behind it. He would not venture farther unless he found hopes of success. And if he did venture farther he would put his life upon it. Giving that, he made amends for all errors. And if, on the other hand, success crowned their efforts, then Knolles would forgive his failure at the gateway. A minute later, every doubt banished from his mind, he was making his way through the darkness under the guidance of Black Simon.

Outside the camp the two other men-at-arms were waiting for them, and the four advanced together. Presently a little group of figures loomed up in the darkness. It was a cloudy night, and a thin rain was falling,

which obscured both the castle and the fort ; but a stone had been placed by Simon in the daytime which assured that they were between the two.

" Is blind Andreas there ? " asked Simon.

" Yes, kind sir, I am here," said a voice.

" This man," said Simon, " was once rich and of good repute, but he was beggared by this robber lord, who afterwards put out his eyes so that he has lived for many years in darkness at the charity of others."

" How can he help us in our enterprise if he be indeed blind ? " asked Nigel.

" It is for that very reason, fair lord, that he can be of greater service than any other man," Simon answered ; " for it often happens that when a man has lost a sense the good God will strengthen those that remain. Hence it is that Andreas has such ears that he can hear the sap in the trees or the cheep of the mouse in its burrow. He has come to help us to find the tunnel."

" And I have found it," said the blind man, proudly. " Here I have placed my staff upon the line of it. Twice as I lay there with my ear to the ground I have heard footsteps pass beneath me."

" I trust you make no mistake, old man," said Nigel.

For answer the blind man raised his staff and smote twice upon the ground, once to the right and once to the left. The one gave a dull thud, the other a hollow boom.

" Can you not hear that ? " he asked. " Will you ask me now if I make a mistake ? "

" Indeed, we are much beholden to you ! " cried Nigel. " Let the peasants dig, then, and as silently as they may. Do you keep your ear upon the ground, Andreas, so that if anyone pass beneath us we shall be warned."

So, amid the driving rain, the little group toiled in the darkness. The blind man lay silent, flat upon his face, and twice they heard his warning hiss and stopped their work, while someone passed beneath. In an hour they had dug down to a stone arch which was clearly the outer side of the tunnel roof. Here was a sad obstacle, for it

might take long to loosen a stone, and if their work was not done by the break of day then their enterprise was indeed hopeless. They loosened the mortar with a dagger, and at last dislodged one small stone which enabled them to get at the others. Presently a dark hole blacker than the night around them yawned at their feet, and their swords could touch no bottom to it. They had opened the tunnel.

"I would fain enter it first," said Nigel. "I pray you to lower me down." They held him to the full length of their arms, and then letting him drop they heard him land safely beneath them. An instant later the blind man started up with a low cry of alarm.

"I hear steps coming," said he. "They are far off, but they draw nearer."

Simon thrust his head and neck down the hole. "Squire Nigel," he whispered, "can you hear me?"

"I can hear you, Simon."

"Andreas says that someone comes."

"Then cover over the hole," came the answer. "Quick, I pray you, cover it over!"

A mantle was stretched across it, so that no glimmer of light should warn the newcomer. The fear was that he might have heard the sound of Nigel's descent. But soon it was clear that he had not done so, for Andreas announced that he was still advancing. Presently Nigel could hear the distant thud of his feet. If he bore a lantern all was lost. But no gleam of light appeared in the black tunnel, and still the footsteps drew nearer.

Nigel breathed a prayer of thanks to all his guardian saints as he crouched close to the slimy wall and waited breathless, his dagger in his hand. Nearer yet and nearer came the steps. He could hear the stranger's coarse breathing in the darkness. Then as he brushed past Nigel bounded upon him with a tiger spring. There was one gasp of astonishment, and not a sound more, for the squire's grip was on the man's throat and his body was pinned motionless against the wall.

"Simon! Simon!" cried Nigel, loudly.

The mantle was moved from the hole.

"Have you a cord? Or your belts linked together may serve."

One of the peasants had a rope, and Nigel soon felt it dangling against his hand. He listened and there was no sound in the passage. For an instant he released his captive's throat. A torrent of prayers and entreaties came forth. The man was shaking like a leaf in the wind. Nigel pressed the point of his dagger against his face and dared him to open his lips. Then he slipped the rope beneath his arms and tied it.

"Pull him up!" he whispered, and for an instant the grey glimmer above him was obscured.

"We have him, fair sir," said Simon.

"Then drop me the rope and hold it fast."

A moment later Nigel stood among the group of men who had gathered round their captive. It was too dark to see him, and they dare not strike flint and steel.

Simon passed his hand roughly over him and felt a fat clean-shaven face, and a cloth gabardine which hung to the ankles. "Who are you?" he whispered. "Speak the truth and speak it low, if you would ever speak again."

The man's teeth chattered in his head with cold and fright.

"I speak no English," he murmured.

"French, then," said Nigel.

"I am a holy priest of God. You court the ban of holy Church when you lay hands upon me. I pray you let me go upon my way, for there are those whom I would shrive and housel. If they should die in sin, their damnation is upon you."

"How are you called, then?"

"I am Dom Peter de Cervolles."

"De Cervolles, the arch-priest, he who heated the brazier when they burned out my eyes," cried old Andreas. "Of all the devils in hell there is none fouler than this one. Friends, friends, if I have done aught for you this

night, I ask but one reward, that ye let me have my will of this man."

But Nigel pushed the old man back. "There is no time for this," he said. "Now, hark you, priest—if priest indeed you be—your gown and tonsure will not save you if you play us false, for we are here of a set purpose, and we will go forward with it, come what may. Answer me and answer me truly or it will be an ill night for you. In what part of the castle does this tunnel enter?"

"In the lower cellar."

"What is at the end?"

"An oaken door."

"Is it barred?"

"Yes, it is barred."

"How would you have entered?"

"I would have given the password."

"Who then would have opened?"

"There is a guard within."

"And beyond him?"

"Beyond him are the prison cells and the jailers."

"Who else would be afoot?"

"No one save a guard at the gate and another on the battlement."

"What, then, is the password?"

The man was silent.

"The password, fellow!"

The cold points of two daggers pricked his throat, but still he would not speak.

"Where is the blind man?" asked Nigel. "Here, Andreas, you can have him and do what you will with him."

"Nay, nay," the priest whimpered. "Keep him off me. Save me from blind Andreas! I will tell you everything."

"The password, then, this instant?"

"It is '*Benedicite*!'"

"We have the password, Simon," cried Nigel. "Come, then, let us on to the farther end. These peasants will

guard the priest, and they will remain here lest we wish to send a message."

"Nay, fair sir, it is in my mind that we can do better," said Simon. "Let us take the priest with us, so that he who is within may know his voice."

"It is well thought of," said Nigel, "and first let us pray together, for indeed this night may well be our last."

He and the three men-at-arms knelt in the rain and sent up their simple orisons, Simon still clutching tight to his prisoner's wrist.

The priest fumbled in his breast, and drew something forth.

"It is the heart of the blessed confessor Saint Enogat," said he. "It may be that it will ease and assoil your souls if you would wish to handle it."

The four Englishmen passed the flat silver case from hand to hand, each pressing his lips devoutly upon it. Then they rose to their feet. Nigel was the first to lower himself down the hole; then Simon; then the priest, who was instantly seized by the other two. The men-at-arms followed them. They had scarcely moved away from the hole when Nigel stopped.

"Surely someone else came after us," said he.

They listened, but no whisper or rustle came from behind them. For a minute they paused and then resumed their journey through the dark. It seemed a long, long way, though in truth it was but a few hundred yards before they came to a door with a glimmer of yellow light around it, which barred their passage. Nigel struck upon it with his hand.

There was the rasping of a bolt and then a loud voice: "Is that you, priest?"

"Yes, it is I," said the prisoner, in a quavering voice. "Open, Arnold."

The voice was enough. There was no question of passwords. The door swung inward, and in an instant the janitor was cut down by Nigel and Simon. So sudden and so fierce was the attack that save for the thud of his

body no sound was heard. A flood of light burst outward in the passage, and the Englishmen stood with blinking eyes in its glare.

In front of them lay a stone-flagged corridor, across which lay the dead body of the janitor. It had doors on either side of it, and another grated door at the farther end. A strange hubbub, a kind of low droning and whining, filled the air. The four men were standing listening, full of wonder as to what this might mean, when a sharp cry came from behind them. The priest lay in a shapeless heap upon the ground, and the blood was rushing from his gaping throat. Down the passage, a black shadow in the yellow light, there fled a crouching man, who clattered with a stick as he went.

"It is Andreas," cried West-country Will. "He has slain him."

"Then it was he that I heard behind us," said Nigel. "Doubtless he was at our very heels in the darkness. I fear that the priest's cry has been heard."

"Nay," said Simon, "there are so many cries that one more may well pass. Let us take this lamp from the wall and see what sort of devil's den we have around us."

They opened the door upon the right, and so horrible a smell issued from it that they were driven back from it. The lamp which Simon held forward showed a monkey-like creature mowing and grimacing in a corner, man or woman none could tell, but driven crazy by loneliness and horror. In the other cell was a grey-bearded man fettered to the wall, looking blankly before him, a body without a soul, yet with life still in him, for his dull eyes turned slowly in their direction. But it was from behind the central door at the end of the passage that the chorus of sad cries came which filled the air.

"Simon," said Nigel, "before we go farther we will take this outer door from its hinges. With it we will block this passage so that at the worst we may hold our ground here until help comes. Do you back to the camp as fast as your feet can bear you. The peasants will draw you

upward through the hole. Give my greetings to Sir Robert and tell him that the castle is taken without fail if he comes this way with fifty men. Say that we have made a lodgment within the walls. And tell him also, Simon, that I would counsel him to make a stir before the gateway so that the guard may be held there whilst we make good our footing behind them. Go, good Simon, and lose not a moment ! "

But the man-at-arms shook his head. " It is I who have brought you here, fair sir, and here I bide through fair and foul. But you speak wisely and well, for Sir Robert should indeed be told what is going forward now that we have gone so far. Harding, do you go with all speed and bear the gentle Nigel's message."

Reluctantly the man-at-arms sped upon his errand. They could hear the racing of his feet and the low jingle of his harness until they died away in the tunnel. Then the three companions approached the door at the end. It was their intention to wait where they were until help should come, but suddenly amid the babel of cries within there broke forth an English voice, shouting in torment.

" My God ! " it cried, " I pray you, comrades, for a cup of water, as you hope for Christ's mercy ! "

A shout of laughter and the thud of a heavy blow followed the appeal.

All the hot blood rushed to Nigel's head at the sound, buzzing in his ears and throbbing in his temples. There are times when the fiery heart of a man must overbear the cold brain of a soldier. With one bound he was at the door, with another he was through it, the men-at-arms at his heels. So strange was the scene before them that for an instant all three stood motionless with horror and surprise.

It was a great vaulted chamber, brightly lit by many torches. At the farther end roared a great fire. In front of it three naked men were chained to posts in such a way that, flinch as they might, they could never get beyond the range of its scorching heat. Yet they were so far

from it that no actual burn would be inflicted if they could but keep turning and shifting so as continually to present some fresh portion of their flesh to the flames. Hence they danced and whirled in front of the fire, tossing ceaselessly this way and that within the compass of their chains, wearied to death, their protruding tongues cracked and blackened with thirst, but unable for one instant to rest from their writhings and contortions.

Even stranger was the sight at each side of the room, whence came that chorus of groans which had first struck upon the ears of Nigel and his companions. A line of great hogsheads were placed alongside the walls, and within each sat a man, his head protruding from the top. As they moved within there was a constant splashing and washing of water. The white wan faces all turned together as the door flew open, and a cry of amazement and of hope took the place of those long-drawn moans of despair.

At the same instant two fellows clad in black, who had been seated with a flagon of wine between them at a table near the fire, sprang wildly to their feet, staring with blank amazement at this sudden inrush. That instant of delay deprived them of their last chance of safety. Midway down the room was a flight of stone steps which led to the main door.

Swift as a wild cat Nigel bounded toward it and gained the steps a stride or two before the jailers. They turned and made for the other which led to the passage, but Simon and his comrades were nearer to it than they. Two sweeping blows, two dagger thrusts into writhing figures, and the ruffians who worked the will of the Butcher lay dead upon the floor of their slaughter-house.

Oh, the buzz of joy and of prayer from all those white lips ! Oh, the light of returning hope in all those sunken weary eyes ! One wild shout would have gone up had not Nigel's outstretched hands and warning voice hushed them to silence.

He opened the door behind him. A curving newel

staircase wound upward into the darkness. He listened, but no sound came down. There was a key in the outer lock of the iron door. He whipped it out and turned it on the inner side. The ground that they had gained was safe. Now they could turn to the relief of these poor fellows beside them. A few strong blows struck off the irons and freed the three dancers before the fire. With a husky croak of joy, they rushed across to their comrades' water-barrels, plunged their heads in like horses, and drank and drank and drank. Then in turn the poor shivering wretches were taken out of the barrels, their skins bleached and wrinkled with long soaking. Their bonds were torn from them; but, cramped and fixed, their limbs refused to act, and they tumbled and twisted upon the floor in their efforts to reach Nigel and to kiss his hand.

In a corner lay Aylward, dripping from his barrel and exhausted with cold and hunger. Nigel ran to his side and raised his head. The jug of wine from which the two jailers had drunk still stood upon their table. The squire placed it to the archer's lips, and he took a hearty pull at it.

"How is it with you now, Aylward?"

"Better, squire, better, but may I never touch water again as long as I live! Alas! poor Dicon has gone, and Stephen also—the life chilled out of them. The cold is in the very marrow of my bones. I pray you, let me lean upon your arm as far as the fire, that I may warm the frozen blood and set it running in my veins once more."

A strange sight it was to see these twenty naked men crouching in a half-circle round the fire with their trembling hands extended to the blaze. Soon their tongues at least were thawed, and they poured out the story of their troubles, with many a prayer and ejaculation to the saints for their safe delivery. No food had crossed their lips since they had been taken. The Butcher had commanded them to join his garrison and to shoot upon their comrades from the wall. When they refused he had set aside three of them for execution.

The others had been dragged to the cellar, whither the leering tyrant had followed them. Only one question he had asked them, whether they were of a hot-blooded nature or of a cold. Blows were showered upon them until they answered. Three had said cold, and had been condemned to the torment of the fire. The rest who had said hot were delivered up to the torture of the water-cask. Every few hours this man or fiend had come down to exult over their sufferings and to ask them whether they were ready yet to enter his service. Three had consented and were gone. But the others had all of them stood firm, two of them even to their death.

Such was the tale to which Nigel and his comrades listened while they waited impatiently for the coming of Knolles and his men. Many an anxious look did they cast down the black tunnel, but no glimmer of light and no clash of steel came from its depths. Suddenly, however, a loud and measured sound broke upon their ears. It was a dull metallic clang, ponderous and slow, growing louder and ever louder—the tread of an armoured man. The poor wretches round the fire, all unnerved by hunger and suffering, huddled together with wan, scared faces, their eyes fixed in terror on the door.

"It is he!" they whispered. "It is the Butcher himself!"

Nigel had darted to the door and listened intently. There were no footfalls save those of one man. Once sure of that, he softly turned the key in the lock. At the same instant there came a bull's bellow from without.

"Ives! Bertrand!" cried the voice. "Can you not hear me coming, you drunken varlets? You shall cool your own heads in the water-casks, you lazy rascals! What, not even now! Open, you dogs. Open, I say!"

He had thrust down the latch, and with a kick he flung the door wide and rushed inward. For an instant he stood motionless, a statue of dull yellow metal, his eyes fixed upon the empty casks and the huddle of naked men. Then, with the roar of a trapped lion, he turned,

but the door had slammed behind him, and Black Simon, with grim figure and sardonic face, stood between.

The Butcher looked round him helplessly, for he was unarmed save for his dagger. Then his eyes fell upon Nigel's roses.

"You are a gentleman of coat-armour," he cried. "I surrender myself to you."

"I will not take your surrender, you black villain," said Nigel. "Draw and defend yourself. Simon, give him your sword."

"Nay, this is madness," said the blunt man-at-arms. "Why should I give the wasp a sting?"

"Give it him, I say. I cannot kill him in cold blood."

"But I can!" yelled Aylward, who had crept up from the fire. "Come, comrades! By these ten finger-bones! has he not taught us how cold blood should be warmed?"

Like a pack of wolves they were on him, and he clanged upon the floor with a dozen frenzied naked figures clutching and clinging above him. In vain Nigel tried to pull them off. They were mad with rage, these tortured starving men, their eyes fixed and glaring, their hair on end, their teeth gnashing with fury, while they tore at the howling, writhing man. Then, with a rattle and clatter, they pulled him across the room by his two ankles and dragged him into the fire.

Nigel shuddered and turned away his eyes as he saw the brazen figure roll out and stagger to his knees, only to be hurled once more into the heart of the blaze. His prisoners screamed with joy and clapped their hands as they pushed him back with their feet until the armour was too hot for them to touch. Then at last he lay still and glowed darkly red, while the naked men danced in a wild half-circle round the fire.

But now at last the supports had come. Lights flashed and armour gleamed down the tunnel. The cellar filled with armed men, while from above came the cries and turmoil of the feigned assault upon the gate. Led by Knolles and Nigel, the storming party rushed upwards and

seized the court-yard. The guard of the gate taken in the rear threw down their weapons and cried for mercy. The gate was thrown open and the assailants rushed in, with hundreds of furious peasants at their heels. Some of the robbers died in hot blood, many in cold ; but all died, for Knolles had vowed to give no quarter. Day was just breaking when the last fugitive had been hunted out and slain. From all sides came the yells and whoops of the soldiers, with the rending and riving of doors as they burst into the store-rooms and treasure-chambers. There was a joyous scramble among them for the plunder of eleven years ; gold and jewels, satins and velvets, rich plate and noble hangings were all to be had for the taking.

The rescued prisoners, their hunger appeased and their clothes restored, led the search for booty. Nigel, leaning on his sword by the gateway, saw Aylward totter past, a huge bundle under each arm, another slung over his back, and a smaller packet hanging from his mouth. He dropped it for a moment as he passed his young master.

" By these ten finger-bones ! I am right glad that I came to the war, and no man could ask for a more goodly life," said he. " I have a present here for every girl in Tilford, and my father need never fear the frown of the sacrist of Waverley again. But how of you, Squire Loring ? It standeth not aright that we should gather the harvest whilst you, who sowed it, go forth empty-handed. Come, gentle sir, take these things that I have gathered, and I will go back and find more."

But Nigel smiled and shook his head. " You have gained what your heart desired, and perchance I have done so also," said he.

An instant later Knolles strode up to him with out-stretched hand.

" I ask your pardon, Nigel," said he. " I have spoken too hotly in my wrath."

" Nay, fair sir, I was at fault."

" If we stand here now within this castle, it is to you that I owe it. The king shall know of it, and Chandos

also. Can I do aught else, Nigel, to prove to you the high esteem in which I hold you ? "

The squire flushed with pleasure. " Do you send a messenger home to England, fair sir, with news of these doings ? "

" Surely, I must do so. But do not tell me, Nigel, that you would be that messenger. Ask me some other favour, for indeed I cannot let you go."

" Now, God forbid ! " cried Nigel. " By Saint Paul ! I would not be so caitiff and so thrall as to leave you when some small deed might still be done. But I would fain send a message by your messenger."

" To whom ? "

" It is to the Lady Mary, daughter of old Sir John Buttesthorn, who dwells near Guildford."

" But you will write the message, Nigel. Such greetings as a cavalier sends to his lady-love should be under seal."

" Nay, he can carry my message by word of mouth."

" Then I shall tell him, for he goes this morning. What message, then, shall he say to the lady ? "

" He will give her my very humble greeting, and he will say to her that for the second time Saint Catharine has been our friend."

## 22. *How Robert of Beaumanoir came to Ploermel*

SIR ROBERT KNOLLES and his men passed onward that day, looking back many a time to see the two dark columns of smoke, one thicker and one more slender, which arose from the castle and from the fort of La Brohinière. There was not an archer nor a man-at-arms who did not bear a great bundle of spoil upon his back, and Knolles frowned darkly as he looked upon them. Gladly would he have thrown it all down by the roadside, but he had tried such matters before, and he knew that it was as safe to tear a half-gnawed bone from a bear as their

blood-won plunder from such men as these. In any case it was but two days' march to Ploermel, where he hoped to bring his journey to an end.

That night they camped at Mauron, where a small English and Breton garrison held the castle. Right glad were the bowmen to see some of their own countrymen once more, and they spent the night over wine and dice, a crowd of Breton girls assisting, so that next morning their bundles were much lighter, and most of the plunder of La Brohinière was left with the men and women of Mauron. Next day their march lay with a fair sluggish river upon their right, and a great rolling forest upon their left, which covered the whole country. At last, towards evening, the towers of Ploermel rose before them, and they saw against a darkening sky the Red Cross of England waving in the wind. So blue was the river Duc which skirted the road, and so green its banks, that they might indeed have been back beside their own homely streams, the Oxford Thames or the Midland Trent, but ever as the darkness deepened there came in wild gusts the howling of wolves from the forest to remind them that they were in a land of war. So busy had men been for many years in hunting one another that the beasts of the chase had grown to a monstrous degree, until the streets of the towns were no longer safe from the wild inroads of the fierce creatures, the wolves and the bears, who swarmed around them.

It was nightfall when the little army entered the outer gate of the Castle of Ploermel and encamped in the broad bailey-yard. Ploermel was at that time the centre of British power in Mid-Brittany, as Hennebon was in the West, and it was held by a garrison of five hundred men under an old soldier, Richard of Bambro', a rugged North-umbrian, trained in that great school of warriors, the border wars. He who had ridden the marches of the most troubled frontier in Europe, and served his time against the Liddlesdale and Nithsdale raiders, was hardened for a life in the field.

Of late, however, Bambro' had been unable to undertake any enterprise, for his reinforcements had failed him, and amid his following he had but three English knights and seventy men. The rest were a mixed crew of Bretons, Hainaulters, and a few German mercenary soldiers, brave men individually, as those of that stock have ever been, but lacking interest in the cause, and bound together by no common tie of blood or tradition.

On the other hand, the surrounding castles, and especially that of Josselin, were held by strong forces of enthusiastic Bretons, inflamed by a common patriotism, and full of warlike ardour. Robert of Beaumanoir, the fierce seneschal of the house of Rohan, pushed constant forays and excursions against Ploermel, so that town and castle were both in daily dread of being surrounded and besieged. Several small parties of the English faction had been cut off and slain to a man, and so straitened were the others that it was difficult for them to gather provisions from the country round.

Such was the state of Bambro's garrison when on that March evening Knolles and his men streamed into the bailey-yard of his castle.

In the glare of the torches at the inner gate Bambro' was waiting to receive them, a dry, hard, wizened man, small and fierce, with beady black eyes and quick, furtive ways. Beside him, a strange contrast, stood his squire, Croquart, a German, whose name and fame as a man-at-arms were widespread, though, like Robert Knolles himself, he had begun as a humble page. He was a very tall man, with an enormous spread of shoulders, and a pair of huge hands with which he could crack a horse-shoe. He was slow and lethargic, save in moments of excitement, and his calm blond face, his dreamy blue eyes, and his long fair hair gave him so gentle an appearance that none save those who had seen him in his berserk mood, raging, an iron giant, in the forefront of the battle, could ever guess how terrible a warrior he might be. Little knight and huge squire stood together under the arch of

the donjon and gave welcome to the newcomers, while a swarm of soldiers crowded round to embrace their comrades and to lead them off where they might feed and make merry together.

Supper had been set in the hall of Ploermel, wherein the knights and squires assembled. Bambro' and Croquart were there with Sir Hugh Calverly, an old friend of Knolles and a fellow-townsman, for both were men of Chester. Sir Hugh was a middle-sized flaxen man, with hard grey eyes and fierce, large-nosed face, sliced across with the scar of a sword-cut. There, too, were Geoffrey D'Ardaine, a young Breton seigneur; Sir Thomas Belford, a burly thick-set Midland Englishman; Sir Thomas Walton, whose surcoat of scarlet martlets showed that he was of the Surrey Waltons; James Marshall and John Russell, young English squires; and the two brothers, Richard and Hugh Le Galliard, who were of Gascon blood. Besides these were several squires unknown to fame, and of the newcomers, Sir Robert Knolles, Sir Thomas Percy, Nigel Loring, and two other squires, Allington and Parsons. These were the company who gathered in the torchlight round the table of the Seneschal of Ploermel, and kept high revel with joyous hearts because they thought that much honour and noble deeds lay before them.

But one sad face there was at the board, and that belonged to him at the head of it. Sir Richard Bambro' sat with his chin leaning upon his hand and his eyes downcast upon the cloth, while all around him rose the merry clatter of voices, everyone planning some fresh enterprise which might now be attempted. Sir Robert Knolles was for an immediate advance upon Josselin. Calverly thought that a raid might be made into the South, where the main French power lay. Others spoke of an attack upon Vannes.

To all these eager opinions Bambro' listened in a moody silence, which he broke at last by a fierce execration which drew a hushed attention from the company.

"Say no more, fair sirs," he cried, "for indeed your words are like so many stabs in my heart. All this and more we might have done. But of a truth you are too late."

"Too late?" cried Knolles. "What mean you, Richard?"

"Alas that I should have to say it, but you and all these fair soldiers might be back in England once more for all the profit that I am like to have from your coming. Saw you a rider on a white horse ere you reached the Castle?"

"Nay, I saw him not."

"He came by the western road from Hennebon. Would that he had broken his neck ere he came here. Not an hour ago he left his message, and now hath ridden on to warn the garrison of Malestroit. A truce has been proclaimed for a year betwixt the French king and the English, and he who breaks it forfeits life and estate."

"A truce!" Here was an end to all their fine dreams. They looked blankly at each other all round the table, while Croquart brought his great fist down upon the board until the glasses rattled again. Knolles sat with clinched hands as if he were a figure of stone, while Nigel's heart turned cold and heavy within him. A truce! Where, then, was his third deed, and how might he return without it?

Even as they sat in moody silence there was the call of a bugle from somewhere out in the darkness.

Sir Richard looked up with surprise. "We are not wont to be summoned after once the portcullis is down," said he. "Truce or no truce, we must let no man within our walls until we have proved him. Croquart, see to it!"

The huge German left the room. The company were still seated in despondent silence when he returned.

"Sir Richard," said he, "the brave knight Robert of Beaumanoir and his Squire William de Montaubon are without the gate, and would fain have speech with you."

Bambro' started in his chair. What could the fierce

leader of the Bretons, a man who was red to the elbow with English blood, have to say to them? On what errand had he left his castle of Josselin to pay this visit to his deadly enemies?"

"Are they armed?" he asked.

"They are unarmed."

"Then admit them and bring them hither, but double the guards, and take all heed against surprise."

Places were set at the farther end of the table for these most unexpected guests. Presently the door was swung open, and Croquart, with all form and courtesy, announced the two Bretons, who entered with the proud and lofty air of gallant warriors and high-bred gentlemen.

Beaumanoir was a tall, dark man, with raven hair and long, swarthy beard. He was strong and straight as a young oak, with fiery black eyes, and no flaw in his comely features, save that his front teeth had been dashed from their sockets. His squire, William of Montaubon, was also tall, with a thin, hatchet face, and two small grey eyes set very close upon either side of a long, fierce nose. In Beaumanoir's expression one read only gallantry and frankness; in Montaubon's there was gallantry also, but it was mixed with the cruelty and cunning of the wolf. They bowed as they entered, and the little English seneschal advanced with outstretched hand to meet them.

"Welcome, Robert, so long as you are beneath this roof," said he. "Perhaps the time may come in another place when we may speak to each other in another fashion."

"So I hope, Richard," said Beaumanoir; "but, indeed, we of Josselin bear you in high esteem, and are much beholden to you and to your men for all that you have done for us. We could not wish better neighbours, nor any from whom more honour is to be gained. I learn that Sir Robert Knolles and others have joined you, and we are heavy-hearted to think that the orders of our kings should debar us from attempting a venture."

He and his squire sat down at the places set for them, and, filling their glasses, drank to the company.

"What you say is true, Robert," said Bambro', "and before you came we were discussing the matter among ourselves, and grieving that it should be so. When heard you of the truce?"

"Yester evening a messenger rode from Nantes."

"Our news came to-night from Hennebon. The king's own seal was on the order. So I fear that for a year, at least, you will bide at Josselin and we at Ploermel, and kill time as we may. Perchance we may hunt the wolf together in the great forest, or fly our hawks on the banks of the Duc."

"Doubtless we shall do all this, Richard," said Beaumanoir; "but by Saint Cadoc it is in my mind that, with good-will upon both sides, we may please ourselves, and yet stand excused before our kings."

Knights and squires leaned forward in their chairs, their eager eyes fixed upon him. He broke into a gap-toothed smile as he looked round at the circle, the wizened seneschal, the blond giant, Nigel's fresh young face, the grim features of Knolles, and the yellow, hawk-like Calverly, all burning with the same desire.

"I see that I need not doubt the good-will," said he, "and of that I was very certain before I came upon this errand. Bethink you, then, that this order applies to war but not to challenges, spear-runnings, knightly exchanges, or the like. King Edward is too good a knight, and so is King John, that either of them should stand in the way of a gentleman who desires to advance himself, or to venture his body for the exaltation of his lady. Is this not so?"

A murmur of eager assent rose from the table.

"If you, as the garrison of Ploermel, march upon the garrison of Josselin, then it is very plain that we have broken the truce, and upon our heads be it. But if there be a private bickering betwixt me, for example, and this young squire whose eyes show that he is very eager for honour, and if, thereafter, others on each side join in and fight upon the quarrel, it is in no sense war, but rather our own private business which no king can alter."

"Indeed, Robert," said Bambro', "all that you say is very good and fair."

Beaumanoir leaned forward towards Nigel, his brimming glass in his hand.

"Your name, squire?" said he.

"My name is Nigel Loring."

"I see that you are young and eager, so I choose you, as I would fain have been chosen when I was of your age."

"I thank you, fair sir," said Nigel. "It is great honour that one so famous as yourself should condescend to do some small deed upon me."

"But we must have cause for quarrel, Nigel. Now, here I drink to the ladies of Brittany, who, of all ladies upon this earth, are the most fair and the most virtuous, so that the least worthy amongst them is far above the best of England. What say you to that, young sir?"

Nigel dipped his finger in his glass, and, leaning over, he placed its wet impress on the Breton's hand.

"This in your face!" said he.

Beaumanoir swept off the red drop of moisture and smiled his approval.

"It could not have been better done," said he. "Why spoil my velvet paltock, as many a hot-headed fool would have done? It is in my mind, young sir, that you will go far. And now, who follows up this quarrel?"

A growl ran round the table.

Beaumanoir ran his eye round and shook his head.

"Alas!" said he, "there are but twenty of you here, and I have thirty at Josselin who are so eager to advance themselves that, if I return without hope for all of them, there will be sore hearts amongst them. I pray you, Richard, since we have been at these pains to arrange matters, that you in turn will do what you may. Can you not find ten more men?"

"But not of gentle blood."

"Nay, it matters not, if they will only fight."

"Of that there can be no doubt, for the castle is full

of archers and men-at-arms who would gladly play a part in the matter."

"Then choose ten," said Beaumanoir.

But for the first time the wolf-like squire opened his thin lips.

"Surely, my lord, you will not allow archers," said he.

"I fear not any man."

"Nay, fair sir, consider that this is a trial of weapons betwixt us, where man faces man. You have seen these English archers, and you know how fast and how strong are their shafts. Bethink you that if ten of them were against us, it is likely that half of us would be down before ever we came to handstrokes."

"By Saint Cadoc, William, I think that you are right," cried the Breton. "If we are to have such a fight as will remain in the memories of men, you will bring no archers and we no crossbows. Let it be steel upon steel. How say you, then?"

"Surely we can bring ten men-at-arms to make up the thirty that you desire, Robert. It is agreed, then, that we fight on no quarrel of England and France, but over this matter of the ladies in which you and Squire Loring have fallen out. And now the time?"

"At once."

"Surely at once, or perchance a second messenger may come and this also be forbidden. We will be ready with to-morrow's sunrise."

"Nay, a day later," cried the Breton squire. "Bethink you, my lord, that the three lances of Radenac would take time to come over."

"They are not of our garrison, and they shall not have a place."

"But, fair sir, of all the lances of Brittany——"

"Nay, William, I will not have it an hour later. To-morrow it shall be, Richard."

"And where?"

"I marked a fitting place even as I rode here this evening. If you cross the river and take the bridle-path

through the fields which leads to Josselin you come midway upon a mighty oak standing at the corner of a fair and level meadow. There let us meet at midday to-morrow."

"Agreed!" cried Bambro'. "But I pray you not to rise, Robert! The night is still young, and the spices and hippocras will soon be served. Bide with us, I pray you, for if you would fain hear the latest songs from England, these gentlemen have doubtless brought them. To some of us perchance it is the last night, so we would make it a full one."

But the gallant Breton shook his head. "It may indeed be the last night for many," said he, "and it is but right that my comrades should know it. I have no need of monk or friar, for I cannot think that harm will ever come beyond the grave to one who has borne himself as a knight should, but others have other thoughts upon these matters, and would fain have time for prayer and penitence. Adieu, fair sirs, and I drink a last glass to a happy meeting at the midway oak."

## 23. *How Thirty of Josselin encountered Thirty of Ploermel*

ALL night the Castle of Ploermel rang with warlike preparations, for the smiths were hammering and filing and riveting, preparing the armour for the champions. In the stable yard hostlers were testing and grooming the great war-horses, while in the chapel knights and squires were easing their souls at the knees of old Father Benedict.

Down in the courtyard, meanwhile, the men-at-arms had been assembled, and the volunteers weeded out until the best men had been selected. Black Simon had obtained a place, and great was the joy which shone upon his grim visage. With him were chosen young Nicholas Dagsworth, a gentleman adventurer who was nephew to

the famous Sir Thomas, Walter the German, Hulbitée—a huge peasant whose massive frame gave promise which his sluggish spirit failed to fulfil—John Alcock, Robin Adey and Raoul Provost. These with three others made up the required thirty. Great was the grumbling and evil the talk among the archers when it was learned that none of them were to be included, but the bow had been forbidden on either side. It is true that many of them were expert fighters both with axe and with sword, but they were unused to carry heavy armour, and a half-armed man would have short shrift in such a hand-to-hand struggle as lay before them.

It was two hours after tierce, or one hour before noon, on the fourth Wednesday of Lent, in the year of Christ 1351, that the men of Ploermel rode forth from their castle-gate and crossed the bridge of the Duc. In front was Bambro', with his squire, Croquart, the latter on a great roan horse bearing the banner of Ploermel, which was a black rampant lion holding a blue flag upon a field of ermine. Behind him came Robert Knolles and Nigel Loring, with an attendant at their side, who carried the pennon of the black raven. Then rode Sir Thomas Percy, with his blue lion flaunting above him, and Sir Hugh Calverly, whose banner bore a silver owl, followed by the massive Belford, who carried a huge iron club, weighing sixty pounds, upon his saddle-bow, and Sir Thomas Walton, the knight of Surrey. Behind them were four brave Anglo-Bretons, Perrot de Commelain, Le Gaillart, d'Aspremont and d'Ardaine, who fought against their own countrymen because they were partisans of the Countess of Montfort. Her engrailed silver cross upon a blue field was carried at their head. In the rear were five German or Hainault mercenaries, the tall Hulbitée, and the men-at-arms. Altogether of these combatants twenty were of English birth, four were Breton, and six were of German blood.

So, with glitter of armour and flaunting of pennons, their war-horses tossing and pawing, the champions rode

down to the midway oak. Behind them streamed hundreds of archers and men-at-arms, whose weapons had been wisely taken from them, lest a general battle should ensue. With them also went the townsfolk, men and women, together with wine-sellers, provision merchants, armourers, grooms, and heralds, with surgeons to tend the wounded and priests to shrive the dying. The path was blocked by this throng, but all over the face of the country, horsemen and footmen, gentle and simple, men and women, could be seen speeding their way to the scene of the encounter.

The journey was not a long one, for presently, as they threaded their way through the fields, there appeared before them a great grey oak which spread its gnarled leafless branches over the corner of a green and level meadow. The tree was black with the peasants who had climbed into it, and all round it was a huge throng, chattering and calling like a rookery at sunset. A storm of hooting broke out from them at the approach of the English, for Bambro' was hated in the country, where he raised money for the Montfort cause by putting every parish to ransom, and maltreating those who refused to pay. There was little amenity in the warlike ways which had been learned upon the Scottish border. The champions rode onward without deigning to take notice of the taunts of the rabble, but the archers turned that way and soon beat the mob to silence. Then they resolved themselves into the keepers of the ground, and pressed the people back until they formed a dense line along the edge of the field, leaving the whole space clear for the warriors.

The Breton champions had not yet arrived, so the English tethered their horses at one side of the ground, and then gathered round their leader. Every man had his shield slung round his neck, and had cut his spear to the length of five feet, so that it might be more manageable for fighting on foot. Besides the spear, a sword or a battle-axe hung at the side of each. They were clad from

head to foot in armour, with devices upon the crests and surcoats to distinguish them from their antagonists. At present their visors were still up, and they chatted gaily with each other.

"By Saint Dunstan!" cried Percy, slapping his gauntleted hands together and stamping his steel feet, "I shall be right glad to get to work, for my blood is chilled."

"I warrant you will be warm enough ere you get through," said Calverly.

"Or cold for ever. Candle shall burn and bell toll at Alnwick Chapel if I leave this ground alive; but come what may, fair sirs, it should be a famous joust, and one which will help us forward. Surely each of us will have worshipfully won worship, if we chance to come through."

"You say truth, Thomas," said Knolles, bracing his girdle. "For my own part I have no joy in such encounters when there is warfare to be carried out, for it standeth not aright that a man should think of his own pleasure and advancement rather than of the king's cause and the weal of the army. But in times of truce I can think of no better way in which a day may be profitably spent. Why so silent, Nigel?"

"Indeed, fair sir, I was looking towards Josselin, which lies, as I understand, beyond those woods. I see no sign of this debonair gentleman and of his following. It would be indeed grievous pity if any cause came to hold them back."

Hugh Calverly laughed at the words. "You need have no fear, young sir," said he. "Such a spirit lies in Robert de Beaumanoir that if he must come alone he would ride against us none the less. I warrant that if he were on a bed of death he would be borne here and die on the green field."

"You say truly, Hugh," said Bambro'. "I know him and those who ride behind him. Thirty stouter men or more skilled in arms are not to be found in Christendom. It is in my mind that, come what may, there will be much

honour for all of us this day. Ever in my head I have a rhyme which the wife of a Welsh archer gave me when I crossed her hand with a golden bracelet after the intaking of Bergerac. She was of the old blood of Merlin with the power of sight. Thus she said—

" ' 'Twixt the oak-tree and the river
Knightly fame and brave endeavour
Make an honoured name for ever.'

Methinks I see the oak-tree, and yonder is the river. Surely this should betide some good to us."

The huge German squire betrayed some impatience during this speech of his leader. Though his rank was subordinate, no man present had more experience of warfare or was more famous as a fighter than he. He now broke brusquely into the talk.

" We should be better employed in ordering our line and making our plans than in talking of the rhymes of Merlin or such old wives' tales," said he. " It is to our own strong arms and good weapons that we must trust this day. And first I would ask you, Sir Richard, what is your will if perchance you should fall in the midst of the fight ? "

Bambro' turned to the others. " If such should be the case, fair sirs, I desire that my squire, Croquart, should command."

There was a pause, while the knights looked with some chagrin at each other. The silence was broken by Knolles.

" I will do what you say, Richard," said he, " though indeed it is bitter that we who are knights should serve beneath a squire. Yet it is not for us to fall out among ourselves now at this last moment, and I have ever heard that Croquart is a very worthy and valiant man. Therefore, I will pledge you on jeopardy of my soul that I will accept him as leader if you fall."

" So will I also, Richard," said Calverly.

" And I too ! " cried Belford. " But surely I hear music, and yonder are their pennons amid the trees."

They all turned, leaning upon their short spears, and watched the advance of the men of Josselin, as their troop wound its way out from the woodlands. In front rode three heralds with tabards of the ermine of Brittany, blowing loudly upon silver trumpets. Behind them a great man upon a white horse bore the banner of Josselin, which carries nine golden bezants upon a scarlet field. Then came the champions riding two and two, fifteen knights and fifteen squires, each with his pennon displayed. Behind them on a litter was borne an aged priest, the Bishop of Rennes, carrying in his hands the viaticum and the holy oils that he might give the last aid and comfort of the Church to those who were dying. The procession was terminated by hundreds of men and women from Josselin, Guegon, and Helleon, and by the entire garrison of the fortress, who came, as the English had done, without their arms. The head of this long column had reached the field before the rear were clear of the wood, but as they arrived the champions picketed their horses on the farther side, behind which their banner was planted, and the people lined up until they had inclosed the whole lists with a dense wall of spectators.

With keen eyes the English party had watched the armorial blazonry of their antagonists, for those fluttering pennons and brilliant surcoats carried a language which all men could read. In front was the banner of Beaumanoir, blue with silver frets. His motto, "*J'ayme qui m'ayme*," was carried on a second flag by a little page.

"Whose is the shield behind him—silver with scarlet drops?" asked Knolles.

"It is his squire, William of Montaubon," Calverly answered. "And there are the golden lion of Rochefort and the silver cross of Du Bois the Strong. I would not wish to meet a better company than are before us this day. See, there are the blue rings of young Tintiniac, who slew my squire, Hubert, last Lammastide. With the aid of Saint George I will avenge him ere nightfall."

"By the three kings of Almain," growled Croquart,

" we will need to fight hard this day, for never have I seen so many good soldiers gathered together. Yonder is Yves Cheruel, whom they call the man of iron; Caro de Bodegat also, with whom I have had more than one bickering—that is he with the three ermine circles on the scarlet shield. There too is left-handed Alain de Karanais; bear in mind that his stroke comes on the side where there is no shield."

" Who is the small stout man," asked Nigel—" he with the black and silver shield? By Saint Paul! he seems a very worthy person and one from whom much might be gained, for he is nigh as broad as he is long."

" It is Sir Robert Raguenel," said Calverly, whose long spell of service in Brittany had made him familiar with the people. " It is said that he can lift a horse upon his back. Beware a full stroke of that steel mace, for the armour is not made that can abide it. But here is the good Beaumanoir, and surely it is time that we came to grips."

The Breton leader had marshalled his men in a line opposite to the English, and now he strode forward and shook Bambro' by the hand.

" By Saint Cadoc! this is a very joyous meeting, Richard," said he, " and we have certainly hit upon a very excellent way of keeping a truce."

" Indeed, Robert," said Bambro', " we owe you much thanks, for I can see that you have been at great pains to bring a worthy company against us this day. Surely if all should chance to perish there will be few noble houses in Brittany who will not mourn."

" Nay, we have none of the highest of Brittany," Beaumanoir answered. " Neither a Blois, nor a Leon, nor a Rohan, nor a Conan, fights in our ranks this day. And yet we are all men of blood and coat-armour, who are ready to venture our persons for the desire of our ladies and the love of the high order of knighthood. And now, Richard, what is your sweet will concerning this fight? "

"That we continue until one or other can endure no longer, for since it is seldom that so many brave men draw together it is fitting that we see as much as is possible of each other."

"Richard, your words are fair and good. It shall be even as you say. For the rest, each shall fight as pleases him best from the time that the herald calls the word. If any man from without shall break in upon us he shall be hanged on yonder oak."

With a salute he drew down his visor and returned to his own men, who were kneeling in a twinkling, many-coloured group, while the old bishop gave them his blessing.

The heralds rode round with a warning to the spectators. Then they halted at the side of the two bands of men, who now stood in a long line facing each other with fifty yards of grass between. The visors had been closed, and every man was now cased in metal from head to foot, some few glowing in brass, the greater number shining in steel. Only their fierce eyes could be seen smouldering in the dark shadow of their helmets. So for an instant they stood glaring and crouching.

Then, with a loud cry of "*Allez*!" the herald dropped his upraised hand, and the two lines of men shuffled as fast as their heavy armour would permit, until they met with a sharp clang of metal in the middle of the field. There was a sound as of sixty smiths working upon their anvils. Then the babel of yells and shouts from the spectators, cheering on this party or that, rose and swelled, until even the uproar of the combat was drowned in that mighty surge.

So eager were the combatants to engage that in a few moments all order had been lost and the two bands were mixed up in one furious scrambling, clattering throng, each man tossed hither and thither, thrown against one adversary and then against another, beaten and hustled and buffeted, with only the one thought in his mind to thrust with his spear or to beat with his axe against

anyone who came within the narrow slit of vision left by his visor.

But alas for Nigel and his hopes of some great deed! His was at least the fate of the brave, for he was the first to fall. With a high heart, he had placed himself in the line as nearly opposite to Beaumanoir as he could, and had made straight for the Breton leader, remembering that in the outset the quarrel had been so ordered that it lay between them. But ere he could reach his goal, he was caught in the swirl of his own comrades, and, being the lighter man, was swept aside, and dashed into the arms of Alain de Karanais, the left-handed swordsman, with such a crash that the two rolled upon the ground together. Light-footed as a cat, Nigel had sprung up first, and was stooping over the Breton squire, when the powerful dwarf Taguenel brought his mace thudding down upon the exposed back of his helmet. With a groan, Nigel fell upon his face, blood gushing from his mouth, nose, and ears. There he lay, trampled over by either party, while that great fight for which his fiery soul had panted was swaying back and forward above his unconscious form.

But Nigel was not long unavenged. The huge iron club of Belford struck the dwarf Raguenel to the ground, while Belford in turn was felled by a sweeping blow from Beaumanoir. Sometimes a dozen were on the ground at one time, but so strong was the armour, and so deftly was the force of a blow broken by guard and shield, that the stricken men were often pulled to their feet once more by their comrades, and were able to continue the fight.

Some, however, were beyond all aid. Croquart had cut at a Breton knight named Jean Rousselot, and had shorn away his shoulder-piece, exposing his neck and the upper part of his arm. Vainly he tried to cover this vulnerable surface with his shield. It was his right side, and he could not stretch it far enough across, nor could he get away on account of the press of men around him. For a time he held his foemen at bay, but that bare patch

of white shoulder was a mark for every weapon, until at last a hatchet sank up to the socket in the knight's chest. Almost at the same moment a second Breton, a young squire named Geoffrey Mellon, was slain by a thrust from Black Simon, which found the weak spot beneath the armpit. Three other Bretons, Evan Cheruel, Caro de Bodegat, and Tristan de Pestivien, the first two knights and the latter a squire, became separated from their comrades, and were beaten to the ground with English all around them, so that they had to choose between instant death and surrender. They handed their swords to Bambro', and stood apart, each of them sorely wounded, watching with hot and bitter hearts the mêlée which still surged up and down the field.

But now the combat had lasted twenty minutes without stint or rest, until the warriors were so exhausted with the burden of their armour, the loss of blood, the shock of blows, and their own furious exertions, that they could scarce totter or raise their weapons. There must be a pause if the combat was to have any decisive end.

"*Cessez! Cessez! Retirez!*" cried the heralds, as they spurred their horses between the exhausted men.

Slowly the gallant Beaumanoir led the twenty-five men who were left to their original station, where they opened their visors and threw themselves down upon the grass, panting like weary dogs, and wiping the sweat from their bloodshot eyes. A pitcher of wine of Anjou was carried round by a page, and each in turn drained a cup, save only Beaumanoir, who kept his Lent with such strictness that neither food nor drink might pass his lips before sunset. He paced slowly among his men, croaking forth encouragement from his parched lips, and pointing out to them that among the English there was scarce a man who was not wounded, and some so sorely that they could hardly stand. If the fight so far had gone against them, there were still five hours of daylight, and much might happen before the last of them was laid upon his back.

Varlets had rushed forth to draw away the two dead Bretons, and a brace of English archers had carried Nigel from the field. With his own hands, Aylward had unlaced the crushed helmet, and had wept to see the bloodless and unconscious face of his young master. He still breathed, however, and stretched upon the grass by the riverside the bowman tended him with rude surgery, until the water upon his brow and the wind upon his face had coaxed back the life into his battered frame. He breathed with heavy gasps, and some tinge of blood crept back into his cheeks, but still he lay unconscious of the roar of the crowd and of that great struggle which his comrades were now waging once again.

The English had lain for a space, bleeding and breathless, in no better case than their rivals, save that they were still twenty-nine in number. But of this muster there were not nine who were hale men, and some were so weak from loss of blood that they could scarce keep standing. Yet, when the signal was at last given to re-engage, there was not a man upon either side who did not totter to his feet and stagger forward toward his enemies.

But the opening of this second phase of the combat brought one great misfortune and discouragement to the English. Bambro', like the others, had undone his visor, but with his mind full of many cares, he had neglected to make it fast again. There was an opening an inch broad between it and the beaver. As the two lines met, the left-handed Breton squire, Alan de Karanais, caught sight of Bambro's face, and in an instant thrust his short spear through the opening. The English leader gave a cry of pain and fell on his knees, but staggered to his feet again, too weak to raise his shield. As he stood exposed, the Breton knight, Geoffrey Dubois the Strong, struck him such a blow with his axe that he beat in the whole breast-plate with the breast behind it. Bambro' fell dead upon the ground, and for a few minutes a fierce fight raged round his body.

Then the English drew back, sullen and dogged, bearing Bambro' with them, and the Bretons, breathing hard, gathered again in their own quarter. At the same instant the three prisoners picked up such weapons as were scattered upon the grass and ran over to join their own party.

"Nay, nay!" cried Knolles, raising his visor and advancing. "This may not be. You have been held to mercy when we might have slain you, and by the Virgin, I will hold you dishonoured, all three, if you stand not back."

"Say not so, Robert Knolles," Evan Cheruel answered. "Never yet has the word dishonour been breathed with my name; but I should count myself *fainéant* if I did not fight beside my comrades when chance has made it right and proper that I should do so."

"By Saint Cadoc! he speaks truly," croaked Beaumanoir, advancing in front of his men. "You are well aware, Robert, that it is the law of war and the usage of chivalry that if the knight to whom you have surrendered be himself slain, the prisoners thereby become released."

There was no answer to this, and Knolles, weary and spent, returned to his comrades.

"I would that we had slain them," said he. "We have lost our leader, and they have gained three men by the same stroke."

"If any more lay down their arms, it is my order that you slay them forthwith," said Croquart, whose bent sword and bloody armour showed how manfully he had borne himself in the fray. "And now, comrades, do not be heavy-hearted because we have lost our leader. Indeed, his rhymes of Merlin have availed him little. By the three kings of Almain! I can teach you what is better than an old woman's prophecies, and that is that you should keep your shoulders together and your shields so close that none can break between them. Then you will know what is on either side of you, and you can fix your eyes upon the front. Also, if any be so weak or wounded

that he must sink his hands, his comrades on right and left can bear him up. Now advance all together in God's name, for the battle is still ours if we bear ourselves like men."

In a solid line the English advanced, while the Bretons ran forward as before to meet them. The swiftest of these was a certain squire, Geoffrey Poulart, who bore a helmet which was fashioned as a cock's head, with high comb above, and long pointed beak in front pierced with the breathing-holes. He thrust with his sword at Calverly, but Belford, who was the next in the line, raised his giant club and struck him a crushing blow from the side. He staggered, and then, pushing forth from the crowd, he ran round and round in circles as one whose brain is stricken, the blood dripping from the holes of his brazen beak. So for a long time he ran, the crowd laughing and cock-crowing at the sight, until at last he stumbled and fell stone dead upon his face. But the fighters had seen nothing of his fate, for desperate and unceasing was the rush of the Bretons and the steady advance of the English line.

For a time it seemed as if nothing would break it, but gap-toothed Beaumanoir was a general as well as a warrior. While his weary, bleeding, hard-breathing men still flung themselves upon the front of the line, he himself, with Raguenel, Tintiniac, Alain de Karanais, and Dubois, rushed round the flank and attacked the English with fury from behind. There was a long and desperate *mêlée*, until once more the heralds, seeing the combatants stand gasping and unable to strike a blow, rode in and called yet another interval of truce.

But in those few minutes while they had been assaulted upon both sides the losses of the English party had been heavy. The Anglo-Breton D'Ardaine had fallen before Beaumanoir's sword, but not before he had cut deeply into his enemy's shoulder. Sir Thomas Walton, Richard of Ireland, one of the squires, and Hulbitée the big peasant had all fallen before the mace of the dwarf Raguenel or

the swords of his companions. Some twenty men were still left standing upon either side, but all were in the last state of exhaustion, gasping, reeling, hardly capable of striking a blow.

It was strange to see them as they staggered, with many a lurch and stumble, towards each other once again, for they moved like drunken men, and the scales of their neck-armour and joints were as red as fishes' gills when they raised them. They left foul wet footprints behind them on the green grass as they moved forward once more to their endless contest.

Beaumanoir, faint with the drain of his blood and with a tongue of leather, paused as he advanced.

"I am fainting, comrades," he cried. "I must drink."

"Drink your own blood, Beaumanoir!" cried Dubois, and the weary men all croaked together in dreadful laughter.

But now the English had learned from experience, and under the guidance of Croquart they fought no longer in a straight line, but in one so bent that at last it became a circle. As the Bretons still pushed and staggered against it they thrust it back on every side, until they had turned it into the most dangerous formation of all, a solid block of men, their faces turned outward, their weapons bristling forth to meet every attack. Thus the English stood, and no assault could move them. They could lean against each other back to back while they waited and allowed their foemen to tire themselves out. Again and again the gallant Bretons tried to make a way through. Again and again they were beaten back by a shower of blows.

Beaumanoir, his head giddy with fatigue, opened his helmet and gazed in despair at this terrible, unbreakable circle. Only too clearly he could see the inevitable result. His men were wearing themselves out. Already many of them could scarce stir hand or foot, and might be dead for any aid which they could give him in winning the fight. Soon all would be in the same plight. Then these cursed English would break their circle to swarm over his

helpless men and to strike them down. Do what he might, he could see no way by which such an end might be prevented. He cast his eyes round in his agony, and there was one of his Bretons slinking away to the side of the lists. He could scarce credit his senses when he saw by the scarlet and silver that the deserter was his own well-tried squire, William of Montaubon.

"William! William!" he cried. "Surely you would not leave me?"

But the other's helmet was closed and he could hear nothing. Beaumanoir saw that he was staggering away as swiftly as he could. With a cry of bitter despair, he drew into a knot as many of his braves as could still move, and together they made a last rush upon the English spears. This time he was firmly resolved, deep in his gallant soul, that he would come no foot back, but would find his death there among his foemen or carve a path into the heart of their ranks. The fire in his breast spread from man to man of his followers, and amid the crashing of blows they still locked themselves against the English shields and drove hard for an opening in their ranks.

But all was vain! Beaumanoir's head reeled. His senses were leaving him. In another minute he and his men would have been stretched senseless before this terrible circle of steel, when suddenly the whole array fell in pieces before his eyes; his enemies, Croquart, Knolles, Calverly, Belford, all were stretched upon the ground together, their weapons dashed from their hands and their bodies too exhausted to rise. The surviving Bretons had but strength to fall upon them dagger in hand, and to wring from them their surrender with the sharp point stabbing through their visors. Then victors and vanquished lay groaning and panting in one helpless and blood-smeared heap.

To Beaumanoir's simple mind it has seemed that at the supreme moment the Saints of Brittany had risen at their country's call. Already, as he lay gasping, his heart was pouring forth its thanks to his patron Saint Cadoc.

But the spectators had seen clearly enough the earthly cause of this sudden victory, and a hurricane of applause from one side, with a storm of hooting from the other, showed how different was the emotion which it raised in minds which sympathised with the victors or the vanquished.

William of Montaubon, the cunning squire, had made his way across to the spot where the steeds were tethered, and had mounted his own great roussin. At first it was thought that he was about to ride from the field, but the howl of execration from the Breton peasants changed suddenly to a yell of applause and delight as he turned the beast's head for the English circle and thrust his long prick spurs into its side. Those who faced him saw this sudden and unexpected appearance. Time was when both horse and rider must have winced away from the shower of their blows. But now they were in no state to meet such a rush. They could scarce raise their arms. Their blows were too feeble to hurt this mighty creature. In a moment it had plunged through the ranks, and seven of them were on the grass. It turned and rushed through them again, leaving five others helpless beneath its hoofs. No need to do more ! Already Beaumanoir and his companions were inside the circle, the prostrate men were helpless, and Josselin had won.

That night a train of crestfallen archers, bearing many a prostrate figure, marched sadly into Ploermel Castle. Behind them rode ten men, all weary, all wounded, and all with burning hearts against William of Montaubon for the foul trick that he had served them.

But over at Josselin, yellow gorse-blossoms in their helmets, the victors were borne in on the shoulders of a shouting mob, amid the fanfare of trumpets and the beating of drums. Such was the combat of the Midway Oak, where brave men met brave men, and such honour was gained that from that day he who had fought in the battle of the Thirty was ever given the highest place and the post of honour, nor was it easy for any man to pretend to have been there, for it has been said by that great

chronicler who knew them all, that not one on either side failed to carry to his grave the marks of that stern encounter.

## 24. *How Nigel was called to his Master*

"MY sweet ladye," wrote Nigel, in a script which it would take the eyes of love to read, "there hath been a most noble meeting in the fourth sennight of Lent betwixt some of our own people and sundry most worthy persons of this country, which ended, by the grace of our lady, in so fine a joust that no man living can call to mind so fair an occasion. Much honour was gained by the Sieur de Beaumanoir and also by an Almain named Croquart, with whom I hope to have some speech when I am hale again, for he is a most excellent person and very ready to advance himself or to relieve another from a vow. For myself I had hoped, with Godde's help, to venture that third small deed which might set me free to haste to your sweet side, but things have gone awry with me, and I early met with such scathe and was of so small comfort to my friends that my heart is heavy within me, and in sooth I feel that I have lost honour rather than gained it. Here I have lain since the Feast of the Virgin, and here I am like still to be, for I can move no limb, save only my hand; but grieve not, sweet lady, for Saint Catharine hath been our friend since in so short a time I had two such ventures as the Red Ferret and the intaking of the Reaver's fortalice. It needs but one more deed, and sickerly when I am hale once more it will not be long ere I seek it out. Till then, if my eyes may not rest upon you, my heart at least is ever at thy feet."

So he wrote from his sick-room in the Castle of Ploermel late in the summer, but yet another summer had come before his crushed head had mended and his wasted limbs had gained their strength once more. With despair he heard of the breaking of the truce, and of the fight at Mauron, in which Sir Robert Knolles and Sir Walter

Bentley crushed the rising power of Brittany—a fight in which many of the thirty champions of Josselin met their end. Then, when with renewed strength and high hopes in his heart he went forth to search for the famous Croquart, who proclaimed himself ever ready night and day to meet any man with any weapon, it was only to find that, in trying the paces of his new horse, the German had been cast into a ditch and had broken his neck. In the same ditch perished Nigel's last chance of soon accomplishing that deed which should free him from his vow.

There was truce once more over all Christendom, and mankind was sated with war, so that only in far-off Prussia, where the Teutonic knights waged ceaseless battle with the Lithuanian heathen, could he hope to find his heart's desire. But money and high knightly fame were needed ere a man could go upon the northern crusade, and ten years were yet to pass ere Nigel should look from the battlements of Marienberg on the waters of the Frische Haff, or should endure the torture of the hot plate when bound to the Holy Woden stone of Memel. Meanwhile, he chafed his burning soul out through the long seasons of garrison life in Brittany, broken only by one visit to the château of the father of Raoul, when he carried to the Lord of Grosbois the news of how his son had fallen like a gallant gentleman under the gateway of La Brohinière.

And then, then at last, when all hope was well-nigh dead in his heart, there came one glorious July morning which brought a horseman bearing a letter to the Castle of Vannes, of which Nigel was now seneschal. It contained but few words, short and clear as the call of a war-trumpet. It was Chandos who wrote. He needed his squire at his side, for his pennon was in the breeze once more. He was at Bordeaux. The prince was starting at once for Bergerac, whence he would make a great raid into France. It would not end without a battle. They had sent word of their coming, and the good French king had promised to be at great pains to receive them. Let Nigel hasten at once. If the army had left, then let him

follow after with all speed. Chandos had three other squires, but would very gladly see his fourth once again, for he had heard much of him since he parted, and nothing which he might not have expected to hear of his father's son. Such was the letter which made the summer sun shine brighter and the blue sky seem of a still fairer blue upon that happy morning in Vannes.

It is a weary way from Vannes to Bordeaux. Coast-wise ships are hard to find, and winds blow north when all brave hearts would fain be speeding south. A full month has passed from the day when Nigel received his letter before he stood upon the quayside of the Garonne amid the stacked barrels of Gascon wine and helped to lead Pommers down the gang-planks. Not Aylward himself had a worse opinion of the sea than the great yellow horse, and he whinnied with joy as he thrust his muzzle into his master's outstretched hand, and stamped his ringing hoofs upon the good firm cobblestones. Beside him, slapping his tawny shoulder in encouragement, was the lean spare form of Black Simon, who had remained ever under Nigel's pennon.

But Aylward, where he was? Alas! two years before he and the whole of Knolles' company of archers had been drafted away on the king's service to Guienne, and since he could not write the squire knew not whether he was alive or dead. Simon, indeed, had thrice heard of him from wandering archers, each time that he was alive and well and newly married, but as the wife in one case was a fair maid, and in another a dark, while in the third she was a French widow, it was hard to know the truth.

Already the army had been gone a month, but news of it came daily to the town, and such news as all men could read, for through the landward gates there rolled one constant stream of waggons, pouring down the Libourne Road, and bearing the booty of southern France. The town was full of foot soldiers, for none but mounted men had been taken by the prince. With sad faces and longing eyes they watched the passing of the train of plunder-

laden carts, piled high with rich furniture, silks, velvets, tapestries, carvings, and precious metals, which had been the pride of many a lordly home in fair Auvergne or the wealthy Bourbonnais.

Let no man think that in these wars England alone was face to face with France alone. There is glory and to spare without trifling with the truth. Two provinces in France, both rich and warlike, had become English through a royal marriage, and these, Guienne and Gascony, furnished many of the most valiant soldiers under the island flag. So poor a country as England could not afford to keep a great force overseas, and so must needs have lost the war with France through want of power to uphold the struggle. The feudal system enabled an army to be drawn rapidly together with small expense, but at the end of a few weeks it dispersed again as swiftly, and only by a well-filled money-chest could it be held together. There was no such chest in England, and the king was for ever at his wits' end how to keep his men in the field.

But Guienne and Gascony were full of knights and squires who were always ready to assemble from their isolated castles for a raid into France, and these with the addition of those English cavaliers who fought for honour, and a few thousand of the formidable archers, hired for fourpence a day, made an army with which a short campaign could be carried on. Such were the materials of the prince's force, some eight thousand strong, who were now riding in a great circle through southern France, leaving a broad wale of blackened and ruined country behind them.

But France, even with her south-western corner in English hands, was still a very warlike power, far richer and more populous than her rival. Single provinces were so great that they were stronger than many a kingdom. Normandy in the north, Burgundy in the east, Brittany in the west, and Languedoc in the south were each capable of fitting out a great army of its own. Therefore the brave and spirited John, watching from Paris this insolent raid into his dominions, sent messengers in hot haste to

all these great feudatories, as well as to Lorraine, Picardy, Auvergne, Hainault, Vermandois, Champagne, and to the German mercenaries over his eastern border, bidding all of them to ride hard, with bloody spur, day and night, until they should gather to a head at Chartres.

There a great army had assembled early in September, while the prince, all unconscious of its presence, sacked towns and besieged castles from Bourges to Issodun, passing Romorantin, and so onward to Vierzon and to Tours. From week to week there were merry skirmishes at barriers, brisk assaults of fortresses in which much honour was won, knightly meetings with detached parties of Frenchmen and occasional spear-runnings, where noble champions deigned to venture their persons. Houses, too, were to be plundered, while wine and women were in plenty. Never had either knights or archers had so pleasant and profitable an excursion, so that it was with high heart and much hope of pleasant days at Bordeaux with their pockets full of money that the army turned south from the Loire and began to retrace its steps to the seaboard city.

But now its pleasant and martial promenade changed suddenly to very serious work of war. As the prince moved south he found that all supplies had been cleared away from in front of him and that there was neither fodder for the horses nor food for the men. Two hundred waggons laden with spoil rolled at the head of the army, but the starving soldiers would soon have gladly changed it all for as many loads of bread and meat. The light troops of the French had preceded them, and burned or destroyed everything that could be of use. Now also for the first time the prince and his men became aware that a great army was moving upon the eastern side of them, streaming southward in the hope of cutting off their retreat to the sea. The sky glowed with their fires at night, and the autumn sun twinkled and gleamed from one end of the horizon to the other upon the steel caps and flashing weapons of a mighty host.

Anxious to secure his plunder, and conscious that the

levies of France were far superior in number to his own force, the prince redoubled his attempts to escape ; but his horses were exhausted and his starving men were hardly to be kept in order. A few more days would unfit them for battle. Therefore, when he found near the village of Maupertuis a position in which a small force might have a chance to hold its own, he gave up the attempt to out-march his pursuers, and he turned at bay, like a hunted boar, all tusks and eyes of flame.

While these high events had been in progress, Nigel with Black Simon and four other men-at-arms from Bordeaux were hastening northward to join the army. As far as Bergerac they were in a friendly land, but thence onward they rode over a blackened landscape with many a roofless house, its two bare gable-ends sticking upward—a " Knolles' mitre," as it was afterwards called, when Sir Robert worked his stern will upon the country. For three days they rode northward, seeing many small parties of French in all directions, but too eager to reach the army to ease their march in the search of adventures.

Then at last after passing Lusignan they began to come in touch with English foragers, mounted bowmen for the most part, who were endeavouring to collect supplies either for the army or for themselves. From them Nigel learned that the prince, with Chandos ever at his side, was hastening south and might be met within a short day's march. As he still advanced these English stragglers became more and more numerous, until at last he overtook a considerable column of archers moving in the same direction as his own party. These were men whose horses had failed them and who had therefore been left behind on the advance, but were now hastening to be in in time for the impending battle. A crowd of peasant girls accompanied them upon their march, and a whole train of laden mules were led beside them.

Nigel and his little troop of men-at-arms were riding past the archers when Black Simon, with a sudden exclamation, touched his leader upon the arm.

" See yonder, fair sir," he cried, with gleaming eyes, " there where the wastrel walks with the great fardel upon his back ! Who is he who marches behind him ? "

Nigel looked, and was aware of a stunted peasant who bore upon his rounded back an enormous bundle very much larger than himself. Behind him walked a burly broad-shouldered archer, whose stained jerkin and battered headpiece gave token of long and hard service. His bow was slung over his shoulder, and his arms were round the waists of two buxom Frenchwomen, who tripped along beside him with much laughter and many saucy answers flung back over their shoulders to a score of admirers behind them.

" Aylward ! " cried Nigel, spurring forward.

The archer turned his bronzed face, stared for an instant with wild eyes, and then, dropping his two ladies, who were instantly carried off by his comrades, he rushed to seize the hand which his young master held down to him.

" Now, by my hilt, Squire Nigel, this is the fairest sight of my lifetime ! " he cried. " And you, old leather-face ! Nay, Simon, I would put my arms round your dried herring of a body, if I could but reach you. Here is Pommers too, and I read in his eye that he knows me well, and is as ready to put his teeth into me as when he stood in my father's stall."

It was like a whiff of the heather-perfumed breezes of Hankley to see his homely face once more. Nigel laughed with sheer joy as he looked at him.

" It was an ill day when the king's service called you from my side," said he, " and by Saint Paul ! I am right glad to set eyes upon you once more ! I see well that you are in no wise altered, but the same Aylward that I have ever known. But who is this varlet with the great bundle who waits upon your movements ? "

" It is no less than a feather-bed, fair sir, which he bears upon his back, for I would fain bring it to Tilford, and yet it is overlarge for me when I take my place with my fellows in the ranks. But indeed this war has been a

most excellent one, and I have already sent half a waggon-load of my gear back to Bordeaux to await my home-coming. Yet I have my fears when I think of all the rascal foot-archers who are waiting there, for some folk have no grace or honesty in their souls, and cannot keep their hands from that which belongs to another. But if I may throw my leg over yonder spare horse I will come on with you, fair sir, for indeed it would be joy to my heart to know that I was riding under your banner once again."

So Aylward, having given instructions to the bearer of his feather-bed, rode away in spite of shrill protests from his French companions, who speedily consoled themselves with those of his comrades who seemed to have most to give.

Nigel's party was soon clear of the column of archers and riding hard in the direction of the prince's army. They passed by a narrow and winding track, through the great wood of Nouaille, and found before them a marshy valley down which ran a sluggish stream. Along its farther bank hundreds of horses were being watered, and beyond was a dense block of waggons. Through these the comrades passed, and then topped a small mound, from which the whole strange scene lay spread before them.

Down the valley the slow stream meandered, with marshy meadows on either side. A mile or two lower a huge drove of horses were to be seen assembled upon the bank. They were the steeds of the French cavalry, and the blue haze of a hundred fires showed where King John's men were camping. In front of the mound upon which they stood the English line was drawn, but there were few fires, for indeed, save their horses, there was little for them to cook. Their right rested upon the river, and their array stretched across a mile of ground, until the left was in touch with a tangled forest which guarded it from flank attack. In front was a long, thick hedge and much broken ground, with a single deeply rutted country road cutting through it in the middle. Under the hedge and along

the whole front of the position lay swarms of archers upon the grass, the greater number slumbering peacefully with sprawling limbs in the warm rays of the September sun. Behind were the quarters of the various knights, and from end to end flew the banners and pennons marked with the devices of the chivalry of England and Guienne.

With a glow in his heart Nigel saw those badges of famous captains and leaders, and knew that now at last he also might show his coat-armour in such noble company. There was the flag of Jean Grailly, the Captal de Buch, five silver shells on a black cross, which marked the presence of the most famous soldier of Gascony, while beside it waved the red lion of the noble Knight of Hainault, Sir Eustace d'Ambreticourt. These two coats Nigel knew, as did every warrior in Europe, but a dense grove of pennoned lances surrounded them, bearing charges which were strange to him, from which he understood that these belonged to the Guienne division of the army. Farther down the line the famous English ensigns floated on the wind, the scarlet and gold of Warwick, the silver star of Oxford, the golden cross of Suffolk, the blue and gold of Willoughby, and the gold-fretted scarlet of Audley. In the very centre of them all was one which caused all others to pass from his mind, for close to the royal banner of England, crossed with the label of the prince, there waved the war-worn flag with the red wedge upon the golden field which marked the quarters of the noble Chandos.

At the sight Nigel set spurs to his horse, and a few minutes later had reached the spot. Chandos, gaunt from hunger and want of sleep, but with the old fire lurking in his eye, was standing by the prince's tent, gazing down at what could be seen of the French array, and heavy with thought. Nigel sprang from his horse and was within touch of his master when the silken hanging of the royal tent was torn violently aside and Edward rushed out.

He was without his armour and clad in a sober suit

of black, but the high dignity of his bearing and the imperious anger which flushed his face proclaimed the leader and the prince. At his heels was a little white-haired ecclesiastic in a flowing gown of scarlet sendal, expostulating and arguing in a torrent of words.

"Not another word, my Lord Cardinal," cried the angry prince. "I have listened to you overlong, and by God's dignity! that which you say is neither good nor fair in my ears. Hark you, John, I would have your counsel. What think you is the message which my Lord Cardinal of Perigord has carried from the king of France? He says that of his clemency he will let my army pass back to Bordeaux if we will restore to him all that we have taken, remit all ransoms, and surrender my own person with that of a hundred nobles of England and Guienne to be held as prisoners. What think you, John?"

Chandos smiled. "Things are not done in that fashion," said he.

"But, my lord Chandos," cried the Cardinal, "I have made it clear to the prince that indeed it is a scandal to all Christendom and a cause of mocking to the heathen, that two great sons of the Church should turn their swords thus upon each other."

"Then bid the king of France keep clear of us," said the prince.

"Fair son, you are aware that you are in the heart of his country, and that it standeth not aright that he should suffer you to go forth as you came. You have but a small army, three thousand bowmen and five thousand men-at-arms at the most, who seem in evil case for want of food and rest. The king has thirty thousand men at his back, of which twenty thousand are expert men-at-arms. It is fitting therefore that you make such terms as you may, lest worse befall."

"Give my greetings to the king of France and tell him that England will never pay ransom for me. But it seems to me, my Lord Cardinal, that you have our numbers and condition very ready upon your tongue, and I would fain

know how the eye of a Churchman can read a line of battle so easily. I have seen that these knights of your household have walked freely to and fro within our camp, and I much fear that when I welcomed you as envoys I have in truth given my protection to spies. How say you, my Lord Cardinal ? "

" Fair prince, I know not how you can find it in your heart or conscience to say such evil words."

" There is this red-bearded nephew of thine, Robert de Duras. See where he stands yonder, counting and prying. Hark hither, young sir ! I have been saying to your uncle the Cardinal that it is in my mind that you and your comrades have carried news of our disposition to the French king. How say you ? "

The knight turned pale and sank his eyes. " My lord," he murmured, " it may be that I have answered some questions."

" And how will such answers accord with your honour, seeing that we have trusted you since you came in the train of the cardinal ? "

" My lord, it is true that I am in the train of the cardinal, and yet I am liege man of King John and a knight of France, so I pray you to assuage your wrath against me."

The prince ground his teeth and his piercing eyes blazed upon the youth.

" By my father's soul ! I can scarce forbear to strike you to the earth ! But this I promise you, that if you show that sign of the Red Griffin in the field and if you be taken alive in to-morrow's battle, your head shall most assuredly be shorn from your shoulders ! "

" Fair son, indeed you speak wildly," cried the Cardinal. " I pledge you my word that neither my nephew Robert nor any of my train will take part in the battle. And now I leave you, sire, and may God assoil your soul, for indeed in all this world no men stand in greater peril than you and those who are around you, and I rede you that you spend the night in such ghostly exercises as may

best prepare you for that which may befall." So saying the cardinal bowed, and with his household walking behind him set off for the spot where they had left their horses, whence they rode to the neighbouring abbey.

The angry prince turned upon his heel and entered his tent once more, while Chandos, glancing round, held out a warm welcoming hand to Nigel.

"I have heard much of your noble deeds," said he. "Already your name rises as a squire-errant. I stood no higher, nor so high, at your age."

Nigel flushed with pride and pleasure. "Indeed, my dear lord, it is very little that I have done. But now that I am back at your side I hope that in truth I shall learn to bear myself in worthy fashion, for where else should I win honour if it be not under your banner?"

"Truly, Nigel, you have come at a very good time for advancement. I cannot see how we can leave this spot without a great battle which will live in men's minds for ever. In all our fights in France I cannot call to mind any in which they have been so strong or we so weak as now, so that there will be the more honour to be gained. I would that we had two thousand more archers. But I doubt not that we shall give them much trouble ere they drive us out from amidst these hedges. Have you seen the French?"

"Nay, fair sir, I have but this moment arrived."

"I was about to ride forth myself to coast their army and observe their countenance, so come with me ere the night fall, and we shall see what we can of their order and dispositions."

There was a truce between the two forces for the day, on account of the ill-advised and useless interposition of the Cardinal of Perigord. Hence when Chandos and Nigel had pushed their horses through the long hedge which fronted the position they found that many small parties of the knights of either army were riding up and down on the plain outside. The greater number of these groups were French, since it was very necessary for them

to know as much as possible of the English defences ; and many of their scouts had ridden up to within a hundred yards of the hedge, where they were sternly ordered back by the pickets of archers on guard.

Through these scattered knots of horsemen Chandos rode, and as many of them were old antagonists it was "Ha, John!" on the one side, and "Ha, Raoul!" "Ha, Nicholas!" "Ha, Guichard!" upon the other, as they brushed past them. Only one cavalier greeted them amiss, a large, red-faced man, the Lord Clermont, who by some strange chance bore upon his surcoat a blue virgin standing amid golden sunbeams, which was the very device which Chandos had donned for the day. The fiery Frenchman dashed across their path and drew his steed back on its haunches.

"How long is it, my lord Chandos," said he, hotly, "since you have taken it upon yourself to wear my arms?"

Chandos smiled. "It is surely you who have mine," said he, "since this surcoat was worked for me by the good nuns of Windsor a long year ago."

"If it were not for the truce," said Clermont, "I would soon show you that you have no right to wear it."

"Look for it then in the battle to-morrow, and I also will look for yours." Chandos answered. "There we can very honourably settle the matter."

But the Frenchman was choleric and hard to appease.

"You English can invent nothing," said he, "and you take for your own whatever you see handsome belonging to others." So, grumbling and fuming, he rode upon his way, while Chandos, laughing gaily, spurred onward across the plain.

The immediate front of the English lines was shrouded with scattered trees and bushes which hid the enemy ; but when they had cleared these a fair view of the great French army lay before them. In the centre of the huge camp was a long and high pavilion of red silk, with the silver lilies of the king at one end of it, and the golden oriflamme of the battle-flag of old France at the other.

Like the reeds of a pool from side to side of the broad array, and dwindling away as far as their eyes could see, were the banners and pennons of high barons and famous knights, but above them all flew the ducal standards which showed that the feudal muster of all the warlike provinces of France was in the field before them.

With a kindling eye Chandos looked across at the proud ensigns of Normandy, of Burgundy, of Auvergne, of Champagne, of Vermandois, and of Berry, flaunting and gleaming in the rays of the sinking sun. Riding slowly down the line he marked with attentive gaze the camp of the crossbowmen, the muster of the German mercenaries, the numbers of the foot-soldiers, the arms of every proud vassal or vavasor which might give some guide as to the power of each division. From wing to wing and round the flanks he went, keeping ever within crossbow-shot of the army, and then at last having noted all things in his mind he turned his horse's head and rode slowly back, heavy with thought, to the English lines.

## 25. *How the King of France held Counsel at Maupertuis*

THE morning of Sunday, the nineteenth of September, in the year of our Lord 1356, was cold and fine. A haze which rose from the marshy valley of Muisson covered both camps and set the starving Englishmen shivering, but it cleared slowly away as the sun rose. In the red silken pavilion of the French king—the same which had been viewed by Nigel and Chandos the evening before—a solemn mass was held by the Bishop of Chalons, who prayed for those who were about to die, with little thought in his mind that his own last hour was so near at hand. Then, when communion had been taken by the king and his four young sons the altar was cleared away, and a great red-covered table placed lengthwise down the tent, round which John might assemble his council and de-

termine how best he should proceed. With the silken roof, rich tapestries of Arras round the walls and eastern rugs beneath the feet, his palace could furnish no fairer chamber.

King John, who sat upon the canopied dais at the upper end, was now in the sixth year of his reign and the thirty-sixth of his life. He was a short burly man, ruddy-faced and deep-chested, with dark kindly eyes and a most noble bearing. It did not need the blue cloak sewed with silver lilies to mark him as the king. Though his reign had been short, his fame was already widespread over all Europe as a kindly gentleman and a fearless soldier—a fit leader for a chivalrous nation. His elder son, the Duke of Normandy, still hardly more than a boy, stood beside him, his hand upon the king's shoulder, and John half turned from time to time to fondle him. On the right, at the same high dais, was the king's younger brother, the Duke of Orleans, a pale heavy-featured man, with a languid manner and intolerant eyes. On the left was the Duke of Bourbon, sad-faced and absorbed, with that gentle melancholy in his eyes and bearing which comes often with the premonition of death. All these were in their armour, save only for their helmets, which lay upon the board before them.

Below, grouped around the long red table, was an assembly of the most famous warriors in Europe. At the end nearest the king was the veteran soldier the Duke of Athens, son of a banished father, and now high constable of France. On one side of him sat the red-faced and choleric Lord Clermont, with the same blue virgin in golden rays upon his surcoat which had caused his quarrel with Chandos the night before. On the other was a noble-featured grizzly-haired soldier, Arnold d'Andreghen, who shared with Clermont the honour of being Marshal of France. Next to them sat Lord James of Bourbon, a brave warrior who was afterwards slain by the White Company at Brignais, and beside him a little group of German noblemen, including the Earl of Salzburg and the Earl of Nassau, who had ridden over the frontier with

their formidable mercenaries at the bidding of the French king. The ridged armour and the hanging nasals of their bassinets were enough in themselves to tell every soldier that they were from beyond the Rhine. At the other side of the table was a line of proud and war-like lords, Fiennes, Chatillon, Nesle, de Landas, de Beaujeu, with the fierce knight-errant de Chargny, he who had planned the surprise of Calais, and Eustace de Ribeaumont, who had upon the same occasion won the prize of valour from the hands of Edward of England. Such were the chiefs to whom the king now turned for assistance and advice.

"You have already heard, my friends," said he, "that the Prince of Wales has made no answer to the proposal which we sent by the Lord Cardinal of Perigord. Certes this is as it should be, and though I have obeyed the call of Holy Church I had no fears that so excellent a prince as Edward of England would refuse to meet us in battle. I am now of opinion that we should fall upon them at once, lest perchance the Cardinal's cross should again come betwixt our swords and our enemies."

A buzz of joyful assent arose from the meeting, and even from the attendant men-at-arms who guarded the door. When it had died away the Duke of Orleans rose in his place beside the king.

"Sire," said he, "you speak as we would have you do, and I for one am of opinion that the Cardinal of Perigord has been an ill friend of France, for why should we bargain for a part when we have but to hold out our hands in order to grasp the whole? What need is there for words? Let us spring to horse forthwith and ride over this handful of marauders who have dared to lay waste your fair dominions. If one them of go hence save as our prisoner we are the more to blame."

"By Saint Denis, brother!" said the king, smiling. "if words could slay you would have had them all upon their backs ere ever we left Chartres. You are new to war, but when you have had experience of a stricken field or two you know that things must be done with fore-

thought and in order or they may go awry. In our father's time we sprang to horse and spurred upon these English at Crécy and elsewhere as you advise, but we had little profit from it, and now we are grown wiser. How say you, Sieur de Ribeaumont ? You have coasted their lines and observed their countenance. Would you ride down upon them, as my brother has advised, or how would you order the matter ? "

De Ribeaumont, a tall dark-eyed, handsome man, paused ere he answered.

" Sire," he said at last, " I have indeed ridden along their front and down their flanks in company with Lord Landas and Lord de Beaujeu, who are here at your council to witness to what I say. Indeed, sire, it is in my mind that though the English are few in number yet they are in such a position amongst these hedges and vines that you would be well-advised if you were to leave them alone, for they have no food and must retreat, so that you will be able to follow them and to fight them to better advantage."

A murmur of disapproval rose from the company and the Lord Clermont, marshal of the army, sprang to his feet, his face red with anger.

" Eustace, Eustace," said he, " I bear in mind the days when you were of great heart and high enterprise, but since King Edward gave you yonder chaplet of pearls you have ever been backward against the English ! "

" My Lord Clermont," said de Ribeaumont, sternly, " it is not for me to brawl at the king's council and in the face of the enemy, but we will go further into this matter at some other time. Meanwhile, the king has asked me for my advice and I have given it as best I might."

" It had been better for your honour, Sir Eustace, had you held your peace," said the Duke of Orleans. " Shall we let them slip from our fingers when we have them here and are fourfold their number ? I know not where we should dwell afterwards, for I am very sure that we should be ashamed to ride back to Paris, or to look our ladies in the eyes again."

"Indeed, Eustace, you have done well to say what is in your mind," said the king; "but I have already said that we shall join battle this morning, so that there is no room here for further talk. But I would fain have heard from you how it would be wisest and best that we attack them?"

"I will advise you, sire, to the best of my power. Upon their right is a river with marshes around it, and upon their left a great wood, so that we can advance only upon the centre. Along their front is a thick hedge, and behind it I saw the green jerkins of their archers, as thick as the sedges by the river. It is broken by one road where only four horsemen could ride abreast, which leads through the position. It is clear then, that if we are to drive them back we must cross the great hedge, and I am very sure that the horses will not face it with such a storm of arrows beating from behind it. Therefore, it is my counsel that we fight upon foot, as the English did at Crécy, for indeed we may find that our horses will be more hindrance than help to us this day."

"The same thought was in my own mind, sire," said Arnold d'Andreghen, the veteran marshal. "At Crécy the bravest had to turn their backs, for what can a man do with a horse which is mad with pain and fear? If we advance upon foot we are our own masters, and if we stop the shame is ours."

"The counsel is good," said the Duke of Athens, turning his shrewd wizened face to the king; "but one thing only I would add to it. The strength of these people lies in their archers, and if we could throw them into disorder, were it only for a short time, we should win the hedge; else they will shoot so strongly that we must lose many men before we reach it, for indeed we have learned that no armour will keep out their shafts when they are close."

"Your words, fair sir, are both good and wise," said the king, "but I pray you to tell us how you would throw these archers into disorder?"

"I would choose three hundred horsemen, sire, the

best and most forward in the army. With these I would ride up the narrow road, and so turn to right and left, falling upon the archers behind the hedge. It may be that the three hundred would suffer sorely, but what are they among so great a host, if a road may be cleared for their companions ? "

" I would say a word to that, sire," cried the German Count of Nassau. " I have come here with my comrades to venture our persons in your quarrel ; but we claim the right to fight in our own fashion, and we would count it dishonour to dismount from our steeds out of fear of the arrows of the English. Therefore, with your permission, we will ride to the front, as the Duke of Athens has advised, and so clear a path for the rest of you."

" This may not be ! " cried the Lord Clermont, angrily. " It would be strange indeed if Frenchmen could not be found to clear a path for the army of the King of France. One would think to hear you talk, my Lord Count, that your hardihood was greater than our own, but by our Lady of Rocamadour you will learn before nightfall that it is not so. It is for me, who am a marshal of France, to lead these three hundred, since it is an honourable venture."

" And I claim the same right for the same reason," said Arnold of Andreghen.

The German count struck the table with his mailed fist.

" Do what you like ! " said he. " But this only I can promise you, that neither I nor any of the German riders will descend from our horses so long as they are able to carry us, for in our country it is only people of no consequence who fight upon their feet."

The Lord Clermont was leaning angrily forward with some hot reply when King John intervened.

" Enough, enough ! " he said. " It is for you to give your opinions, and for me to tell you what you will do. Lord Clermont, and you, Arnold, you will choose three hundred of the bravest cavaliers in the army and you will endeavour to break these archers. As to you and your Germans, my Lord Nassau, you will remain upon horse-

back, since you desire it, and you will follow the marshals and support them as best you may. The rest of the army will advance upon foot, in three other divisions as arranged : yours, Charles," and he patted his son, the Duke of Normandy, affectionately upon the hand ; " yours Philip," he glanced at the Duke of Orleans ; " and the main battle which is my own. To you, Geoffrey de Chargny, I intrust the oriflamme this day. But who is this knight and what does he desire ? "

A young knight, ruddy bearded and tall, a red griffin upon his surcoat, had appeared in the opening of the tent. His flushed face and dishevelled dress showed that he had come in haste.

" Sire," said he, " I am Robert de Duras, of the household of the Cardinal de Perigord. I have told you yesterday all that I have learned of the English camp. This morning I was again admitted to it, and I have seen their waggons moving to the rear. Sire, they are in flight for Bordeaux."

" 'Fore God, I knew it ! " cried the Duke of Orleans, in a voice of fury. " Whilst we have been talking they have slipped through our fingers. Did I not warn you ? "

" Be silent, Philip ! " said the king angrily. " But you, sir, have you seen this with your own eyes ? "

" With my own eyes, sire, and I have ridden straight from their camp."

King John looked at him with a stern gaze. " I know not how it accords with your honour to carry such tidings in such a fashion," said he ; " but we cannot choose but take advantage of it. Fear not, brother Philip, it is in my mind that you will see all that you would wish of the Englishmen before nightfall. Should we fall upon them whilst they cross the ford it will be to our advantage. Now, fair sirs, I pray you to hasten to your posts and to carry out all that we have agreed. Advance the oriflamme, Geoffrey, and do you marshal the divisions, Arnold. So may God and Saint Denis have us in their holy keeping this day ! "

The Prince of Wales stood upon that little knoll where Nigel had halted the day before. Beside him were Chandos, and a tall sun-burned warrior of middle age, the Gascon Captal de Buch. The three men were all attentively watching the distant French lines, while behind them a column of waggons wound down to the ford of the Muisson.

Close in the rear four knights in full armour with open visors sat their horses and conversed in undertones with each other. A glance at their shields would have given their names to any soldier, for they were all men of fame who had seen much warfare. At present they were awaiting their orders, for each of them commanded the whole or part of a division of the army. The youth upon the left, dark, slim, and earnest, was William Montacute, Earl of Salisbury, only twenty-eight years of age, and yet a veteran of Crécy. How high he stood in reputation is shown by the fact that the command of the rear, the post of honour in a retreating army, had been given to him by the prince. He was talking to a grizzled harsh-faced man, somewhat over middle age, with lion features and fierce light-blue eyes which gleamed as they watched the distant enemy. It was the famous Robert de Ufford, Earl of Suffolk, who had fought without a break from Cadsand onward through the whole Continental War. The other tall silent soldier, with the silver star gleaming upon his surcoat, was John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, and he listened to the talk of Thomas Beauchamp, a burly, jovial, ruddy nobleman and a tried soldier, who leaned forward and tapped his mailed hand upon the other's steel-clad thigh. They were old battle-companions, of the same age and in the very prime of life, with equal fame and equal experience of the wars. Such was the group of famous English soldiers who sat their horses behind the prince and waited for their orders.

"I would that you had laid hands upon him," said the prince angrily, continuing his conversation with Chandos, "and yet, perchance, it was wiser to play this trick and make them think that we were retreating."

"He has certainly carried the tidings," said Chandos, with a smile. "No sooner had the waggons started than I saw him gallop down the edge of the wood."

"It was well thought of, John," the prince remarked, "for it would indeed be great comfort if we could turn their own spy against them. Unless they advance upon us, I know not how we can hold out another day, for there is not a loaf left in the army; and yet if we leave this position, where shall we hope to find such another?"

"They will stoop, fair sir, they will stoop to our lure. Even now Robert de Duras will be telling them that the waggons are on the move, and they will hasten to overtake us lest we pass the ford. But who is this, who rides so fast? Here perchance may be tidings."

A horseman had spurred up to the knoll. He sprang from the saddle, and sank on one knee before the prince.

"How now, my Lord Audley," said Edward. "What would you have?"

"Sir," said the knight, still kneeling with bowed head before his leader, "I have a boon to ask of you."

"Nay, James, rise! Let me hear what I can do."

The famous knight-errant, pattern of chivalry for all time, rose and turned his swarthy face and dark earnest eyes upon his master.

"Sir," said he, "I have ever served most loyally my lord your father and yourself, and shall continue so to do so long as I have life. Dear sir, I must now acquaint you that formerly I made a vow if ever I should be in any battle under your command that I would be foremost or die in the attempt. I beg therefore that you will graciously permit me to honourably quit my place among the others, that I may post myself in such wise as to accomplish my vow."

The prince smiled, for it was very sure that vow or no vow, permission or no permission, Lord James Audley would still be in the van.

"Go, James," said he, shaking his hand, "and God

grant that this day you may shine in valour above all knights. But hark, John, what is that ? "

Chandos cast up his fierce nose like the eagle which smells slaughter afar.

" Surely, sir, all is forming even as we had planned it."

From far away there came a thunderous shout. Then another and yet another.

" See, they are moving ! " cried the Captal de Buch.

All morning they had watched the gleam of the armed squadrons who were drawn up in front of the French camp. Now, while a great blare of trumpets was borne to their ears, the distant masses flickered and twinkled in the sunlight.

" Yes, yes, they are moving ! " cried the prince.

" They are moving ! They are moving ! " Down the line the murmur ran. And then, with a sudden impulse, the archers at the hedge sprang to their feet and the knights behind them waved their weapons in the air, while one tremendous shout of warlike joy carried their defiance to the approaching enemy. Then there fell such a silence that the pawing of the horses or the jingle of their harness struck loud upon the ear, until amid the hush there rose a low deep roar like the sound of the tide upon the beach, ever growing and deepening as the host of France drew near.

## 26. *How Nigel found his Third Deed*

FOUR archers lay behind a clump of bushes ten yards in front of the thick hedge which shielded their companions. Amid the long line of bowmen those behind them were their own company, and in the main the same who were with Knolles in Brittany. The four in front were their leaders : old Wat of Carlisle, Ned Widdington the red-headed dalesman, the bald bowyer Bartholomew, and Samkin Aylward, newly rejoined after a week's absence. All four were munching bread and apples, for Aylward had brought in a full haversack, and

divided them freely among his starving comrades. The old borderer and the Yorkshireman were gaunt and hollow-eyed with privation, while the bowyer's round face had fallen in so that the skin hung in loose pouches under his eyes and beneath his jaws.

Behind them lines of haggard, wolfish men glared through the underwood, silent and watchful save that they burst into a fierce yelp of welcome when Chandos and Nigel galloped up, sprang from their horses and took their station beneath them. All along the green fringe of bowmen might be seen the steel-clad figures of knights and squires who had pushed their way into the front line to share the fortune of the archers.

"I call to mind that I once shot six ends with a Kentish woldsman at Ashford——" began the bowyer.

"Nay, nay, we have heard that story!" said old Wat, impatiently. "Shut thy clap, Bartholomew, for it is no time for redeless gossip! Walk down the line, I pray you, and see if there be no frayed string nor broken nock nor loosened whipping to be mended."

The stout bowyer passed down the fringe of bowmen, amid a running fire of rough wit. Here and there a bow was thrust out at him through the hedge for his professional advice.

"Wax your heads!" he kept crying. "Pass down the wax-pot and wax your heads. A waxed arrow will pass where a dry will be held. Tom Beverley, you jack-fool! where is your bracer-guard? Your string will flay your arm ere you reach your up-shot this day. And you, Watkin, draw not to your mouth, as is your wont, but to your shoulder. You are so used to the wine-pot that the string must needs follow it. Nay, stand loose, and give space for your drawing arms, for they will be on us anon."

He ran back and joined his comrades in the front, who had now risen to their feet. Behind them a half-mile of archers stood behind the hedge, each with his great war-bow strung, half a dozen shafts loose behind him, and eighteen more in the quiver slung across his front. With

arrow on string, their feet firm-planted, their fierce eager faces peering through the branches, they awaited the coming storm.

The broad flood of steel, after oozing slowly forward, had stopped about a mile from the English front. The greater part of the army had then descended from their horses, while a crowd of varlets and ostlers led them to the rear. The French formed themselves now into three great divisions, which shimmered in the sun like silver pools, reed-capped with many a thousand of banners and pennons. A space of several hundred yards divided each, At the same time two bodies of horsemen formed themselves in front. The first consisted of three hundred men in one thick column, the second of a thousand, riding in a more extended line.

The prince had ridden up to the line of archers. He was in dark armour, his visor open, and his handsome aquiline face all glowing with spirit and martial fire. The bowmen yelled at him, and he waved his hands to them as a huntsman cheers his hounds.

"Well, John, what think you now?" he asked. "What would my noble father not give to be by our side this day? Have you seen that they have left their horses?"

"Yes, my fair lord, they have learned their lesson," said Chandos. "Because we have had good fortune upon our feet at Crécy and elsewhere, they think that they have found the trick of it. But it is in my mind that it is very different to stand when you are assailed, as we have done, and to assail others when you must drag your harness for a mile and come weary to the fray."

"You speak wisely, John. But these horsemen who form in front and ride slowly toward us, what make you of them?"

"Doubtless they hope to cut the strings of our bowmen and so clear a way for the others. But they are indeed a chosen band, for mark you, fair sir, are not those the colours of Clermont upon the left, and of d'Andreghen

upon the right, so that both marshals ride with the vanguard ? "

" By God's soul, John ! " cried the prince, " it is very sure that you can see more with one eye than any man in this army with two. But it is even as you say. And this larger band behind ? '

" They should be Germans, fair sir, by the fashion of their harness."

The two bodies of horsemen had moved slowly over the plain, with a space of nearly a quarter of a mile between them. Now, having come two bowshots from the hostile line, they halted. All that they could see of the English was the long hedge, with an occasional twinkle of steel through its leafy branches, and behind that the spear-heads of the men-at-arms rising from amid the brushwood and the vines. A lovely autumn countryside with changing many-tinted foliage lay stretched before them, all bathed in peaceful sunshine, and nothing save those flickering fitful gleams to tell of the silent and lurking enemy who barred their way. But the bold spirit of the French cavaliers rose the higher to the danger. The clamour of their war-cries filled the air, and they tossed their pennoned spears over their heads in menace and defiance. From the English line it was a noble sight, the gallant, pawing, curveting horses, the many-coloured twinkling riders, the swoop and wave and toss of plume and banner.

Then a bugle rang forth. With a sudden yell every spur struck deep, every lance was laid in rest, and the whole gallant squadron flew like a glittering thunderbolt for the centre of the English line.

A hundred yards they had crossed, and yet another hundred, but there was no movement in front of them, and no sound save their own hoarse battle-cries and the thunder of their horses. Ever swifter and swifter they flew. From behind the hedge it was a vision of horses, white, bay, and black, their necks stretched, their nostrils distended, their bellies to the ground, while of the rider

one could but see a shield with a plume-tufted visor above it, and a spear-head twinkling in front.

Then of a sudden the prince raised his hand and gave a cry. Chandos echoed it, it swelled down the line, and with one mighty chorus of twanging strings and hissing shafts the long-pent storm broke at last.

Alas for the noble steeds! Alas for the gallant men! When the lust of battle is over who would not grieve to see that noble squadron break into red ruin before the rain of arrows beating upon the faces and breasts of the horses? The front rank crashed down, and the others piled themselves upon the top of them, unable to check their speed, or to swerve aside from the terrible wall of their shattered comrades which had so suddenly sprung up before them. Fifteen feet high was that blood-spurting mound of screaming, kicking horses and writhing, struggling men. Here and there on the flanks a horseman cleared himself and dashed for the hedge, only to have his steed slain under him and to be hurled from his saddle. Of all the three hundred gallant riders, not one ever reached that fatal hedge.

But now in a long rolling wave of steel the German battalion roared swiftly onward. They opened in the centre to pass that terrible mound of death, and then spurred swiftly in upon the archers. They were brave men, well led, and in their open lines they could avoid the clubbing together which had been the ruin of the vanguard; yet they perished singly even as the others had perished together. A few were slain by the arrows. The greater number had their horses killed under them, and were so shaken and shattered by the fall that they could not raise their limbs, overweighted with iron, from the spot where they lay.

Three men riding together broke through the bushes which sheltered the leaders of the archers, cut down Widdington the Dalesman, spurred onward through the hedge, dashed over the bowmen behind it, and made for the prince. One fell with an arrow through his head, a

second was beaten from his saddle by Chandos, and the third was slain by the prince's own hand. A second band broke through near the river, but were cut off by Lord Audley and his squires, so that all were slain. A single horseman whose steed was mad with pain, an arrow in its eye and a second in its nostril, sprang over the hedge and clattered through the whole army, disappearing amid whoops and laughter into the woods behind. But none others won as far as the hedge. The whole front of the position was fringed with a litter of German wounded or dead, while one great heap in the centre marked the downfall of the gallant French three hundred.

While these two waves of the attack had broken in front of the English position, leaving this blood-stained wreckage behind them, the main divisions had halted and made their last preparations for their own assault. They had not yet begun their advance, and the nearest was still half a mile distant, when the few survivors from the forlorn hope, their maddened horses bristling with arrows, flew past them on either flank.

At the same moment the English archers and men-at-arms dashed through the hedge, and dragged all who were living out of that tangled heap of shattered horses and men. It was a mad wild rush, for in a few minutes the fight must be renewed, and yet there was a rich harvest of wealth for the lucky man who could pick a wealthy prisoner from amid the crowd. The nobler spirits disdained to think of ransoms while the fight was still unsettled; but a swarm of needy soldiers, Gascons and English, dragged the wounded out by the leg or the arm, and with daggers at their throats demanded their names title, and means. He who had made a good prize hurried him to the rear where his own servants could guard him, while he who was disappointed too often drove the dagger home and then rushed once more into the tangle in the hope of better luck. Clermont, with an arrow through the sky-blue virgin on his surcoat, lay dead within ten paces of the hedge; d'Andreghen was dragged by a penniless

squire from under a horse and became his prisoner. The Earls of Salzburg and of Nassau were both found helpless on the ground and taken to the rear. Aylward cast his thick arms round Count Otto von Langenbeck, and laid him, helpless from a broken leg, behind his bush. Black Simon had made prize of Bernard, Count of Ventadour, and hurried him through the hedge. Everywhere there was rushing and shouting, brawling and buffeting, while amid it all a swarm of archers were seeking their shafts, plucking them from the dead, and sometimes even from the wounded. Then there was a sudden cry of warning. In a moment every man was back in his place once more, and the line of the hedge was clear.

It was high time; for already the first division of the French was close upon them. If the charge of the horsemen had been terrible from its rush and its fire, this steady advance of a huge phalanx of armoured footmen was even more fearsome to the spectator. They moved very slowly, on account of the weight of their armour, but their progress was the more regular and inexorable. With elbows touching—their shields slung in front, their short five-foot spears carried in their right hands, and their maces or swords ready at their belts, the deep column of men-at-arms moved onward. Again the storm of arrows beat upon them, clinking and thudding on the armour. They crouched double behind their shields as they met it. Many fell, but still the slow tide lapped onward. Yelling they surged up to the hedge, and lined it for half a mile, struggling hard to pierce it.

For five minutes the long straining ranks faced each other with fierce stab of spear on one side and heavy beat of axe or mace upon the other. In many parts the hedge was pierced or levelled to the ground, and the French men-at-arms were raging among the archers, hacking and hewing among the lightly armed men. For a moment it seemed as if the battle was on the turn.

But John de Vere, Earl of Oxford, cool, wise, and crafty in war, saw and seized his chance. On the right flank a

marshy meadow skirted the river. So soft was it that a heavy-armed man would sink to his knees. At his order a spray of light bowmen was thrown out from the battle-line and forming upon the flank of the French poured their arrows into them. At the same moment Chandos, with Audley, Nigel, Bartholomew Burghersh, the Captal de Buch, and a score of other knights sprang upon their horses, and charging down the narrow lane rode over the French line in front of them. Once through it they spurred to left and right, trampling down the dismounted men-at-arms.

A fearsome sight was Pommers that day, his red eyes rolling, his nostrils gaping, his tawny mane tossing, and his savage teeth gnashing in fury, as he tore and smashed and ground beneath his ramping hoofs all that came before him. Fearsome too was the rider, ice-cool, alert, concentrated of purpose, with heart of fire and muscles of steel. A very angel of battle he seemed as he drove his maddened horse through the thickest of the press ; but, strive as he would, the tall figure of his master upon his coal-black steed was ever half a length before him.

Already the moment of danger was passed. The French line had given back. Those who had pierced the hedge had fallen like brave men amid the ranks of their foemen. The division of Warwick had hurried up from the vineyards to fill the gaps of Salisbury's battle line. Back rolled the shining tide, slowly at first, even as it had advanced, but quicker now as the bolder fell and the weaker shredded out and shuffled with ungainly speed for a place of safety. Again there was a rush from behind the hedge. Again there was a reaping of that strange crop of bearded arrows which grew so thick upon the ground, and again the wounded prisoners were seized and dragged in brutal haste to the rear. Then the line was restored, and the English, weary, panting and shaken, awaited the next attack.

But a great good fortune had come to them—so great that as they looked down the valley they could scarce

credit their own senses. Behind the division of the dauphin, which had pressed them so hard, stood a second division hardly less numerous, led by the Duke of Orleans. The fugitives from in front, blood-smeared and be-draggled, blinded with sweat and with fear, rushed amid its ranks in their flight, and in a moment, without a blow being struck, had carried them off in their wild rout. This vast array, so solid and so martial, thawed suddenly away like a snow-wreath in the sun. It was gone, and in its place thousands of shining dots scattered over the whole plain as each man made his own way to the spot where he could find his horse and bear himself from the field. For a moment it seemed that the battle was won, and a thunder-shout of joy pealed up from the English line.

But as the curtain of the duke's division was drawn away it was only to disclose stretching far behind it, and spanning the valley from side to side, the magnificent array of the French king, solid, unshaken, and preparing its ranks for the attack. Its numbers were as great as those of the English army ; it was unscathed by all that was past, and it had a valiant monarch to lead it to the charge. With the slow deliberation of the man who means to do or to die, its leader marshalled its ranks for the supreme effort of the day.

Meanwhile during that brief moment of exultation when the battle appeared to be won, a crowd of hot-headed young knights and squires swarmed and clamoured round the prince, beseeching that he would allow them to ride forth.

"See this insolent fellow who bears three martlets upon a field gules!" cried Sir Maurice Berkeley. "He stands betwixt the two armies as though he had no dread of us."

"I pray you, sir, that I may ride out to him since he seems ready to attempt some small deed," pleaded Nigel.

"Nay, fair sirs, it is an evil thing that we should break our line, seeing that we still have much to do," said the prince. "See! he rides away, and so the matter is settled."

"Nay, fair prince," said the young knight who had

spoken first. "My grey horse, Lebryte, could run him down ere he could reach shelter. Never since I left Severn side have I seen steed as fleet as mine. Shall I not show you?" In an instant he had spurred the charger and was speeding across the plain.

The Frenchman, John de Helennes, a squire of Picardy, had waited with a burning heart, his soul sick at the flight of the division in which he had ridden. In the hope of doing some redeeming exploit, or of meeting his own death, he had loitered between the armies, but no movement had come from the English lines. Now he had turned his horse's head to join the king's array, when the low drumming of hoofs sounded behind him, and he turned to find a horseman hard upon his heels. Each had drawn his sword, and the two armies paused to view the fight. In the first bout Sir Maurice Berkeley's lance was struck from his hand, and as he sprang down to recover it the Frenchman ran him through the thigh, dismounted from his horse, and received his surrender. As the unfortunate Englishman hobbled away at the side of his captor a roar of laughter burst from both armies at the spectacle.

"By my ten finger-bones!" cried Aylward, chuckling behind the remains of his bush, "he found more on his distaff that time than he knew how to spin. Who was the knight?'

"By his arms," said old Wat, "he should either be a Berkeley of the West, or a Popham of Kent."

"I call to mind that I shot a match of six ends once with a Kentish woldsman——" began the fat bowyer.

"Nay, nay, stint thy talk, Bartholomew!" cried old Wat. "Here is poor Ned with his head cloven, and it would be more fitting if you were saying aves for his soul, instead of all this bobance and boasting. How now, Tom of Beverley?"

"We have suffered sorely in this last bout, Wat. There are forty of our men upon their backs, and the Dean foresters on the right are in worse case still."

"Talking will not mend it, Tom, and if all but one were on their backs he must still hold his ground."

While the archers were chatting, the leaders of the army were in solemn conclave just behind them. Two divisions of the French had been repulsed, and yet there was many an anxious face as the older knights looked across the plain at the unbroken array of the French king moving slowly toward them. The line of the archers was much thinned and shredded. Many knights and squires had been disabled in the long and fierce combat at the hedge. Others, exhausted by want of food, had no strength left and were stretched panting upon the ground. Some were engaged in carrying the wounded to the rear and laying them under the shelter of the trees, while others were replacing their broken swords or lances from the weapons of the slain. The Captal de Buch, brave and experienced as he was, frowned darkly and whispered his misgivings to Chandos.

But the prince's courage flamed the higher as the shadow fell, while his dark eyes gleamed with a soldier's pride as he glanced round him at his weary comrades, and then at the dense masses of the king's battle which now, with a hundred trumpets blaring and a thousand pennons waving, rolled slowly over the plain.

"Come what may, John, this has been a most noble meeting," said he. "They will not be ashamed of us in England. Take heart, my friends, for if we conquer we shall carry the glory ever with us; but if we be slain then we die most worshipfully and in high honour, as we have ever prayed that we might die, and we leave behind us our brothers and kinsmen who will assuredly avenge us. It is but one more effort and all will be well. Warwick, Oxford, Salisbury, Suffolk, every man to the front! My banner to the front also! Your horses, fair sirs! The archers are spent, and our own good lances must win the field this day. Advance, Walter, and may God and Saint George be with England!"

Sir Walter Woodland, riding a high black horse, took

station by the prince, with the royal banner resting in a socket by his saddle. From all sides the knights and squires crowded in upon it, until they formed a great squadron containing the survivors of the battalions of Warwick and Salisbury, as well as those of the prince. Four hundred men-at-arms who had been held in reserve were brought up and thickened the array, but even so Chandos's face was grave as he scanned it, and then turned his eyes upon the masses of the Frenchmen.

"I like it not, fair sir. The weight is overgreat," he whispered to the prince.

"How would you order it, John? Speak what is in your mind."

"We should attempt something upon their flank whilst we hold them in front. How say you, Jean?"

He turned to the Captal de Buch, whose dark, resolute face reflected the same misgivings.

"Indeed, John, I think as you do," said he. "The French king is a very valiant man, and so are those who are about him, and I know not how we may drive them back unless we can do as you advise. If you will give me only a hundred men I will attempt it."

"Surely the task is mine, fair sir, since the thought has come from me," said Chandos.

"Nay, John, I would keep you at my side. But you speak well, Jean, and you shall do even as you have said. Go, ask the Earl of Oxford for a hundred men-at-arms and as many hobbelers, that you may ride round the mound yonder, and so fall upon them unseen. Let all that are left of the archers gather on each side, shoot away their arrows, and then fight as best they may. Wait till they are past yonder thorn-bush and then, Walter, bear my banner straight against that of the King of France. Fair sirs, may God and the thought of your ladies hold high your hearts!"

The French monarch, seeing that his footmen had made no impression upon the English, and also that the hedge had been well-nigh levelled to the ground in the course of

the combat, so that it no longer presented an obstacle, had ordered his followers to remount their horses, and it was as a solid mass of cavalry that the chivalry of France advanced to their last supreme effort. The king was in the centre of the front line, Geoffrey de Chargny with the golden oriflamme upon his right, and Eustace de Ribeaumont with the royal lilies upon his left. At his elbow was the Duke of Athens, High Constable of France, and round him were the nobles of the court, fiery and furious, yelling their war-cries, as they waved their weapons over their heads. Six thousand gallant men of the bravest race in Europe, men whose very names are like blasts of a battle-trumpet—Beaujeus and Chatillons, Tancarvilles and Ventadours—pressed hard behind the silver lilies.

Slowly they moved at first, walking their horses that they might be the fresher for the shock. Then they broke into a trot which was quickening into a gallop when the remains of the hedge in front of them was beaten in an instant to the ground and the broad line of the steel-clad chivalry of England swept grandly forth to the final shock. With loose rein and busy spur the two lines of horsemen galloped at the top of their speed straight and hard for each other. An instant later they met with a thunder-crash which was heard by the burghers on the wall of Poictiers, seven good miles away.

Under that frightful impact horses fell dead with broken necks, and many a rider, held in his saddle by the high pommel, fractured his thighs with the shock. Here and there a pair met breast to breast, the horses rearing straight upward and falling back upon their masters. But for the most part the line had opened in the gallop, and the cavaliers, flying through the gaps, buried themselves in the enemy's ranks. Then the flanks shredded out, and the thick press in the centre loosened until there was space to swing a sword and to guide a steed. For ten acres there was one wild tumultuous swirl of tossing heads, of gleaming weapons which rose and fell, of upthrown hands, of tossing plumes and of

lifted shields, while the din of a thousand war-cries and the clash-clash of metal upon metal rose and swelled like the roar and beat of an ocean surge upon a rock-bound coast. Backward and forward swayed the mighty throng, now down the valley and now up, as each side in turn put forth its strength for a fresh rally. Locked in one long deadly grapple, great England and gallant France with iron hearts and souls of fire strove and strove for mastery.

Sir Walter Woodland, riding hard upon his high black horse, had plunged into the swelter and headed for the blue and silver banner of King John. Close at his heels in a solid wedge rode the prince, Chandos, Nigel, Lord Reginald Cobham, Audley, with his four famous squires, and a score of the flower of the English and Gascon knighthood. Holding together and bearing down opposition by a shower of blows and by the weight of their powerful horses, their progress was still very slow, for ever fresh waves of French cavaliers surged up against them and broke in front only to close in again upon their rear. Sometimes they were swept backward by the rush, sometimes they gained a few paces, sometimes they could but keep their foothold, and yet from minute to minute that blue and silver flag which waved above the press grew ever a little closer. A dozen furious hard-breathing French knights had broken into their ranks, and clutched at Sir Walter Woodland's banner, but Chandos and Nigel guarded it on one side, Audley with his squires on the other, so that no man laid his hand upon it and lived.

But now there was a distant crash and a roar of "Saint George for Guienne!" from behind. The Captal de Buch had charged home. "Saint George for England!" yelled the main attack, and ever the counter-cry came back to them from afar. The ranks opened in front of them. The French were giving way. A small knight with golden scroll-work upon his armour threw himself upon the prince and was struck dead by his mace. It was the Duke of Athens, Constable of France, but none had time

to note it, and the fight rolled on over his body. Looser still were the French ranks. Many were turning their horses, for that ominous roar had shaken their resolution. The little English wedge poured onward, the prince, Chandos, Audley, and Nigel ever in the van.

A huge warrior in black, bearing a golden banner, appeared suddenly in a gap of the shredding ranks. He tossed his precious burden to a squire, who bore it away. Like a pack of hounds on the very haunch of a deer the English rushed yelling for the oriflamme. But the black warrior flung himself across their path. "Chargny! Chargny *à la recousse*!" he roared with a voice of thunder. Sir Reginald Cobham dropped before his battle-axe, so did the Gascon de Clisson. Nigel was beaten down on to the crupper of his horse by a sweeping blow; but at the same instant Chandos's quick blade passed through the Frenchman's camail and pierced his throat. So died Geoffrey de Chargny; but the oriflamme was saved.

Dazed with the shock, Nigel still kept his saddle, and Pommers, his yellow hide mottled with blood, bore him onward with the others. The French horsemen were now in full flight; but one stern group of knights stood firm, like a rock in a rushing torrent, beating off all, whether friend or foe, who tried to break the ranks. The oriflamme had gone, and so had the blue and silver banner, but here were desperate men ready to fight to the death. In their ranks honour was to be reaped. The prince and his following hurled themselves upon them, while the rest of the English horsemen swept onward to secure the fugitives and to win their ransoms. But the nobler spirits —Audley, Chandos, and the others—would have thought it shame to gain money while there was work to be done or honour to be won. Furious was the wild attack, desperate the prolonged defence. Men fell from their saddles for very exhaustion.

Nigel, still at his place near Chandos's elbow, was hotly attacked by a short broad-shouldered warrior upon a stout white cob, but Pommers reared with pawing forefeet and

dashed the smaller horse to the ground. The falling rider clutched Nigel's arm and tore him from the saddle, so that the two rolled upon the grass under the stamping hoofs, the English squire on the top and his shortened sword glimmered before the visor of the gasping, breathless Frenchman.

"*Je me rends! je me rends!*" he panted.

For a moment a vision of rich ransoms passed through Nigel's brain. That noble palfrey, that gold-flecked armour, meant fortune to the captor. Let others have it! There was work still to be done. How could he desert the prince and his noble master for the sake of a private gain? Could he lead a prisoner to the rear when honour beckoned him to the van? He staggered to his feet, seized Pommers by the mane, and swung himself into the saddle.

An instant later he was by Chandos's side once more and they were bursting together through the last ranks of the gallant group who had fought so bravely to the end. Behind them was one long swath of the dead and the wounded. In front the whole wide plain was covered with the flying French and their pursuers.

The prince reined up his steed and opened his visor, while his followers crowded round him with waving weapons and frenzied shouts of victory.

"What now, John!" cried the smiling prince, wiping his streaming face with his ungauntleted hand. "How fares it then?"

"I am little hurt, fair lord, save for a crushed hand and a spear-prick in the shoulder. But you, sir? I trust you have no scathe?"

"In truth, John, with you at one elbow and Lord Audley at the other, I know not how I could come to harm. But alas! I fear that Sir James is sorely stricken."

The gallant Lord Audley had dropped upon the ground and the blood oozed from every crevice of his battered armour. His four brave squires—Dutton of Dutton, Delves of Doddington, Fowlhurst of Crewe, and Hawkstone of Wainhill—wounded and weary themselves, but

with no thought save for their master, unlaced his helmet and bathed his pallid blood-stained face.

He looked up at the prince with burning eyes. "I thank you, sir, for deigning to consider so poor a knight as myself," said he, in a feeble voice.

The prince dismounted and bent over him. "I am bound to honour you very much, James," said he, "for by your valour this day you have won glory and renown above us all, and your prowess has proved you to be the bravest knight."

"My lord," murmured the wounded man, "you have a right to say what you please; but I wish it were as you say."

"James," said the prince, "from this time onward I make you a knight of my own household, and I settle upon you five hundred marks of yearly income from my own estates in England."

"Sir," the knight answered, "God make me worthy of the good fortune you bestow upon me. Your knight I will ever be, and the money I will divide with your leave amongst these four squires who have brought me whatever glory I have won this day." So saying his head fell back, and he lay white and silent upon the grass.

"Bring water!" said the prince. "Let the royal leech see to him; for I had rather lose many men than the good Sir James. Ha, Chandos, what have we here?"

A knight lay across the path with his helmet beaten down upon his shoulders. On his surcoat and shield were the arms of a red griffin.

"It is Robert de Duras, the spy," said Chandos.

"Well for him that he has met his end," said the angry prince. "Put him on his shield, Hubert, and let four archers bear him to the monastery. Lay him at the feet of the cardinal and say that by this sign I greet him. Place my flag on yonder high bush, Walter, and let my tent be raised there, that my friends may know where to seek me."

The flight and pursuit had thundered far away, and

the field was deserted save for the numerous groups of weary horsemen who were making their way back, driving their prisoners before them. The archers were scattered over the whole plain, rifling the saddle-bags and gathering the armour of those who had fallen, or searching for their own scattered arrows.

Suddenly, however, as the prince was turning toward the bush which he had chosen for his headquarters, there broke out from behind him an extraordinary uproar and a group of knights and squires came pouring toward him, all arguing, swearing and abusing each other in French and English at the tops of their voices. In the midst of them limped a stout little man in gold-spangled armour, who appeared to be the object of the contention, for one would drag him one way and one another, as though they would pull him limb from limb.

"Nay, fair sirs, gently, gently, I pray you!" he pleaded. "There is enough for all, and no need to treat me so rudely."

But ever the hubbub broke out again, and swords gleamed as the angry disputants glared furiously at each other. The prince's eyes fell upon the small prisoner, and he staggered back with a gasp of astonishment.

"King John!" he cried.

A shout of joy rose from the warriors around him. "The king of France! The king of France a prisoner!" they cried in an ecstasy.

"Nay, nay, fair sirs, let him not hear that we rejoice! Let no word bring pain to his soul!" Running forward the prince clasped the French king by the two hands.

"Most welcome, sire!" he cried. "Indeed it is good for us that so gallant a knight should stay with us for some short time, since the chance of war has so ordered it. Wine there! Bring wine for the king!"

But John was flushed and angry. His helmet had been roughly torn off, and blood was smeared upon his cheek. His noisy captors stood around him in a circle, eyeing him hungrily like dogs who have been beaten from

their quarry. There were Gascons and English, knights, squires, and archers, all pushing and straining.

"I pray you, fair prince, to get rid of these rude fellows," said King John, "for indeed they have plagued me sorely. By Saint Denis! my arm has been well-nigh pulled from its socket."

"What wish you then?" asked the prince, turning angrily upon the noisy swarm of his followers.

"We took him, fair lord. He is ours!" cried a score of voices. They closed in, all yelping together like a pack of wolves. "It was I, fair lord!"—"Nay, it was I!"—"You lie, you rascal, it was I!" Again their fierce eyes glared and their blood-stained hands sought the hilts of their weapons.

"Nay, this must be settled here and now!" said the prince. "I crave your patience, fair and honoured sir, for a few brief minutes, since indeed much ill-will may spring from this if it be not set at rest. Who is this tall knight who can scarce keep his hands from the king's shoulder?"

"It is Denis de Morbecque, my lord, a knight of Saint Omer, who is in our service, being an outlaw from France."

"I call him to mind. How, then, Sir Denis? What say you in this matter?"

"He gave himself to me, fair lord. He had fallen in the press, and I came upon him and seized him. I told him that I was a knight from Artois, and he gave me his glove. See here, I bear it in my hand."

"It is true, fair lord! It is true!" cried a dozen French voices.

"Nay, sir, judge not too soon!" shouted an English squire, pushing his way to the front. "It was I who had him at my mercy, and he is my prisoner, for he spoke to this man only because he could tell by his tongue that he was his own countryman. I took him, and here are a score to prove it."

"It is true, fair lord! We saw it, and it was even so!" cried a chorus of Englishmen.

At all times there are growling and snapping between

the English and their allies of France. The prince saw how easily this might set a light to such a flame as could not readily be quenched. It must be stamped out now ere it had time to mount

"Fair and honoured lord," he said to the king, "again I pray you for a moment of patience. It is your word and only yours which can tell us what is just and right. To whom were you graciously pleased to commit your royal person?"

King John looked up from the flagon which had been brought to him and wiped his lips with the dawnings of a smile upon his ruddy face.

"It was not this Englishman," he said, and a cheer burst from the Gascons, "nor was it this bastard Frenchman," he added. "To neither of them did I surrender."

There was a hush of surprise.

"To whom then, sire?" asked the prince.

The king looked slowly round. "There was a devil of a yellow horse," said he. "My poor palfrey went over like a skittle-pin before a ball. Of the rider I know nothing save that he bore red roses on a silver shield. Ah! by Saint Denis, there is the man himself, and there his thrice-accursed horse!"

His head swimming, and moving as if in a dream, Nigel found himself the centre of the circle of armed and angry men.

The prince laid his hand upon his shoulder. "It is the little cock of Tilford Bridge," said he. "On my father's soul, I have ever said that you would win your way. Did you receive the king's surrender?"

"Nay, fair lord, I did not receive it."

"Did you hear him give it?"

"I heard, sir, but I did not know that it was the king. My master Lord Chandos had gone on, and I followed after."

"And left him lying. Then the surrender was not complete, and by the laws of war the ransom goes to Denis de Morbecque, if his story be true."

"It is true," said the king. "He was the second."

"Then the ransom is yours, Denis. But for my part I swear by my father's soul that I had rather have the honour this squire has gathered than all the richest ransoms of France."

At these words spoken before that circle of noble warriors Nigel's heart gave one great throb, and he dropped upon his knee before the prince.

"Fair lord, how can I thank you?" he murmured. "These words at least are more than any ransom."

"Rise up!" said the smiling prince, and he smote with his sword upon his shoulder. "England has lost a brave squire, and has gained a gallant knight. Nay, linger not, I pray! Rise up, Sir Nigel."

## 27. *How the Third Messenger came to Cosford*

TWO months have passed, and the long slopes of Hindhead are russet with the faded ferns—the fuzzy brown pelt which wraps the chilling earth. With whoop and scream the wild November wind sweeps over the great rolling downs, tossing the branches of the Cosford beeches, and rattling at the rude latticed windows. The stout old knight of Dupplin, grown even a little stouter, with whiter beard to fringe an ever redder face, sits as of yore at the head of his own board. A well-heaped platter, flanked by a foaming tankard stands before him. At his right sits the Lady Mary, her dark, plain, queenly face marked deep with those years of weary waiting, but bearing the gentle grace and dignity which only sorrow and restraint can give. On his left is Mathew, the old priest. Long ago the golden-haired beauty had passed from Cosford to Fernhurst, where the young and beautiful Lady Edith Brocas is the belle of all Sussex, a sunbeam of smiles and merriment, save perhaps when her thoughts for an instant fly back to that dread night when

she was plucked from under the very talons of the foul hawk of Shalford.

The old knight looked up as a fresh gust of wind with a dash of rain beat against the window behind him.

"By Saint Hubert, it is a wild night," said he. "I had hoped to-morrow to have a flight at a heron of the pool or a mallard at the brook. How fares it with little Katherine the peregrine, Mary?"

"I have joined the wing, father, and I have imped the feathers; but I fear it will be Christmas ere she can fly again."

"This is a hard saying," said Sir John; "for indeed I have seen no bolder better bird. Her wing was broken by a heron's beak last Sabbath sennight, holy father, and Mary has the mending of it."

"I trust, my son, that you had heard mass ere you turned to worldly pleasure upon God's holy day," Father Mathew answered.

"Tut, tut!" said the old knight, laughing. "Shall I make confession at the head of my own table? I can worship the good God amongst His own works, the woods and the fields, better than in yon pile of stone and wood. But I call to mind a charm for a wounded hawk which was taught me by the fowler of Gaston de Foix. How did it run? 'The lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has conquered.' Yes, those were the words to be said three times as you walk round the perch where the bird is mewed."

The old priest shook his head. "Nay, these charms are tricks of the devil," said he. "Holy Church lends them no countenance, for they are neither good nor fair. But how is it now with your tapestry, Lady Mary? When last I was beneath this roof you had half done in five fair colours the story of Theseus and Ariadne."

"It is half done still, holy father."

"How is this, my daughter? Have you, then, so many calls?"

"Nay, holy father, her thoughts are otherwhere," Sir

John answered. "She will sit an hour at a time, the needle in her hand and her soul a hundred leagues from Cosford House. Ever since the prince's battle——"

"Good father, I beg you——"

"Nay, Mary, none can hear me, save your own confessor, Father Mathew. Ever since the prince's battle, I say, when we heard that young Nigel had won such honour, she is brain-wode, and sits ever—well, even as you see her now."

An intent look had come into Mary's eyes; her gaze was fixed upon the dark rain-splashed window. It was a face carved from ivory, white-lipped and rigid, on which the old priest looked.

"What is it, my daughter? What do you see?"

"I see nothing, father."

"What is it, then, that disturbs you?"

"I hear, father."

"What do you hear?"

"There are horsemen on the road."

The old knight laughed. "So it goes on, father. What day is there that a hundred horsemen do not pass our gate, and yet every clink of hoofs sets her poor heart a-trembling. So strong and steadfast she has ever been, my Mary, and now no sound too slight to shake her to the soul! Nay, daughter, nay, I pray you!"

She had half-risen from her chair, her hands clinched and her dark, startled eyes still fixed upon the window.

"I hear them, father! I hear them amid the wind and the rain! Yes, yes, they are turning—they have turned! My God, they are at our very door!"

"By Saint Hubert, the girl is right!" cried old Sir John, beating his fist upon the board. "Ho, varlets, out with you to the yard! Set the mulled wine on the blaze once more! There are travellers at the gate, and it is no night to keep a dog waiting at our door. Hurry, Hannekin! Hurry, I say, or I will haste you with my cudgel!"

Plainly to the ears of all men could be heard the stamping of the horses. Mary had stood up, quivering in every

limb. An eager step at the threshold, the door was flung wide, and there in the opening stood Nigel, the rain gleaming upon his smiling face, his cheeks flushed with the beating of the wind, his blue eyes shining with tenderness and love. Something held her by the throat, the light of the torches danced up and down ; but her strong spirit rose at the thought that others should see that inner holy of holies of her soul. There is a heroism of women to which no valour of man can attain. Her eyes only carried him her message as she held out her hand.

" Welcome, Nigel ! " said she.

He stooped and kissed it.

" Saint Catharine has brought me home," said he.

A merry supper it was at Cosford Manor that night, with Nigel at the head between the jovial old knight and the Lady Mary, while at the farther end Samkin Aylward wedged between two servant maids kept his neighbours in alternate laughter and terror as he told his tales of the French Wars. Nigel had to turn his doeskin heels and show his little golden spurs. As he spoke of what was passed Sir John clapped him on the shoulder, while Mary took his strong right hand in hers, and the good old priest, smiling, blessed them both. Nigel had drawn a little golden ring from his pocket, and it twinkled in the torchlight.

" Did you say that you must go on your way to-morrow, father ? " he asked the priest.

" Indeed, fair son, the matter presses."

" But you may bide the morning ? "

" It will suffice if I start at noon."

" Much may be done in a morning." He looked at Mary, who blushed and smiled. " By Saint Paul ! I have waited long enough."

" Good, good ! " chuckled the old knight, with wheezy laughter. " Even so I wooed your mother, Mary. Wooers were brisk in the olden time. To-morrow is Tuesday, and Tuesday is ever a lucky day. Alas ! that the good Dame Ermyntrude is no longer with us to see it done ! The old hound must run us down, Nigel, and

I hear its bay upon my own heels ; but my heart will rejoice that before the end I may call you son. Give me your hand, Mary, and yours, Nigel. Now, take an old man's blessing, and may God keep and guard you both, and give you your desert, for I believe on my soul that in all this broad land there dwells no nobler man nor any woman more fitted to be his mate."

There let us leave them, their hearts full of gentle joy, the golden future of hope and promise stretching out before their youthful eyes. Alas for those green spring dreamings ! How often do they fade and wither until they fall and rot, a dreary sight, by the wayside of life ! But here, by God's blessing, it was not so, for they burgeoned and they grew, ever fairer and more noble, until the whole wide world might marvel at the beauty of it.

It has been told elsewhere how as the years passed Nigel's name rose higher in honour ; but still Mary's would keep pace with it, each helping and sustaining the other upon an ever higher path. In many lands did Nigel carve his fame, and ever as he returned spent and weary from his work he drank fresh strength and fire and craving for honour from her who glorified his home. At Twynham Castle they dwelled for many years, beloved and honoured by all. Then in the fullness of time they came back to the Tilford Manor-house and spent their happy, healthy age amid those heather downs where Nigel had passed his first lusty youth, ere ever he turned his face to the wars. Thither also came Aylward when he had left the Pied Merlin where for many a year he sold ale to the men of the forest.

But the years pass ; the old wheel turns and ever the thread runs out. The wise and the good, the noble and the brave, they come from the darkness, and into the darkness they go, whence, whither, and why, who may say ? Here is the slope of Hindhead. The fern still glows russet in November, the heather still burns red in July ; but where now is the Manor of Cosford ? Where

is the old house of Tilford ? Where, but for a few scattered grey stones, is the mighty pile of Waverley ? And yet even gnawing Time has not eaten all things away. Walk with me towards Guildford, reader, upon the busy highway. Here, where the high green mound rises before us, mark yonder roofless shrine which still stands four-square to the winds. It is St. Catharine's, where Nigel and Mary plighted their faith. Below lies the winding river, and over yonder you still see the dark Chantry woods which mount up to the bare summit, on which, roofed and whole, stands that Chapel of the Martyr where the comrades beat off the archers of the crooked Lord of Shalford. Down yonder on the flanks of the long chalk hills one traces the road by which they made their journey to the wars. And now turn hither to the north, down this sunken winding path ! It is all unchanged since Nigel's day. Here is the Church of Compton. Pass under the aged and crumbling arch. Before the steps of that ancient altar, unrecorded and unbrassed, lies the dust of Nigel and of Mary. Near them is that of Maude their daughter, and of Alleyne Edricson, whose spouse she was ; their children and children's children are lying by their side. Here too, near the old yew in the churchyard, is the little mound which marks where Samkin Aylward went back to that good soil from which he sprang.

So lie the dead leaves ; but they and such as they nourish for ever that great old trunk of England, which still sheds forth another crop and another, each as strong and as fair as the last. The body may lie in mouldering chancel, or in crumbling vault, but the rumour of noble lives, the record of valour and truth, can never die, but lives on in the soul of the people. Our own work lies ready to our hands ; and yet our strength may be the greater and our faith the firmer if we spare an hour from present toils to look back upon the women who were gentle and strong, or the men who loved honour more than life on this green stage of England where for a few short years we play our little part.

# MICAH CLARKE

## HIS STATEMENT

# 1. *Of Cornet Joseph Clarke of the Ironsides*

IT may be, my dear grandchildren, that at one time or another I have told you nearly all the incidents which have occurred during my adventurous life. To your father and to your mother, at least, I know that none of them are unfamiliar. Yet when I consider that time wears on, and that a grey head is apt to contain a failing memory, I am prompted to use these long winter evenings in putting it all before you from the beginning, that you may have it as one clear story in your minds, and pass it on as such to those who come after you. For now that the house of Brunswick is firmly established upon the throne and that peace prevails in the land, it will become less easy for you every year to understand how men felt when Englishmen were in arms against Englishmen, and when he who should have been the shield and the protector of his subjects had no thought but to force upon them what they most abhorred and detested.

My story is one which you may well treasure up in your memories, and tell again to others, for it is not likely that in this whole county of Hampshire, or even perhaps in all England, there is another left alive who is so well able to speak from his own knowledge of these events, or who has played a more forward part in them. All that I know I shall endeavour soberly and in due order to put before you. I shall try to make these dead men quicken into life for your behoof, and to call back out of the mists of the past those scenes which were brisk enough in the acting, though they read so dully and so heavily in the pages of the worthy men who have set themselves to record them. Perchance my words, too, might, in the ears of strangers,

seem to be but an old man's gossip. To you, however, who know that these eyes which are looking at you looked also at the things which I describe, and that this hand has struck in for a good cause, it will, I know, be different. Bear in mind as you listen that it was your quarrel as well as our own in which we fought, and that if now you grow up to be free men in a free land, privileged to think or to pray as your consciences shall direct, you may thank God that you are reaping the harvest which your fathers sowed in blood and suffering when the Stuarts were on the throne.

I was born then in the year 1664, at Havant, which is a flourishing village a few miles from Portsmouth off the main London road, and there it was that I spent the greater part of my youth. It is now as it was then, a pleasant, healthy spot, with a hundred or more brick cottages scattered along in a single irregular street, each with its little garden in front, and maybe a fruit tree or two at the back. In the middle of the village stood the old church with the square tower and the great sun-dial like a wrinkle upon its grey weather-blotched face. On the outskirts the Presbyterians had their chapel; but when the Act of Uniformity was passed, their good minister, Master Breckinridge, whose discourses had often crowded his rude benches while the comfortable pews of the church were empty, was cast into gaol, and his flock dispersed. As to the Independents, of whom my father was one, they also were under the ban of the law, but they attended conventicle at Emsworth, whither we would trudge, rain or shine, on every Sabbath morning. These meetings were broken up more than once, but the congregation was composed of such harmless folk, so well beloved and respected by their neighbours, that the peace officers came after a time to ignore them, and to let them worship in their own fashion. There were Papists, too, amongst us, who were compelled to go as far as Portsmouth for their Mass. Thus, you see, small as was our village, we were a fair miniature of the whole country, for

we had our sects and our factions, which were all the more bitter for being confined in so narrow a compass.

My father, Joseph Clarke, was better known over the countryside by the name of Ironside Joe, for he had served in his youth in the Yaxley troop of Oliver Cromwell's famous regiment of horse, and had preached so lustily and fought so stoutly that old Noll himself called him out of the ranks after the fight at Dunbar, and raised him to a cornetcy. It chanced, however, that having some little time later fallen into an argument with one of his troopers concerning the mystery of the Trinity, the man, who was a half-crazy zealot, smote my father across the face, a favour which he returned by a thrust from his broadsword, which sent his adversary to test in person the truth of his beliefs. In most armies it would have been conceded that my father was within his rights in punishing promptly so rank an act of mutiny, but the soldiers of Cromwell had so high a notion of their own importance and privileges, that they resented this summary justice upon their companion. A court-martial sat upon my father, and it is likely that he would have been offered up as a sacrifice to appease the angry soldiery, had not the Lord Protector interfered, and limited the punishment to dismissal from the army. Cornet Clarke was accordingly stripped of his buff coat and steel cap, and wandered down to Havant, where he settled into business as a leather merchant and tanner, thereby depriving Parliament of as trusty a soldier as ever drew blade in its service. Finding that he prospered in trade, he took as wife Mary Shepstone, a young Churchwoman, and I, Micah Clarke, was the first pledge of their union.

My father, as I remember him first, was tall and straight, with a great spread of shoulder and a mighty chest. His face was craggy and stern, with large harsh features, shaggy overhanging brows, high-bridged fleshy nose, and a full-lipped mouth which tightened and set when he was angry. His grey eyes were piercing and soldier-like, yet I have seen them lighten up into a kindly and merry

twinkle. His voice was the most tremendous and awe-inspiring that I have ever listened to. I can well believe what I have heard, that when he chanted the Hundredth Psalm as he rode down among the blue bonnets at Dunbar, the sound of him rose above the blare of trumpets and the crash of guns, like the deep roll of a breaking wave. Yet though he possessed every quality which was needed to raise him to distinction as an officer, he had thrown off his military habits when he returned to civil life. As he prospered and grew rich he might well have worn a sword, but instead he would ever bear a small copy of the Scriptures bound to his girdle, where other men hung their weapons. He was sober and measured in his speech, and it was seldom, even in the bosom of his own family, that he would speak of the scenes which he had taken part in, or of the great men, Fleetwood and Harrison, Blake and Ireton, Desborough and Lambert, some of whom had been simple troopers like himself when the troubles broke out. He was frugal in his eating, backward in drinking, and allowed himself no pleasures save three pipes a day of Oronooko tobacco, which he kept ever in a brown jar by the great wooden chair on the left-hand side of the mantelshelf.

Yet for all his self-restraint the old leaven would at times begin to work in him, and bring on fits of what his enemies would call fanaticism and his friends piety, though it must be confessed that this piety was prone to take a fierce and fiery shape. As I look back, one or two instances of that stand out so hard and clear in my recollection that they might be scenes which I had seen of late in the playhouse, instead of memories of my childhood more than threescore years ago, when the second Charles was on the throne.

The first of these occurred when I was so young that I can remember neither what went before nor what immediately after it. It stuck in my infant mind when other things slipped through it. We were all in the house one sultry summer evening, when there came a

rattle of kettledrums and a clatter of hoofs, which brought my mother and my father to the door, she with me in her arms that I might have the better view. It was a regiment of horse on their way from Chichester to Portsmouth, with colours flying and band playing, making the bravest show that ever my youthful eyes had rested upon. With what wonder and admiration did I gaze at the sleek prancing steeds, the steel morions, the plumed hats of the officers, the scarfs and bandoliers. Never, I thought, had such a gallant company assembled, and I clapped my hands and cried out in my delight. My father smiled gravely, and took me from my mother's arms. "Nay, lad," he said, "thou art a soldier's son, and should have more judgment than to commend such a rabble as this. Canst thou not, child as thou art, see that their arms are ill-found, their stirrup-irons rusted, and their ranks without order or cohesion? Neither have they thrown out a troop in advance, as should even in times of peace be done, and their rear is straggling from here to Bedhampton. Yea," he continued, suddenly shaking his long arm at the troopers, and calling out to them, "ye are corn ripe for the sickle and waiting only for the reapers!" Several of them reined up at this sudden out-flame. "Hit the crop-eared rascal over the pate, Jack!" cried one to another, wheeling his horse round; but there was that in my father's face which caused him to fall back into the ranks again with his purpose unfulfilled. The regiment jingled on down the road, and my mother laid her thin hands upon my father's arm, and lulled with her pretty coaxing ways the sleeping devil which had stirred within him.

On another occasion which I can remember, about my seventh or eighth year, his wrath burst out with more dangerous effect. I was playing about him as he worked in the tanning yard one spring afternoon, when in through the open doorway strutted two stately gentlemen, with gold facings to their coats and smart cockades at the side of their three-cornered hats. They were, as I afterwards

understood, officers of the fleet who were passing through Havant, and seeing us at work in the yard, designed to ask us some question as to their route. The younger of the pair accosted my father and began his speech by a great clatter of words which were all High Dutch to me, though I now see that they were a string of such oaths as are common in the mouth of a sailor; though why the very men who are in most danger of appearing before the Almighty should go out of their way to insult Him, hath ever been a mystery to me. My father in a rough stern voice bade him speak with more reverence of sacred things, on which the pair of them gave tongue together, swearing tenfold worse than before, and calling my father a canting rogue and a smug-faced Presbytery Jack. What more they might have said I know not, for my father picked up the great roller wherewith he smoothed the leather, and dashing at them he brought it down on the side of one of their heads with such a swashing blow, that had it not been for his stiff hat the man would never have uttered oath again. As it was, he dropped like a log upon the stones of the yard, while his companion whipped out his rapier and made a vicious thrust; but my father, who was as active as he was strong, sprang aside, and bringing his cudgel down upon the out-stretched arm of the officer, cracked it like the stem of a tobacco-pipe. This affair made no little stir, for it occurred at the time when those arch-liars, Oates, Bedloe and Carstairs, were disturbing the public mind by their rumours of plots, and a rising of some sort was expected throughout the country. Within a few days all Hampshire was ringing with an account of the mal-content tanner of Havant, who had broken the head and the arm of two of his Majesty's servants. An inquiry showed, however, that there was no treasonable meaning in the matter, and the officers having confessed that the first words came from them, the Justices contented them-selves with imposing a fine upon my father, and binding him over to keep the peace for a period of six months.

I tell you these incidents that you may have an idea of the fierce and earnest religion which filled not only your own ancestor, but most of those men who were trained in the parliamentary armies. In many ways they were more like those fanatic Saracens, who believe in conversion by the sword, than the followers of a Christian creed. Yet they have this great merit, that their own lives were for the most part clean and commendable, for they rigidly adhered themselves to those laws which they would gladly have forced at the sword's point upon others. It is true that among so many there were some whose piety was a shell for their ambition, and others who practised in secret what they denounced in public, but no cause, however good, is free from such hypocritical parasites. That the greater part of the saints, as they termed themselves, were men of sober and God-fearing lives, may be shown by the fact that, after the disbanding of the army of the Commonwealth, the old soldiers flocked into trade throughout the country, and made their mark wherever they went by their industry and worth. There is many a wealthy business house now in England which can trace its rise to the thrift and honesty of some simple pikeman of Ireton or Cromwell.

But that I may help you to understand the character of your great-grandfather, I shall give an incident which shows how fervent and real were the emotions which prompted the violent moods which I have described. I was about twelve at the time, my brothers Hosea and Ephraim were respectively nine and seven, while little Ruth could scarce have been more than four. It chanced that a few days before a wandering preacher of the Independents had put up at our house, and his religious ministrations had left my father moody and excitable. One night I had gone to bed as usual, and was sound asleep with my two brothers beside me, when we were roused and ordered to come downstairs. Huddling on our clothes we followed him into the kitchen, where my mother was sitting pale and scared with Ruth upon her knee.

"Gather round me, my children," he said, in a deep reverent voice, "that we may all appear before the throne together. The kingdom of the Lord is at hand—oh, be ye ready to receive Him! This very night, my loved ones, ye shall see Him in His splendour, with the angels and the archangels in their might and their glory. At the third hour shall He come—that very third hour which is now drawing upon us."

"Dear Joe," said my mother, in soothing tones, "thou art scaring thyself and the children to no avail. If the Son of Man be indeed coming, what matters it whether we be abed or afoot?"

"Peace, woman," he answered sternly; "has He not said that He will come like a thief in the night, and that it is for us to await Him? Join with me, then, in prayerful outpourings that we may be found as those in bridal array. Let us offer up thanks that He has graciously vouchsafed to warn us through the words of His servant. Oh, great Lord, look down upon this small flock and lead it to the sheepfold! Mix not the little wheat with the great world of chaff. Oh, merciful Father! look graciously upon my wife, and forgive her the sin of Erastianism, she being but a woman and little fitted to cast off the bonds of antichrist wherein she was born. And these too, my little ones, Micah and Hosea, Ephraim and Ruth, all named after Thy faithful servants of old, oh let them stand upon Thy right hand this night!" Thus he prayed on in a wild rush of burning, pleading words, writhing prostrate upon the floor in the vehemence of his supplication, while we, poor trembling mites, huddled round our mother's skirts and gazed with terror at the contorted figure seen by the dim light of the simple oil lamp. On a sudden the clang of the new church clock told that the hour had come. My father sprang from the floor, and rushing to the casement, stared up with wild expectant eyes at the starry heavens. Whether he conjured up some vision in his excited brain, or whether the rush of feeling on finding that his expectations

were in vain, was too much for him, it is certain that he threw his long arms upwards, uttered a hoarse scream, and tumbled backwards with foaming lips and twitching limbs upon the ground. For an hour or more my poor mother and I did what we could to soothe him, while the children whimpered in a corner, until at last he staggered slowly to his feet, and in brief broken words ordered us to our rooms. From that time I have never heard him allude to the matter, nor did he ever give us any reason why he should so confidently have expected the second coming upon that particular night. I have learned since, however, that the preacher who visited us was what was called in those days a fifth-monarchy man, and that this particular sect was very liable to these premonitions. I have no doubt that something which he had said had put the thought into my father's head, and that the fiery nature of the man had done the rest.

So much for your great-grandfather, Ironside Joe. I have preferred to put these passages before you, for on the principle that actions speak louder than words, I find that in describing a man's character it is better to give examples of his ways than to speak in broad and general terms. Had I said that he was fierce in his religion and subject to strange fits of piety, the words might have made little impression upon you ; but when I tell you of his attack upon the officers in the tanning-yard, and his summoning us down in the dead of the night to await the second coming, you can judge for yourselves the lengths to which his belief would carry him. For the rest, he was an excellent man of business, fair and even generous in his dealings, respected by all and loved by few, for his nature was too self-contained to admit of much affection. To us he was a stern and rigid father, punishing us heavily for whatever he regarded as amiss in our conduct. He had a store of such proverbs as " Give a child its will and a whelp its fill, and neither will strive," or " Children are certain cares and uncertain comforts," wherewith he would temper my mother's

more kindly impulses. He could not bear that we should play trick-track upon the green, or dance with the other children upon the Saturday night.

As to my mother, dear soul, it was her calm, peaceful influence which kept my father within bounds, and softened his austere rule. Seldom indeed, even in his darkest moods, did the touch of her gentle hand and the sound of her voice fail to soothe his fiery spirit. She came of a Church stock, and held to her religion with a quiet grip which was proof against every attempt to turn her from it. I imagine that at one time her husband had argued much with her upon Arminianism and the sin of simony, but finding his exhortations useless, he had abandoned the subject save on very rare occasions. In spite of her Episcopacy, however, she remained a staunch Whig, and never allowed her loyalty to the throne to cloud her judgment as to the doings of the monarch who sat upon it.

Women were good housekeepers fifty years ago, but she was conspicuous among the best. To see her spotless cuffs and snowy kirtle one would scarce credit how hard she laboured. It was only the well-ordered house and the dustless rooms which proclaimed her constant industry. She made salves and eyewaters, powders and confects, cordials and persico, orangeflower water and cherry brandy, each in its due season, and all of the best. She was wise, too, in herbs and simples. The villagers and the farm labourers would rather any day have her advice upon their ailments than that of Dr. Jackson of Purbrook, who never mixed a draught under a silver crown. Over the whole countryside there was no woman more deservedly respected and more esteemed both by those above her and by those beneath.

Such were my parents as I remember them in my childhood. As to myself, I shall let my story explain the growth of my own nature. My brothers and my sister were all brown-faced, sturdy little country children, with no very marked traits save a love of mischief controlled

by the fear of their father. These, with Martha the serving-maid, formed our whole household during those boyish years when the pliant soul of the child is hardening into the settled character of the man. How these influences affected me I shall leave for a future sitting, and if I weary you by recording them, you must remember that I am telling these things rather for your profit than for your amusement; that it may assist you in your journey through life to know how another has picked out the path before you.

## 2. *Of my Going to School and of my Coming Thence*

WITH the home influences which I have described, it may be readily imagined that my young mind turned very much upon the subject of religion, the more so as my father and mother took different views upon it. The old Puritan soldier held that the Bible alone contained all things essential to salvation, and that though it might be advisable that those who were gifted with wisdom or eloquence should expound the Scriptures to their brethren, it was by no means necessary, but rather hurtful and degrading, that any organised body of ministers or of bishops should claim special prerogatives, or take the place of mediators between the creature and the Creator. For the wealthy dignitaries of the Church, rolling in their carriages to their cathedrals, in order to preach the doctrines of their Master, who wore His sandals out in tramping over the countryside, he professed the most bitter contempt; nor was he more lenient to those poorer members of the clergy who winked at the vices of their patrons that they might secure a seat at their table, and who would sit through a long evening of profanity rather than bid good-bye to the cheesecakes and the wine flask. That such men represented religious truth was abhorrent to his mind, nor would he even

give his adhesion to that form of church government dear to the Presbyterians, where a general council of the ministers directed the affairs of their church. Every man was, in his opinion, equal in the eyes of the Almighty, and none had a right to claim any precedence over his neighbour in matters of religion. The Book was written for all, and all were equally able to read it, provided that their minds were enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

My mother, on the other hand, held that the very essence of a church was that it should have a hierarchy and a graduated government within itself, with the king at the apex, the archbishops beneath him, the bishops under their control, and so down through the ministry to the common folk. Such was, in her opinion, the Church as established in the beginning, and no religion without these characteristics could lay any claim to being the true one. Ritual was to her of as great importance as morality, and if every tradesman and farmer were allowed to invent prayers, and change the service as the fancy seized him, it would be impossible to preserve the purity of the Christian creed. She agreed that religion was based upon the Bible, but the Bible was a book which contained much that was obscure, and unless that obscurity were cleared away by a duly elected and consecrated servant of God, a lineal descendant of the Disciples, all human wisdom might not serve to interpret it aright. That was my mother's position, and neither argument nor entreaty could move her from it. The only question of belief on which my two parents were equally ardent was their mutual dislike and distrust of the Roman Catholic forms of worship, and in this the Churchwoman was every whit as decided as the fanatical Independent.

It may seem strange to you in these days of tolerance, that the adherents of this venerable creed should have met with such universal ill-will from successive generations of Englishmen. We recognise now that there are no more useful or loyal citizens in the state than our Catholic brethren, and Mr. Alexander Pope or any other leading

Papist is no more looked down upon for his religion than was Mr. William Penn for his Quakerism in the reign of King James. We can scarce credit how noblemen like Lord Stafford, ecclesiastics like Archbishop Plunkett, and commoners like Langhorne and Pickering, were dragged to death on the testimony of the vilest of the vile, without a voice being raised in their behalf; or how it could be considered a patriotic act on the part of an English Protestant to carry a flail loaded with lead beneath his cloak as a menace against his harmless neighbours who differed from him on points of doctrine. It was a long madness which has now happily passed off, or at least shows itself in a milder and rarer form.

Foolish as it appears to us, there were some solid reasons to account for it. You have read doubtless how, a century before I was born, the great kingdom of Spain waxed and prospered. Her ships covered every sea. Her troops were victorious wherever they appeared. In letters, in learning, in all the arts of war and peace they were the foremost nation in Europe. You have heard also of the ill-blood which existed between this great nation and ourselves; how our adventurers harried their possessions across the Atlantic, while they retorted by burning such of our seamen as they could catch by their devilish Inquisition, and by threatening our coasts both from Cadiz and from their provinces in the Netherlands. At last so hot became the quarrel that the other nations stood off, as I have seen the folk clear a space for the sword-players at Hockley-in-the-Hole, so that the Spanish giant and tough little England were left face to face to fight the matter out. Throughout all that business it was as the emissary of the Pope, and as the avenger of the dishonoured Roman Church, that King Philip professed to come. It is true that Lord Howard and many another gentleman of the old religion fought stoutly against the Dons, but the people could never forget that the reformed faith had been the flag under which they had conquered, and that the blessing of the Pontiff had rested with their

opponents. Then came the cruel and foolish attempt of Mary to force upon them a creed for which they had no sympathy, and at the heels of it another great Roman Catholic power menaced our liberty from the Continent. The growing strength of France promoted a correspond-
ing distrust of Papistry in England, which reached a head when, at about the time of which I write, Louis XIV threatened us with invasion at the very moment when, by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, he showed his intolerant spirit towards the faith which we held dear. The narrow Protestantism of England was less a religious sentiment than a patriotic reply to the aggressive bigotry of her enemies. Our Catholic countrymen were unpopular, not so much because they believed in Transubstantiation, as because they were unjustly suspected of sympathising with the Emperor or with the King of France. Now that our military successes have secured us against all fear of attack, we have happily lost that bitter religious hatred but for which Oates and Dangerfield would have lied in vain.

In the days when I was young, special causes had inflamed this dislike and made it all the more bitter because there was a spice of fear mingled with it. As long as the Catholics were only an obscure faction they might be ignored, but when, towards the close of the reign of the second Charles, it appeared to be absolutely certain that a Catholic dynasty was about to fill the throne, and that Catholicism was to be the court religion and the stepping-stone to preferment, it was felt that a day of vengeance might be at hand for those who had trampled upon it when it was defenceless. There was alarm and uneasiness amongst all classes. The Church of England, which depends upon the monarch as an arch depends upon the keystone ; the nobility, whose estates and coffers had been enriched by the plunder of the abbeys ; the mob, whose ideas of Papistry were mixed up with thumbscrews and Fox's Martyrology, were all equally disturbed. Nor was the prospect a hopeful one for their cause. Charles

was a very lukewarm Protestant, and indeed showed upon his deathbed that he was no Protestant at all. There was no longer any chance of his having legitimate offspring. The Duke of York, his younger brother, was therefore heir to the throne, and he was known to be an austere and narrow Papist, while his spouse, Mary of Modena, was as bigoted as himself. Should they have children, there could be no question but that they would be brought up in the faith of their parents, and that a line of Catholic monarchs would occupy the throne of England. To the Church, as represented by my mother, and to Nonconformity, in the person of my father, this was an equally intolerable prospect.

I have been telling you all this old history because you will find, as I go on, that this state of things caused in the end such a seething and fermenting throughout the nation that even I, a simple village lad, was dragged into the whirl and had my whole life influenced by it. If I did not make the course of events clear to you, you would hardly understand the influences which had such an effect upon my whole history. In the meantime, I wish you to remember that when King James II ascended the throne he did so amid a sullen silence on the part of a large class of his subjects, and that both my father and my mother were among those who were zealous for a Protestant succession.

My childhood was, as I have already said, a gloomy one. Now and again when there chanced to be a fair at Portsdown Hill, or when a passing raree showman set up his booth in the village, my dear mother would slip a penny or two from her housekeeping money into my hand, and with a warning finger upon her lip would send me off to see the sights. These treats were, however, rare events, and made such a mark upon my mind, that when I was sixteen years of age I could have checked off upon my fingers all that I had ever seen. There was William Harker the strong man, who lifted Farmer Alcott's roan mare; and there was Tubby Lawson the dwarf, who

could fit himself into a pickle jar—these two I well remember from the wonder wherewith they struck my youthful soul. Then there was the show of the playing dolls, and that of the enchanted island and Mynheer Munster from the Lowlands, who could turn himself round upon a tight-rope while playing most sweetly upon a virginal. Last, but far the best in my estimation, was the grand play at the Portsdown Fair, entitled "The true and ancient story of Maudlin, the merchant's daughter of Bristol, and of her lover Antonio. How they were cast away upon the shores of Barbary, where the mermaids are seen floating upon the sea and singing in the rocks, foretelling their danger." This little piece gave me keener pleasure than ever in after years I received from the grandest comedies of Mr. Congreve and of Mr. Dryden, though acted by Kynaston, Betterton and the whole strength of the King's own company. At Chichester once I remember that I paid a penny to see the left shoe of the youngest sister of Potiphar's wife, but as it looked much like any other old shoe, and was just about the size to have fitted the show-woman, I have often feared that my penny fell into the hands of rogues.

There were other shows, however, which I might see for nothing, and yet were more real and every whit as interesting as any for which I paid. Now and again upon a holiday I was permitted to walk down to Portsmouth—once I was even taken in front of my father upon his pad nag, and there I wandered with him through the streets with wondering eyes, marvelling over the strange sights around me. The walls and the moats, the gates and the sentinels, the long High Street with the great government buildings, and the constant rattle of drums and blare of trumpets; they made my little heart beat quicker beneath my sagathy stuff jacket. Here was the house in which some thirty years before the proud Duke of Buckingham had been struck down by the assassin's dagger. There, too, was the Governor's dwelling, and I remember that even as I looked he came

riding up to it, red-faced and choleric, with a nose such as a Governor should have, and his breast all slashed with gold. "Is he not a fine man?" I said, looking up at my father. He laughed and drew his hat down over his brows. "It is the first time that I have seen Sir Ralph Lingard's face," said he, "but I saw his back at Preston fight. Ah, lad, proud as he looks, if he did but see old Noll coming in through the door he would not think it beneath him to climb out through the window!" The clank of steel or the sight of a buff-coat would always serve to stir up the old Roundhead bitterness in my father's breast.

But there were other sights in Portsmouth besides the red-coats and their Governor. The yard was the second in the kingdom, after Chatham, and there was ever some new warship ready upon the slips. Then there was a squadron of King's ships, and sometimes the whole fleet at Spithead, when the streets would be full of sailors, with their faces as brown as mahogany and pigtails as stiff and hard as their cutlasses. To watch their rolling gait, and to hear their strange, quaint talk, and their tales of the Dutch wars, was a rare treat to me; and I have sometimes when I was alone fastened myself on to a group of them, and passed the day in wandering from tavern to tavern. It chanced one day, however, that one of them insisted upon my sharing his glass of Canary wine, and afterwards out of roguishness persuaded me to take a second, with the result that I was sent home speechless in the carrier's cart, and was never again allowed to go into Portsmouth alone. My father was less shocked at the incident than I should have expected, and reminded my mother that Noah had been overtaken in a similar manner. He also narrated how a certain field-chaplain Grant, of Desborough's regiment, having after a hot and dusty day drunk sundry flagons of mum, had thereafter sung certain ungodly songs, and danced in a manner unbecoming to his sacred profession. Also, how he had afterwards explained that such backslidings were not to be regarded

as faults of the individual, but rather as actual obsessions of the evil one, who contrived in this manner to give scandal to the faithful, and selected the most godly for his evil purpose. This ingenious defence of the field-chaplain was the saving of my back, for my father, who was a believer in Solomon's axiom, had a stout ash stick and a strong arm for whatever seemed to him to be a falling away from the true path.

From the day that I first learned my letters from the hornbook at my mother's knee I was always hungry to increase my knowledge, and never a piece of print came in my way that I did not eagerly master. My father pushed the sectarian hatred of learning to such a length that he was averse to having any worldly books within his doors.[1] I was dependent therefore for my supply upon one or two of my friends in the village, who lent me a volume at a time from their small libraries. These I would carry inside my shirt, and would only dare to produce when I could slip away into the fields, and lie hid among the long grass, or at night when the rushlight was still burning, and my father's snoring assured me that there was no danger of his detecting me. In this way I worked up from Don Bellianis of Greece and the *Seven Champions*, through Tarleton's *Jests* and other such books, until I could take pleasure in the poetry of Waller and of Herrick, or in the plays of Massinger and Shakespeare. How sweet were the hours when I could lay aside all thought of freewill and of predestination, to lie with my heels in the air among the scented clover, and listen to old Chaucer telling the sweet story of Grisel the patient, or to weep for the chaste Desdemona, and mourn over the untimely end of her gallant spouse. There were times as I rose up with my mind full of the noble poetry, and glanced over the fair slope of the countryside, with the gleaming sea beyond it, and the purple outline of the Isle of Wight upon the horizon ; when it would be borne in upon me that the Being who created all this, and who

[1] Note A, Appendix.

gave man the power of pouring out these beautiful thoughts, was not the possession of one sect or another, or of this nation or that, but was the kindly Father of every one of the little children whom He had let loose on this fair playground. It grieved me then, and it grieves me now, that a man of such sincerity and lofty purpose as your great-grandfather should have been so tied down by iron doctrines, and should imagine his Creator to be so niggard of His mercy as to withhold it from nine-and-ninety in the hundred. Well, a man is as he is trained, and if my father bore a narrow mind upon his broad shoulders, he has at least the credit that he was ready to do and to suffer all things for what he conceived to be the truth. If you, my dears, have more enlightened views, take heed that they bring you to lead a more enlightened life.

When I was fourteen years of age, a yellow-haired, brown-faced lad, I was packed off to a small private school at Petersfield, and there I remained for a year, returning home for the last Saturday in each month. I took with me only a scanty outfit of schoolbooks, with Lilly's *Latin Grammar*, and Rosse's *View of all the Religions in the World from the Creation down to our own Times*, which was shoved into my hands by my good mother as a parting present. With this small stock of letters I might have fared badly, had it not happened that my master, Mr. Thomas Chillingfoot, had himself a good library, and took a pleasure in lending his books to any of his scholars who showed a desire to improve themselves. Under this good old man's care I not only picked up some smattering of Latin and Greek, but I found means to read good English translations of many of the classics, and to acquire a knowledge of the history of my own and other countries. I was rapidly growing in mind as well as in body, when my school career was cut short by no less an event than my summary and ignominious expulsion. How this unlooked-for ending to my studies came about I must now set before you.

Petersfield had always been a great stronghold of the Church, having hardly a Nonconformist within its bounds. The reason of this was that most of the house property was owned by zealous Churchmen, who refused to allow anyone who differed from the Established Church to settle there. The Vicar, whose name was Pinfold, possessed in this manner great power in the town, and as he was a man with a high inflamed countenance and a pompous manner, he inspired no little awe among the quiet inhabitants. I can see him now with his beaked nose, his rounded waistcoat, and his bandy legs, which looked as if they had given way beneath the load of learning which they were compelled to carry. Walking slowly with right hand stiffly extended, tapping the pavement at every step with his metal-headed stick, he would pause as each person passed him, and wait to see that he was given the salute which he thought due to his dignity. This courtesy he never dreamed of returning, save in the case of some of his richer parishioners ; but if by chance it were omitted, he would hurry after the culprit, and, shaking his stick in his face, insist upon his doffing his cap to him. We youngsters, if we met him on our walks, would scuttle by him like a brood of chickens passing an old turkey cock, and even our worthy master showed a disposition to turn down a side-street when the portly figure of the Vicar was seen rolling in our direction. This proud priest made a point of knowing the history of everyone within his parish, and having learnt that I was the son of an Independent, he spoke severely to Mr. Chillingfoot upon the indiscretion which he had shown in admitting me to his school. Indeed, nothing but my mother's good name for orthodoxy prevented him from insisting upon my dismissal.

At the other end of the village there was a large day-school. A constant feud prevailed between the scholars who attended it and the lads who studied under our master. No one could tell how the war broke out, but for many years there had been a standing quarrel between

the two, which resulted in skirmishes, sallies and ambuscades, with now and then a pitched battle. No great harm was done in these encounters, for the weapons were usually snowballs in winter and pine-cones or clods of earth in the summer. Even when the contest got closer and we came to fisticuffs, a few bruises and a little blood was the worst that could come of it. Our opponents were more numerous than we, but we had the advantage of being always together and of having a secure asylum upon which to retreat, while they, living in scattered houses all over the parish, had no common rallying-point. A stream, crossed by two bridges, ran through the centre of the town, and this was the boundary which separated our territories from those of our enemies. The boy who crossed the bridge found himself in hostile country.

It chanced that in the first conflict which occurred after my arrival at the school I distinguished myself by singling out the most redoubtable of our foemen, and smiting him such a blow that he was knocked helpless and was carried off by our party as a prisoner. This feat of arms established my good name as a warrior, so I came at last to be regarded as the leader of our forces, and to be looked up to by bigger boys than myself. This promotion tickled my fancy so much, that I set to work to prove that I deserved it by devising fresh and ingenious schemes for the defeat of our enemies.

One winter's evening news reached us that our rivals were about to make a raid upon us under cover of night, and that they proposed coming by the little-used plank bridge, so as to escape our notice. This bridge lay almost out of the town, and consisted of a single broad piece of wood without a rail, erected for the good of the town clerk, who lived just opposite to it. We proposed to hide ourselves amongst the bushes on our side of the stream, and make an unexpected attack upon the invaders as they crossed. As we started, however, I bethought me of an ingenious stratagem which I had read of as being practised in the German wars, and having

expounded it to the great delight of my companions, we took Mr. Chillingfoot's saw, and set off for the seat of action.

On reaching the bridge all was quiet and still. It was quite dark and very cold, for Christmas was approaching. There were no signs of our opponents. We exchanged a few whispers as to who should do the daring deed, but as the others shrank from it, and as I was too proud to propose what I dare not execute, I gripped the saw, and sitting astraddle upon the plank set to work upon the very centre of it.

My purpose was to weaken it in such a way that, though it would bear the weight of one, it would collapse when the main body of our foemen were upon it, and so precipitate them into the ice-cold stream. The water was but a couple of feet deep at the place, so that there was nothing for them but a fright and a ducking. So cool a reception ought to deter them from ever invading us again, and confirm my reputation as a daring leader. Reuben Lockarby, my lieutenant, son of old John Lockarby of the Wheatsheaf, marshalled our forces behind the hedgerow, whilst I sawed vigorously at the plank until I had nearly severed it across. I had no compunction about the destruction of the bridge, for I knew enough of carpentry to see that a skilful joiner could in an hour's work make it stronger than ever by putting a prop beneath the point where I had divided it. When at last I felt by the yielding of the plank that I had done enough, and that the least strain would snap it, I crawled quietly off, and taking up my position with my schoolfellows, awaited the coming of the enemy.

I had scarce concealed myself when we heard the steps of someone approaching down the footpath which led to the bridge. We crouched behind the cover, convinced that the sound must come from some scout whom our foemen had sent on in front—a big boy evidently, for his step was heavy and slow, with a clinking noise mingling with it, of which we could make nothing. Nearer came

the sound and nearer, until a shadowy figure loomed out of the darkness upon the other side, and after pausing and peering for a moment, came straight for the bridge. It was only as he was setting foot upon the plank and beginning gingerly to pick his way across it, that we discerned the outlines of the familiar form, and realised the dreadful truth that the stranger whom we had taken for the advance guard of our enemy was in truth none other than Vicar Pinfold, and that it was the rhythmic pat of his stick which we heard mingling with his footfalls. Fascinated by the sight, we lay bereft of all power to warn him—a line of staring eyeballs. One step, two steps, three steps did the haughty Churchman take, when there was a rending crack, and he vanished with a mighty splash into the swift-flowing stream. He must have fallen upon his back, for we could see the curved outline of his portly figure standing out above the surface as he struggled desperately to regain his feet. At last he managed to get erect, and came spluttering for the bank with such a mixture of godly ejaculations and of profane oaths that, even in our terror, we could not keep from laughter. Rising from under his feet like a covey of wild-fowl, we scurried off across the fields and so back to the school, where, as you may imagine, we said nothing to our good master of what had occurred.

The matter was too serious, however, to be hushed up. The sudden chill set up some manner of disturbance in the bottle of sack which the Vicar had just been drinking with the town clerk, and an attack of gout set in which laid him on his back for a fortnight. Meanwhile an examination of the bridge had shown that it had been sawn across, and an inquiry traced the matter to Mr. Chillingfoot's boarders. To save a wholesale expulsion of the school from the town, I was forced to acknowledge myself as both the inventor and perpetrator of the deed. Chillingfoot was entirely in the power of the Vicar, so he was forced to read me a long homily in public—which he balanced by an affectionate leave-taking in private—and

to expel me solemnly from the school. I never saw my old master again, for he died not many years afterwards ; but I hear that his second son William is still carrying on the business, which is larger and more prosperous than of old. His eldest son turned Quaker and went out to Penn's settlement, where he is reported to have been slain by the savages.

This adventure shocked my dear mother, but it found great favour in the eyes of my father, who laughed until the whole village resounded with his stentorian merriment. It reminded him, he said, of a similar stratagem executed at Market Drayton by that God-fearing soldier Colonel Pride, whereby a captain and three troopers of Lunsford's own regiment of horse had been drowned, and many others precipitated into a river, to the great glory of the true Church and to the satisfaction of the chosen people. Even of the Church folk many were secretly glad at the misfortune which had overtaken the Vicar, for his pretensions and his pride had made him hated throughout the district.

By this time I had grown into a sturdy, broad-shouldered lad, and every month added to my strength and my stature. When I was sixteen I could carry a bag of wheat or a cask of beer against any man in the village, and I could throw the fifteen-pound putting-stone to a distance of thirty-six feet, which was four feet farther than could Ted Dawson, the blacksmith. Once when my father was unable to carry a bale of skins out of the yard, I whipped it up and bare it away upon my shoulders. The old man would often look gravely at me from under his heavy thatched eyebrows, and shake his grizzled head as he sat in his arm-chair puffing his pipe. "You grow too big for the nest, lad," he would say. "I doubt some of these days you'll find your wings and away !" In my heart I longed that the time would come, for I was weary of the quiet life of the village, and was anxious to see the great world of which I had heard and read so much. I could not look southward without my spirit stirring within me as my

eyes fell upon those dark waves, the white crests of which are like a fluttering signal ever waving to an English youth and beckoning him to some unknown but glorious goal.

## 3. *Of Two Friends of my Youth*

I FEAR, my children, that you will think that the prologue is overlong for the play ; but the foundations must be laid before the building is erected, and a statement of this sort is a sorry and a barren thing unless you have a knowledge of the folk concerned. Be patient, then, while I speak to you of the old friends of my youth, some of whom you may hear more of hereafter, while others remained behind in the country hamlet, and yet left traces of our early intercourse upon my character which might still be discerned there.

Foremost for good amongst all whom I knew was Zachary Palmer, the village carpenter, a man whose aged and labour-warped body contained the simplest and purest of spirits. Yet his simplicity was by no means the result of ignorance, for from the teachings of Plato to those of Hobbes there were few systems ever thought out by man which he had not studied and weighed. Books were far dearer in my boyhood than they are now, and carpenters were less well paid, but old Palmer had neither wife nor child, and spent little on food or raiment. Thus it came about that on the shelf over his bed he had a more choice collection of books—few as they were in number—than the squire or the parson, and these books he had read until he not only understood them himself, but could impart them to others.

This white-bearded and venerable village philosopher would sit by his cabin door upon a summer evening, and was never so pleased as when some of the young fellows would slip away from their bowls and their quoit-playing in order to lie in the grass at his feet, and ask him questions about the great men of old, their words and their deeds.

But of all the youths I and Reuben Lockarby, the innkeeper's son, were his two favourites, for we would come the earliest and stop the latest to hear the old man talk. No father could have loved his children better than he did us, and he would spare no pains to get at our callow thoughts, and to throw light upon whatever perplexed or troubled us. Like all growing things, we had run our heads against the problem of the universe. We had peeped and pryed with our boyish eyes into those profound depths in which the keenest-sighted of the human race had seen no bottom. Yet when we looked around us in our own village world, and saw the bitterness and rancour which pervaded every sect, we could not but think that a tree which bore such fruit must have something amiss with it. This was one of the thoughts unspoken to our parents which we carried to good old Zachary, and on which he had much to say which cheered and comforted us.

"These janglings and wranglings," said he, "are but on the surface, and spring from the infinite variety of the human mind, which will ever adapt a creed to suit its own turn of thought. It is the solid core that underlies every Christian creed which is of importance. Could you but live among the Romans or the Greeks, in the days before this new doctrine was preached, you would then know the change that it has wrought in the world. How this or that text should be construed is a matter of no moment, however warm men may get over it. What is of the very greatest moment is, that every man should have a good and solid reason for living a simple, cleanly life. This the Christian creed has given us."

"I would not have you be virtuous out of fear," he said upon another occasion. "The experience of a long life has taught me, however, that sin is always punished in this world, whatever may come in the next. There is always some penalty in health, in comfort or in peace of mind to be paid for every wrong. It is with nations as it is with individuals. A book of history is a book of

sermons. See how the luxurious Babylonians were destroyed by the frugal Persians, and how these same Persians when they learned the vices of prosperity were put to the sword by the Greeks. Read on and mark how the sensual Greeks were trodden down by the more robust and hardier Romans, and finally how the Romans, having lost their manly virtues, were subdued by the nations of the north. Vice and destruction came ever hand in hand. Thus did Providence use each in turn as a scourge wherewith to chastise the follies of the other. These things do not come by chance. They are part of a great system which is at work in your own lives. The longer you live the more you will see that sin and sadness are never far apart, and that no true prosperity can exist away from virtue."

A very different teacher was the sea-dog Solomon Sprent, who lived in the second last cottage on the left-hand side of the main street of the village. He was one of the old tarpaulin breed, who had fought under the red cross ensign against Frenchman, Don, Dutchman and Moor, until a round shot carried off his foot and put an end to his battles for ever. In person he was thin, and hard, and brown, as lithe and active as a cat, with a short body and very long arms, each ending in a great hand which was ever half closed as though shutting upon a rope. From head to foot he was covered with the most marvellous tattooings, done in blue, red and green, beginning with the Creation upon his neck and winding up with the Ascension upon his left ankle. Never have I seen such a walking work of art. He was wont to say that had he been drowned and his body cast up upon some savage land, the natives might have learned the whole of the blessed gospel from a contemplation of his carcass. Yet with sorrow I must say that the seaman's religion appeared to have all worked into his skin, so that very little was left for inner use. It had broken out upon the surface, like the spotted fever, but his system was clear of it elsewhere. He could swear in eleven languages and three-and-twenty

dialects, nor did he ever let his great powers rust for want of practice. He would swear when he was happy or when he was sad, when he was angry or when he was loving, but this swearing was so mere a trick of speech, without malice or bitterness, that even my father could hardly deal harshly with the sinner. As time passed, however, the old man grew more sober and more thoughtful, until in his latter days he went back to the simple beliefs of his childhood, and learned to fight the devil with the same steady courage with which he had faced the enemies of his country.

Old Solomon was a never-failing source of amusement and of interest to my friend Lockarby and myself. On gala days he would have us in to dine with him, when he would regale us with lobscouse and salmagundi, or perhaps with an outland dish, a pillaw or olla podrida, or fish broiled after the fashion of the Azores, for he had a famous trick of cooking, and could produce the delicacies of all nations. And all the time that we were with him he would tell us the most marvellous stories of Rupert, under whom he served ; how he would shout from the poop to his squadron to wheel to the right, or to charge, or to halt, as the case might be, as if he were still with his regiment of horse. Of Blake, too, he had many stories to tell. But even the name of Blake was not so dear to our old sailor as was that of Sir Christopher Mings. Solomon had at one time been his coxswain, and could talk by the hour of those gallant deeds which had distinguished him from the day that he entered the navy as a cabin boy until he fell upon his own quarter-deck, a full admiral of the red, and was borne by his weeping ship's company to his grave in Chatham churchyard. " If so be as there's a jasper sea up aloft," said the old seaman, " I'll wager that Sir Christopher will see that the English flag has proper respect paid to it upon it, and that we are not fooled by foreigners. I've served under him in this world, and I ask nothing better than to be his coxswain in the next—if so be as he should chance to have a vacancy for such."

These remembrances would always end in the brewing of an extra bowl of punch, and the drinking of a solemn bumper to the memory of the departed hero.

Stirring as were Solomon Sprent's accounts of his old commanders, their effect upon us was not so great as when, about his second or third glass, the floodgates of his memory would be opened, and he would pour out long tales of the lands which he had visited, and the peoples which he had seen. Leaning forward in our seats with our chins resting upon our hands, we two youngsters would sit for hours, with our eyes fixed upon the old adventurer, drinking in his words, while he, pleased at the interest which he excited, would puff slowly at his pipe and reel off story after story of what he had seen or done. In those days, my dears, there was no Defoe to tell us the wonders of the world, no *Spectator* to lie upon our breakfast table, no Gulliver to satisfy our love of adventure by telling us of such adventures as never were. Not once in a month did a common newsletter fall into our hands. Personal hazards, therefore, were of more value then than they are now, and the talk of a man like old Solomon was a library in itself. To us it was all real. His husky tones and ill-chosen words were as the voice of an angel, and our eager minds filled in the details and supplied all that was wanting in his narratives. In one evening we have engaged a Sallee rover off the Pillars of Hercules ; we have coasted down the shores of the African continent, and seen the great breakers of the Spanish Main foaming upon the yellow sand ; we have passed the black-ivory merchants with their human cargoes ; we have faced the terrible storms which blow ever around the Cape de Boa Esperanza ; and finally, we have sailed away out over the great ocean beyond, amid the palm-clad coral islands, with the knowledge that the realms of Prester John lie somewhere behind the golden haze which shimmers upon the horizon. After such a flight as that we would feel, as we came back to the Hampshire village and the dull realities of country life,

like wild birds who had been snared by the fowler and clapped into narrow cages. Then it was that the words of my father, "You will find your wings some day and fly away," would come back to me, and set up such a restlessness as all the wise words of Zachary Palmer could not allay.

## 4. *Of the Strange Fish that we Caught at Spithead*

ONE evening in the month of May 1685, about the end of the first week of the month, my friend Reuben Lockarby and I borrowed Ned Marley's pleasure boat, and went a-fishing out of Langston Bay. At that time I was close on one-and-twenty years of age, while my companion was one year younger. A great intimacy had sprung up between us, founded on mutual esteem, for he being a little undergrown man was proud of my strength and stature, while my melancholy and somewhat heavy spirit took a pleasure in the energy and joviality which never deserted him, and in the wit which gleamed as bright and as innocent as summer lightning through all that he said. In person he was short and broad, round-faced, ruddy-cheeked, and in truth a little inclined to be fat, though he would never confess to more than a pleasing plumpness, which was held, he said, to be the acme of manly beauty amongst the ancients. The stern test of common danger and mutual hardship entitle me to say that no man could have desired a stauncher or more trusty comrade. As he was destined to be with me in the sequel, it was but fitting that he should have been at my side on that May evening which was the starting-point of our adventures.

We pulled out beyond the Warner Sands to a place half-way between them and the Nab, where we usually found bass in plenty. There we cast the heavy stone which served us as an anchor overboard, and proceeded to set

our lines. The sun sinking slowly behind a fog-bank had slashed the whole western sky with scarlet streaks, against which the wooded slopes of the Isle of Wight stood out vaporous and purple. A fresh breeze was blowing from the south-east, flecking the long green waves with crests of foam, and filling our eyes and lips with the smack of the salt spray. Over near St. Helen's Point a King's ship was making her way down the channel, while a single large brig was tacking about a quarter of a mile or less from where we lay. So near were we that we could catch a glimpse of the figures upon her deck as she heeled over to the breeze, and could hear the creaking of her yards and the flapping of her weather-stained canvas as she prepared to go about.

"Look ye, Micah," said my companion, looking up from his fishing-line. "That is a most weak-minded ship—a ship which will make no way in the world. See how she hangs in the wind, neither keeping on her course nor tacking. She is a trimmer of the seas—the Lord Halifax of the ocean."

"Why, there is something amiss with her," I replied, staring across with hand-shaded eyes. "She yaws about as though there were no one at the helm. Her main-yard goes aback! Now it is forward again! The folk on her deck seem to me to be either fighting or dancing. Up with the anchor, Reuben, and let us pull to her."

"Up with the anchor and let us get out of her way," he answered, still gazing at the stranger. "Why will you ever run that meddlesome head of yours into danger's way? She flies Dutch colours, but who can say whence she really comes? A pretty thing if we were snapped up by a buccaneer and sold in the Plantations!"

"A buccaneer in the Solent!" cried I derisively. "We shall be seeing the black flag in Emsworth Creek next. But hark! What is that?"

The crack of a musket sounded from aboard the brig. Then came a moment's silence and another musket shot rang out, followed by a chorus of shouts and cries. Simul-

taneously the yards swung round into position, the sails caught the breeze once more, and the vessel darted away on a course which would take her past Bembridge Point out to the English Channel. As she flew along her helm was put hard down, a puff of smoke shot out from her quarter, and a cannon ball came hopping and splashing over the waves, passing within a hundred yards of where we lay. With this farewell greeting she came up into the wind again and continued her course to the southward.

"Heart o' grace!" ejaculated Reuben in loose-lipped astonishment. "The murdering villains!"

"I would to the Lord that King's ship would snap them up!" cried I savagely, for the attack was so unprovoked that it stirred my bile. "What could the rogues have meant? They are surely drunk or mad!"

"Pull at the anchor, man, pull at the anchor!" my companion shouted, springing up from the seat. "I understand it! Pull at the anchor!"

"What then?" I asked, helping him to haul the great stone up, hand over hand, until it came dripping over the side.

"They were not firing at us, lad. They were aiming at someone in the water between us and them. Pull, Micah! Put your back into it! Some poor fellow may be drowning."

"Why, I declare!" said I, looking over my shoulder as I rowed, "there is his head upon the crest of a wave. Easy, or we shall be over him! Two more strokes and be ready to seize him! Keep up, friend! There's help at hand!"

"Take help to those who need help," said a voice out of the sea. "Zounds, man, keep a guard on your oar! I fear a pat from it very much more than I do the water."

These words were delivered in so calm and self-possessed a tone that all concern for the swimmer was set at rest. Drawing in our oars we faced round to have a look at him. The drift of the boat had brought us so

close that he could have grasped the gunwale had he been so minded.

"Sapperment!" he cried in a peevish voice; "to think of my brother Nonus serving me such a trick! What would our blessed mother have said could she have seen it? My whole kit gone, to say nothing of my venture in the voyage! And now I have kicked off a pair of new jack-boots that cost sixteen rix-dollars at Vanseddar's at Amsterdam. I can't swim in jack-boots, nor can I walk without them."

"Won't you come in out of the wet, sir?" asked Reuben, who could scarce keep serious at the stranger's appearance and address. A pair of long arms shot out of the water, and in a moment, with a lithe, snake-like motion, the man wound himself into the boat and coiled his great length upon the stern-sheets. Very lanky he was and very thin, with a craggy hard face, clean-shaven and sunburned, with a thousand little wrinkles intersecting it in every direction. He had lost his hat, and his short wiry hair, slightly flecked with grey, stood up in a bristle all over his head. It was hard to guess at his age, but he could scarce have been under his fiftieth year, though the ease with which he had boarded our boat proved that his strength and energy were unimpaired. Of all his characteristics, however, nothing attracted my attention so much as his eyes, which were almost covered by their drooping lids, and yet looked out through the thin slits which remained with marvellous brightness and keenness. A passing glance might give the idea that he was languid and half asleep, but a closer one would reveal those glittering, shifting lines of light, and warn the prudent man not to trust too much to his first impressions.

"I could swim to Portsmouth," he remarked, rummaging in the pockets of his sodden jacket; "I could swim well-nigh anywhere. I once swam from Gran on the Danube to Buda, while a hundred thousand janissaries danced with rage on the nether bank. I did, by the keys of St. Peter! Wessenburg's Pandours would tell you

whether Decimus Saxon could swim. Take my advice, young men, and always carry your tobacco in a water-tight metal box."

As he spoke he drew a flat box from his pocket, and several wooden tubes, which he screwed together to form a long pipe. This he stuffed with tobacco, and having lit it by means of a flint and steel with a piece of touch-paper from the inside of his box, he curled his legs under him in Eastern fashion, and settled down to enjoy a smoke. There was something so peculiar about the whole incident, and so preposterous about the man's appearance and actions, that we both broke into a roar of laughter, which lasted until for very exhaustion we were compelled to stop. He neither joined in our merriment nor expressed offence at it, but continued to suck away at his long wooden tube with a perfectly stolid and impassive face, save that the half-covered eyes glinted rapidly backwards and forwards from one to the other of us.

"You will excuse our laughter, sir," I said at last; "my friend and I are unused to such adventures, and are merry at the happy ending of it. May we ask whom it is that we have picked up?"

"Decimus Saxon is my name," the stranger answered; "I am the tenth child of a worthy father, as the Latin implies. There are but nine betwixt me and an inheritance. Who knows? Small-pox might do it, or the plague!"

"We heard a shot aboard of the brig," said Reuben.

"That was my brother Nonus shooting at me," the stranger observed, shaking his head sadly.

"But there was a second shot."

"Ah, that was me shooting at my brother Nonus."

"Good lack!" I cried. "I trust that thou hast done him no hurt."

"But a flesh wound, at the most," he answered. "I thought it best to come away, however, lest the affair grow into a quarrel. I am sure that it was he who trained the nine-pounder on me when I was in the water.

It came near enough to part my hair. He was always a good shot with a falconet or a mortar-piece. He could not have been hurt, however, to get down from the poop to the main-deck in the time."

There was a pause after this, while the stranger drew a long knife from his belt, and cleaned out his pipe with it. Reuben and I took up our oars, and having pulled up our tangled fishing-lines, which had been streaming behind the boat, we proceeded to pull in towards the land.

"The question now is," said the stranger, "where we are to go to?"

"We are going down Langston Bay," I answered.

"Oh, we are, are we?" he cried, in a mocking voice; "you are sure of it—eh? You are certain we are not going to France? We have a mast and sail there, I see, and water in the beaker. All we want are a few fish, which I hear are plentiful in these waters, and we might make a push for Barfleur."

"We are going down Langston Bay," I repeated coldly.

"You see might is right upon the waters," he explained, with a smile which broke his whole face up into crinkles. "I am an old soldier, a tough fighting man, and you are two raw lads. I have a knife, and you are unarmed. D'ye see the line of argument? The question now is, Where are we to go?"

I faced round upon him with the oar in my hand. "You boasted that you could swim to Portsmouth," said I, "and so you shall. Into the water with you, you sea-viper, or I'll push you in as sure as my name is Micah Clarke."

"Throw your knife down, or I'll drive the boat-hook through you," cried Reuben, pushing it forward to within a few inches of the man's throat.

"Sink me, but this is most commendable!" he said, sheathing his weapon, and laughing softly to himself. "I love to draw spirit out of the young fellows. I am the steel, d'ye see, which knocks the valour out of your flint. A notable simile, and one in every way worthy of

that most witty of mankind, Samuel Butler. This," he continued, tapping a protuberance which I had remarked over his chest, " is not a natural deformity, but is a copy of that inestimable *Hudibras*, which combines the light touch of Horace with the broader mirth of Catullus. Heh ! what think you of the criticism ? "

" Give up that knife," said I sternly.

" Certainly," he replied, handing it over to me with a polite bow. " Is there any other reasonable matter in which I can oblige ye ? I will give up anything to do ye pleasure—save only my good name and soldierly repute, or this same copy of *Hudibras*, which, together with a Latin treatise upon the usages of war, written by a Fleming and printed at Liège in the Lowlands, I do ever bear in my bosom."

I sat down beside him with the knife in my hand. " You pull both oars," I said to Reuben ; " I'll keep guard over the fellow and see that he plays us no trick. I believe that you are right, and that he is nothing better than a pirate. He shall be given over to the justices when we get to Havant."

I thought that our passenger's coolness deserted him for a moment, and that a look of annoyance passed over his face.

" Wait a bit ! " he said ; " your name, I gather, is Clarke, and your home is Havant. Are you a kinsman of Joseph Clarke, the old Roundhead of that town ? "

" He is my father," I answered.

" Hark to that, now ! " he cried, with a throb of laughter ; " I have a trick of falling on my feet. Look at this, lad ! Look at this ! " He drew a packet of letters from his inside pocket, wrapped in a bit of tarred cloth, and opening it he picked one out and placed it upon my knee. " Read ! " said he, pointing at it with his long thin finger.

It was inscribed in large plain characters, " To Joseph Clarke, leather merchant of Havant, by the hand of Master Decimus Saxon, part-owner of the ship *Providence*,

from Amsterdam to Portsmouth." At each side it was sealed with a massive red seal, and was additionally secured with a broad band of silk.

"I have three-and-twenty of them to deliver in the neighbourhood," he remarked. "That shows what folk think of Decimus Saxon. Three-and-twenty lives and liberties are in my hands. Ah, lad, invoices and bills of lading are not done up in that fashion. It is not a cargo of Flemish skins that is coming for the old man. The skins have good English hearts in them; aye, and English swords in their fists to strike out for freedom and for conscience. I risk my life in carrying this letter to your father; and you, his son, threaten to hand me over to the justices! For shame! For shame! I blush for you!"

"I don't know what you are hinting at," I answered. "You must speak plainer if I am to understand you."

"Can we trust him?" he asked, jerking his head in the direction of Reuben.

"As myself."

"How very charming!" said he, with something between a smile and a sneer. "David and Jonathan—or, to be more classical and less scriptural, Damon and Pythias—eh? These papers, then, are from the faithful abroad, the exiles in Holland, ye understand, who are thinking of making a move and of coming over to see King James in his own country with their swords strapped on their thighs. The letters are to those from whom they expect sympathy, and notify when and where they will make a landing. Now, my dear lad, you will perceive that instead of my being in your power, you are so completely in mine that it needs but a word from me to destroy your whole family. Decimus Saxon is staunch, though, and that word shall never be spoken."

"If all this be true," said I, "and if your mission is indeed as you have said, why did you even now propose to make for France?"

"Aptly asked, and yet the answer is clear enough," he replied; "sweet and ingenuous as are your faces, I could

not read upon them that ye would prove to be Whigs and friends of the good old cause. Ye might have taken me to where excisemen or others would have wanted to pry and peep, and so endangered my commission. Better a voyage to France in an open boat than that."

"I will take you to my father," said I, after a few moments' thought. "You can deliver your letter and make good your story to him. If you are indeed a true man, you will meet with a warm welcome; but should you prove, as I shrewdly suspect, to be a rogue, you need expect no mercy."

"Bless the youngster! He speaks like the Lord High Chancellor of England! What is it the old man says?

'He could not ope
His mouth, but out there fell a trope.'

But it should be a threat, which is the ware in which you are fond of dealing,

'He could not let
A minute pass without a threat.'

How's that, eh? Waller himself could not have capped the couplet neater."

All this time Reuben had been swinging away at his oars, and we had made our way into Langston Bay, down the sheltered waters of which we were rapidly shooting. Sitting in the sheets, I turned over in my mind all that this waif had said. I had glanced over his shoulder at the addresses of some of the letters—Steadman of Basingstoke, Wintle of Alresford, Fortescue of Bognor, all well-known leaders of the Dissenters. If they were what he represented them to be it was no exaggeration to say that he held the fortunes and fates of these men entirely in his hands. Government would be only too glad to have a valid reason for striking hard at the men whom they feared. On the whole it was well to tread carefully in the matter, so I restored our prisoner's knife to him, and treated him with increased consideration. It was well-nigh dark when we beached the boat, and entirely so before we reached

Havant, which was fortunate, as the bootless and hatless state of our dripping companion could not have failed to set tongues wagging, and perhaps to excite the inquiries of the authorities. As it was, we scarce met a soul before reaching my father's door.

## 5. *Of the Man with the Drooping Lids*

MY mother and my father were sitting in their high-backed chairs on either side of the empty fire-place when we arrived, he smoking his evening pipe of Oronooko, and she working at her embroidery. The moment that I opened the door the man whom I had brought stepped briskly in, and bowing to the old people began to make glib excuses for the lateness of his visit, and to explain the manner in which we had picked up him. I could not help smiling at the utter amazement expressed upon my mother's face as she gazed at him, for the loss of his jack-boots exposed a pair of interminable spindle-shanks which were in ludicrous contrast to the baggy low country knee-breeches which surmounted them. His tunic was made of coarse sad-coloured kersey stuff with flat new gilded brass buttons, beneath which was a whitish callamanca vest edged with silver. Round the neck of his coat was a broad white collar after the Dutch fashion, out of which his long scraggy throat shot upwards with his round head and bristle of hair balanced upon the top of it, like the turnip on a stick at which we used to throw at the fairs. In this guise he stood blinking and winking in the glare of light, and pattering out his excuses with as many bows and scrapes as Sir Peter Witling in the play. I was in the act of following him into the room, when Reuben plucked at my sleeve to detain me.

"Nay, I won't come in with you, Micah," said he; "there's mischief likely to come of all this. My father may grumble over his beer jugs, but he's a Churchman and a Tantivy for all that. I'd best keep out of it."

"You are right," I answered. "There is no need for you to meddle in the business. Be mum as to all that you have heard."

"Mum as a mouse," said he, and pressing my hand turned away into the darkness. When I returned to the sitting-room I found that my mother had hurried into the kitchen, where the crackling of sticks showed that she was busy in building a fire. Decimus Saxon was seated at the edge of the iron-bound oak chest at the side of my father, and was watching him keenly with his little twinkling eyes, while the old man was fixing his horn glasses and breaking the seals of the packet which his strange visitor had just handed to him.

I saw that when my father looked at the signature at the end of the long, closely written letter he gave a whiff of surprise and sat motionless for a moment or so staring at it. Then he turned to the commencement and read it very carefully through, after which he turned it over and read it again. Clearly it brought no unwelcome news, for his eyes sparkled with joy when he looked up from his reading, and more than once he laughed aloud. Finally he asked the man Saxon how it had come into his possession, and whether he was aware of its contents.

"Why, as to that," said the messenger, "it was handed to me by no less a person than Dicky Rumbold himself, and in the presence of others whom it's not for me to name. As to the contents, your own sense will tell you that I would scarce risk my neck by bearing a message without I knew what the message was. I am no chicken at the trade, sir. Cartels, *pronunciamientos*, challenges, flags of truce, and proposals for waffenstillstands, as the Deutschers call it—they've all gone through my hands, and never one gone awry."

"Indeed!" quoth my father. "You are yourself one of the faithful?"

"I trust that I am one of those who are on the narrow and thorny track," said he, speaking through his nose, as was the habit of the extreme sectaries.

"A track upon which no prelate can guide us," said my father.

"Where man is nought and the Lord is all," rejoined Saxon.

"Good! good!" cried my father. "Micah, you shall take this worthy man to my room, and see that he hath dry linen, and my second-best suit of Utrecht velvet. It may serve until his own are dried. My boots, too, may perchance be useful—my riding ones of untanned leather. A hat with silver braiding hangs above them in the cupboard. See that he lacks for nothing which the house can furnish. Supper will be ready when he hath changed his attire. I beg that you will go at once, good Master Saxon, lest you take a chill."

"There is but one thing that we have omitted," said our visitor, solemnly rising up from his chair and clasping his long nervous hands together. "Let us delay no longer to send up a word of praise to the Almighty for His manifold blessings, and for the mercy wherewith He plucked me and my letters out of the deep, even as Jonah was saved from the violence of the wicked ones who hurled him overboard, and it may be fired falconets at him, though we are not so informed in Holy Writ. Let us pray, my friends!"

Then in a high-toned chanting voice he offered up a long prayer of thanksgiving, winding up with a petition for grace and enlightenment for the house and all its inmates. Having concluded by a sonorous amen, he at last suffered himself to be led upstairs; while my mother, who had slipped in and listened with much edification to his words, hurried away to prepare him a bumper of green usquebaugh with ten drops of Daffy's Elixir therein, which was her sovereign recipe against the effects of a soaking. There was no event in life, from a christening to a marriage, but had some appropriate food or drink in my mother's vocabulary, and no ailment for which she had not some pleasant cure in her well-stocked cupboards.

Master Decimus Saxon in my father's black Utrecht velvet and untanned riding boots looked a very different

man to the bedraggled castaway who had crawled like a conger eel into our fishing-boat. It seemed as if he had cast off his manner with his raiment, for he behaved to my mother during supper with an air of demure gallantry which sat upon him better than the pert and flippant carriage which he had shown towards us in the boat. Truth to say, if he was now more reserved, there was a very good reason for it, for he played such havoc amongst the eatables that there was little time for talk. At last, after passing from the round of cold beef to a capon pasty, and topping up with a two-pound perch, washed down by a great jug of ale, he smiled upon us all and told us that his fleshly necessities were satisfied for the nonce. "It is my rule," he remarked, "to obey the wise precept which advises a man to rise from table feeling that he could yet eat as much as he has partaken of."

"I gather from your words, sir, that you have yourself seen hard service," my father remarked when the board had been cleared and my mother had retired for the night.

"I am an old fighting man," our visitor answered, screwing his pipe together, "a lean old dog of the hold-fast breed. This body of mine bears the mark of many a cut and slash received for the most part in the service of the Protestant faith, though some few were caught for the sake of Christendom in general when warring against the Turk. There is blood of mine, sir, spotted all over the map of Europe. Some of it, I confess, was spilled in no public cause, but for the protection of mine own honour in the private duello or holmgang, as it was called among the nations of the north. It is necessary that a cavaliero of fortune, being for the greater part a stranger in a strange land, should be somewhat nice in matters of the sort, since he stands, as it were, as the representative of his country, whose good name should be more dear to him than his own."

"Your weapon on such occasions was, I suppose, the sword?" my father asked, shifting uneasily in his seat, as he would do when his old instincts were waking up.

"Broadsword, rapier, Toledo, spontoon, battle-axe, pike or half-pike, morgenstiern and halbert. I speak with all due modesty, but with backsword, sword and dagger, sword and buckler, single falchion, case of falchions or any other such exercise, I will hold mine own against any man that ever wore neat's leather, save only my elder brother Quartus."

"By my faith," said my father with his eyes shining, "were I twenty years younger I should have at you! My backsword play hath been thought well of by stout men of war. God forgive me that my heart should still turn to such vanities."

"I have heard godly men speak well of it," remarked Saxon. "Master Richard Rumbold himself spake of your deeds of arms to the Duke of Argyle. Was there not a Scotsman, one Storr or Stour?"

"Aye, aye! Storr of Drumlithie. I cut him nigh to the saddle-bow in a skirmish on the eve of Dunbar. So Dicky Rumbold had not forgotten it, eh? He was a hard one both at praying and at fighting. We have ridden knee to knee in the field, and we have sought truth together in the chamber. So, Dick will be in harness once again! He could not be still if a blow were to be struck for the trampled faith. If the tide of war set in this direction, I too—who knows? who knows?"

"And here is a stout man-at-arms," said Saxon, passing his hand down my arm. "He hath thew and sinew, and can use proud words too upon occasion, as I have good cause to know, even in our short acquaintance. Might it not be that he too should strike in in this quarrel?"

"We shall discuss it," my father answered, looking thoughtfully at me from under his heavy brows. "But I pray you, friend Saxon, to give us some further account upon these matters. My son Micah, as I understand, hath picked you out of the waves. How came you there?"

Decimus Saxon puffed at his pipe for a minute or more in silence, as one who is marshalling facts each in its due order.

"It came about in this wise," he said at last. "When John of Poland chased the Turk from the gates of Vienna, peace broke out in the Principalities, and many a wandering cavaliero like myself found his occupation gone. There was no war waging save only some petty Italian skirmish, in which a soldier could scarce expect to reap either dollars or repute, so I wandered across the Continent, much cast down at the strange peace which prevailed in every quarter. At last, however, on reaching the Lowlands, I chanced to hear that the *Providence*, owned and commanded by my two brothers, Nonus and Quartus, was about to start from Amsterdam for an adventure to the Guinea coast. I proposed to them that I should join them, and was accordingly taken into partnership on condition that I paid one-third of the cost of the cargo. While waiting at the port I chanced to come across some of the exiles, who, having heard of my devotion to the Protestant cause, brought me to the Duke and to Master Rumbold, who committed these letters to my charge. This makes it clear how they came into my possession."

"But not how you and they came into the water," my father suggested.

"Why, that was but the veriest chance," the adventurer answered with some little confusion of manner. "It was the *fortuna belli*, or more properly *pacis*. I had asked my brothers to put into Portsmouth that I might get rid of these letters, on which they replied in a boorish and unmannerly fashion that they were still waiting for the thousand guineas which represented my share of the venture. To this I answered with brotherly familiarity that it was a small thing, and should be paid for out of the profits of our enterprise. Their reply was that I had promised to pay the money down, and that money down they must have. I then proceeded to prove, both by the Aristotelian and by the Platonic or deductive method, that having no guineas in my possession it was impossible for me to produce a thousand of them, at the same time pointing out that the association of an honest man in the business

was in itself an ample return for the money, since their own reputations had been somewhat blown on. I further offered in the same frank and friendly spirit to meet either of them with sword or with pistol, a proposal which should have satisfied any honour-loving cavaliero. Their base mercantile souls prompted them, however, to catch up two muskets, one of which Nonus discharged at me, and it is likely that Quartus would have followed suit had I not plucked the gun from his hand and unloaded it to prevent further mischief. In unloading it I fear that one of the slugs blew a hole in brother Nonus. Seeing that there was a chance of further disagreements aboard the vessel, I at once decided to leave her, in doing which I was forced to kick off my beautiful jack-boots, which were said by Vanseddars himself to be the finest pair that ever went out of his shop, square-toes, double-soled—alas ! alas ! "

" Strange that you should have been picked up by the son of the very man to whom you had a letter."

" The working of Providence," Saxon answered. " I have two-and-twenty other letters which must all be delivered by hand. If you will permit me to use your house for a while, I shall make it my headquarters."

" Use it as though it were your own," said my father.

" Your most grateful servant, sir," he cried, jumping up and bowing with his hand over his heart. " This is indeed a haven of rest after the ungodly and profane company of my brothers. Shall we then put up a hymn, and retire from the business of the day ? "

My father willingly agreed, and we sang " Oh, happy land ! " after which our visitor followed me to his room, bearing with him the unfinished bottle of usquebaugh which my mother had left on the table. He took it with him, he explained, as a precaution against Persian ague, contracted while battling against the Ottoman, and liable to recur at strange moments. I left him in our best spare bedroom, and returned to my father, who was still seated, heavy with thought, in his old corner.

" What think you of my find, dad ? " I asked.

"A man of parts and of piety," he answered; "but in truth he has brought me news so much after my heart, that he could not be unwelcome were he the Pope of Rome."

"What news, then?"

"This, this!" he cried joyously, plucking the letter out of his bosom. "I will read it to you, lad. Nay, perhaps I had best sleep the night upon it, and read it to-morrow when our heads are clearer. May the Lord guide my path, and confound the tyrant! Pray for light, boy, for my life and yours may be equally at stake."

## 6. *Of the Letter that came from the Lowlands*

IN the morning I was up betimes, and went forthwith, after the country fashion, to our guest's room to see if there was aught in which I could serve him. On pushing at his door, I found that it was fastened, which surprised me the more as I knew that there was neither key nor bolt upon the inside. On my pressing against it, however, it began to yield, and I could see then that a heavy chest which was used to stand near the window had been pulled round in order to shut out any intrusion. This precaution, taken under my father's roof, as though he were in a den of thieves, angered me, and I gave a butt with my shoulder which cleared the box out of the way, and enabled me to enter the room.

The man Saxon was sitting up in bed, staring about him as though he were not very certain for the moment where he was. He had tied a white kerchief round his head by way of night bonnet, and his hard-visaged, clean-shaven face, looking out through this, together with his bony figure, gave him some resemblance to a gigantic old woman. The bottle of usquebaugh stood empty by his bedside. Clearly his fears had been realised, and he had had an attack of the Persian ague.

"Ah, my young friend!" he said at last. "Is it, then,

the custom of this part of the country to carry your visitor's rooms by storm or escalado in the early hours of the morning ? "

" Is it the custom," I answered sternly, " to barricade up your door when you are sleeping under the roof-tree of an honest man ? What did you fear, that you should take such a precaution ? "

" Nay, you are indeed a spitfire," he replied, sinking back upon the pillow, and drawing the clothes round him, " a feuerkopf as the Germans call it, or sometimes tollkopf, which in its literal significance meaneth a fool's head. Your father was, as I have heard, a strong and a fierce man when the blood of youth ran in his veins ; but you, I should judge, are in no way behind him. Know, then, that the bearer of papers of import, *documenta preciosa sed periculosa*, is bound to leave nought to chance, but to guard in every way the charge which hath been committed to him. True it is that I am in the house of an honest man, but I know not who come or who may go during the hours of the night. Indeed, for the matter of that—but enough is said. I shall be with you anon."

" Your clothes are dry and are ready for you," I remarked.

" Enough ! enough ! " he answered. " I have no quarrel with the suit which your father has lent me. It may be that I have been used to better, but they will serve my turn. The camp is not the court."

It was evident to me that my father's suit was infinitely better, both in texture and material, than that which our visitor had brought with him. As he had withdrawn his head, however, entirely beneath the bedclothes, there was nothing more to be said, so I descended to the lower room, where I found my father busily engaged fastening a new buckle to his sword-belt while my mother and the maid were preparing the morning meal.

" Come into the yard with me, Micah," quoth my father ; " I would have a word with you." The workmen had not yet come to their work, so we strolled out

into the sweet morning air, and seated ourselves on the low stone bankment on which the skins are dressed.

"I have been out here this morning trying my hand at the broadsword exercise," said he; "I find that I am as quick as ever on a thrust, but my cuts are sadly stiff. I might be of use at a pinch, but, alas! I am not the same swordsman who led the left troop of the finest horse regiment that ever followed a kettledrum. The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away! Yet, if I am old and worn, there is the fruit of my loins to stand in my place and to wield the same sword in the same cause. You shall go in my place, Micah."

"Go! Go whither?"

"Hush, lad, and listen! Let not your mother know too much, for the hearts of women are soft. When Abraham offered up his eldest born, I trow that he said little to Sarah on the matter. Here is the letter. Know you who this Dicky Rumbold is?"

"Surely I have heard you speak of him as an old companion of yours."

"The same—a staunch man and true. So faithful was he—faithful even to slaying—that when the army of the righteous dispersed, he did not lay aside his zeal with his buff-coat. He took to business as a maltster at Hoddesdon, and in his house was planned the famous Rye House Plot, in which so many good men were involved."

"Was it not a foul assassination plot?" I asked.

"Nay, nay, be not led away by terms! It is a vile invention of the malignants that these men planned assassination. What they would do they purposed doing in broad daylight, thirty of them against fifty of the Royal Guard, when Charles and James passed on their way to Newmarket. If the royal brothers got pistol-bullet or sword-stab, it would be in open fight, and at the risk of their attackers. It was give and take, and no murder."

He paused and looked inquiringly at me; but I could not truthfully say that I was satisfied, for an attack upon the lives of unarmed and unsuspecting men, even though

surrounded by a bodyguard, could not, to my mind, be justified.

"When the plot failed," my father continued, "Rumbold had to fly for his life, but he succeeded in giving his pursuers the slip and in making his way to the Lowlands. There he found that many enemies of the Government had gathered together. Repeated messages from England, especially from the western counties and from London, assured them that if they would but attempt an invasion they might rely upon help both in men and in money. They were, however, at fault for some time for want of a leader of sufficient weight to carry through so large a project; but now at last they have one, who is the best that could have been singled out—none other than the well-beloved Protestant chieftain James, Duke of Monmouth, son of Charles II."

"Illegitimate son," I remarked.

"That may or may not be. There are those who say that Lucy Walters was a lawful wife. Bastard or no, he holds the sound principles of the true Church, and he is beloved by the people. Let him appear in the West, and soldiers will rise up like the flowers in the spring time."

He paused, and led me away to the farther end of the yard, for the workmen had begun to arrive and to cluster round the dipping trough.

"Monmouth is coming over," he continued, "and he expects every brave Protestant man to rally to his standard. The Duke of Argyle is to command a separate expedition, which will set the Highlands of Scotland in a blaze. Between them they hope to bring the persecutor of the faithful on his knees. But I hear the voice of the man Saxon, and I must not let him say that I have treated him in a churlish fashion. Here is the letter, lad. Read it with care, and remember that when brave men are striving for their rights it is fitting that one of the old rebel house of Clarke should be among them."

I took the letter, and wandering off into the fields, I settled myself under a convenient tree, and set myself to

read it. This yellow sheet which I now hold in my hand is the very one which was brought by Decimus Saxon, and read by me that bright May morning under the hawthorn shade. I give it to you as it stands :

"To my friend and companion in the cause of the Lord, Joseph Clarke.—Know, friend, that aid and delivery is coming upon Israel, and that the wicked king and those who uphold him shall be smitten and entirely cast down, until their place in the land shall know them no more. Hasten, then, to testify to thy own faith, that in the day of trouble ye be not found wanting.

"It has chanced from time to time that many of the suffering Church, both from our own land and from among the Scots, have assembled in this good Lutheran town of Amsterdam, until enough are gathered together to take a good work in hand. For amongst our own folk there are my Lord Grey of Wark, Wade, Dare of Taunton, Ayloffe, Holmes, Hollis, Goodenough and others whom thou shalt know. Of the Scots there are the Duke of Argyle, who has suffered sorely for the Covenant, Sir Patrick Hume, Fletcher of Saltoun, Sir John Cochrane, Dr. Ferguson, Major Elphinstone and others. To these we would fain have added Locke and old Hal Ludlow, but they are, as those of the Laodicean Church, neither cold nor warm.

"It has now come to pass, however, that Monmouth, who has long lived in dalliance with the Midianitish woman known by the name of Wentworth, has at last turned him to higher things, and has consented to make a bid for the crown. It was found that the Scots preferred to follow a chieftain of their own, and it has therefore been determined that Argyle—M'Callum More, as the breechless savages of Inverary call him—shall command a separate expedition landing upon the western coast of Scotland. There he hopes to raise five thousand Campbells, and to be joined by all the Covenanters and Western Whigs, men who would make troops of the old

breed had they but God-fearing officers with an experience of the chance of fields and the usages of war. With such a following he should be able to hold Glasgow, and to draw away the King's force to the north. Ayloffe and I go with Argyle. It is likely that our feet may be upon Scottish ground before thy eyes read these words.

"The stronger expedition starts with Monmouth, and lands at a fitting place in the West, where we are assured that we have many friends. I cannot name the spot lest this letter miscarry, but thou shalt hear anon. I have written to all good men along the coast, bidding them to be prepared to support the rising. The King is weak, and hated by the greater part of his subjects. It doth but need one good stroke to bring his crown in the dust. Monmouth will start in a few weeks, when his equipment is finished and the weather favourable. If thou canst come, mine old comrade, I know well that thou will need no bidding of mine to bring thee to our banner. Should perchance a peaceful life and waning strength forbid thy attendance, I trust that thou wilt wrestle for us in prayer, even as the holy prophet of old ; and perchance, since I hear that thou hast prospered according to the things of this world, thou mayst be able to fit out a pikeman or two, or to send a gift towards the military chest, which will be none too plentifully lined. We trust not to gold, but to steel and to our own good cause, yet gold will be welcome none the less. Should we fall, we fall like men and Christians. Should we succeed, we shall see how the perjured James, the persecutor of the saints with the heart like a nether millstone, the man who smiled when the thumbs of the faithful were wrenched out of their sockets at Edinburgh—we shall see how manfully he can bear adversity when it falls to his lot. May the hand of the Almighty be over us !

"I know little of the bearer of this, save that he professes to be of the elect. Shouldst thou go to Monmouth's camp, see that thou take him with thee, for I hear that he hath had good experience in the German.

Swedish and Ottoman wars.—Yours in the faith of Christ,

RICHARD RUMBOLD.

"Present my services to thy spouse. Let her read Timothy, chapter two, ninth to fifteenth verses."

This long letter I read very carefully, and then putting it in my pocket returned indoors to my breakfast. My father looked at me, as I entered, with questioning eyes, but I had no answer to return him, for my own mind was clouded and uncertain.

That day Decimus Saxon left us, intending to make a round of the country and to deliver his letters, but promising to be back again ere long. We had a small mishap ere he went, for as we were talking of his journey my brother Hosea must needs start playing with my father's powder-flask, which in some way went off with a sudden fluff, spattering the walls with fragments of metal. So unexpected and loud was the explosion, that both my father and I sprang to our feet; but Saxon, whose back was turned to my brother, sat four-square in his chair without a glance behind him or a shade of change in his rugged face. As luck would have it, no one was injured, not even Hosea, but the incident made me think more highly of our new acquaintance. As he started off down the village street, his long stringy figure and strange gnarled visage, with my father's silver-braided hat cocked over his eye, attracted rather more attention than I cared to see, considering the importance of the missives which he bore, and the certainty of their discovery should he be arrested as a masterless man. Fortunately, however, the curiosity of the country folk did but lead them to cluster round their doors and windows, staring open-eyed, while he, pleased at the attention which he excited, strode along with his head in the air and a cudgel of mine twirling in his hand. He had left golden opinions behind him. My father's good wishes had been won by his piety and by the sacrifices which he claimed to have made for the

faith. My mother he had taught how wimples are worn amongst the Serbs, and had also demonstrated to her a new method of curing marigolds in use in some parts of Lithuania. For myself, I confess that I retained a vague distrust of the man, and was determined to avoid putting faith in him more than was needful. At present, however, we had no choice but to treat him as an ambassador from friends.

And I? What was I to do? Should I follow my father's wishes, and draw my maiden sword on behalf of the insurgents, or should I stand aside and see how events shaped themselves? It was more fitting that I should go than he. But, on the other hand, I was no keen religious zealot. Papistry, Church, Dissent, I believed that there was good in all of them, but that not one was worth the spilling of human blood. James might be a perjurer and a villain, but he was, as far as I could see, the rightful king of England, and no tales of secret marriages or black boxes could alter the fact that his rival was apparently an illegitimate son, and as such ineligible to the throne. Who could say what evil act upon the part of a monarch justified his people in setting him aside? Who was the judge in such a case? Yet, on the other hand, the man had notoriously broken his own pledges, and that surely should absolve his subjects from their allegiance. It was a weighty question for a country-bred lad to have to settle, and yet settled it must be, and that speedily. I took up my hat and wandered away down the village street, turning the matter over in my head.

But it was no easy thing for me to think seriously of anything in the hamlet; for I was in some way, my dear children, though I say it myself, a favourite with the young and with the old, so that I could not walk ten paces without some greeting or address. There were my own brothers trailing behind me, Baker Mitford's children tugging at my skirts, and the millwright's two little maidens one on either hand. Then, when I had persuaded these young rompers to leave me, out came Dame Fullar-

ton the widow, with a sad tale about how her grindstone had fallen out of its frame, and neither she nor her household could lift it in again. That matter I set straight and proceeded on my way ; but I could not pass the sign of the Wheatsheaf without John Lockarby, Reuben's father, plunging out at me and insisting upon my coming in with him for a morning cup.

" The best glass of mead in the countryside, and brewed under my own roof," said he proudly, as he poured it into the flagon. " Why, bless you, Master Micah, a man with a frame like yours wants store o' good malt to keep it up wi'."

" And malt like this is worthy of a good frame to contain it," quoth Reuben, who was at work among the flasks.

" What think ye, Micah ? " said the landlord. " There was the Squire o' Milton over here yester morning wi' Johnny Ferneley o' the Bank side, and they will have it that there's a man in Fareham who could wrestle you, the best of three, and find your own grip, for a good round stake."

" Tut ! tut ! " I answered ; " you would have me like a prize mastiff, showing my teeth to the whole countryside. What matter if the man can throw me, or I him ? "

" What matter ? Why, the honour of Havant," quoth he. " Is that no matter ? But you are right," he continued, draining off his horn. " What is all this village life with its small successes to such as you ? You are as much out of your place as a vintage wine at a harvest supper. The whole of broad England, and not the streets of Havant, is the fit stage for a man of your kidney. What have you to do with the beating of skins and the tanning of leather ? "

" My father would have you go forth as a knight-errant, Micah," said Reuben, laughing. " You might chance to get your own skin beaten and your own leather tanned."

" Who ever knew so long a tongue in so short a body ? " cried the innkeeper. " But in good sooth, Master Micah, I am in sober earnest when I say that you are indeed

wasting the years of your youth, when life is sparkling and clear, and that you will regret it when you have come to the flat and flavourless dregs of old age."

"There spoke the brewer," said Reuben; "but indeed, Micah, my father is right, for all that he hath such a hops-and-water manner of putting it."

"I will think over it," I answered, and with a nod to the kindly couple proceeded on my way.

Zachariah Palmer was planing a plank as I passed. Looking up he bade me good-morrow.

"I have a book for you, lad," he said.

"I have but now finished the *Comus*," I answered, for he had lent me John Milton's poem. "But what is this new book, daddy?"

"It is by the learned Locke, and treateth of states and statecraft. It is but a small thing, but if wisdom could show in the scales it would weigh down many a library. You shall have it when I have finished it, to-morrow may-hap or the day after. A good man is Master Locke. Is he not at this moment a wanderer in the Lowlands, rather than bow his knee to what his conscience approved not of?"

"There are many good men among the exiles, are there not?" said I.

"The pick of the country," he answered. "Ill fares the land that drives the highest and bravest of its citizens away from it. The day is coming, I fear, when every man will have to choose betwixt his beliefs and his freedom. I am an old man, Micah boy, but I may live long enough to see strange things in this once Protestant kingdom."

"But if these exiles had their way," I objected, "they would place Monmouth upon the throne, and so unjustly alter the succession."

"Nay, nay," old Zachary answered, laying down his plane. "If they use Monmouth's name, it is but to strengthen their cause, and to show that they have a leader of repute. Were James driven from the throne,

the Commons of England in Parliament assembled would be called upon to name his successor. There are men at Monmouth's back who would not stir unless this were so."

"Then, daddy," said I, "since I can trust you, and since you will tell me what you do really think, would it be well, if Monmouth's standard be raised, that I should join it?"

The carpenter stroked his white beard and pondered for a while. "It is a pregnant question," he said at last, "and yet methinks that there is but one answer to it, especially for your father's son. Should an end be put to James's rule, it is not too late to preserve the nation in its old faith; but if the disease is allowed to spread, it may be that even the tyrant's removal would not prevent his evil seed from sprouting. I hold, therefore, that should the exiles make such an attempt, it is the duty of every man who values liberty of conscience to rally round them. And you, my son, the pride of the village, what better use could you make of your strength than to devote it to helping to relieve your country of this insupportable yoke? It is treasonable and dangerous counsel—counsel which might lead to a short shrift and a bloody death—but, as the Lord liveth, if you were child of mine I should say the same."

So spoke the old carpenter with a voice which trembled with earnestness, and went to work upon his plank once more, while I, with a few words of gratitude, went on my way pondering over what he had said to me. I had not gone far, however, before the hoarse voice of Solomon Sprent broke in upon my meditations.

"Hoy there! Ahoy!" he bellowed, though his mouth was but a few yards from my ear. "Would ye come across my hawse without slacking weigh? Clew up, d'ye see, clew up!"

"Why, Captain," I said, "I did not see you. I was lost in thought."

"All adrift and without look-outs," quoth he, pushing

his way through the break in the garden hedge. "Od's niggars, man! friends are not so plentiful, d'ye see, that ye need pass 'em by without a dip o' the ensign. So help me, if I had had a barker I'd have fired a shot across your bows."

"No offence, Captain," said I, for the veteran appeared to be nettled; "I have much to think of this morning."

"And so have I, mate," he answered, in a softer voice. "What think ye of my rig, eh?" He turned himself slowly round in the sunlight as he spoke, and I perceived that he was dressed with unusual care. He had a blue suit of broad-cloth trimmed with eight rows of buttons, and breeches of the same material with great bunches of ribbon at the knee. His vest was of lighter blue picked out with anchors in silver, and edged with a finger's-breadth of lace. His boot was so wide that he might have had his foot in a bucket, and he wore a cutlass at his side suspended from a buff belt, which passed over his right shoulder.

"I've had a new coat o' paint all over," said he, with a wink. "Carramba! the old ship is water-tight yet. What would ye say, now, were I about to sling my hawser over a little scow, and take her in tow?"

"A cow!" I cried.

"A cow! what d'ye take me for? A wench, man, and as tight a little craft as ever sailed into the port of wedlock."

"I have heard no better news for many a long day," said I; "I did not even know that you were betrothed. When then is the wedding to be?"

"Go slow, friend—go slow, and heave your lead-line! You have got out of your channel, and are in shoal water. I never said as how I was betrothed."

"What then?" I asked.

"I am getting up anchor now, to run down to her and summon her. Look ye, lad," he continued, plucking off his cap and scratching his ragged locks; "I've had to do wi' wenches enow from the Levant to the Antilles—

wenches such as a sailorman meets, who are all paint and pocket. It's but the heaving of a hand grenade, and they strike their colours. This is a craft of another guess build, and unless I steer wi' care she may put one in between wind and water before I so much as know that I am engaged. What think ye, heh ? Should I lay myself boldly alongside, d'ye see, and ply her with small arms, or should I work myself clear and try a long-range action ? I am none of your slippery, grease-tongued, long-shore lawyers, but if so be as she's willing for a mate, I'll stand by her in wind and weather while my planks hold out."

" I can scarce give advice in such a case," said I, " for my experience is less than yours. I should say though that you had best speak to her from your heart, in plain sailor language."

" Aye, aye, she can take it or leave it. Phœbe Dawson it is, the sister of the blacksmith. Let us work back and have a drop of the right Nants before we go. I have an anker newly come, which never paid the King a groat."

" Nay, you had best leave it alone," I answered.

" Say you so ? Well, mayhap you are right. Throw off your moorings, then, and clap on sail, for we must go."

" But I am not concerned," said I.

" Not concerned ! Not——" he was too much overcome to go on, and could but look at me with a face full of reproach. " I thought better of you, Micah. Would you let this crazy old hulk go into action, and not stand by to fire a broadside ? "

" What would you have me do then ? "

" Why, I would have you help me as the occasion may arise. If I start to board her, I would have you work across the bows so as to rake her. Should I range up on the larboard quarter, do you lie on the starboard. If I get crippled, do you draw her fire until I refit. What, man, you would not desert me ! "

The old seaman's tropes and maritime conceits were not always intelligible to me, but it was clear that he had set his heart upon my accompanying him, which I was

equally determined not to do. At last by much reasoning I made him understand that my presence would be more hindrance than help, and would probably be fatal to his chances of success.

"Well, well," he grumbled at last, "I've been concerned in no such expedition before. An it be the custom for single ships to engage, I'll stand to it alone. You shall come with me as consort, though, and stand to and fro in the offing, or sink me if I stir a step."

My mind was full of my father's plans and of the courses which lay before me. There seemed to be no choice, however, as old Solomon was in dead earnest, but to lay the matter aside for the moment and see the upshot of this adventure.

"Mind, Solomon," said I, "I don't cross the threshold."

"Aye, aye, mate. You can please yourself. We have to beat up against the wind all the way. She's on the look-out, for I hailed her yesternight, and let her know as how I should bear down on her about seven bells of the morning watch."

I was thinking as we trudged down the road that Phœbe would need to be learned in sea terms to make out the old man's meaning, when he pulled up short and clapped his hands to his pockets.

"Zounds!" he cried, "I have forgot to bring a pistol."

"In Heaven's name!" I said in amazement, "what could you want with a pistol?"

"Why, to make signals with," said he. "Odds me that I should have forgot it! How is one's consort to know what is going forward when the flagship carries no artillery? Had the lass been kind I should have fired one gun, that you might know it."

"Why," I answered, "if you come not out I shall judge that all is well. If things go amiss I shall see you soon."

"Aye—or stay! I'll hoist a white jack at the port-hole. A white jack means that she hath hauled down her colours.

Nombre de Dios, when I was a powder-boy in the old ship *Lion*, the day that we engaged the *Spiritus Sanctus* of two tier o' guns—the first time that ever I heard the screech of ball—my heart never thumped as it does now. What say ye if we run back with a fair wind and broach that anker of Nants ? "

" Nay, stand to it, man," said I ; for by this time we had come to the ivy-clad cottage behind which was the village smithy. " What, Solomon ! an English seaman never feared a foe, either with petticoats or without them."

" No, curse me if he did ! " quoth Solomon, squaring his shoulders, " never a one, Don, Devil or Dutchman ; so here goes for her ! " So saying he made his way into the cottage, leaving me standing by the garden wicket, half amused and half annoyed at this interruption to my musings.

As it proved, the sailor had no very great difficulty with his suit, and soon managed to capture his prize, to use his own language. I heard from the garden the growling of his gruff voice, and a good deal of shrill laughter ending in a small squeak, which meant, I suppose, that he was coming to close quarters. Then there was silence for a little while, and at last I saw a white kerchief waving from the window, and perceived, moreover, that it was Phœbe herself who was fluttering it. Well, she was a smart, kindly-hearted lass, and I was glad in my heart that the old seaman should have such a one to look after him.

Here, then, was one good friend settled down finally for life. Another warned me that I was wasting my best years in the hamlet. A third, the most respected of all, advised me openly to throw in my lot with the insurgents, should the occasion arise. If I refused, I should have the shame of seeing my aged father setting off for the wars, whilst I lingered at home. And why should I refuse ? Had it not long been the secret wish of my heart to see something of the great world, and what fairer chance could present itself ? My wishes, my friend's advice and my father's hopes all pointed in the one direction.

"Father," said I, when I returned home, "I am ready to go where you will."

"May the Lord be glorified!" he cried solemnly. "May He watch over your young life, and keep your heart steadfast to the cause which is assuredly His!"

And so, my dear grandsons, the great resolution was taken, and I found myself committed to one side in the national quarrel.

## 7. *Of the Horseman who rode from the West*

MY father set to work forthwith preparing for our equipment, furnishing Saxon out as well as myself on the most liberal scale, for he was determined that the wealth of his age should be as devoted to the cause as was the strength of his youth. These arrangements had to be carried out with the most extreme caution, for there were many Prelatists in the village, and in the present disturbed state of the public mind any activity on the part of so well known a man would have at once attracted attention. So carefully did the wary old soldier manage matters, however, that we soon found ourselves in a position to start at an hour's notice, without any of our neighbours being a whit the wiser.

His first move was to purchase through an agent two suitable horses at Chichester fair, which were conveyed to the stables of a trusty Whig farmer living near Portchester, who was ordered to keep them until they were called for. Of these animals one was a mottled grey, of great mettle and power, standing seventeen and a half hands high, and well up to my weight, for in those days, my dears, I had not laid on flesh, and weighed a little under sixteen stone for all my height and strength. A critic might have said that Covenant, for so I named my steed, was a trifle heavy about the head and neck, but I found him a trusty, willing brute, with great power and endurance. Saxon, who when fully accoutred could scarce have weighed more

than twelve stone, had a light bay Spanish jennet, of great speed and spirit. This mare he named Chloe, " after a godly maiden of his acquaintance," though, as my father remarked, there was a somewhat ungodly and heathenish smack about the appellation. These horses and their harness were bought and held ready without my father appearing in the matter in any way.

This important point having been settled, there was the further question of arms to be discussed, which gave rise to much weighty controversy between Decimus Saxon and my father, each citing many instances from their own experiences where the presence or absence of some taslet or arm-guard had been of the deepest import to the wearer. Your great-grandfather had set his heart upon my wearing the breastplate which still bore the dints of the Scottish spears at Dunbar, but on trying it on we found it was too small for me. I confess that this was a surprise, for when I looked back at the awe with which I had regarded my father's huge proportions, it was marvellous to me to have this convincing proof that I had outgrown him. By ripping down the side-leather and piercing holes through which a lace could be passed, my mother managed to arrange it so that I could wear it without discomfort. A pair of taslets or thigh-pieces, with guards for the upper arm and gauntlets, were all borrowed from the old Parliamentary equipment, together with the heavy straight sword and pair of horse-pistols which formed the usual weapons of a cavalier. My father had chosen me a headpiece in Portsmouth, fluted, with good barrets, padded inside with soft leather, very light and yet very strong. When fully equipped, both Saxon and my father agreed that I had all that was requisite for a well-appointed soldier. Saxon had purchased a buff-coat, a steel cap and a pair of jack-boots, so that with the rapier and pistols which my father had presented him with, he was ready to take the field at any time.

There would, we hoped, be no great difficulty in our reaching Monmouth's forces when the hour came. In

those troublous times the main roads were so infested by highwaymen and footpads, that it was usual for travellers to carry weapons and even armour for their protection. There was no reason therefore why our appearance should excite suspicion. Should questions be asked, Saxon had a long story prepared, to the effect that we were travelling to join Henry Somerset, Duke of Beaufort, to whose household we belonged. This invention he explained to me, with many points of corroboration which I was to furnish, but when I said positively that I should rather be hanged as a rebel than speak a falsehood, he looked at me open-eyed, and shook his head as one much shocked. A few weeks of campaigning, he said, would soon cure me of my squeamishness. For himself, no more truthful child had ever carried a horn-book, but he had learned to lie upon the Danube, and looked upon it as a necessary part of the soldier's upbringing. "For what are all stratagems, ambuscades and outfalls but lying upon a large scale?" he argued. "What is an adroit commander but one who hath a facility for disguising the truth? When, at the battle of Senlac, William the Norman ordered his men to feign flight in order that they might break his enemy's array, a wile much practised both by the Scythians of old and by the Croats of our own day, pray what is it but the acting of a lie? Or when Hannibal, having tied torches to the horns of great droves of oxen, caused the Roman Consuls to imagine that his army was in retreat, was it not a deception or infraction of the truth?—a point well brought out by a soldier of repute in the treatise 'An in bello dolo uti liceat; an apud hostes falsiloquio uti liceat.' And so if, after these great models, I in order to gain mine ends do announce that we are bound to Beaufort when we are in truth making for Monmouth, is it not in accord with the usages of war and the customs of great commanders?" All which specious argument I made no attempt to answer, beyond repeating that he might avail himself of the usage, but that he must not look to me for corroboration. On the

other hand, I promised to hold my speech and to say nothing which might hamper him, with which pledge he was forced to be contented.

And now at last, my patient listeners, I shall be able to carry you out of the humble life of the village, and to cease my gossip of the men who were old when I was young, and who are now lying this many a year in the Bedhampton churchyard. You shall come with me now, and you shall see England as it was in those days, and you shall hear of how we set forth to the wars, and of all the adventures which overtook us. And if what I tell you should ever chance to differ from what you have read in the book of Mr. Coke or of Mr. Oldmixon, or of anyone else who has set these matters down in print, do ye bear in mind that I am telling of what I saw with these very eyes, and that I have helped to make history, which is a higher thing than to write it.

It was, then, towards nightfall upon the twelfth day of June, 1685, that the news reached our part of the country that Monmouth had landed the day before at Lyme, a small seaport on the boundary between Dorsetshire and Devonshire. A great beacon blaze upon Portsdown Hill was the first news that we had of it, and then came a rattling and a drumming from Portsmouth, where the troops were assembled under arms. Mounted messengers clattered through the village street with their heads low on their horses' necks, for the great tidings must be carried to London, that the Governor of Portsmouth might know how to act.[1] We were standing at our doorway in the gloaming, watching the coming and the going, and the line of beacon fires which were lengthening away to the eastward, when a little man galloped up to the door and pulled his panting horse up.

"Is Joseph Clarke here?" he asked.

"I am he," said my father.

"Are these men true?" he whispered, pointing with his whip at Saxon and myself. "Then the trysting-place

[1] Note B, Appendix.

is Taunton. Pass it on to all whom ye know. Give my horse a bait and a drink, I beg of ye, for I must get on my way."

My young brother Hosea looked to the tired creature, while we brought the rider inside and drew him a stoup of beer. A wiry, sharp-faced man he was, with a birth-mark upon his temple. His face and clothes were caked with dust, and his limbs were so stiff from the saddle that he could scarce put one foot before another.

"One horse hath died under me," he said, "and this can scarce last another twenty miles. I must be in London by morning, for we hope that Danvers and Wild-man may be able to raise the city. Yester evening I left Monmouth's camp. His blue flag floats over Lyme."

"What force hath he?" my father asked anxiously.

"He hath but brought over leaders. The force must come from you folk at home. He has with him Lord Grey of Wark, with Wade, the German Buyse, and eighty or a hundred more. Alas! that two who came are already lost to us. It is an evil, evil omen."

"What is amiss, then?"

"Dare, the goldsmith of Taunton, hath been slain by Fletcher of Saltoun in some child's quarrel about a horse. The peasants cried out for the blood of the Scot, and he was forced to fly aboard the ships. A sad mishap it is, for he was a skilful leader and a veteran soldier."

"Aye, aye," cried Saxon impatiently, "there will be some more skilful leaders and veteran soldiers in the West presently to take his place. But if he knew the usages of war, how came it that he should fight upon a private quarrel at such a time?" He drew a flat brown book from his bosom, and ran his long thin finger down the table of contents. "Subsectio nona—here is the very case set forth, 'An in bello publico provocatus ad duellum privatæ amicitiæ causâ declinare possit,' in which the learned Fleming layeth it down that a man's private honour must give way to the good of the cause. Did it not happen in my own case that, on the eve of the raising

of the Anlagerung of Vienna, we stranger officers having been invited to the tent of the General, it chanced that a red-headed Irisher, one O'Daffy, an ancient in the regiment of Pappenheimer, did claim precedence of me on the ground of superiority of blood? On this I drew my glove across his face, not, mark ye, in anger, but as showing that I differed in some degree from his opinion. At which dissent he did at once offer to sustain his contention, but I, having read this subsection to him, did make it clear to him that we could not in honour settle the point until the Turk was chased from the city. So after the onfall——"

"Nay, sir, I may hear the narrative some future day," said the messenger, staggering to his feet. "I hope to find a relay at Chichester, and time presses. Work for the cause now, or be slaves for ever. Farewell!" He clambered into his saddle, and we heard the clatter of his hoofs dying away down the London road.

"The time hath come for you to go, Micah," said my father solemnly. "Nay, wife, do not weep, but rather hearten the lad on his way by a blithe word and a merry face. I need not tell you to fight manfully and fearlessly in this quarrel. Should the tide of war set in this direction, you may find your old father riding by your side. Let us now bow down and implore the favour of the Almighty upon this expedition."

We all knelt down in the low-roofed, heavy-raftered room while the old man offered up an earnest, strenuous prayer for our success. Even now, as I speak to ye, that group rises up before mine eyes. I see once again your ancestor's stern, rugged face, with his brows knitted and his corded hands writhed together in the fervour of his supplication. My mother kneels beside him with the tears trickling down her sweet, placid face, stifling her sobs lest the sound of them make my leave-taking more bitter. The children are in the sleeping-room upstairs, and we hear the patter of their bare feet upon the floor. The man Saxon sprawls across one of the oaken chairs,

half kneeling, half reclining, with his long legs trailing out behind, and his face buried in his hands. All round in the flickering light of the hanging lamp I see the objects which have been so familiar to me from childhood—the settle by the fireplace, the high-back stiff-elbowed chairs, the stuffed fox above the door, the picture of Christian viewing the Promised Land from the summit of the Delectable Mountains—all small trifles in themselves, but making up among them the marvellous thing we call home, the all-powerful loadstone which draws the wanderer's heart from the farther end of the earth. Should I ever see it again save in my dreams—I, who was leaving this sheltered cove to plunge into the heart of the storm?

The prayer finished, we all rose with the exception of Saxon, who remained with his face buried in his hands for a minute or so before starting to his feet. I shrewdly suspect that he had been fast asleep, though he explained that he had paused to offer up an additional supplication. My father placed his hands upon my head and invoked the blessing of Heaven upon me. He then drew my companion aside, and I heard the jingling of coin, from which I judge that he was giving him something wherewith to start upon his travels. My mother clasped me to her heart, and slipped a small square of paper into my hand, saying that I was to look at it at my leisure, and that I should make her happy if I would but conform to the instructions contained in it. This I promised to do, and tearing myself away I set off down the darkened village street, with my long-limbed companion striding by my side.

It was close upon one in the morning, and all the country folk had been long abed. Passing the Wheatsheaf and the house of old Solomon, I could not but wonder what they would think of my martial garb were they afoot. I had scarce time to form the same thought before Zachary Palmer's cottage when his door flew open, and the carpenter came running out with his white hair streaming in the fresh night breeze.

"I have been awaiting you, Micah," he cried. "I had

heard that Monmouth was up, and I knew that you would not lose a night ere starting. God bless you, lad, God bless you ! Strong of arm and soft of heart, tender to the weak and stern to the oppressor, you have the prayers and the love of all who know you." I pressed his extended hands, and the last I saw of my native hamlet was the shadowy figure of the carpenter as he waved his good wishes to me through the darkness.

We made our way across the fields to the house of Whittier, the Whig farmer, where Saxon got into his war harness. We found our horses ready saddled and bridled, for my father had at the first alarm sent a message across that we should need them. By two in the morning we were breasting Portsdown Hill, armed, mounted and fairly started on our journey to the rebel camp.

## 8. *Of our Start for the Wars*

ALL along the ridge of Portsdown Hill we had the lights of Portsmouth and of the harbour ships twinkling beneath us on the left, while on the right the Forest of Bere was ablaze with the signal fires which proclaimed the landing of the invader. One great beacon throbbed upon the summit of Butser, while beyond that, as far as eye could reach, twinkling sparks of light showed how the tidings were being carried north into Berkshire and eastward into Sussex. Of these fires, some were composed of faggots piled into heaps, and others of tar barrels set upon poles. We passed one of these last just opposite to Porchester, and the watchers around it, hearing the tramp of our horses and the clank of our arms, set up a loud huzza, thinking doubtless that we were King's officers bound for the West.

Master Decimus Saxon had flung to the winds the precise demeanour which he had assumed in the presence of my father, and rattled away with many a jest and scrap of rhyme or song as we galloped through the darkness.

"Gadzooks!" said he frankly, "it is good to be able to speak freely without being expected to tag every sentence with a hallelujah or an amen."

"You were ever the leader in those pious exercises," I remarked drily.

"Aye, indeed. You have nicked it there! If a thing must be done, then take a lead in it, whatever it may be. A plaguy good precept, which has stood me in excellent stead before now. I cannot bear in mind whether I told you how I was at one time taken prisoner by the Turks and conveyed to Stamboul. There were a hundred of us or more, but the others either perished under the bastinado, or are to this day chained to an oar in the Imperial Ottoman galleys, where they are like to remain until they die under the lash, or until some Venetian or Genoese bullet finds its way into their wretched carcasses. I alone came off with freedom."

"And pray, how did you make your escape?" I asked.

"By the use of the wit wherewith Providence hath endowed me," he answered complacently; "for, seeing that their accursed religion is the blind side of these infidels, I did set myself to work upon it. To this end I observed the fashion in which our guard performed their morning and evening exercises, and having transformed my doublet into a praying cloth, I did imitate them, save only that I prayed at greater length and with more fervour."

"What!" I cried in horror. "You did pretend to be a Mussulman?"

"Nay, there was no pretence. I became a Mussulman. That, however, betwixt ourselves, as it might not stand me in very good stead with some Reverend Aminadab Fount-of-Grace in the rebel camp, who is no admirer of Mahmoud."

I was so astounded at the impudence of this confession, coming from the mouth of one who had been leading the exercises of a pious Christian family, that I was fairly

bereft of speech. Decimus Saxon whistled a few bars of a sprightly tune, and then continued—

"My perseverance in these exercises soon led to my being singled out from among the other prisoners, until I so prevailed upon my gaolers that the doors were opened for me, and I was allowed out on condition of presenting myself at the prison gates once a day. What use, think ye, did I make of my freedom?"

"Nay, you are capable of anything," said I.

"I set off forthwith to their chief mosque—that of St. Sophia. When the doors opened and the muezzin called, I was ever the first to hurry in to devotions and the last to leave them. Did I see a Mussulman strike his head upon the pavement I would strike mine twice. Did I see him bend and bow, I was ready to prostrate myself. In this way ere long the piety of the converted Giaour became the talk of the city, and I was provided with a hut in which to make my sacred meditations. Here I might have done well, and indeed I had well-nigh made up my mind to set up as a prophet and write an extra chapter to the Koran, when some foolish trifle made the faithful suspicious of my honesty. It was but some nonsense of a wench being found in my hut by some who came to consult me upon a point of faith, but it was enough to set their heathen tongues wagging; so I thought it wisest to give them the slip in a Levantine coaster and leave the Koran uncompleted. It is perhaps as well, for it would be a sore trial to have to give up Christian women and pork, for their garlic-breathing houris and accursed kybobs of sheep's flesh."

We had passed through Fareham and Botley during this conversation, and were now making our way down the Bishopstoke road. The soil changes about here from chalk to sand, so that our horses' hoofs did but make a dull subdued rattle, which was no bar to our talk—or rather to my companion's, for I did little more than listen. In truth, my mind was so full of anticipations of what was before us, and of thoughts of the home behind, that I was

in no humour for sprightly chatter. The sky was somewhat clouded, but the moon glinted out between the rifts, showing us the long road which wound away in front of us. On either side were scattered houses with gardens sloping down towards the road. The heavy, sickly scent of strawberries was in the air.

"Hast ever slain a man in anger?" asked Saxon, as we galloped along.

"Never," I answered.

"Ha! You will find that when you hear the clink of steel against steel, and see your foeman's eyes, you will straightway forget all rules, maxims and precepts of the fence which your father or others may have taught you."

"I have learned little of the sort," said I. "My father did but teach me to strike an honest downright blow. This sword can shear through a square inch of iron bar."

"Scanderbeg's sword must have Scanderbeg's arm," he remarked. "I have observed that it is a fine piece of steel. One of the real old text-compellers and psalm-expounders which the faithful drew in the days of yore, when they would

> 'Prove their religion orthodox,
> By Apostolic blows and knocks.'

You have not fenced much, then?"

"Scarce at all," said I.

"It is as well. With an old and tried swordsman like myself, knowledge of the use of his weapon is everything; but with a young Hotspur of your temper, strength and energy go for much. I have oft remarked that those who are most skilled at the shooting of the popinjay, the cleaving of the Turk's head, and other such sports, are ever laggards in the field. Had the popinjay a crossbow as well, and an arrow on the string, or had the Turk a fist as well as a head, our young gallant's nerves would scarce be as steady over the business. I make no doubt, Master

Clarke, that we shall make trusty comrades. What saith old Butler ?

> ' Never did trusty squire with knight,
> Or knight with squire e'er jump more right.'

I have scarce dared to quote *Hudibras* for these weeks past, lest I should set the Covenant fermenting in the old man's veins."

" If we are indeed to be comrades," said I sternly, " you must learn to speak with more reverence and less flippancy of my father, who would assuredly never have harboured you had he heard the tale which you have told me even now."

" Belike not," the adventurer answered, chuckling to himself. " It is a long stride from a mosque to a conventicle. But be not so hot-headed, my friend. You lack that repose of character which will come to you, no doubt, in your more mature years. What, man ! within five minutes of seeing me you would have smitten me on the head with an oar, and ever since you have been like a bandog at my heels, ready to bark if I do but set my foot over what you regard as the straight line. Remember that you go now among men who fight on small occasion of quarrel. A word awry may mean a rapier thrust."

" Do you bear the same in mind," I answered hotly ; " my temper is peaceful, but covert threats and veiled menace I shall not abide."

" Od's mercy ! " he cried. " I see that you will start carving me anon, and take me to Monmouth's camp in sections. Nay, nay, we shall have fighting enow without falling out among ourselves. What houses are those on the left ? "

" The village of Swathling," I replied. " The lights of Bishopstoke lie to the right, in the hollow."

" Then we are fifteen miles on our way, and methinks there is already some faint flush of dawn in the east. Hullo, what have we here ? Beds must be scarce if folks sleep on the highways."

A dark blur which I had remarked upon the roadway in front of us had resolved itself as we approached into the figure of a man, stretched at full length, with his face downwards, and his head resting upon his crossed arms.

"Some reveller, mayhap, from the village inn," I remarked.

"There's blood in the air," said Saxon, raising up his beak-like nose like a vulture which scents carrion. "Methinks he sleeps the sleep which knows no waking."

He sprang down from his saddle, and turned the figure over upon his back. The cold pale light of the early dawn shimmering upon his staring eyes and colourless face showed that the old soldier's instinct was correct, and that he had indeed drawn his last breath.

"Here's a pretty piece of work," said Saxon, kneeling by the dead man's side and passing his hands over his pockets. "Footpads, doubtless. Not a stiver in his pockets, nor as much as a sleeve-link to help pay for the burial."

"How was he slain?" I asked in horror, looking down at the poor vacant face, the empty house from which the tenant had departed.

"A stab from behind and a tap on the head from the butt of a pistol. He cannot have been dead long, and yet every groat is gone. A man of position, too, I should judge from his dress—broadcloth coat by the feel, satin breeches, and silver buckles on his shoes. The rogues must have had some plunder with him. Could we but run across them, Clarke, it would be a great and grand thing."

"It would indeed," said I heartily. "What greater privilege than to execute justice upon such cowardly murderers!"

"Pooh! pooh!" he cried. "Justice is a slippery dame, and hath a two-edged sword in her hand. We may have enough of justice in our character as rebels to give us a surfeit of it. I would fain overtake these robbers that we may relieve them of their *spolia opima*, together with

any other wealth which they may have unlawfully amassed. My learned friend the Fleming layeth it down that it is no robbery to rob a robber. But where shall we conceal this body ? "

" Wherefore should we conceal it ? " I asked.

" Why, man, unused to war or the precautions of a warrior, you must yet see that should this body be found here, there will be a hue and cry through the country, and that strangers like ourselves will be arrested on suspicion. Should we clear ourselves, which is no very easy matter, the justice will at least want to know whence we come and whither we go, which may lead to inquiries that may bode us little good. I shall therefore take the liberty, mine unknown and silent friend, of dragging you into yon bushes, where for a day or two at least you are like to lie unobserved, and so bring no harm upon honest men."

" For God's sake do not treat it so unkindly," I cried, springing down from my horse and laying my hand upon my companion's arm. " There is no need to trail it in so unseemly a fashion. If it must be moved hence, I shall carry it with all due reverence." So saying, I picked the body up in my arms, and bearing it to a wayside clump of yellow gorse bushes, I laid it solemnly down and drew the branches over it to conceal it.

" You have the thews of an ox and the heart of a woman," muttered my companion. " By the Mass, that old white-headed psalm-singer was right ; for if my memory serves me, he said words to that effect. A few handfuls of dust will hide the stains. Now we may jog upon our way without any fear of being called upon to answer for another man's sins. Let me but get my girth tightened and we may soon be out of danger's way.

" I have had to do," said Saxon, as we rode onwards, " with many gentry of this sort, with Albanian brigands, the banditti of Piedmont, the Lanzknechte and Freiritter of the Rhine, Algerine picaroons, and other such folk. Yet I cannot call to mind one who hath ever been able to retire in his old age on a sufficient competence. It is but

a precarious trade, and must end sooner or later in a dance on nothing in a tight cravat, with some kind friend tugging at your legs to ease you of any breath that you might have left."

"Nor does that end all," I remarked.

"No. There is Tophet behind and the flames of hell. So our good friends the parsons tell us. Well, if a man is to make no money in this world, be hanged at the end of it, and finally burn for ever, he hath assuredly wandered on to a thorny track. If, on the other hand, one could always lay one's hands on a well-lined purse, as these rogues have done to-night, one might be content to risk something in the world to come."

"But what can the well-filled purse do for them?" said I. "What will the few score pieces which these bloodthirsty wretches have filched from this poor creature avail them when their own hour of death comes round?"

"True," said Saxon drily; "they may, however, prove useful in the meantime. This you say is Bishopstoke. What are the lights over yonder?"

"They come, I think, from Bishop's Waltham," I answered.

"We must press on, for I would fain be in Salisbury before it is broad day. There we shall put our horses up until evening and have some rest, for there is nothing gained by man or beast coming jaded to the wars. All this day the western roads will be crowded with couriers, and mayhap patrolled by cavalry as well, so that we cannot show our faces upon it without a risk of being stopped and examined. Now if we lie by all day, and push on at dusk, keeping off the main road and making our way across Salisbury Plain and the Somersetshire downs, we shall be less likely to come to harm."

"But what if Monmouth be engaged before we come up to him?" I asked.

"Then we shall have missed a chance of getting our throats cut. Why, man, supposing that he has been routed and entirely dispersed, would it not be a merry

conceit for us to appear upon the scene as two loyal yeomen, who had ridden all the way from Hampshire to strike in against the King's enemies? We might chance to get some reward in money or in land for our zeal. Nay, frown not, for I was but jesting. Breathe our horses by walking them up this hill. My jennet is as fresh as when we started, but those great limbs of thine are telling upon the grey."

The patch of light in the east had increased and broadened, and the sky was mottled with little pink feathers of cloud. As we passed over the low hills by Chandler's Ford and Romsey we could see the smoke of Southampton to the south-east, and the broad dark expanse of the New Forest with the haze of morning hanging over it. A few horsemen passed us, pricking along, too much engrossed in their own errand to inquire ours. A couple of carts and a long string of pack-horses, laden principally with bales of wool, came straggling along a by-road, and the drivers waved their broad hats to us and wished us Godspeed. At Dunbridge the folk were just stirring, and paused in taking down the cottage shutters to come to the garden railings and watch us pass. As we entered Dean, the great red sun pushed its rosy rim over the edge of the horizon, and the air was filled with the buzz of insects and the sweet scent of the morning. We dismounted at this latter village, and had a cup of ale while resting and watering the horses. The landlord could tell us nothing about the insurgents, and indeed seemed to care very little about the matter one way or the other. "As long as brandy pays a duty of six shillings and eightpence a gallon, and freight and leakage comes to half a crown, while I am expected to sell it at twelve shillings, it matters little to me who is King of England. Give me a king that will prevent the hop-blight and I am his man." Those were the landlord's politics, and I dare say a good many more were of his way of thinking.

From Dean to Salisbury is all straight road with moor,

morass and fenland on either side, broken only by the single hamlet of Aldersbury, just over the Wiltshire border. Our horses, refreshed by the short rest, stepped out gallantly, and the brisk motion, with the sunlight and the beauty of the morning, combined to raise our spirits and cheer us after the depression of the long ride through the darkness, and the incident of the murdered traveller. Wild duck, widgeon and snipe flapped up from either side of the road at the sound of the horses' hoofs, and once a herd of red deer sprang to their feet from among the ferns and scampered away in the direction of the forest. Once, too, when passing a dense clump of trees, we saw a shadowy white creature half hidden by the trunks, which must, I fancy, have been one of those wild cattle of which I have heard the peasants speak, who dwell in the recesses of the southern woods, and are so fierce and intractable that none dare approach them. The breadth of the view, the keenness of the air, and the novelty of the sense of having great work to do, all combined to send a flush of life through my veins such as the quiet village existence had never been able to give. My more experienced companion felt the influence too, for he lifted up a cracked voice and broke into a droning chant, which he assured me was an Eastern ode which had been taught him by the second sister of the Hospodar of Wallachia.

"Anent Monmouth," he remarked, coming back suddenly to the realities of our position. "It is unlikely that he can take the field for some days, though much depends upon his striking a blow soon, and so raising the courage of his followers before the King's troops can come down upon him. He has, mark ye, not only his troops to find, but their weapons, which is like to prove a more difficult matter. Suppose he can raise five thousand men—and he cannot stir with less—he will not have one musket in five, so the rest must do as they can with pikes and bills, or such other rude arms as they can find. All this takes time, and though there may be skirmishes, there can scarce be any engagement of import before we arrive."

"He will have been landed three or four days ere we reach him," said I.

"Hardly time for him with his small staff of officers to enrol his men and divide them into regiments. I scarce expect to find him at Taunton, though we were so directed. Hast ever heard whether there are any rich Papists in those parts?"

"I know not," I replied.

"If so there might be plate chests and silver chargers, to say nothing of my lady's jewels and other such trifles to reward a faithful soldier. What would war be without plunder! A bottle without the wine—a shell without the oyster. See the house yonder that peeps through the trees. I warrant there is a store of all good things under that roof, which you and I might have for the asking, did we but ask with our swords in our grip. You are my witness that your father did give and not lend me this horse."'

"Why say you that, then?"

"Lest he claim a half of whatever booty I may chance to gain. What saith my learned Fleming under the heading 'an qui militi equum præbuit, prædæ ab eo captæ particeps esse debeat?' which signifieth 'whether he who lendeth a horse hath a claim on the plunder of him who borroweth it.' In this discourse he cites a case wherein a Spanish commander having lent a steed to one of his captains, and the said captain having captured the general of the enemy, the commander did sue him for a half share of the twenty thousand crowns which formed the ransom of the prisoner. A like case is noted by the famous Petrinus Bellus in his book *De Re Militari*, much read by leaders of repute."[1]

"I can promise you," I answered, "that no such claim shall ever be made by my father upon you. See yonder, over the brow of the hill, how the sun shines upon the high cathedral tower, which points upwards with its great stone finger to the road that every man must travel."

[1] Note C, Appendix.

"There is good store of silver and plate in these same churches," quoth my companion. "I remember that at Leipsic, when I was serving my first campaign, I got a candlestick, which I was forced to sell to a Jew broker for a fourth of its value; yet even at his price it sufficed to fill my haversack with broad pieces."

It chanced that Saxon's mare had gained a stride or two upon mine whilst he spoke, so that I was able to get a good view of him without turning my head. I had scarce had light during our ride to see how his harness sat upon him, but now I was amazed on looking at him to mark the change which it had wrought in the man. In his civil dress his lankiness and length of limb gave him an awkward appearance, but on horseback, with his lean, gaunt face looking out from his steel cap, his breast-plate and buff jacket filling out his figure, and his high boots of untanned leather reaching to the centre of his thighs, he looked the veteran man-at-arms which he purported to be. The ease with which he sat his horse, the high, bold expression upon his face, and the great length of his arms, all marked him as one who could give a good account of himself in a fray. In his words alone I could have placed little trust, but there was that in his bearing which assured even a novice like myself that he was indeed a trained man of war.

"That is the Avon which glitters amongst the trees," I remarked. "We are about three miles from Salisbury town."

"It is a noble spire," said he, glancing at the great stone spire in front of us. "The men of old would seem to have spent all their days in piling stones upon stones. And yet we read of tough battles and shrewd blows struck, showing that they had some time for soldierly relaxation, and were not always at this mason work."

"The Church was rich in those days," I answered, shaking my bridle, for Covenant was beginning to show signs of laziness. "But here comes one who might perhaps tell us something of the war."

A horseman who bore traces of having ridden long and hard was rapidly approaching us. Both rider and steed were grey with dust and splashed with mire, yet he galloped with loosened rein and bent body, as one to whom every extra stride is of value.

"What ho, friend!" cried Saxon, reining his mare across the road so as to bar the man's passage. "What news from the West?"

"I must not tarry," the messenger gasped, slackening his speed for an instant. "I bear papers of import from Gregory Alford, Mayor of Lyme, to his Majesty's Council. The rebels make great head, and gather together like bees in the swarming time. There are some thousands in arms already, and all Devonshire is on the move. The rebel horse under Lord Grey hath been beaten back from Bridport by the red militia of Dorset, but every prickeared Whig from the Channel to the Severn is making his way to Monmouth." With this brief summary of the news he pushed his way past us and clattered on in a cloud of dust upon his mission.

"The broth is fairly on the fire, then," quoth Decimus Saxon, as we rode onwards. "Now that skins have been slit the rebels may draw their swords and fling away their scabbards, for it's either victory for them or their quarters will be dangling in every market town of the county. Heh, lad? we throw a main for a brave stake."

"Marked ye that Lord Grey had met with a check," said I.

"Pshaw! it is of no import. A cavalry skirmish at the most, for it is impossible that Monmouth could have brought his main forces to Bridport; nor would he if he could, for it is out of his track. It was one of those three-shots-and-a-gallop affrays, where each side runs away and each claims the victory. But here we are in the streets of Salisbury. Now leave the talking to me, or your wrong-headed truthfulness may lay us by the heels before our time."

Passing down the broad High Street we dismounted in front of the Blue Boar inn, and handed our tired horses over to the ostler, to whom Saxon, in a loud voice, and with many rough military oaths, gave strict injunctions as to their treatment. He then clanked into the inn parlour, and throwing himself into one chair with his feet upon another, he summoned the landlord up before him, and explained our needs in a tone and manner which should give him a due sense of our quality.

"Of your best, and at once," quoth he. "Have your largest double-couched chamber ready with your softest lavender-scented sheets, for we have had a weary ride and must rest. And hark ye, landlord, no palming off your stale, musty goods as fresh, or of your washy French wines for the true Hainault vintage. I would have you to understand that my friend here and I are men who meet with some consideration in the world, though we care not to speak our names to every underling. Deserve well of us, therefore, or it may be the worse for you."

This speech, combined with my companion's haughty manner and fierce face, had such an effect upon the landlord that he straightway sent us in the breakfast which had been prepared for three officers of the Blues, who were waiting for it in the next apartment. This kept them fasting for another half-hour, and we could hear their oaths and complaints through the partition while we were devouring their capon and venison pie. Having eaten a hearty meal and washed it down with a bottle of Burgundy we sought our room, and throwing our tired limbs upon the bed, were soon in a deep slumber.

## 9. *Of a Passage of Arms at the Blue Boar*

I HAD slept several hours when I was suddenly aroused by a prodigious crash, followed by the clash of arms and shrill cries from the lower floor. Springing to my feet I found that the bed upon which my

comrade had lain was vacant, and that the door of the apartment was opened. As the uproar still continued, and as I seemed to discern his voice in the midst of it, I caught up my sword, and without waiting to put on either headpiece, steel-breast or arm-plates, I hurried to the scene of the commotion.

The hall and passage were filled with silly maids and staring drawers, attracted, like myself, by the uproar. Through these I pushed my way into the apartment where we had breakfasted in the morning, which was a scene of the wildest disorder. The round table in the centre had been tilted over upon its side, and three broken bottles of wine, with apples, pears, nuts and the fragments of the dishes containing them, were littered over the floor. A couple of packs of cards and a dice-box lay amongst the scattered feast. Close by the door stood Decimus Saxon, with his drawn rapier in his hand and a second one beneath his feet, while facing him there was a young officer in a blue uniform, whose face was reddened with shame and anger, and who looked wildly about the room as though in search of some weapon to replace that of which he had been deprived. He might have served Cibber or Gibbons as a model for a statue of impotent rage. Two other officers dressed in the same blue uniform stood by their comrade, and as I observed that they had laid their hands upon the hilts of their swords, I took my place by Saxon's side, and stood ready to strike in should the occasion arise.

"What would the maitre d'armes say—the maitre d'escrime?" cried my companion. "Methinks he should lose his place for not teaching you to make a better show. Out on him! Is this the way that he teaches the officers of his Majesty's guard to use their weapons?"

"This raillery, sir," said the elder of the three, a squat, brown, heavy-faced man, "is not undeserved, and yet might perchance be dispensed with. I am free to say that our friend attacked you somewhat hastily, and that a

little more deference should have been shown by so young a soldier to a cavalier of your experience."

The other officer, who was a fine-looking, noble-featured man, expressed himself in much the same manner. "If this apology will serve," said he, "I am prepared to join in it. If, however, more is required, I shall be happy to take the quarrel upon myself."

"Nay, nay, take your bradawl!" Saxon answered good-humouredly, kicking the sword towards his youthful opponent. "But, mark you! when you would lunge, direct your point upwards rather than down, for otherwise you must throw your wrist open to your antagonist, who can scarce fail to disarm you. In quarte, tierce or saccoon the same holds good."

The youth sheathed his sword, but was so overcome by his own easy defeat and the contemptuous way in which his opponent had dismissed him, that he turned and hurried out of the room. Meanwhile Decimus Saxon and the two officers set to work getting the table upon its legs and restoring the room to some sort of order, in which I did what I could to assist them.

"I held three queens for the first time to-day," grumbled the soldier of fortune. "I was about to declare them when this young bantam flew at my throat. He hath likewise been the cause of our losing three flasks of most excellent muscadine. When he hath drunk as much bad wine as I have been forced to do, he will not be so hasty in wasting the good."

"He is a hot-headed youngster," the older officer replied, "and a little solitary reflection added to the lesson which you have taught him may bring him profit. As for the muscadine, that loss will soon be repaired, the more gladly as your friend here will help us to drink it."

"I was roused by the crash of weapons," said I, "and I scarce know now what has occurred."

"Why, a mere tavern brawl, which your friend's skill and judgment prevented from becoming serious. I prythee take the rush-bottomed chair, and do you, Jack,

order the wine. If our comrade hath spilled the last it is for us to furnish this, and the best the cellars contain. We have been having a hand at basset, which Mr. Saxon here playeth as skilfully as he wields the small-sword. It chanced that the luck ran against young Horsford, which doubtless made him prone to be quick in taking offence. Your friend in conversation, when discoursing of his experiences in foreign countries, remarked that the French household troops were to his mind brought to a higher state of discipline than any of our own regiments, on which Horsford fired up, and after a hot word or two they found themselves, as you have seen, at drawn bilbo. The boy hath seen no service, and is therefore over-eager to give proof of his valour."

"Wherein," said the tall officer, "he showed a want of thought towards me, for had the words been offensive it was for me, who am a senior captain and brevet-major, to take it up, and not for a slip of a cornet, who scarce knows enough to put his troop through the exercise."

"You say right, Ogilvy," said the other, resuming his seat by the table and wiping the cards which had been splashed by the wine. "Had the comparison been made by an officer of Louis's guard for the purpose of contumely and braggadocio, it would then indeed have become us to venture a passado. But when spoken by an Englishman of ripe experience it becomes a matter of instructive criticism, which should profit rather than annoy."

"True, Ambrose," the other answered. "Without such criticism a force would become stagnant, and could never hope to keep level with those continental armies, which are ever striving amongst themselves for increased efficacy."

So pleased was I at these sensible remarks on the part of the strangers, that I was right glad to have the opportunity of making their closer acquaintance over a flask of excellent wine. My father's prejudices had led me to believe that a King's officer was ever a compound of the

coxcomb and the bully, but I found on testing it that this idea, like most others which a man takes upon trust, had very little foundation upon truth. As a matter of fact, had they been dressed in less warlike garb and deprived of their swords and jack-boots, they would have passed as particularly mild-mannered men, for their conversation ran in the learned channels, and they discussed Boyle's researches in chemistry and the ponderation of air with much gravity and show of knowledge. At the same time, their brisk bearing and manly carriage showed that in cultivating the scholar they had not sacrificed the soldier.

"May I ask, sir," said one of them, addressing Saxon, "whether in your wide experiences you have ever met with any of those sages and philosophers who have conferred such honour and fame upon France and Germany?"

My companion looked ill at ease, as one who feels that he has been taken off his ground. "There was indeed one such at Nurnberg," he answered, "one Gervinus or Gervanus, who, the folk said, could turn an ingot of iron into an ingot of gold as easily as I turn this tobacco into ashes. Old Pappenheimer shut him up with a ton of metal, and threatened to put the thumbikins upon him unless he changed it into gold pieces. I can vouch for it that there was not a yellow-boy there, for I was captain of the guard and searched the whole dungeon through. To my sorrow I say it, for I had myself added a small iron brazier to the heap, thinking that if there should be any such change it would be as well that I should have some small share in the experiment."

"Alchemy, transmutation of metals and the like have been set aside by true science," remarked the taller officer. "Even old Sir Thomas Browne of Norwich, who is ever ready to plead the cause of the ancients, can find nothing to say in favour of it. From Trismegistus downwards through Albertus Magnus, Aquinas, Raymond Lullius, Basil Valentine, Paracelsus and the rest, there is not one who has left more than a cloud of words behind him."

"Nor did the rogue I mention," said Saxon. "There was another, Van Helstatt, who was a man of learning, and cast horoscopes in consideration of some small fee or honorarium. I have never met so wise a man, for he would talk of the planets and constellations as though he kept them all in his own backyard. He made no more of a comet than if it were a mouldy china orange, and he explained their nature to us, saying that they were but common stars which had had a hole knocked in them, so that their insides or viscera protruded. He was indeed a philosopher!"

"And did you ever put his skill to the test?" asked one of the officers, with a smile.

"Not I, forsooth, for I have ever kept myself clear of black magic or diablerie of the sort. My comrade Pierce Scotton, who was an Oberst in the Imperial cavalry brigade, did pay him a rose noble to have his future expounded. If I remember aright, the stars said that he was over-fond of wine and women—he had a wicked eye and a nose like a carbuncle. They foretold also that he would attain a marshal's baton and die at a ripe age, which might well have come true had he not been unhorsed a month later at Ober-Graustock, and slain by the hoofs of his own troop. Neither the planets nor even the experienced farrier of the regiment could have told that the brute would have foundered so completely."

The officers laughed heartily at my companion's views, and rose from their chairs, for the bottle was empty and the evening beginning to draw in. "We have work to do here," said the one addressed as Ogilvy. "Besides, we must find this foolish boy of ours, and tell him that it is no disgrace to be disarmed by so expert a swordsman. We have to prepare the quarters for the regiment, who will be up to join Churchill's forces not later than to-night. Ye are yourselves bound for the West, I understand?"

"We belong to the Duke of Beaufort's household," said Saxon.

"Indeed! I thought ye might belong to Portman's

yellow regiment of militia. I trust that the Duke will muster every man he can, and make play until the royal forces come up."

"How many will Churchill bring?" asked my companion carelessly.

"Eight hundred horse at the most, but my Lord Feversham will follow after with close on four thousand foot."

"We may meet on the field of battle, if not before," said I, and we bade our friendly enemies a very cordial adieu.

"A skilful equivoque that last of yours, Master Micah," quoth Decimus Saxon, "though smacking of double dealing in a truth-lover like yourself. If we meet them in battle I trust that it may be with cheváux-de-frise of pikes and morgenstierns before us, and a litter of caltrops in front of them, for Monmouth has no cavalry that could stand for a moment against the Royal Guards."

"How came you to make their acquaintance?" I asked.

"I slept a few hours, but I have learned in camps to do with little rest. Finding you in sound slumber, and hearing the rattle of the dice-box below, I came softly down and found means to join their party—whereby I am a richer man by fifteen guineas, and might have had more had that young fool not lugged out at me, or had the talk not turned afterwards upon such unseemly subjects as the laws of chemistry and the like. Prithee, what have the Horse Guards Blue to do with the laws of chemistry? Wessenburg of the Pandours would, even at his own mess table, suffer much free talk—more perhaps than fits in with the dignity of a leader. Had his officers ventured upon such matter as this, however, there would have been a drum-head court-martial, or a cashiering at the least."

Without stopping to dispute either Master Saxon's judgment or that of Wessenburg of the Pandours, I proposed that we should order an evening meal, and should employ the remaining hour or two of daylight in looking over the city. The principal sight is of course the noble cathedral, which is built in such exact proportion

that one would fail to understand its great size did one not actually enter it and pace round the long dim aisles. So solemn were its sweeping arches and the long shafts of coloured light which shone through the stained-glass windows, throwing strange shadows amongst the pillars, that even my companion, albeit not readily impressed, was silent and subdued. It was a great prayer in stone.

On our way back to the inn we passed the town lock-up, with a railed space in front of it, in which three great black-muzzled bloodhounds were stalking about, with fierce crimsoned eyes and red tongues lolling out of their mouths. They were used, a bystander told us, for the hunting down of criminals upon Salisbury Plain, which had been a refuge for rogues and thieves, until this means had been adopted for following them to their hiding-places. It was well-nigh dark before we returned to the hostel, and entirely so by the time that we had eaten our suppers, paid our reckoning, and got ready for the road.

Before we set off I bethought me of the paper which my mother had slipped into my hand on parting, and drawing it from my pouch I read it by the rushlight in our chamber. It still bore the splotches of the tears which she had dropped on it, poor soul, and ran in this wise :

" Instructions from Mistress Mary Clarke to her son Micah, on the twelfth day of June in the year of our Lord sixteen hundred and eighty-five.

" On occasion of his going forth, like David of old, to do battle with the Goliath of Papistry, which hath overshadowed and thrown into disrepute that true and reverent regard for ritual which should exist in the real Church of England, as ordained by law.

" Let these points be observed by him, namely, to wit :

" 1. Change your hosen when the occasion serves. You have two pairs in your saddle-bag, and can buy more, for the wool work is good in the West.

" 2. A hare's foot suspended round the neck driveth away colic.

"3. Say the Lord's Prayer night and morning. Also read the scriptures, especially Job, the Psalms and the Gospel according to St. Matthew.

"4. Daffy's elixir possesses extraordinary powers in purifying the blood and working off all phlegms, humours, vapours or rheums. The dose is five drops. A small phial of it will be found in the barrel of your left pistol, with wadding around it lest it come to harm.

"5. Ten golden pieces are sewn into the hem of your under doublet. Touch them not, save as a last resource.

"6. Fight stoutly for the Lord, and yet I pray you, Micah, be not too forward in battle, but let others do their turn also. Press not into the heart of the fray, and yet flinch not from the standard of the Protestant faith.

"And oh, Micah, my own bright boy, come back safe to your mother, or my very heart will break!

"And the deponent will ever pray."

The sudden gush of tenderness in the last few lines made the tears spring to my eyes, and yet I could scarce forbear from smiling at the whole composition, for my dear mother had little time to cultivate the graces of style, and it was evidently her thought that in order to make her instructions binding it was needful to express them in some sort of legal form. I had little time to think over her advice, however, for I had scarce finished reading it before the voice of Decimus Saxon, and the clink of the horses' hoofs upon the cobble-stones of the yard, informed me that all was ready for our departure.

## 10. *Of our Perilous Adventure on the Plain*

WE were not half a mile from the town before the roll of kettle drums and the blare of bugles swelling up musically through the darkness announced the arrival of the regiment of horse which our friends at the inn had been expecting.

"It is as well, perhaps," said Saxon, "that we gave them the slip, for that young springald might have smelled a rat and played us some ill-turn. Have you chanced to see my silken kerchief?"

"Not I," I answered.

"Nay, then, it must have fallen from my bosom during our ruffle. I can ill afford to leave it, for I travel light in such matters. Eight hundred men, quoth the major, and three thousand to follow. Should I meet this same Oglethorpe or Ogilvy when the little business is over, I shall read him a lesson on thinking less of chemistry and more of the need of preserving military precautions. It is well always to be courteous to strangers and to give them information, but it is well also that the information should be false."

"As his may have been," I suggested.

"Nay, nay, the words came too glibly from his tongue. So ho, Chloe, so ho! She is full of oats and would fain gallop, but it is so plaguy dark that we can scarce see where we are going."

We had been trotting down the broad high-road skimmering vaguely white in the gloom, with the shadowy trees dancing past us on either side, scarce outlined against the dark background of cloud. We were now coming upon the eastern edge of the great plain, which extends forty miles one way and twenty the other, over the greater part of Wiltshire and past the boundaries of Somersetshire. The main road to the West skirts this wilderness, but we had agreed to follow a less important track, which would lead us to our goal, though in a more tedious manner. Its insignificance would, we hoped, prevent it from being guarded by the King's horse. We had come to the point where this by-road branches off from the main highway when we heard the clatter of horses' hoofs behind us.

"Here comes someone who is not afraid to gallop," I remarked.

"Halt here in the shadow!" cried Saxon, in a short,

quick whisper. "Have your blade loose in the scabbard. He must have a set errand who rides so fast o' nights."

Looking down the road we could make out through the darkness a shadowy blur which soon resolved itself into man and horse. The rider was well-nigh abreast of us before he was aware of our presence, when he pulled up his steed in a strange, awkward fashion, and faced round in our direction.

"Is Micah Clarke there?" he said, in a voice which was strangely familiar to my ears.

"I am Micah Clarke," said I.

"And I am Reuben Lockarby," cried our pursuer, in a mock heroic voice. "Ah, Micah lad, I'd embrace you were it not that I should assuredly fall out of the saddle if I attempted it, and perchance drag you along. That sudden pull up well-nigh landed me on the roadway. I have been sliding off and clambering on ever since I bade good-bye to Havant. Sure, such a horse for slipping from under one was never bestridden by man."

"Good Heavens, Reuben!" I cried in amazement, "what brings you all this way from home?"

"The very same cause which brings you, Micah, and also Don Decimo Saxon, late of the Solent, whom methinks I see in the shadow behind you. How fares it, oh illustrious one?"

"It is you, then, young cock of the woods!" growled Saxon, in no very overjoyed voice.

"No less a person," said Reuben. "And now, my gay cavalieros, round with your horses and trot on your way, for there is no time to be lost. We ought all to be at Taunton to-morrow."

"But, my dear Reuben," said I, "it cannot be that you are coming with us to join Monmouth. What would your father say? This is no holiday jaunt, but one that may have a sad and stern ending. At the best, victory can only come through much bloodshed and danger. At the worst, we are as like to wind up upon a scaffold as not."

"Forwards, lads, forwards!" cried he, spurring on his

horse, "it is all arranged and settled. I am about to offer my august person, together with a sword which I borrowed and a horse which I stole, to his most Protestant highness, James, Duke of Monmouth."

"But how comes it all?" I asked, as we rode on together. "It warms my very heart to see you, but you were never concerned either in religion or in politics. Whence, then, this sudden resolution?"

"Well, truth to tell," he replied, "I am neither a king's man nor a duke's man, nor would I give a button which sat upon the throne. I do not suppose that either one or the other would increase the custom of the Wheatsheaf, or want Reuben Lockarby for a councillor. I am a Micah Clarke man, though, from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet; and if he rides to the wars, may the plague strike me if I don't stick to his elbow!" He raised his hand excitedly as he spoke, and instantly losing his balance, he shot into a dense clump of bushes by the roadside whence his legs flapped helplessly in the darkness.

"That makes the tenth," said he, scrambling out and clambering into his saddle once more. "My father used to tell me not to sit a horse too closely. 'A gentle rise and fall,' said the old man. Egad, there is more fall than rise, and it is anything but gentle."

"Od's truth!" exclaimed Saxon. "How in the name of all the saints in the calendar do you expect to keep your seat in the presence of an enemy if you lose it on a peaceful high-road?"

"I can but try, my illustrious," he answered, rearranging his ruffled clothing. "Perchance the sudden and unexpected character of my movements may disconcert the said enemy."

"Well, well, there may be more truth in that than you are aware of," quoth Saxon, riding upon Lockarby's bridle arm, so that there was scarce room for him to fall between us. "I had sooner fight a man like that young fool at the inn, who knew a little of the use of his weapon,

than one like Micah here, or yourself, who know nothing. You can tell what the one is after, but the other will invent a system of his own which will serve his turn for the nonce. Ober-hauptmann Muller was reckoned to be the finest player at the small-sword in the Kaiser's army, and could for a wager snick any button from an opponent's vest without cutting the cloth. Yet was he slain in an encounter with Fahnführer Zollner, who was a cornet in our own Pandour corps, and who knew as much of the rapier as you do of horsemanship. For the rapier, be it understood, is designed to thrust and not to cut, so that no man wielding it ever thinks of guarding a side-stroke. But Zollner, being a long-armed man, smote his antagonist across the face with his weapon as though it had been a cane, and then, ere he had time to recover himself, fairly pinked him. Doubtless if the matter were to do again, the Ober-hauptmann would have got his thrust in sooner, but as it was, no explanation or excuse could get over the fact that the man was dead."

"If want of knowledge maketh a dangerous swordsman," quoth Reuben, "then am I even more deadly than the unpronounceable gentleman whom you have mentioned. To continue my story, however, which I broke off in order to step down from my horse, I found out early in the morning that ye were gone, and Zachary Palmer was able to tell me whither. I made up my mind, therefore, that I would out into the world also. To this end I borrowed a sword from Solomon Sprent, and my father having gone to Gosport, I helped myself to the best nag in his stables—for I have too much respect for the old man to allow one of his flesh and blood to go ill-provided to the wars. All day I have ridden, since early morning, being twice stopped on suspicion of being ill-affected, but having the good luck to get away each time. I knew that I was close at your heels, for I found them searching for you at the Salisbury Inn."

Decimus whistled. "Searching for us?" said he.

"Yes. It seems that they had some notion that ye

were not what ye professed to be, so the inn was surrounded as I passed, but none knew which road ye had taken."

"Said I not so?" cried Saxon. "That young viper hath stirred up the regiment against us. We must push on, for they may send a party on our track."

"We are off the main road now," I remarked; "even should they pursue us, they would be unlikely to follow this side track."

"Yet it would be wise to show them a clean pair of heels," said Saxon, spurring his mare into a gallop. Lockarby and I followed his example, and we all three rode swiftly along the rough moorland track.

We passed through scattered belts of pinewood, where the wild cat howled and the owl screeched, and across broad stretches of fenland and moor, where the silence was only broken by the booming cry of the bittern or the fluttering of wild duck far above our heads. The road was in parts overgrown with brambles, and was so deeply rutted and so studded with sharp and dangerous hollows, that our horses came more than once upon their knees. In one place the wooden bridge which led over a stream had broken down, and no attempt had been made to repair it, so that we were compelled to ride our horses girth deep through the torrent. At first some scattered lights had shown that we were in the neighbourhood of human habitations, but these became fewer as we advanced, until the last died away and we found ourselves upon the desolate moor which stretched away in unbroken solitude to the shadowy horizon. The moon had broken through the clouds and now shone hazily through wreaths of mist, throwing a dim light over the wild scene, and enabling us to keep to the track, which was not fenced in in any way and could scarce be distinguished from the plain around it.

We had slackened our pace under the impression that all fear of pursuit was at an end, and Reuben was amusing us by an account of the excitement which had been caused

in Havant by our disappearance, when through the stillness of the night a dull, muffled rat-tat-tat struck upon my ear. At the same moment Saxon sprang from his horse and listened intently with sidelong head.

"Boot and saddle!" he cried, springing into his seat again. "They are after us as sure as fate. A dozen troopers by the sound. We must shake them off, or good-bye to Monmouth."

"Give them their heads," I answered, and striking spurs into our steeds, we thundered on through the darkness. Covenant and Chloe were as fresh as could be wished, and soon settled down into a long springy gallop. Our friend's horse, however, had been travelling all day, and its long-drawn, laboured breathing showed that it could not hold out for long. Through the clatter of our horses' hoofs I could still from time to time hear the ominous murmur from behind us.

"This will never do, Reuben," said I anxiously, as the weary creature stumbled, and the rider came perilously near to shooting over its head.

"The old horse is nearly foundered," he answered ruefully. "We are off the road now, and the rough ground is too much for her."

"Yes, we are off the track," cried Saxon over his shoulder—for he led us by a few paces. "Bear in mind that the Bluecoats have been on the march all day, so that their horses may also be blown. How in Himmel came they to know which road we took?"

As if in answer to his ejaculation, there rose out of the still night behind us a single, clear, bell-like note, swelling and increasing in volume until it seemed to fill the whole air with its harmony.

"A bloodhound!" cried Saxon.

A second sharper, keener note, ending in an unmistakable howl, answered the first.

"Another of them," said he. "They have loosed the brutes that we saw near the Cathedral. Gad! we little thought when we peered over the rails at them, a few

hours ago, that they would so soon be on our own track. Keep a firm knee and a steady seat, for a slip now would be your last."

"Holy mother!" cried Reuben, "I had steeled myself to die in battle—but to be dog's-meat! It is something outside the contract."

"They hold them in leash," said Saxon, between his teeth, "else they would outstrip the horses and be lost in the darkness. Could we but come on running water we might put them off our track."

"My horse cannot hold on at this pace for more than a very few minutes," Reuben cried. "If I break down, do ye go on, for ye must remember that they are upon your track and not mine. They have found cause for suspicion of the two strangers of the inn, but none of me."

"Nay, Reuben, we shall stand or fall together," said I sadly, for at every step his horse grew more and more feeble. "In this darkness they will make little distinction between persons."

"Keep a good heart," shouted the old soldier, who was now leading us by twenty yards or more. "We can hear them because the wind blows from that way, but it's odds whether they have heard us. Methinks they slacken in their pursuit."

"The sound of their horses has indeed grown fainter," said I joyfully.

"So faint that I can hear it no longer," my companion cried.

We reined up our panting steeds and strained our ears, but not a sound could we hear save the gentle murmur of the breeze amongst the whin-bushes, and the melancholy cry of the night-jar. Behind us the broad rolling plain, half light and half shadow, stretched away to the dim horizon without sign of life or movement.

"We have either outstripped them completely, or else they have given up the chase," said I. "What ails the horses that they should tremble and snort?"

"My poor beast is nearly done for," Reuben remarked,

leaning forward and passing his hand down the creature's reeking neck.

"For all that we cannot rest," said Saxon. "We may not be out of danger yet. Another mile or two may shake us clear. But I like it not."

"Like not what?"

"These horses and their terrors. The beasts can at times both see and hear more than we, as I could show by divers examples drawn from mine own experience on the Danube and in the Palatinate, were the time and place more fitting. Let us on, then, before we rest."

The weary horses responded bravely to the call, and struggled onwards over the broken ground for a considerable time. At last we were thinking of pulling up in good earnest, and of congratulating ourselves upon having tired out our pursuers, when of a sudden the bell-like baying broke upon our ears far louder than it had been before—so loud, indeed, that it was evident that the dogs were close upon our heels.

"The accursed hounds!" cried Saxon, putting spurs to his horse and shooting ahead of us; "I feared as much. They have freed them from the leash. There is no escape from the devils, but we can choose the spot where we shall make our stand."

"Come on, Reuben," I shouted. "We have only to reckon with the dogs now. Their masters have let them loose, and turned back for Salisbury."

"Pray heaven they break their necks before they get there!" he cried. "They set dogs on us as though we were rats in a cock-pit. Yet they call England a Christian country! It's no use, Micah. Poor Dido can't stir another step."

As he spoke, the sharp fierce bay of the hounds rose again, clear and stern on the night air, swelling up from a low hoarse growl to a high angry yelp. There seemed to be a ring of exultation in their wild cry, as though they knew that their quarry was almost run to earth.

"Not another step!" said Reuben Lockarby, pulling

up and drawing his sword. "If I must fight, I shall fight here."

"There could be no better place," I replied. Two great jagged rocks rose before us, jutting abruptly out of the ground, and leaving a space of twelve or fifteen feet between them. Through this gap we rode, and I shouted loudly for Saxon to join us. His horse, however, had been steadily gaining upon ours, and at the renewed alarm had darted off again, so that he was already some hundred yards from us. It was useless to summon him, even could he hear our voices, for the hounds would be upon us before he could return.

"Never heed him," I said hurriedly. "Do you rein your steed behind that rock, and I behind this. They will serve to break the force of the attack. Dismount not, but strike down, and strike hard."

On either side in the shadow of the rock we waited in silence for our terrible pursuers. Looking back at it, my dear children, I cannot but think that it was a great trial on such young soldiers as Reuben and myself to be put, on the first occasion of drawing our swords, into such a position. For I have found, and others have confirmed my opinion, that of all dangers that a man is called upon to face, that arising from savage and determined animals is the most unnerving. For with men there is ever the chance that some trait of weakness or of want of courage may give you an advantage over them, but with fierce beasts there is no such hope. We knew that the creatures to whom we were opposed could never be turned from our throats while there was breath in their bodies. One feels in one's heart, too, that the combat is an unequal one, for your life is precious at least to your friends, while their lives, what are they? All this and a great deal more passed swiftly through our minds as we sat with drawn swords, soothing our trembling horses as best we might, and waiting for the coming of the hounds.

Nor had we long to wait. Another long, deep, thunderous bay sounded in our ears, followed by a profound

silence, broken only by the quick shivering breathing of the horses. Then suddenly, and noiselessly, a great tawny brute, with its black muzzle to the earth, and its overhung cheeks flapping on either side, sprang into the band of moonlight between the rocks, and on into the shadow beyond. It never paused or swerved for an instant, but pursued its course straight onwards without a glance to right or to left. Close behind it came a second, and behind that a third, all of enormous size, and looking even larger and more terrible than they were in the dim shifting light. Like the first, they took no notice of our presence, but bounded on along the trail left by Decimus Saxon.

The first and second I let pass, for I hardly realised that they so completely overlooked us. When the third, however, sprang out into the moonlight, I drew my right-hand pistol from its holster, and resting its long barrel across my left forearm, I fired at it as it passed. The bullet struck the mark, for the brute gave a fierce howl of rage and pain, but true to the scent, it never turned or swerved. Lockarby fired also as it disappeared among the brushwood, but with no apparent effect. So swiftly and so noiselessly did the great hounds pass, that they might have been grim silent spirits of the night, the phantom dogs of Herne the hunter, but for that one fierce yelp which followed my shot.

"What brutes!" my companion ejaculated; "what shall we do, Micah?"

"They have clearly been laid on Saxon's trail," said I. "We must follow them up, or they will be too many for him. Can you hear anything of our pursuers?"

"Nothing."

"They have given up the chase, then, and let the dogs loose as a last resource. Doubtless the creatures are trained to return to the town. But we must push on, Reuben, if we are to help our companion."

"One more spurt, then, little Dido," cried Reuben; "can you muster strength for one more? Nay, I have

not the heart to put spurs to you. If you can do it, I know you will."

The brave mare snorted, as though she understood her rider's words, and stretched her weary limbs into a gallop. So stoutly did she answer the appeal that, though I pressed Covenant to his topmost speed, she was never more than a few strides behind him.

"He took this direction," said I, peering anxiously out into the darkness. "He can scarce have gone far, for he spoke of making a stand. Or, perhaps, finding that we are not with him, he may trust to the speed of his horse."

"What chance hath a horse of outstripping these brutes?" Reuben answered. "They must run him to earth, and he knows it. Hullo! what have we here?"

A dark dim form lay stretched in the moonlight in front of us. It was the dead body of a hound—the one evidently at which I had fired.

"There is one of them disposed of," I cried joyously; "we have but two to settle with now."

As I spoke we heard the crack of two pistol-shots some little distance to the left. Heading our steeds in that direction, we pressed on at the top of our speed. Presently out of the darkness in front of us there arose such a roaring and a yelping as sent the hearts into our mouths. It was not a single cry, such as the hounds had uttered when they were on the scent, but a continuous deep-mouthed uproar, so fierce and so prolonged, that we could not doubt that they had come to the end of their run.

"Pray God that they have not got him down!" cried Reuben, in a faltering voice.

The same thought had crossed my own mind, for I have heard a similar though lesser din come from a pack of otter hounds when they had overtaken their prey and were tearing it to pieces. Sick at heart, I drew my sword with the determination that, if we were too late to save our companion, we should at least revenge him upon the four-footed fiends. Bursting through a thick belt of

scrub and tangled gorse bushes, we came upon a scene so unlike what we had expected that we pulled up our horses in astonishment.

A circular clearing lay in front of us, brightly illuminated by the silvery moonshine. In the centre of this rose a giant stone, one of those high dark columns which are found all over the plain, and especially in the parts round Stonehenge. It could not have been less than fifteen feet in height, and had doubtless been originally straight, but wind and weather, or the crumbling of the soil, had gradually suffered it to tilt over until it inclined at such an angle that an active man might clamber up to the summit. On the top of this ancient stone, cross-legged and motionless, like some strange carved idol of former days, sat Decimus Saxon, puffing sedately at the long pipe which was ever his comfort in moments of difficulty. Beneath him, at the base of the monolith, as our learned men call them, the two great bloodhounds were rearing and springing, clambering over each other's backs in their frenzied and futile eagerness to reach the impassive figure perched above them, while they gave vent to their rage and disappointment in the hideous uproar which had suggested such terrible thoughts to our mind.

We had little time, however, to gaze at this strange scene, for upon our appearance the hounds abandoned their helpless attempts to reach Saxon, and flew, with a fierce snarl of satisfaction, at Reuben and myself. One great brute, with flaring eyes and yawning mouth, his white fangs glistening in the moonlight, sprang at my horse's neck ; but I met him fair with a single sweeping cut, which shore away his muzzle, and left him wallowing and writhing in a pool of blood. Reuben, meanwhile, had spurred his horse forward to meet his assailant ; but the poor tired steed flinched at the sight of the fierce hound, and pulled up suddenly, with the result that her rider rolled headlong into the very jaws of the animal. It might have gone ill with Reuben had he been left to his own resources. At the most he could only have kept the cruel teeth from his

throat for a very few moments ; but seeing the mischance, I drew my remaining pistol, and springing from my horse, discharged it full into the creature's flank while it struggled with my friend. With a last yell of rage and pain it brought its fierce jaws together in one wild impotent snap, and then sank slowly over upon its side, while Reuben crawled from beneath it, scared and bruised, but none the worse otherwise for his perilous adventure.

" I owe you one for that, Micah," he said gratefully. " I may live to do as much for you."

" And I owe ye both one," said Saxon, who had scrambled down from his place of refuge. " I pay my debts, too, whether for good or evil. I might have stayed up there until I had eaten my jack-boots, for all the chance I had of ever getting down again. Sancta Maria ! but that was a shrewd blow of yours, Clarke ! The brute's head flew in halves like a rotten pumpkin. No wonder that they stuck to my track, for I have left both my spare girth and my kerchief behind me, which would serve to put them on Chloe's scent as well as mine own."

" And where is Chloe ? " I asked, wiping my sword.

" Chloe had to look out for herself. I found the brutes gaining on me, you see, and I let drive at them with my barkers ; but with a horse flying at twenty mile an hour, what chance is there for a single slug finding its way home ? Things looked black then, for I had no time to reload ; and the rapier, though the king of weapons in the duello, is scarce strong enough to rely upon on an occasion like this. As luck would have it, just as I was fairly puzzled, what should I come across but this handy stone, which the good priests of old did erect, as far as I can see, for no other purpose than to provide worthy cavalieros with an escape from such ignoble and scurvy enemies. I had no time to spare in clambering up it, for I had to tear my heel out of the mouth of the foremost of them, and might have been dragged down by it had he not found my spur too tough a morsel for his chewing. But

surely one of my bullets must have reached its mark." Lighting the touch-paper in his tobacco-box, he passed it over the body of the hound which had attacked me, and then of the other.

"Why, this one is riddled like a sieve," he cried. "What do you load your petronels with, good Master Clarke?"

"With two leaden slugs."

"Yet two leaden slugs have made a score of holes at the least! And of all things in this world, here is the neck of a bottle stuck in the brute's hide!"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "I remember. My dear mother packed a bottle of Daffy's elixir in the barrel of my pistol."

"And you have shot it into the bloodhound!" roared Reuben. "Ho! ho! When they hear that tale at the tap of the Wheatsheaf, there will be some throats dry with laughter. Saved my life by shooting a dog with a bottle of Daffy's elixir!"

"And a bullet as well, Reuben, though I dare warrant the gossips will soon contrive to leave that detail out. It is a mercy the pistol did not burst. But what do you propose to do now, Master Saxon?"

"Why, to recover my mare if it can anywise be done," said the adventurer. "Though on this vast moor, in the dark, she will be as difficult to find as a Scotsman's breeches or a flavourless line in *Hudibras*."

"And Reuben Lockarby's steed can go no further," I remarked. "But do mine eyes deceive me, or is there a glimmer of light over yonder?"

"A Will-o'-the-wisp," said Saxon.

"'An *ignis fatuus* that bewitches,
And leads men into pools and ditches.'

Yet I confess that it burns steady and clear, as though it came from lamp, candle, rushlight, lanthorn or other human agency."

"Where there is light there is life," cried Reuben.

"Let us make for it, and see what chance of shelter we may find there."

"It cannot come from our dragoon friends," remarked Decimus. "A murrain on them! how came they to guess our true character; or was it on the score of some insult to the regiment that that young Fahnführer has set them on our track? If I have him at my sword's point again, he shall not come off so free. Well, do ye lead your horses, and we shall explore this light, since no better course is open to us."

Picking our way across the moor, we directed our course for the bright point which twinkled in the distance; and as we advanced we hazarded a thousand conjectures as to whence it could come. If it were a human dwelling, what sort of being could it be who, not content with living in the heart of this wilderness, had chosen a spot so far removed from the ordinary tracks which crossed it? The roadway was miles behind us, and it was probable that no one save those driven by such a necessity as that which had overtaken us would ever find themselves in that desolate region. No hermit could have desired an abode more completely isolated from all communion with his kind.

As we approached we saw that the light did indeed come from a small cottage, which was built in a hollow, so as to be invisible from any quarter save that from which we approached it. In front of this humble dwelling a small patch of ground had been cleared of shrub, and in the centre of this little piece of sward our missing steed stood grazing at her leisure upon the scanty herbage. The same light which had attracted us had doubtless caught her eye, and drawn her towards it by hopes of oats and of water. With a grunt of satisfaction Saxon resumed possession of his lost property, and leading her by the bridle, approached the door of the solitary cottage.

## II. *Of the Lonely Man and the Gold Chest*

THE strong yellow glare which had attracted us across the moor found its way out through a single narrow slit alongside the door which served the purpose of a rude window. As we advanced towards it the light changed suddenly to red, and that again to green, throwing a ghastly pallor over our faces, and especially heightening the cadaverous effect of Saxon's austere features. At the same time we became aware of a most subtle and noxious odour which poisoned the air all round the cottage. This combination of portents in so lonely a spot worked upon the old man-at-arms' superstitious feelings to such an extent that he paused and looked back at us inquiringly. Both Reuben and I were determined, however, to carry the adventure through, so he contented himself with falling a little behind us, and pattering to himself some exorcism appropriate to the occasion. Walking up to the door, I rapped upon it with the hilt of my sword and announced that we were weary travellers who were seeking a night's shelter.

The first result of my appeal was a sound as of someone bustling rapidly about, with the clinking of metal and noise of the turning of locks. This died away into a hush, and I was about to knock once more when a crackling voice greeted us from the other side of the door.

"There is little shelter here, gentlemen, and less provisions," it said. "It is but six miles to Amesbury, where at the Cecil Arms ye shall find, I doubt not, all that is needful for man and for beast."

"Nay, nay, mine invisible friend," quoth Saxon, who was much reassured by the sound of a human voice, "this is surely but a scurvy reception. One of our horses is completely foundered, and none of them are in very good plight, so that we could no more make for the Cecil Arms at Amesbury than for the Gruner Mann at Lubeck. I

prithee, therefore, that you will allow us to pass the remainder of the night under your roof."

At this appeal there was much creaking of locks and rasping of bolts, which ended in the door swinging slowly open, and disclosing the person who had addressed us.

By the strong light which shone out from behind him we could see that he was a man of venerable aspect, with snow-white hair and a countenance which bespoke a thoughtful and yet fiery nature. The high pensive brow and flowing beard smacked of the philosopher, but the keen sparkling eye, the curved aquiline nose, and the lithe upright figure which the weight of years had been unable to bend, were all suggestive of the soldier. His lofty bearing, and his rich though severe costume of black velvet, were at strange variance with the humble nature of the abode which he had chosen for his dwelling-place.

"Ho!" said he, looking keenly at us. "Two of ye unused to war, and the other an old soldier. Ye have been pursued, I see!"

"How did you know that, then?" asked Decimus Saxon.

"Ah, my friend, I too have served in my time. My eyes are not so old but that they can tell when horses have been spurred to the utmost, nor is it difficult to see that this young giant's sword hath been employed in something less innocent than toasting bacon. Your story, however, can keep. Every true soldier thinks first of his horse, so I pray that you will tether yours without, since I have neither ostler nor serving man to whom I may entrust them."

The strange dwelling into which we presently entered had been prolonged into the side of the little hill against which it had been built, so as to form a very long narrow hall. The ends of this great room, as we entered, were wrapped in shadow, but in the centre was a bright glare from a brazier full of coals, over which a brass pipkin was

suspended. Beside the fire a long wooden table was plentifully covered with curved glass flasks, basins, tubings and other instruments of which I knew neither the name nor the purpose. A long row of bottles containing various coloured liquids and powders were arranged along a shelf, whilst above it another shelf bore a goodly array of brown volumes. For the rest there was a second rough-hewn table, a pair of cupboards, three or four wooden settles, and several large screens pinned to the walls and covered all over with figures and symbols, of which I could make nothing. The vile smell which had greeted us outside was very much worse within the chamber, and arose apparently from the fumes of the boiling, bubbling contents of the brazen pot.

"Ye behold in me," said our host, bowing courteously to us, "the last of an ancient family. I am Sir Jacob Clancing of Snellaby Hall."

"Smellaby it should be, methinks," whispered Reuben, in a voice which fortunately did not reach the ears of the old knight.

"I pray that ye be seated," he continued, "and that ye lay aside your plates and headpieces, and remove your boots. Consider this to be your inn, and behave as freely. Ye will hold me excused if for a moment I turn my attention from you to this operation on which I am engaged, which will not brook delay."

Saxon began forthwith to undo his buckles and to pull off his harness, while Reuben, throwing himself into a chair, appeared to be too weary to do more than unfasten his sword-belt. For my own part, I was glad to throw off my gear, but I kept my attention all the while upon the movements of our host, whose graceful manners and learned appearance had aroused my curiosity and admiration.

He approached the evil-smelling pot, and stirred it up with a face which indicated so much anxiety that it was clear that he had pushed his courtesy to us so far as to risk the ruin of some important experiment. Dipping

his ladle into the compound, he scooped some up, and then poured it slowly back into the vessel, showing a yellow turbid fluid. The appearance of it evidently reassured him, for the look of anxiety cleared away from his features, and he uttered an exclamation of relief. Taking a handful of a whitish powder from a trencher at his side he threw it into the pipkin, the contents of which began immediately to seethe and froth over into the fire, causing the flames to assume the strange greenish hue which we had observed before entering. This treatment had the effect of clearing the fluid, for the chemist was enabled to pour off into a bottle a quantity of perfectly watery transparent liquid, while a brownish sediment remained in the vessel, and was emptied out upon a sheet of paper. This done, Sir Jacob Clancing pushed aside all his bottles, and turned towards us with a smiling face and a lighter air.

"We shall see what my poor larder can furnish forth," said he. "Meanwhile, this odour may be offensive to your untrained nostrils, so we shall away with it." He threw a few grains of some balsamic resin into the brazier, which at once filled the chamber with a most agreeable perfume. He then laid a white cloth upon the table, and taking from a cupboard a dish of cold trout and a large meat pasty, he placed them upon it, and invited us to draw up our settles and set to work.

"I would that I had more toothsome fare to offer ye," said he. "Were we at Snellaby Hall, ye should not be put off in this scurvy fashion, I promise ye. This may serve, however, for hungry men, and I can still lay my hands upon a brace of bottles of the old Alicant." So saying, he brought a pair of flasks out from a recess, and having seen us served and our glasses filled, he seated himself in a high-backed oaken chair and presided with old-fashioned courtesy over our feast. As we supped, I explained to him what our errand was, and narrated the adventures of the night, without making mention of our destination.

"You are bound for Monmouth's camp," he said quietly, when I had finished, looking me full in the face with his keen dark eyes. "I know it, but ye need not fear lest I betray you, even were it in my power. What chance, think ye, hath the Duke against the King's forces?"

"As much chance as a farmyard fowl against a spurred gamecock, did he rely only on those whom he hath with him," Saxon answered. "He hath reason to think, however, that all England is like a powder magazine, and he hopes to be the spark to set it alight."

The old man shook his head sadly. "The King hath great resources," he remarked. "Where is Monmouth to get his trained soldiers?"

"There is the militia," I suggested.

"And there are many of the old parliamentary breed, who are not too far gone to strike a blow for their belief," said Saxon. "Do you but get half-a-dozen broad-brimmed, snuffle-nosed preachers into a camp, and the whole Presbytery tribe will swarm round them like flies on a honey-pot. No recruiting sergeants will ever raise such an army as did Noll's preachers in the eastern counties, where the promise of a seat by the throne was thought of more value than a ten-pound bounty. I would I could pay mine own debts with these same promises."

"I should judge from your speech, sir," our host observed, "that you are not one of the sectaries. How comes it, then, that you are throwing the weight of your sword and your experience into the weaker scale?"

"For the very reason that it is the weaker scale," said the soldier of fortune. "I should gladly have gone with my brother to the Guinea coast and had no say in the matter one way or the other, beyond delivering letters and such trifles. Since I must be doing something, I choose to fight for Protestantism and Monmouth. It is nothing to me whether James Stuart or James Walters sits upon the throne, but the court and army of the King

are already made up. Now, since Monmouth hath both courtiers and soldiers to find, it may well happen that he may be glad of my services and reward them with honourable preferment."

"Your logic is sound," said our host, "save only that you have omitted the very great chance which you will incur of losing your head if the Duke's party are borne down by the odds against them."

"A man cannot throw a main without putting a stake on the board," said Saxon.

"And you, young sir," the old man asked, "what has caused you to take a hand in so dangerous a game?"

"I come of a Roundhead stock," I answered, "and my folk have always fought for the liberty of the people and the humbling of tyranny. I come in the place of my father."

"And you, sir?" our questioner continued, looking at Reuben.

"I have come to see something of the world, and to be with my friend and companion here," he replied.

"And I have stronger reasons than any of ye," Sir Jacob cried, "for appearing in arms against any man who bears the name of Stuart. Had I not a mission here which cannot be neglected, I might myself be tempted to hie westward with ye, and put these grey hairs of mine once more into the rough clasp of a steel headpiece. For where now is the noble castle of Snellaby, and where those glades and woods amidst which the Clancings have grown up, and lived and died, ere ever Norman William set his foot on English soil? A man of trade—a man who, by the sweat of his half-starved workers, had laid by ill-gotten wealth, is now the owner of all that fair property. Should I, the last of the Clancings, show my face upon it, I might be handed over to the village beadle as a trespasser, or scourged off it perhaps by the bowstrings of insolent huntsmen."

"And how comes so sudden a reverse of fortune?" I asked.

"Fill up your glasses!" cried the old man, suiting the action to the word. "Here's a toast for you! Perdition to all faithless princes! How came it about, ye ask? Why, when the troubles came upon the first Charles, I stood by him as though he had been mine own brother. At Edgehill, at Naseby, in twenty skirmishes and battles, I fought stoutly in his cause, maintaining a troop of horse at my own expense, formed from among my own gardeners, grooms and attendants. Then the military chest ran low, and money must be had to carry on the contest. My silver chargers and candlesticks were thrown into the melting-pot, as were those of many another cavalier. They went in metal and they came out as troopers and pikemen. So we tided over a few months until again the purse was empty, and again we filled it amongst us. This time it was the home farm and the oak trees that went. Then came Marston Moor, and every penny and man was needed to repair that great disaster. I flinched not, but gave everything. This boiler of soap, a prudent, fat-cheeked man, had kept himself free from civil broils, and had long had a covetous eye upon the castle. It was his ambition, poor worm, to be a gentleman, as though a gabled roof and a crumbling house could ever make him that. I let him have his way, however, and threw the sum received, every guinea of it, into the King's coffers. And so I held out until the final ruin of Worcester, when I covered the retreat of the young prince, and may indeed say that save in the Isle of Man I was the last Royalist who upheld the authority of the crown. The Commonwealth had set a price upon my head as a dangerous malignant, so I was forced to take my passage in a Harwich ketch, and arrived in the Lowlands with nothing save my sword and a few broad pieces in my pocket."

"A cavalier might do well even then," remarked Saxon. "There are ever wars in Germany where a man is worth his hire. When the North Germans are not in arms against the Swedes or French, the South Germans are sure to be having a turn with the janissaries."

"I did indeed take arms for a time in the employ of the United Provinces, by which means I came face to face once more with mine old foes, the Roundheads. Oliver had lent Reynolds's brigade to the French, and right glad was Louis to have the service of such seasoned troops. 'Fore God, I stood on the counterscarp at Dunkirk, and I found myself, when I should have been helping the defence, actually cheering on the attack. My very heart rose when I saw the bull-dog fellows clambering up the breach with their pikes at the trail, and never quavering in their psalm-tune, though the bullets sung around them as thick as bees in the hiving time. And when they did come to close hugs with the Flemings, I tell you they set up such a rough cry of soldierly joy that my pride in them as Englishmen overtopped my hatred of them as foes. However, my soldiering was of no great duration, for peace was soon declared, and I then pursued the study of chemistry, for which I had a strong turn, first with Vorhaager of Leyden, and later with De Huy of Strasburg, though I fear that these weighty names are but sounds to your ears."

"Truly," said Saxon, "there seemeth to be some fatal attraction in this same chemistry, for we met two officers of the Blue Guards in Salisbury, who, though they were stout soldierly men in other respects, had also a weakness in that direction."

"Ha!" cried Sir Jacob, with interest. "To what school did they belong?"

"Nay, I know nothing of the matter," Saxon answered, "save that they denied that Gervinus of Nurnberg, whom I guarded in prison, or any other man, could transmute metals."

"For Gervinus I cannot answer," said our host, "but for the possibility of it I can pledge my knightly word. However, of that anon. The time came at last when the second Charles was invited back to his throne, and all of us, from Jeffrey Hudson, the court dwarf, up to my Lord Clarendon, were in high feather at the hope of

regaining our own once more. For my own claim, I let it stand for some time, thinking that it would be a more graceful act for the King to help a poor cavalier who had ruined himself for the sake of his family without solicitation on his part. I waited and waited, but no word came, so at last I betook myself to the levée and was duly presented to him. 'Ah,' said he, greeting me with the cordiality which he could assume so well, 'you are, if I mistake not, Sir Jasper Killigrew?' 'Nay, your Majesty,' I answered, 'I am Sir Jacob Clancing, formerly of Snellaby Hall, in Staffordshire'; and with that I reminded him of Worcester fight and of many passages which had occurred to us in common. 'Od's fish!' he cried, 'how could I be so forgetful! And how are all at Snellaby?' I then explained to him that the Hall had passed out of my hands, and told him in a few words the state to which I had been reduced. His face clouded over and his manner chilled to me at once. 'They are all on to me for money and for places,' he said, 'and truly the Commons are so niggardly to me that I can scarce be generous to others. However, Sir Jacob, we shall see what can be done for thee,' and with that he dismissed me. That same night the secretary of my Lord Clarendon came to me, and announced with much form and show that, in consideration of my long devotion and the losses which I had sustained, the King was graciously pleased to make me a lottery cavalier."

"And pray, sir, what is a lottery cavalier?" I asked.

"It is nothing else than a licensed keeper of a gambling-house. This was his reward to me. I was to be allowed to have a den in the piazza of Covent Garden, and there to decoy the young sparks of the town and fleece them at ombre. To restore my own fortunes I was to ruin others. My honour, my family, my reputation, they were all to weigh for nothing so long as I had the means of bubbling a few fools out of their guineas."

"I have heard that some of the lottery cavaliers did well," remarked Saxon reflectively.

"Well or ill, it was no employment for me. I waited upon the King and implored that his bounty would take another form. His only reply was that for one so poor I was strangely fastidious. For weeks I hung about the court—I and other poor cavaliers like myself—watching the royal brothers squandering upon their gaming and their harlots sums which would have restored us to our patrimonies. I have seen Charles put upon one turn of a card as much as would have satisfied the most exacting of us. In the parks of St. James, or in the Gallery at Whitehall, I still endeavoured to keep myself before his eyes, in the hope that some provision would be made for me. At last I received a second message from him. It was that unless I could dress more in the mode he could dispense with my attendance. That was his message to the old broken soldier who had sacrificed health, wealth, position, everything in the service of his father and himself."

"Shameful!" we cried, all three.

"Can you wonder, then, that I cursed the whole Stuart race, false-hearted, lecherous and cruel? For the Hall, I could buy it back to-morrow if I chose, but why should I do so when I have no heir?"

"Ho, you have prospered then!" said Decimus Saxon, with one of his shrewd sidelong looks. "Perhaps you have yourself found out how to convert pots and pans into gold in the way you have spoken of. But that cannot be, for I see iron and brass in this room which would hardly remain there could you convert it to gold."

"Gold has its uses, and iron has its uses," said Sir Jacob oracularly. "The one can never supplant the other."

"Yet these officers," I remarked, "did declare to us that it was but a superstition of the vulgar."

"Then these officers did show that their knowledge was less than their prejudice. Alexander Setonius, a Scot, was first of the moderns to achieve it. In the month of March 1602 he did change a bar of lead into gold in the house of a certain Hansen, at Rotterdam, who hath testi-

fied to it. He then not only repeated the same process before three learned men sent by the Kaiser Rudolph, but he taught Johann Wolfgang Dienheim of Freibourg, and Gustenhofer of Strasburg, which latter taught it to my own illustrious master——"

"Who in turn taught it to you," cried Saxon triumphantly. "I have no great store of metal with me, good sir, but there are my headpiece, back and breastplate, taslets and thigh-pieces, together with my sword, spurs and the buckles of my harness. I pray you to use your most excellent and praiseworthy art upon these, and I will promise within a few days to bring round a mass of metal which shall be more worthy of your skill."

"Nay, nay," said the alchemist, smiling and shaking his head. "It can indeed be done, but only slowly and in order, small pieces at a time, and with much expenditure of work and patience. For a man to enrich himself at it he must labour hard and long; yet in the end I will not deny that he may compass it. And now, since the flasks are empty and your young comrade is nodding in his chair, it will perhaps be as well for you to spend as much of the night as is left in repose." He drew several blankets and rugs from a corner and scattered them over the floor. "It is a soldier's couch," he remarked; "but ye may sleep on worse before ye put Monmouth on the English throne. For myself, it is my custom to sleep in an inside chamber, which is hollowed out of the hill." With a few last words and precautions for our comfort he withdrew with the lamp, passing through a door which had escaped our notice at the further end of the apartment.

Reuben, having had no rest since he left Havant, had already dropped upon the rugs, and was fast asleep, with a saddle for a pillow. Saxon and I sat for a few minutes longer by the light of the burning brazier.

"One might do worse than take to this same chemical business," my companion remarked, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "See you yon iron-bound chest in the corner?"

"What of it?"

"It is two-thirds full of gold, which this worthy gentleman hath manufactured."

"How know you that?" I asked incredulously.

"When you did strike the door panel with the hilt of your sword, as though you would drive it in, you may have heard some scuttling about, and the turning of a lock. Well, thanks to my inches, I was able to look through yon slit in the wall, and I saw our friend throw something into the chest with a chink, and then lock it. It was but a glance at the contents, yet I could swear that that dull yellow light could come from no metal but gold. Let us see if it be indeed locked." Rising from his seat he walked over to the box and pulled vigorously at the lid.

"Forbear, Saxon, forbear!" I cried angrily. "What would our host say, should he come upon you?"

"Nay, then, he should not keep such things beneath his roof. With a chisel or a dagger now, this might be prised open."

"By Heaven!" I whispered, "if you should attempt it I shall lay you on your back."

"Well, well, young Anak! it was but a passing fancy to see the treasure again. Now, if he were but well favoured to the King, this would be fair prize of war. Marked ye not that he claimed to have been the last Royalist who drew sword in England? and he confessed that he had been proscribed as a malignant. Your father, godly as he is, would have little compunction in despoiling such an Amalekite. Besides, bethink you, he can make more as easily as your good mother maketh cranberry dumplings."

"Enough said!" I answered sternly. "It will not bear discussion. Get ye to your couch, lest I summon our host and tell him what manner of man he hath entertained."

With many grumbles Saxon consented at last to curl his long limbs up upon a mat, whilst I lay by his side and remained awake until the mellow light of morning

streamed through the chinks between the ill-covered rafters. Truth to tell, I feared to sleep, lest the free-booting habits of the soldier of fortune should be too strong for him, and he should disgrace us in the eyes of our kindly and habits entertainer. At last, however, his long-drawn breathing assured me that he was asleep, and I was able to settle down to a few hours of welcome rest.

## 12. *Of Certain Passages upon the Moor*

IN the morning, after a breakfast furnished by the remains of our supper, we looked to our horses and prepared for our departure. Ere we could mount, however, our kindly host came running out to us with a load of armour in his arms.

"Come hither," said he, beckoning to Reuben. "It is not meet, lad, that you should go bare-breasted against the enemy when your comrades are girt with steel. I have here mine own old breastplate and headpiece, which should, methinks, fit you, for if you have more flesh than I, I am a larger framework of a man. Ah, said I not so! Were't measured for you by Silas Thomson, the court armourer, it could not grip better. Now on with the headpiece. A close fit again. You are now a cavalier whom Monmouth or any other leader might be proud to see ride beneath his banner."

Both helmet and body-plates were of the finest Milan steel, richly inlaid with silver and with gold, and carved all over in rare and curious devices. So stern and soldierly was the effect, that the ruddy, kindly visage of our friend staring out of such a panoply had an ill-matched and somewhat ludicrous appearance.

"Nay, nay," cried the old cavalier, seeing a smile upon our features, "it is but right that so precious a jewel as a faithful heart should have a fitting casket to protect it."

"I am truly beholden to you, sir," said Reuben; "I can scarce find words to express my thanks. Holy

mother ! I have a mind to ride straight back to Havant, to show them how stout a man-at-arms hath been reared amongst them."

" It is steel of proof," Sir Jacob remarked ; " a pistol-bullet might glance from it. And you," he continued, turning to me, " here is a small gift by which you shall remember this meeting. I did observe that you did cast a wistful eye upon my bookshelf. It is Plutarch's lives of the ancient worthies, done into English by the ingenious Mr. Latimer. Carry this volume with you, and shape your life after the example of the giant men whose deeds are here set forth. In your saddle-bag I place a small but weighty packet, which I desire you to hand over to Monmouth upon the day of your arrival in his camp. As to you, sir," addressing Decimus Saxon, " here is a slug of virgin gold for you, which may fashion into a pin or such-like ornament. You may wear it with a quiet conscience, for it is fairly given to you and not filched from your entertainer whilst he slept."

Saxon and I shot a sharp glance of surprise at each other at this speech, which showed that our words of the night before were not unknown to him. Sir Jacob, however, showed no signs of anger, but proceeded to point out our road and to advise us as to our journey.

" You must follow this sheep-track until you come on another and broader pathway which makes for the West," said he. " It is little used, and there is small chance of your falling in with any of your enemies upon it. This path will lead you between the villages of Fovant and Hindon, and so on to Mere, which is no great distance from Bruton, upon the Somersetshire border."

Thanking our venerable host for his great kindness towards us we gave rein to our horses, and left him once more to the strange solitary existence in which we had found him. So artfully had the site of his cottage been chosen, that when we looked back to give him a last greeting both he and his dwelling had disappeared already from our view, nor could we, among the many

mounds and hollows, determine where the cottage lay which had given us such welcome shelter. In front of us and on either side the great uneven dun-coloured plain stretched away to the horizon, without a break in its barren gorse-covered surface. Over the whole expanse there was no sign of life, save for an occasional rabbit which whisked into its burrow on hearing our approach, or a few thin and hungry sheep, who could scarce sustain life by feeding on the coarse and wiry grass which sprang from the unfruitful soil.

The pathway was so narrow that only one of us could ride upon it at a time, but we presently abandoned it altogether, using it simply as a guide, and galloping along side by side over the rolling plain. We were all silent, Reuben meditating upon his new corslet, as I could see from his frequent glances at it ; while Saxon, with his eyes half closed, was brooding over some matter of his own. For my own part, my thoughts ran upon the ignominy of the old soldier's designs upon the gold chest, and the additional shame which rose from the knowledge that our host had in some way divined his intention. No good could come of an alliance with a man so devoid of all feelings of honour or of gratitude. So strongly did I feel upon it that I at last broke the silence by pointing to a cross path, which turned away from the one which we were pursuing, and recommending him to follow it, since he had proved that he was no fit company for honest men.

" By the living rood ! " he cried, laying his hand upon the hilt of his rapier, " have you taken leave of your senses ? These are words such as no honourable cavaliero can abide."

" They are none the less words of truth," I answered.

His blade flashed out in an instant, while his mare bounded twice her length under the sharp dig of his spurs.

" We have here," he cried, reining her round, with his fierce lean face all of a quiver with passion, " an excellent level stretch on which to discuss the matter. Out with your bilbo and maintain your words."

"I shall not stir a hair's-breadth to attack you," I answered. "Why should I, when I bear you no ill-will? If you come against me, however, I will assuredly beat you out of your saddle, for all your tricky sword play." I drew my broadsword as I spoke, and stood upon my guard, for I guessed that with so old a soldier the onset would be sharp and sudden.

"By all the saints in heaven!" cried Reuben, "which ever of ye strikes first at the other I'll snap this pistol at his head. None of your jokes, Don Decimo, for by the Lord I'll let drive at you if you were my own mother's son. Put up your sword, for the trigger falls easy, and my finger is a twitching."

"Curse you for a spoil-sport!" growled Saxon, sulkily sheathing his weapon. "Nay, Clarke," he added, after a few moments of reflection, "this is but child's play, that two camarados with a purpose in view should fall out over such a trifle. I, who am old enough to be your father, should have known better than to have drawn upon you, for a boy's tongue wags on impulse and without due thought. Do but say that you have said more than you meant."

"My way of saying it may have been over-plain and rough," I answered, for I saw that he did but want a little salve where my short words had galled him. "At the same time, our ways differ from your ways, and that difference must be mended, or you can be no true comrade of ours."

"All right, Master Morality," quoth he, "I must e'en unlearn some of the tricks of my trade. Od's feet, man, if ye object to me, what the henker would ye think of some whom I have known? However, let that pass. It is time that we were at the wars, for our good swords will not bide in their scabbards.

'The trenchant blade, Toledo trusty,
For want of fighting was grown rusty,
And ate into itself for lack
Of somebody to hew and hack.'

You cannot think a thought but old Samuel hath been before you."

"Surely we shall be at the end of this dreary plain presently," Reuben cried. "Its insipid flatness is enough to set the best of friends by the ears. We might be in the deserts of Libya instead of his most graceless Majesty's county of Wiltshire."

"There is smoke over yonder, upon the side of that hill," said Saxon, pointing to the southward.

"Methinks I see one straight line of houses there," I observed, shading my eyes with my hand. "But it is distant, and the shimmer of the sun disturbs the sight."

"It must be the hamlet of Hindon," said Reuben. "Oh, the heat of this steel coat! I wonder if it were very unsoldierly to slip it off and tie it about Dido's neck. I shall be baked alive else, like a crab in its shell. How say you, illustrious, is it contravened by any of those thirty-nine articles of war which you bear about in your bosom?"

"The bearing of the weight of your harness, young man," Saxon answered gravely, "is one of the exercises of war, and as such only attainable by such practice as you are now undergoing. You have many things to learn, and one of them is not to present petronels too readily at folk's heads when you are on horseback. The jerk of your charger's movement even now might have drawn your trigger, and so deprived Monmouth of an old and tried soldier."

"There would be much weight in your contention," my friend answered, "were it not that I now bethink me that I had forgot to recharge my pistol since discharging it at that great yellow beast yesternight."

Decimus Saxon shook his head sadly. "I doubt we shall never make a soldier of you," he remarked. "You fall from your horse if the brute does but change his step, you show a levity which will not jump with the gravity of the true soldado, you present empty petronels as a menace, and finally, you crave permission to tie your armour—armour which the Cid himself might be proud to wear—

around the neck of your horse. Yet you have heart and mettle, I believe, else you would not be here."

"Gracias, Signor!" cried Reuben, with a bow which nearly unhorsed him; "the last remark makes up for all the rest, else had I been forced to cross blades with you, to maintain my soldierly repute."

"Touching that same incident last night," said Saxon, "of the chest filled, as I surmise, with gold, which I was inclined to take as lawful plunder, I am now ready to admit that I may have shown an undue haste and precipitance, considering that the old man treated us fairly."

"Say no more of it," I answered, "if you will but guard against such impulses for the future."

"They do not properly come from me," he replied, "but from Will Spotterbridge, who was a man of no character at all."

"And how comes he to be mixed up in the matter?" I asked curiously.

"Why, marry, in this wise. My father married the daughter of this same Will Spotterbridge, and so weakened a good old stock by an unhealthy strain. Will was a rake-hell of Fleet Street in the days of James, a chosen light of Alsatia, the home of bullies and of brawlers. His blood hath through his daughter been transmitted to the ten of us, though I rejoice to say that I, being the tenth, it had by that time lost much of its virulence, and indeed amounts to little more than a proper pride, and a laudable desire to prosper."

"How, then, has it affected the race?" I asked.

"Why," he answered, "the Saxons of old were a round-faced, contented generation, with their ledgers in their hands for six days and their bibles on the seventh. If my father did but drink a cup of small beer more than his wont, or did break out upon provocation into any fond oath, as 'Od's niggers!' or 'Heart alive!' he would mourn over it as though it were the seven deadly sins. Was this a man, think ye, in the ordinary course of nature to beget ten long lanky children, nine of whom might

have been first cousins of Lucifer, and foster-brothers of Beelzebub ? "

" It was hard upon him," remarked Reuben.

" On him ! Nay, the hardship was all with us. If he with his eyes open chose to marry the daughter of an incarnate devil like Will Spotterbridge, because she chanced to be powdered and patched to his liking, what reason hath he for complaint ? It is we, who have the blood of this Hector of the taverns grafted upon our own good honest stream, who have most reason to lift up our voices."

" Faith, by the same chain of reasoning," said Reuben, " one of my ancestors must have married a woman with a plaguy dry throat, for both my father and I are much troubled with the complaint."

" You have assuredly inherited a plaguy pert tongue," growled Saxon. " From what I have told you, you will see that our whole life is a conflict between our natural Saxon virtue and the ungodly impulses of the Spotterbridge taint. That of which you have had cause to complain yesternight is but an example of the evil to which I am subjected."

" And your brothers and sisters ? " I asked ; " how hath this circumstance affected them ? " The road was bleak and long, so that the old soldier's gossip was a welcome break to the tedium of the journey.

" They have all succumbed," said Saxon, with a groan. " Alas, alas ! they were a goodly company could they have turned their talents to better uses. Prima was our eldest born. She did well until she attained womanhood. Secundus was a stout seaman, and owned his own vessel when he was yet a young man. It was remarked, however, that he started on a voyage in a schooner and came back in a brig, which gave rise to some inquiry. It may be, as he said, that he found it drifting about in the North Sea, and abandoned his own vessel in favour of it, but they hung him before he could prove it. Tertia ran away with a north-country drover, and hath been on the run ever

since. Quartus and Nonus have been long engaged in busying themselves over the rescue of the black folk from their own benighted and heathen country, conveying them over by the shipload to the plantations, where they may learn the beauties of the Christian religion. They are, however, men of violent temper and profane speech, who cherish no affection for their younger brother. Quintus was a lad of promise, but he found a hogshead of rumbo which was thrown up from a wreck, and he died soon afterwards. Sextus might have done well, for he became clerk to Johnny Tranter the attorney; but he was of an enterprising turn, and he shifted the whole business, papers, cash and all, to the Lowlands, to the no small inconvenience of his employer, who hath never been able to lay hands either on one or the other from that day to this. Septimus died young. As to Octavius, Will Spotterbridge broke out early in him, and he was slain in a quarrel over some dice, which were said by his enemies to be so weighted that the six must ever come upwards. Let this moving recital be a warning to ye, if ye are fools enough to saddle yourselves with a wife, to see that she hath no vice in her, for a fair face is a sorry make-weight against a foul mind."

Reuben and I could not but laugh over this frank family confession, which our companion delivered without a sign of shame or embarrassment. "Ye have paid a heavy price for your father's want of discretion," I remarked. "But what in the name of fate is this upon our left?"

"A gibbet, by the look of it," said Saxon, peering across at the gaunt framework of wood, which rose up from a little knoll. "Let us ride past it, for it is little out of our way. They are rare things in England, though by my faith there were more gallows than milestones when Turenne was in the Palatinate. What between the spies and traitors who were bred by the war, the rascally Schwartzritter and Lanzknechte, the Bohemian vagabonds, and an occasional countryman who was put out of the

way lest he do something amiss, there was never such a brave time for the crows."

As we approached this lonely gibbet we saw that a dried-up wisp of a thing which could hardly be recognised as having once been a human being was dangling from the centre of it. This wretched relic of mortality was secured to the cross-bar by an iron chain, and flapped drearily backwards and forwards in the summer breeze. We had pulled up our horses, and were gazing in silence at this sign-post of death, when what had seemed to us to be a bundle of rags thrown down at the foot of the gallows began suddenly to move, and turned towards us the wizened face of an aged woman, so marked with evil passions and so malignant in its expression that it inspired us with even more horror than the unclean thing which dangled above her head.

"Gott in Himmel!" cried Saxon, "it is ever thus! A gibbet draws witches as a magnet draws needles. All the hexerei of the countryside will sit round one, like cats round a milk-pail. Beware of her! she hath the evil eye!"

"Poor soul! It is the evil stomach that she hath," said Reuben, walking his horse up to her. "Whoever saw such a bag of bones! I warrant that she is pining away for want of a crust of bread."

The creature whined, and thrust out two skinny claws to grab the piece of silver which our friend had thrown down to her. Her fierce dark eyes and beak-like nose, with the gaunt bones over which the yellow parchment-like skin was stretched tightly, gave her a fear-inspiring aspect, like some foul bird of prey, or one of those vampires of whom the story-tellers write.

"What use is money in the wilderness?" I remarked; "she cannot feed herself upon a silver piece."

She tied the coin hurriedly into the corner of her rags, as though she feared that I might try to wrest it from her. "It will buy bread," she croaked.

"But who is there to sell it, good mistress?" I asked.

"They sell it at Fovant, and they sell it at Hindon," she answered. "I bide here o' days, but I travel at night."

"I warrant she does, and on a broomstick," quoth Saxon; "but tell us, mother, who is it who hangs above your head?"

"It is he who slew my youngest born," cried the old woman, casting a malignant look at the mummy above her, and shaking a clenched hand at it which was hardly more fleshy than its own. "It is he who slew my bonny boy. Out here upon the wide moor he met him, and he took his young life from him when no kind hand was near to stop the blow. On that ground there my lad's blood was shed, and from that watering hath grown this goodly gallows-tree with its fine ripe fruit upon it. And here, come rain, come shine, shall I, his mother, sit while two bones hang together of the man who slew my heart's darling." She nestled down in her rags as she spoke, and leaning her chin upon her hands stared up with an intensity of hatred at the hideous remnant.

"Come away, Reuben," I cried, for the sight was enough to make one loathe one's kind. "She is a ghoul, not a woman."

"Pah! it gives one a foul taste in the mouth," quoth Saxon. "Who is for a fresh gallop over the Downs? Away with care and carrion!

'Sir John got on his bonny brown steed,
To Monmouth for to ride—a.
A brave buff-coat upon his back,
A broadsword by his side—a.
Ha, ha, young man, we rebels can
Pull down King James's pride—a!'

Hark away, lads, with a loose rein and a bloody heel!"

We spurred our steeds and galloped from the unholy spot as fast as our brave beasts could carry us. To all of us the air had a purer flavour and the heath a sweeter scent by contrast with the grim couple whom we had left behind us. What a sweet world would this be, my children, were it not for man and his cruel ways!

When we at last pulled up we had set some three or four miles between the gibbet and ourselves. Right over against us, on the side of a gentle slope, stood a bright little village, with a red-roofed church rising up from amidst a clump of trees. To our eyes, after the dull sward of the plain, it was a glad sight to see the green spread of the branches and the pleasant gardens which girt the hamlet round. All morning we had seen no sight of a human being, save the old hag upon the moor and a few peat-cutters in the distance. Our belts, too, were beginning to be loose upon us, and the remembrance of our breakfast more faint.

"This," said I, "must be the village of Mere, which we were to pass before coming to Bruton. We shall soon be over the Somersetshire border."

"I trust that we shall soon be over a dish of beef-steaks," groaned Reuben. "I am well-nigh famished. So fair a village must needs have a passable inn, though I have not seen one yet upon my travels which would compare with the old Wheatsheaf."

"Neither inn nor dinner for us just yet," said Saxon. "Look yonder to the north, and tell me what you see."

On the extreme horizon there was visible a long line of gleaming, glittering points, which shone and sparkled like a string of diamonds. These brilliant specks were all in rapid motion, and yet kept their positions to each other.

"What is it, then?" we both cried.

"Horse upon the march," quoth Saxon. "It may be our friends of Salisbury, who have made a long day's journey; or, as I am inclined to think, it may be some other body of the King's horse. They are far distant, and what we see is but the sun shining on their casques; yet they are bound for this very village, if I mistake not. It would be wisest to avoid entering it, lest the rustics set them upon our track. Let us skirt it and push on for Bruton, where we may spare time for bite and sup."

"Alas, alas! for our dinners!" cried Reuben ruefully. "I have fallen away until my body rattles about, inside

this shell of armour, like a pea in a pod. However, lads, it is all for the Protestant faith."

"One more good stretch to Bruton, and we may rest in peace," said Saxon. "It is ill dining when a dragoon may be served up as a grace after meat. Our horses are still fresh, and we should be there in little over an hour."

We pushed on our way accordingly, passing at a safe distance from Mere, which is the village where the second Charles did conceal himself after the battle of Worcester. The road beyond was much crowded by peasants, who were making their way out of Somersetshire, and by farmers' waggons, which were taking loads of food to the West, ready to turn a few guineas either from the King's men or from the rebels. We questioned many as to the news from the war, but though we were now on the outskirts of the disturbed country, we could gain no clear account of how matters stood, save that all agreed that the rising was on the increase. The country through which we rode was a beautiful one, consisting of low swelling hills, well tilled and watered by numerous streamlets. Crossing over the River Brue by a good stone bridge, we at last reached the small country town for which we had been making, which lies embowered in the midst of a broad expanse of fertile meadows, orchards, and sheep-walks. From the rising ground by the town we looked back over the plain without seeing any traces of the troopers. We learned, too, from an old woman of the place, that though a troop of the Wiltshire Yeomanry had passed through the day before, there were no soldiers quartered at present in the neighbourhood. Thus assured we rode boldly into the town, and soon found our way to the principal inn. I have some dim remembrance of an ancient church upon an eminence, and of a quaint stone cross within the market-place, but assuredly, of all the recollections which I retain of Bruton there is none so pleasing as that of the buxom landlady's face, and of the steaming dishes which she lost no time in setting before us.

# 13. *Of Sir Gervas Jerome, Knight Banneret of the County of Surrey*

THE inn was very full of company, being occupied not only by many Government agents and couriers on their way to and from the seat of the rising, but also by all the local gossips, who gathered there to exchange news and consume Dame Hobson the landlady's home-brewed. In spite, however, of this stress of custom and the consequent uproar, the hostess conducted us into her own private room, where we could consume her excellent cheer in peace and quietness. This favour was due, I think, to a little sly manœuvring and a few whispered words from Saxon, who amongst other accomplishments which he had picked up during his chequered career had a pleasing knack of establishing friendly relations with the fair sex, irrespective of age, size, or character. Gentle and simple, Church and Dissent, Whig and Tory, if they did but wear a petticoat our comrade never failed, in spite of his fifty years, to make his way into their good graces by the help of his voluble tongue and assured manner.

"We are your grateful servants, mistress," said he, when the smoking joint and the batter pudding had been placed upon the table. "We have robbed you of your room. Will you not honour us so far as to sit down with us and share our repast?"

"Nay, kind sir," said the portly dame, much flattered by the proposal; "it is not for me to sit with gentles like yourselves."

"Beauty has a claim which persons of quality, and above all cavalieros of the sword, are the first to acknowledge," cried Saxon, with his little twinkling eyes fixed in admiration upon her buxom countenance. "Nay, by my troth, you shall not leave us. I shall lock the door first. If you will not eat, you shall at least drink a cup of Alicant with me."

"Nay, sir, it is too much honour," cried Dame Hobson, with a simper. "I shall go down into the cellars and bring a flask of the best."

"Nay, by my manhood, you shall not," said Saxon, springing up from his seat. "What are all these infernal lazy drawers here for if you are to descend to menial offices?" Handing the widow to a chair he clanked away into the tap-room, where we heard him swearing at the men-servants, and cursing them for a droning set of rascals who had taken advantage of the angelic goodness of their mistress and her incomparable sweetness of temper.

"Here is the wine, fair mistress," said he, returning presently with a bottle in either hand. "Let me fill your glass. Ha! it flows clear and yellow like a prime vintage. These rogues can stir their limbs when they find that there is a man to command them."

"Would that there were ever such," said the widow meaningly, with a languishing look at our companion. "Here is to you, sir—and to ye, too, young sirs," she added, sipping at her wine. "May there be a speedy end to the insurrection, for I judge, from your gallant equipment, that ye be serving the King."

"His business takes us to the West," said Reuben, "and we have every reason to hope that there will be a speedy end to the insurrection."

"Aye, aye, though blood will be shed first," she said, shaking her head. "They tell me that the rebels are as many as seven thousand, and that they swear to give an' take no quarter, the murderous villains! Alas! how any gentleman can fall to such bloody work when he might have a clean honourable occupation, such as innkeeping or the like, is more than my poor mind can understand. There is a sad difference betwixt the man who lieth on the cold ground, not knowing how long it may be before he is three feet deep in it, and he who passeth his nights upon a warm feather bed, with mayhap a cellar beneath it stocked with even such wines as we are now drinking."

She again looked hard at Saxon as she spoke, while Reuben and I nudged each other beneath the table.

"This business hath doubtless increased your trade, fair mistress," quoth Saxon.

"Aye, and in the way that payeth best," said she. "The few kilderkins of beer which are drunk by the common folk make little difference one way or the other. But now, when we have lieutenants of counties, officers, mayors, and gentry spurring it for very life down the highways, I have sold more of my rare old wines in three days than ever I did before in a calendar month. It is not ale, or strong waters, I promise you, that these gentles drink, but Priniac, Languedoc, Tent, Muscadine, Chiante, and Tokay—never a flask under the half-guinea."

"So indeed!" quoth Saxon thoughtfully. "A snug home and a steady income."

"Would that my poor Peter had lived to share it with me," said Dame Hobson, laying down her glass, and rubbing her eyes with a corner of her kerchief. "He was a good man, poor soul, though in very truth and between friends he did at last become as broad and as thick as one of his own puncheons. Ah well, the heart is the thing! Marry come up! if a woman were ever to wait until her own fancy came her way, there would be more maids than mothers in the land."

"Prithee, good dame, how runs your own fancy?" asked Reuben mischievously.

"Not in the direction of fat, young man," she answered smartly, with a merry glance at our plump companion.

"She has hit you there, Reuben," said I.

"I would have no pert young springald," she continued, "but one who hath knowledge of the world, and ripe experience. Tall he should be, and of sinewy build, free of speech that he might lighten the weary hours, and help entertain the gentles when they crack a flagon of wine. Of business habits he must be, too, forsooth, for is there not a busy hostel and two hundred good pounds

a year to pass through his fingers? If Jane Hobson is to be led to the altar again it must be by such a man as this."

Saxon had listened with much attention to the widow's words, and had just opened his mouth to make some reply to her when a clattering and bustle outside announced the arrival of some traveller. Our hostess drank off her wine and pricked up her ears, but when a loud authoritative voice was heard in the passage, demanding a private room and a draught of sack, her call to duty overcame her private concerns, and she bustled off with a few words of apology to take the measure of the newcomer.

"Body o' me, lads!" quoth Decimus Saxon the moment that she disappeared, "ye can see how the land lies. I have half a mind to let Monmouth carve his own road, and to pitch my tent in this quiet English township."

"Your tent, indeed!" cried Reuben; "it is a brave tent that is furnished with cellars of such wine as we are drinking. And as to the quiet, my illustrious, if you take up your residence here I'll warrant that the quiet soon comes to an end."

"You have seen the woman," said Saxon, with his brow all in a wrinkle with thought. "She hath much to commend her. A man must look to himself. Two hundred pounds a year are not to be picked off the roadside every June morning. It is not princely, but it is something for an old soldier of fortune who hath been in the wars for five-and-thirty years, and foresees the time when his limbs will grow stiff in his harness. What sayeth our learned Fleming—'an mulier——' but what in the name of the devil have we here?"

Our companion's ejaculation was called forth by a noise as of a slight scuffle outside the door, with a smothered "Oh, sir!" and "What will the maids think?" The contest was terminated by the door being opened, and Dame Hobson re-entering the room with her face in a glow, and a slim young man dressed in the height of fashion at her heels.

"I am sure, good gentlemen," said she, "that ye will not object to this young nobleman drinking his wine in the same room with ye, since all the others are filled with the townsfolk and commonalty."

"Faith! I must needs be mine own usher," said the stranger, sticking his gold-laced cap under his left arm and laying his hand upon his heart, while he bowed until his forehead nearly struck the edge of the table. "Your very humble servant, gentlemen, Sir Gervas Jerome, knight banneret of his Majesty's county of Surrey, and at one time custos rotulorum of the district of Beacham Ford."

"Welcome, sir," quoth Reuben, with a merry twinkle in his eye. "You have before you Don Decimo Saxon of the Spanish nobility, together with Sir Micah Clarke and Sir Reuben Lockarby, both of his Majesty's county of Hampshire."

"Proud and glad to meet ye, gentlemen!" cried the newcomer, with a flourish. "But what is this upon the table? Alicant? Fie, fie, it is a drink for boys. Let us have some good sack with plenty of body in it. Claret for youth, say I, sack for maturity, and strong waters in old age. Fly, my sweetest, move those dainty feet of thine, for egad! my throat is like leather. Od's 'oons, I drank deep last night, and yet it is clear that I could not have drunk enough, for I was as dry as a concordance when I awoke."

Saxon sat silently at the table, looking so viciously at the stranger out of his half-closed glittering eyes that I feared that we should have another such brawl as occurred at Salisbury, with perhaps a more unpleasant ending. Finally, however, his ill-humour at the gallant's free and easy attention to our hostess spent itself in a few muttered oaths, and he lit his long pipe, the never-failing remedy of a ruffled spirit. As to Reuben and myself, we watched our new companion half in wonder and half in amusement, for his appearance and manners were novel enough to raise the interest of inexperienced youngsters like ourselves.

I have said that he was dressed in the height of fashion, and such indeed was the impression which a glance would give. His face was thin and aristocratic, with a well-marked nose, delicate features, and gay careless expression. Some little paleness of the cheeks and darkness under the eyes, the result of hard travel or dissipation, did but add a chastening grace to his appearance. His white periwig, velvet and silver riding-coat, lavender vest, and red satin knee-breeches were all of the best style and cut, but when looked at closely, each and all of these articles of attire bore evidence of having seen better days. Beside the dust and stains of travel, there was a shininess or a fading of colour here and there which scarce accorded with the costliness of their material or the bearing of their wearer. His long riding-boots had a gaping seam in the side of one of them, whilst his toe was pushing its way through the end of the other. For the rest, he wore a handsome silver-hilted rapier at his side, and had a frilled cambric shirt somewhat the worse for wear and open at the front, as was the mode with the gallants of those days. All the time he was speaking he mumbled a toothpick, which together with his constant habit of pronouncing his o's as a's made his conversation sound strange to our ears.[1] Whilst we were noting these peculiarities he was reclining upon Dame Hobson's best taffetta-covered settee, tranquilly combing his wig with a delicate ivory comb which he had taken from a small satin bag which hung upon the right of his sword-belt.

"Lard preserve us from country inns!" he remarked. "What with the boors that swarm in every chamber, and the want of mirrors, and jasmine water, and other necessaries, blister me if one has not to do one's toilet in the common room. 'Oons! I'd as soon travel in the land of the Great Mogul!"

"When you shall come to be my age, young sir," Saxon answered, "you may know better than to decry a comfortable country hostel."

[1] Note D, Appendix.

"Very like, sir, very like!" the gallant answered, with a careless laugh. "For all that, being mine own age, I feel the wilds of Wiltshire and the inns of Bruton to be a sorry change after the Mall, and the fare of Pontack's or the Coca Tree. Ah, Lud! here comes the sack! Open it, my pretty Hebe, and send a drawer with fresh glasses, for these gentlemen must do me the honour of drinking with me. A pinch of snuff, sirs? Aye, ye may well look hard at the box. A pretty little thing, sirs, from a certain lady of title, who shall be nameless; though, if I were to say that her title begins with a D and her name with a C, a gentleman of the Court might hazard a guess."

Our hostess, having brought fresh glasses, withdrew, and Decimus Saxon soon found an opportunity for following her. Sir Gervas Jerome continued, however, to chatter freely to Reuben and myself over the wine, rattling along as gaily and airily as though we were old acquaintances.

"Sink me, if I have not frighted your comrade away!" he remarked. "Or is it possible that he hath gone on the slot of the plump widow? Methought he looked in no very good temper when I kissed her at the door. Yet it is a civility which I seldom refuse to anything which wears a cap. Your friend's appearance smacked more of Mars than of Venus, though, indeed, those who worship the god are wont to be on good terms with the goddess. A hardy old soldier, I should judge, from his feature and attire."

"One who hath seen much service abroad," I answered.

"Ha! ye are lucky to ride to the wars in the company of so accomplished a cavalier. For I presume that it is to the wars that ye are riding, since ye are all so armed and accoutred."

"We are indeed bound for the West," I replied, with some reserve, for in Saxon's absence I did not care to be too loose-tongued.

"And in what capacity?" he persisted. "Will ye risk your crowns in defence of King James's one, or will

ye strike in, hit or miss, with these rogues of Devon and Somerset? Stop my vital breath, if I would not as soon side with the clown as with the crown, with all due respect to your own principles!"

"You are a daring man," said I, "if you air your opinions thus in every inn parlour. Dost not know that a word of what you have said, whispered to the nearest justice of the peace, might mean your liberty, if not your life?"

"I don't care the rind of a rotten orange for life or liberty either," cried our acquaintance, snapping his finger and thumb. "Burn me if it wouldn't be a new sensation to bandy words with some heavy-chopped country justice, with the Popish plot still stuck in his gizzard, and be thereafter consigned to a dungeon, like the hero in John Dryden's latest. I have been round-housed many a time by the watch in the old Hawkubite days; but this would be a more dramatic matter, with high treason, block, and axe all looming in the background."

"And rack and pincers for a prologue," said Reuben. "This ambition is the strangest that I have ever heard tell of."

"Anything for a change," cried Sir Gervas, filling up a bumper. "Here's to the maid that's next our heart, and here's to the heart that loves the maids! War, wine, and women, 'twould be a dull world without them. But you have not answered my question."

"Why truly, sir," said I, "frank as you have been with us, I can scarce be equally so with you, without the permission of the gentlemen who has just left the room. He is the leader of our party. Pleasant as our short intercourse has been, these are parlous times, and hasty confidences are apt to lead to repentance."

"A Daniel come to judgment!" cried our new acquaintance. "What ancient, ancient words from so young a head! You are, I'll warrant, five years younger than a scatterbrain like myself, and yet you talk like the seven wise men of Greece. Wilt take me as a valet?"

"A valet!" I exclaimed.

"Aye, a valet, a man-servant. I have been waited upon so long that it is my turn to wait now, and I would not wish a more likely master. By the Lard! I must, in applying for a place, give an account of my character and a list of my accomplishments. So my rascals ever did with me, though in good truth I seldom listened to their recital. Honesty—there I score a trick. Sober—Ananias himself could scarce say that I am that. Trustworthy—indifferently so. Steady—hum! about as much so as Garraway's weathercock. Hang it, man, I am choke full of good resolutions, but a sparkling glass or a roguish eye will deflect me, as the mariners say of the compass. So much for my weaknesses. Now let me see what qualifications I can produce. A steady nerve, save only when I have my morning qualms, and a cheerful heart; I score two on that. I can dance saraband, minuet, or corranto; fence, ride, and sing French chansons. Good Lard! who ever heard a valet urge such accomplishments? I can play the best game of piquet in London. So said Sir George Etherege when I won a cool thousand off him at the Groom Parter. But that won't advance me much, either. What is there, then, to commend me? Why, marry, I can brew a bowl of punch, and I can broil a devilled fowl. It is not much, but I can do it well."

"Truly, good sir," I said, with a smile, "neither of these accomplishments is like to prove of much use to us on our present errand. You do, however, but jest, no doubt, when you talk of descending to such a position."

"Not a whit! not a whit!" he replied earnestly. "'To such base uses do we come,' as Will Shakespeare has it. If you would be able to say that you have in your service Sir Gervas Jerome, knight banneret, and sole owner of Beacham Ford Park, with a rent-roll of four thousand good pounds a year, he is now up for sale, and will be knocked down to the bidder who pleases him best. Say but the word, and we'll have another flagon of sack to clinch the bargain."

"But," said I, "if you are indeed owner of this fair property, why should you descend to so menial an occupation?"

"The Jews, the Jews, oh most astute and yet most slow-witted master! The ten tribes have been upon me, and I have been harried and wasted, bound, ravished, and despoiled. Never was Agag, king of Amalek, more completely in the hands of the chosen, and the sole difference is that they have hewed into pieces mine estate instead of myself."

"Have you lost all, then?" Reuben asked, open-eyed.

"Why no—not all—by no means all!" he answered, with a merry laugh; "I have a gold Jacobus and a guinea or two in my purse. 'Twill serve for a flask or so yet. There is my silver-hilted rapier, my rings, my gold snuff-box, and my watch by Tompion at the sign of the Three Crowns. It was never bought under a hundred, I'll warrant. Then there are such relics of grandeur as you see upon my person, though they begin to look as frail and worn as a waiting-woman's virtue. In this bag, too, I retain the means for preserving that niceness and elegance of person which made me, though I say it, as well groomed a man as ever set foot in St. James's Park. Here are French scissors, eyebrow brush, toothpick case, patch-box, powder-bag, comb, puff, and my pair of red-heeled shoes. What could a man wish for more? These, with a dry throat, a cheerful heart, and a ready hand, are my whole stock in trade."

Reuben and I could not forbear from laughing at the curious inventory of articles which Sir Gervas had saved from the wreck of his fortunes. He upon seeing our mirth was so tickled at his own misfortunes, that he laughed in a high treble key until the whole house resounded with his merriment. "By the Mass," he cried at last, "I have never had so much honest amusement out of my prosperity as hath been caused in me by my downfall. Fill up your glasses!"

"We have still some distance to travel this evening, and must not drink more," I observed, for prudence told me that it was dangerous work for two sober country lads to keep pace with an experienced toper.

"So!" said he in surprise. "I should have thought that would be a 'raison de plus,' as the French say. But I wish your long-legged friend would come back, even if he were intent upon slitting my weazand for my attention to the widow. He is not a man to flinch from his liquor, I'll warrant. Curse this Wiltshire dust that clings to my periwig!"

"Until my comrade returns, Sir Gervas," said I, "you might, since the subject does not appear to be a painful one to you, let us know how these evil times, which you bear with such philosophy, came upon you."

"The old story!" he answered, flicking away a few grains of snuff with his deeply-laced cambric handkerchief. "The old, old story! My father, a good, easy country baronet, finding the family purse somewhat full, must needs carry me up to town to make a man of me. There as a young lad I was presented at Court, and being a slim active youngster with a pert tongue and assured manner, I caught the notice of the Queen, who made me one of her pages of honour. This post I held until I grew out of it, when I withdrew from town, but egad! I found I must get back to it again, for Beacham Ford Park was as dull as a monastery after the life which I had been living. In town I stayed then with such boon companions as Tommy Lawson, my Lord Halifax, Sir Jasper Lemarck, little Geordie Chichester, aye, and old Sidney Godolphin of the Treasury; for with all his staid ways and long-winded budgets he could drain a cup with the best of us, and was as keen on a main of cocks as on a committee of ways and means. Well, it was rare sport while it lasted, and sink me if I wouldn't do the same again if I had my time once more. It is like sliding down a greased plank though, for at first a man goes slow enough, and thinks he can pull himself up, but presently

he goes faster and faster, until he comes with a crash on to the rocks of ruin at the bottom."

"And did you run through four thousand pounds a year?" I exclaimed.

"Od's bodikins, man, you speak as if this paltry sum were all the wealth of the Indies. Why, from Ormonde or Buckingham, with their twenty thousand, down to ranting Dicky Talbot, there was not one of my set who could not have bought me out. Yet I must have my coach and four, my town house, my liveried servants, and my stable full of horses. To be in the mode I must have my poet, and throw him a handful of guineas for his dedication. Well, poor devil, he is one who will miss me. I warrant his heart was as heavy as his verses when he found me gone, though perchance he has turned a few guineas by this time by writing a satire upon me. It would have a ready sale among my friends. Gad's life! I wonder how my levées get on, and whom all my suitors have fastened on to now. There they were morning after morning, the French pimp, the English bully, the needy man o' letters, the neglected inventor—I never thought to have got rid of them, but indeed I have shaken them off very effectually now. When the honey-pot is broken it is farewell to the flies."

"And your noble friends?" I asked. "Did none of them stand by you in your adversity?"

"Well, well, I have nought to complain of!" exclaimed Sir Gervas. "They were brave-hearted boys for the most part. I might have had their names on my bills as long as their fingers could hold a pen, but slit me if I like bleeding my own companions. They might have found a place for me, too, had I consented to play second-fiddle where I had been used to lead the band. I' faith, I care not what I turn my hand to amongst strangers, but I would fain leave my memory sweet in town."

"As to what you proposed, of serving us as a valet," said I, "it is not to be thought of. We are, in spite of my friend's waggishness, but two plain blunt countrymen,

and have no more need of a valet than one of those poets which you have spoken of. On the other hand, if you should care to attach yourself to our party, we shall take you where you will see service which shall be more to your taste than the curling of periwigs or the brushing of eyebrows."

"Nay, nay, my friend. Speak not with unseemly levity of the mysteries of the toilet," he cried. "Ye would yourselves be none the worse for a touch of mine ivory comb, and a closer acquaintance with the famous skin-purifying wash of Murphy which I am myself in the habit of using."

"I am beholden to you, sir," said Reuben, "but the famous spring water wash by Providence is quite good enough for the purpose."

"And Dame Nature hath placed a wig of her own upon me," I added, "which I should be very loth to change."

"Goths! Perfect Goths!" cried the exquisite, throwing up his white hands. "But here comes a heavy tread and the clink of armour in the passage. 'Tis our friend the knight of the wrathful countenance, if I mistake not."

It was indeed Saxon, who strode into the room to tell us that our horses were at the door, and that all was ready for our departure. Taking him aside I explained to him in a whisper what had passed between the stranger and ourselves, with the circumstances which had led me to suggest that he should join our party. The old soldier frowned at the news.

"What have we to do with such a coxcomb?" he said. "We have hard fare and harder blows before us. He is not fit for the work."

"You said yourself that Monmouth will be weak in horse," I answered. "Here is a well-appointed cavalier, who is to all appearance a desperate man and ready for anything. Why should we not enrol him?"

"I fear," said Saxon, "that his body may prove to be like the bran of a fine cushion, of value only for what it has around it. However, it is perhaps for the best. The

handle to his name may make him welcome in the camp, for from what I hear there is some dissatisfaction at the way in which the gentry stand aloof from the enterprise."

"I had feared," I remarked, still speaking in a whisper, "that we were about to lose one of our party instead of gaining one in this Bruton inn."

"I have thought better of it," he answered, with a smile. "Nay, I'll tell you of it anon. Well, Sir Gervas Jerome," he added aloud, turning to our new associate, "I hear that you are coming with us. For a day you must be content to follow without question or remark. Is that agreed?"

"With all my heart," cried Sir Gervas.

"Then here's a bumper to our better acquaintance," cried Saxon, raising his glass.

"I pledge ye all," quoth the gallant. "Here's to a fair fight, and may the best men win."

"Donnerblitz, man!" said Saxon. "I believe there's mettle in you for all your gay plumes. I do conceive a liking for you. Give me your hand!"

The soldier of fortune's great brown grip enclosed the delicate hand of our new friend in a pledge of comradeship. Then, having paid our reckoning and bade a cordial adieu to Dame Hobson, who glanced methought somewhat reproachfully or expectantly at Saxon, we sprang on our steeds and continued our journey amidst a crowd of staring villagers, who huzzaed lustily as we rode out from amongst them.

## 14. *Of the Stiff-legged Parson and his Flock*

OUR road lay through Castle Carey and Somerton, which are small towns lying in the midst of a most beautiful pastoral country, well wooded and watered by many streams. The valleys along the centre of which the road lies are rich and luxuriant, sheltered from the winds by long rolling hills, which are themselves highly

cultivated. Here and there we passed the ivy-clad turret of an old castle or the peaked gables of a rambling country house, protruding from amongst the trees and marking the country seat of some family of repute. More than once, when these mansions were not far from the road, we were able to perceive the unrepaired dints and fractures on the walls received during the stormy period of the civil troubles. Fairfax it seems had been down that way, and had left abundant traces of his visit. I have no doubt that my father would have had much to say of these signs of Puritan wrath had he been riding at our side.

The road was crowded with peasants who were travelling in two strong currents, the one setting from east to west, and the other from west to east. The latter consisted principally of aged people and of children, who were being sent out of harm's way to reside in the less disturbed counties until the troubles should be over. Many of these poor folk were pushing barrows in front of them, in which a few bedclothes and some cracked utensils represented the whole of their worldly goods. Others more prosperous had small carts, drawn by the wild shaggy colts which are bred on the Somerset moors. What with the spirit of the half-tamed beasts and the feebleness of the drivers, accidents were not uncommon, and we passed several unhappy groups who had been tumbled with their property into a ditch, or who were standing in anxious debate round a cracked shaft or a broken axle.

The countrymen who were making for the West were upon the other hand men in the prime of life, with little or no baggage. Their brown faces, heavy boots, and smockfrocks proclaimed most of them to be mere hinds, though here and there we overtook men who, by their top-boots and corduroys, may have been small farmers or yeomen. These fellows walked in gangs, and were armed for the most part with stout oak cudgels, which were carried as an aid to their journey, but which in the hands of powerful men might become formidable weapons.

From time to time one of these travellers would strike up a psalm tune, when all the others within earshot would join in, until the melody rippled away down the road. As we passed some scowled angrily at us, while others whispered together and shook their heads, in evident doubt as to our character and aims. Now and again among the people we marked the tall broad-brimmed hat and Geneva mantle which were the badges of the Puritan clergy.

"We are in Monmouth's country at last," said Saxon to me, for Reuben Lockarby and Sir Gervas Jerome had ridden on ahead. "This is the raw material which we shall have to lick into soldiership."

"And no bad material either," I replied, taking note of the sturdy figures and bold, hearty faces of the men. "Think ye that they are bound for Monmouth's camp, then?"

"Aye, are they. See you yon long-limbed parson on the left—him with the pent-house hat. Markest thou not the stiffness wherewith he moves his left leg?"

"Why, yes; he is travel-worn doubtless."

"Ho! ho!" laughed my companion. "I have seen such a stiffness before now. The man hath a straight sword within the leg of his breeches. A regular Parliamentary tuck, I'll warrant. When he is on safe ground he will produce it, aye, and use it too, but until he is out of all danger of falling in with the King's horse he is shy of strapping it to his belt. He is one of the old breed by his cut, who

'Call fire and sword and desolation,
A godly thorough reformation.'

Old Samuel hath them to a penstroke! There is another ahead of him there, with the head of a scythe inside his smock. Can you not see the outline? I warrant there is not one of the rascals but hath a pike-head or sickle-blade concealed somewhere about him. I begin to feel the breath of war once more, and to grow

younger with it. Hark ye, lad! I am glad that I did not tarry at the inn."

"You seemed to be in two minds about it," said I.

"Aye, aye. She was a fine woman, and the quarters were comfortable. I do not gainsay it. But marriage, d'ye see, is a citadel that it is plaguy easy to find one's way into, but once in old Tilly himself could not bring one out again with credit. I have known such a device on the Danube, where at the first onfall the Mamelukes have abandoned the breach for the very purpose of ensnaring the Imperial troops in the narrow streets beyond, from which few ever returned. Old birds are not caught with such wiles. I did succeed in gaining the ear of one of the gossips, and asking him what he could tell me of the good dame and her inn. It seemeth that she is somewhat of a shrew upon occasion, and that her tongue had more to do with her husband's death than the dropsy which the leech put it down to. Again, a new inn hath been started in the village, which is well-managed, and is like to draw the custom from her. It is, too, as you have said, a dull, sleepy spot. All these reasons weighed with me, and I decided that it would be best to raise my siege of the widow, and to retreat whilst I could yet do so with the credit and honours of war."

"'Tis best so," said I; "you could not have settled down to a life of toping and ease. But our new comrade, what think you of him?"

"Faith!" Saxon answered, "we shall extend into a troop of horse if we add to our number every gallant who is in want of a job. As to this Sir Gervas, however, I think, as I said at the inn, that he hath more mettle in him than one would judge at first sight. These young sprigs of the gentry will always fight, but I doubt if he is hardened enough or hath constancy enough for such a campaign as this is like to be. His appearance, too, will be against him in the eyes of the saints; and though Monmouth is a man of easy virtue, the saints are like to have the chief voice in his councils. Now do but look at

him as he reins up that showy grey stallion and gazes back at us. Mark his riding-hat tilted over his eye, his open bosom, his whip dangling from his button-hole, his hand on his hip, and as many oaths in his mouth as there are ribbons to his doublet. Above all, mark the air with which he looks down upon the peasants beside him. He will have to change his style if he is to fight by the side of the fanatics. But hark! I am much mistaken if they have not already got themselves into trouble."

Our friends had pulled up their horses to await our coming. They had scarce halted, however, before the stream of peasants who had been moving along abreast of them slackened their pace, and gathered round them with a deep ominous murmur and threatening gestures. Other rustics, seeing that there was something afoot, hurried up to help their companions. Saxon and I put spurs to our horses, and pushing through the throng, which was becoming every instant larger and more menacing, made our way to the aid of our friends, who were hemmed in on every side by the rabble. Reuben had laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword, while Sir Gervas was placidly chewing his toothpick and looking down at the angry mob with an air of amused contempt.

"A flask or two of scent amongst them would not be amiss," he remarked; "I would I had a casting bottle."

"Stand on your guard, but do not draw," cried Saxon. "What the henker hath come over the chaw-bacons? They mean mischief. How now, friends, why this uproar?"

This question instead of allaying the tumult appeared to make it tenfold worse. All round us twenty deep were savage faces and angry eyes, with the glint here and there of a weapon half drawn from its place of concealment. The uproar, which had been a mere hoarse growl, began to take shape and form. "Down with the Papists!" was the cry. "Down with the Prelatists!" "Smite the Erastian butchers!" "Smite the Philistine horsemen!" "Down with them!"

A stone or two had already whistled past our ears, and we had been forced in self-defence to draw our swords, when the tall minister whom we had already observed shoved his way through the crowd, and by dint of his lofty stature and commanding voice prevailed upon them to be silent.

"How say ye," he asked, turning upon us, "fight ye for Baal or for the Lord? He who is not with us is against us."

"Which is the side of Baal, most reverend sir, and which of the Lord?" asked Sir Gervas Jerome. "Methinks if you were to speak plain English instead of Hebrew we might come to an understanding sooner."

"This is no time for light words," the minister cried, with a flush of anger upon his face. "If ye would keep your skins whole, tell me, are ye for the bloody usurper James Stuart, or are ye for his most Protestant Majesty King Monmouth?"

"What! He hath come to the title already!" exclaimed Saxon. "Know then that we are four unworthy vessels upon our way to offer our services to the Protestant cause."

"He lies, good Master Pettigrue, he lies most foully," shouted a burly fellow from the edge of the crowd. "Who ever saw a good Protestant in such a Punchinello dress as yonder? Is not Amalekite written upon his raiment? Is he not attired as becometh the bridegroom of the harlot of Rome? Why then should we not smite him?"

"I thank you, my worthy friend," said Sir Gervas, whose attire had moved this champion's wrath. "If I were nearer I should give you some return for the notice which you have taken of me."

"What proof have we that ye are not in the pay of the usurper, and on your way to oppress the faithful?" asked the Puritan divine.

"I tell you, man," said Saxon impatiently, "that we have travelled all the way from Hampshire to fight

against James Stuart. We will ride with ye to Monmouth's camp, and what better proof could ye desire than that ?"

"It may be that ye do but seek an opportunity of escaping from our bondage," the minister observed, after conferring with one or two of the leading peasants. "It is our opinion, therefore, that before coming with us ye must deliver unto us your swords, pistols, and other carnal weapons."

"Nay, good sir, that cannot be," our leader answered. "A cavalier may not with honour surrender his blade or his liberty in the manner ye demand. Keep close to my bridle-arm, Clarke, and strike home at any rogue who lays hands on you."

A hum of anger rose from the crowd, and a score of sticks and scythe-blades were raised against us, when the minister again interposed and silenced his noisy following.

"Did I hear aright ?" he asked. "Is your name Clarke ?"

"It is," I answered.

"Your Christian name ?"

"Micah."

"Living at ?"

"Havant."

The clergyman conferred for a few moments with a grizzly-bearded, harsh-faced man dressed in black buckram who stood at his elbow.

"If you are really Micah Clarke of Havant," quoth he, "you will be able to tell us the name of an old soldier, skilled in the German wars, who was to have come with ye to the camp of the faithful."

"Why, this is he," I answered; "Decimus Saxon is his name."

"Aye, aye, Master Pettigrue," cried the old man. "The very name given by Dicky Rumbold. He said that either the old Roundhead Clarke or his son would go with him. But who are these ?"

"This is Master Reuben Lockarby, also of Havant, and

Sir Gervas Jerome of Surrey," I replied. "They are both here as volunteers desiring to serve under the Duke of Monmouth."

"Right glad I am to see ye, then," said the stalwart minister heartily. "Friends, I can answer for these gentlemen that they favour the honest folk and the old cause."

At these words the rage of the mob turned in an instant into the most extravagant adulation and delight. They crowded round us, patting our riding-boots, pulling at the skirts of our dress, pressing our hands and calling down blessings upon our heads, until their pastor succeeded at last in rescuing us from their attentions and in persuading them to resume their journey. We walked our horses in the midst of them whilst the clergyman strode along betwixt Saxon and myself. He was, as Reuben remarked, well fitted to be an intermediary between us, for he was taller though not so broad as I was, and broader though not so tall as the adventurer. His face was long, thin, and hollow-cheeked, with a pair of great thatched eyebrows and deep-sunken melancholy eyes, which lit up upon occasion with a sudden quick flash of fiery enthusiasm.

"Joshua Pettigrue is my name, gentlemen," said he; "I am an unworthy worker in the Lord's vineyard, testifying with voice and with arm to His holy covenant. These are my faithful flock, whom I am bringing westward that they may be ready for the reaping when it pleases the Almighty to gather them in."

"And why have you not brought them into some show of order or formation?" asked Saxon. "They are straggling along the road like a line of geese upon a common when Michaelmas is nigh. Have you no fears? Is it not written that your calamity cometh suddenly—suddenly shall you be broken down without remedy?"

"Aye, friend, but is it not also written, 'Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding'? Mark ye, if I were to draw up my men

in military fashion it would invite attention and attack from any of James Stuart's horse who may come our way. It is my desire to bring my flock to the camp and obtain pieces for them before exposing them to so unequal a contest."

"Truly, sir, it is a wise resolution," said Saxon grimly, "for if a troop of horse came down upon these good people the pastor would find himself without his flock."

"Nay, that could never be!" cried Master Pettigrue with fervour. "Say rather that pastor, flock, and all would find their way along the thorny track of martyrdom to the new Jerusalem. Know, friend, that I have come from Monmouth in order to conduct these men to his standard. I received from him, or rather from Master Ferguson, instruction to be on the look-out for ye and for several others of the faithful we expect to join us from the East. By what route came ye?"

"Over Salisbury Plain and so through Bruton."

"And saw ye or met ye any of our people upon the way?"

"None," Saxon answered. "We left the Blue Guards at Salisbury, however, and we saw either them or some other horse regiment near this side of the Plain at the village of Mere."

"Ah, there is a gathering of the eagles," cried Master Joshua Pettigrue, shaking his head. "They are men of fine raiment, with war-horses and chariots and trappings, like the Assyrians of old, yet shall the angel of the Lord breathe upon them in the night. Yea, He shall cut them off utterly in His wrath, and they shall be destroyed."

"Amen! Amen!" cried as many of the peasants as were within earshot.

"They have elevated their horn, Master Pettigrue," said the grizzly-haired Puritan. "They have set up their candlestick on high—the candlestick of a perverse ritual and of an idolatrous service. Shall it not be dashed down by the hands of the righteous?"

"Lo, this same candle waxed big and burned sooty,

even as an offence to the nostrils, in the days of our fathers," cried a burly red-faced man, whose dress proclaimed him to be one of the yeoman class. "So was it when Old Noll did get his snuffing shears to work upon it. It is a wick which can only be trimmed by the sword of the faithful." A grim laugh from the whole party proclaimed their appreciation of the pious waggery of their companion.

"Ah, Brother Sandcroft," cried the pastor, "there is much sweetness and manna hidden in thy conversation. But the way is long and dreary. Shall we not lighten it by a song of praise? Where is Brother Thistlethwaite, whose voice is as the cymbal, the tabor, and the dulcimer?"

"Lo, most pious Master Pettigrue," said Saxon, "I have myself at times ventured to lift up my voice before the Lord." Without any further apology he broke out in stentorian tones into the following hymn, the refrain of which was caught up by pastor and congregation.

The Lord He is a morion
That guards me from all wound;
The Lord He is a coat of mail
That circles me all round.
Who then fears to draw the sword,
And fight the battle of the Lord?

The Lord He is the buckler true
That swings on my left arm;
The Lord He is the plate of proof
That shieldeth me from harm.
Who then fears to draw the sword,
And fight the battle of the Lord?

Who then dreads the violent,
Or fears the man of pride?
Or shall I flee from two or three
If He be by my side?
Who then fears to draw the sword,
And fight the battle of the Lord?

My faith is like a citadel
Girt round with moat and wall,
No mine, or sap, or breach, or gap
Can e'er prevail at all.
Who then fears to draw the sword,
And fight the battle of the Lord?

Saxon ceased, but the Reverend Joshua Pettigrue waved his long arms and repeated the refrain, which was taken up again and again by the long column of marching peasants.

"It is a godly hymn," said our companion, who had, to my disgust and to the evident astonishment of Reuben and Sir Gervas, resumed the snuffling, whining voice which he had used in the presence of my father. "It hath availed much on the field of battle."

"Truly," returned the clergyman, "if your comrades are of as sweet a savour as yourself, ye will be worth a brigade of pikes to the faithful," a sentiment which raised a murmur of assent from the Puritans around. "Since, sir," he continued, "you have had much experience in the wiles of war, I shall be glad to hand over to you the command of this small body of the faithful, until such time as we reach the army."

"It is time, too, in good faith, that ye had a soldier at your head," Decimus Saxon answered quietly. "My eyes deceive me strangely if I do not see the gleam of sword and cuirass upon the brow of yonder declivity. Methinks our pious exercises have brought the enemy upon us."

## 15. *Of our Brush with the King's Dragoons*

SOME little distance from us a branch road ran into that along which we and our motley assemblage of companions-in-arms were travelling. This road curved down the side of a well-wooded hill, and then over the level for a quarter of a mile or so before opening on the other. Just at the brow of the rising ground there stood a thick bristle of trees, amid the trunks of which there came and went a bright shimmer of sparkling steel, which proclaimed the presence of armed men. Farther back, where the road took a sudden turn and ran along the ridge of the hill, several horsemen could be plainly seen outlined against the evening sky. So peaceful, however,

was the long sweep of countryside, mellowed by the golden light of the setting sun, with a score of village steeples and manor-houses peeping out from amongst the woods, that it was hard to think that the thundercloud of war was really lowering over that fair valley, and that at any instant the lightning might break from it.

The country folk, however, appeared to have no difficulty at all in understanding the danger to which they were exposed. The fugitives from the West gave a yell of consternation, and ran wildly down the road or whipped up their beasts of burden in the endeavour to place as safe a distance as possible between themselves and the threatened attack. The chorus of shrill cries and shouts, with the cracking of whips, creaking of wheels, and the occasional crash when some cart-load of goods came to grief, made up a most deafening uproar, above which our leader's voice resounded in sharp, eager exhortation and command. When, however, the loud brazen shriek from a bugle broke from the wood, and the head of a troop of horse began to descend the slope, the panic became greater still, and it was difficult for us to preserve any order at all amidst the wild rush of the terrified fugitives.

"Stop that cart, Clarke," cried Saxon vehemently, pointing with his sword to an old waggon, piled high with furniture and bedding, which was lumbering along drawn by two raw-boned colts. At the same moment I saw him drive his horse into the crowd and catch at the reins of another similar one. Giving Covenant's bridle a shake I was soon abreast of the cart which he had indicated, and managed to bring the furious young horses to a standstill.

"Bring it up!" cried our leader, working with the coolness which only a long apprenticeship to war can give. "Now, friends, cut the traces!" A dozen knives were at work in a moment, and the kicking struggling animals scampered off, leaving their burdens behind them. Saxon sprang off his horse and set the example in dragging the waggon across the roadway, while some of the peasants, under the direction of Reuben Lockarby and of Master

Joshua Pettigrue, arranged a couple of other carts to block the way fifty yards further down. The latter precaution was to guard against the chance of the royal horse riding through the fields and attacking us from behind. So speedily was the scheme conceived and carried out, that within a very few minutes of the first alarm we found ourselves protected front and rear by a lofty barricade, while within this improvised fortress was a garrison of a hundred and fifty men.

"What firearms have we amongst us?" asked Saxon hurriedly.

"A dozen pistols at the most," replied the elderly Puritan, who was addressed by his companions as Hope-above Williams. "John Rodway, the coachman, hath his blunderbuss. There are also two godly men from Hungerford, who are keepers of game, and who have brought their pieces with them."

"They are here, sir," cried another, pointing to two stout, bearded fellows, who were ramming charges into their long-barrelled muskets. "Their names are Wat and Nat Millman."

"Two who can hit their mark are worth a battalion who shoot wide," our leader remarked. "Get under the waggon, my friends, and rest your pieces upon the spokes. Never draw trigger until the sons of Belial are within three pikes' length of ye."

"My brother and I," quoth one of them, "can hit a running doe at two hundred paces. Our lives are in the hands of the Lord, but two, at least, of these hired butchers we shall send before us."

"As gladly as ever we slew stoat or wild-cat," cried the other, slipping under the waggon. "We are keeping the Lord's preserves now, brother Wat, and truly these are some of the vermin that infest them."

"Let all who have pistols line the waggon," said Saxon, tying his mare to the hedge—an example which we all followed. "Clarke, do you take charge upon the right with Sir Gervas, while Lockarby assists Master

Pettigrue upon the left. Ye others shall stand behind with stones. Should they break through our barricades slash at the horses with your scythes. Once down, the riders are no match for ye."

A low sullen murmur of determined resolution rose from the peasants, mingled with pious ejaculations and little scraps of hymn or of prayer. They had all produced from under their smocks rustic weapons of some sort. Ten or twelve had petronels, which, from their antique look and rusty condition, threatened to be more dangerous to their possessors than to the enemy. Others had sickles, scythe-blades, flails, half-pikes, or hammers, while the remainder carried long knives and oaken clubs. Simple as were these weapons, history has proved that in the hands of men who are deeply stirred by religious fanaticism they are by no means to be despised. One had but to look at the stern, set faces of our followers, and the gleam of exultation and expectancy which shone from their eyes, to see that they were not the men to quail, either from superior numbers or equipment.

"By the Mass!" whispered Sir Gervas, "it is magnificent! An hour of this is worth a year in the Mall. The old Puritan bull is fairly at bay. Let us see what sort of sport the bull-pups make in the baiting of him! I'll lay five pieces to four on the chaw-bacons!"

"Nay, it's no matter for idle betting," said I shortly, for his light-hearted chatter annoyed me at so solemn a moment.

"Five to four on the soldiers, then!" he persisted. "It is too good a match not to have a stake on it one way or the other."

"Our lives are the stake," said I.

"Faith, I had forgot it!" he replied, still mumbling his toothpick. "'To be or not to be?' as Will of Stratford says. Kynaston was great on the passage. But here is the bell that rings the curtain up."

Whilst we had been making our dispositions the troop of horse—for there appeared to be but one—had trotted

down the cross-road, and had drawn up across the main highway. They numbered, as far as I could judge, about ninety troopers, and it was evident from their three-cornered hats, steel plates, red sleeves, and bandoliers, that they were dragoons of the regular army. The main body halted a quarter of a mile from us, while three officers rode to the front and held a short consultation, which ended in one of them setting spurs to his horse and cantering down in our direction. A bugler followed a few paces behind him, waving a white kerchief and blowing an occasional blast upon his trumpet.

"Here comes an envoy," cried Saxon, who was standing up in the waggon. "Now, my brethren, we have neither kettledrum nor tinkling brass, but we have the instrument wherewith Providence hath endowed us. Let us show the red-coats that we know how to use it.

'Who then dreads the violent,
Or fears the man of pride?
Or shall I flee from two or three
If He be by my side?'

Seven score voices broke in, in a hoarse roar, upon the chorus—

"Who then fears to draw the sword,
And fight the battle of the Lord?"

I could well believe at that moment that the Spartans had found the lame singer Tyrtæus the most successful of their generals, for the sound of their own voices increased the confidence of the country folk, while the martial words of the old hymn roused the dogged spirit in their breasts. So high did their courage run that they broke off their song with a loud warlike shout, waving their weapons above their heads, and ready I verily believe to march out from their barricades and make straight for the horsemen. In the midst of this clamour and turmoil the young dragoon officer, a handsome, olive-faced lad, rode fearlessly up to the barrier, and pulling up his beautiful roan steed, held up his hand with an imperious gesture which demanded silence.

"Who is the leader of this conventicle?" he asked.

"Address your message to me, sir," said our leader from the top of the waggon, "but understand that your white flag will only protect you whilst you use such language as may come from one courteous adversary to another. Say your say or retire."

"Courtesy and honour," said the officer, with a sneer, "are not extended to rebels who are in arms against their lawful sovereign. If you are the leader of this rabble, I warn you if they are not dispersed within five minutes by this watch"—he pulled out an elegant gold time-piece—"we shall ride down upon them and cut them to pieces."

"The Lord can protect His own," Saxon answered, amid a fierce hum of approval from the crowd. "Is this all thy message?"

"It is all, and you will find it enough, you Presbyterian traitor," cried the dragoon cornet. "Listen to me, misguided fools," he continued, standing up upon his stirrups and speaking to the peasants at the other side of the waggon. "What chance have ye with your whittles and cheese-scrapers? Ye may yet save your skins if ye will but deliver up your leaders, throw down what ye are pleased to call your arms, and trust to the King's mercy."

"This exceedeth the limitations of your privileges," said Saxon, drawing a pistol from his belt and cocking it. "If you say another word to seduce these people from their allegiance, I fire."

"Hope not to benefit Monmouth," cried the young officer, disregarding the threat, and still addressing his words to the peasants. "The whole royal army is drawing round him and——"

"Have a care!" shouted our leader, in a deep harsh voice.

"His head within a month shall roll upon the scaffold."

"But you shall never live to see it," said Saxon, and stooping over he fired straight at the cornet's head. At the flash of the pistol the trumpeter wheeled round and galloped for his life, while the roan horse turned and followed with its master still seated firmly in the saddle.

"Verily you have missed the Midianite!" cried Hope-above Williams.

"He is dead," said our leader, pouring a fresh charge into his pistol. "It is the law of war, Clarke," he added, looking round at me. "He hath chosen to break it, and must pay forfeit."

As he spoke I saw the young officer lean gradually over in his saddle, until, when about half-way back to his friends, he lost his balance and fell heavily in the roadway, turning over two or three times with the force of his fall, and lying at last still and motionless, a dust-coloured heap. A loud yell of rage broke from the troopers at the sight, which was answered by a shout of defiance from the Puritan peasantry.

"Down on your faces!" cried Saxon; "they are about to fire."

The crackle of musketry and a storm of bullets, pinging on the hard ground, or cutting twigs from the hedges on either side of us, lent emphasis to our leader's order. Many of the peasants crouched behind the feather beds and tables which had been pulled out of the cart. Some lay in the waggon itself, and some sheltered themselves behind or underneath it. Others again lined the ditches on either side or lay flat upon the roadway, while a few showed their belief in the workings of Providence by standing upright without flinching from the bullets. Amongst these latter were Saxon and Sir Gervas, the former to set an example to his raw troops, and the latter out of pure laziness and indifference. Reuben and I sat together in the ditch, and I can assure you, my dear grandchildren, that we felt very much inclined to bob our heads when we heard the bullets piping all around them. If any soldier ever told you that he did not the first time that he was under fire, then that soldier is not a man to trust. After sitting rigid and silent, however, as if we had both stiff necks, for a very few minutes, the feeling passed completely away, and from that day to this it has never returned to me. You see familiarity breeds con-

tempt with bullets as with other things, and though it is no easy matter to come to like them, like the King of Sweden or my Lord Cutts, it is not so very hard to become indifferent to them.

The cornet's death did not remain long unavenged. A little old man with a sickle, who had been standing near Sir Gervas, gave a sudden sharp cry, and springing up into the air with a loud "Glory to God!" fell flat upon his face dead. A bullet had struck him just over the right eye. Almost at the same moment one of the peasants in the waggon was shot through the chest, and sat up coughing blood all over the wheel. I saw Master Joshua Pettigrue catch him in his long arms, and settle some bedding under his head, so that he lay breathing heavily and puttering forth prayers. The minister showed himself a man that day, for amid the fierce carbine fire he walked boldly up and down, with a drawn rapier in his left hand—for he was a left-handed man—and his Bible in the other. "This is what you are dying for, dear brothers," he cried continually, holding the brown volume up in the air; "are ye not ready to die for this?" And every time he asked the question a low eager murmur of assent rose from the ditches, the waggon, and the road.

"They aim like yokels at a Wappenschaw," said Saxon, seating himself on the side of the waggon. "Like all young soldiers they fire too high. When I was an adjutant it was my custom to press down the barrels of the muskets until my eye told me that they were level. These rogues think that they have done their part if they do but let the gun off, though they are as like to hit the plovers above us as ourselves."

"Five of the faithful have fallen," said Hope-above Williams. "Shall we not sally forth and do battle with the children of Antichrist? Are we to lie here like so many popinjays at a fair for the troopers to practise upon?"

"There is a stone barn over yonder on the hillside," I remarked. "If we who have horses, and a few others,

were to keep the dragoons in play, the people might be able to reach it, and so be sheltered from the fire."

"At least let my brother and me have a shot or two back at them," cried one of the marksmen beside the wheel.

To all our entreaties and suggestions, however, our leader only replied by a shake of the head, and continued to swing his long legs over the side of the waggon with his eyes fixed intently upon the horsemen, many of whom had dismounted and were leaning their carbines over the cruppers of their chargers.

"This cannot go on, sir," said the pastor, in a low earnest voice; "two more men have just been hit."

"If fifty more men are hit we must wait until they charge," Saxon answered. "What would you do, man? If you leave this shelter you will be cut off and utterly destroyed. When you have seen as much of war as I have done, you will learn to put up quietly with what is not to be avoided. I remember on such another occasion when the rearguard or nachhut of the Imperial troops was followed by Croats, who were in the pay of the Grand Turk, I lost half my company before the mercenary renegades came to close fighting. Ha, my brave boys, they are mounting! We shall not have to wait long now."

The dragoons were indeed climbing into their saddles again, and forming across the road, with the evident intention of charging down upon us. At the same time about thirty men detached themselves from the main body and trotted away into the fields upon our right. Saxon growled a hearty oath under his breath as he observed them.

"They have some knowledge of warfare after all," said he. "They mean to charge us flank and front. Master Joshua, see that your scythesmen line the quickset hedge upon the right. Stand up well, my brothers, and flinch not from the horses. You men with the sickles, lie in the ditch there, and cut at the legs of the brutes. A line of stone throwers behind that. A heavy stone is as sure as a

bullet at close quarters. If ye would see your wives and children again, make that hedge good against the horsemen. Now for the front attack. Let the men who carry petronels come into the waggon. Two of yours, Clarke, and two of yours, Lockarby. I can spare one also. That makes five. Now here are ten others of a sort and three muskets. Twenty shots in all. Have you no pistols, Sir Gervas?"

"No, but I can get a pair," said our companion, and springing upon his horse he forced his way through the ditch, past the barrier, and so down the road in the direction of the dragoons.

The movement was so sudden and so unexpected that there was a dead silence for a few seconds, which was broken by a general howl of hatred and execration from the peasants. "Shoot upon him! Shoot down the false Amalekite!" they shrieked. "He hath gone to join his kind! He hath delivered us up into the hands of the enemy! Judas! Judas!" As to the horsemen, who were still forming up for a charge and waiting for the flanking party to get into position, they sat still and silent, not knowing what to make of the gaily-dressed cavalier who was speeding towards them.

We were not left long in doubt, however. He had no sooner reached the spot where the cornet had fallen than he sprang from his horse and helped himself to the dead man's pistols, and to the belt which contained his powder and ball. Mounting at his leisure, amid a shower of bullets which puffed up the white dust all around him, he rode onwards towards the dragoons and discharged one of his pistols at them. Wheeling round he politely raised his cap, and galloped back to us, none the worse for his adventure, though a ball had grazed his horse's fetlock and another had left a hole in the skirt of his riding-coat. The peasants raised a shout of jubilation as he rode in, and from that day forward our friend was permitted to wear his gay trappings and to bear himself as he would, without being suspected of having mounted the livery of

Satan or of being wanting in zeal for the cause of the saints.

"They are coming," cried Saxon. "Let no man draw trigger until he sees me shoot. If any does, I shall send a bullet through him, though it was my last shot and the troopers were amongst us."

As our leader uttered this threat and looked grimly round upon us with an evident intention of executing it, a shrill blare of a bugle burst from the horsemen in front of us, and was answered by those upon our flank. At the signal both bodies set spurs to their horses and dashed down upon us at the top of their speed. Those in the field were delayed for a few moments, and thrown into some disorder, by finding that the ground immediately in front of them was soft and boggy, but having made their way through it they re-formed upon the other side and rode gallantly at the hedge. Our own opponents, having a clear course before them, never slackened for an instant, but came thundering down with a jingling of harness and a tempest of oaths upon our rude barricades.

Ah, my children! when a man in his age tries to describe such things as these, and to make others see what he has seen, it is only then that he understands what a small stock of language a plain man keeps by him for his ordinary use in the world, and how unfit it is to meet any call upon it. For though at this very moment I can myself see that white Somersetshire road, with the wild whirling charge of the horsemen, the red angry faces of the men, and the gaping nostrils of the horses all wreathed and framed in clouds of dust, I cannot hope to make it clear to your young eyes, which never have looked, and, I trust, never shall look, upon such a scene. When, too, I think of the sound, a mere rattle and jingle at first, but growing in strength and volume with every step, until it came upon us with a thunderous rush and roar which gave the impression of irresistible power, I feel that that too is beyond the power of my feeble words to express. To inexperienced soldiers like ourselves it seemed impossible

that our frail defence and our feeble weapons could check for an instant the impetus and weight of the dragoons. To right and left I saw white set faces, open-eyed and rigid, unflinching, with a stubbornness which rose less from hope than from despair. All round rose exclamations and prayers. "Lord, save Thy people!" "Mercy, Lord, mercy!" "Be with us this day!" "Receive our souls, O merciful Father!" Saxon lay across the waggon with his eyes glinting like diamonds and his petronel presented at the full length of his rigid arm. Following his example we all took aim as steadily as possible at the first rank of the enemy. Our only hope of safety lay in making that one discharge so deadly that our opponents should be too much shaken to continue their attack.

Would the man never fire? They could not be more than ten paces from us. I could see the buckles of the men's plates and the powder charges in their bandoliers. One more stride yet, and at last our leader's pistol flashed and we poured in a close volley, supported by a shower of heavy stones from the sturdy peasants behind. I could hear them splintering against casque and cuirass like hail upon a casement. The cloud of smoke veiling for an instant the line of galloping steeds and gallant riders drifted slowly aside to show a very different scene. A dozen men and horses were rolling in one wild blood-spurting heap, the unwounded falling over those whom our balls and stones had brought down. Struggling, snorting chargers, iron-shod feet, staggering figures rising and falling, wild, hatless, bewildered men half stunned by a fall, and not knowing which way to turn—that was the foreground of the picture, while behind them the remainder of the troop were riding furiously back, wounded and hale, all driven by the one desire of getting to a place of safety where they might rally their shattered formation. A great shout of praise and thanksgiving rose from the delighted peasants, and surging over the barricade they struck down or secured the few uninjured troopers who

had been unable or unwilling to join their companions in their flight. The carbines, swords, and bandoliers were eagerly pounced upon by the victors, some of whom had served in the militia, and knew well how to handle the weapons which they had won.

The victory, however, was by no means completed. The flanking squadron had ridden boldly at the hedge, and a dozen or more had forced their way through, in spite of the showers of stones and the desperate thrusts of the pikemen and scythemen. Once amongst the peasants, the long swords and the armour of the dragoons gave them a great advantage, and though the sickles brought several of the horses to the ground the soldiers continued to lay about them freely, and to beat back the fierce but ill-armed resistance of their opponents. A dragoon sergeant, a man of great resolution and of prodigious strength, appeared to be the leader of the party, and encouraged his followers both by word and example. A stab from a half-pike brought his horse to the ground, but he sprang from the saddle as it fell, and avenged its death by a sweeping back-handed cut from his broadsword. Waving his hat in his left hand he continued to rally his men, and to strike down every Puritan who came against him, until a blow from a hatchet brought him on his knees and a flail stroke broke his sword close by the hilt. At the fall of their leader his comrades turned and fled through the hedge, but the gallant fellow, wounded and bleeding, still showed fight, and would assuredly have been knocked upon the head for his pains had I not picked him up and thrown him into the waggon, where he had the good sense to lie quiet until the skirmish was at an end. Of the dozen who broke through, not more than four escaped, and several others lay dead or wounded upon the other side of the hedge, impaled by scythe-blades or knocked off their horses by stones. Altogether nine of the dragoons were slain and fourteen wounded, while we retained seven unscathed prisoners, ten horses fit for service, and a score or so of carbines, with good store of match, powder, and

ball. The remainder of the troop fired a single, straggling, irregular volley, and then galloped away down the cross-road, disappearing amongst the trees from which they had emerged.

All this, however, had not been accomplished without severe loss upon our side. Three men had been killed and six wounded, one of them very seriously, by the musketry fire. Five had been cut down when the flanking party broke their way in, and only one of these could be expected to recover. In addition to this, one man had lost his life through the bursting of an ancient petronel, and another had his arm broken by the kick of a horse. Our total losses, therefore, were eight killed and the same wounded, which could not but be regarded as a very moderate number when we consider the fierceness of the skirmish, and the superiority of our enemy both in discipline and in equipment.

So elated were the peasants by their victory, that those who had secured horses were clamorous to be allowed to follow the dragoons, the more so as Sir Gervas Jerome and Reuben were both eager to lead them. Decimus Saxon refused, however, to listen to any such scheme, nor did he show more favour to the Reverend Joshua Pettigrue's proposal, that he should in his capacity as pastor mount immediately upon the waggon, and improve the occasion by a few words of healing and unction.

"It is true, good Master Pettigrue, that we owe much praise and much outpouring, and much sweet and holy contending, for this blessing which hath come upon Israel," said he, "but the time hath not yet arrived. There is an hour for prayer and an hour for labour. Hark ye, friend"—to one of the prisoners—"to what regiment do you belong?"

"It is not for me to reply to your questions," the man answered sulkily.

"Nay, then, we'll try if a string round your scalp and a few twists of a drumstick will make you find your tongue," said Saxon, pushing his face up to that of the prisoner, and

staring into his eyes with so savage an expression that the man shrank away affrighted.

"It is a troop of the second dragoon regiment," he said.

"Where is the regiment itself?"

"We left it on the Ilchester and Langport road."

"You hear," said our leader. "We have not a moment to spare, or we may have the whole crew about our ears. Put our dead and wounded in the carts, and we can harness two of these chargers to them. We shall not be in safety until we are in Taunton town."

Even Master Joshua saw that the matter was too pressing to permit of any spiritual exercises. The wounded men were lifted into the waggon and laid upon the bedding, while our dead were placed in the cart which had defended our rear. The peasants who owned these, far from making any objection to this disposal of their property, assisted us in every way, tightening girths and buckling traces. Within an hour of the ending of the skirmish we found ourselves pursuing our way once more, and looking back through the twilight at the scattered black dots upon the white road, where the bodies of the dragoons marked the scene of our victory.

## 16. *Of our Coming to Taunton*

THE purple shadows of evening had fallen over the countryside, and the sun had sunk behind the distant Quantock and Brendon Hills, as our rude column of rustic infantry plodded through Curry Rivell, Wrantage, and Henlade. At every wayside cottage and red-tiled farmhouse the people swarmed out as we passed, with jugs full of milk or beer, shaking hands with our yokels, and pressing food and drink upon them. In the little villages old and young came buzzing to greet us, and cheered long and loud for King Monmouth and the Protestant cause. The stay-at-homes were mostly elderly folks and children, but here and there a young labourer, whom hesitation or duties had kept back, was so

carried away by our martial appearance, and by the visible trophies of our victory, that he snatched up a weapon and joined our ranks.

The skirmish had reduced our numbers, but it had done much to turn our rabble of peasants into a real military force. The leadership of Saxon, and his stern, short words of praise or of censure, had done even more. The men kept some sort of formation, and stepped together briskly in a compact body. The old soldier and I rode at the head of the column, with Master Pettigrue still walking between us. Then came the cartful of our dead, whom we were carrying with us to ensure their decent burial. Behind this walked twoscore of scythe and sickle men, with their rude weapons over their shoulders, preceding the waggon in which the wounded were carried. This was followed by the main body of the peasants, and the rear was brought up by ten or twelve men under the command of Lockarby and Sir Gervas, mounted upon captured chargers, and wearing the breastplates, swords, and carbines of the dragoons.

I observed that Saxon rode with his chin upon his shoulder, casting continual uneasy glances behind him, and halting at every piece of rising ground to make sure that there were no pursuers at our heels. It was not until, after many weary miles of marching, the lights of Taunton could be seen twinkling far off in the valley beneath us that he at last heaved a deep sigh of relief, and expressed his belief that all danger was over.

"I am not prone to be fearful upon small occasion," he remarked, "but hampered as we are with wounded men and prisoners, it might have puzzled Petrinus himself to know what we should have done had the cavalry overtaken us. I can now, Master Pettigrue, smoke my pipe in peace, without pricking up my ears at every chance rumble of a wheel or shout of a village roisterer."

"Even had they pursued us," said the minister stoutly, "as long as the hand of the Lord shall shield us, why should we fear them?"

"Aye, aye!" Saxon answered impatiently, "but the devil prevaileth at times. Were not the chosen people themselves overthrown and led into captivity? How say you, Clarke?"

"One such skirmish is enough for a day," I remarked.

"Faith! if instead of charging us they had continued that carbine fire, we must either have come forth or been shot where we lay."

"For that reason I forbade our friends with the muskets to answer it," said Saxon. "Our silence led them to think that we had but a pistol or two among us, and so brought them to charge us. Thus our volley became the more terrifying since it was unexpected. I'll wager there was not a man amongst them who did not feel that he had been led into a trap. Mark you how the rogues wheeled and fled with one accord, as though it had been part of their daily drill!"

"The peasants stood to it like men," I remarked.

"There is nothing like a tincture of Calvinism for stiffening a line of battle," said Saxon. "Look at the Swede when he is at home. What more honest, simple-hearted fellow could you find with no single soldierly virtue, save that he could put away more spruce beer than you would care to pay for. Yet if you do but cram him with a few strong, homely texts, place a pike in his hand, and give him a Gustavus to lead him, there is no infantry in the world that can stand against him. On the other hand, I have seen young Turks, untrained to arms, strike in on behalf of the Koran as lustily as these brave fellows behind us did for the Bible which Master Pettigrue held up in front of them."

"I trust, sir," said the minister gravely, "that you do not, by these remarks, intend to institute any comparison between our sacred scriptures and the writings of the impostor Mahomet, or to infer that there is any similarity between the devil-inspired fury of the infidel Saracens and the Christian fortitude of the struggling faithful!"

"By no means," Saxon answered, grinning at me over the minister's head. "I was but showing how closely the Evil One can imitate the workings of the Spirit."

"Too true, Master Saxon, too true!" the clergyman answered sadly. "Amid the conflict and discord it is hard to pick out the true path. But I marvel much that amidst the snares and temptations that beset a soldier's life you have kept yourself unsullied, with your heart still set upon the true faith."

"It was through no strength of mine own," said Saxon piously.

"In very truth, such men as you are much needed in Monmouth's army," Master Joshua exclaimed. "They have there several, as I understand, from Holland, Brandenburg, and Scotland, who have been trained in arms, but who care so little for the cause which we uphold that they curse and swear in a manner that affrights the peasants, and threatens to call down a judgment upon the army. Others there are who cling close to the true faith, and have been born again among the righteous; but alas! they have had no experience of camps and fields. Our blessed Master can work by means of weak instruments, yet the fact remains that a man may be a chosen light in a pulpit, and yet be of little avail in an onslaught such as we have seen this day. I can myself arrange my discourse to the satisfaction of my flock, so that they grieve when the sand is run out; [1] but I am aware that this power would stand me in little stead when it came to the raising of barricades and the use of carnal weapons. In this way it comes about, in the army of the faithful, that those who are fit to lead are hateful to the people, while those to whose words the people will hearken know little of war. Now we have this day seen that you are ready of head and of hand, of much experience of battle, and yet of demure and sober life, full of yearnings after the word and strivings against Apollyon. I therefore repeat that you shall be as a very Joshua amongst them, or as a Samson, destined

[1] Note E, Appendix—Hour-glasses in pulpits.

to tear down the twin pillars of Prelacy and Popery, so as to bury this corrupt government in its fall."

Decimus Saxon's only reply to this eulogy was one of those groans which were supposed, among the zealots, to be the symbol of intense inner conflict and emotion. So austere and holy was his expression, so solemn his demeanour, and so frequent the upturnings of his eyes, clasping of his hands, and other signs which marked the extreme sectary, that I could not but marvel at the depths and completeness of the hypocrisy which had cast so complete a cloak over his rapacious self. For very mischief's sake I could not refrain from reminding him that there was one at least who valued his professions at their real value.

"Have you told the worthy minister," said I, "of your captivity amongst the Mussulmans, and of the noble way in which you did uphold the Christian faith at Stamboul?"

"Nay," cried our companion, "I would fain hear the tale. I marvel much that one so faithful and unbending as thyself was ever let loose by the unclean and bloodthirsty followers of Mahomet."

"It does not become me to tell the tale," Saxon answered with great presence of mind, casting at the same time a most venomous sidelong glance at me. "It is for my comrades in misfortune and not for me to describe what I endured for the faith. I have little doubt, Master Pettigrue, that you would have done as much had you been there. The town of Taunton lies very quiet beneath us, and there are few lights for so early an hour, seeing that it has not yet gone ten. It is clear that Monmouth's forces have not reached it yet, else had there been some show of camp-fires in the valley; for though it is warm enough to lie out in the open, the men must have fires to cook their victual."

"The army could scarce have come so far," said the pastor. "They have, I hear, been much delayed by the want of arms and by the need of discipline. Bethink ye,

it was on the eleventh day of the month that Monmouth landed at Lyme, and it is now but the night of the fourteenth. There was much to be done in the time."

"Four whole days!" growled the old soldier. "Yet I expected no better, seeing that they have, so far as I can hear, no tried soldiers amongst them. By my sword, Tilly or Wallenstein would not have taken four days to come from Lyme to Taunton, though all James Stuart's cavalry barred the way. Great enterprises are not pushed through in this halting fashion. The blow should be sharp and sudden. But tell me, worthy sir, all that you know about the matter, for we have heard little upon the road save rumour and surmise. Was there not some fashion of onfall at Bridport?"

"There was indeed some shedding of blood at that place. The first two days were consumed, as I understand, in the enrolling of the faithful and the search for arms wherewith to equip them. You may well shake your head, for the hours were precious. At last five hundred men were broken into some sort of order, and marched along the coast under command of Lord Grey of Wark and Wade the lawyer. At Bridport they were opposed by the red Dorset militia and part of Portman's yellow coats. If all be true that is said, neither side had much to boast of. Grey and his cavalry never tightened bridle until they were back in Lyme once more, though it is said their flight had more to do with the hard mouths of their horses than with the soft hearts of the riders. Wade and his footmen did bravely, and had the best of it against the King's troops. There was much outcry against Grey in the camp, but Monmouth can scarce afford to be severe upon the only nobleman who hath joined his standard."

"Pshaw!" cried Saxon peevishly. "There was no great stock of noblemen in Cromwell's army, I trow, and yet they held their own against the King, who had as many lords by him as there are haws in a thicket. If ye have the people on your side, why should ye crave for

these bewigged fine gentlemen, whose white hands and delicate rapiers are of as much service as so many ladies' bodkins ? "

" Faith ! " said I, " if all the fops are as careless for their lives as our friend Sir Gervas, I could wish no better comrades in the field."

" In good sooth, yes ! " cried Master Pettigrue heartily. " What though he be clothed in a Joseph's coat of many colours, and hath strange turns of speech ! No man could have fought more stoutly or shown a bolder front against the enemies of Israel. Surely the youth hath good in his heart, and will become a seat of grace and a vessel of the Spirit, though at present he be entangled in the net of worldly follies and carnal vanities."

" It is to be hoped so," quoth Saxon devoutly. " And what else can you tell us of the revolt, worthy sir ? "

" Very little, save that the peasants have flocked in in such numbers that many have had to be turned away for want of arms. Every tithing-man in Somersetshire is searching for axes and scythes. There is not a blacksmith but is at his forge from morn to night at work upon pike-heads. There are six thousand men of a sort in the camp, but not one in five carries a musket. They have advanced, I hear, upon Axminster, where they must meet the Duke of Albemarle, who hath set out from Exeter with four thousand of the train bands."

" Then we shall be too late, after all," I exclaimed.

" You will have enough of battles before Monmouth exchanges his riding-hat for a crown, and his laced roquelaure for the royal purple," quoth Saxon. " Should our worthy friend here be correctly informed and such an engagement take place, it will but be the prologue to the play. When Feversham and Churchill come up with the King's own troops it is then that Monmouth takes the last spring, that lands him either on the throne or the scaffold."

Whilst this conversation had been proceeding we had been walking our horses down the winding track which

leads along the eastern slope of Taunton Deane. For some time past we had been able to see in the valley beneath us the lights of Taunton town and the long silver strip of the river Tone. The moon was shining brightly in a cloudless heaven, throwing a still and peaceful radiance over the fairest and richest of English valleys. Lordly manorial houses, pinnacled towers, clusters of nestling thatch-roofed cottages, broad silent stretches of cornland, dark groves with the glint of lamp-lit windows shining from their recesses—it all lay around us like the shadowy, voiceless landscapes which stretch before us in our dreams. So calm and so beautiful was the scene that we reined up our horses at the bend of the pathway, the tired and foot-sore peasants came to a halt, while even the wounded raised themselves in the waggon in order to feast their eyes upon this land of promise. Suddenly, in the still-ness, a strong fervent voice was heard calling upon the source of all life to guard and preserve that which He had created. It was Joshua Pettigrue, who had flung himself upon his knees, and who, while asking for future guidance, was returning thanks for the safe deliverance which his flock had experienced from the many perils which had beset them upon their journey. I would, my children, that I had one of those magic crystals of which we have read, that I might show you that scene. The dark figures of the horsemen, the grave, earnest bearing of the rustics as they knelt in prayer or leaned upon their rude weapons, the half-cowed, half-sneering expression of the captive dragoons, the line of white pain-drawn faces that peeped over the side of the waggon, and the chorus of groans, cries, and ejaculations which broke in upon the steady earnest voice of the pastor. Above us the brilliant heavens, beneath us the beautiful sloping valley, stretch-ing away in the white moonlight as far as the eye could reach. Could I but paint such a scene with the brush of a Verrio or Laguerre, I should have no need to describe it in these halting and feeble words.

Master Pettigrue had concluded his thanksgiving, and

was in the act of rising to his feet, when the musical peal of a bell rose up from the sleeping town before us. For a minute or more it rose and fell in its sweet clear cadence. Then a second with a deeper, harsher note joined in, and then a third, until the air was filled with the merry jangling. At the same time a buzz of shouting or huzzaing could be heard, which increased and spread until it swelled into a mighty uproar. Lights flashed in the windows, drums beat, and the whole place was astir. These sudden signs of rejoicing coming at the heels of the minister's prayer were seized upon as a happy omen by the superstitious peasants, who set up a glad cry, and pushing onwards were soon within the outskirts of the town.

The footpaths and causeway were black with throngs of the townsfolk, men, women and children, many of whom were bearing torches and lanthorns, all flocking in the same direction. Following them we found ourselves in the market-place, where crowds of apprentice lads were piling up faggots for a bonfire, while others were broaching two or three great puncheons of ale. The cause of this sudden outbreak of rejoicing was, we learned, that news had just come in that Albemarle's Devonshire militia had partly deserted and partly been defeated at Axminster that very morning. On hearing of our own successful skirmish the joy of the people became more tumultuous than ever. They rushed in amongst us, pouring blessings on our heads, in their strange burring west-country speech, and embracing our horses as well as ourselves. Preparations were soon made for our weary companions. A long empty wool warehouse, thickly littered with straw, was put at their disposal, with a tub of ale and a plentiful supply of cold meats and wheaten bread. For our own part we made our way down East Street through the clamorous hand-shaking crowd to the White Hart Inn, where after a hasty meal we were right glad to seek our couches. Late into the night, however, our slumbers were disturbed by the rejoicings of the mob, who, having

burned the effigies of Lord Sunderland and of Gregory Alford, Mayor of Lyme, continued to sing west-country songs and Puritan hymns into the small hours of the morning.

## 17. *Of the Gathering in the Market-square*

THE fair town in which we now found ourselves was, although Monmouth had not yet reached it, the real centre of the rebellion. It was a prosperous place, with a great woollen and kersey trade, which gave occupation to as many as seven thousand inhabitants. It stood high, therefore, amongst English boroughs, being inferior only to Bristol, Norwich, Bath, Exeter, York, Worcester and Nottingham amongst the country towns. Taunton had long been famous not only for its own resources and for the spirit of its inhabitants, but also for the beautiful and highly cultivated country which spread around it, and gave rise to a gallant breed of yeomen. From time immemorial the town had been a rallying-point for the party of liberty, and for many years it had leaned to the side of Republicanism in politics and of Puritanism in religion. No place in the kingdom had fought more stoutly for the Parliament, and though it had been twice besieged by Goring, the burghers, headed by the brave Robert Blake, had fought so desperately, that the Royalists had been compelled each time to retire discomfited. On the second occasion the garrison had been reduced to dog's-flesh and horseflesh, but no word of surrender had come either from them or their heroic commander, who was the same Blake under whom the old seaman Solomon Sprent had fought against the Dutch. After the Restoration the Privy Council had shown their recollection of the part played by the Somersetshire town, by issuing a special order that the battlements which fenced round the maiden stronghold should be destroyed. Thus, at the time of which I speak, nothing but a line of ruins and

a few unsightly mounds represented the massive line of wall which had been so bravely defended by the last generation of townsmen. There were not wanting, however, many other relics of those stormy times. The houses on the outskirts were still scarred and splintered from the effects of the bombs and grenades of the Cavaliers. Indeed, the whole town bore a grimly martial appearance, as though she were a veteran among boroughs who had served in the past, and was not averse to seeing the flash of guns and hearing the screech of shot once more.

Charles's Council might destroy the battlements which his soldiers had been unable to take, but no royal edict could do away with the resolute spirit and strong opinions of the burghers. Many of them, born and bred amidst the clash of civil strife, had been fired from their infancy by the tales of the old war, and by reminiscences of the great assault when Lunsford's babe-eaters were hurled down the main breach by the strong arms of their fathers. In this way there was bred in Taunton a fiercer and more soldierly spirit that is usual in an English country town, and this flame was fanned by the unwearied ministerings of a chosen band of Nonconformist clergymen, amongst whom Joseph Alleine was the most conspicuous. No better focus for a revolt could have been chosen, for no city valued so highly those liberties and that creed which was in jeopardy.

A large body of the burghers had already set out to join the rebel army, but a good number had remained behind to guard the city, and these were reinforced by gangs of peasants, like the one to which we had attached ourselves, who had trooped in from the surrounding country, and now divided their time between listening to their favourite preachers and learning to step in line and to handle their weapons. In yard, street and market-square there was marching and drilling, night, morning and noon. As we rode out after breakfast the whole town was ringing with the shouting of orders and the clatter of arms. Our own friends of yesterday marched into the market-place

at the moment we entered it, and no sooner did they catch sight of us than they plucked off their hats and cheered lustily, nor would they desist until we cantered over to them and took our places at their head.

"They have vowed that none other should lead them," said the minister, standing by Saxon's stirrup.

"I could not wish to lead stouter fellows," said he. "Let them deploy into double line in front of the town hall. So, so, smartly there, rear rank!" he shouted, facing his horse towards them. "Now swing round into position. Keep your ground, left flank, and let the others pivot upon you. So—as hard and as straight as an Andrea Ferrara. I prithee, friend, do not carry your pike as though it were a hoe, though I trust you will do some weeding in the Lord's vineyard with it. And you, sir, your musquetoon should be sloped upon your shoulder, and not borne under your arm like a dandy's cane. Did ever an unhappy soldier find himself called upon to make order among so motley a crew! Even my good friend the Fleming cannot so avail here, nor does Petrinus, in his 'De re militari,' lay down any injunctions as to the method of drilling a man who is armed with a sickle or a scythe."

"Shoulder scythe, port scythe, present scythe—mow!" whispered Reuben to Sir Gervas, and the pair began to laugh, heedless of the angry frowns of Saxon.

"Let us divide them," he said, "into three companies of eighty men. Or stay—how many musqueteers have we in all? Five-and-fifty. Let them stand forward, and form the first line or company. Sir Gervas Jerome, you have officered the militia of your county, and have doubtless some knowledge of the manual exercise. If I am commandment of this force I hand over the captaincy of this company to you. It shall be the first line in battle, a position which I know you will not be averse to."

"Gad, they'll have to powder their heads," said Sir Gervas, with decision.

"You shall have the entire ordering of them," Saxon

answered. "Let the first company take six paces to the front—so! Now let the pikeman stand out. Eighty-seven, a serviceable company! Lockarby, do you take these men in hand, and never forget that the German wars have proved that the best of horse has no more chance against steady pikemen than the waves against a crag. Take the captaincy of the second company, and ride at their head."

"Faith! If they don't fight better than their captain rides," whispered Reuben, "it will be an evil business. I trust they will be firmer in the field than I am in the saddle."

"The third company of scythesmen I commit to your charge, Captain Micah Clarke," continued Saxon. "Good Master Joshua Pettigrue will be our field-chaplain. Shall not his voice and his presence be to us as manna in the wilderness, and as springs of water in dry places? The under-officers I see that you have yourselves chosen, and your captains shall have power to add to the number from those who smite boldly and spare not. Now one thing I have to say to you, and I speak it that all may hear, and that none may hereafter complain that the rules he serves under were not made clear to him. For I tell you now that when the evening bugle calls, and the helm and pike are laid aside, I am as you and you as I, fellow-workers in the same field, and drinkers from the same wells of life. Lo, I will pray with you, or preach with you, or hearken with you, or expound to you, or do aught that may become a brother pilgrim upon the weary road. But hark you, friends! when we are in arms and the good work is to be done, on the march, in the field, or on parade, then let your bearing be strict, soldierly and scrupulous, quick to hear and alert to obey, for I shall have no sluggards or laggards, and if there be any such my hand shall be heavy upon them, yea, even to the cutting of them off. I say there shall be no mercy for such," here he paused and surveyed his force with a set face and his eyelids drawn low over his glinting, shift-

ing eyes. "If, then," he continued, "there is any man among you who fears to serve under a hard discipline, let him stand forth now, and let him betake him to some easier leader, for I say to you that whilst I command this corps, Saxon's regiment of Wiltshire foot shall be worthy to testify in this great and soul-raising cause."

The Colonel stopped and sat silent upon his mare. The long lines of rustic faces looked up, some stolidly, some admiringly, some with an expression of fear at his stern, gaunt face and baneful eyes. None moved, however, so he continued.

"Worthy Master Timewell, the Mayor of this fair town of Taunton, who has been a tower of strength to the faithful during these long and spirit-trying times, is about to inspect us when the others shall have assembled. Captains, to your companies then! Close up there on the musqueteers, with three paces between each line. Scythesmen, take ground to your left. Let the under-officers stand on the flanks and rear. So! 'tis smartly done for a first venture, though a good adjutant with a prugel after the Imperial fashion might find work to do."

Whilst we were thus rapidly and effectively organising ourselves into a regiment, other bodies of peasantry more or less disciplined had marched into the market-square, and had taken up their position there. Those on our right had come from Frome and Radstock, in the north of Somersetshire, and were a mere rabble armed with flails, hammers and other such weapons, with no common sign of order or cohesion save the green boughs which waved in their hat-bands. The body upon our left, who bore a banner amongst them announcing that they were men of Dorset, were fewer in number but better equipped, having a front rank, like our own, entirely armed with muskets.

The good townsmen of Taunton, with their wives and their daughters, had meanwhile been assembling on the balconies and at the windows which overlooked the square, whence they might have a view of the pageant. The

grave, square-bearded, broadclothed burghers, and their portly dames in velvet and three-piled taffeta, looked down from every post of vantage, while here and there a pretty, timid face peeping out from a Puritan coif made good the old claim, that Taunton excelled in beautiful women as well as in gallant men. The side-walks were crowded with the commoner folk—old white-bearded wool-workers, stern-faced matrons, country lasses with their shawls over their heads, and swarms of children, who cried out with their treble voices for King Monmouth and the Protestant succession.

"By my faith!" said Sir Gervas, reining back his steed until he was abreast of me, "our square-toed friends need not be in such post-haste to get to heaven when they have so many angels among them on earth. Gad's wounds, are they not beautiful? Never a patch or a diamond amongst them, and yet what would not our faded belles of the Mall or the Piazza give for their innocence and freshness?"

"Nay, for Heaven's sake do not smile and bow at them," said I. "These courtesies may pass in London, but they may be misunderstood among simple Somerset maidens and their hot-headed, hard-handed kinsfolk."

I had hardly spoken before the folding-doors of the town-hall were thrown open, and a procession of the city fathers emerged into the market-place. Two trumpeters in parti-coloured jerkins preceded them, who blew a flourish upon their instruments as they advanced. Behind came the aldermen and councilmen, grave and reverend elders, clad in their sweeping gowns of black silk, trimmed and tippeted with costly furs. In rear of these walked a pursy little red-faced man, the town clerk, bearing a staff of office in his hand, while the line of dignitaries was closed by the tall and stately figure of Stephen Timewell, Mayor of Taunton.

There was much in this magistrate's appearance to attract attention, for all the characteristics of the Puritan party to which he belonged were embodied and exaggerated

in his person. Of great height he was and very thin, with a long-drawn, heavy-eyelidded expression, which spoke of fasts and vigils. The bent shoulders and the head sunk upon the breast proclaimed the advances of age, but his bright steel-grey eyes and the animation of his eager face showed how the enthusiasm of religion could rise superior to bodily weakness. A peaked, straggling grey beard descended half-way to his waist, and his long snow-white hairs fluttered out from under a velvet skull-cap. The latter was drawn tightly down upon his head, so as to make his ears protrude in an unnatural manner on either side, a custom which had earned for his party the title of "prickeared," so often applied to them by their opponents. His attire was of studious plainness and sombre in colour, consisting of his black mantle, dark velvet breeches and silk hosen, with velvet bows upon his shoes instead of the silver buckles then in vogue. A broad chain of gold around his neck formed the badge of his office. In front of him strutted the fat red-vested town clerk, one hand upon his hip, the other extended and bearing his wand of office, looking pompously to right and left, and occasionally bowing as though the plaudits were entirely on his own behalf. This little man had tied a huge broadsword to his girdle, which clanked along the cobblestones when he walked and occasionally inserted itself between his legs, when he would gravely cock his foot over it again and walk on without any abatement of his dignity. At last, finding these interruptions become rather too frequent he depressed the hilt of his great sword in order to elevate the point, and so strutted onwards like a bantam cock with a single straight feather in its tail.

Having passed round the front and rear of the various bodies, and inspected them with a minuteness and attention which showed that his years had not dulled his soldier's faculties, the Mayor faced round with the evident intention of addressing us. His clerk instantly darted in front of him, and waving his arms began to shout, "Silence, good people! Silence for his most worshipful

the Mayor of Taunton ! Silence for the worthy Master Stephen Timewell ! " until in the midst of his gesticulations and cries he got entangled once more with his overgrown weapon, and went sprawling on his hands and knees in the kennel.

" Silence yourself, Master Tetheridge," said the chief magistrate severely. " If your sword and your tongue were both clipped, it would be as well for yourself and us. Shall I not speak a few words in season to these good people but you must interrupt with your discordant bellowings ? "

The busybody gathered himself together and slunk behind the group of councilmen, while the Mayor slowly ascended the steps of the market cross. From this position he addressed us, speaking in a high piping voice which gathered strength as he proceeded, until it was audible at the remotest corners of the square.

" Friends in the faith," he said, " I thank the Lord that I have been spared in my old age to look down upon this goodly assembly. For we of Taunton have ever kept the flame of the Covenant burning amongst us, obscured it may be at times by time-servers and Laodiceans, but none the less burning in the hearts of our people. All round us, however, there was a worse than Egyptian darkness, where Popery and Prelacy, Arminianism, Erastianism and Simony might rage and riot unchecked and unconfined. But what do I see now ? Do I see the faithful cowering in their hiding-places and straining their ears for the sound of the horsehoofs of their oppressors ? Do I see a time-serving generation, with lies on their lips and truth buried in their hearts ? No ! I see before me godly men, not from this fair city only, but from the broad country round, and from Dorset, and from Wiltshire, and some even as I hear from Hampshire, all ready and eager to do mighty work in the cause of the Lord. And when I see these faithful men, and when I think that every broad piece in the strong boxes of my townsmen is ready to support them, and when I know that the

persecuted remnant throughout the country is wrestling hard in prayer for us, then a voice speaks within me and tells me that we shall tear down the idols of Dagon, and build up in this England of ours such a temple of the true faith that not Popery, nor Prelacy, nor idolatry, nor any other device of the Evil One shall ever prevail against it."

A deep irrepressible hum of approval burst from the close ranks of the insurgent infantry, with a clang of arms as musquetoon or pike was grounded upon the stone pavement. Saxon half-turned his fierce face, raising an impatient hand, and the hoarse murmur died away among our men, though our less-disciplined companions to right and left continued to wave their green boughs and to clatter their arms. The Taunton men opposite stood grim and silent, but their set faces and bent brows showed that their townsman's oratory had stirred the deep fanatic spirit which distinguished them.

"In my hands," continued the Mayor, drawing a roll of paper from his bosom, "is the proclamation which our royal leader hath sent in advance of him. In his great goodness and self-abnegation he had, in his early declaration given forth at Lyme, declared that he should leave the choice of a monarch to the Commons of England, but having found that his enemies did most scandalously and basely make use of this his self-denial, and did assert that he had so little confidence in his own cause that he dared not take publicly the title which is due to him, he hath determined that this should have an end. Know, therefore, that it is hereby proclaimed that James, Duke of Monmouth, is now and henceforth rightful King of England; that James Stuart, the Papist and fratricide, is a wicked usurper, upon whose head, dead or alive, a price of five thousand guineas is affixed; and that the assembly now sitting at Westminster, and calling itself the Commons of England, is an illegal assembly, and its acts are null and void in the sight of the law. God bless King Monmouth and the Protestant religion!"

The trumpeters struck up a flourish and the people

huzzaed, but the Mayor raised his thin white hands as a signal for silence. "A messenger hath reached me this morning from the King," he continued. "He sends a greeting to all his faithful Protestant subjects, and having halted at Axminster to rest after his victory, he will advance presently and be with ye in two days at the latest.

"Ye will grieve to hear that good Alderman Rider was struck down in the thick of the fray. He hath died like a man and a Christian, leaving all his worldly goods, together with his cloth works and household property, to the carrying on of the war. Of the other slain there are not more than ten of Taunton birth. Two gallant young brothers have been cut off, Oliver and Ephraim Hollis, whose poor mother——"

"Grieve not for me, good Master Timewell," cried a female voice from the crowd. "I have three others as stout, who shall all be offered in the same quarrel."

"You are a worthy woman, Mistress Hollis," the Mayor answered, "and your children shall not be lost to you. The next name upon my list is Jesse Trefail, then come Joseph Millar, and Aminadab Holt——"

An elderly musqueteer in the first line of the Taunton foot pulled his hat down over his brows and cried out in a loud steady voice, "The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

"It is your only son, Master Holt," said the Mayor, "but the Lord also sacrificed His only Son that you and I might drink the waters of eternal life. The others are Path of Light Regan, James Fletcher, Salvation Smith and Robert Johnstone."

The old Puritan gravely rolled up his papers, and having stood for a few moments with his hands folded across his breast in silent prayer, he descended from the market cross, and moved off, followed by the aldermen and councilmen. The crowd began likewise to disperse in sedate and sober fashion, with grave earnest faces and downcast eyes. A large number of the countryfolk, however, more curious or less devout than the citizens,

gathered round our regiment to see the men who had beaten off the dragoons.

"See the mon wi' a face like a gerfalcon," cried one, pointing to Saxon; "'tis he that slew the Philistine officer yestreen, an' brought the faithful off victorious."

"Mark ye yon other one," cried an old dame, "him wi' the white face an' the clothes like a prince. He's one o' the Quality, what's come a' the way froe Lunnon to testify to the Protestant creed. He's a main pious gentlemen, he is, an' if he had bided in the wicked city they'd ha' had his head off, like they did the good Lord Roossell, or put him in chains wi' the worthy Maister Baxter."

"Marry come up, gossip," cried a third. "The girt mun on the grey horse is the soldier for me. He has the smooth cheeks o' a wench, an' limbs like Goliath o' Gath. I'll war'nt he could pick up my old gaffer Jones an' awa' wi' him at his saddle-bow, as easy as Towser does a rotten! But here's good Master Tetheridge, the clark, and on great business too, for he's a mun that spares ne time ne trooble in the great cause."

"Room, good people, room!" cried the little clerk, bustling up with an air of authority. "Hinder not the high officials of the Corporation in the discharge of their functions. Neither should ye hamper the flanks of fighting men, seeing that you thereby prevent that deploying and extending of the line which is now advocated by many high commanders. I prithee, who commands this cohort, or legion rather, seeing that you have auxiliary horse attached to it?"

"'Tis a regiment, sirrah," said Saxon sternly. "Colonel Saxon's regiment of Wiltshire foot, which I have the honour to command."

"I beg your Colonelship's pardon," cried the clerk nervously, edging away from the swarthy-faced soldier. "I have heard speak of your Colonelship, and of your doings in the German wars. I have myself trailed a pike in my youth and have broken a head or two, aye, and a heart or two also, when I wore buff and bandolier."

"Discharge your message," said our Colonel shortly.

"'Tis from his most worshipful the Mayor, and is addressed to yourself and to your captains, who are doubtless these tall cavaliers whom I see on either side of me. Pretty fellows, by my faith! but you and I know well, Colonel, that a little trick of fence will set the smallest of us on a level with the brawniest. Now I warrant that you and I, being old soldiers, could, back to back, make it good against these three gallants."

"Speak, fellow," snarled Saxon, and reaching out a long sinewy arm he seized the loquacious clerk by the lappet of his gown, and shook him until his long sword clattered again.

"How, Colonel, how?" cried Master Tetheridge, while his vest seemed to acquire a deeper tint from the sudden pallor of his face. "Would you lay an angry hand upon the Mayor's representative? I wear a bilbo by my side, as you can see. I am also somewhat quick and choleric, and warn you therefore not to do aught which I might perchance construe into a personal slight. As to my message, it was that his most worshipful the Mayor did desire to have word with you and your captains in the town-hall."

"We shall be there anon," said Saxon, and turning to the regiment he set himself to explain some of the simpler movements and exercises, teaching his officers as well as his men, for though Sir Gervas knew something of the manual, Lockarby and I brought little but our good-will to the task. When the order to dismiss was at last given, our companies marched back to their barracks in the wool warehouse, while we handed over our horses to the grooms from the White Hart, and set off to pay our respects to the Mayor.

## 18. *Of Master Stephen Timewell, Mayor of Taunton*

WITHIN the town-hall all was bustle and turmoil. At one side behind a low table covered with green baize sat two scriveners with great rolls of paper in front of them. A long line of citizens passed slowly before them, each in turn putting down a roll or bag of coins which was duly noted by the receivers. A square iron-bound chest stood by their side, into which the money was thrown, and we noted as we passed that it was half full of gold pieces. We could not but mark that many of the givers were men whose threadbare doublets and pinched faces showed that the wealth which they were dashing down so readily must have been hoarded up for such a purpose, at the cost of scanty fare and hard living. Most of them accompanied their gift by a few words of prayer, or by some pithy text anent the treasure which rusteth not, or the lending to the Lord. The town clerk stood by the table giving forth the vouchers for each sum, and the constant clack of his tongue filled the hall, as he read aloud the names and amounts, with his own remarks between.

"Abraham Willis," he shouted as we entered; "put him down twenty-six pounds and ten shillings. You shall receive ten per centum upon this earth, Master Willis, and I warrant that it shall not be forgotten hereafter. John Standish, two pounds. William Simons, two guineas. Stand-fast Healing, forty-five pounds. That is a rare blow which you have struck into the ribs of Prelacy, good Master Healing. Solomon Warren, five guineas. James White, five shillings—the widow's mite, James! Thomas Bakewell, ten pounds. Nay, Master Bakewell, surely out of three farms on the banks of Tone, and grazing land in the fattest part of Athelney, you can spare more than this for the good cause. We shall doubtless see you again. Alderman Smithson, ninety

pounds. Aha! There is a slap for the scarlet woman! A few more such and her throne shall be a ducking-stool. We shall break her down, worthy Master Smithson, even as Jehu, the son of Nimshi, broke down the house of Baal." So he babbled on with praise, precept and rebuke, though the grave and solemn burghers took little notice of his empty clamour.

At the other side of the hall were several long wooden drinking-troughs, which were used for the storing of pikes and scythes. Special messengers and tithing-men had been sent out to scour the country for arms, who, as they returned, placed their prizes here under the care of the armourer-general. Besides the common weapons of the peasants there was a puncheon half full of pistols and petronels, together with a good number of muskets, screw-guns, snaphances, birding-pieces and carbines, with a dozen bell-mouthed brass blunderbusses, and a few old-fashioned wall-pieces, such as sakers and culverins taken from the manor-houses of the county. From the walls and the lumber-rooms of these old dwellings many other arms had been brought to light which were doubtless esteemed as things of price by our forefathers, but which would seem strange to your eyes in these days, when a musket may be fired once in every two minutes, and will carry a ball to a distance of four hundred paces. There were halberds, battle-axes, morning stars, brown bills, maces and ancient coats of chain mail, which might even now save a man from sword stroke or pike thrust.

In the midst of the coming and the going stood Master Timewell, the Mayor, ordering all things like a skilful and provident commander. I could understand the trust and love which his townsmen had for him, as I watched him labouring with all the wisdom of an old man and the blithesomeness of a young one. He was hard at work as we approached in trying the lock of a falconet; but perceiving us, he came forward and saluted us with much kindliness.

"I have heard much of ye," said he; "how ye caused

the faithful to gather to a head, and so beat off the horsemen of the usurper. It will not be the last time, I trust, that ye shall see their backs. I hear, Colonel Saxon, that ye have seen much service abroad."

"I have been the humble tool of Providence in much good work," said Saxon, with a bow. "I have fought with the Swedes against the Brandenburgers, and again with the Brandenburgers against the Swedes, my time and conditions with the latter having been duly carried out. I have afterwards in the Bavarian service fought against Swedes and Brandenburgers combined, besides having undergone the great wars on the Danube against the Turk, and two campaigns with the Messieurs in the Palatinate, which latter might be better termed holiday making than fighting."

"A soldierly record in very truth," cried the Mayor, stroking his white beard. "I hear that you are also powerfully borne onwards in prayer and song. You are, I perceive, one of the old breed of '44, Colonel—the men who were in the saddle all day, and on their knees half the night. When shall we see the like of them again? A few such broken wrecks as I are left, with the fire of our youth all burned out and nought left but the ashes of lethargy and lukewarmness."

"Nay, nay," said Saxon, "your position and present business will scarce jump with the modesty of your words. But here are young men who will find the fire if their elders bring the brains. This is Captain Micah Clarke, and Captain Lockarby, and Captain the Honourable Sir Gervas Jerome, who have all come far to draw their swords for the downtrodden faith."

"Taunton welcomes ye, young sirs," said the Mayor, looking a trifle askance, as I thought, at the baronet, who had drawn out his pocket-mirror, and was engaged in the brushing of his eyebrows. "I trust that during your stay in this town ye will all four take up your abode with me. 'Tis a homely roof, and simple fare, but a soldier's wants are few. And now, Colonel, I would fain have your

advice as to these three drakes, whether if rehooped they may be deemed fit for service ; and also as to these demi-cannons, which were used in the old Parliamentary days, and may yet have a word to say in the people's cause."

The old soldier and the Puritan instantly plunged into a deep and learned disquisition upon the merits of wall-pieces, drakes, demi-culverins, sakers, minions, mortar-pieces, falcons and pattereroes, concerning all which pieces of ordnance Saxon had strong opinions to offer, fortified by many personal hazards and experiences. He then dwelt upon the merits of fire-arrows and fire-pikes in the attack or defence of places of strength, and had finally begun to descant upon sconces, "directis lateribus," and upon works, semilunar, rectilineal, horizontal or orbicular, with so many references to his Imperial Majesty's lines at Gran, that it seemed that his discourse would never find an end. We slipped away at last, leaving him still discussing the effects produced by the Austrian grenadoes upon a Bavarian brigade of pikes at the battle of Ober-Graustock.

"Curse me if I like accepting this old fellow's offer," said Sir Gervas, in an undertone. "I have heard of these Puritan households. Much grace to little sack, and texts flying about as hard and as jagged as flint stones. To bed at sundown, and a sermon ready if ye do but look kindly at the waiting-wench or hum the refrain of a ditty."

"His home may be larger, but it could scarce be stricter than that of my own father," I remarked.

"I'll warrant that," cried Reuben. "When we have been a-morris-dancing, or having a Saturday night game of 'kiss-in-the-ring,' or 'parson-has-lost-his-coat,' I have seen Ironside Joe stride past us, and cast a glance at us which hath frozen the smile upon our lips. I warrant that he would have aided Colonel Pride to shoot the bears and hack down the maypoles."

"'Twere fratricide for such a man to shoot a bear," quoth Sir Gervas, "with all respect, friend Clarke, for your honoured progenitor."

"No more than for you to shoot at a popinjay," I answered, laughing; "but as to the Mayor's offer, we can but go to meat with him now, and should it prove irksome it will be easy for you to plead some excuse, and so get honourably quit of it. But bear in mind, Sir Gervas, that such households are in very truth different to any with which you are acquainted, so curb your tongue or offence may come of it. Should I cry 'hem!' or cough, it will be a sign to you that you had best beware."

"Agreed, young Solomon!" cried he. "It is, indeed, well to have a pilot like yourself who knows these godly waters. For my own part, I should never know how near I was to the shoals. But our friends have finished the battle of Ober what's its name, and are coming towards us. I trust, worthy Mr. Mayor, that your difficulties have been resolved?"

"They are, sir," replied the Puritan. "I have been much edified by your Colonel's discourse, and I have little doubt that by serving under him ye will profit much by his ripe experience."

"Very like, sir, very like," said Sir Gervas carelessly.

"But it is nigh one o'clock," the Mayor continued, "our frail flesh cries aloud for meat and drink. I beg that ye will do me the favour to accompany me to my humble dwelling, where we shall find the household board already dressed."

With these words he led the way out of the hall and paced slowly down Fore Street, the people falling back to right and to left as he passed, and raising their caps to do him reverence. Here and there, as he pointed out to us, arrangements had been made for barring the road with strong chains to prevent any sudden rush of cavalry. In places, too, at the corner of a house, a hole had been knocked in the masonry through which peeped the dark muzzle of a carronade or wall-piece. These precautions were the more necessary as several bodies of the Royal Horse, besides the one which we had repulsed, were known to be within the Deane, and the town, deprived of

its ramparts, was open to an incursion from any daring commander.

The chief magistrate's house was a squat square-faced stone building within a court which opened on to East Street. The peaked oak door, spangled with broad iron nails, had a gloomy and surly aspect, but the hall within was lightful and airy, with a bright polished cedar planking, and high panelling of some dark-grained wood which gave forth a pleasant smell as of violets. A broad flight of steps rose up from the farther end of the hall, down which as we entered a young sweet-faced maid came tripping, with an old dame behind her, who bore in her hands a pile of fresh napery. At the sight of us the elder one retreated up the stairs again, whilst the younger came flying down three steps at a time, threw her arms round the old Mayor's neck, and kissed him fondly, looking hard into his face the while, as a mother gazes into that of a child with whom she fears that aught may have gone amiss.

"Weary again, daddy, weary again," she said, shaking her head anxiously with a small white hand upon each of his shoulders. "Indeed, and indeed, thy spirit is greater than thy strength."

"Nay, nay, lass," said he, passing his hand fondly over her rich brown hair. "The workman must toil until the hour of rest is rung. This, gentlemen, is my granddaughter Ruth, the sole relic of my family and the light of mine old age. The whole grove hath been cut down, and only the oldest oak and the youngest sapling left. These cavaliers, little one, have come from afar to serve the cause, and they have done us the honour to accept of our poor hospitality."

"Ye are come in good time, gentlemen," she answered, looking us straight in the eyes with a kindly smile as a sister might greet her brothers. "The household is gathered round the table and the meal is ready."

"But not more ready than we," cried the stout old burgher. "Do thou conduct our guests to their places,

whilst I seek my room and doff these robes of office, with my chain and tippet, ere I break my fast."

Following our fair guide we passed into a very large and lofty room, the walls of which were wainscoted with carved oak, and hung at either end with tapestry. The floor was tessellated after the French fashion, and plentifully strewn with skins and rugs. At one end of the apartment stood a great white marble fireplace, like a small room in itself, fitted up, as was the ancient custom, with an iron stand in the centre, and with broad stone benches in the recess on either side. Lines of hooks above the chimneypiece had been used, as I surmise, to support arms, for the wealthy merchants of England were wont to keep enough in their houses to at least equip their apprentices and craftsmen. They had now, however, been removed, nor was there any token of the troublous times save a single heap of pikes and halberds piled together in a corner.

Down the centre of this room there ran a long and massive table, which was surrounded by thirty or forty people, the greater part of whom were men. They were on their feet as we entered, and a grave-faced man at the farther end was drawling forth an interminable grace, which began as a thanksgiving for food, but wandered away into questions of Church and State, and finally ended in a supplication for Israel now in arms to do battle for the Lord. While this was proceeding we stood in a group by the door with our caps doffed, and spent our time in observing the company more closely than we could have done with courtesy had their eyes not been cast down and their thoughts elsewhere.

They were of all ages, from greybeards down to lads scarce out of their teens, all with the same solemn and austere expression of countenance, and clad in the same homely and sombre garb. Save their wide white collars and cuffs, not a string of any colour lessened the sad severity of their attire. Their black coats and doublets were cut straight and close, and their cordovan leather

shoes, which in the days of our youth were usually the seat of some little ornament, were uniformly square-toed and tied with sad-coloured ribbon. Most of them wore plain sword-belts of untanned hide, but the weapons themselves, with their broad felt hats and black cloaks, were laid under the benches or placed upon the settles which lined the walls. They stood with their hands clasped and their heads bent, listening to the untimely address, and occasionally by some groan or exclamation testifying that the preacher's words had moved them.

The overgrown grace came at last to an end, when the company sat silently down, and proceeded without pause or ceremony to attack the great joints which smoked before them. Our young hostess led us to the end of the table, where a high carved chair with a black cushion upon it marked the position of the master of the house. Mistress Timewell seated herself upon the right of the Mayor's place, with Sir Gervas beside her, while the post of honour upon the left was assigned to Saxon. On my left sat Lockarby, whose eyes I observed had been fixed in undisguised and all-absorbing admiration upon the Puritan maiden from the first moment that he had seen her. The table was of no great breadth, so that we could talk across in spite of the clatter of plates and dishes, the bustle of servants, and the deep murmur of voices.

"This is my father's household," said our hostess, addressing herself to Saxon. "There is not one of them who is not in his employ. He hath many apprentices in the wool trade. We sit down forty to meat every day in the year."

"And to right good fare, too," quoth Saxon, glancing down the table. "Salmon, ribs of beef, loin of mutton, veal, pasties—what could man wish for more? Plenty of good home-brewed, too, to wash it down. If worthy Master Timewell can arrange that the army be victualled after the same fashion, I for one shall be beholden to him. A cup of dirty water and a charred morsel cooked on a

ramrod over the camp fire are like to take the place of these toothsome dainties."

"Is it not best to have faith?" said the Puritan maiden. "Shall not the Almighty feed His soldiers even as Elisha was fed in the wilderness and Hagar in the desert?"

"Aye," exclaimed a lanky-haired, swarthy young man who sat upon the right of Sir Gervas, "He will provide for us, even as the stream of water gushed forth out of dry places, even as the quails and the manna lay thick upon barren soil."

"So I trust, young sir," quoth Saxon, "but we must none the less arrange a victual-train, with a staff of wains, duly numbered, and an intendant over each, after the German fashion. Such things should not be left to chance."

Pretty Mistress Timewell glanced up with a half-startled look at this remark, as though shocked at the want of faith implied in it. Her thoughts might have taken the form of words had not her father entered the room at the moment, the whole company rising and bowing to him as he advanced to his seat.

"Be seated, friends," said he, with a wave of his hand; "we are a homely folk, Colonel Saxon, and the old-time virtue of respect for our elders has not entirely forsaken us. I trust, Ruth," he continued, "that thou hast seen to the wants of our guests."

We all protested that we had never received such attention and hospitality.

"'Tis well, 'tis well," said the good wool-worker. "But your plates are clear and your glasses empty. William, look to it! A good workman is ever a good trencherman. If a 'prentice of mine cannot clean his platter, I know that I shall get little from him with carder and teazel. Thew and sinew need building up. A slice from that round of beef, William! Touching that same battle of Ober-Graustock, Colonel, what part was played in the fray by that regiment of Pandour horse, in which, as I understand, thou didst hold a commission?"

This was a question on which, as may be imagined, Saxon had much to say, and the pair were soon involved in a heated discussion, in which the experiences of Roundway Down and Marston Moor were balanced against the results of a score of unpronounceable fights in the Styrian Alps and along the Danube. Stephen Timewell in his lusty youth had led first a troop and then a regiment through the wars of the Parliament, from Chalgrove Field to the final battle at Worcester, so that his warlike passages, though less varied and extensive than those of our companion, were enough to enable him to form and hold strong opinions. These were in the main the same as those of the soldier of fortune, but when their ideas differed upon any point, there arose forthwith such a cross-fire of military jargon, such speech of estacados and palisados, such comparisons of light horse and heavy, of pikemen and musqueteers, of Lanzknechte, Leaguers and on-falls, that the unused ear became bewildered with the babble. At last, on some question of fortification, the Mayor drew his outworks with the spoons and knives, on which Saxon opened his parallels with lines of bread, and pushing them rapidly up with traverses and covered ways, he established himself upon the re-entering angle of the Mayor's redoubt. This opened up a fresh question as to counter-mines, with the result that the dispute raged with renewed vigour.

Whilst this friendly strife was proceeding between the elders, Sir Gervas Jerome and Mistress Ruth had fallen into conversation at the other side of the table. I have seldom seen, my dear children, so beautiful a face as that of this Puritan damsel ; and it was beautiful with that sort of modest and maidenly comeliness where the features derive their sweetness from the sweet soul which shines through them. The perfectly-moulded body appeared to be but the outer expression of the perfect spirit within. Her dark-brown hair swept back from a broad and white forehead, which surmounted a pair of well-marked eyebrows and large blue thoughtful eyes. The whole cast of

her features was gentle and dove-like, yet there was a firmness in the mouth and delicate prominence of the chin which might indicate that in times of trouble and danger the little maid would prove to be no unworthy descendant of the Roundhead soldier and Puritan magistrate. I doubt not that where more loud-tongued and assertive dames might be cowed, the Mayor's soft-voiced daughter would begin to cast off her gentler disposition, and to show the stronger nature which underlay it. It amused me much to listen to the efforts which Sir Gervas made to converse with her, for the damsel and he lived so entirely in two different worlds, that it took all his gallantry and ready wit to keep on ground which would be intelligible to her.

"No doubt you spend much of your time in reading, Mistress Ruth," he remarked. "It puzzles me to think what else you can do so far from town?"

"Town!" said she in surprise. "What is Taunton but a town?"

"Heaven forbid that I should deny it," replied Sir Gervas, "more especially in the presence of so many worthy burghers, who have the name of being somewhat jealous of the honour of their native city. Yet the fact remains, fair mistress, that the town of London so far transcends all other towns that it is called, even as I called it just now, *the* town."

"Is it so very large, then?" she cried, with pretty wonder. "But new houses are building in Taunton, outside the old walls, and beyond Shuttern, and some even at the other side of the river. Perhaps in time it may be as large."

"If all the folks in Taunton were to be added to London," said Sir Gervas, "no one there would observe that there had been any increase."

"Nay, there you are laughing at me. That is against all reason," cried the country maiden.

"Your grandfather will bear our my words," said Sir Gervas. "But to return to your reading, I'll warrant

that there is not a page of Scudéry and her *Grand Cyprus* which you have not read. You are familiar, doubtless, with every sentiment in Cowley, or Waller, or Dryden ? "

" Who are these ? " she asked. " At what church do they preach ? "

" Faith ! " cried the baronet, with a laugh, " honest John preaches at the church of Will Unwin, commonly known as Will's, where many a time it is two in the morning before he comes to the end of his sermon. But why this question ? Do you think that no one may put pen to paper unless they have also a right to wear a gown and climb up to a pulpit ? I had thought that all of your sex had read Dryden. Pray, what are your own favourite books ? "

" There is Alleine's *Alarm to the Unconverted*," said she. " It is a stirring work, and one which hath wrought much good. Hast thou not found it to fructify within thee ? "

" I have not read the book you name," Sir Gervas confessed.

" Not read it ? " she cried, with raised eyebrows. " Truly I had thought that everyone had read the *Alarm*. What dost thou think, then, of *Faithful Contendings* ? "

" I have not read it."

" Or of Baxter's Sermons ? " she asked.

" I have not read them."

" Of Bull's *Spirit Cordial*, then ? "

" I have not read it."

Mistress Ruth Timewell stared at him in undisguised wonder. " You may think me ill-bred to say it, sir," she remarked, " but I cannot but marvel where you have been, or what you have done all your life. Why, the very children in the street have read these books."

" In truth, such works come little in our way in London," Sir Gervas answered. " A play of George Etherege's, or a jingle of Sir John Suckling's is lighter, though mayhap less wholesome food for the mind. A

man in London may keep pace with the world of letters without much reading, for what with the gossip of the coffee-houses and the news-letters that fall in his way, and the babble of poets or wits at the assemblies, with mayhap an evening or two in the week at the playhouse, with Vanbrugh or Farquhar, one can never part company for long with the muses. Then, after the play, if a man is in no humour for a turn of luck at the green table at the Groom Porter's, he may stroll down to the Coca Tree if he be a Tory, or to St. James's if he be a Whig, and it is ten to one if the talk turn not upon the turning of alcaics, or the contest between blank verse or rhyme. Then one may, after an arrière supper, drop into Will's or Slaughter's and find Old John, with Tickell and Congreve and the rest of them, hard at work on the dramatic unities, or poetical justice, or some such matter. I confess that my own tastes lay little in that line, for about that hour I was likely to be worse employed with wine-flask, dice-box or——"

"Hem! hem!" cried I warningly, for several of the Puritans were listening with faces which expressed anything but approval.

"What you say of London is of much interest to me," said the Puritan maiden, "though these names and places have little meaning to my ignorant ears. You did speak, however, of the playhouse. Surely no worthy man goes near those sinks of iniquity, the baited traps of the Evil One? Has not the good and sanctified Master Bull declared from the pulpit that they are the gathering-place of the froward, the chosen haunts of the perverse Assyrians, as dangerous to the soul as any of those Papal steeple-houses wherein the creature is sacrilegiously confounded with the Creator?"

"Well and truly spoken, Mistress Timewell," cried the lean young Puritan upon the right, who had been an attentive listener to the whole conversation. "There is more evil in such houses than ever in the cities of the plain. I doubt not that the wrath of the Lord will

descend upon them, and destroy them, and wreck them utterly, together with the dissolute men and abandoned women who frequent them."

"Your strong opinions, friend," said Sir Gervas quietly, "are borne out doubtless by your full knowledge of the subject. How often, prithee, have you been in these playhouses which you are so ready to decry?"

"I thank the Lord that I have never been so far tempted from the straight path as to set foot within one," the Puritan answered, "nor have I ever been in that great sewer which is called London. I trust, however, that I with others of the faithful may find our way thither with our tucks at our sides ere this business is finished, when we shall not be content, I'll warrant, with shutting these homes of vice, as Cromwell did, but we shall not leave one stone upon another, and shall sow the spot with salt, that it may be a hissing and a byword amongst the people."

"You are right, John Derrick," said the Mayor, who had overheard the latter part of his remarks. "Yet methinks that a lower tone and a more backward manner would become you better when you are speaking with your master's guests. Touching these same playhouses, Colonel, when we have carried the upper hand this time, we shall not allow the old tares to check the new wheat. We know what fruit these places have borne in the days of Charles, the Gwynnes, the Palmers and the whole base crew of foul lecherous parasites. Have you ever been in London, Captain Clarke?"

"Nay, sir; I am country born and bred."

"The better man you," said our host. "I have been there twice. The first time was in the days of the Rump, when Lambert brought in his division to overawe the Commons. I was then quartered at the sign of the Four Crosses in Southwark, then kept by a worthy man, one John Dolman, with whom I had much edifying speech concerning predestination. All was quiet and sober then, I promise you, and you might have walked from West-

minster to the Tower in the dead of the night without hearing aught save the murmur of prayer and the chanting of hymns. Not a ruffler or a wench was in the streets after dark, nor anyone save staid citizens upon their business, or the halberdiers of the watch. The second visit which I made was over this business of the levelling of the ramparts, when I and neighbour Foster, the glover, were sent at the head of a deputation from this town to the Privy Council of Charles. Who could have credited that a few years would have made such a change? Every evil thing that had been stamped underground had spawned and festered until its vermin brood flooded the streets, and the godly were themselves driven to shun the light of day. Apollyon had indeed triumphed for awhile. A quiet man could not walk the highways without being elbowed into the kennel by swaggering swashbucklers, or accosted by painted hussies. Padders and michers, laced cloaks, jingling spurs, slashed boots, tall plumes, bullies and pimps, oaths and blasphemies—I promise you hell was waxing fat. Even in the solitude of one's coach one was not free from the robber."

"How that, sir?" asked Reuben.

"Why, marry, in this wise. As I was the sufferer I have best right to tell the tale. Ye must know that after our reception—which was cold enough, for we were about as welcome to the Privy Council as the hearth-tax man is to the village housewife—we were asked, more as I guess from derision than from courtesy, to the evening levée at Buckingham Palace. We would both fain have been excused from going, but we feared that our refusal might give undue offence, and so hinder the success of our mission. My homespun garments were somewhat rough for such an occasion, yet I determined to appear in them, with the addition of a new black baize waistcoat faced with silk, and a good periwig, for which I gave three pounds ten shillings in the Haymarket."

The young Puritan opposite turned up his eyes and murmured something about "sacrificing to Dagon,"

which fortunately for him was inaudible to the high-spirited old man.

"It was but a worldly vanity," quoth the Mayor; "for, with all deference, Sir Gervas Jerome, a man's own hair arranged with some taste, and with perhaps a sprinkling of powder, is to my mind the fittest ornament to his head. It is the contents and not the case which availeth. Having donned this frippery, good Master Foster and I hired a calash and drove to the Palace. We were deep in grave and, I trust, profitable converse speeding through the endless streets, when of a sudden I felt a sharp tug at my head, and my hat fluttered down on to my knees. I raised my hands, and lo! they came upon my bare pate. The wig had vanished. We were rolling down Fleet Street at the moment, and there was no one in the calash save neighbour Foster, who sat as astounded as I. We looked high and low, on the seats and beneath them, but not a sign of the periwig was there. It was gone utterly and without a trace."

"Whither then?" we asked with one voice.

"That was the question which we set ourselves to solve. For a moment I do assure ye that we bethought us that it might be a judgment upon us for our attention to such carnal follies. Then it crossed my mind that it might be the doing of some malicious sprite, as the Drummer of Tedworth, or those who occasioned the disturbances no very long time since at the old Gast House at Little Burton here in Somersetshire.[1] With this thought we hallooed to the coachman, and told him what had occurred to us. The fellow came down from his perch, and having heard our story, he burst straightway into much foul language, and walking round to the back of his calash, showed us that a slit had been made in the leather wherewith it was fashioned. Through this the thief had thrust his hand and had drawn my wig through the hole, resting the while on the crossbar of the coach. It was no uncommon thing, he said, and the

[1] Note F, Appendix.—Disturbances in the Little Gast House.

wig-snatchers were a numerous body who waited beside the peruke-makers' shops, and when they saw a customer come forth with a purchase which was worth their pains they would follow him, and, should he chance to drive, deprive him of it in this fashion. Be that as it may, I never saw my wig again, and had to purchase another before I could venture into the royal presence."

"A strange adventure truly," exclaimed Saxon. "How fared it with you for the remainder of the evening?"

"But scurvily, for Charles's face, which was black enough at all times, was blackest of all to us; nor was his brother the Papist more complaisant. They had but brought us there that they might dazzle us with their glitter and gee-gaws, in order that we might bear a fine report of them back to the West with us. There were supple-backed courtiers, and strutting nobles, and hussies with their shoulders bare, who should for all their high birth have been sent to Bridewell as readily as any poor girl who ever walked at the cart's tail. Then there were the gentlemen of the chamber, with cinnamon and plum-coloured coats, and a brave show of gold lace and silk and ostrich feather. Neighbour Foster and I felt as two crows might do who have wandered among the peacocks. Yet we bare in mind in whose image we were fashioned, and we carried ourselves, I trust, as independent English burghers. His Grace of Buckingham had his flout at us, and Rochester sneered, and the women simpered; but we stood four square, my friend and I, discussing, as I well remember, the most precious doctrines of election and reprobation, without giving much heed either to those who mocked us, or to the gamesters upon our left, or to the dancers upon our right. So we stood throughout the evening, until, finding that they could get little sport from us, my Lord Clarendon, the Chancellor, gave us the word to retire, which we did at our leisure after saluting the King and the company."

"Nay, that I should never have done!" cried the young Puritan, who had listened intently to his elder's narrative.

"Would it not have been more fitting to have raised up your hands and called down vengeance upon them, as the holy man of old did upon the wicked cities?"

"More fitting, quotha!" said the Mayor impatiently. "It is most fitting that youth should be silent until his opinion is asked on such matters. God's wrath comes with leaden feet, but it strikes with iron hands. In His own good time He has judged when the cup of these men's iniquities is overflowing. It is not for us to instruct Him. Curses have, as the wise man said, a habit of coming home to roost. Bear that in mind, Master John Derrick, and be not too liberal with them."

The young apprentice, for such he was, bowed his head sullenly to the rebuke, whilst the Mayor, after a short pause, resumed his story.

"Being a fine night," said he, "we chose to walk back to our lodgings; but never shall I forget the wicked scenes wherewith we were encountered on the way. Good Master Bunyan, of Elstow, might have added some pages to his account of Vanity Fair had he been with us. The women, be-patched, be-ruddled and brazen; the men swaggering, roistering, cursing—the brawling, the drabbing and the drunkenness! It was a fit kingdom to be ruled over by such a court. At last we had made our way to more quiet streets, and were hoping that our adventures were at an end, when of a sudden there came a rush of half-drunken cavaliers from a side street, who set upon the passers-by with their swords, as though we had fallen into an ambuscade of savages in some Paynim country. They were, as I surmise, of the same breed as those of whom the excellent John Milton wrote: 'The sons of Belial, flown with insolence and wine.' Alas! my memory is not what it was, for at one time I could say by rote whole books of that noble and godly poem."

"And pray, how fared ye with these rufflers, sir?" I asked.

"They beset us, and some few other honest citizens who were wending their ways homewards, and waving

their naked swords they called upon us to lay down our arms and pay homage. 'To whom?' I asked. They pointed to one of their number who was more gaudily dressed and somewhat drunker than the rest. 'This is our most sovereign liege,' they cried. 'Sovereign over whom?' I asked. 'Over the Tityre Tus,' they answered. 'Oh, most barbarous and cuckoldy citizen, do you not recognise that you have fallen into the hands of that most noble order?' 'This is not your real monarch,' said I, 'for he is down beneath us chained in the pit, where some day he will gather his dutiful subjects around him.' 'Lo, he hath spoken treason!' they cried, on which, without much more ado, they set upon us with sword and dagger. Neighbour Foster and I placed our backs against a wall, and with our cloaks round our left arms we made play with our tucks, and managed to put in one or two of the old Wigan Lane raspers. In particular, friend Foster pinked the King in such wise that his Majesty ran howling down the street like a gored bull-pup. We were beset by numbers, however, and might have ended our mission then and there had not the watch appeared upon the scene, struck up our weapons with their halberds, and so arrested the whole party. Whilst the fray lasted the burghers from the adjoining houses were pouring water upon us, as though we were cats on the tiles, which, though it did not cool our ardour in the fight, left us in a scurvy and unsavoury condition. In this guise we were dragged to the round-house, where we spent the night amidst bullies, thieves and orange wenches, to whom I am proud to say that both neighbour Foster and myself spoke some words of joy and comfort. In the morning we were released, and forthwith shook the dust of London from our feet; nor do I ever wish to return thither, unless it be at the head of our Somersetshire regiments, to see King Monmouth don the crown which he had wrested in fair fight from the Popish perverter."

As Master Stephen Timewell ended his tale a general shuffling and rising announced the conclusion of the meal.

The company filed slowly out in order of seniority, all wearing the same gloomy and earnest expression, with grave gait and downcast eyes. These Puritan ways were, it is true, familiar to me from childhood, yet I had never before seen a large household conforming to them, or marked their effect upon so many young men.

"You shall bide behind for a while," said the Mayor, as we were about to follow the others. "William, do you bring a flask of the old green-sealed sack. These creature comforts I do not produce before my lads, for beef and honest malt is the fittest food for such. On occasion, however, I am of Paul's opinion, that a flagon of wine among friends is no bad thing for mind or for body. You can away now, sweetheart, if you have aught to engage you."

"Do you go out again?" asked Mistress Ruth.

"Presently, to the town-hall. The survey of arms is not yet complete."

"I shall have your robes ready, and also the rooms of our guests," she answered, and so, with a bright smile to us, tripped away upon her duty.

"I would that I could order our town as that maiden orders this house," said the Mayor. "There is not a want that is not supplied before it is felt. She reads my thoughts and acts upon them ere my lips have time to form them. If I have still strength to spend in the public service, it is because my private life is full of restful peace. Do not fear the sack, sirs. It cometh from Brooke and Hellier's of Abchurch Lane, and may be relied upon."

"Which showeth that one good thing cometh out of London," remarked Sir Gervas.

"Aye, truly," said the old man, smiling. "But what think ye of my young men, sir? They must needs be of a very different class to any with whom you are acquainted, if, as I understand, you have frequented court circles."

"Why, marry, they are good enough young men, no doubt," Sir Gervas answered lightly. "Methinks, how-

ever, that there is a want of sap about them. It is not blood, but sour butter-milk that flows in their veins."

"Nay, nay," the Mayor responded warmly. "There you do them an injustice. Their passions and feelings are under control, as the skilful rider keeps his horse in hand; but they are as surely there as is the speed and endurance of the animal. Did you observe the godly youth who sat upon your right, whom I had occasion to reprove more than once for over-zeal? He is a fit example of how a man may take the upper hand of his feelings, and keep them in control."

"And how has he done so?" I asked.

"Why, between friends," quoth the Mayor, "it was but last Lady-day that he asked the hand of my grand-daughter Ruth in marriage. His time is nearly served, and his father, Sam Derrick, is an honourable craftsman, so that the match would have been no unfitting one. The maiden turned against him, however—young girls will have their fancies—and the matter came to an end. Yet here he dwells under the same roof-tree, at her elbow from morn to night, with never a sign of that passion which can scarce have died out so soon. Twice my wool warehouse hath been nigh burned to the ground since then, and twice he hath headed those who fought the flames. There are not many whose suit hath been rejected who would bear themselves in so resigned and patient a fashion."

"I am prepared to find that your judgment is the correct one," said Sir Gervas Jerome. "I have learned to distrust too hasty dislikes, and bear in mind that couplet of John Dryden—

> 'Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow.
> He who would search for pearls must dive below.'"

"Or worthy Dr. Samuel Butler," said Saxon, "who, in his immortal poem of *Hudibras*, says—

> 'The fool can only see the skin:
> The wise man tries to peep within.'"

"I wonder, Colonel Saxon," said our host severely, "that you should speak favourably of that licentious poem, which is composed, as I have heard, for the sole purpose of casting ridicule upon the godly. I should as soon have expected to hear you praise the wicked and foolish work of Hobbes, with his mischievous thesis, *A Deo rex, a rege lex.*"

"It is true that I contemn and despise the use which Butler hath made of his satire," said Saxon adroitly; "yet I may admire the satire itself, just as one may admire a damascened blade without approving of the quarrel in which it is drawn."

"These distinctions are, I fear, too subtle for my old brain," said the stout old Puritan. "This England of ours is divided into two camps, that of God and that of Antichrist. He who is not with us is against us, nor shall any who serve under the devil's banner have anything from me save my scorn and the sharp edge of my sword."

"Well, well," said Saxon, filling up his glass, "I am no Laodicean or time-server. The cause shall not find me wanting with tongue or with sword."

"Of that I am well convinced, my worthy friend," the Mayor answered, "and if I have spoken over sharply you will hold me excused. But I regret to have evil tidings to announce to you. I have not told the commonalty lest it cast them down, but I know that adversity will be but the whet-stone to give your ardour a finer edge. Argyle's rising has failed, and he and his companions are prisoners in the hands of the man who never knew what pity was."

We all started in our chairs at this, and looked at one another aghast, save only Sir Gervas Jerome, whose natural serenity was, I am well convinced, proof against any disturbance. For you may remember, my children, that I stated when I first took it in hand to narrate to you these passages of my life, that the hopes of Monmouth's party rested very much upon the raid which Argyle and the Scottish exiles had made upon Ayrshire, where it was hoped that they would create such a disturbance as

would divert a good share of King James's forces, and so make our march to London less difficult. This was the more confidently expected since Argyle's own estates lay upon that side of Scotland, where he could raise five thousand swordsmen among his own clansmen. The western counties abounded, too, in fierce zealots who were ready to assert the cause of the Covenant, and who had proved themselves in many a skirmish to be valiant warriors. With the help of the Highlanders and of the Covenanters it seemed certain that Argyle would be able to hold his own, the more so since he took with him to Scotland the English Puritan Rumbold, and many others skilled in warfare. This sudden news of his total defeat and downfall was therefore a heavy blow, since it turned the whole forces of the Government upon ourselves.

"Have you the news from a trusty source?" asked Decimus Saxon, after a long silence.

"It is beyond all doubt or question," Master Stephen Timewell answered. "Yet I can well understand your surprise, for the Duke had trusty councillors with him. There was Sir Patrick Hume of Polwarth——"

"All talk and no fight," said Saxon.

"And Richard Rumbold."

"All fight and no talk," quoth our companion. "He should, methinks, have rendered a better account of himself."

"Then there was Major Elphinstone."

"A bragging fool!" cried Saxon.

"And Sir John Cochrane."

"A captious, long-tongued, short-witted sluggard," said the soldier of fortune. "The expedition was doomed from the first with such men at its head. Yet I had thought that could they have done nought else, they might at least have flung themselves into the mountain country, where these bare-legged caterans could have held their own amid their native clouds and mists. All taken, you say! It is a lesson and a warning to us. I tell you that

unless Monmouth infuses more energy into his councils, and thrusts straight for the heart instead of fencing and foining at the extremities, we shall find ourselves as Argyle and Rumbold. What mean these two days wasted at Axminster at a time when every hour is of import? Is he, every time that he brushes a party of militia aside, to stop forty-eight hours and chant 'Te Deums' when Churchill and Feversham are, as I know, pushing for the West with every available man, and the Dutch grenadiers are swarming over like rats into a granary?"

"You are very right, Colonel Saxon," the Mayor answered. "And I trust that when the King comes here we may stir him up to more prompt action. He has much need of more soldierly advisers, for since Fletcher hath gone there is hardly a man about him who hath been trained to arms."

"Well," said Saxon moodily, "now that Argyle hath gone under we are face to face with James, with nothing but our own good swords to trust to."

"To them and to the justice of our cause. How like ye the news, young sirs? Has the wine lost its smack on account of it? Are ye disposed to flinch from the standard of the Lord?"

"For my own part I shall see the matter through," said I.

"And I shall bide where Micah Clarke bides," quoth Reuben Lockarby.

"And to me," said Sir Gervas, "it is a matter of indifference, so long as I am in good company and there is something stirring."

"In that case," said the Mayor, "we had best each turn to his own work, and have all ready for the King's arrival. Until then I trust that ye will honour my humble roof."

"I fear that I cannot accept your kindness," Saxon answered. "When I am in harness I come and go early and late. I shall therefore take up my quarters in the inn, which is not very well furnished with victual, and yet can

supply me with the simple fare which, with a black Jack of October and a pipe of Trinidado, is all I require."

As Saxon was firm in this resolution the Mayor forbore to press it upon him, but my two friends gladly joined with me in accepting the worthy wool-worker's offer, and took up our quarters for the time under his hospitable roof.

## 19. *Of a Brawl in the Night*

DECIMUS SAXON refused to avail himself of Master Timewell's house and table for the reason, as I afterwards learned, that, the Mayor being a firm Presbyterian, he thought it might stand him in ill stead with the Independents and other zealots were he to allow too great an intimacy to spring up between them. Indeed, my dears, from this time onward this cunning man framed his whole life and actions in such a way as to make friends of the sectaries, and to cause them to look upon him as their leader. For he had a firm belief that in all such outbreaks as that in which we were engaged, the most extreme party is sure in the end to gain the upper hand. "Fanatics," he said to me one day, "mean fervour, and fervour means hard work, and hard work means power." That was the centre point of all his plotting and scheming.

And first of all he set himself to show how excellent a soldier he was, and he spared neither time nor work to make this apparent. From morn till midday, and from afternoon till night, we drilled and drilled until in very truth the shouting of the orders and the clatter of the arms became wearisome to our ears. The good burghers may well have thought that Colonel Saxon's Wiltshire foot were as much part of the market-place as the town cross or the parish stocks. There was much to be done in very little time, so much that many would have thought it hopeless to attempt it. Not only was there the general muster of the regiment, but we had each to practise our

own companies in their several drills, and to learn as best we could the names and the wants of the men. Yet our work was made easier to us by the assurance that it was not thrown away, for at every gathering our bumpkins stood more erect, and handled their weapons more deftly. From cock-crow to sun-down the streets resounded with "Poise your muskets! Order your muskets! Rest your muskets! Handle your primers!" and all the other orders of the old manual exercise.

As we became more soldierly we increased in numbers, for our smart appearance drew the pick of the new-comers into our ranks. My own company swelled until it had to be divided, and the others enlarged in proportion. The baronet's musqueteers mustered a full hundred, skilled for the most part in the use of the gun. Altogether we sprang from three hundred to four hundred and fifty, and our drill improved until we received praise from all sides on the state of our men.

Late in the evening I was riding slowly back to the house of Master Timewell when Reuben clattered after me, and besought me to turn back with him to see a note-worthy sight. Though feeling little in the mood for such things, I turned Covenant and rode with him down the length of High Street, and into the suburb which is known as Shuttern, where my companion pulled up at a bare barn-like building, and bade me look in through the window.

The interior, which consisted of a single great hall, the empty warehouse in which wool had used to be stored, was all alight with lamps and candles. A great throng of men, whom I recognised as belonging to my own company, or that of my companion, lay about on either side, some smoking, some praying, and some burnishing their arms. Down the middle a line of benches had been drawn up, on which there were seated astraddle the whole hundred of the baronet's musqueteers, each engaged in plaiting into a queue the hair of the man who sat in front of him. A boy walked up and down with a pot of grease,

by the aid of which with some whipcord the work was going forward merrily. Sir Gervas himself with a great flour dredger sat perched upon a bale of wool at the head of the line, and as quickly as any queue was finished he examined it through his quizzing glass, and if it found favour in his eyes, daintily powdered it from his dredger, with as much care and reverence as though it were some service of the Church. No cook seasoning a dish could have added his spices with more nicety of judgment than our friend displayed in whitening the pates of his company. Glancing up from his labours he saw our two smiling faces looking in at him through the window, but his work was too engrossing to allow him to leave it, and we rode off at last without having speech with him.

By this time the town was very quiet and still, for the folk in those parts were early bed-goers, save when some special occasion kept them afoot. We rode slowly together through the silent streets, our horses' hoofs ringing out sharp against the cobble stones, talking about such light matters as engage the mind of youth. The moon was shining very brightly above us, silvering the broad streets, and casting a fretwork of shadows from the peaks and pinnacles of the churches. At Master Timewell's courtyard I sprang from my saddle, but Reuben, attracted by the peace and beauty of the scene, rode onwards with the intention of going as far as the town gate.

I was still at work upon my girth buckles, undoing my harness, when of a sudden there came from the street a shouting and a rushing, with the clinking of blades, and my comrade's voice calling upon me for help. Drawing my sword I ran out. Some little way down there was a clear space, white with the moonshine, in the centre of which I caught a glimpse of the sturdy figure of my friend springing about with an activity for which I had never given him credit, and exchanging sword thrusts with three or four men who were pressing him closely. On the ground there lay a dark figure, and behind the struggling group Reuben's mare reared and plunged in sympathy

with her master's peril. As I rushed down, shouting and waving my sword, the assailants took flight down a side street, save one, a tall sinewy swordsman, who rushed in upon Reuben, stabbing furiously at him, and cursing him the while for a spoil-sport. To my horror I saw, as I ran, the fellow's blade slip inside my friend's guard, who threw up his arms and fell prostrate, while the other with a final thrust dashed off down one of the narrow winding lanes which led from East Street to the banks of the Tone.

"For Heaven's sake where are you hurt?" I cried, throwing myself upon my knees beside his prostrate body. "Where is your injury, Reuben?"

"In the wind, mostly," quoth he, blowing like a smithy bellows; "likewise on the back of my pate. Give me your hand, I pray."

"And are you indeed scathless?" I cried, with a great lightening of the heart as I helped him to his feet. "I thought that the villain had stabbed you."

"As well stab a Warsash crab with a bodkin," said he. "Thanks to good Sir Jacob Clancing, once of Snellaby Hall and now of Salisbury Plain, their rapiers did no more than scratch my plate of proof. But how is it with the maid?"

"The maid?" said I.

"Aye, it was to save her that I drew. She was beset by these night walkers. See, she rises! They threw her down when I set upon them."

"How is it with you, mistress?" I asked; for the prostrate figure had arisen and taken the form of a woman, young and graceful to all appearance, with her face muffled in a mantle. "I trust that you have met with no hurt."

"None, sir," she answered, in a low, sweet voice, "but that I have escaped is due to the ready valour of your friend, and the guiding wisdom of Him who confutes the plots of the wicked. Doubtless a true man would have rendered this help to any damsel in distress, and yet it may add to your satisfaction to know that she whom you

have served is no stranger to you." With these words she dropped her mantle and turned her face towards us in the moonlight.

"Good lack! it is Mistress Timewell!" I cried, in amazement.

"Let us homewards," she said, in firm, quick tones. "The neighbours are alarmed, and there will be a rabble collected anon. Let us escape from the babblement."

Windows had indeed begun to clatter up in every direction, and loud voices to demand what was amiss. Far away down the street we could see the glint of lanthorns swinging to and fro as the watch hurried thitherwards. We slipped along in the shadow, however, and found ourselves safe within the Mayor's courtyard, without let or hindrance.

"I trust, sir, that you have really met with no hurt," said the maiden to my companion.

Reuben had said not a word since she had uncovered her face, and bore the face of a man who finds himself in some pleasant dream and is vexed only by the fear lest he wake up from it. "Nay, I am not hurt," he answered, "but I would that you could tell us who these roving blades may be, and where they may be found."

"Nay, nay," said she, with uplifted finger, "you shall not follow the matter further. As to the men, I cannot say with certainty who they may have been. I had gone forth to visit Dame Clatworthy, who hath the tertian ague, and they did beset me on my return. Perchance they are some who are not of my grandfather's way of thinking in affairs of State, and who struck at him through me. But ye have both been so kind that ye will not refuse me one other favour which I shall ask ye?"

We protested that we could not, with our hands upon our sword-hilts.

"Nay, keep them for the Lord's quarrel," said she, smiling at the action. "All that I ask is that ye will say nothing of this matter to my grandsire. He is choleric, and a little matter doth set him in a flame, so old as he is.

I would not have his mind turned from the public needs to a private trifle of this sort. Have I your promises ? "

" Mine," said I, bowing.

" And mine," said Lockarby.

" Thanks, good friends. Alack ! I have dropped my gauntlet in the street. But it is of no import. I thank God that no harm has come to anyone. My thanks once more, and may pleasant dreams await ye." She sprang up the steps and was gone in an instant.

Reuben and I unharnessed our horses and saw them cared for in silence. We then entered the house and ascended to our chambers, still without a word. Outside his room door my friend paused.

" I have heard that long man's voice before, Micah," said he.

" And so have I," I answered. " The old man must beware of his 'prentices. I have half a mind to go back for the little maiden's gauntlet."

A merry twinkle shot through the cloud which had gathered on Reuben's brow. He opened his left hand and showed me the doe-skin glove crumpled up in his palm.

" I would not barter it for all the gold in her grandsire's coffers," said he, with a sudden outflame, and then half-laughing, half-blushing at his own heat, he whisked in and left me to my thoughts.

And so I learned for the first time, my dears, that my good comrade had been struck by the little god's arrows. When a man's years number one score, love springs up in him, as the gourd grew in the Scriptures, in a single night. I have told my story ill if I have not made you understand that my friend was a frank, warm-hearted lad of impulse, whose reason seldom stood sentry over his inclinations. Such a man can no more draw away from a winning maid than the needle can shun the magnet. He loves as the mavis sings or the kitten plays. Now, a slow-witted, heavy fellow like myself, in whose veins the blood has always flowed somewhat coolly and temperately, may go

into love as a horse goes into a shelving stream, step by step, but a man like Reuben is kicking his heels upon the bank one moment, and is over ears in the deepest pool the next.

Heaven only knows what match it was that had set the tow alight. I can but say that from that day on my comrade was sad and cloudy one hour, gay and blithesome the next. His even flow of good spirits had deserted him, and he became as dismal as a moulting chicken, which has ever seemed to me to be one of the strangest outcomes of what poets have called the joyous state of love. But, indeed, pain and pleasure are so very nearly akin in this world, that it is as if they were tethered in neighbouring stalls, and a kick would at any time bring down the partition. Here is a man who is as full of sighs as a grenade is of powder, his face is sad, his brow is downcast, his wits are wandering; yet if you remark to him that it is an ill thing that he should be in this state, he will answer you, as like as not, that he would not exchange it for all the powers and principalities. Tears to him are golden, and laughter is but base coin. Well, my dears, it is useless for me to expound to you that which I cannot myself understand. If, as I have heard, it is impossible to get the thumb-marks of any two men to be alike, how can we expect their inmost thoughts and feelings to tally? Yet this I can say with all truth, that when I asked your grandmother's hand I did not demean myself as if I were chief mourner at a funeral. She will bear me out that I walked up to her with a smile upon my face, though mayhap there was a little flutter at my heart, and I took her hand and I said—but, lack-a-day, whither have I wandered? What has all this to do with Taunton town and the rising of 1685?

On the night of Wednesday, June 17, we learned that the King, as Monmouth was called throughout the West, was lying less than ten miles off with his forces, and that he would make his entry into the loyal town of Taunton the next morning. Every effort was made, as ye may well

guess, to give him a welcome which should be worthy of the most Whiggish and Protestant town in England. An arch of evergreens had already been built up at the western gate, bearing the motto, " Welcome to King Monmouth ! " and another spanned the entrance to the market-place from the upper window of the White Hart Inn, with " Hail to the Protestant Chief ! " in great scarlet letters. A third, if I remember right, bridged the entrance to the Castle yard, but the motto on it has escaped me. The cloth and wool industry is, as I have told you, the staple trade of the town, and the merchants had no mercy on their wares, but used them freely to beautify the streets. Rich tapestries, glossy velvets and costly brocades fluttered from the windows or lined the balconies. East Street, High Street and Fore Street were draped from garret to basement with rare and beautiful fabrics, while gay flags hung from the roofs on either side, or fluttered in long festoons from house to house. The royal banner of England floated from the lofty tower of St. Mary Magdalene, while the blue ensign of Monmouth waved from the sister turret of St. James. Late into the night there was planning and hammering, working and devising, until when the sun rose upon Thursday, June 18, it shone on as brave a show of bunting and evergreen as ever graced a town. Taunton had changed as by magic from a city into a flower garden.

Master Stephen Timewell had busied himself in these preparations, but he had borne in mind at the same time that the most welcome sight which he could present to Monmouth's eyes was the large body of armed men who were prepared to follow his fortunes. There were sixteen hundred in the town, two hundred of which were horse, mostly well armed and equipped. These were disposed in such a way that the King should pass them in his progress. The townsmen lined the market-place three deep from the Castle gate to the entrance to the High Street ; from thence to Shuttern, Dorsetshire and Frome peasants were drawn up on either side of the street ;

while our own regiment was stationed at the western gate. With arms well burnished, serried ranks and fresh sprigs of green in every bonnet, no leader could desire a better addition to his army. When all were in their places, and the burghers and their wives had arrayed themselves in their holiday gear, with gladsome faces and baskets of new-cut flowers, all was ready for the royal visitor's reception.

"My orders are," said Saxon, riding up to us as we sat our horses beside our companions, "that I and my captains should fall in with the King's escort as he passes, and so accompany him to the market-place. Your men shall present arms, and shall then stand their ground until we return."

We all three drew our swords and saluted.

"If ye will come with me, gentlemen, and take position to the right of the gate here," said he, "I may be able to tell ye something of these folk as they pass. Thirty years of war in many climes should give me the master craftsman's right to expound to his apprentices."

We all very gladly followed his advice, and passed out through the gate, which was now nothing more than a broad gap amongst the mounds which marked the lines of the old walls. "There is no sign of them yet," I remarked, as we pulled up upon a convenient hillock. "I suppose that they must come by this road which winds through the valley before us."

"There are two sorts of bad general," quoth Saxon, "the man who is too fast and the man who is too slow. His Majesty's advisers will never be accused of the former failing, whatever other mistakes they may fall into. There was old Marshal Grunberg, with whom I did twenty-six months' soldiering in Bohemia. He would fly through the country pell-mell, horse, foot and artillery, as if the devil were at his heels. He might make fifty blunders, but the enemy had never time to take advantage. I call to mind a raid which we made into Silesia, when, after two days or so of mountain roads, his Oberhauptmann of the

staff told him that it was impossible for the artillery to keep up. 'Lass es hinter!' says he. So the guns were left, and by the evening of the next day the foot were dead-beat. 'They cannot walk another mile!' says the Oberhauptmann. 'Lassen Sie hinter!' says he. So on we went with the horse—I was in his Pandour regiment, worse luck! But after a skirmish or two, what with the roads and what with the enemy, our horses were foundered and useless. 'The horses are used up!' says the Oberhauptmann. 'Lassen Sie hinter!' he cries; and I warrant that he would have pushed on to Prague with his staff, had they allowed him. 'General Hinterlassen' we called him after that."

"A dashing commander, too," cried Sir Gervas. "I would fain have served under him."

"Aye, and he had a way of knocking his recruits into shape which would scarce be relished by our good friends here in the west country," said Saxon. "I remember that after the leaguer of Salzburg, when we had taken the castle or fortalice of that name, we were joined by some thousand untrained foot, which had been raised in Dalmatia in the Emperor's employ. As they approached our lines with waving of hands and blowing of bugles, old Marshal Hinterlassen discharged a volley of all the cannon upon the walls at them, killing threescore and striking great panic into the others. 'The rogues must get used to standing fire sooner or later,' said he, 'so they may as well commence their education at once.'"

"He was a rough schoolmaster," I remarked. "He might have left that part of the drill to the enemy."

"Yet his soldiers loved him," said Saxon. "He was not a man, when a city had been forced, to inquire into every squawk of a woman, or give ear to every burgess who chanced to find his strong-box a trifle the lighter. But as to the slow commanders, I have known none to equal Brigadier Baumgarten, also of the Imperial service. He would break up his winter-quarters and sit down before some place of strength, where he would raise a sconce

here, and sink a sap there, until his soldiers were sick of the very sight of the place. So he would play with it, as a cat with a mouse, until at last it was about to open its gates, when, as like as not, he would raise the leaguer and march back into his winter-quarters. I served two campaigns under him without honour, sack, plunder or emolument, save a beggarly stipend of three gulden a day, paid in clipped money, six months in arrear. But mark ye the folk upon yonder tower! They are waving their kerchiefs as though something were visible to them."

"I can see nothing," I answered, shading my eyes and gazing down the tree-sprinkled valley which rose slowly in green uplands to the grassy Blackdown hills.

"Those on the housetops are waving and pointing," said Reuben. "Methinks I can myself see the flash of steel among yonder woods."

"There it is," cried Saxon, extending his gauntleted hand, "on the western bank of the Tone, hard by the wooden bridge. Follow my finger, Clarke, and see if you cannot distinguish it."

"Yes, truly," I exclaimed, "I see a bright shimmer coming and going. And there to the left, where the road curves over the hill, mark you that dense mass of men! Ha! the head of the column begins to emerge from the trees."

There was not a cloud in the sky, but the great heat had caused a haze to overlie the valley, gathering thickly along the winding course of the river, and hanging in little sprays and feathers over the woodlands which clothe its banks. Through this filmy vapour there broke from time to time fierce sparkles of brilliant light as the sun's rays fell upon breastplate or headpiece. Now and again the gentle summer breeze wafted up sudden pulses of martial music to our ears, with the blare of trumpets and the long deep snarl of the drums. As we gazed, the van of the army began to roll out from the cover of the trees and to darken the white dusty roads. The long line slowly extended itself, writhing out of the forest land like

a dark snake with sparkling scales, until the whole rebel army—horse, foot and ordnance—were visible beneath us. The gleam of the weapons, the waving of numerous banners, the plumes of the leaders, and the deep columns of marching men, made up a picture which stirred the very hearts of the citizens, who, from the housetops and from the ruinous summit of the dismantled walls, were enabled to gaze down upon the champions of their faith. If the mere sight of a passing regiment will cause a thrill in your bosoms, you can fancy how it is when the soldiers upon whom you look are in actual arms for your own dearest and most cherished interests, and have just come out victorious from a bloody struggle. If every other man's hand was against us, these at last were on our side, and our hearts went out to them as to friends and brothers. Of all the ties that unite men in this world, that of a common danger is the strongest.

It all appeared to be most warlike and most imposing to my inexperienced eyes, and I thought as I looked at the long array that our cause was as good as won. To my surprise, however, Saxon pished and pshawed under his breath, until at last, unable to contain his impatience, he broke out in hot discontent.

"Do but look at that vanguard as they breast the slope," he cried. "Where is the advance party, or Vorreiter, as the Germans call them? Where, too, is the space which should be left between the fore-guard and the main battle? By the sword of Scanderbeg, they remind me more of a drove of pilgrims, as I have seen them approaching the shrine of St. Sebaldus of Nürnberg with their banners and streamers. There in the centre, amid that cavalcade of cavaliers, rides our new monarch doubtless. Pity he hath not a man by him who can put this swarm of peasants into something like campaign order. Now do but look at those four pieces of ordnance trailing along like lame sheep behind the flock. Caracco, I would that I were a young King's officer with a troop of light horse on the ridge yonder! My faith, how I should sweep

down yon cross-road like a kestrel on a brood of young plover! Then heh for cut and thrust, down with the skulking cannoniers, a carbine fire to cover us, round with the horses, and away go the rebel guns in a cloud of dust! How's that, Sir Gervas?"

"Good sport, Colonel," said the baronet, with a touch of colour in his white cheeks. "I warrant that you did keep your Pandours on the trot."

"Aye, the rogues had to work or hang—one or t'other. But methinks our friends here are scarce as numerous as reported. I reckon them to be a thousand horse, and mayhap five thousand two hundred foot. I have been thought a good tally-man on such occasions. With fifteen hundred in the town that would bring us to close on eight thousand men, which is no great force to invade a kingdom and dispute a crown."

"If the West can give eight thousand, how many can all the counties of England afford?" I asked. "Is not that the fairer way to look at it?"

"Monmouth's popularity lies mostly in the West," Saxon answered. "It was the memory of that which prompted him to raise his standard in these counties."

"His standards, rather," quoth Reuben. "Why, it looks as though they had hung their linen up to dry all down the line."

"True! They have more ensigns than ever I saw with so small a force," Saxon answered, rising in his stirrups. "One or two are blue, and the rest, as far as I can see for the sun shining upon them, are white, with some motto or device."

Whilst we had been conversing, the body of horse which formed the vanguard of the Protestant army had approached within a quarter of a mile or less of the town, when a loud, clear bugle-call brought them to a halt. In each successive regiment or squadron the signal was repeated, so that the sound passed swiftly down the long array until it died away in the distance. As the coil of men formed up upon the white road, with just a tremulous

shifting motion along the curved and undulating line, its likeness to a giant serpent occurred again to my mind.

"I could fancy it a great boa," I remarked, "which was drawing its coils round the town."

"A rattlesnake, rather," said Reuben, pointing to the guns in the rear. "It keeps all its noise in its tail."

"Here comes its head, if I mistake not," quoth Saxon. "It were best perhaps that we stand at the side of the gate."

As he spoke a group of gaily dressed cavaliers broke away from the main body and rode straight for the town. Their leader was a tall, slim, elegant young man, who sat his horse with the grace of a skilled rider, and who was remarkable amongst those around him for the gallantry of his bearing and the richness of his trappings. As he galloped towards the gate a roar of welcome burst from the assembled multitude, which was taken up and prolonged by the crowds behind, who, though unable to see what was going forward, gathered from the shouting that the King was approaching.

## 20. *Of the Muster of the Men of the West*

MONMOUTH was at that time in his thirty-sixth year, and was remarkable for those superficial graces which please the multitude and fit a man to lead in a popular cause. He was young, well-spoken, witty and skilled in all martial and manly exercises. On his progress in the West he had not thought it beneath him to kiss the village maidens, to offer prizes at the rural sports, and to run races in his boots against the fleetest of the barefooted countrymen.[1] His nature was vain and prodigal, but he excelled in that showy magnificence and careless generosity which wins the hearts of the people. Both on the Continent and at Bothwell Bridge, in Scotland, he had led armies with success, and his kindness and

[1] Note G, Appendix.—Monmouth's Progress.

mercy to the Covenanters after his victory had caused him to be as much esteemed amongst the Whigs as Dalzell and Claverhouse were hated. As he reined up his beautiful black horse at the gate of the city, and raised his plumed montero cap to the shouting crowd, the grace and dignity of his bearing were such as might befit the knight-errant in a Romance who is fighting at long odds for a crown which a tyrant has filched from him.

He was reckoned well-favoured, but I cannot say that I found him so. His face was, I thought, too long and white for comeliness, yet his features were high and noble, with well-marked nose and clear, searching eyes. In his mouth might perchance be noticed some trace of that weakness which marred his character, though the expression was sweet and amiable. He wore a dark purple roquelaure, riding-jacket, faced and lapelled with gold lace, through the open front of which shone a silver breastplate. A velvet suit of a lighter shade than the jacket, a pair of high yellow Cordovan boots, with a gold-hilted rapier on one side, and a poniard of Parma on the other, each hung from the morocco-leather sword-belt, completed his attire. A broad collar of Mechlin lace flowed over his shoulders, while wristbands of the same costly material dangled from his sleeves. Again and again he raised his cap and bent to the saddle-bow in response to the storm of cheering. "A Monmouth! A Monmouth!" cried the people; "Hail to the Protestant chief!" "Long live the noble King Monmouth!" while from every window, and roof, and balcony fluttering kerchief or waving hat brightened the joyous scene. The rebel van caught fire at the sight and raised a great deep-chested shout, which was taken up again and again by the rest of the army, until the whole countryside was sonorous.

In the meanwhile the city elders, headed by our friend the Mayor, advanced from the gate in all the dignity of silk and fur to pay homage to the King. Sinking upon one knee by Monmouth's stirrup, he kissed the hand which was graciously extended to him.

"Nay, good Master Mayor," said the King, in a clear, strong voice, "it is for my enemies to sink before me, and not for my friends. Prithee, what is this scroll which you do unroll?"

"It is an address of welcome and of allegiance, your Majesty, from your loyal town of Taunton."

"I need no such address," said King Monmouth, looking round. "It is written all around me in fairer characters than ever found themselves upon parchment. My good friends have made me feel that I was welcome without the aid of clerk or scrivener. Your name, good Master Mayor, is Stephen Timewell, as I understand?"

"The same, your Majesty."

"Too curt a name for so trusty a man," said the King, drawing his sword and touching him upon the shoulder with it. "I shall make it longer by three letters. Rise up, Sir Stephen, and may I find that there are many other knights in my dominions as loyal and as stout."

Amidst the huzzas which broke out afresh at this honour done to the town, the Mayor withdrew with the councilmen to the left side of the gate, whilst Monmouth with his staff gathered upon the right. At a signal a trumpeter blew a fanfare, the drums struck up a point of war, and the insurgent army, with serried ranks and waving banners, resumed its advance upon the town. As it approached, Saxon pointed out to us the various leaders and men of note who surrounded the King, giving us their names and some few words as to their characters.

"That is Lord Grey of Wark," said he; "the little middle-aged lean man at the King's bridle-arm. He hath been in the Tower once for treason. 'Twas he who fled with the Lady Henrietta Berkeley, his wife's sister. A fine leader truly for a godly cause! The man upon his left, with the red swollen face and the white feather in his cap, is Colonel Holmes. I trust that he will never show the white feather save on his head. The other upon the high chestnut horse is a lawyer, though, by my soul, he is a better man at ordering a battalion than at drawing a bill

of costs. He is the republican Wade who led the foot at the skirmish at Bridport, and brought them off with safety. The tall heavy-faced soldier in the steel bonnet is Anthony Buyse, the Brandenburger, a soldado of fortune, and a man of high heart, as are most of his countrymen. I have fought both with him and against him ere now."

"Mark ye the long thin man behind him?" cried Reuben. "He hath drawn his sword, and waves it over his head. 'Tis a strange time and place for the broad-sword exercise. He is surely mad."

"Perhaps you are not far amiss," said Saxon. "Yet, by my hilt, were it not for that man there would be no Protestant army advancing upon us down yonder road. 'Tis he who by dangling the crown before Monmouth's eyes beguiled him away from his snug retreat in Brabant. There is not one of these men whom he hath not tempted into this affair by some bait or other. With Grey it was a dukedom, with Wade the woolsack, with Buyse the plunder of Cheapside. Every one hath his own motive, but the clues to them all are in the hands of yonder crazy fanatic, who makes the puppets dance as he will. He hath plotted more, lied more, and suffered less than any Whig in the party."

"It must be that Dr. Robert Ferguson of whom I have heard my father speak," said I.

"You are right. 'Tis he. I have but seen him once in Amsterdam, and yet I know him by his shock wig and crooked shoulders. It is whispered that of late his over-weening conceit hath unseated his reason. See, the German places his hand upon his shoulder and persuades him to sheathe his weapon. King Monmouth glances round too, and smiles as though he were the Court buffoon with a Geneva cloak instead of the motley. But the van is upon us. To your companies, and mind that ye raise your swords to the salute while the colours of each troop go by."

Whilst our companion had been talking the whole Protestant army had been streaming towards the town

and the head of the fore-guard was abreast with the gate-way. Four troops of horse led the way, badly equipped and mounted, with ropes instead of bridles, and in some cases squares of sacking in place of saddles. The men were armed for the most part with sword and pistol, while a few had the buff-coats, plates and headpieces taken at Axminster, still stained sometimes with the blood of the last wearer. In the midst of them rode a banner-bearer, who carried a great square ensign hung upon a pole, which was supported upon a socket let into the side of the girth. Upon it was printed in golden letters the legend, " Pro libertate et religione nostrâ." These horse-soldiers were made up of yeomen's and farmers' sons, unused to discipline, and having a high regard for them-selves as volunteers, which caused them to cavil and argue over every order. For this cause, though not wanting in natural courage, they did little service during the war, and were a hindrance rather than a help to the army.

Behind the horse came the foot, walking six abreast, divided into companies of varying size, each company bearing a banner which gave the name of the town or village from which it had been raised. This manner of arranging the troops had been chosen because it had been found to be impossible to separate men who were akin and neighbours to each other. They would fight, they said, side by side, or they would not fight at all. For my own part, I think that it is no bad plan, for when it comes to push of pike, a man stands all the faster when he knows that he hath old and tried friends on either side of him. Many of these country places I came to know afterwards from the talk of the men, and many others I have travelled through so that the names upon the banners have come to have a real meaning with me. Homer hath, I remem-ber, a chapter or book wherein he records the names of all the Grecian chiefs and whence they came, and how many men they brought to the common muster. It is a pity that there is not some Western Homer who could record the names of these brave peasants and artisans,

and recount what each did or suffered in upholding a noble though disastrous cause. Their places of birth at least shall not be lost as far as mine own feeble memory can carry me.

The first foot regiment, if so rudely formed a band could be so called, consisted of men of the sea, fishers and coastmen, clad in the heavy blue jerkins and rude garb of their class. They were bronzed, weather-beaten tarpaulins, with hard mahogany faces, variously armed with birding pieces, cutlasses or pistols. I have a notion that it was not the first time that those weapons had been turned against King James's servants, for the Somerset and Devon coasts were famous breeding-places for smugglers, and many a saucy lugger was doubtless lying up in creek or in bay whilst her crew had gone a-soldiering to Taunton. As to discipline, they had no notion of it, but rolled along in true blue-water style, with many a shout and halloo to each other or to the crowd. From Star Point to Portland Roads there would be few nets for many weeks to come, and fish would swim the narrow seas which should have been heaped on Lyme Cobb or exposed for sale in Plymouth market. Each group, or band, of these men of the sea bore with it its own banner, that of Lyme in the front, followed by Topsham, Colyford, Bridport, Sidmouth, Otterton, Abbotsbury and Charmouth, all southern towns, which are on or near the coast. So they trooped past us, rough and careless, with caps cocked, and the reek of their tobacco rising up from them like the steam from a tired horse. In number they may have been four hundred or thereabouts.

The peasants of Rockbere, with flail and scythe, led the next column, followed by the banner of Honiton, which was supported by two hundred stout lacemakers from the banks of the Otter. These men showed by the colour of their faces that their work kept them within four walls, yet they excelled their peasant companions in their alert and soldierly bearing. Indeed, with all the troops, we observed that, though the countrymen were the stouter

and heartier, the craftsmen were the most ready to catch the air and spirit of the camp. Behind the men of Honiton came the Puritan clothworkers of Wellington, with their mayor upon a white horse beside their standard-bearer, and a band of twenty instruments before him. Grim-visaged, thoughtful, sober men, they were for the most part clad in grey suits and wearing broad-brimmed hats. "For God and faith" was the motto of a streamer which floated from amongst them. The clothworkers formed three strong companies, and the whole regiment may have numbered close on six hundred men.

The third regiment was headed by five hundred foot from Taunton, men of peaceful and industrious life, but deeply imbued with those great principles of civil and religious liberty which were three years later to carry all before them in England. As they passed the gates they were greeted by a thunderous welcome from their townsmen upon the walls and at the windows. Their steady, solid ranks, and broad, honest burgher faces, seemed to me to smack of discipline and of work well done. Behind them came the musters of Winterbourne, Ilminster, Chard, Yeovil and Collumpton, a hundred or more pikesmen to each, bringing the tally of the regiment to a thousand men.

A squadron of horse trotted by, closely followed by the fourth regiment, bearing in its van the standards of Beaminster, Crewkerne, Langport and Chidiock, all quiet Somersetshire villages, which had sent out their manhood to strike a blow for the old cause. Puritan ministers, with their steeple hats and Geneva gowns, once black, but now white with dust, marched sturdily along beside their flocks. Then came a strong company of wild half-armed shepherds from the great plains which extend from the Blackdowns on the south to the Mendips on the north—very different fellows, I promise you, from the Corydons and Strephons of Master Waller or Master Dryden, who have depicted the shepherd as ever shedding tears of love, and tootling upon a plaintive pipe. I fear that Chloë or

Phyllis would have met with rough wooing at the hands of these Western savages. Behind them were musqueteers from Dorchester, pikemen from Newton Poppleford, and a body of stout infantry from among the serge workers of Ottery St. Mary. This fourth regiment numbered rather better than eight hundred, but was inferior in arms and in discipline to that which preceded it.

The fifth regiment was headed by a column of fen men from the dreary marches which stretch round Athelney. These men, in their sad and sordid dwellings, had retained the same free and bold spirit which had made them in past days the last resource of the good King Alfred and the protectors of the Western shires from the inroads of the Danes, who were never able to force their way into their watery strongholds. Two companies of them, towsy-headed and bare-legged, but loud in hymn and prayer, had come out from their fastnesses to help the Protestant cause. At their heels came the woodmen and lumberers of Bishop's Lidiard, big, sturdy men in green jerkins, and the white-smocked villagers of Huish Champflower. The rear of the regiment was formed by four hundred men in scarlet coats, with white cross-belts and well-burnished muskets. These were deserters from the Devonshire Militia, who had marched with Albemarle from Exeter, and who had come over to Monmouth on the field at Axminster. These kept together in a body, but there were many other militiamen, both in red and in yellow coats, amongst the various bodies which I have set forth. This regiment may have numbered seven hundred men.

The sixth and last column of foot was headed by a body of peasants bearing " Minehead " upon their banner, and the ensign of the three wool-bales and the sailing ship, which is the sign of that ancient borough. They had come for the most part from the wild country which lies to the north of Dunster Castle and skirts the shores of the Bristol Channel. Behind them were the poachers and

huntsmen of Porlock Quay, who had left the red deer of Exmoor to graze in peace whilst they followed a nobler quarry. They were followed by men from Dulverton, men from Milverton, men from Wiveliscombe and the sunny slopes of the Quantocks, swart, fierce men from the bleak moors of Dunkerry Beacon, and tall, stalwart pony rearers and graziers from Bampton. The banners of Bridgewater, of Shepton Mallet and of Nether Stowey swept past us, with that of the fishers of Clovelly and the quarreymen of the Blackdowns. In the rear were three companies of strange men, giants in stature, though somewhat bowed with labour, with long tangled beards, and unkempt hair hanging over their eyes. These were the miners from the Mendip hills and from the Oare and Bagworthy valleys, rough, half-savage men, whose eyes rolled up at the velvets and brocades of the shouting citizens, or fixed themselves upon their smiling dames with a fierce intensity which scared the peaceful burghers. So the long line rolled in until three squadrons of horse and four small cannon, with the blue-coated Dutch cannoniers as stiff as their own ramrods, brought up the rear. A long train of carts and of waggons which had followed the army were led into the fields outside the walls and there quartered.

When the last soldier had passed through the Shuttern Gate, Monmouth and his leaders rode slowly in, the Mayor walking by the King's charger. As we saluted they all faced round to us, and I saw a quick flush of surprise and pleasure come over Monmouth's pale face as he noted our close lines and soldierly bearing.

"By my faith, gentlemen," he said, glancing round at his staff, "our worthy friend the Mayor must have inherited Cadmus's dragon teeth. Where raised ye this pretty crop, Sir Stephen? How came ye to bring them to such perfection too, even, I declare, to the hair powder of the grenadiers?"

"I have fifteen hundred in the town," the old woolworker answered proudly; "though some are scarce as disciplined. These men come from Wiltshire, and the

officers from Hampshire. As to their order, the credit is due not to me, but to the old soldier, Colonel Decimus Saxon, whom they have chosen as their commander, as well as to the captains who serve under him."

"My thanks are due to you, Colonel," said the King, turning to Saxon, who bowed and sank the point of his sword to the earth, "and to you also, gentlemen. I shall not forget the warm loyalty which brought you from Hampshire in so short a time. Would that I could find the same virtue in higher places! But, Colonel Saxon, you have, I gather, seen much service abroad. What think you of the army which hath just passed before you?"

"If it please your Majesty," Saxon answered, "it is like so much uncarded wool, which is rough enough in itself, and yet may in time come to be woven into a noble garment."

"Hem! There is not much leisure for the weaving," said Monmouth. "But they fight well. You should have seen them fall on at Axminster! We hope to see you and to hear your views at the council table. But how is this? Have I not seen this gentleman's face before?"

"It is the Honourable Sir Gervas Jerome of the county of Surrey," quoth Saxon.

"Your Majesty may have seen me at St. James's," said the baronet, raising his hat, "or in the balcony at Whitehall. I was much at Court during the latter years of the late king."

"Yes, yes. I remember the name as well as the face," cried Monmouth. "You see, gentlemen," he continued, turning to his staff, "the courtiers begin to come in at last. Were you not the man who did fight Sir Thomas Killigrew behind Dunkirk House? I thought as much. Will you not attach yourself to my personal attendants?"

"If it please your Majesty," Sir Gervas answered, "I am of opinion that I could do your royal cause better service at the head of my musqueteers."

"So be it! So be it!" said King Monmouth. Setting spurs to his horse, he raised his hat in response to the cheers of the troops and cantered down the High Street

under a rain of flowers, which showered from roof and window upon him, his staff and his escort. We had joined in his train, as commanded, so that we came in for our share of this merry crossfire. One rose as it fluttered down was caught by Reuben, who, I observed, pressed it to his lips, and then pushed it inside his breastplate. Glancing up, I caught sight of the smiling face of our host's daughter peeping down at us from a casement.

"Well caught, Reuben!" I whispered. "At trick-track or trap and ball you were ever our best player."

"Ah, Micah," said he, "I bless the day that ever I followed you to the wars. I would not change places with Monmouth this day."

"Has it gone so far then!" I exclaimed. "Why, lad, I thought that you were but opening your trenches, and you speak as though you had carried the city."

"Perhaps I am over-hopeful," he cried, turning from hot to cold, as a man doth when he is in love, or hath the tertian ague, or other bodily trouble. "God knows that I am little worthy of her, and yet——"

"Set not your heart too firmly upon that which may prove to be beyond your reach," said I. "The old man is rich, and will look higher."

"I would he were poor!" sighed Reuben, with all the selfishness of a lover. "If this war last I may win myself some honour or title. Who knows? Others have done it, and why not I?"

"Of our three from Havant," I remarked, "one is spurred onwards by ambition, and one by love. Now, what am I to do who care neither for high office nor for the face of a maid? What is to carry me into the fight?"

"Our motives come and go, but yours is ever with you," said Reuben. "Honour and duty are the two stars, Micah, by which you have ever steered your course."

"Faith, Mistress Ruth has taught you to make pretty speeches," said I, "but methinks she ought to be here amid the beauty of Taunton."

As I spoke we were riding into the market-place, which

was now crowded with our troops. Round the cross were grouped a score of maidens clad in white muslin dresses with blue scarfs around their waists. As the King approached, these little maids, with much pretty nervousness, advanced to meet him, and handed him a banner which they had worked for him, and also a dainty gold-clasped Bible. Monmouth handed the flag to one of his captains, but he raised the book above his head, exclaiming that he had come there to defend the truths contained within it, at which the cheerings and acclamations broke forth with redoubled vigour. It had been expected that he might address the people from the cross, but he contented himself with waiting while the heralds proclaimed his titles to the Crown, when he gave the word to disperse, and the troops marched off to the different centres where food had been provided for them. The King and his chief officers took up their quarters in the Castle, while the Mayor and richer burgesses found bed and board for the rest. As to the common soldiers, many were billeted among the townsfolk, many others encamped in the streets and Castle grounds, while the remainder took up their dwelling among the waggons in the fields outside the city, where they lit up great fires, and had sheep roasting and beer flowing as merrily as though a march on London were but a holiday outing.

## 21. *Of my Hand-grips with the Brandenburger*

KING MONMOUTH had called a council meeting for the evening, and summoned Colonel Decimus Saxon to attend it, with whom I went, bearing with me the small package which Sir Jacob Clancing had given over to my keeping. On arriving at the Castle we found that the King had not yet come out from his chamber, but we were shown into the great hall to await him, a fine room with lofty windows and a noble ceiling of carved

woodwork. At the further end the royal arms had been erected without the bar sinister which Monmouth had formerly worn. Here were assembled the principal chiefs of the army, with many of the inferior commanders, town officers, and others who had petitions to offer. Lord Grey of Wark stood silently by the window, looking out over the countryside with a gloomy face. Wade and Holmes shook their heads and whispered in a corner. Ferguson strode about with his wig awry, shouting out exhortations and prayers in a broad Scottish accent. A few of the more gaily dressed gathered round the empty fireplace, and listened to a tale from one of their number which appeared to be shrouded in many oaths, and which was greeted with shouts of laughter. In another corner a numerous group of zealots, clad in black or russet gowns, with broad white bands and hanging mantles, stood round some favourite preacher, and discussed in an undertone Calvinistic philosophy and its relation to statecraft. A few plain, homely soldiers, who were neither sectaries nor courtiers, wandered up and down, or stared out through the windows at the busy encampment upon the Castle Green. To one of these, remarkable for his great size and breadth of shoulder, Saxon led me, and touching him on the sleeve, he held out his hand as to an old friend.

"Mein Gott!" cried the German soldier of fortune, for it was the same man whom my companion had pointed out in the morning, "I thought it was you, Saxon, when I saw you by the gate, though you are even thinner than of old. How a man could suck up so much good Bavarian beer as you have done, and yet make so little flesh upon it, is more than I can verstehen. How have all things gone with you?"

"As of old," said Saxon. "More blows than thalers, and greater need of a surgeon than of a strong-box. When did I see you last, friend? Was it not at the onfall at Nürnberg, when I led the right and you the left wing of the heavy horse?"

"Nay," said Buyse. "I have met you in the way of

business since then. Have you forgot the skirmish on the Rhine bank, when you did flash your snapphahn at me? Sapperment! Had some rascally schelm not stabbed my horse I should have swept your head off as a boy cuts thistles mit a stick."

"Aye, aye," Saxon answered composedly, "I had forgot it. You were taken, if I remember aright, but did afterwards brain the sentry with your fetters, and swam the Rhine under the fire of a regiment. Yet, I think that we did offer you the same terms that you were having with the others."

"Some such base offer was indeed made me," said the German sternly. "To which I answered that, though I sold my sword, I did not sell my honour. It is well that cavaliers of fortune should show that an engagement is with them—how do ye say it?—unbreakable until the war is over. Then by all means let him change his paymaster. Warum nicht?"

"True, friend, true!" replied Saxon. "These beggarly Italians and Swiss have made such a trade of the matter, and sold themselves so freely, body and soul, to the longest purse, that it is well that we should be nice upon points of honour. But you remember the old hand-grip which no man in the Palatinate could exchange with you? Here is my captain, Micah Clarke. Let him see how warm a North German welcome may be."

The Brandenburger showed his white teeth in a grin as he held out his broad brown hand to me. The instant that mine was enclosed in it he suddenly bent his whole strength upon it, and squeezed my fingers together until the blood tingled in the nails, and the whole hand was limp and powerless.

"Donnerwetter!" he cried, laughing heartily at my start of pain and surprise. "It is a rough Prussian game, and the English lads have not much stomach for it."

"Truly, sir," said I, "it is the first time that I have seen the pastime, and I would fain practise it under so able a master."

"What, another!" he cried. "Why, you must be still pringling from the first. Nay, if you will I shall not refuse you, though I fear it may weaken your hold upon your sword-hilt."

He held out his hand as he spoke, and I grasped it firmly, thumb to thumb, keeping my elbow high so as to bear all my force upon it. His own trick was, as I observed, to gain command of the other hand by a great output of strength at the onset. This I prevented by myself putting out all my power. For a minute or more we stood motionless, gazing into each other's faces. Then I saw a bead of sweat trickle down his forehead, and I knew that he was beaten. Slowly his grip relaxed, and his hand grew limp and slack while my own tightened ever upon it, until he was forced in a surly, muttering voice to request that I should unhand him.

"Teufel und hexerei!" he cried, wiping away the blood which oozed from under his nails, "I might as well put my fingers in a rat-trap. You are the first man that ever yet exchanged fair hand-grips with Anthony Buyse."

"We breed brawn in England as well as in Brandenburg," said Saxon, who was shaking with laughter over the German soldier's discomfiture. "Why, I have seen that lad pick up a full-size sergeant of dragoons and throw him into a cart as though he had been a clod of earth."

"Strong he is," grumbled Buyse, still wringing his injured hand, "strong as old Gotz mit de iron grip. But what good is strength alone in the handling of a weapon? It is not the force of a blow, but the way in which it is geschlagen, that makes the effect. Your sword now is heavier than mine, by the look of it, and yet my blade would bite deeper. Eh? Is not that a more soldierly sport than kinderspiel such as hand-grasping and the like?"

"He is a modest youth," said Saxon. "Yet I would match his stroke against yours."

"For what?" snarled the German.

"For as much wine as we can take at a sitting."

"No small amount, either," said Buyse; "a brace of gallons at the least. Well, be it so. Do you accept the contest?"

"I shall do what I may," I answered, "though I can scarce hope to strike as heavy a blow as so old and tried a soldier."

"Henker take your compliments," he cried gruffly. "It was with sweet words that you did coax my fingers into that fool-catcher of yours. Now, here is my old headpiece of Spanish steel. It has, as you can see, one or two dints of blows, and a fresh one will not hurt it. I place it here upon this oaken stool high enough to be within fair sword-sweep. Have at it, Junker, and let us see if you can leave your mark upon it!"

"Do you strike first, sir," said I, "since the challenge is yours."

"I must bruise my own headpiece to regain my soldierly credit," he grumbled. "Well, well, it has stood a cut or two in its day." Drawing his broadsword, he waved back the crowd who had gathered around us, while he swung the great weapon with tremendous force round his head, and brought it down with a full, clean sweep on to the smooth cap of steel. The headpiece sprang high into the air and then clattered down upon the oaken floor with a long, deep line bitten into the solid metal.

"Well struck!" "A brave stroke!" cried the spectators. "It is proof steel thrice welded, and warranted to turn a sword-blade," one remarked, raising up the helmet to examine it, and then replacing it upon the stool.

"I have seen my father cut through proof steel with this very sword," said I, drawing the fifty-year-old weapon. "He put rather more of his weight into it than you have done. I have heard him say that a good stroke should come from the back and loins rather than from the mere muscles of the arm."

"It is not a lecture we want, but a beispiel or example," sneered the German. "It is with your stroke that we have to do, and not with the teaching of your father."

"My stroke," said I, "is in accordance with his teaching"; and, whistling round the sword, I brought it down with all my might and strength upon the German's helmet. The good old Commonwealth blade shore through the plate of steel, cut the stool asunder and buried its point two inches deep in the oaken floor. "It is but a trick," I explained. "I have practised it in the winter evenings at home."

"It is not a trick that I should care to have played upon me," said Lord Grey, amid a general murmur of applause and surprise. "Od's bud, man, you have lived two centuries too late. What would not your thews have been worth before gunpowder put all men upon a level!"

"Wunderbar!" growled Buyse, "wunderbar! I am past my prime, young sir, and may well resign the palm of strength to you. It was a right noble stroke. It hath cost me a runlet or two of canary, and a good old helmet; but I grudge it not, for it was fairly done. I am thankful that my head was not darin. Saxon, here, used to show us some brave schwertspielerei, but he hath not the weight for such smashing blows as this."

"My eye is still true and my hand firm, though both are perhaps a trifle the worse for want of use," said Saxon, only too glad at the chance of drawing the eyes of the chiefs upon him. "At backsword, sword and dagger, sword and buckler, single falchion and case of falchions, mine old challenge still holds good against any comer, save only my brother Quartus, who plays as well as I do, but hath an extra half-inch in reach which gives him the vantage."

"I studied sword-play under Signor Contarini of Paris," said Lord Grey. "Who was your master?"

"I have studied, my lord, under Signor Stern Necessity of Europe," quoth Saxon. "For five-and-thirty years my life has depended from day to day upon being able to cover myself with this slip of steel. Here is a small trick which showeth some nicety of eye: to throw this ring to the ceiling and catch it upon a rapier point. It seems

simple, perchance, and yet is only to be attained by some practice."

"Simple!" cried Wade the lawyer, a square-faced, bold-eyed man. "Why, the ring is but the girth of your little finger. A man might do it once by good luck, but none could ensure it."

"I will lay a guinea a thrust on it," said Saxon; and tossing the little gold circlet up into the air, he flashed out his rapier and made a pass at it. The ring rasped down the steel blade and tinkled against the hilt, fairly impaled. By a sharp motion of the wrist he shot it up to the ceiling again, where it struck a carved rafter and altered its course; but again, with a quick step forward, he got beneath it and received it on his sword-point. "Surely there is some cavalier present who is as apt at the trick as I am," he said, replacing the ring upon his finger.

"I think, Colonel, that I could venture upon it," said a voice; and looking round, we found that Monmouth had entered the room and was standing quietly on the outskirts of the throng, unperceived in the general interest which our contention had excited. "Nay, nay, gentlemen," he continued pleasantly, as we uncovered and bowed with some little embarrassment; "how could my faithful followers be better employed than by breathing themselves in a little sword-play? I prithee lend me your rapier, Colonel." He drew a diamond ring from his finger, and spinning it up into the air, he transfixed it as deftly as Saxon had done. "I practised the trick at The Hague, where, by my faith, I had only too many hours to devote to such trifles. But how come these steel links and splinters of wood to be littered over the floor?"

"A son of Anak hath appaired amang us," said Ferguson, turning his face, all scarred and reddened with the king's evil, in my direction. "A Goliath o' Gath, wha hath a stroke like untae a weaver's beam. Hath he no the smooth face o' a bairn and the thews o' Behemoth?"

"A shrewd blow indeed," King Monmouth remarked,

picking up half the stool. "How is our champion named?"

"He is my captain, your Majesty," Saxon answered, resheathing the sword which the King had handed to him; "Micah Clarke, a man of Hampshire birth."

"They breed a good old English stock in those parts," said Monmouth; "but how comes it that you are here, sir? I summoned this meeting for my own immediate household, and for the colonels of the regiments. If every captain is to be admitted into our councils, we must hold our meetings on the Castle Green, for no apartment could contain us."

"I ventured to come here, your Majesty," I replied, "because on my way hither I received a commission, which was that I should deliver this small but weighty package into your hands. I therefore thought it my duty to lose no time in fulfilling my errand."

"What is in it?" he asked.

"I know not," I answered.

Doctor Ferguson whispered a few words into the King's ear, who laughed and held out his hand for the packet.

"Tut! tut!" said he. "The days of the Borgias and the Medicis are over, Doctor. Besides, the lad is no Italian conspirator, but hath honest blue eyes and flaxen hair as Nature's certificate to his character. This is passing heavy—an ingot of lead, by the feel. Lend me your dagger, Colonel Holmes. It is stitched round with packthread. Ha! it is a bar of gold—solid virgin gold by all that is wonderful. Take charge of it, Wade, and see that it is added to the common fund. This little piece of metal may furnish ten pikemen. What have we here? A letter and an enclosure. 'To James, Duke of Monmouth'—hum! It was written before we assumed our royal state. 'Sir Jacob Clancing, late of Snellaby Hall, sends greeting and a pledge of affection. Carry out the good work. A hundred more such ingots await you when you have crossed Salisbury Plain.' Bravely promised, Sir Jacob! I would that you had sent them.

Well, gentlemen, ye see how support and tokens of good-will come pouring in upon us. Is not the tide upon the turn? Can the usurper hope to hold his own? Will his men stand by him? Within a month or less I shall see ye all gathered round me at Westminster, and no duty will then be so pleasing to me as to see that ye are all, from the highest to the lowest, rewarded for your loyalty to your monarch in this the hour of his darkness and his danger."

A murmur of thanks rose up from the courtiers at this gracious speech, but the German plucked at Saxon's sleeve and whispered, "He hath his warm fit upon him. You shall see him cold anon."

"Fifteen hundred men have joined me here where I did but expect a thousand at the most," the King continued. "If we had high hopes when we landed at Lyme Cobb with eighty at our back, what should we think now when we find ourselves in the chief city of Somerset with eight thousand brave men around us? 'Tis but one other affair like that at Axminster, and my uncle's power will go down like a house of cards. But gather round the table, gentlemen, and we shall discuss matters in due form."

"There is yet a scrap of paper which you have not read, sire," said Wade, picking up a little slip which had been enclosed in the note.

"It is a rhyming catch or the posy of a ring," said Monmouth, glancing at it. "What are we to make of this?

'When thy star is in trine,
Between darkness and shine,
Duke Monmouth, Duke Monmouth,
Beware of the Rhine!'

Thy star in trine! What tomfoolery is this?"

"If it please your Majesty," said I, "I have reason to believe that the man who sent you this message is one of those who are deeply skilled in the arts of divination, and who pretend from the motions of the celestial bodies to foretell the fates of men."

"This gentleman is right, sir," remarked Lord Grey. "'Thy star in trine' is an astrological term, which signifieth when your natal planet shall be in a certain quarter of the heavens. The verse is of the nature of a prophecy. The Chaldeans and Egyptians of old are said to have attained much skill in the art, but I confess that I have no great opinion of those latter-day prophets who busy themselves in answering the foolish questions of every housewife."

> "And tell by Venus and the moon,
> Who stole a thimble or a spoon,"

muttered Saxon, quoting from his favourite poem.

"Why, here are our Colonels catching the rhyming complaint," said the King, laughing. "We shall be dropping the sword and taking to the harp anon, as Alfred did in these very parts. Or I shall become a king of bards and trouveurs, like good King René of Provence. But, gentlemen, if this be indeed a prophecy, it should, methinks, bode well for our enterprise. It is true that I am warned against the Rhine, but there is little prospect of our fighting this quarrel upon its banks."

"Worse luck!" murmured the German, under his breath.

"We may, therefore, thank this Sir Jacob and his giant messenger for his forecast as well as for his gold. But here comes the worthy Mayor of Taunton, the oldest of our councillors and the youngest of our knights. Captain Clarke, I desire you to stand at the inside of the door and to prevent intrusion. What passes amongst us will, I am well convinced, be safe in your keeping."

I bowed and took up my post as ordered, while the councilmen and commanders gathered round the great oaken table which ran down the centre of the hall. The mellow evening light was streaming through the three western windows, while the distant babble of the soldiers upon the Castle Green sounded like the sleepy drone of insects. Monmouth paced with quick uneasy steps up

and down the further end of the room until all were seated, when he turned towards them and addressed them.

"You will have surmised, gentlemen," he said, "that I have called you together to-day that I might have the benefit of your collective wisdom in determining what our next steps should be. We have now marched some forty miles into our kingdom, and we have met wherever we have gone with the warm welcome which we expected. Close upon eight thousand men follow our standards, and as many more have been turned away for want of arms. We have twice met the enemy, with the effect that we have armed ourselves with their muskets and field-pieces. From first to last there hath been nothing which has not prospered with us. We must look to it that the future be as successful as the past. To ensure this I have called ye together, and I now ask ye to give me your opinions of our situation, leaving me after I have listened to your views to form our plan of action. There are statesmen among ye, and there are soldiers among ye, and there are godly men among ye who may chance to get a flash of night when statesman and soldier are in the dark. Speak fearlessly, then, and let me know what is in your minds."

From my central post by the door I could see the lines of faces on either side of the board, the solemn close-shaven Puritans, sunburned soldiers and white-wigged moustachioed courtiers. My eyes rested particularly upon Ferguson's scorbutic features, Saxon's hard aquiline profile, the German's burly face, and the peaky thoughtful countenance of the Lord of Wark.

"If naebody else will gie an opeenion," cried the fanatical Doctor, "I'll een speak mysel' as led by the inward voice. For have I no worked in the cause and slaved in it, much enduring and suffering mony things at the honds o' the froward, whereby my ain speerit hath plentifully fructified? Have I no been bruised as in a wine-press, and cast oot wi' hissing and scorning into waste places?"

"We know your merits and your sufferings, Doctor,"

said the King. "The question before us is as to our course of action."

"Was there no a voice heard in the East?" cried the old Whig. "Was there no a soond as o' a great crying, the crying for a broken covenant and a sinful generation? Whence came the cry? Wha's was the voice? Was it no that o' the man Robert Ferguson, wha raised himsel' up against the great ones in the land, and wouldna be appeased?"

"Aye, aye, Doctor," said Monmouth impatiently. "Speak to the point, or give place to another."

"I shall mak' mysel' clear, your Majesty. Have we no heard that Argyle is cutten off? And why was he cutten off? Because he hadna due faith in the workings o' the Almighty, and must needs reject the help o' the children o' light in favour o' the bare-legged spawn o' Prelacy, wha are half Pagan, half Popish. Had he walked in the path o' the Lord he wudna be lying in the Tolbooth o' Edinburgh wi' the tow or the axe before him. Why did he no gird up his loins and march straight onwards wi' the banner o' light, instead o' dallying here and biding there like a half-hairted Didymus? And the same or waur will fa' upon us if we dinna march on intae the land and plant our ensigns afore the wicked toun o' London—the toun where the Lord's wark is tae be done, and the tares tae be separated frae the wheat, and piled up for the burning."

"Your advice, in short, is that we march on?" said Monmouth.

"That we march on, your Majesty, and that we prepare oorselves tae be the vessels o' grace, and forbear frae polluting the cause o' the Gospel by wearing the livery o' the devil"—here he glared at a gaily attired cavalier at the other side of the table—"or by the playing o' cairds, the singing o' profane songs and the swearing o' oaths, all which are nichtly done by members o' this army, wi' the effect o' giving much scandal tae God's ain folk."

A hum of assent and approval rose up from the more Puritan members of the council at this expression of

opinion, while the courtiers glanced at each other and curled their lips in derision. Monmouth took two or three turns and then called for another opinion.

"You, Lord Grey," he said, "are a soldier and a man of experience. What is your advice? Should we halt here or push forward towards London?"

"To advance to the East would, in my humble judgment, be fatal to us," Grey answered, speaking slowly, with the manner of a man who has thought long and deeply before delivering an opinion. "James Stuart is strong in horse, and we have none. We can hold our own amongst hedgerows or in broken country, but what chance could we have in the middle of Salisbury Plain? With the dragoons round us we should be like a flock of sheep amid a pack of wolves. Again, every step which we take towards London removes us from our natural vantage ground, and from the fertile country which supplies our necessities, while it strengthens our enemy by shortening the distance he has to convey his troops and his victuals. Unless, therefore, we hear of some great outbreak elsewhere, or of some general movement in London in our favour, we would do best to hold our ground and wait an attack."

"You argue shrewdly and well, my Lord Grey," said the King. "But how long are we to wait for this outbreak which never comes, and for this support which is ever promised and never provided? We have now been seven long days in England, and during that time of all the House of Commons no single man hath come over to us, and of the lords none save my Lord Grey, who was himself an exile. Not a baron or an earl, and only one baronet, hath taken up arms for me. Where are the men whom Danvers and Wildman promised me from London? Where are the brisk boys of the City who were said to be longing for me? Where are the breakings out from Berwick to Portland which they foretold? Not a man hath moved save only these good peasants. I have been deluded, ensnared, trapped—trapped by vile agents who

have led me into the shambles." He paced up and down, wringing his hands and biting his lips, with despair stamped upon his face. I observed that Buyse smiled and whispered something to Saxon—a hint, I suppose, that this was the cold fit of which he spoke.

"Tell me, Colonel Buyse," said the King, mastering his emotion by a strong effort. "Do you, as a soldier, agree with my Lord Grey?"

"Ask Saxon, your Majesty," the German answered. "My opinion in a Raths-Versammling is, I have observed, ever the same as his."

"Then we turn to you, Colonel Saxon," said Monmouth. "We have in this council a party who are in favour of an advance and a party who wish to stand their ground. Their weight and numbers are, methinks, nearly equal. If you had the casting vote how would you decide?" All eyes were bent upon our leader, for his martial bearing, and the respect shown to him by the veteran Buyse, made it likely that his opinion might really turn the scale. He sat for a few moments in silence with his hands before his face.

"I will give my opinion, your Majesty," he said at last. "Feversham and Churchill are making for Salisbury with three thousand foot, and they have pushed on eight hundred of the Blue Guards, and two or three dragoon regiments. We should, therefore, as Lord Grey says, have to fight on Salisbury Plain, and our foot armed with a medley of weapons could scarce make head against their horse. All is possible to the Lord, as Dr. Ferguson wisely says. We are as grains of dust in the hollow of His hand. Yet He hath given us brains wherewith to choose the better course, and if we neglect it we must suffer the consequence of our folly."

Ferguson laughed contemptuously, and breathed out a prayer, but many of the other Puritans nodded their heads to acknowledge that this was not an unreasonable view to take of it.

"On the other hand, sire," Saxon continued, "it

appears to me that to remain here is equally impossible. Your Majesty's friends throughout England would lose all heart if the army lay motionless and struck no blow. The rustics would flock off to their wives and homes. Such an example is catching. I have seen a great army thaw away like an icicle in the sunshine. Once gone, it is no easy matter to collect them again. To keep them we must employ them. Never let them have an idle minute. Drill them. March them. Exercise them. Work them. Preach to them. Make them obey God and their Colonel. This cannot be done in snug quarters. They must travel. We cannot hope to end this business until we get to London. London, then, must be our goal. But there are many ways of reaching it. You have, sire, as I have heard, many friends at Bristol and in the Midlands. If I might advise, I should say let us march round in that direction. Every day that passes will serve to swell your forces and improve your troops, while all will feel something is astirring. Should we take Bristol—and I hear that the works are not very strong—it would give us a very good command of shipping, and a rare centre from which to act. If all goes well with us, we could make our way to London through Gloucestershire and Worcestershire. In the meantime I might suggest that a day of fast and humiliation be called to bring down a blessing on the cause."

This address, skilfully compounded of worldly wisdom and of spiritual zeal, won the applause of the whole council, and especially that of King Monmouth, whose melancholy vanished as if by magic.

"By my faith, Colonel," said he, "you make it all as clear as day. Of course, if we make ourselves strong in the West, and my uncle is threatened with disaffection elsewhere, he will have no chance to hold out against us. Should he wish to fight us upon our own ground, he must needs drain his troops from north, south and east, which is not to be thought of. We may very well march to London by way of Bristol."

"I think that the advice is good," Lord Grey observed ;

" but I should like to ask Colonel Saxon what warrant he hath for saying that Churchill and Feversham are on their way, with three thousand regular foot and several regiments of horse ? "

" The word of an officer of the Blues with whom I conversed at Salisbury," Saxon answered. " He confided in me, believing me to be one of the Duke of Beaufort's household. As to the horse, one party pursued us on Salisbury Plain with bloodhounds, and another attacked us not twenty miles from here and lost a score of troopers and a cornet."

" We heard something of the brush," said the King. " It was bravely done. But if these men are so close we have no great time for preparation."

" Their foot cannot be here before a week," said the Mayor. " By that time we might be behind the walls of Bristol."

" There is one point which might be urged," observed Wade the lawyer. " We have, as your Majesty most truly says, met with heavy discouragement in the fact that no noblemen and few commoners of repute have declared for us. The reason is, I opine, that each doth wait for his neighbour to make a move. Should one or two come over the others would soon follow. How, then, are we to bring a duke or two to our standards ? "

" There's the question, Master Wade," said Monmouth, shaking his head despondently.

" I think that it might be done," continued the Whig lawyer. " Mere proclamations addressed to the commonalty will not catch these gold fish. They are not to be angled for with a naked hook. I should recommend that some form of summons or writ be served upon each of them calling upon them to appear in our camp within a certain date under pain of high treason."

" There spake the legal mind," quoth King Monmouth, with a laugh. " But you have omitted to tell us how the said writ or summons is to be conveyed to these same delinquents."

"There is the Duke of Beaufort," continued Wade, disregarding the King's objection. "He is President of Wales, and he is, as your Majesty knows, lieutenant of four English counties. His influence overshadows the whole West. He hath two hundred horses in his stables at Badminton, and a thousand men, as I have heard, sit down at his tables every day. Why should not a special effort be made to gain over such a one, the more so as we intend to march in his direction?"

"Henry, Duke of Beaufort, is unfortunately already in arms against his sovereign," said Monmouth gloomily.

"He is, sire, but he may be induced to turn in your favour the weapon which he hath raised against you. He is a Protestant. He is said to be a Whig. Why should we not send a message to him? Flatter his pride. Appeal to his religion. Coax and threaten him. Who knows? He may have private grievances of which we know nothing, and may be ripe for such a move."

"Your counsel is good, Wade," said Lord Grey, "but methinks his Majesty hath asked a pertinent question. Your messenger would, I fear, find himself swinging upon one of the Badminton oaks if the Duke desired to show his loyalty to James Stuart. Where are to we find a man who is wary enough and bold enough for such a mission, without risking one of our leaders, who could be ill-spared at such a time?"

"It is true," said the King. "It were better not to venture it at all than to do it in a clumsy and halting fashion. Beaufort would think that it was a plot not to gain him over, but to throw discredit upon him. But what means our giant at the door by signing to us?"

"If it please your Majesty," I asked, "have I permission to speak?"

"We would fain hear you, Captain," he answered graciously. "If your understanding is in any degree correspondent to your strength, your opinion should be of weight."

"Then, your Majesty," said I, "I would offer myself

as a fitting messenger in this matter. My father bid me spare neither life nor limb in this quarrel, and if this honourable council thinks that the Duke may be gained over, I am ready to guarantee that the message shall be conveyed to him if man and horse can do it."

"I'll warrant that no better herald could be found," cried Saxon. "The lad hath a cool head and a staunch heart."

"Then, young sir, we shall accept your loyal and gallant offer," said Monmouth. "Are ye all agreed, gentlemen, upon the point?"

A murmur of assent rose from the company.

"You shall draw up the paper, Wade. Offer him money, a seniority amongst the dukes, the perpetual Presidentship of Wales—what you will, if you can but shake him. If not, sequestration, exile and everlasting infamy. And, hark ye! you can enclose a copy of the papers drawn up by Van Brunow, which prove the marriage of my mother, together with the attestations of the witnesses. Have them ready by to-morrow at daybreak, when the messenger may start."[1]

"They shall be ready, your Majesty," said Wade.

"In that case, gentlemen," continued King Monmouth, "I may now dismiss ye to your posts. Should anything fresh arise I shall summon ye again, that I may profit by your wisdom. Here we shall stay, if Sir Stephen Timewell will have us, until the men are refreshed and the recruits enrolled. We shall then make our way Bristolwards, and see what luck awaits us in the North. If Beaufort comes over all will be well. Farewell, my kind friends! I need not tell ye to be diligent and faithful."

The council rose at the King's salutation, and bowing to him they began to file out of the Castle hall. Several of the members clustered round me with hints for my journey or suggestions as to my conduct.

"He is a proud, froward man," said one. "Speak

[1] Note H, Appendix.—Monmouth's Contention of Legitimacy.

humbly to him or he will never hearken to your message, but will order you to be scourged out of his presence."

"Nay, nay!" cried another. "He is hot, but he loves a man that is a man. Speak boldly and honestly to him, and he is more like to listen to reason."

"Speak as the Lord shall direct you," said a Puritan. "It is His message which you bear as well as the King's."

"Entice him out alone upon some excuse," said Buyse, "then up and away mit him upon your crupper. Hagelsturm! that would be a proper game."

"Leave him alone," cried Saxon. "The lad hath as much sense as any of ye. He will see which way the cat jumps. Come, friend, let us make our way back to our men."

"I am sorry, indeed, to lose you," he said, as we threaded our way through the throng of peasants and soldiers upon the Castle Green. "Your company will miss you sorely. Lockarby must see to the two. If all goes well you should be back in three or four days. I need not tell you that there is a real danger. If the Duke wishes to prove to James that he would not allow himself to be tampered with, he can only do it by punishing the messenger, which as lieutenant of a county he hath power to do in times of civil commotion. He is a hard man if all reports be true. On the other hand, if you should chance to succeed it may lay the foundations of your fortunes and be the means of saving Monmouth. He needs help, by the Lord Harry! Never have I seen such a rabble as this army of his. Buyse says that they fought lustily at this ruffle at Axminster, but he is of one mind with me, that a few whiffs of shot and cavalry charges would scatter them over the countryside. Have you any message to leave?"

"None, save my love to my mother," said I.

"It is well. Should you fall in any unfair way, I shall not forget his Grace of Beaufort, and the next of his gentlemen who comes in my way shall hang as high as Haman. And now you had best make for your chamber,

and have as good a slumber as you may, since to-morrow at cock-crow begins your new mission."

## 22. *Of the News from Havant*

HAVING given my orders that Covenant should be saddled and bridled by daybreak, I had gone to my room and was preparing for a long night's rest, when Sir Gervas, who slept in the same apartment, came dancing in with a bundle of papers waving over his head.

"Three guesses, Clarke!" he cried. "What would you most desire?"

"Letters from Havant," said I eagerly.

"Right," he answered, throwing them into my lap. "Three of them, and not a woman's hand among them. Sink me, if I can understand what you have been doing all your life.

'How can youthful heart resign
Lovely woman, sparkling wine?'

But you are so lost in your news that you have not observed my transformation."

"Why, wherever did you get these?" I asked in astonishment, for he was attired in a delicate plum-coloured suit with gold buttons and trimmings, set off by silken hosen and Spanish leather shoes with roses on the instep.

"It smacks more of the court than of the camp," quoth Sir Gervas, rubbing his hands and glancing down at himself with some satisfaction. "I am also revictualled in the matter of ratafia and orange-flower water, together with two new wigs, a bob and a court, a pound of the Imperial snuff from the sign of the Black Man, a box of De Crepigny's hair powder, my foxskin muff and several other necessaries. But I hinder you in your reading."

"I have seen enough to tell me that all is well at home,"

I answered, glancing over my father's letter. "But how came these things?"

"Some horsemen have come in from Petersfield, bearing them with them. As to my little box, which a fair friend of mine in town packed for me, it was to be forwarded to Bristol, where I am now supposed to be, and should be were it not for my good fortune in meeting your party. It chanced to find its way, however, to the Bruton inn, and the good woman there, whom I had conciliated, found means to send it after me. It is a good rule to go upon, Clarke, in this earthly pilgrimage, always to kiss the landlady. It may seem a small thing, and yet life is made up of small things. I have few fixed principles, I fear, but two there are which I can say from my heart that I never transgress. I always carry a corkscrew, and I never forget to kiss the landlady."

"From what I have seen of you," said I, laughing, "I could be warranty that those two duties are ever fulfilled."

"I have letters, too," said he, sitting on the side of the bed and turning over a sheaf of papers. "'Your broken-hearted Araminta.' Hum! The wench cannot know that I am ruined or her heart would speedily be restored. What's this? A challenge to match my bird Julius against my Lord Dorchester's cockerel for a hundred guineas. Faith! I am too busy backing the Monmouth rooster for the champion stakes. Another asking me to chase the stag at Epping. Zounds! had I not cleared off I should have been run down myself, with a pack of bandog bailiffs at my heels. A dunning letter from my clothier. He can afford to lose this bill. He hath had many a long one out of me. An offer of three thousand from little Dicky Chichester. No, no, Dicky, it won't do. A gentleman can't live upon his friends. None the less grateful. How now? From Mrs. Butterworth! No money for three weeks! Bailiffs in the house! Now, curse me, if this is not too bad!"

"What is the matter?" I asked, glancing up from my own letters. The baronet's pale face had taken a tinge of

red, and he was striding furiously up and down the bedroom with a letter crumpled up in his hand.

"It is a burning shame, Clarke," he cried. "Hang it, she shall have my watch. It is by Tompion, of the sign of the Three Crowns in Paul's Yard, and cost a hundred when new. It should keep her for a few months. Mortimer shall measure swords with me for this. I shall write villain upon him with my rapier's point."

"I have never seen you ruffled before," said I.

"No," he answered, laughing. "Many have lived with me for years and would give me a certificate for temper. But this is too much. Sir Edward Mortimer is my mother's younger brother, Clarke, but he is not many years older than myself. A proper, strait-laced, soft-voiced lad he has ever been, and, as a consequence, he throve in the world, and joined land to land after the scriptural fashion. I had befriended him from my purse in the old days, but he soon came to be a richer man than I, for all that he gained he kept, whereas all I got—well, it went off like the smoke of the pipe which you are lighting. When I found that all was up with me I received from Mortimer an advance, which was sufficient to take me according to my wish over to Virginia, together with a horse and a personal outfit. There was some chance, Clarke, of the Jerome acres going to him should aught befall me, so that he was not averse to helping me off to a land of fevers and scalping knives. Nay, never shake your head, my dear country lad, you little know the wiles of the world."

"Give him credit for the best until the worst is proved," said I, sitting up in bed smoking, with my letters littered about in front of me.

"The worst *is* proved," said Sir Gervas, with a darkening face. "I have, as I said, done Mortimer some turns which he might remember, though it did not become me to remind him of them. This Mistress Butterworth is mine old wet-nurse, and it hath been the custom of the family to provide for her. I could not bear the thought

that in the ruin of my fortune she should lose the paltry guinea or so a week which stood between her and hunger. My only request to Mortimer, therefore, made on the score of old friendship, was that he should continue this pittance, I promising that should I prosper I would return whatever he should disburse. The mean-hearted villain wrung my hand and swore that it should be so. How vile a thing is human nature, Clarke! For the sake of this paltry sum, he, a rich man, hath broken his pledge, and left this poor woman to starve. But he shall answer to me for it. He thinks that I am on the Atlantic. If I march back to London with these brave boys I shall disturb the tenor of his sainted existence. Meanwhile I shall trust to sun-dials, and off goes my watch to Mother Butterworth. Bless her ample bosoms! I have tried many liquors, but I dare bet that the first was the most healthy. But how of your own letters? You have been frowning and smiling like an April day."

"There is one from my father, with a few words attached from my mother," said I. "The second is from an old friend of mine, Zachariah Palmer, the village carpenter. The third is from Solomon Sprent, a retired seaman, for whom I have an affection and respect."

"You have a rare trio of newsmen. I would I knew your father, Clarke. He must, from what you say, be a stout bit of British oak. I spoke even now of your knowing little of the world, but indeed it may be that in your village you can see mankind without the varnish, and so come to learn more of the good of human nature. Varnish or none, the bad will ever peep through. Now this carpenter and seaman show themselves no doubt for what they are. A man might know my friends of the court for a lifetime, and never come upon their real selves, nor would it perhaps repay the search when you had come across it. Sink me, but I wax philosophical, which is the old refuge of the ruined man. Give me a tub, and I shall set up in the Piazza of Covent Garden, and be the

Diogenes of London. I would not be wealthy again, Micah ! How goes the old lilt ?—

> ‘ Our money shall never indite us
> Or drag us to Goldsmith Hall,
> No pirates or wrecks can affright us.
> We that have no estates
> Fear no plunder or rates,
> Nor care to lock gates.
> He that lies on the ground cannot fall ! ’

That last would make a good motto for an almshouse.”

“ You will have Sir Stephen up,” said I warningly, for he was carolling away at the pitch of his lungs.

“ Never fear ! He and his ’prentices were all at the broadsword exercise in the hall as I came by. It is worth something to see the old fellow stamp, and swing his sword, and cry, ‘ Ha ! ’ on the down-cut. Mistress Ruth and friend Lockarby are in the tapestried room, she spinning and he reading aloud one of those entertaining volumes which she would have me read. Methinks she hath taken his conversion in hand, which may end in his converting her from a maid into a wife. And so you go to the Duke of Beaufort ! Well, I would that I could travel with you, but Saxon will not hear of it, and my musqueteers must be my first care. God send you safe back ! Where is my jasmine powder and the patch-box ? Read me your letters if there be aught in them of interest. I have been splitting a flask with our gallant Colonel at his inn, and he hath told me enough of your home at Havant to make me wish to know more.”

“ This one is somewhat grave,” said I.

“ Nay, I am in the humour for grave things. Have at it, if it contain the whole Platonic philosophy.”

“ ’Tis from the venerable carpenter who hath for many years been my adviser and friend. He is one who is religious without being sectarian, philosophic without being a partisan, and loving without being weak.”

“ A paragon, truly ! ” exclaimed Sir Gervas, who was busy with his eyebrow brush.

" This is what he saith," I continued, and proceeded to read the very letter which I now read to you.

" ' Having heard from your father, my dear lad, that there was some chance of being able to send a letter to you, I have written this, and am now sending it under the charge of the worthy John Packingham, of Chichester, who is bound for the West. I trust that you are now safe with Monmouth's army, and that you have received honourable appointment therein. I doubt not that you will find among your comrades some who are extreme sectaries, and others who are scoffers and disbelievers. Be advised by me, friend, and avoid both the one and the other. For the zealot is a man who not only defends his own right of worship, wherein he hath justice, but wishes to impose upon the consciences of others, by which he falls into the very error against which he fights. The mere brainless scoffer is, on the other hand, lower than the beast of the field, since he lacks the animal's self-respect and humble resignation.' "

" My faith ! " cried the Baronet, " the old gentleman hath a rough side to his tongue."

" ' Let us take religion upon its broadest base, for the truth must be broader than aught which we can conceive. The presence of a table doth prove the existence of a carpenter, and so the presence of a universe proves the existence of a universe Maker, call Him by what name you will. So far the ground is very firm beneath us, without either inspiration, teaching or any aid whatever. Since, then, there *must* be a world Maker, let us judge of His nature by His work. We cannot observe the glories of the firmament, its infinite extent, its beauty and the Divine skill wherewith every plant and animal hath its wants cared for, without seeing that He is full of wisdom, intelligence and power. We are still, you will perceive, upon solid ground, without having to call to our aid aught save pure reason.

" ' Having got so far, let us inquire to what end the universe was made, and we put upon it. The teaching

of all nature shows that it must be to the end of improvement and upward growth, the increase in real virtue, in knowledge and in wisdom. Nature is a silent preacher which holds forth upon week-days as on Sabbaths. We see the acorn grow into the oak, the egg into the bird, the maggot into the butterfly. Shall we doubt, then, that the human soul, the most precious of all things, is also upon the upward path? And how can the soul progress save through the cultivation of virtue and self-mastery? What other way is there? There is none. We may say with confidence, then, that we are placed here to increase in knowledge and in virtue.

"'This is the core of all religion, and this much needs no faith in the acceptance. It is as true and as capable of proof as one of those exercises of Euclid which we have gone over together. On this common ground men have raised many different buildings. Christianity, the creed of Mahomet, the creed of the Easterns, have all the same essence. The difference lies in the forms and the details. Let us hold to our own Christian creed, the beautiful, often-professed, and seldom-practised doctrine of love, but let us not despise our fellow-men, for we are all branches from the common root of truth.

"'Man comes out of darkness into light. He tarries awhile and then passes into darkness again. Micah, lad, the days are passing, mine as well as thine. Let them not be wasted. They are few in number. What says Petrarch? "To him that enters, life seems infinite; to him that departs, nothing." Let every day, every hour, be spent in furthering the Creator's end—in getting out whatever power for good there is in you. What is pain, or work, or trouble? The cloud that passes over the sun. But the result of work well done is everything. It is eternal. It lives and waxes stronger through the centuries. Pause not for rest. The rest will come when the hour of work is past.

"'May God protect and guard you! There is no great news. The Portsmouth garrison hath marched to

the West. Sir John Lawson, the magistrate, hath been down here threatening your father and others, but he can do little for want of proofs. Church and Dissent are at each other's throats as ever. Truly the stern law of Moses is more enduring than the sweet words of Christ. Adieu, my dear lad! All good wishes from your grey-headed friend, ZACHARIAH PALMER.' "

"Od's fish!" cried Sir Gervas, as I folded up the letter, "I have heard Stillingfleet and Tenison, but I never listened to a better sermon. This is a bishop disguised as a carpenter. The crozier would suit his hand better than the plane. But how of our seaman friend? Is he a tarpaulin theologian—a divine among the tarry-breeks?"

"Solomon Sprent is a very different man, though good enough in his way," said I. "But you shall judge him from his letter."

"'Master Clarke. Sir,—When last we was in company I had run in under the batteries on cutting-out service, while you did stand on and off in the channel and wait signals. Having stopped to refit and to overhaul my prize, which proved to be in proper trim alow and aloft——'"

"What the devil doth he mean?" asked Sir Gervas.

"It is a maid of whom he talks—Phœbe Dawson, the sister of the blacksmith. He hath scarce put foot on land for nigh forty years, and can as a consequence only speak in this sea jargon, though he fancies that he uses as pure King's English as any man in Hampshire."

"Proceed, then," quoth the Baronet.

"'Having also read her the articles of war, I explained to her the conditions under which we were to sail in company on life's voyage, namely:

"'First. She to obey signals without question as soon as received.

"'Second. She to steer by my reckoning.

"'Third. She to stand by me as true consort in foul weather, battle or shipwreck.

"'Fourth. She to run under my guns if assailed by picaroons, privateeros or garda-costas.

"'Fifth. Me to keep her in due repair, dry-dock her at intervals, and see that she hath her allowance of coats of paint, streamers and bunting, as befits a saucy pleasure boat.

"'Sixth. Me to take no other craft in tow, and if any be now attached, to cut their hawsers.

"'Seventh. Me to revictual her day by day.

"'Eighth. Should she chance to spring a leak, or be blown on her beam ends by the winds of misfortune, to stand by her and see her pumped out or righted.

"'Ninth. To fly the Protestant ensign at the peak during life's voyage, and to lay our course for the great harbour, in the hope that moorings and ground to swing may be found for two British-built crafts when laid up for eternity.

"' 'Twas close on eight-bells before these articles were signed and sealed. When I headed after you I could not so much as catch a glimpse of your topsail. Soon after I heard as you had gone a-soldiering, together with that lean, rakish, long-sparred, picaroon-like craft which I have seen of late in the village. I take it unkind of you that you have not so much as dipped ensign to me on leaving. But perchance the tide was favourable, and you could not tarry. Had I not been jury-rigged, with one of my spars shot away, I should have dearly loved to have strapped on my hanger and come with you to smell gun-powder once more. I would do it now, timber-toe and all, were it not for my consort, who might claim it as a breach of the articles, and so sheer off. I must follow the light on her poop until we are fairly joined.

"'Farewell, mate! In action, take an old sailor's advice. Keep the weather-gauge and board! Tell that to your admiral on the day of battle. Whisper it in his ear. Say to him, 'Keep the weather-gauge and board!' Tell him also to strike quick, strike hard and keep on striking. That's the word of Christopher Mings, and

a better man has not been launched, though he did climb in through the hawse-pipe.—Yours to command, SOLOMON SPRENT.' "

Sir Gervas had been chuckling to himself during the reading of this epistle, but at the last part we both broke out a-laughing.

" Land or sea, he will have it that battles are fought in ships," said the Baronet. " You should have had that sage piece of advice for Monmouth's council to-day. Should he ever ask your opinion it must be, ' Keep the weather-gauge and board ! ' "

" I must to sleep," said I, laying aside my pipe. " I should be on the road by daybreak."

" Nay, I prithee, complete your kindness by letting me have a glimpse of your respected parent, the Roundhead."

" 'Tis but a few lines," I answered. " He was ever short of speech. But if they interest you, you shall hear them. ' I am sending this by a godly man, my dear son, to say that I trust that you are bearing yourself as becomes you. In all danger and difficulty trust not to yourself, but ask help from on high. If you are in authority, teach your men to sing psalms when they fall on, as is the good old custom. In action give point rather than edge. A thrust must beat a cut. Your mother and the others send their affection to you. Sir John Lawson hath been down here like a ravening wolf, but could find no proof against me. John Marchbank, of Bedhampton, is cast into prison. Truly Antichrist reigns in the land, but the kingdom of light is at hand. Strike lustily for truth and conscience.—Your loving father, JOSEPH CLARKE.

" ' Postscriptum [from my mother].—I trust that you will remember what I have said concerning your hosen and also the broad linen collars, which you will find in the bag. It is little over a week since you left, yet it seems a year. When cold or wet, take ten drops of Daffy's elixir in a small glass of strong waters. Should your feet chafe, rub tallow on the inside of your boots. Commend me to Master Saxon and to Master Lockarby,

if he be with you. His father was mad at his going, for he hath a great brewing going forward, and none to mind the mash-tub. Ruth hath baked a cake, but the oven hath played her false, and it is lumpy in the inside. A thousand kisses, dear heart, from your loving mother, M. C.' "

"A right sensible couple," quoth Sir Gervas, who, having completed his toilet, had betaken him to his couch. "I now begin to understand your manufacture, Clarke. I see the threads that are used in the weaving of you. Your father looks to your spiritual wants. Your mother concerns herself with the material. Yet the old carpenter's preaching is, methinks, more to your taste. You are a rank latitudinarian, man. Sir Stephen would cry fie upon you, and Joshua Pettigrue abjure you! Well, out with the light, for we should both be stirring at cock-crow. That is our religion at present."

"Early Christians," I suggested, and we both laughed as we settled down to sleep.

## 23. *Of the Snare on the Weston Road*

JUST after sunrise I was awoke by one of the Mayor's servants, who brought word that the Honourable Master Wade was awaiting me downstairs. Having dressed and descended, I found him seated by the table in the sitting-room with papers and wafer-box, sealing up the missive which I was to carry. He was a small, worn, grey-faced man, very erect in his bearing and sudden in his speech, with more of the soldier than of the lawyer in his appearance.

"So," said he, pressing his seal above the fastening of the string, "I see that your horse is ready for you outside. You had best make your way round by Nether Stowey and the Bristol Channel, for we have heard that the enemy's horse guard the roads on the far side of Wells. Here is your packet."

I bowed and placed it in the inside of my tunic.

"It is a written order as suggested in the council. The Duke's reply may be written, or it may be by word of mouth. In either case guard it well. This packet contains also a copy of the depositions of the clergyman at The Hague, and of the other witnesses who saw Charles of England marry Lucy Walters, the mother of his Majesty. Your mission is one of such importance that the whole success of our enterprise may turn upon it. See that you serve the paper upon Beaufort in person, and not through any intermediary, or it might not stand in a court of law."

I promised to do so if possible.

"I should advise you also," he continued, "to carry sword and pistol as a protection against the chance dangers of the road, but to discard your headpiece and steel-front as giving you too warlike an aspect for a peaceful messenger."

"I had already come to that resolve," said I.

"There is nothing more to be said, Captain," said the lawyer, giving me his hand. "May all good fortune go with you. Keep a still tongue and a quick ear. Watch keenly how all things go. Mark whose face is gloomy and whose content. The Duke may be at Bristol, but you had best make for his seat at Badminton. Our sign of the day is Tewkesbury."

Thanking my instructor for his advice I went out and mounted Covenant, who pawed and champed at his bit in his delight at getting started once more. Few of the townsmen were stirring, though here and there a night-bonneted head stared out at me through a casement. I took the precaution of walking the horse very quietly until we were some distance from the house, for I had told Reuben nothing of my intended journey, and I was convinced that if he knew of it neither discipline, nor even his new ties of love, would prevent him from coming with me. Covenant's iron-shod feet rang sharply, in spite of my care, upon the cobble-stones, but looking back I

saw that the blinds of my faithful friend's room were undrawn, and that all seemed quiet in the house. I shook my bridle, therefore, and rode at a brisk trot through the silent streets, which were still strewn with faded flowers and gay with streamers. At the north gate a guard of half a company was stationed, who let me pass upon hearing the word. Once beyond the old walls I found myself out on the countryside, with my face to the north and a clear road in front of me.

It was a blithesome morning. The sun was rising over the distant hills, and heaven and earth were ruddy and golden. The trees in the wayside orchards were full of swarms of birds, who chattered and sang until the air was full of their piping. There was lightsomeness and gladness in every breath. The wistful-eyed red Somerset kine stood along by the hedgerows, casting great shadows down the fields and gazing at me as I passed. Farm horses leaned over wooden gates, and snorted a word of greeting to their glossy-coated brother. A great herd of snowy-fleeced sheep streamed towards us over the hillside and frisked and gambolled in the sunshine. All was innocent life, from the lark which sang on high to the little shrew-mouse which ran amongst the ripening corn, or the martin which dashed away at the sound of my approach. All alive and all innocent. What are we to think, my dear children, when we see the beasts of the field full of kindness and virtue and gratitude? Where is this superiority of which we talk?

From the high ground to the north I looked back upon the sleeping town, with the broad edging of tents and waggons, which showed how suddenly its population had outgrown it. The Royal Standard still fluttered from the tower of St. Mary Magdalene, while close by its beautiful brother-turret of St. James bore aloft the blue flag of Monmouth. As I gazed the quick petulant roll of a drum rose up on the still morning air, with the clear ringing call of the bugles summoning the troops from their slumbers. Beyond the town, and on either side of it, stretched a

glorious view of the Somersetshire downs, rolling away to the distant sea, with town and hamlet, castle turret and church tower, wooded coombe and stretch of grain-land —as fair a scene as the eye could wish to rest upon. As I wheeled my horse and sped upon my way I felt, my dears, that this was a land worth fighting for, and that a man's life was a small thing if he could but aid, in however trifling a degree, in working out its freedom and its happiness. At a little village over the hill I fell in with an outpost of horse, the commander of which rode some distance with me, and set me on my road to Nether Stowey. It seemed strange to my Hampshire eyes to note that the earth is all red in these parts—very different to the chalk and gravel of Havant. The cows, too, are mostly red. The cottages are built neither of brick nor of wood, but of some form of plaster, which they call cob, which is strong and smooth so long as no water comes near it. They shelter the walls from the rain, therefore, by great overhanging thatches. There is scarcely a steeple in the whole countryside, which also seems strange to a man from any other part of England. Every church hath a square tower, with pinnacles upon the top, and they are mostly very large, with fine peals of bells.

My course ran along by the foot of the beautiful Quantock Hills, where heavy-wooded coombes are scattered over the broad heathery downs, deep with bracken and whortlebushes. On either side of the track steep winding glens sloped downwards, lined with yellow gorse, which blazed out from the deep-red soil like a flame from embers. Peat-coloured streams splashed down these valleys and over the road, through which Covenant ploughed fetlock deep, and shied to see the broad-backed trout darting from between his fore feet.

All day I rode through this beautiful country, meeting few folk, for I kept away from the main roads. A few shepherds and farmers, a long-legged clergyman, a pack-man with his mule, and a horseman with a great bag,

whom I took to be a buyer of hair, are all that I can recall. A black jack of ale and the heel of a loaf at a wayside inn were all my refreshments. Near Combwich, Covenant cast a shoe, and two hours were wasted before I found a smithy in the town and had the matter set right. It was not until evening that I at last came out upon the banks of the Bristol Channel, at a place called Shurton Bars, where the muddy Parret makes its way into the sea. At this point the channel is so broad that the Welsh mountains can scarcely be distinguished. The shore is flat and black and oozy, flecked over with white patches of sea-birds, but further to the east there rises a line of hills, very wild and rugged, rising in places into steep precipices. These cliffs run out into the sea, and numerous little harbours and bays are formed in their broken surface, which are dry half the day, but can float a good-sized boat at half-tide. The road wound over these bleak and rocky hills, which are sparsely inhabited by a wild race of fishermen, or shepherds, who came to their cabin doors on hearing the clatter of my horse's hoofs, and shot some rough West-country jest at me as I passed. As the night drew in the country became bleaker and more deserted. An occasional light twinkling in the distance from some lonely hillside cottage was the only sign of the presence of man. The rough track still skirted the sea, and high as it was, the spray from the breakers drifted across it. The salt prinkled on my lips, and the air was filled with the hoarse roar of the surge and the thin piping of curlews, who flitted past in the darkness like white, shadowy, sad-voiced creatures from some other world. The wind blew in short, quick, angry puffs from the westward, and far out on the black waters a single glimmer of light rising and falling, tossing up, and then sinking out of sight, showed how fierce a sea had risen in the channel.

Riding through the gloaming in this strange wild scenery my mind naturally turned towards the past. I thought of my father and my mother, of the old carpenter

and of Solomon Sprent. Then I pondered over Decimus Saxon, his many-faced character having in it so much to be admired and so much to be abhorred. Did I like him or no? It was more than I could say. From him I wandered off to my faithful Reuben, and to his love passage with the pretty Puritan, which in turn brought me to Sir Gervas and the wreck of his fortunes. My mind then wandered to the state of the army and the prospects of the rising, which led me to my present mission with its perils and its difficulties. Having turned over all these things in my mind I began to doze upon my horse's back, overcome by the fatigue of the journey and the drowsy lullaby of the waves. I had just fallen into a dream in which I saw Reuben Lockarby crowned King of England by Mistress Ruth Timewell, while Decimus Saxon endeavoured to shoot him with a bottle of Daffy's elixir, when in an instant, without warning, I was dashed violently from my horse, and left lying half-conscious on the stony track.

So stunned and shaken was I by the sudden fall, that though I had a dim knowledge of shadowy figures bending over me, and of hoarse laughter sounding in my ears, I could not tell for a few minutes where I was nor what had befallen me. When at last I did make an attempt to recover my feet I found that a loop of rope had been slipped round my arms and my legs so as to secure them. With a hard struggle I got one hand free, and dashed it in the face of one of the men who were holding me down; but the whole gang of a dozen or more set upon me at once, and while some thumped and kicked at me, others tied a fresh cord round my elbows, and deftly fastened it in such a way as to pinion me completely. Finding that in my weak and dazed state all efforts were of no avail, I lay sullen and watchful, taking no heed of the random blows which were still showered upon me. So dark was it that I could neither see the faces of my attackers, nor form any guess as to who they might be, or how they had hurled me from my saddle. The champing and stamping

of a horse hard by showed me that Covenant was a prisoner as well as his master.

"Dutch Pete's got as much as he can carry," said a rough, harsh voice. "He lies on the track as limp as a conger."

"Ah, poor Pete!" muttered another. "He'll never deal a card or drain a glass of the right Cognac again."

"There you lie, mine goot vriend," said the injured man, in weak, quavering tones. "And I will prove that you lie if you have a flaschen in your pocket."

"If Pete were dead and buried," the first speaker said, "a word about strong waters would bring him to. Give him a sup from your bottle, Dicon."

There was a great gurgling and sucking in the darkness, followed by a gasp from the drinker. "Gott sei gelobt," he exclaimed in a stronger voice, "I have seen more stars than ever were made. Had my kopf not been well hooped he would have knocked it in like an ill-staved cask. He shlags like the kick of a horse."

As he spoke the edge of the moon peeped over a cliff and threw a flood of cold clear light upon the scene. Looking up I saw that a strong rope had been tied across the road from one tree trunk to another about eight feet above the ground. This could not be seen by me, even had I been fully awake, in the dusk; but catching me across the breast as Covenant trotted under it, it had swept me off and dashed me with great force to the ground. Either the fall or the blows which I had received had cut me badly, for I could feel the blood trickling in a warm stream past my ear and down my neck. I made no attempt to move, however, but waited in silence to find out who these men were into whose hands I had fallen. My one fear was lest my letters should be taken away from me, and my mission rendered of no avail. That in this, my first trust, I should be disarmed without a blow and lose the papers which had been confided to me, was a chance which made me flush and tingle with shame at the very thought.

The gang who had seized me were rough-bearded fellows in fur caps and fustian jackets, with buff belts round their waists, from which hung short straight whinyards. Their dark sun-dried faces and their great boots marked them as fishermen or seamen, as might be guessed from their rude sailor speech. A pair knelt on either side with their hands upon my arms, a third stood behind with a cocked pistol pointed at my head, while the others, seven or eight in number, were helping to his feet the man whom I had struck, who was bleeding freely from a cut over the eye.

"Take the horse up to Daddy Mycroft's," said a stout, black-bearded man, who seemed to be their leader. "It is no mere dragooner hack,[1] but a comely, full-blooded brute, which will fetch sixty pieces at the least. Your share of that, Peter, will buy salve and plaster for your cut."

"Ha, houndsfoot!" cried the Dutchman, shaking his fist at me. "You would strike Peter, would you? You would draw Peter's blood, would you? Tausend Teufel, man! if you and I were together upon the hillside we should see vich vas the petter man."

"Slack your jaw tackle, Pete," growled one of his comrades. "This fellow is a limb of Satan for sure, and doth follow a calling that none but a mean, snivelling, base-born son of a gun would take to. Yet I warrant, from the look of him, that he could truss you like a woodcock if he had his great hands upon you. And you would howl for help as you did last Martinmas, when you did mistake Cooper Dick's wife for a gauger."

"Truss me, would he? Todt und Hölle!" cried the other, whom the blow and the brandy had driven to madness. "We shall see. Take that, thou deyvil's spawn, take that!" He ran at me, and kicked me as hard as he could with his heavy sea-boots.

Some of the gang laughed, but the man who had spoken before gave the Dutchman a shove that sent him whirling.

[1] Note I, Appendix.—Dragooners and Chargers.

"None of that," he said sternly. "We'll have British fair-play on British soil, and none of your cursed long-shore tricks. I won't stand by and see an Englishman kicked, d'ye see, by a tub-bellied, round-starned, schnapps-swilling, chicken-hearted son of an Amsterdam lust-vrouw. Hang him, if the skipper likes. That's all above-board, but by thunder, if it's a fight that you will have, touch that man again."

"All right, Dicon," said their leader soothingly. "We all know that Pete's not a fighting man, but he's the best cooper on the coast, eh, Pete? There is not his equal at staving, hooping and bumping. He'll take a plank of wood and turn it into a keg while another man would be thinking of it."

"Oh, you remember that, Captain Murgatroyd," said the Dutchman sulkily. "But see you me knocked about and shlagged, and bullied, and called names, and what help have I? So help me, when the *Maria* is in the Texel next, I'll take to my old trade, I will, and never set foot on her again."

"No fear," the Captain answered, laughing. "While the *Maria* brings in five thousand good pieces a year, and can show her heels to any cutter on the coast, there is no fear of greedy Pete losing his share of her. Why, man, at this rate you may have a lust-haus of your own in a year or two, with a trimmed lawn, and the trees all clipped like peacocks, and the flowers in pattern, and a canal by the door, and a great bouncing housewife just like any Burgomeister. There's many such a fortune been made out of Mechlin and Cognac."

"Aye, and there's many a broken kopf got over Mechlin and Cognac," grumbled my enemy. "Donner! There are other things beside lust-houses and flower-beds. There are lee-shores and nor'-westers, beaks and pre-ventives."

"And there's where the smart seaman has the pull over the herring buss, or the skulking coaster that works from Christmas to Christmas with all the danger and none of

the little pickings. But enough said! Up with the prisoner, and let us get him safely into the bilboes."

I was raised to my feet and half-carried, half dragged along in the midst of the gang. My horse had already been led away in the opposite direction. Our course lay off the road, down a very rocky and rugged ravine which sloped away towards the sea. There seemed to be no trace of a path, and I could only stumble along over rocks and bushes as best I might in my fettered and crippled state. The blood, however, had dried over my wounds, and the cool sea breeze playing upon my forehead refreshed me, and helped me to take a clearer view of my position.

It was plain from their talk that these men were smugglers. As such, they were not likely to have any great love for the Government, or desire to uphold King James in any way. On the contrary, their goodwill would probably be with Monmouth, for had I not seen the day before a whole regiment of foot in his army, raised from among the coaster folk? On the other hand, their greed might be stronger than their loyalty, and might lead them to hand me over to justice in the hope of reward. On the whole it would be best, I thought, to say nothing of my mission, and to keep my papers secret as long as possible.

But I could not but wonder, as I was dragged along, what had led these men to lie in wait for me as they had done. The road along which I had travelled was a lonely one, and yet a fair number of travellers bound from the West through Weston to Bristol must use it. The gang could not lie in perpetual guard over it. Why had they set a trap on this particular night, then? The smugglers were a lawless and desperate body, but they did not, as a rule, descend to foot-paddery or robbery. As long as no one interfered with them they were seldom the first to break the peace. Then, why had they lain in wait for me, who had never injured them? Could it possibly be that I had been betrayed? I was still turning over these questions in my mind when we all came to a

halt, and the Captain blew a shrill note on a whistle which hung round his neck.

The place where we found ourselves was the darkest and most rugged spot in the whole wild gorge. On either side great cliffs shot up, which arched over our heads, with a fringe of ferns and bracken on either lip, so that the dark sky and the few twinkling stars were well-nigh hid. Great black rocks loomed vaguely out in the shadowy light, while in front a high tangle of what seemed to be brushwood barred our road. At a second whistle, however, a glint of light was seen through the branches, and the whole mass was swung to one side as though it moved upon a hinge. Beyond it a dark winding passage opened into the side of the hill, down which we went with our backs bowed, for the rock ceiling was of no great height. On every side of us sounded the throbbing of the sea.

Passing through the entrance, which must have been dug with great labour through the solid rock, we came out into a lofty and roomy cave, lit up by a fire at one end, and by several torches. By their smoky yellow glare I could see that the roof was, at least, fifty feet above us, and was hung by long lime-crystals, which sparkled and gleamed with great brightness. The floor of the cave was formed of fine sand, as soft and velvety as a Wilton carpet, sloping down in a way which showed that the cave must at its mouth open upon the sea, which was confirmed by the booming and splashing of the waves, and by the fresh salt air which filled the whole cavern. No water could be seen, however, as a sharp turn cut off our view of the outlet.

In this rock-girt space, which may have been sixty paces long and thirty across, there were gathered great piles of casks, kegs and cases ; muskets, cutlasses, staves, cudgels and straw were littered about upon the floor. At one end a high wood fire blazed merrily, casting strange shadows along the walls, and sparkling like a thousand diamonds among the crystals on the roof. The smoke was carried away through a great cleft in the rocks.

Seated on boxes, or stretched on the sand round the fire, there were seven or eight more of the band, who sprang to their feet and ran eagerly towards us as we entered.

"Have ye got him?" they cried. "Did he indeed come? Had he attendants?"

"He is here, and he is alone," the Captain answered. "Our hawser fetched him off his horse as neatly as ever a gull was netted by a cragsman. What have ye done in our absence, Silas?"

"We have the packs ready for carriage," said the man addressed, a sturdy, weather-beaten seaman of middle age. "The silk and lace are done in these squares covered over with sacking. The one I have marked 'yarn' and the other 'jute'—a thousand of Mechlin to a hundred of the shiny. They will sling over a mule's back. Brandy, schnapps, Schiedam and Hamburg Goldwasser are all set out in due order. The 'baccy is in the flat cases over by the Black Drop there. A plaguy job we had carrying it all out, but here it is ship-shape at last, and the lugger floats like a skimming dish, with scarce ballast enough to stand up to a five-knot breeze."

"Any signs of the *Fairy Queen*?" asked the smuggler.

"None. Long John is down at the water's edge looking out for her flash-light. This wind should bring her up if she has rounded Combe-Martin Point. There was a sail about ten miles to the east-nor'-east at sundown. She might have been a Bristol schooner, or she might have been a King's fly-boat."

"A King's crawl-boat," said Captain Murgatroyd, with a sneer. "We cannot hang the gauger until Venables brings up the *Fairy Queen*, for after all it was one of his hands that was snackled. Let him do his own dirty work."

"Tausend Blitzen!" cried the ruffian Dutchman, "would it not be a kindly gruss to Captain Venables to chuck the gauger down the Black Drop ere he come? He may have such another job to do for us some day."

"Zounds, man, are you in command or am I?" said

the leader angrily. "Bring the prisoner forward to the fire! Now, hark ye, dog of a land-shark; you are as surely a dead man as though you were laid out with the tapers burning. See here"—he lifted a torch, and showed by its red light a great crack in the floor across the far end of the cave—"you can judge of the Black Drop's depth!" he said, raising an empty keg and tossing it over into the yawning gulf. For ten seconds we stood silent before a dull distant clatter told that it had at last reached the bottom.

"It will carry him half-way to hell before the breath leaves him," said one.

"It's an easier death than the Devizes gallows!" cried a second.

"Nay, he shall have the gallows first!" a third shouted. "It is but his burial that we are arranging."

"He hath not opened his mouth since we took him," said the man who was called Dicon. "Is he a mute, then? Find your tongue, my fine fellow, and let us hear what your name is. It would have been well for you if you had been born dumb, so that you could not have sworn our comrade's life away."

"I have been waiting for a civil question after all this brawling and brabbling," said I. "My name is Micah Clarke. Now, pray inform me who ye may be, and by what warrant ye stop peaceful travellers upon the public highway?"

"This is our warrant," Murgatroyd answered, touching the hilt of his cutlass. "As to who we are, ye know that well enough. Your name is not Clarke, but Westhouse, or Waterhouse, and you are the same cursed exciseman who snackled our poor comrade, Cooper Dick, and swore away his life at Ilchester."

"I swear that you are mistaken," I replied. "I have never in my life been in these parts before."

"Fine words! Fine words!" cried another smuggler. "Gauger or no, you must jump for it, since you know the secret of our cave."

"Your secret is safe with me," I answered. "But if ye wish to murder me, I shall meet my fate as a soldier should. I should have chosen to die on the field of battle, rather than to lie at the mercy of such a pack of water-rats in their burrow."

"My faith!" said Murgatroyd. "This is too tall talk for a gauger. He bears himself like a soldier, too. It is possible that in snaring the owl we have caught the falcon. Yet we had certain token that he would come this way, and on such another horse."

"Call up Long John," suggested the Dutchman. "I vould not give a plug of Trinidado for the Schelm's word. Long John was with Cooper Dick when he was taken."

"Aye," growled the mate Silas. "He got a wipe over the arm from the gauger's whinyard. He'll know his face, if any will."

"Call him, then," said Murgatroyd, and presently a long, loose-limbed seaman came up from the mouth of the cave, where he had been on watch. He wore a red kerchief round his forehead, and a blue jerkin, the sleeve of which he slowly rolled up as he came nigh.

"Where is Gauger Westhouse?" he cried; "he has left his mark on my arm. Rat me, if the scar is healed yet. The sun is on our side of the wall now, gauger. But hullo, mates! who be this that ye have clapped into irons? This is not our man!"

"Not our man!" they cried, with a volley of curses.

"Why, this fellow would make two of the gauger, and leave enough over to fashion a magistrate's clerk. Ye may hang him to make sure, but still he's not the man."

"Yes, hang him!" said Dutch Pete. "Sapperment! is our cave to be the talk of all the country? Vere is the pretty *Maria* to go then, vid her silks and her satins, her kegs and her cases? Are we to risk our cave for the sake of this fellow? Besides, has he not schlagged my kopf—schlagged your cooper's kopf—as if he had hit me mit mine own mallet? Is that not vorth a hemp cravat?"

"Worth a jorum of rumbo," cried Dicon. "By your

leave, Captain, I would say that we are not a gang of padders and michers, but a crew of honest seamen, who harm none but those who harm us. Exciseman Westhouse hath slain Cooper Dick, and it is just that he should die for it ; but as to taking this young soldier's life, I'd as soon think of scuttling the saucy *Maria*, or of mounting the Jolly Roger at her peak."

What answer would have been given to this speech I cannot tell, for at that moment a shrill whistle resounded outside the cave, and two smugglers appeared bearing between them the body of a man. It hung so limp that I thought at first that he might be dead, but when they threw him on the sand he moved, and at last sat up like one who is but half awoken from a swoon. He was a square dogged-faced fellow, with a long white scar down his cheek, and a close-fitting blue coat with brass buttons.

" It's Gauger Westhouse ! " cried a chorus of voices.

" Yes, it is Gauger Westhouse," said the man calmly, giving his neck a wriggle as though he were in pain. " I represent the King's law, and in its name I arrest ye all, and declare all the contraband goods which I see around me to be confiscate and forfeited, according to the second section of the first clause of the statute upon illegal dealing. If there are any honest men in this company, they will assist me in the execution of my duty." He staggered to his feet as he spoke, but his spirit was greater than his strength, and he sank back upon the sand amid a roar of laughter from the rough seamen.

" We found him lying on the road when we came from Daddy Mycroft's," said one of the newcomers, who were the same men who had led away my horse. " He must have passed just after you left, and the rope caught him under the chin and threw him a dozen paces. We saw the revenue button on his coat, so we brought him down. Body o' me, but he kicked and plunged for all that he was three-quarters stunned."

" Have ye slacked the hawser ? " the Captain asked.

" We cast one end loose and let it hang."

" 'Tis well. We must keep him for Captain Venables. But now, as to our other prisoner : we must overhaul him and examine his papers, for so many craft are sailing under false colours that we must needs be careful. Hark ye, Mister Soldier ! What brings you to these parts, and what king do you serve ! for I hear there's a mutiny broke out, and two skippers claim equal rating in the old British ship."

" I am serving under King Monmouth," I answered, seeing that the proposed search must end in the finding of my papers.

" Under King Monmouth ! " cried the smuggler. " Nay, friend, that rings somewhat false. The good King hath, I hear, too much need of his friends in the south to let an able soldier go wandering along the sea-coast like a Cornish wrecker in a sou'-wester. "

" I bear despatches," said I, " from the King's own hand to Henry Duke of Beaufort, at his castle at Badminton. Ye can find them in my inner pocket, but I pray ye not to break the seal, lest it bring discredit upon my mission."

" Sir," cried the gauger, rising himself upon his elbow, " I do hereby arrest you on the charge of being a traitor, a promoter of treason, a vagrant and a masterless man within the meaning of the fourth statute of the Act. As an officer of the law I call upon you to submit to my warrant."

" Brace up his jaw with your scarf, Jim," said Murgatroyd. " When Venables comes he will soon find a way to check his gab. Yes," he continued, looking at the back of my papers, " it is marked, as you say, ' From James the Second of England, known lately as the Duke of Monmouth, to Henry Duke of Beaufort, President of Wales, by the hand of Captain Micah Clarke, of Saxon's regiment of Wiltshire foot.' Cast off the lashings, Dicon. So, Captain, you are a free man once more, and I grieve that we should have unwittingly harmed you. We are good Lutherans to a man, and would rather speed you than hinder you on this mission."

"Could we not indeed help him on his way?" said the mate Silas. "For myself, I don't fear a wet jacket or a tarry hand for the cause, and I doubt not ye are all of my way of thinking. Now with this breeze we could run up to Bristol and drop the Captain by morning, which would save him from being snapped up by any land-sharks on the road."

"Aye, aye," cried Long John. "The King's horse are out beyond Weston, but he could give them the slip if he had the *Maria* under him."

"Well," said Murgatroyd, "we could get back by three long tacks. Venables will need a day or so to get his goods ashore. If we are to sail back in company we shall have time on our hands. How would the plan suit you, Captain?"

"My horse!" I objected.

"It need not stop us. I can rig up a handy horse-stall with my spare spars and the grating. The wind has died down. The lugger could be brought to Dead Man's Edge, and the horse led down to it. Run up to Daddy's, Jim; and you, Silas, see to the boat. Here is some cold junk and biscuit—seaman's fare, Captain—and a glass o' the real Jamaica to wash it down, an thy stomach be not too dainty for rough living."

I seated myself on a barrel by the fire, and stretched my limbs, which were cramped and stiffened by their confinement, while one of the seamen bathed the cut on my head with a wet kerchief, and another laid out some food on a case in front of me. The rest of the gang had trooped away to the mouth of the cave to prepare the lugger, save only two or three who stood on guard round the ill-fated gauger. He lay with his back resting against the wall of the cave, and his arms crossed over his breast, glancing round from time to time at the smugglers with menacing eyes, as a staunch old hound might gaze at a pack of wolves who had overmatched him. I was turning it over in my own mind whether aught could be done to help him, when Murgatroyd came over, and dipping a

tin pannikin into the open rum tub, drained it to the success of my mission.

"I shall send Silas Bolitho with you," said he, "while I bide here to meet Venables, who commands my consort. If there is aught that I can do to repay you for your ill usage——"

"There is but one thing, Captain," I broke in eagerly. "It is as much, or more, for your own sake than mine that I ask it. Do not allow this unhappy man to be murdered."

Murgatroyd's face flushed with anger. "You are a plain speaker, Captain Clarke," said he. "This is no murder. It is justice. What harm do we here? There is not an old housewife over the whole countryside who does not bless us. Where is she to buy her souchong, or her strong waters, except from us? We charge little, and force our goods on no one. We are peaceful traders. Yet this man and his fellows are ever yelping at our heels, like so many dogfish on a cod bank. We have been harried, and chivied, and shot at until we are driven into such dens as this. A month ago, four of our men were bearing a keg up the hillside to Farmer Black, who hath dealt with us these five years back. Of a sudden, down came half a score of horse, led by this gauger, hacked and slashed with their broadswords, cut Long John's arm open, and took Cooper Dick prisoner. Dick was haled to Ilchester Gaol, and hung up after the assizes like a stoat on a gamekeeper's door. This night we had news that this very gauger was coming this way, little knowing that we should be on the look-out for him. Is it a wonder that we should lay a trap for him, and that, having caught him, we should give him the same justice as he gave our comrades?"

"He is but a servant," I argued. "He hath not made the law. It is his duty to enforce it. It is with the law itself that your quarrel is."

"You are right," said the smuggler gloomily. "It is with Judge Moorcroft that we have our chief account to

square. He may pass this road upon his circuit. Heaven send he does! But we shall hang the gauger too. He knows our cave now, and it would be madness to let him go."

I saw that it was useless to argue longer, so I contented myself with dropping my pocket-knife on the sand within reach of the prisoner, in the hope that it might prove to be of some service to him. His guards were laughing and joking together, and giving little heed to their charge, but the gauger was keen enough, for I saw his hand close over it.

I had walked and smoked for an hour or more, when Silas the mate appeared, and said that the lugger was ready and the horse aboard. Bidding Murgatroyd farewell, I ventured a few more words in favour of the gauger, which were received with a frown and an angry shake of the head. A boat was drawn up on the sand, inside the cave, at the water's edge. Into this I stepped, as directed, with my sword and pistols, which had been given back to me, while the crew pushed her off and sprang in as she glided into deep water.

I could see by the dim light of the single torch which Murgatroyd held upon the margin, that the roof of the cave sloped sheer down upon us as we sculled slowly out towards the entrance. So low did it come at last that there was only a space of a few feet between it and the water, and we had to bend our heads to avoid the rocks above us. The boatmen gave two strong strokes, and we shot out from under the overhanging ledge, and found ourselves in the open with the stars shining murkily above us, and the moon showing herself dimly and cloudily through a gathering haze. Right in front of us was a dark blur, which, as we pulled towards it, took the outline of a larger lugger rising and falling with the pulse of the sea. Her tall thin spars and delicate network of cordage towered above us as we glided under the counter, while the creaking of blocks and rattle of ropes showed that she was all ready to glide off upon her journey. Lightly and daintily

she rode upon the waters, like some giant seafowl, spreading one white pinion after another in preparation for her flight. The boatmen ran us alongside and steadied the dingy while I climbed over the bulwarks on to the deck.

She was a roomy vessel, very broad in the beam, with a graceful curve in her bows, and masts which were taller than any that I had seen on such a boat on the Solent. She was decked over in front, but very deep in the after part, with ropes fixed all round the sides to secure kegs when the hold should be full. In the midst of this after-deck the mariners had built a strong stall, in which my good steed was standing, with a bucket full of oats in front of him. My old friend shoved his nose against my face as I came aboard, and neighed his pleasure at finding his master once more. We were still exchanging caresses when the grizzled head of Silas Bolitho the mate popped out of the cabin hatchway.

"We are fairly on our way now, Captain Clarke," said he. "The breeze has fallen away to nothing, as you can see, and we may be some time in running down to our port. Are you not aweary?"

"I am a little tired," I confessed. "My head is throbbing from the crack I got when that hawser of yours dashed me from my saddle."

"An hour or two of sleep will make you as fresh as a Mother Carey's chicken," said the smuggler. "Your horse is well cared for, and you can leave him without fear. I will set a man to tend him, though, truth to say, the rogues know more about studding-sails and halliards than they do of steeds and their requirements. Yet no harm can come to him, so you had best come down and turn in."

I descended the steep stairs which led down into the low-roofed cabin of the lugger. On either side a recess in the wall had been fitted up as a couch.

"This is your bed," said he, pointing to one of them. "We shall call you if there be aught to report." I needed no second invitation, but flinging myself down without undressing, I sank in a few minutes into a dream-

less sleep, which neither the gentle motion of the boat nor the clank of feet above my head could break off.

## 24. *Of the Welcome that Met me at Badminton*

WHEN I opened my eyes I had some ado to recall where I was, but on sitting up it was brought home to me by my head striking the low ceiling with a sharp rap. On the other side of the cabin Silas Bolitho was stretched at full length with a red woollen nightcap upon his head, fast asleep and snoring. In the centre of the cabin hung a swing-table, much worn, and stained all over with the marks of countless glasses and pannikins. A wooden bench, screwed to the floor, completed the furniture, with the exception of a stand of muskets along one side. Above and below the berths in which we lay were rows of lockers, in which, doubtless, some of the more choice laces and silks were stowed. The vessel was rising and falling with a gentle motion, but from the flapping of canvas I judged that there was a little wind. Slipping quietly from my couch, so as not to wake the mate, I stole upon deck.

We were, I found, not only becalmed, but hemmed in by a dense fog-bank which rolled in thick, choking wreaths all round us, and hid the very water beneath us. We might have been a ship of the air riding upon a white cloud-bank. Now and anon a little puff of breeze caught the foresail and bellied it out for a moment, only to let it flap back against the mast, limp and slack, once more. A sunbeam would at times break through the dense cloud, and would spangle the dead grey wall with a streak of rainbow colour, but the haze would gather in again and shut off the bright invader. Covenant was staring right and left with great questioning eyes. The crew were gathered along the bulwarks and smoking their pipes while they peered out into the dense fog.

"God den, Captain," said Dicon, touching his fur cap. "We have had a rare run while the breeze lasted, and the mate reckoned before he turned in that we were not many miles from Bristol town."

"In that case, my good fellow," I answered, "ye can set me ashore, for I have not far to go."

"We must e'en wait till the fog lifts," said Long John. "There's only one place along here, d'ye see, where we can land cargoes unquestioned. When it clears we shall turn her head for it, but until we can take our bearings it is anxious work wi' the sands under our lee."

"Keep a look-out there, Tom Baldock!" cried Dicon to a man in the bows. "We are in the track of every Bristol ship, and though there's so little wind, a high-sparred craft might catch a breeze which we miss."

"Sh!" said Long John suddenly, holding up his hand in warning. "Sh!"

We listened with all our ears, but there was no sound, save the gentle wash of the unseen waves against our sides.

"Call the mate!" whispered the seaman. "There's a craft close by us. I heard the rattle of a rope upon her deck."

Silas Bolitho was up in an instant, and we all stood straining our ears, and peering through the dense fog-bank. We had well-nigh made up our minds that it was a false alarm, and the mate was turning back in no very good humour, when a clear loud bell sounded seven times quite close to us, followed by a shrill whistle and a confused shouting and stamping.

"It's a King's ship," growled the mate. "That's seven bells, and the bo'sun is turning out the watch below."

"It was on our quarter," whispered one.

"Nay, I think it was on our larboard bow," said another.

The mate held up his hand, and we all listened for some fresh sign of the whereabouts of our scurvy neighbour. The wind had freshened a little, and we were slipping through the water at four or five knots an hour. Of a sudden a hoarse voice was heard roaring at our very side.

" 'Bout ship ! " it shouted. " Bear a hand on the lee-braces, there ! Stand by the halliards ! Bear a hand, ye lazy rogues, or I'll be among ye with my cane, with a wannion to ye ! "

" It is a King's ship, sure enough, and she lies just there," said Long John, pointing out over the quarter. " Merchant adventurers have civil tongues. It's your blue-coated, gold-braided, swivel-eyed quarter-deckers that talk of canes. Ha ! did I not tell ye ? "

As he spoke, the white screen of vapour rolled up like the curtain in a playhouse, and uncovered a stately war-ship, lying so close that we could have thrown a biscuit aboard. Her long, lean, black hull rose and fell with a slow, graceful rhythm, while her beautiful spars and snow-white sails shot aloft until they were lost in the wreaths of fog which still hung around her. Nine bright brass cannons peeped out at us from her portholes. Above the line of hammocks, which hung like carded wool along her bulwarks, we could see the heads of the seamen staring down at us, and pointing us out to each other. On the high poop stood an elderly officer with cocked hat and trim white wig, who at once whipped up his glass and gazed at us through it.

" Ahoy, there ! " he shouted, leaning over the taffrail. " What lugger is that ? "

" The *Lucy*," answered the mate, " bound from Porlock Quay to Bristol with hides and tallow. Stand ready to tack ! " he added in a lower voice, " the fog is coming down again."

" Ye have one of the hides with the horse still in it," cried the officer. " Run down under our counter. We must have a closer look at ye."

" Aye, aye, sir ! " said the mate, and putting his helm hard down the boom swung across, and the *Maria* darted off like a scared seabird into the fog. Looking back there was nothing but a dim loom to show where we had left the great vessel. We could hear, however, the hoarse shouting of orders and the bustle of men.

"Look out for squalls, lads!" cried the mate. "He'll let us have it now."

He had scarcely spoken before there were half-a-dozen throbs of flame in the mist behind, and as many balls sung among our rigging. One cut away the end of the yard, and left it dangling; another grazed the bowsprit, and sent a puff of white splinters into the air.

"Warm work, Captain, eh?" said old Silas, rubbing his hands. "Zounds, they shoot better in the dark than ever they did in the light. There have been more shots fired at this lugger than she could carry were she loaded with them. And yet they never so much as knocked the paint off her before. There they go again!"

A fresh discharge burst from the man-of-war, but this time they had lost all trace of us, and were firing by guess.

"That is their last bark, sir," said Dixon.

"No fear. They'll blaze away for the rest of the day," growled another of the smugglers. "Why, Lor' bless ye, it's good exercise for the crew, and the 'munition is the King's, so it don't cost nobody a groat."

"It's well the breeze freshened," said Long John. "I heard the creak o' davits just after the first discharge. She was lowering her boats, or I'm a Dutchman."

"The petter for you if you vas, you seven-foot stock-fish," cried my enemy the cooper, whose aspect was not improved by a great strip of plaster over his eye. "You might have learned something petter than to pull on a rope, or to swab decks like a vrouw all your life."

"I'll set you adrift in one of your own barrels, you skin of lard," said the seaman. "How often are we to trounce you before we knock the sauce out of you?"

"The fog lifts a little towards the land," Silas remarked. "Methinks I see the loom of St. Austin's Point. It rises there upon the starboard bow."

"There it is, sure enough, sir!" cried one of the seamen, pointing to a dark cape which cut into the mist.

"Steer for the three-fathom creek then," said the mate.

"When we are on the other side of the point, Captain Clarke, we shall be able to land your horse and yourself. You will then be within a few hours' ride of your destination."

I led the old seaman aside, and having thanked him for the kindness which he had shown me, I spoke to him of the gauger, and implored him to use his influence to save the man.

"It rests with Captain Venables," said he gloomily. "If we let him go what becomes of our cave?"

"Is there no way of ensuring his silence?" I asked.

"Well, we might ship him to the Plantations," said the mate. "We could take him to the Texel with us, and get Captain Donders or some other to give him a lift across the western ocean."

"Do so," said I, "and I shall take care that King Monmouth shall hear of the help which ye have given his messenger."

"Well, we shall be there in a brace of shakes," he remarked. "Let us go below and load your ground tier, for there is nothing like starting well trimmed with plenty of ballast in the hold."

Following the sailor's advice I went down with him and enjoyed a rude but plentiful meal. By the time that we had finished, the lugger had been run into a narrow creek, with shelving sandy banks on either side. The district was wild and marshy, with few signs of any inhabitants. With much coaxing and pushing Covenant was induced to take to the water, and swam easily ashore, while I followed in the smugglers' dingy. A few words of rough, kindly leave-taking were shouted after me; I saw the dingy return, and the beautiful craft glided out to sea and faded away once more into the mists which still hung over the face of the waters.

Truly Providence works in strange ways, my children, and until a man comes to the autumn of his days he can scarce say what hath been ill-luck and what hath been good. For of all the seeming misfortunes which have befallen

me during my wandering life, there is not one which I have not come to look upon as a blessing. And if you once take this into your hearts, it is a mighty help in enabling you to meet all troubles with a stiff lip ; for why should a man grieve when he hath not yet determined whether what hath chanced may not prove to be a cause of rejoicing ? Now here ye will perceive that I began by being dashed upon a stony road, beaten, kicked and finally well-nigh put to death in mistake for another. Yet it ended in my being safely carried to my journey's end, whereas, had I gone by land, it is more than likely that I should have been cut off at Weston ; for, as I heard afterwards, a troop of horse were making themselves very active in those parts by blocking the roads and seizing all who came that way.

Being now alone, my first care was to bathe my face and hands in a stream which ran down to the sea, and to wipe away any trace of my adventures of the night before. My cut was but a small one, and was concealed by my hair. Having reduced myself to some sort of order I next rubbed down my horse as best I could, and rearranged his girth and his saddle. I then led him by the bridle to the top of a sand-hill hard by, whence I might gain some idea as to my position.

The fog lay thick upon the Channel, but all inland was very clear and bright. Along the coast the country was dreary and marshy, but at the other side a goodly extent of fertile plain lay before me, well tilled and cared for. A range of lofty hills, which I guessed to be the Mendips, bordered the whole skyline, and further north there lay a second chain in the blue distance. The glittering Avon wound its way over the countryside like a silver snake in a flower-bed. Close to its mouth, and not more than two leagues from where I stood, rose the spires and towers of stately Bristol, the Queen of the West, which was and still may be the second city in the kingdom. The forests of masts which shot up like a pinegrove above the roofs of the houses bore witness to the great trade both with

Ireland and with the Plantations which had built up so flourishing a city.

As I knew that the Duke's seat was miles on the Gloucestershire side of the city, and as I feared lest I might be arrested and examined should I attempt to pass the gates, I struck inland with intent to ride round the walls and so avoid the peril. The path which I followed led me into a country lane, which in turn opened into a broad highway crowded with travellers, both on horseback and on foot. As the troublous times required that a man should journey with his arms, there was nought in my outfit to excite remark, and I was able to jog on among the other horsemen without question or suspicion. From their appearance they were, I judged, country farmers or squires for the most part, who were riding into Bristol to hear the news, and to store away their things of price in a place of safety.

"By your leave, zur!" said a burly, heavy-faced man in a velveteen jacket, riding up upon my bridle-arm. "Can you tell me whether his Grace of Beaufort is in Bristol or at his house o' Badminton?"

I answered that I could not tell, but that I was myself bound for his presence.

"He was in Bristol yestreen a-drilling o' the trainbands," said the stranger; "but, indeed, his Grace be that loyal, and works that hard for his Majesty's cause, that he's a' ower the country, and it is but chance work for to try and to catch him. But if you are about to zeek him, whither shall you go?"

"I will to Badminton," I answered, "and await him there. Can you tell me the way?"

"What! Not know the way to Badminton!" he cried with a blank stare of wonder. "Whoy, I thought all the warld knew that. You're not fra Wales or the border counties, zur, that be very clear."

"I am a Hampshire man," said I. "I have come some distance to see the Duke."

"Aye, so I should think!" he cried, laughing loudly.

"If you doan't know the way to Badminton you doan't know much! But I'll go with you, danged if I doan't, and I'll show you your road, and run my chance o' finding the Duke there. What be your name?"

"Micah Clarke is my name."

"And Vairmer Brown is mine—John Brown by the register, but better knowed as the Vairmer. Tak' this turn to the right off the high-road. Now we can trot our beasts and not be smothered in other folk's dust. And what be you going to Beaufort for?"

"On private matters which will not brook discussion," I answered.

"Lor', now! Affairs o' State belike," said he, with a whistle. "Well, a still tongue saves many a neck. I'm a cautious man myself, and these be times when I wouldna whisper some o' my thoughts—not, not into the ears o' my old brown mare here—for fear I'd see her some day standing over against me in the witness-box."

"They seem very busy over there," I remarked, for we were now in full sight of the walls of Bristol, where gangs of men were working hard with pick and shovel improving the defences.

"Aye, they be busy sure enough, makin' ready in case the rebels come this road. Cromwell and his tawnies found it a rasper in my vather's time, and Monmouth is like to do the same."

"It hath a strong garrison, too," said I, bethinking me of Saxon's advice at Salisbury. "I see two or three regiments out yonder on the bare open space."

"They have four thousand foot and a thousand horse," the farmer answered. "But the foot are only train-bands, and there's no trusting them after Axminster. They say up here that the rebels run to nigh twenty thousand, and that they give no quarter. Well, if we must have civil war, I hope it may be hot and sudden, not spun out for a dozen years like the last one. If our throats are to be cut, let it be with a shairp knife, and not with a blunt hedge shears."

"What say you to a stoup of cider?" I asked, for we were passing an ivy-clad inn, with "The Beaufort Arms" printed upon the sign.

"With all my heart, lad," my companion answered. "Ho, there! two pints of the old hard-brewed! That will serve to wash the dust down. The real Beaufort Arms is up yonder at Badminton, for at the buttery hatch one may call for what one will in reason and never put hand to pocket."

"You speak of the house as though you knew it well," said I.

"And who should know it better?" asked the sturdy farmer, wiping his lips, as we resumed our journey. "Why, it seems but yesterday that I played hide-and-seek wi' my brothers in the old Boteler Castle, that stood where the new house o' Badminton, or Acton Turville, as some calls it, now stands. The Duke hath built it but a few years, and, indeed, his Dukedom itself is scarce older. There are some who think that he would have done better to stick by the old name that his forebears bore."

"What manner of man is the Duke?" I asked.

"Hot and hasty, like all of his blood. Yet when he hath time to think, and hath cooled down, he is just in the main. Your horse hath been in the water this morning, vriend."

"Yes," said I shortly, "he hath had a bath."

"I am going to his Grace on the business of a horse," quoth my companion. "His officers have pressed my piebald four-year-old, and taken it without a 'With your leave,' or 'By your leave,' for the use of the King. I would have them know that there is something higher than the Duke, or even than the King. There is the English law, which will preserve a man's goods and his chattels. I would do aught in reason for King James's service, but my piebald four-year-old is too much."

"I fear that the needs of the public service will override your objection," said I.

"Why, it is enough to make a man a Whig," he cried.

" Even the Roundheads always paid their vair penny for every pennyworth they had, though they wanted a vair pennyworth for each penny. I have heard my father say that trade was never so brisk as in 'forty-six, when they were down this way. Old Noll had a noose of hemp ready for horse-stealers, were they for King or for Parliament. But here comes his Grace's carriage, if I mistake not."

As he spoke a great heavy yellow coach, drawn by six cream-coloured Flemish mares, dashed down the road, and came swiftly towards us. Two mounted lackeys galloped in front, and two others all in light blue and silver liveries rode on either side.

" His Grace is not within, else there had been an escort behind," said the farmer, as we reined our horses aside to let the carriage pass. As they swept by he shouted out a question as to whether the Duke was at Badminton, and received a nod from the stately bewigged coachman in reply.

" We are in luck to catch him," said Farmer Brown. " He's as hard to find these days as a crake in a wheatfield. We should be there in an hour or less. I must thank you that I did not take a fruitless journey into Bristol. What did you say your errand was ? "

I was again compelled to assure him that the matter was not one of which I could speak with a stranger, on which he appeared to be huffed, and rode for some miles without opening his mouth. Groves of trees lined the road on either side, and the sweet smell of pines was in our nostrils. Far away the musical pealing of a bell rose and fell on the hot, close summer air. The shelter of the branches was pleasant, for the sun was very strong, blazing down out of a cloudless heaven, and raising a haze from the fields and valleys.

" 'Tis the bell from Chipping Sodbury," said my companion at last, wiping his ruddy face. " That's Sodbury Church yonder over the brow of the hill, and here on the right is the entrance of Badminton Park."

High iron gates, with the leopard and griffin, which are

the supporters of the Beaufort arms, fixed on the pillars which flanked them, opened into a beautiful domain of lawn and grass land with clumps of trees scattered over it, and broad sheets of water, thick with wild fowl. At every turn as we rode up the winding avenue some new beauty caught our eyes, all of which were pointed out and expounded by Farmer Brown, who seemed to take as much pride in the place as though it belonged to him. Here it was a rockery where a thousand bright-coloured stones shone out through the ferns and creepers which had been trained over them. There it was a pretty prattling brook, the channel of which had been turned so as to make it come foaming down over a steep ledge of rocks. Or perhaps it was some statue of nymph or sylvan god, or some artfully built arbour overgrown with roses or honeysuckle. I have never seen grounds so tastefully laid out, and it was done, as all good work in art must be done, by following Nature so closely that it only differed from her handiwork in its profusion in so narrow a compass. A few years later our healthy English taste was spoiled by the pedant gardening of the Dutch with their straight flat ponds, and their trees all clipped and in a line like vegetable grenadiers. In truth, I think that the Prince of Orange and Sir William Temple had much to answer for in working this change, but things have now come round again, I understand, and we have ceased to be wiser than Nature in our pleasure-grounds.

As we drew near the house we came on a large extent of level sward on which a troop of horse were exercising, who were raised, as my companion informed me, entirely from the Duke's own personal attendants. Passing them we rode through a grove of rare trees and came out on a broad space of gravel which lay in front of the house. The building itself was of great extent, built after the new Italian fashion, rather for comfort than for defence ; but on one wing there remained, as my companion pointed out, a portion of the old keep and battlements of the feudal castle of the Botelers, looking as out of place as a

farthingale of Queen Elizabeth joined to a court dress fresh from Paris. The main doorway was led up to by lines of columns and a broad flight of marble steps, on which stood a group of footmen and grooms, who took our horses when we dismounted. A grey-haired steward or major-domo inquired our business, and on learning that we wished to see the Duke in person, he told us that his Grace would give audience to strangers in the afternoon at half after three by the clock. In the meantime he said that the guests' dinner had just been laid in the hall, and it was his master's wish that none who came to Badminton should depart hungry. My companion and I were but too glad to accept the steward's invitation, so having visited the bathroom and attended to the needs of the toilet, we followed a footman, who ushered us into a great room where the company had already assembled.

The guests may have numbered fifty or sixty, old and young, gentle and simple, of the most varied types and appearance. I observed that many of them cast haughty and inquiring glances round them, in the pauses between the dishes, as though each marvelled how he came to be a member of so motley a crew. Their only common feature appeared to be the devotion which they showed to the platter and the wine flagon. There was little talking, for there were few who knew their neighbours. Some were soldiers who had come to offer their swords and their services to the King's lieutenant ; others were merchants from Bristol, with some proposal or suggestion anent the safety of their property. There were two or three officials of the city, who had come out to receive instructions as to its defence, while here and there I marked the child of Israel, who had found his way there in the hope that in times of trouble he might find high interest and noble borrowers. Horse-dealers, saddlers, armourers, surgeons and clergymen completed the company, who were waited upon by a staff of powdered and liveried servants, who brought and removed the dishes with the silence and deftness of long training.

The room was a contrast to the bare plainness of Sir Stephen Timewell's dining-hall at Taunton, for it was richly panelled and highly decorated all round. The floor was formed of black and white marble, set in squares, and the walls were of polished oak, and bore a long line of paintings of the Somerset family, from John of Gaunt downwards. The ceiling, too, was tastefully painted with flowers and nymphs, so that a man's neck was stiff ere he had done admiring it. At the further end of the hall yawned a great fireplace of white marble, with the lions and lilies of the Somerset arms carved in oak above it, and a long gilt scroll bearing the family motto, " Mutare vel timere sperno." The massive tables at which we sat were loaded with silver chargers and candelabra, and bright with the rich plate for which Badminton was famous. I could not but think that, if Saxon could clap eyes upon it, he would not be long in urging that the war be carried on in this direction.

After dinner we were all shown into a small ante-chamber, set round with velvet settees, where we were to wait till the Duke was ready to see us. In the centre of this room there stood several cases, glass-topped and lined with silk, wherein were little steel and iron rods, with brass tubes and divers other things, very bright and ingenious, though I could not devise for what end they had been put together. A gentleman in waiting came round with paper and ink-horn, making notes of our names and of our business. Him I asked whether it might not be possible for me to have an entirely private audience.

" His Grace never sees in private," he replied. " He has ever his chosen councillors and officers in attendance."

" But the business is one which is only fit for his own ear," I urged.

" His Grace holds that there is no business fit only for his own ear," said the gentleman. " You must arrange matters as best you can when you are shown in to him. I will promise, however, that your request be carried to him, though I warn you that it cannot be granted."

I thanked him for his good offices, and turned away with the farmer to look at the strange little engines within the cases.

"What is it?" I asked. "I have never seen aught that was like it."

"It is the work of the mad Marquis of Worcester," quoth he. "He was the Duke's grandfather. He was ever making and devising such toys, but they were never of any service to himself or to others. Now, look ye here! This wi' the wheels were called the water-engine, and it was his crazy thought that, by heating the water in that 'ere kettle, ye might make the wheels go round, and thereby travel along iron bars quicker nor a horse could run. 'Oons! I'd match my old brown mare against all such contrivances to the end o' time. But to our places, for the Duke is coming."

We had scarce taken our seats with the other suitors, when the folding-doors were flung open, and a stout, thick, short man of fifty, or thereabouts, came bustling into the room, and strode down it between two lines of bowing clients. He had large projecting blue eyes, with great pouches of skin beneath them, and a yellow, sallow visage. At his heels walked a dozen officers and men of rank, with flowing wigs and clanking swords. They had hardly passed through the opposite door into the Duke's own room, when the gentleman with the list called out a name, and the guests began one after the other to file into the great man's presence.

"Methinks his Grace is in no very gentle temper," quoth Farmer Brown. "Did you not mark how he gnawed his nether lip as he passed?"

"He seemed a quiet gentleman enough," I answered, "it would try Job himself to see all these folk of an afternoon."

"Hark at that!" he whispered, raising his finger. As he spoke the sound of the Duke's voice in a storm of wrath was heard from the inner chamber, and a little sharp-faced man came out and flew through the ante-chamber as though fright had turned his head.

"He is an armourer of Bristol," whispered one of my neighbours. "It is likely that the Duke cannot come to terms with him over a contract."

"Nay," said another. "He supplied Sir Marmaduke Hyson's troop with sabres, and it is said that the blades will bend as though they were lead. Once used they can never be fitted back into the scabbard again."

"The tall man who goes in now is an inventor," quoth the first. "He hath the secret of some very grievous fire, such as hath been used by the Greeks against the Turks in the Levant, which he desires to sell for the better fortifying of Bristol."

The Greek fire seemed to be in no great request with the Duke, for the inventor came out presently with his face as red as though it had been touched by his own compound. The next upon the list was my honest friend the farmer. The angry tones which greeted him promised badly for the fate of the four-year-old, but a lull ensued, and the farmer came out and resumed his seat, rubbing his great red hands with satisfaction.

"Ecod!" he whispered. "He was plaguy hot at first, but he soon came round, and he hath promised that if I pay for the hire of a dragooner as long as the war shall last I shall have back the piebald."

I had been sitting all this time wondering how in the world I was to conduct my business amid the swarm of suppliants and the crowd of officers who were attending the Duke. Had there been any likelihood of my gaining audience with him in any other way I should gladly have adopted it, but all my endeavours to that end had been useless. Unless I took this occasion I might never come face to face with him at all. But how could he give due thought or discussion to such a matter before others? What chance was there of his weighing it as it should be weighed? Even if his feelings inclined him that way, he dared not show any sign of wavering when so many eyes were upon him. I was tempted to feign some other reason for my coming, and trust to fortune to give me

some more favourable chance for handing him my papers. But then that chance might never arrive, and time was pressing. It was said that he would return to Bristol next morning. On the whole, it seemed best that I should make the fittest use I could of my present position in the hope that the Duke's own discretion and self-command might, when he saw the address upon my despatches, lead to a more private interview.

I had just come to this resolution when my name was read out, on which I rose and advanced into the inner chamber. It was a small but lofty room, hung in blue silk with a broad gold cornice. In the centre was a square table littered over with piles of papers, and behind this sat his Grace with full-bottomed wig rolling down to his shoulders, very stately and imposing. He had the same subtle air of the court which I had observed both in Monmouth and in Sir Gervas, which, with his high bold features and large piercing eyes, marked him as a leader of men. His private scrivener sat beside him, taking notes of his directions, while the others stood behind in a half circle, or took snuff together in the deep recess of the window.

"Make a note of Smithson's order," he said, as I entered. "A hundred pots and as many fronts and backs to be ready by Tuesday; also sixscore snaphances for the musqueteers, and two hundred extra spades for the workers. Mark that the order be declared null and void unless fulfilled within the time appointed."

"It is so marked, your Grace."

"Captain Micah Clarke," said the Duke, reading from the list in front of him. "What is your wish, Captain?"

"One which it would be better if I could deliver privately to your Grace," I answered.

"Ah, you are he who desired private audience? Well, Captain, these are my council and they are as myself. So we may look upon ourselves as alone. What I may hear they may hear. Zounds, man, never stammer and boggle, but out with it!"

My request had roused the interest of the company, and those who were in the window came over to the table. Nothing could have been worse for the success of my mission, and yet there was no help for it but to deliver my despatches. I can say with a clear conscience, without any vainglory, that I had no fears for myself. The doing of my duty was the one thought in my mind. And here I may say once for all, my dear children, that I am speaking of myself all through this statement with the same freedom as though it were another man. In very truth the strong active lad of one-and-twenty *was* another man from the grey-headed old fellow who sits in the chimney corner and can do nought better than tell old tales to the youngsters. Shallow water gives a great splash, and so a braggart has ever been contemptible in my eyes. I trust, therefore, that ye will never think that your grandad is singing his own praises, or setting himself up as better than his neighbours. I do but lay the facts, as far I can recall them, before ye with all freedom and with all truth.

My short delay and hesitation had sent a hot flush of anger into the Duke's face, so I drew the packet of papers from my inner pocket and handed them to him with a respectful bow. As his eyes fell upon the superscription, he gave a sudden start of surprise and agitation, making a motion as though to hide them in his bosom. If this were his impulse he overcame it, and sat lost in thought for a minute or more with the papers in his hand. Then with a quick toss of the head, like a man who hath formed his resolution, he broke the seals and cast his eyes over the contents, which he then threw down upon the table with a bitter laugh.

"What think ye, gentlemen?" he cried, looking round with scornful eyes; "what think ye this private message hath proved to be? It is a letter from the traitor Monmouth, calling upon me to resign the allegiance of my natural sovereign and to draw my sword in his behalf! If I do this I am to have his gracious favour and protec-

tion. If not, I incur sequestration, banishment and ruin. He thinks Beaufort's loyalty is to be bought like a packman's ware, or bullied out of him by ruffling words. The descendant of John of Gaunt is to render fealty to the brat of a wandering playwoman ! "

Several of the company sprang to their feet, and a general buzz of surprise and anger greeted the Duke's words. He sat with bent brows, beating his foot against the ground, and turning over the papers upon the table.

" What hath raised his hopes to such mad heights ? " he cried. " How doth he presume to send such a missive to one of my quality ? Is it because he hath seen the backs of a parcel of rascally militiamen, and because he hath drawn a few hundred chaw-bacons from the plough's tail to his standard, that he ventures to hold such language to the President of Wales ? But ye will be my witnesses as to the spirit in which I received it ? "

" We can preserve your Grace from all danger of slander on that point," said an elderly officer, while a murmur of assent from the others greeted the remark.

" And you ! " cried Beaufort, raising his voice and turning his flashing eyes upon me ; " who are you that dare to bring such a message to Badminton ? You had surely taken leave of your senses ere you did set out upon such an errand ! "

" I am in the hands of God here as elsewhere," I answered, with some flash of my father's fatalism. " I have done what I promised to do, and the rest is no concern of mine."

" You shall find it a very close concern of thine," he shouted, springing from his chair and pacing up and down the room ; " so close as to put an end to all thy other concerns in this life. Call in the halberdiers from the outer hall ! Now, fellow, what have you to say for yourself ? "

" There is nought to be said," I answered.

" But something to be done," he retorted in a fury. " Seize this man and secure his hands ! "

Four halberdiers who had answered the summons

closed in upon me and laid hands on me. Resistance would have been folly, for I had no wish to harm the men in the doing of their duty. I had come to take my chance, and if that chance should prove to be death, as seemed likely enough at present, it must be met as a thing foreseen. I thought of those old-time lines which Master Chillingfoot, of Petersfield, had ever held up to our admiration—

Non civium ardor prava jubentium
Non vultus instantis tyranni
Mente quatit solidâ.

Here was the "vultus instantis tyranni," in this stout, bewigged, lace-covered, yellow-faced man in front of me. I had obeyed the poet in so far that my courage had not been shaken. I confess that this spinning dust-heap of a world has never had such attractions for me that it would be a pang to leave it. Never, at least, until my marriage —and that, you will find, alters your thoughts about the value of your life, and many other of your thoughts as well. This being so, I stood erect, with my eyes fixed upon the angry nobleman, while his soldiers were putting the gyves about my wrists.

## 25. *Of Strange Doings in the Boteler Dungeon*

"TAKE down this fellow's statement," said the Duke to his scrivener. "Now, sirrah, it may not be known to you that his gracious Majesty the King hath conferred plenary powers upon me during these troubled times, and that I have his warrant to deal with all traitors without either jury or judge. You do bear a commission, I understand, in the rebellious body which is here described as Saxon's regiment of Wiltshire Foot? Speak the truth for your neck's sake."

"I will speak the truth for the sake of something higher than that, your Grace," I answered. "I command a company in that regiment."

"And who is this Saxon?"

"I will answer all that I may concerning myself," said I, "but not a word which may reflect upon others."

"Ha!" he roared, hot with anger. "Our pretty gentleman must needs stand upon the niceties of honour after taking up arms against his King. I tell you, sir, that your honour is in such a parlous state already that you may well throw it over and look to your safety. The sun is sinking in the west. Ere it set your life, too, may have set for ever."

"I am the keeper of my own honour, your Grace," I answered. "As to my life, I should not be standing here this moment if I had any great dread of losing it. It is right that I should tell you that my Colonel hath sworn to exact a return for any evil that may befall me, on you or any of your household who may come into his power. This I say, not as a threat, but as a warning, for I know him to be a man who is like to be as good as his word."

"Your Colonel, as you call him, may find it hard enough to save himself soon," the Duke answered with a sneer. "How many men hath Monmouth with him?"

I smiled and shook my head.

"How shall we make this traitor find his tongue?" he asked furiously, turning to his council.

"I should clap on the thumbkins," said one fierce-faced old soldier.

"I have known a lighted match between the fingers work wonders," another suggested. "Sir Thomas Dalzell hath in the Scottish war been able to win over several of that most stubborn and hardened race, the Western Covenanters, by such persuasion."

"Sir Thomas Dalzell," said a grey-haired gentleman, clad in black velvet, "hath studied the art of war among the Muscovites, in their barbarous and bloody encounters with the Turks. God forbid that we Christians of England should seek our examples among the skin-clad idolaters of a savage country."

"Sir William would like to see war carried out on truly

courteous principles," said the first speaker. "A battle should be like a stately minuet, with no loss of dignity or of etiquette."

"Sir," the other answered hotly, "I have been in battles when you were in your baby linen, and I handled a battoon when you could scarce shake a rattle. In leaguer or onfall a soldier's work is sharp and stern, but I say that the use of torture, which the law of England hath abolished, should also be laid aside by the law of nations."

"Enough, gentlemen, enough!" cried the Duke, seeing that the dispute was like to wax warm. "Your opinion, Sir William, hath much weight with us, and yours also, Colonel Hearn. We shall discuss this at greater length in privacy. Halberdiers, remove the prisoner, and let a clergyman be sent to look to his spiritual needs!"

"Shall we take him to the strong room, your Grace?" asked the Captain of the guard.

"No, to the old Boteler dungeon," he replied; and I heard the next name upon the list called out, while I was led through a side door with a guard in front and behind me. We passed through endless passages and corridors, with heavy step and clank of arms, until we reached the ancient wing. Here, in the corner turret, was a small, bare room, mouldy and damp, with a high, arched roof, and a single long slit in the outer wall to admit light. A small wooden couch and a rude chair formed the whole of the furniture. Into this I was shown by the Captain, who stationed a guard at the door, and then came in after me and loosened my wrists. He was a sad-faced man, with solemn sunken eyes and a dreary expression, which matched ill with his bright trappings and gay sword-knot.

"Keep your heart up, friend," said he, in a hollow voice. "It is but a choke and a struggle. A day or two since we had the same job to do, and the man scarcely groaned. Old Spender, the Duke's marshal, hath as sure a trick of tying and as good judgment in arranging a drop as hath Dun of Tyburn. Be of good heart, therefore, for you shall not fall into the hands of a bungler."

"I would that I could let Monmouth know that his letters were delivered," I exclaimed, seating myself on the side of the bed.

"I' faith, they were delivered. Had you been the penny postman of Mr. Robert Murray, of whom we heard so much in London last spring, you could not have handed it in more directly. Why did you not talk the Duke fair? He is a gracious nobleman, and kind of heart, save when he is thwarted or angered. Some little talk as to the rebels' numbers and dispositions might have saved you."

"I wonder that you, as a soldier, should speak or think of such a thing," said I coldly.

"Well, well! Your neck is your own. If it please you to take a leap into nothing it were pity to thwart you. But his Grace commanded that you should have the chaplain. I must away to him."

"I prithee do not bring him," said I. "I am one of a dissenting stock, and I see that there is a Bible in yonder recess. No man can aid me in making my peace with God."

"It is well," he answered, "for Dean Hewby hath come over from Chippenham, and he is discoursing with our good chaplain on the need of self-denial, moistening his throat the while with a flask of the prime tokay. At dinner I heard him put up thanks for what he was to receive, and in the same breath ask the butler how he dared to serve a deacon of the Church with a pullet without truffle dressing. But, perhaps, you would desire Dean Hewby's spiritual help? No? Well, what I can do for you in reason shall be done, since you will not be long upon our hands. Above all, keep a cheery heart."

He left the cell, but presently unlocked the door and pushed his dismal face round the corner. "I am Captain Sinclair, of the Duke's household," he said, "should you have occasion to ask for me. You had best have spiritual help, for I do assure you that there hath been something worse than either warder or prisoner in this cell."

"What then?" I asked.

"Why, marry, nothing less than the Devil," he answered, coming in and closing the door. "It was in this way," he went on, sinking his voice: "Two years agone Hector Marot, the highwayman, was shut up in this very Boteler dungeon. I was myself on guard in the corridor that night, and saw the prisoner at ten o'clock sitting on that bed even as you are now. At twelve I had occasion to look in, as my custom is, with the hope of cheering his lonely hours, when, lo he was gone! Yes, you may well stare. Mine eyes had never been off the door, and you can judge what chance there was of his getting through the windows. Walls and floor are both solid stone, which might be solid rock for the thickness. When I entered there was a plaguy smell of brimstone, and the flame of my lanthorn burned blue. Nay, it is no smiling matter. If the Devil did not run away with Hector Marot, pray who did? for sure I am that no angel of grace could come to him as to Peter of old. Perchance the Evil One may desire a second bird out of the same cage, and so I tell you this that you may be on your guard against his assaults."

"Nay, I fear him not," I answered.

"It is well," croaked the Captain. "Be not cast down!" His head vanished, and the key turned in the creaking lock. So thick were the walls that I could hear no sound after the door was closed. Save for the sighing of the wind in the branches of the trees outside the narrow window, all was as silent as the grave within the dungeon.

Thus left to myself I tried to follow Captain Sinclair's advice as to the keeping up of my heart, though his talk was far from being of a cheering nature. In my young days, more particularly among the sectaries with whom I had been brought most in contact, a belief in the occasional appearance of the Prince of Darkness, and his interference in bodily form with the affairs of men, was widespread and unquestioning. Philosophers in their own quiet chambers may argue learnedly on the absurdity of such things, but in a dim-lit dungeon, cut off from the world,

with the grey gloaming creeping down, and one's own fate hanging in the balance, it becomes a very different matter. The escape, if the Captain's story were true, appeared to border upon the miraculous. I examined the walls of the cell very carefully. They were formed of great square stones cunningly fitted together. The thin slit or window was cut through the centre of a single large block. All over, as high as the hand could reach, the face of the walls was covered with letters and legends cut by many generations of captives. The floor was composed of old foot-worn slabs, firmly cemented together. The closest search failed to show any hole or cranny where a rat could have escaped, far less a man.

It is a very strange thing, my dears, to sit down in cold blood, and think that the chances are that within a few hours your pulses will have given their last throb, and your soul have sped away upon its final errand. Strange and very awesome! The man who rideth down into the press of the battle with his jaw set and his grip tight upon reign and sword-hilt cannot feel this, for the human mind is such that one emotion will ever push out another. Neither can the man who draws slow and catching breaths upon the bed of deadly sickness be said to have experience of it, for the mind weakened with disease can but submit without examining too closely that which it submits to. When, however, a young and hale man sits alone in quiet, and sees present death hanging over him, he hath such food for thought that, should he survive and live to be grey-headed, his whole life will be marked and altered by those solemn hours, as a stream is changed in its course by some rough bank against which it hath struck. Every little fault and blemish stands out clear in the presence of death, as the dust specks appear when the sunbeam shines into the darkened room. I noted them then, and I have, I trust, noted them ever since.

I was seated with my head bowed upon my breast, deeply buried in this solemn train of thoughts, when I was startled by hearing a sharp click, such as a man might

give who wished to attract attention. I sprang to my feet and gazed round in the gathering gloom without being able to tell whence it came. I had well-nigh persuaded myself that my senses had deceived me, when the sound was repeated louder than before, and casting my eyes upwards I saw a face peering in at me through the slit, or part of a face rather, for I could but see the eye and corner of the cheek. Standing on my chair I made out that it was none other than the farmer who had been my companion upon the road.

"Hush, lad!" he whispered, with a warning fore-finger pushed through the narrow crack. "Speak low, or the guard may chance to hear. What can I do for you?"

"How did you come to know where I was?" I asked in astonishment.

"Whoy, mun," he answered, "I know as much of this 'ere house as Beaufort does himsel'. Afore Badminton was built, me and my brothers has spent many a day in climbing over the old Boteler tower. It's not the first time that I have spoke through this window. But, quick; what can I do for you?"

"I am much beholden to you, sir," I answered, "but I fear that there is no help which you can give me, unless, indeed, you could convey news to my friends in the army of what hath befallen me."

"I might do that," whispered Farmer Brown. "Hark ye in your ear, lad, what I never breathed to man yet. Mine own conscience pricks me at times over this bolstering up of a Papist to rule over a Protestant nation. Let like rule like, say I. At the 'lections I rode to Sudbury, and I put in my vote for Maister Evans, of Turnford, who was in favour o' the Exclusionists. Sure enough, if that same Bill had been carried, the Duke would be sitting on his father's throne. The law would have said yes. Now, it says nay. A wonderful thing is the law with its yea, yea, and nay, nay, like Barclay, the Quaker man, that came down here in a leather suit, and ca'd the parson a steepleman. There's the law. It's no use shootin' at it,

or passin' pikes through it, no, nor chargin' at it wi' a troop of horse. If it begins by saying 'nay' it will say 'nay' to the end of the chapter. Ye might as well fight wi' the book o' Genesis. Let Monmouth get the law changed, and it will do more for him than all the dukes in England. For all that he's a Protestant, and I would do what I might to serve him."

"There is a Captain Lockarby, who is serving in Colonel Saxon's regiment, in Monmouth's army," said I. "Should things go wrong with me, I would take it as a great kindness if you would bear him my love, and ask him to break it gently, by word or by letter, to those at Havant. If I were sure that this would be done, it would be a great ease to my mind."

"It shall be done, lad," said the good farmer. "I shall send my best man and fleetest horse this very night, that they may know the straits in which you are. I have a file here if it would help you."

"Nay," I answered, "human aid can do little to help me here."

"There used to be a hole in the roof. Look up and see if you can see aught of it."

"It arches high above my head," I answered, looking upwards; "but there is no sign of any opening."

"There was one," he repeated. "My brother Roger hath swung himself down wi' a rope. In the old time the prisoners were put in so, like Joseph into the pit. The door is but a new thing."

"Hole or no hole, it cannot help me," I answered. "I have no means of climbing to it. Do not wait longer, kind friend, or you may find yourself in trouble."

"Good-bye then, my brave heart," he whispered, and the honest grey eye and corner of ruddy cheek disappeared from the casement. Many a time during the course of the long evening I glanced up with some wild hope that he might return, and every creak of the branches outside brought me on to the chair, but it was the last that I saw of Farmer Brown.

This kindly visit, short as it was, relieved my mind greatly, for I had a trusty man's word that, come what might, my friends should, at least, have some news of my fate. It was now quite dark, and I was pacing up and down the little chamber, when the key turned in the door, and the Captain entered with a rushlight and a great bowl of bread and milk.

"Here is your supper, friend," said he. "Take it down, appetite or no, for it will give you strength to play the man at the time ye wot of. They say it was beautiful to see my Lord Russell die upon Tower Hill. Be of good cheer! Folk may say as much of you. His Grace is in a terrible way. He walketh up and down, and biteth his lip, and clencheth his hands like one who can scarce contain his wrath. It may not be against you, but I know not what else can have angered him."

I made no answer to this Job's comforter, so he presently left me, placing the bowl upon the chair, with the rushlight beside it. I finished the food, and feeling the better for it, stretched myself upon the couch, and fell into a heavy and dreamless sleep. This may have lasted three or four hours, when I was suddenly awoken by a sound like the creaking of hinges. Sitting up on the pallet I gazed around me. The rushlight had burned out and the cell was impenetrably dark. A greyish glimmer at one end showed dimly the position of the aperture, but all else was thick and black. I strained my ears, but no further sound fell upon them. Yet I was certain that I had not been deceived, and that the noise which had aroused me was within my very chamber. I rose and felt my way slowly round the room, passing my hand over the walls and door. Then I paced backwards and forwards to test the flooring. Neither around me nor beneath me was there any change. Whence did the sound come from, then? I sat down upon the side of the bed and waited patiently in the hope of hearing it once again.

Presently it was repeated, a low groaning and creaking

as though a door or shutter long disused was being slowly and stealthily opened. At the same time a dull yellow light streamed down from above, issuing from a thin slit in the centre of the arched roof above me. Slowly as I watched it this slit widened and extended as if a sliding panel were being pulled out, until a good-sized hole was left, through which I saw a head, looking down at me, outlined against the misty light behind it. The knotted end of a rope was passed through this aperture, and came dangling down to the dungeon floor. It was a good stout piece of hemp, strong enough to bear the weight of a heavy man, and I found, upon pulling at it, that it was firmly secured above. Clearly it was the desire of my unknown benefactor that I should ascend by it, so I went up hand over hand, and after some difficulty in squeezing my shoulders through the hole I succeeded in reaching the room above. While I was still rubbing my eyes after the sudden change from darkness into light, the rope was swiftly whisked up and the sliding shutter closed once more. To those who were not in the secret there was nothing to throw light upon my disappearance.

I found myself in the presence of a stout short man clad in a rude jerkin and leather breeches, which gave him somewhat the appearance of a groom. He wore a broad felt hat drawn down very low over his eyes, while the lower part of his face was swathed round with a broad cravat. In his hand he bore a horn lanthorn, by the light of which I saw that the room in which we were was of the same size as the dungeon beneath, and differed from it only in having a broad casement which looked out upon the park. There was no furniture in the chamber, but a great beam ran across it, to which the rope had been fastened by which I ascended.

"Speak low, friend," said the stranger. "The walls are thick and the doors are close, yet I would not have your guardians know by what means you have been spirited away."

"Truly, sir," I answered, "I can scarce credit that it is other than a dream. It is wondrous that my dungeon should be so easily broken into, and more wondrous still that I should find a friend who would be willing to risk so much for my sake."

"Look there!" quoth he, holding down his lanthorn so as to cast its light on the part of the floor where the panel was fitted. "Can you not see how old and crumbled is the stonework which surrounds it? This opening in the roof is as old as the dungeon itself, and older far than the door by which you were led into it. For this was one of those bottle-shaped cells or oubliettes which hard men of old devised for the safe keeping of their captives. Once lowered through this hole into the stone-girt pit a man might eat his heart out, for his fate was sealed. Yet you see that the very device which once hindered escape has now brought freedom within your reach."

"Thanks to your clemency, your Grace," I answered, looking keenly at my companion.

"Now out on these disguises!" he cried, peevishly pushing back the broad-edged hat and disclosing, as I expected, the features of the Duke. "Even a blunt soldier lad can see through my attempts at concealment. I fear, Captain, that I should make a bad plotter, for my nature is as open—well, as thine is. I cannot better the simile."

"Your Grace's voice once heard is not easily forgot," said I.

"Especially when it talks of hemp and dungeons," he answered, with a smile. "But if I clapped you into prison, you must confess that I have made you amends by pulling you out again at the end of my line, like a minnow out of a bottle. But how came you to deliver such papers in the presence of my council?"

"I did what I could to deliver them in private," said I. "I sent you a message to that effect."

"It is true," he answered; "but such messages come in to me from every soldier who wishes to sell his sword,

and every inventor who hath a long tongue and a short purse. How could I tell that the matter was of real import ? "

" I feared to let the chance slip lest it might never return," said I. " I hear that your Grace hath little leisure during these times."

" I cannot blame you," he answered, pacing up and down the room. " But it was untoward. I might have hid the despatches, yet it would have roused suspicions. Your errand would have leaked out. There are many who envy my lofty fortunes and who would seize upon a chance of injuring me with King James. Sunderland or Somers would either of them blow the least rumour into a flame which might prove unquenchable. There was nought for it, therefore, but to show the papers and to turn a harsh face on the messenger. The most venomous tongue could not find fault in my conduct. What course would you have advised under such circumstances ? "

" The most direct," I answered.

" Aye, aye, Sir Honesty. Public men have, however, to pick their steps as best they may, for the straight path would lead too often to the cliff-edge. The Tower would be too scanty for its guests were we all to wear our hearts upon our sleeves. But to you in this privacy I can tell my real thoughts without fear of betrayal or misconstruction. On paper I will not write one word. Your memory must be the sheet which bears my answer to Monmouth. And first of all, erase from it all that you have heard me say in the council-room. Let it be as though it never were spoken. Is that done ? "

" I understand that it did not really represent your Grace's thoughts."

" Very far from it, Captain. But prithee tell me what expectation of success is there among the rebels themselves ? You must have heard your Colonel and others discuss the question, or noted by their bearing which way their thoughts lay. Have they good hopes of holding out against the King's troops ? "

"They have met with nought but success hitherto," I answered.

"Against the militia. But they will find it another thing when they have trained troops to deal with. And yet—and yet! . . . One thing I know, that any defeat of Feversham's army would cause a general rising throughout the country. On the other hand, the King's party are active. Every post brings news of some fresh levy. Albemarle still holds the militia together in the west. The Earl of Pembroke is in arms in Wiltshire. Lord Lumley is moving from the east with the Sussex forces. The Earl of Abingdon is up in Oxfordshire. At the university the caps and gowns are all turning into headpieces and steel fronts. James's Dutch regiments have sailed from Amsterdam. Yet Monmouth hath gained two fights, and why not a third? They are troubled waters—troubled waters!" The Duke paced backwards and forwards with brows drawn down, muttering all this to himself rather than to me, and shaking his head like one in the sorest perplexity.

"I would have you tell Monmouth," he said at last, "that I thank him for the papers which he hath sent me, and that I will duly read and weigh them. Tell him also that I wish him well in his enterprise, and would help him were it not that I am hemmed in by those who watch me closely, and who would denounce me were I to show my true thoughts. Tell him that, should he move his army into these parts, I may then openly declare myself; but to do so now would be to ruin the fortunes of my house, without in any way helping him. Can you bear him that message?"

"I shall do so, your Grace."

"Tell me," he asked, "how doth Monmouth bear himself in this enterprise?"

"Like a wise and gallant leader," I answered.

"Strange," he murmured; "it was ever the jest at court that he had scarce energy or constancy enough to finish a game at ball, but would ever throw his racquet

down ere the winning point was scored. His plans were like a weather-vane, altered by every breeze. He was constant only in his inconstancy. It is true that he led the King's troops in Scotland, but all men knew that Claverhouse and Dalzell were the real conquerors at Bothwell Bridge. Methinks he resembles that Brutus in Roman history who feigned weakness of mind as a cover to his ambitions."

The Duke was once again conversing with himself rather than with me, so that I made no remark, save to observe that Monmouth had won the hearts of the lower people.

"There lies his strength," said Beaufort. "The blood of his mother runs in his veins. He doth not think it beneath him to shake the dirty paw of Jerry the tinker, or to run a race against a bumpkin on the village green. Well, events have shown that he hath been right. These same bumpkins have stood by him when nobler friends have held aloof. I would I could see into the future. But you have my message, Captain, and I trust that, if you change it in the delivery, it will be in the direction of greater warmth and kindliness. It is time now that you depart, for within three hours the guard is changed, and your escape will be discovered."

"But how depart?" I asked.

"Through here," he answered, pushing open the casement, and sliding the rope along the beam in that direction. "The rope may be a foot or two short, but you have extra inches to make matters even. When you have reached the ground, take the gravel path which turns to the right, and follow it until it leads you to the high trees which skirt the park. The seventh of these hath a bough which shoots over the boundary wall. Climb along the bough, drop over upon the other side, and you will find my own valet waiting with your horse. Up with you, and ride, haste, haste, post-haste, for the south. By morn you should be well out of danger's way."

"My sword?" I asked.

"All your property is there. Tell Monmouth what I have said, and let him know that I have used you as kindly as was possible."

"But what will your Grace's council say when they find that I am gone?" I asked.

"Pshaw, man! Never fret about that! I will off to Bristol at daybreak, and give my council enough to think of without their having time to devote to your fate. The soldiers will but have another instance of the working of the Father of Evil, who hath long been thought to have a weakness for that cell beneath us. Faith, if all we hear be true, there have been horrors enough acted there to call up every devil out of the pit. But time presses. Gently through the casement! So! Remember the message."

"Adieu, your Grace!" I answered, and seizing the rope slipped rapidly and noiselessly to the ground, upon which he drew it up and closed the casement. As I looked round, my eye fell upon the dark narrow slit which opened into my cell, and through which honest Farmer Brown had held converse with me. Half-an-hour ago I had been stretched upon the prison pallet without a hope or a thought of escape. Now I was out in the open with no hand to stay me, breathing the air of freedom with the prison and the gallows cast off from me, as the waking man casts off his evil dreams. Such changes shake a man's soul, my children. The heart that can steel itself against death is softened by the assurance of safety. So I have known a worthy trader bear up manfully when convinced that his fortunes had been engulfed in the ocean, but lose all philosophy on finding that the alarm was false, and that they had come safely through the danger. For my own part believing as I do that there is nothing of chance in the affairs of this world, I felt that I had been exposed to this trial in order to dispose me to serious thought, and that I had been saved that I might put those thoughts into effect. As an earnest of my endeavour to do so I knelt down on the green sward, in the shadow of the Boteler turret, and I

prayed that I might come to be of use on the earth, and that I might be helped to rise above my own wants and interests, to aid forward whatever of good or noble might be stirring in my days. It is well-nigh fifty years, my dears, since I bowed my spirit before the Great Unknown in the moon-tinted park of Badminton, but I can truly say that from that day to this the aims which I laid down for myself have served me as a compass over the dark waters of life—a compass which I may perchance not always follow—for flesh is weak and frail, but which hath, at least, been ever present, that I might turn to it in seasons of doubt and of danger.

The path to the right led through groves and past carp ponds for a mile or more, until I reached the line of trees which skirted the boundary wall. Not a living thing did I see upon my way, save a herd of fallow-deer, which scudded away like swift shadows through the shimmering moonshine. Looking back, the high turrets and gables of the Boteler wing stood out dark and threatening against the starlit sky. Having reached the seventh tree, I clambered along the projecting bough which shot over the park wall, and dropped down upon the other side, where I found my good old dapple-grey awaiting me in the charge of a groom. Springing to my saddle, I strapped my sword once more to my side, and galloped off as fast as the four willing feet could carry me on my return journey.

All that night I rode hard without drawing bridle, through sleeping hamlets, by moon-bathed farmhouses, past shining stealthy rivers, and over birch-clad hills. When the eastern sky deepened from pink into scarlet, and the great sun pushed his rim over the blue north Somerset hills, I was already far upon my journey. It was a Sabbath morning, and from every village rose the sweet tinkling and calling of the bells. I bore no dangerous papers with me now, and might therefore be more careless as to my route. At one point I was questioned by a keen-eyed toll-keeper as to whence I came, but my

reply that I was riding direct from his Grace of Beaufort put an end to his suspicions. Further down, near Axbridge, I overtook a grazier who was jogging into Wells upon his sleek cob. With him I rode for some time, and learned that the whole of North Somerset, as well as south, was now in open revolt, and that Wells, Shepton Mallet and Glastonbury were held by armed volunteers for King Monmouth. The royal forces had all retired west, or east, until help should come. As I rode through the villages I marked the blue flag upon the church towers, and the rustics drilling upon the green, without any sign of trooper or dragoon to uphold the authority of the Stuarts.

My road lay through Shepton Mallet, Piper's Inn, Bridgewater and North Petherton, until in the cool of the evening I pulled up my weary horse at the Cross Hands, and saw the towers of Taunton in the valley beneath me. A flagon of beer for the rider, and a sieveful of oats for the steed, put fresh mettle into both of us, and we were jogging on our way once more, when there came galloping down the side of the hill about forty cavaliers, as hard as their horses could carry them. So wild was their riding that I pulled up, uncertain whether they were friend or foe, until, as they came whirling towards me, I recognised that the two officers who rode in front of them were none other than Reuben Lockarby and Sir Gervas Jerome. At the sight of me they flung up their hands, and Reuben shot on to his horse's neck, where he sat for a moment astride of the mane, until the brute tossed him back into the saddle.

"It's Micah! It's Micah!" he gasped, with his mouth open, and the tears hopping down his honest face.

"Od's pitlikins, man, how did you come here?" asked Sir Gervas, poking me with his forefinger as though to see if I were really of flesh and blood. "We were leading a forlorn of horse into Beaufort's country to beat him up, and to burn his fine house about his ears if you had come to harm. There has just come a groom from

some farmer in those parts who hath brought us news that you were under sentence of death, on which I came away with my wig half frizzled, and found that friend Lockarby had leave from Lord Grey to go north with these troopers. But how have you fared?"

"Well and ill," I answered, wringing their kindly hands. "I had not thought last night to see another sun rise, and yet ye see that I am here, sound in life and limb. But all these things will take some time in the telling."

"Aye, and King Monmouth will be on thorns to see you. Right about, my lads, and back for the camp. Never was errand so rapidly and happily finished as this of ours. It would have fared ill with Badminton had you been hurt."

The troopers turned their horses and trotted slowly back to Taunton, while I rode behind them between my two faithful friends, hearing from them all that had occurred in my absence, and telling my own adventures in return. The night had fallen ere we rode through the gates, where I handed Covenant over to the Mayor's groom, and went direct to the castle to deliver an account of my mission.

## 26. *Of the Strife in the Council*

KING MONMOUTH'S council was assembled at the time of my coming, and my entrance caused the utmost surprise and joy, as they had just heard news of my sore danger. Even the royal presence could not prevent several members, among whom were the old Mayor and the two soldiers of fortune, from springing to their feet and shaking me warmly by the hand. Monmouth himself said a few gracious words, and requested that I should be seated at the board with the others.

"You have earned the right to be of our council," said

he ; " and lest there should be a jealousy amongst other captains that you should come among us, I do hereby confer upon you the special title of Scout-master, which, though it entail few if any duties in the present state of our force, will yet give you precedence over your fellows. We had heard that your greeting from Beaufort was of the roughest, and that you were in sore straits in his dungeons. But you have happily come yourself on the very heels of him who bore the tidings. Tell us then from the beginning how things have fared with you."

I should have wished to have limited my story to Beaufort and his message, but as the council seemed to be intent upon hearing a full account of my journey, I told in as short and simple speech as I could the various passages which had befallen me—the ambuscado of the smugglers, the cave, the capture of the gauger, the journey in the lugger, the acquaintance with Farmer Brown, my being cast into prison, with the manner of my release and the message wherewith I had been commissioned. To all of this the council hearkened with the uttermost attention, while a muttered oath ever and anon from a courtier or a groan and prayer from a Puritan showed how keenly they followed the various phases of my fortunes. Above all, they gave the greatest heed to Beaufort's words, and stopped me more than once when I appeared to be passing over any saying or event before they had due time to weigh it. When I at last finished they all sat speechless, looking into each other's faces and waiting for an expression of opinion.

" On my word," said Monmouth at last, " this is a young Ulysses, though his Odyssey doth but take three days in the acting. Scudéry might not be so dull were she to take a hint from these smugglers' caves and sliding panels. How say you, Grey ? "

" He hath indeed had his share of adventure," the nobleman answered, " and hath also performed his mission like a fearless and zealous messenger. You say that Beaufort gave you nought in writing ? "

" Not a word, my lord," I replied.

" And his private message was that he wished us well and would join us if we were in his country ? "

" That was the effect, my lord."

" Yet in his council, as I understand, he did utter bitter things against us, putting affronts upon the King, and making light of his just claims upon the fealty of his nobility ? "

" He did," I answered.

" He would fain stand upon both sides of the hedge at once," said King Monmouth. " Such a man is very like to find himself on neither side, but in the very heart of the briars. It may be as well, however, that we should move his way, so as to give him the chance of declaring himself."

" In any case, as your Majesty remembers," said Saxon, " we had determined to march Bristolwards and attempt the town."

" The works are being strengthened," said I, " and there are five thousand of the Gloucestershire train-bands assembled within. I saw the labourers at work upon the ramparts as I passed."

" If we gain Beaufort we shall gain the town," quoth Sir Stephen Timewell. " There are already a strong body of godly and honest folk therein, who would rejoice to see a Protestant army within their gates. Should we have to beleaguer it we may count upon some help from within."

" Hegel und blitzen ! " exclaimed the German soldier, with an impatience which even the presence of the King could not keep in bounds ; " how can we talk of sieges and leaguers when we have not a breaching-piece in the army ? "

" The Lard will find us the breaching-pieces," cried Ferguson, in his strange, nasal voice. " Did the Lard no breach the too'ers o' Jericho withoot the aid o' gun-pooder ? Did the Lard no raise up the man Robert Ferguson and presairve him through five-and-thairty

indictments and twa-and-twenty proclamations o' the godless? What is there He canna do? Hosannah! Hosannah!"

"The Doctor is right," said a square-faced, leather-skinned English Independent. "We talk too much o' carnal means and worldly chances, without leaning upon that heavenly goodwill which should be to us as a staff on stony and broken paths. Yes, gentlemen," he continued, raising his voice and glancing across the table at some of the courtiers, "ye may sneer at words of piety, but I say that it is you and those like you who will bring down God's anger upon this army."

"And I say so too," cried another sectary fiercely.

"And I," "And I," shouted several, with Saxon, I think, among them.

"Is it your wish, your Majesty, that we should be insulted at your very council board?" cried one of the courtiers, springing to his feet with a flushed face. "How long are we to be subject to this insolence because we have the religion of a gentleman, and prefer to practise it in the privacy of our hearts rather than at the street corners with these pharisees?"

"Speak not against God's saints," cried a Puritan, in a loud, stern voice. "There is a voice within me which tells me that it were better to strike thee dead—yea, even in the presence of the King—than to allow thee to revile those who have been born again."

Several had sprung to their feet on either side. Hands were laid upon sword-hilts, and glances as stern and as deadly as rapier thrusts were flashing backwards and forwards; but the more neutral and reasonable members of the council succeeded in restoring peace, and in persuading the angry disputants to resume their seats.

"How now, gentlemen?" cried the King, his face dark with anger, when silence was at last restored. "Is this the extent of my authority that ye should babble and brawl as though my council-chamber were a Fleet Street pot-house? Is this your respect for my person? I tell ye

that I would forfeit my just claims for ever, and return to Holland, or devote my sword to the cause of Christianity against the Turk, rather than submit to such indignity. If any man be proved to have stirred up strife amongst the soldiers or commonalty on the score of religion I shall know how to deal with him. Let each preach to his own, but let him not interfere with the flock of his neighbour. As to you, Mr. Bramwell, and you, Mr. Joyce, and you also, Sir Henry Nuttall, we shall hold ye excused from attending these meetings until ye have further notice from us. Ye may now separate, each to your quarters, and to-morrow morning we shall, with the blessing of God, start for the north to see what luck may await our enterprise in those parts."

The King bowed as a sign that the formal meeting was over, and taking Lord Grey aside, he conversed with him anxiously in a recess. The courtiers, who numbered in their party several English and foreign gentlemen, who had come over together with some Devonshire and Somerset country squires, swaggered out of the room in a body, with much clinking of spurs and clanking of swords. The Puritans drew gravely together and followed after them, walking not with demure and downcast looks, as was their common use, but with grim faces and knitted brows, as the Jews of old may have appeared when, "To your tents, O Israel!" was still ringing in their ears.

Indeed, religious dissension and sectarian heat were in the very air. Outside, on the Castle Green, the voices of preachers rose up like the drone of insects. Every waggon or barrel or chance provision case had been converted into a pulpit, each with its own orator and little knot of eager hearkeners. Here was a russet-coated Taunton volunteer in jackboots and bandolier, holding forth on the justification by works. Further on a grenadier of the militia, with blazing red coat and white crossbelt, was deep in the mystery of the Trinity. In one or two places, where the rude pulpits were too near to each other, the

sermons had changed into a hot discussion between the two preachers, in which the audience took part by hums or groans, each applauding the champion whose creed was most in accordance with his own. Through this wild scene, made more striking by the ruddy flickering glare of the camp-fires, I picked my way with a weight at my heart, for I felt how vain it must be to hope for success where such division reigned. Saxon looked on, however, with glistening eyes, and rubbed his hands with satisfaction.

"The leaven is working," quoth he. "Something will come of all this ferment."

"I see not what can come of it save disorder and weakness," I answered.

"Good soldiers will come of it, lad," said he. "They are all sharpening themselves, each after his own fashion, on the whetstone of religion. This arguing breedeth fanatics, and fanatics are the stuff out of which conquerors are fashioned. Have you not heard how Old Noll's army divided into Presbyterians, Independents, Ranters, Anabaptists, Fifth Monarchy men, Brownists and a score of other sects, out of whose strife rose the finest regiments that ever formed line upon a field of battle?

'Such as do build their faith upon
The holy text of sword and gun.'

You know old Samuel's couplet. I tell you, I would rather see them thus employed than at their drill, for all their wrangling and jangling."

"But how of this split in the council?" I asked.

"Ah, that is indeed a graver matter. All creeds may be welded together, but the Puritan and the scoffer are like oil and water. Yet the Puritan is the oil, for he will be ever atop. These courtiers do but stand for themselves, while the others are backed up by the pith and marrow of the army. It is well that we are afoot tomorrow. The King's troops are, I hear, pouring across Salisbury Plain, but their ordnance and stores are delaying

them, for they know well that they must bring all they need, since they can expect little from the goodwill of the country folk. Ah, friend Buyse, wie geht es ? "

" Ganz gut," said the big German, looming up before us through the darkness. " But, sapperment, what a cawing and croaking, like a rookery at sunset ! You English are a strange people—yes, donnerwetter, a very strange people ! There are no two of you who think alike upon any subject under Himmel ! The Cavalier will have his gay coat and his loose word. The Puritan will cut your throat rather than give up his sad-coloured dress and his Bible. " King James ! " cry some, " King Monmouth ! " say the peasants. " King Jesus ! " says the Fifth Monarchy man. " No King at all ! " cry Master Wade and a few others who are for a Commonwealth. Since I set foot on the Helderenbergh at Amsterdam, my head hath been in a whirl with trying to understand what it is that ye desire, for before I have got to the end of one man's tale, and begin to see a little through the finsterniss, another will come with another story, and I am in as evil a case as ever. But, my young Hercules, I am right glad to see you back in safety. I am half in fear to give you my hand now, after your recent treatment of it. I trust that you are none the worse for the danger that you have gone through."

" Mine eyelids are in truth a little heavy," I answered. " Save for an hour or two aboard the lugger, and about as long on a prison couch, I have not closed eye since I left the camp."

" We shall fall in at the second bugle call, about eight of the clock," said Saxon. " We shall leave you, therefore, that you may restore yourself after your fatigues." With a parting nod the two old soldiers strode off together down the crowded Fore Street, while I made the best of my way back to the Mayor's hospitable dwelling, where I had to repeat my story all over again to the assembled household before I was at last suffered to seek my room.

## 27. *Of the Affair near Keynsham Bridge*

MONDAY, June 21, 1685, broke very dark and windy, with dull clouds moving heavily across the sky and a constant sputter of rain. Yet a little after daybreak Monmouth's bugles were blowing in every quarter of the town, from Tone Bridge to Shuttern, and by the hour appointed the regiments had mustered, the roll had been called, and the vanguard was marching briskly out through the eastern gate. It went forth in the same order as it entered, our own regiment and the Taunton burghers bringing up the rear. Mayor Timewell and Saxon had the ordering of this part of the army between them, and being men who had seen much service, they drew the ordnance into a less hazardous position, and placed a strong guard of horse, a cannon's shot in the rear, to meet any attempt of the Royal dragoons.

It was remarked on all sides that the army had improved in order and discipline during the three days' halt, owing perchance to the example of our own unceasing drill and soldierly bearing. In numbers it had increased to nigh eight thousand, and the men were well fed and light of heart. With sturdy close-locked ranks they splashed their way through mud and puddle, with many a rough country joke and many a lusty stave from song or hymn. Sir Gervas rode at the head of his musqueteers, whose befloured tails hung limp and lank with the water dripping from them. Lockarby's pikemen and my own company of scythesmen were mostly labourers from the country, who were hardened against all weathers, and plodded patiently along with the rain-drops glistening upon their ruddy faces. In front were the Taunton foot; behind, the lumbering train of baggage waggons, with the horse in the rear of them. So the long line wound its way over the hills.

At the summit, where the road begins to dip down upon

the other side, a halt was called to enable the regiments to close up, and we looked back at the fair town which many of us were never to see again. From the dark walls and house roofs we could still mark the flapping and flutter of white kerchiefs from those whom we left behind. Reuben sat his horse beside me, with his spare shirt streaming in the wind and his great pikemen all agrin behind him, though his thoughts and his eyes were too far away to note them. As we gazed, a long thin quiver of sunshine slipped out between two cloud banks and gilded the summit of the Magdalene tower, with the Royal standard which still waved from it. The incident was hailed as a happy augury, and a great shout spread from rank to rank at the sight of it, with a waving of hats and a clattering of weapons. Then the bugles blew a fanfare, the drums struck up a point of war, Reuben thrust his shirt into his haversack, and on we marched through mud and slush, with the dreary clouds bending low over us, and buttressed by the no less dreary hills on either side. A seeker for omens might have said that the heavens were weeping over our ill-fated venture.

All day we trudged along roads which were quagmires, over our ankles in mud, until in the evening we made our way to Bridgewater, where we gained some recruits, and also some hundred pounds for our military chest, for it was a well-to-do place, with a thriving coast trade carried on down the river Parret. After a night in snug quarters we set off again in even worse weather than before. The country in these parts is a quagmire in the driest season, but the heavy rains had caused the fens to overflow, and turned them into broad lakes on either side of the road. This may have been to some degree in our favour, as shielding us from the raids of the King's cavalry, but it made our march very slow. All day it was splashing and swashing through mud and mire, the rain-drops shining on the gun-barrels and dripping from the heavy-footed horses. Past the swollen Parret, through Eastover, by the peaceful village of Bawdrip, and over Polden Hill

we made our way, until the bugles sounded a halt under the groves of Ashcot, and a rude meal was served out to the men. Then on again, through the pitiless rain, past the wooded park of Piper's Inn, through Walton, where the floods were threatening the cottages, past the orchards of Street, and so in the dusk of the evening into the grey old town of Glastonbury, where the good folk did their best by the warmth of their welcome to atone for the bitterness of the weather.

The next morning was wet still and inclement, so the army made a short march to Wells, which is a good-sized town, well laid out, with a fine cathedral, which hath a great number of figures carved in stone and placed in niches on the outer side, like that which we saw at Salisbury. The townsfolk were strong for the Protestant cause, and the army was so well received that their victual cost little from the military chest. On this march we first began to come into touch with the Royal horse. More than once when the rain mist cleared we saw the gleam of arms upon the low hills which overlook the road, and our scouts came in with reports of strong bodies of dragoons on either flank. At one time they massed heavily upon our rear, as though planning a descent upon the baggage. Saxon, however, planted a regiment of pikes on either side, so that they broke up again and glinted off over the hills.

From Wells we marched upon the twenty-fourth to Shepton Mallet, with the ominous sabres and helmet still twinkling behind and on either side of us.

That evening we were at Keynsham Bridge, less than two leagues from Bristol as the crow flies, and some of our horse forded the river and pushed on almost to the walls.

By morning the rainclouds had at last cleared, so Reuben and I rode slowly up one of the sloping green hills which rose behind the camp, in the hope of gaining some sight of the enemy. Our men we left littered about upon the grass, trying to light fires with the damp sticks,

or laying out their clothes to dry in the sunshine. A strange-looking band they were, coated and splashed with mud from head to heel, their hats all limp and draggled, their arms rusted, and their boots so worn that many walked barefoot, and others had swathed their kerchiefs round their feet. Yet their short spell of soldiering had changed them from honest-faced yokels into fierce-eyed, half-shaven, gaunt-cheeked fellows, who could carry arms or port pikes as though they had done nought else since childhood.

The plight of the officers was no better than that of the men, nor should an officer, my dears, when he is upon service, ever demean himself by partaking of any comfort which all cannot share with him. Let him lie by a soldier's fire and eat a soldier's fare, or let him hence, for he is a hindrance and a stumbling-block. Our clothes were pulp, our steel fronts red with rust, and our chargers as stained and splashed as though they had rolled in the mire. Our very swords and pistols were in such a plight that we could scarce draw the one or snap the other. Sir Gervas alone succeeded in keeping his attire and his person as neat and as dainty as ever. What he did in the watches of the night, and how he gained his sleep, hath ever been a mystery to me, for day after day he turned out at the bugle call, washed, scented, brushed, with wig in order, and clothes from which every speck of mud had been carefully removed. At his saddle-bow he bore with him the great flour dredger which we saw him use at Taunton, and his honest musqueteers had their heads duly dusted every morning, though in an hour their tails would be as brown as nature made them, while the flour would be trickling in little milky streams down their broad backs, or forming in cakes upon the skirts of their coats. It was a long contest between the weather and the Baronet, but our comrade proved the victor.

"There was a time when I was called plump Reuben," quoth my friend, as we rode together up the winding track. "What with too little that is solid and too much

that is liquid I am like to be skeleton Reuben ere I see Havant again. I am as full of rain-water as my father's casks are of October. I would, Micah, that you would wring me out and hang me to dry upon one of these bushes."

"If we are wet, King James's men must be wetter," said I, "for at least we have had such shelter as there was."

"It is poor comfort when you are starved to know that another is in the same plight. I give you my word, Micah, I took in one hole of my sword-belt on Monday, two on Tuesday, one yesterday, and one to-day. I tell you, I am thawing like an icicle in the sun."

"If you should chance to dwindle to nought," said I, laughing, "what account are we to give of you in Taunton? Since you have donned armour and taken to winning the hearts of fair maidens, you have outstripped us all in importance, and become a man of weight and substance."

"I had more substance and weight ere I began trailing over the countryside like a Hambledon packman," quoth he. "But in very truth and with all gravity, Micah, it is a strange thing to feel that the whole world for you, your hopes, your ambitions, your all, are gathered into so small a compass that a hood might cover it, and two little pattens support it. I feel as if she were my own higher self, my loftier part, and that I, should I be torn from her, would remain for ever an incomplete and half-formed being. With her, I ask nothing else. Without her, all else is nothing."

"But have you spoken to the old man?" I asked. "Are you indeed betrothed?"

"I have spoken to him," my friend answered, "but he was so busy in filling ammunition cases that I could not gain his attention. When I tried once more he was counting the spare pikes in the Castle armoury with a tally and an ink-horn. I told him that I had come to crave his granddaughter's hand, on which he turned to me and asked, 'which hand?' with so blank a stare that

it was clear that his mind was elsewhere. On the third trial, though, the day that you did come back from Badminton, I did at last prefer my request, but he flashed out at me that this was no time for such fooleries, and he bade me wait until King Monmouth was on the throne, when I might ask him again. I warrant that he did not call such things fooleries fifty years ago, when he went a-courting himself."

"At least he did not refuse you," said I. "It is as good as a promise that; should the cause be successful, you shall be so too."

"By my faith," cried Reuben, "if a man could by his own single blade bring that about, there is none who hath so strong an interest in it as I. No, not Monmouth himself! The apprentice Derrick hath for a long time raised his eyes to his master's daughter, and the old man was ready to have him as a son, so much was he taken by his godliness and zeal. Yet I have learned from a side-wind that he is but a debauched and low-living man, though he covers his pleasures with a mask of piety. I thought as you did think that he was at the head of the roisterers who tried to bear Mistress Ruth away, though, i' faith, I can scarce think harshly of them, since they did me the greatest service that ever men did yet. Meanwhile I have taken occasion, ere we left Wells two nights ago, to speak to Master Derrick on the matter, and to warn him as he loved his life to plan no treachery against her."

"And how took he this mild intimation?" I asked.

"As a rat takes a rat trap. Snarled out some few words of godly hatred, and so slunk away."

"On my life, lad," said I, "you have been having as many adventures in your own way as I in mine. But here we are upon the hill-top, with as fair an outlook as man could wish to have."

Just beneath us ran the Avon, curving in long bends through the woodlands, with the gleam of the sun striking back from it here and there, as though a row of baby suns

had been set upon a silver string. On the further side the peaceful, many-hued country, rising and falling in a swell of cornfields and orchards, swept away to break in a fringe of forest upon the distant Malverns. On our right were the green hills near Bath and on our left the rugged Mendips, with queenly Bristol crouching behind her forts, and the grey channel behind flecked with snow-white sails. At our very feet lay Keynsham Bridge, and our army spotted in dark patches over the green fields, the smoke of their fires and the babble of their voices floating up in the still summer air.

A road ran along the Somersetshire bank of the Avon, and down this two troops of our horse were advancing, with intent to establish outposts upon our eastern flank. As they jangled past in somewhat loose order, their course lay through a pine-wood, into which the road takes a sharp bend. We were gazing down at the scene when, like lightning from a cloud, a troop of the Horse Guards wheeled out into the open, and breaking from trot to canter, and from canter to gallop, dashed down in a whirlwind of blue and steel upon our unprepared squadrons. A crackle of hastily unslung carbines broke from the leading ranks, but in an instant the Guards burst through them and plunged on into the second troop. For a space the gallant rustics held their own, and the dense mass of men and horses swayed backwards and forwards, with the swirling sword-blades playing above them in flashes of angry light. Then blue coats began to break from among the russet, the fight rolled wildly back for a hundred paces, the dense throng was split asunder, and the Royal Guards came pouring through the rent, and swerved off to right and left through hedges and over ditches, stabbing and hacking at the fleeing horsemen. The whole scene, with the stamping horses, tossing manes, shouts of triumph or despair, gasping of hard-drawn breath and musical clink and clatter of steel, was to us upon the hill like some wild vision, so swiftly did it come and so swiftly go. A sharp, stern bugle-call

summoned the Blues back into the road, where they formed up and trotted slowly away before fresh squadrons could come up from the camp. The sun gleamed and the river rippled as ever, and there was nothing save the long litter of men and horses to mark the course of the hell blast which had broken so suddenly upon us.

As the Blues retired we observed that a single officer brought up the rear, riding very slowly, as though it went much against his mood to turn his back even to an army. The space betwixt the troop and him was steadily growing greater, yet he made no effort to quicken his pace, but jogged quietly on, looking back from time to time to see if he were followed. The same thought sprang into my comrade's mind and my own at the same instant, and we read it in each other's faces.

"This path," cried he eagerly. "It brings us out beyond the grove, and is in the hollow all the way."

"Lead the horses until we get on better ground," I answered. "We may just cut him off if we are lucky."

There was no time for another word, for we hurried off down the uneven track, sliding and slipping on the rain-soaked turf. Springing into our saddles we dashed down the gorge, through the grove, and so out on to the road in time to see the troop disappear in the distance, and to meet the solitary officer face to face.

He was a sun-burned, high-featured man, with black moustachios, mounted on a great raw-boned chestnut charger. As we broke out on to the road he pulled up to have a good look at us. Then, having fully made up his mind as to our hostile intent, he drew his sword, plucked a pistol out of his holster with his left hand, and gripping the bridle between his teeth, dug his spurs into his horse's flanks and charged down upon us at the top of his speed. As we dashed at him, Reuben on his bridle-arm and I on the other, he cut fiercely at me, and at the same moment fired at my companion. The ball grazed Reuben's cheek, leaving a red weal behind it like a lash from a whip, and blackening his face with the pow-

der. His cut, however, fell short, and throwing my arm round his waist as the two horses dashed past each other, I plucked him from the saddle and drew him face upwards across my saddlebow. Brave Covenant lumbered on with his double burden, and before the Guards had learned that they had lost their officer, we had brought him safe, in spite of his struggles and writhings, to within sight of Monmouth's camp.

"A narrow shave, friend," quoth Reuben, with his hand to his cheek. "He hath tattooed my face with powder until I shall be taken for Solomon Sprent's younger brother."

"Thank God that you are unhurt," said I. "See, our horse are advancing along the upper road. Lord Grey himself rides at their head. We had best take our prisoner into camp, since we can do nought here."

"For Christ's sake, either slay me or set me down!" he cried. "I cannot bear to be carried in this plight, like a half-weaned infant, through your campful of grinning yokels."

"I would not make sport of a brave man," I answered. "If you will give your word to stay with us, you shall walk between us."

"Willingly," said he, scrambling down and arranging his ruffled attire. "By my faith, sirs, ye have taught me a lesson not to think too meanly of mine enemies. I should have ridden with my troop had I thought that there was a chance of falling in with outposts or videttes."

"We were upon the hill before we cut you off," quoth Reuben. "Had that pistol ball been a thought straighter it is I that should have been truly the cut-off one. Zounds, Micah! I was grumbling even now that I had fallen away, but had my cheek been as round as of old the slug had been through it."

"Where have I seen you before?" asked our captive, bending his dark eyes upon me. "Aye, I have it! It was in the inn at Salisbury, where my light-headed comrade Horsford did draw upon an old soldier who was

riding with you. Mine own name is Ogilvy—Major Ogilvy of the Horse Guards Blue. I was right glad that ye did come off safely from the hounds. Some word had come of your errand after your departure, so this same Horsford with the Mayor and one or two other Tantivies, whose zeal methinks outran their humanity, slipped the dogs upon your trail."

"I remember you well," I answered. "You will find Colonel Decimus Saxon, my former companion, in the camp. No doubt you will be shortly exchanged for some prisoner of ours."

"Much more likely to have my throat cut," said he, with a smile. "I fear that Feversham in his present temper will scarce pause to make prisoners, and Monmouth may be tempted to pay him back in his own coin. Yet it is the fortune of war, and I should pay for my want of all soldierly caution. Truth to tell, my mind was far from battles and ruses at the moment, for it had wandered away to aqua regia and its action upon the metals, until your appearance brought me back to soldiership."

"The horse are out of sight," said Reuben, looking backwards, "ours as well as theirs. Yet I see a clump of men over yonder at the other side of the Avon, and there on the hillside can you not see the gleam of steel?"

"There are foot there," I answered, puckering my eyes. "It seems to me that I can discern four or five regiments and as many colours of horse. King Monmouth should know of this with all speed."

"He does know of it," said Reuben. "Yonder he stands under the trees with his council about him. See, one of them rides this way!"

A trooper had indeed detached himself from the group and galloped towards us. "If you are Captain Clarke, sir," he said, with a salute, "the King orders you to join his council."

"Then I leave the Major in your keeping, Reuben," I cried. "See that he hath what our means allow." So saying I spurred my horse, and soon joined the group

who were gathered round the King. There were Grey, Wade, Buyse, Ferguson, Saxon, Hollis, and a score more, all looking very grave, and peering down the valley with their glasses. Monmouth himself had dismounted, and was leaning against the trunk of a tree, with his arms folded upon his breast, and a look of white despair upon his face. Behind the tree a lacquey paced up and down leading his glossy black charger, who pranced and tossed his lordly mane, a very king among horses.

"You see, friends," said Monmouth, turning lack-lustre eyes from one leader to another, "Providence would seem to be against us. Some new mishap is ever at our heels."

"Not Providence, your Majesty, but our own negligence," cried Saxon boldly. "Had we advanced on Bristol last night, we might have been on the right side of the ramparts by now."

"But we had no thought that the enemy's foot was so near!" exclaimed Wade.

"I told ye what would come of it, and so did Oberst Buyse and the worthy Mayor of Taunton," Saxon answered. "However, there is nought to be gained by mourning over a broken pipkin. We must e'en piece it together as best we may."

"Let us advance on Bristol, and put oor trust in the Highest," quoth Ferguson. "If it be His mighty wull that we should tak' it, then shall we enter into it, yea, though drakes and sakers lay as thick as cobblestanes in the streets."

"Aye! aye! On to Bristol! God with us!" cried several of the Puritans excitedly.

"But it is madness—dummheit—utter foolishness," Buyse broke in hotly. "You have the chance and you will not take it. Now the chance is gone and you are all eager to go. Here is an army of, as near as I can judge, five thousand men on the right side of the river. We are on the wrong side, and yet you talk of crossing and making a beleaguering of Bristol without breaching-pieces

or spades, and with this force in our rear. Will the town make terms when they can see from their ramparts the van of the army which comes to help them? Or does it assist us in fighting the army to have a strong town beside us, from which horse and foot can make an outfall upon our flank? I say again that it is madness."

What the German soldier said was so clearly the truth that even the fanatics were silenced. Away in the east the long shimmering lines of steel, and the patches of scarlet upon the green hillside, were arguments which the most thoughtless could not overlook.

"What would you advise, then?" asked Monmouth moodily, tapping his jewelled riding-whip against his high boots.

"To cross the river and come to hand-grips with them ere they can get help from the town," the burly German answered bluntly. "I cannot understand what we are here for if it be not to fight. If we win, the town must fall. If we lose, we have had a bold stroke for it, and can do no more."

"Is that your opinion, too, Colonel Saxon?" the King asked.

"Assuredly, your Majesty, if we can fight to advantage. We can scarce do that, however, by crossing the river on a single narrow bridge in the face of such a force. I should advise that we destroy this Keynsham Bridge, and march down this southern bank in the hope of forcing a fight in a position which we may choose."

"We have not yet summoned Bath," said Wade. "Let us do as Colonel Saxon proposes, and let us in the meantime march in that direction and send a trumpet to the governor."

"There is yet another plan," quoth Sir Stephen Timewell, "which is to hasten to Gloucester, to cross the Severn there, and so march through Worcestershire into Shropshire and Cheshire. Your Majesty has many friends in those parts."

Monmouth paced up and down with his hand to his

forehead like one distrait. "What am I to do," he cried at last, "in the midst of all this conflicting advice, when I know that not only my own success but the lives of these poor faithful peasants and craftsmen depend upon my resolution?"

"With all humbleness, your Majesty," said Lord Grey, who had just returned with the horse, "I should suggest, since there are only a few troops of their cavalry on this side of the Avon, that we blow up the bridge and move onwards to Bath, whence we can pass into Wiltshire, which we know to be friendly."

"So be it!" cried the King, with the reckless air of one who accepts a plan, not because it is the best, but because he feels that all are equally hopeless. "What think you, gentlemen?" he added, with a bitter smile. "I have heard news from London this morning, that my uncle has clapped two hundred merchants and others who are suspected of being true to their creed into the Tower and the Fleet. He will have one-half of the nation mounting guard over the other half ere long."

"Or the whole, your Majesty, mounting guard over him," suggested Wade. "He may himself see the Traitor's Gate some of these mornings."

"Ha, ha! Think ye so? think ye so?" cried Monmouth, rubbing his hands and brightening into a smile. "Well, mayhap you have nicked the truth. Who knows? Henry's cause seemed a losing one until Bosworth Field settled the contention. To your charges, gentlemen. We shall march in half-an-hour. Colonel Saxon and you, Sir Stephen, shall cover the rear and guard the baggage—a service of honour with this fringe of horse upon our skirts."

The council broke up forthwith, every man riding off to his own regiment. The whole camp was in a stir, bugles blowing and drums rattling, until in a very short time the army was drawn up in order, and the forlorn of cavalry had already started along the road which leads to Bath. Five hundred horse with the Devonshire militiamen were in the van. After them in order came the

sailor regiment, the North Somerset men, the first Taunton regiment of burghers, the Mendip and Bagworthy miners, the lace- and wool-workers of Honiton, Wellington and Ottery St. Mary; the woodmen, the graziers, the marshmen and the men from the Quantock district. Behind were the guns and the baggage, with our own brigade and four colours of horse as a rearguard. On our march we could see the red-coats of Feversham keeping pace with us upon the other side of the Avon. A large body of his horse and dragoons had forded the stream and hovered upon our skirts, but Saxon and Sir Stephen covered the baggage so skilfully, and faced round so fiercely with such a snarl of musketry whenever they came too nigh, that they never ventured to charge home.

## 28. *Of the Fight in Wells Cathedral*

I AM fairly tied to the chariot-wheels of history now, my dear children, and must follow on with name and place and date, whether my tale suffer by it or no. With such a drama as this afoot it were impertinent to speak of myself, save in so far as I saw or heard what may make these old scenes more vivid to you. It is no pleasant matter for me to dwell upon, yet, convinced as I am that there is no such thing as chance either in the great or the little things of this world, I am very sure that the sacrifices of these brave men were not thrown away, and that their strivings were not as profitless as might at first sight appear. If the perfidious race of Stuart is not now seated upon the throne, and if religion in England is still a thing of free growth, we may, to my thinking, thank these Somerset yokels for it, who first showed how small a thing would shake the throne of an unpopular monarch. Monmouth's army was but the vanguard of that which marched three years later into London, when James and his cruel ministers were flying as outcasts over the face of the earth.

On the night of June 27, or rather early in the morning of June 28, we reached the town of Frome, very wet and miserable, for the rain had come on again, and all the roads were quagmires. From this next day we pushed on once more to Wells, where we spent the night and the whole of the next day, to give the men time to get their clothes dry, and to recover themselves after their privations.

In the forenoon a parade of our Wiltshire regiment was held in the Cathedral Close, when Monmouth praised it, as it well deserved, for the soldierly progress made in so short a time.

As we returned to our quarters after dismissing our men we came upon a great throng of the rough Bagworthy and Oare miners, who were assembled in the open space in front of the Cathedral, listening to one of their own number, who was addressing them from a cart. The wild and frenzied gestures of the man showed us that he was one of those extreme sectaries whose religion runs perilously near to madness. The hums and groans which rose from the crowd proved, however, that his fiery words were well suited to his hearers, so we halted on the verge of the multitude and hearkened to his address. A red-bearded, fierce-faced man he was, with tangled shaggy hair tumbling over his gleaming eyes, and a hoarse voice which resounded over the whole square.

"What shall we not do for the Lord?" he cried; "what shall we not do for the Holy of Holies? Why is it that His hand is heavy upon us? Why is it that we have not freed this land, even as Judith freed Bethulia? Behold, we have looked for peace but no good came, and for a time of health, and behold trouble! Why is this, I say? Truly, brothers, it is because we have slighted the Lord, because we have not been whole-hearted towards Him. Lo! we have praised Him with our breath, but in our deeds we have been cold towards Him. Ye know well that Prelacy is an accursed thing—a hissing and an abomination in the eyes of the Almighty! Yet what

have we, His servants, wrought for Him in this matter? Have we not seen Prelatist churches, churches of form and of show, where the creature is confounded with the Creator—have we not seen them, I say, and have we not forborne to sweep them away, and so lent our sanction to them? There is the sin of a lukewarm and backsliding generation! There is the cause why the Lord should look coldly upon His people! Lo! at Shepton and at Frome we have left such churches behind us. At Glastonbury, too, we have spared those wicked walls which were reared by idolatrous hands of old. Woe unto ye, if, after having put your hands to God's plough, ye turn back from the work! See there!" he howled, facing round to the beautiful Cathedral, "what means this great heap of stones? Is it not an altar of Baal? Is it not built for man-worship rather than God-worship? Is it not there that the man Ken, tricked out in his foolish rochet and baubles, may preach his soulless and lying doctrines, which are but the old dish of Popery served up under a new cover? And shall we suffer this thing? Shall we, the chosen children of the Great One, allow this plague-spot to remain? Can we expect the Almighty to help us when we will not stretch out a hand to help Him? We have left the other temples of Prelacy behind us. Shall we leave this one, too, my brothers?"

"No, no!" yelled the crowd, tossing and swaying.

"Shall we pluck it down, then, until no one stone is left upon another?"

"Yes, yes!" they shouted.

"Now, at once?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Then to work!" he cried, and springing from the cart he rushed towards the Cathedral, with the whole mob of wild fanatics at his heels. Some crowded in, shouting and yelling, through the open doors, while others swarmed up the pillars and pedestals of the front, hacking at the sculptured ornaments, and tugging at the grey old images which filled every niche.

"This must be stopped," said Saxon curtly. "We cannot afford to insult and estray the whole Church of England to please a few hot-headed ranters. The pillage of this Cathedral would do our cause more harm than a pitched battle lost. Do you bring up your company, Sir Gervas, and we shall do what we can to hold them in check until they come."

"Hi, Masterton!" cried the Baronet, spying one of his under-officers among the crowd who were looking on, neither assisting nor opposing the rioters. "Do you hasten to the quarters, and tell Barker to bring up the company with their matches burning. I may be of use here."

"Ha, here is Buyse!" cried Saxon joyously, as the huge German ploughed his way through the crowd. "And Lord Grey, too! We must save the Cathedral, my lord! They would sack and burn it."

"This way, gentlemen," cried an old grey-haired man, running out towards us with hands outspread, and a bunch of keys clanking at his girdle. "Oh hasten, gentlemen, if ye can indeed prevail over these lawless men! They have pulled down Saint Peter, and they will have Paul down too unless help comes. There will not be an apostle left. The east window is broken. They have brought a hogshead of beer, and are broaching it upon the high altar. Oh, alas, alas! that such things should be in a Christian land!" He sobbed aloud and stamped about in a very frenzy of grief.

"It is the verger, sirs," said one of the townsfolk. "He hath grown grey in the Cathedral."

"This way to the vestry door, my lords and gentlemen," cried the old man, pushing a way strenuously through the crowd. "Now, lack-a-day, the sainted Paul hath gone too!"

As he spoke a splintering crash from inside the Cathedral announced some fresh outrage on the part of the zealots. Our guide hastened on with renewed speed, until he came to a low oaken door heavily arched, which

he unlocked with much rasping of wards and creaking of hinges. Through this we sidled as best we might, and hurried after the old man down a stone-flagged corridor, which led through a wicket into the Cathedral close by the high altar.

The great building was full of the rioters, who were rushing hither and thither, destroying and breaking everything which they could lay their hands on. A good number of these were genuine zealots, the followers of the preacher whom we had listened to outside. Others, however, were on the face of them mere rogues and thieves such as gather round every army upon the march. While the former were tearing down images from the walls, or hurling the books of common prayer through the stained-glass windows, the others were rooting up the massive brass candlesticks, and carrying away everything which promised to be of value. One ragged fellow was in the pulpit, tearing off the crimson velvet and hurling it down among the crowd. Another had upset the reading-desk, and was busily engaged in wrenching off the brazen fastenings. In the centre of the side aisle a small group had a rope round the neck of Mark the Evangelist, and were dragging lustily upon it, until, even as we entered, the statue, after tottering for a few moments, came crashing down upon the marble floor. The shouts which greeted every fresh outrage, with the splintering of woodwork, the smashing of windows, and the clatter of falling masonry, made up a most deafening uproar, which was increased by the droning of the organ, until some of the rioters silenced it by slitting up the bellows.

What more immediately concerned ourselves was the scene which was being enacted just in front of us at the high altar. A barrel of beer had been placed upon it, and a dozen ruffians gathered round it, one of whom with many ribald jests had climbed up, and was engaged in knocking in the top of the cask with a hatchet. As we entered he had just succeeded in broaching it, and the brown mead was foaming over, while the mob with roars

of laughter were passing up their dippers and pannikins. The German soldier rapped out a rough jagged oath at this spectacle, and shouldering his way through the roisterers he sprang upon the altar. The ringleader was bending over his cask, black-jack in hand, when the soldier's iron grip fell upon his collar, and in a moment his heels were flapping in the air, and his head three feet deep in the cask, while the beer splashed and foamed in every direction. With a mighty heave Buyse picked up the barrel with the half-drowned miner inside, and hurled it clattering down the broad marble steps which led from the body of the church. At the same time, with the aid of a dozen of our men who had followed us into the Cathedral, we drove back the fellow's comrades, and thrust them out beyond the rails which divided the choir from the nave.

Our inroad had the effect of checking the riot, but it simply did so by turning the fury of the zealots from the walls and windows to ourselves. Images, stone-work and wood-carvings were all abandoned, and the whole swarm came rushing up with a hoarse buzz of rage, all discipline and order completely lost in their religious frenzy. "Smite the Prelatists!" they howled. "Down with the friends of Antichrist! Cut them off even at the horns of the altar! Down with them!" On either side they massed, a wild, half-demented crowd, some with arms and some without, but filled to a man with the very spirit of murder.

"This is a civil war within a civil war," said Lord Grey, with a quiet smile. "We had best draw, gentlemen, and defend the gap in the rails, if we may hold it good until help arrives." He flashed out his rapier as he spoke, and took his stand on the top of the steps, with Saxon and Sir Gervas upon one side of him, Buyse, Reuben and myself upon the other. There was only room for six to wield their weapons with effect, so our scanty band of followers scattered themselves along the line of the rails, which were luckily so high and strong

as to make an escalado difficult in the face of any opposition.

The riot had now changed into open mutiny among these marshmen and miners. Pikes, scythes and knives glimmered through the dim light, while their wild cries re-echoed from the high arched roof like the howling of a pack of wolves. "Go forward, my brothers," cried the fanatic preacher who had been the cause of the outbreak —"go forward against them! What though they be in high places! There is One who is higher than they. Shall we shrink from His work because of a naked sword? Shall we suffer the Prelatist altar to be preserved by these sons of Amalek? On, on! In the name of the Lord!"

"In the name of the Lord!" cried the crowd, with a sort of hissing gasp, like one who is about to plunge into an icy bath. "In the name of the Lord!" From either side they came on, gathering speed and volume, until at last with a wild cry they surged right down upon our sword-points.

I can say nothing of what took place to right or left of me during the ruffle, for indeed there were so many pressing upon us, and the fight was so hot, that it was all that each of us could do to hold our own. The very number of our assailants was in our favour, by hampering their sword-arms. One burly miner cut fiercely at me with his scythe, but missing me he swung half round with the force of the blow, and I passed my sword through his body before he could recover himself. It was the first time that I had ever slain a man in anger, my dear children, and I shall never forget his white startled face as he looked over his shoulder at me ere he fell. Another closed in with me before I could get my weapon disengaged, but I struck him out with my left hand, and then brought the flat of my sword upon his head, laying him senseless upon the pavement. God knows, I did not wish to take the lives of the misguided and ignorant zealots, but our own were at stake. A marshman, looking more like a shaggy wild beast than a

human being, darted under my weapon and caught me round the knees, while another brought a flail down upon my headpiece, from which it glanced on to my shoulder. A third thrust at me with a pike, and pricked me on the thigh, but I shore his weapon in two with one blow, and split his head with the next. The man with the flail gave back at sight of this, and a kick freed me from the unarmed ape-like creature at my feet, so that I found myself clear of my assailants, and none the worse for my encounter, save for a touch on the leg and some stiffness of the neck and shoulder.

Looking round I found that my comrades had also beaten off those who were opposed to them. Saxon was holding his bloody rapier in his left hand, while the blood was trickling from a slight wound upon his right. Two miners lay across each other in front of him, but at the feet of Sir Gervas Jerome no fewer than four bodies were piled together. He had plucked out his snuff-box as I glanced at him, and was offering it with a bow and a flourish to Lord Grey, as unconcernedly as though he were back once more in his London coffee-house. Buyse leaned upon his long broadsword, and looked gloomily at a headless trunk in front of him, which I recognised from the dress as being that of the preacher. As to Reuben, he was unhurt himself, but in sore distress over my own trifling scar, though I assured the faithful lad that it was a less thing than many a tear from branch or thorn which we had had when blackberrying together.

The fanatics, though driven back, were not men to be content with a single repulse. They had lost ten of their number, including their leader, without being able to break our line, but the failure only served to increase their fury. For a minute or so they gathered panting in the aisle. Then with a mad yell they dashed in once more, and made a desperate effort to cut a way through to the altar. It was a fiercer and more prolonged struggle than before. One of our followers was stabbed to the heart over the rails, and fell without a groan. Another was

stunned by a mass of masonry hurled at him by a giant cragsman. Reuben was felled by a club, and would have been dragged out and hacked to pieces had I not stood over him and beaten off his assailants. Sir Gervas was borne off his legs by the rush, but lay like a wounded wildcat, striking out furiously at everything which came within his reach. Buyse and Saxon, back to back, stood firm amidst the seething, rushing crowd, cutting down every man within sweep of their swords. Yet in such a struggle numbers must in the end prevail, and I confess that I for one had begun to have fears for the upshot of our contest, when the heavy tramp of disciplined feet rang through the Cathedral, and the Baronet's musqueteers came at a quick run up the central aisle. The fanatics did not await their charge, but darted off over benches and pews, followed by our allies, who were furious on seeing their beloved Captain upon the ground. There was a wild minute or two, with confused shuffling of feet, stabs, groans and the clatter of musket butts on the marble floor. Of the rioters some were slain, but the greater part threw down their arms and were arrested at the command of Lord Grey, while a strong guard was placed at the gates to prevent any fresh outburst of sectarian fury.

When at last the Cathedral was cleared and order restored, we had time to look around us and to reckon our own injuries. In all my wanderings, and the many wars in which I afterwards fought—wars compared to which this affair of Monmouth's was but the merest skirmish—I have never seen a stranger or more impressive scene. In the dim, solemn light the pile of bodies in front of the rails, with their twisted limbs and white-set faces, had a most sad and ghost-like aspect. The evening light, shining through one of the few unbroken stained-glass windows, cast great splotches of vivid crimson and of sickly green upon the heap of motionless figures. A few wounded men sat about in the front pews or lay upon the steps moaning for water. Of our own small company

not one had escaped unscathed. Three of our followers had been slain outright, while a fourth was lying stunned from a blow. Buyse and Sir Gervas were much bruised. Saxon was cut on the right arm. Reuben had been felled by a bludgeon stroke, and would certainly have been slain but for the fine temper of Sir Jacob Clancing's breastplate, which had turned a fierce pike-thrust. As to myself it is scarce worth the mention, but my head sang for some hours like a good wife's kettle, and my boot was full of blood, which may have been a blessing in disguise, for Sneckson, our Havant barber, was ever dinning into my ears how much the better I should be for a phlebotomy.

In the meantime all the troops had assembled and the mutiny been swiftly stamped out. There were doubtless many among the Puritans who had no love for the Prelatists, but none save the most crack-brained fanatics could fail to see that the sacking of the Cathedral would set the whole Church of England in arms, and ruin the cause for which they were fighting. As it was, much damage had been done ; for whilst the gang within had been smashing all which they could lay their hands upon, others outside had chipped off cornices and gargoyles, and had even dragged the lead covering from the roof and hurled it down in great sheets to their companions beneath. This last led to some profit, for the army had no great store of ammunition, so the lead was gathered up by Monmouth's orders and recast into bullets. The prisoners were held in custody for a time, but it was deemed unwise to punish them, so that they were finally pardoned and dismissed from the army.

A parade of our whole force was held in the fields outside the town upon the second day of our stay at Wells, the weather having at last become warm and sunny. The foot was then found to muster six regiments of nine hundred men, or five thousand four hundred in all. Of these fifteen hundred were musqueteers, two thousand were pikemen, and the rest were scythesmen or peasants with flails and hammers. A few bodies, such as our own

or those from Taunton, might fairly lay claim to be soldiers, but the most of them were still labourers and craftsmen with weapons in their hands. Yet, ill-armed and ill-drilled as they were, they were still strong robust Englishmen, full of native courage and of religious zeal. The light and fickle Monmouth began to take heart once more at the sight of their sturdy bearing, and at the sound of their hearty cheers. I heard him as I sat my horse beside his staff speak exultantly to those around him, and ask whether these fine fellows could possibly be beaten by mercenary half-hearted hirelings.

"What say you, Wade?" he cried. "Are we never to see a smile on that sad face of yours? Do you not see a woolsack in store for you as you look upon these brave fellows?"

"God forbid that I should say a word to damp your Majesty's ardour," the lawyer answered; "yet I cannot but remember that there was a time when your Majesty, at the head of these same hirelings, did drive men as brave as these in headlong rout from Bothwell Bridge."

"True, true!" said the King, passing his hand over his forehead—a favourite motion when he was worried and annoyed. "They were bold men, the western Covenanters, yet they could not stand against the rush of our battalions. But they had had no training, whereas these can fight in line and fire a platoon as well as one would wish to see."

"If we hadna a gun nor a patronal among us," said Ferguson, "if we hadna sae muckle as a sword, but just oor ain honds, yet would the Lard gie us the victory, if it seemed good in His a'-seeing een."

"All battles are but chance work, your Majesty," remarked Saxon, whose sword-arm was bound round with his kerchief. "Some lucky turn, some slip or chance which none can foresee, is ever likely to turn the scale. I have lost when I have looked to win, and I have won when I have looked to lose. It is an uncertain game, and one never knows the finish till the last card is played."

"Not till the stakes are drawn," said Buyse, in his deep guttural voice. "There is many a leader that wins what you call the trick, and yet loses the game."

"The trick being the battle and the game the campaign," quoth the King, with a smile. "Our German friend is a master of camp-fire metaphors. But methinks our poor horses are in a sorry state. What would cousin William over at The Hague, with his spruce guards, think of such a show as this?"

During this talk the long column of foot had tramped past, still bearing the banners which they had brought with them to the wars, though much the worse for wind and weather. Monmouth's remarks had been drawn forth by the aspect of the ten troops of horse which followed. The chargers had been sadly worn by the continued work and constant rain, while the riders, having allowed their caps and fronts to get coated with rust, appeared to be in as bad a plight as their steeds. It was clear to the least experienced of us that if we were to hold our own it was upon our foot that we must rely. On the tops of the low hills all round the frequent shimmer of arms, glancing here and there when the sun's rays struck upon them, showed how strong our enemies were in the very point in which we were so weak. Yet in the main this Wells review was cheering to us, as showing that the men kept in good heart, and that there was no ill-feeling at the rough handling of the zealots upon the day before.

The enemy's horse hovered about us during these days, but the foot had been delayed through the heavy weather and the swollen streams. On the last day of June we marched out of Wells, and made our way across flat sedgy plains and over the low Polden Hills to Bridgewater, where we found some few recruits awaiting us. Here Monmouth had some thoughts of making a stand, and even set to work raising earthworks, but it was pointed out to him that, even could he hold the town, there was not more than a few days' provisions within it, while the

country round had been already swept so bare that little more could be expected from it. The works were therefore abandoned, and, fairly driven to bay, without a loophole of escape left, we awaited the approach of the enemy.

## 29. *Of the Great Cry from the Lonely House*

AND so our weary marching and counter-marching came at last to an end, and we found ourselves with our backs fairly against the wall, and the whole strength of the Government turned against us. Not a word came to us of a rising or movement in our favour in any part of England. Everywhere the Dissenters were cast into prison and the Church dominant. From north and east and west the militia of the counties was on its march against us. In London six regiments of Dutch troops had arrived as a loan from the Prince of Orange. Others were said to be on their way. The City had enrolled ten thousand men. Everywhere there was mustering and marching to succour the flower of the English army, which was already in Somersetshire. And all for the purpose of crushing some five or six thousand clodhoppers and fishermen, half-armed and penniless, who were ready to throw their lives away for a man and for an idea.

But this idea, my dear children, was a noble one, and one which a man might very well sacrifice all for, and yet feel that all was well spent. For though these poor peasants, in their dumb, blundering fashion, would have found it hard to give all their reasons in words, yet in the inmost heart of them they knew and felt that it was England's cause which they were fighting for, and that they were upholding their country's true self against those who would alter the old systems under which she had led the nations. Three more years made all this very plain, and showed that our simple unlettered followers had seen and judged the signs of the times more correctly than

those who called themselves their betters. There are, to my thinking, stages of human progress for which the Church of Rome is admirably suited. Where the mind of a nation is young, it may be best that it should not concern itself with spiritual affairs, but should lean upon the old staff of custom and authority. But England had cast off her swaddling-clothes, and was a nursery of strong, thinking men, who would bow to no authority save that which their reason and conscience approved. It was hopeless, useless, foolish, to try to drive such men back into a creed which they had outgrown. Such an attempt was, however, being made, backed by all the weight of a bigoted king with a powerful and wealthy Church as his ally. In three years the nation would understand it, and the King would be flying from his angry people ; but at present, sunk in a torpor after the long civil wars and the corrupt reign of Charles, they failed to see what was at stake, and turned against those who would warn them, as a hasty man turns on the messenger who is the bearer of evil tidings. Is it not strange, my dears, how quickly a mere shadowy thought comes to take living form, and grow into a very tragic reality ? At one end of the chain is a king brooding over a point of doctrine ; at the other are six thousand desperate men, chivied and chased from shire to shire, standing to bay at last amid the bleak Bridgewater marshes, with their hearts as bitter and as hopeless as those of hunted beasts of prey. A king's theology is a dangerous thing for his subjects.

But if the idea for which these poor men fought was a worthy one, what shall we say of the man who had been chosen as the champion of their cause ? Alas, that such men should have had such a leader ! Swinging from the heights of confidence to the depths of despair, choosing his future council of state one day and proposing to fly from the army on the next, he appeared from the start to be possessed by the very spirit of fickleness. Yet he had borne a fair name before this enterprise. In Scotland he had won golden opinions, not only for his success, but

for the moderation and mercy with which he treated the vanquished. On the Continent he had commanded an English brigade in a way that earned praise from old soldiers of Louis and the Empire. Yet now, when his own head and his own fortunes were at stake, he was feeble, irresolute, and cowardly. In my father's phrase, "all the virtue had gone out of him." I declare when I have seen him riding among his troops, with his head bowed upon his breast and a face like a mute at a burying, casting an air of gloom and of despair all round him, I have felt that, even in case of success, such a man could never wear the crown of the Tudors and the Plantagenets, but that some stronger hand, were it that of one of his own generals, would wrest it from him.

I will do Monmouth the justice to say that from the time when it was at last decided to fight—for the very good reason that no other course was open—he showed up in a more soldierly and manlier spirit. For the first few days in July no means were neglected to hearten our troops and to nerve them for the coming battle. From morning to night we were at work, teaching our foot how to form up in dense groups to meet the charge of horse, and how to depend upon each other, and look to their officers for orders. At night the streets of the little town from the Castle Field to the Parret Bridge resounded with the praying and the preaching. There was no need for the officers to quell irregularities, for the troops punished them amongst themselves. One man who came out on the streets hot with wine was well-nigh hanged by his companions, who finally cast him out of the town as being unworthy to fight in what they looked upon as a sacred quarrel. As to their courage, there was no occasion to quicken that, for they were as fearless as lions, and the only danger was lest their fiery daring should lead them into foolhardiness. Their desire was to hurl themselves upon the enemy like a horde of Moslem fanatics, and it was no easy matter to drill such hot-headed fellows into the steadiness and caution which war demands.

Provisions ran low upon the third day of our stay in Bridgewater, which was due to our having exhausted that part of the country before, and also to the vigilance of the Royal Horse, who scoured the district round and cut off our supplies. Lord Grey determined, therefore, to send out two troops of horse under cover of night, to do what they could to refill the larder. The command of the small expedition was given over to Major Martin Hooker, an old Lifeguardsman of rough speech and curt manners, who had done good service in drilling the headstrong farmers and yeomen into some sort of order. Sir Gervas Jerome and I asked leave from Lord Grey to join the foray—a favour which was readily granted, since there was little stirring in the town.

It was about eleven o'clock on a moonless night that we sallied out of Bridgewater, intending to explore the country in the direction of Boroughbridge and Athelney. We had word that there was no large body of the enemy in that quarter, and it was a fertile district where good store of supplies might be hoped for. We took with us four empty waggons, to carry whatever we might have the luck to find. Our commander arranged that one troop should ride before these and one behind, while a small advance party, under the charge of Sir Gervas, kept some hundreds of paces in front. In this order we clattered out of the town, just as the late bugles were blowing, and swept away down the quiet shadowy roads, bringing anxious peering faces to the casements of the wayside cottages as we whirled past in the darkness.

That ride comes very clearly before me as I think of it. The dark loom of the club-headed willows flitting by us, the moaning of the breeze among the withies, the vague, blurred figures of the troopers, the dull thud of the hoofs, and the jingling of scabbard against stirrup—eye and ear can both conjure up those old-time memories. The Baronet and I rode in front, knee against knee, and his light-hearted chatter of life in town, with his little snatches of verse or song from Cowley or Waller, were

a very balm of Gilead to my sombre and somewhat heavy spirit.

"Life is indeed life on such a night as this," quoth he, as we breathed in the fresh country air with the reeks of crops and of kine. "Rabbit me! but you are to be envied, Clarke, for having been born and bred in the country! What pleasures has the town to offer compared to the free gifts of nature, provided always that there be a perruquier's and a snuff merchant's, and a scent vendor's, and one or two tolerable outfitters within reach? With these and a good coffee-house and a playhouse, I think I could make shift to lead a simple pastoral life for some months."

"In the country," said I, laughing, "we have ever the feeling that the true life of mankind, with the growth of knowledge and wisdom, are being wrought out in the towns."

"Ventre Saint-Gris! It was little knowledge or wisdom that I acquired there," he answered. "Truth to tell, I have lived more and learned more during these few weeks that we have been sliding about in the rain with our ragged lads, than ever I did when I was page of the court, with the ball of fortune at my feet. It is a sorry thing for a mans' mind to have nothing higher to dwell upon than the turning of a compliment or the dancing of a corranto. Zounds, lad! I have your friend the carpenter to thank for much. As he says in his letter, unless a man can get the good that is in him out, he is of less value in the world than one of those fowls that we hear cackling, for they at least fulfil their mission, if it be only to lay eggs. Ged, it is a new creed for me to be preaching!"

"But," said I, "when you were a wealthy man you must have been of service to someone, for how could one spend so much money and yet none be the better?"

"You dear bucolic Micah!" he cried, with a gay laugh. "You will ever speak of my poor fortune with bated breath and in an awestruck voice, as though it were the wealth of the Indies. You cannot think, lad, how easy

it is for a money-bag to take unto itself wings and fly. It is true that the man who spends it doth not consume the money, but passes it on to someone who profits thereby. Yet the fault lies in the fact that it was to the wrong folk that we passed our money, thereby breeding a useless and debauched class at the expense of honest callings. Od's fish, lad! when I think of the swarms of needy beggars, the lecherous pimps, the nose-slitting bullies, the toadies and the flatterers who were reared by us, I feel that in hatching such a poisonous brood our money hath done what no money can undo. Have I not seen them thirty deep of a morning when I have held my levée, cringing up to my bedside——"

"Your bedside!" I exclaimed.

"Aye! it was the mode to receive in bed, attired in laced cambric shirt and periwig, though afterwards it was permitted to sit up in your chamber, but dressed *à la négligence*, in gown and slippers. The mode is a terrible tyrant, Clarke, though its arm may not extend as far as Havant. The idle man of the town must have some rule of life, so he becomes a slave to the law of the fashions. No man in London was more subject to it than myself. I was regular in my irregularities, and orderly in my disorders. At eleven o'clock to the stroke, up came my valet with the morning cup of hippocras, an excellent thing for the qualms, and some slight refection, as the breast of an ortolan or wing of a widgeon. Then came the levée, twenty, thirty or forty of the class I have spoken of, though now and then perhaps there might be some honest case of want among them, some needy man-of-letters in quest of a guinea, or pupil-less pedant with much ancient leaning in his head and very little modern coinage in his pocket. It was not only that I had some power of mine own, but I was known to have the ear of my Lord Halifax, Sidney Godolphin, Lawrence Hyde and others whose will might make or mar a man. Mark you those lights upon the left! Would it not be well to see if there is not something to be had there?"

"Hooker hath orders to proceed to a certain farm," I answered. "This we could take upon our return should we still have space. We shall be back here before morning."

"We must get supplies, if I have to ride back to Surrey for them," said he. "Rat me, if I dare look my musqueteers in the face again unless I bring them something to toast upon the end of their ramrods! They had little more savoury than their own bullets to put in their mouths when I left them. But I was speaking of old days in London. Our time was well filled. Should a man of quality incline to sport there was ever something to attract him. He might see sword-playing at Hockley, or cocking at Shoe Lane, or baiting at Southwark, or shooting at Tothill Fields. Again, he might walk in the physic gardens of St. James's, or go down the river with the ebb tide to the cherry orchards at Rotherhithe, or drive to Islington to drink the cream, or, above all, walk in the Park, which is most modish for a gentleman who dresses in the fashion. You see, Clarke, that we were active in our idleness, and that there was no lack of employment. Then as evening came on there were the playhouses to draw us, Dorset Gardens, Lincoln's Inn, Drury Lane and the Queen's—among the four there was ever some amusement to be found."

"There, at least, your time was well employed," said I; "you could not hearken to the grand thoughts or lofty words of Shakespeare or of Massinger without feeling some image of them in your own soul."

Sir Gervas chuckled quietly. "You are as fresh to me, Micah, as this sweet country air," said he. "Know, thou dear babe, that it was not to see the play that we frequented the playhouse."

"Then, why, in Heaven's name?" I asked.

"To see each other," he answered. "It was the mode, I assure you, for a man of fashion to stand with his back turned to the stage from the rise of the curtain to the fall of it. There were the orange wenches to quiz—plaguy sharp of tongue the hussies are, too—and there were the

vizards of the pit, whose little black masks did invite inquiry, and there were the beauties of the town and the toasts of the Court, all fair mark for our quizzing-glasses. Play, indeed ! S'bud, we had something better to do than to listen to alexandrines or weigh the merits of hexameters ! 'Tis true that if La Jeune were dancing, or if Mrs. Bracegirdle or Mrs. Oldfield came upon the boards, we would hum and clap, but it was the fine woman that we applauded rather than the actress."

" And when the play was over you went doubtless to supper and so to bed ? "

" To supper, certainly. Sometimes to the Rhenish House, sometimes to Pontack's in Abchurch Lane. Everyone had his own taste in that matter. Then there were dice and cards at the Groom Porter's or under the arches at Covent Garden, piquet, passage, hazard, primero —what you choose. After that you could find all the world at the coffee-houses, where an arrière supper was often served with devilled bones and prunes, to drive the fumes of wine from the head. Zounds, Micah ! if the Jews should relax their pressure, or if this war brings us any luck, you shall come to town with me and shall see all these things for yourself."

" Truth to tell, it doth not tempt me much," I answered. " Slow and solemn I am by nature, and in such scenes as you have described I should feel a very death's head at a banquet."

Sir Gervas was about to reply, when of a sudden out of the silence of the night there rose a long-drawn piercing scream, which thrilled through every nerve of our bodies. I have never heard such a wail of despair. We pulled up our horses, as did the troopers behind us, and strained our ears for some sign as to whence the sound proceeded, for some were of opinion that it came from our right and some from our left. The main body with the waggons had come up, and we all listened intently for any return of the terrible cry. Presently it broke upon us again, wild, shrill and agonised : the scream of a woman in mortal distress.

" 'Tis over there, Major Hooker," cried Sir Gervas,

standing up in his stirrups and peering through the darkness. "There is a house about two fields off. I can see some glimmer, as from a window with the blind drawn."

"Shall we not make for it at once?" I asked impatiently, for our commander sat stolidly upon his horse as though by no means sure what course he should pursue.

"I am here, Captain Clarke," said he, "to convey supplies to the army, and I am by no means justified in turning from my course to pursue other adventures."

"Death, man! there is a woman in distress," cried Sir Gervas. "Why, Major, you would not ride past and let her call in vain for help? Hark, there she is again!" As he spoke the wild scream rang out once more from the lonely house.

"Nay, I can abide this no longer," I cried, my blood boiling in my veins; "do you go on your errand, Major Hooker, and my friend and I shall leave you here. We shall know how to justify our action to the King. Come, Sir Gervas!"

"Mark ye, this is flat mutiny, Captain Clarke," said Hooker; "you are under my orders, and should you desert me you do so at your peril."

"In such a case I care not a groat for thy orders," I answered hotly. Turning Covenant I spurred down a narrow, deeply-rutted lane which led towards the house, followed by Sir Gervas and two or three of the troopers. At the same moment I heard a sharp word of command from Hooker and the creaking of wheels, showing that he had indeed abandoned us and proceeded on his mission.

"He is right," quoth the Baronet, as we rode down the lane; "Saxon or any other old soldier would commend his discipline."

"There are things which are higher than discipline," I muttered. "I could not pass on and leave this poor soul in her distress. But see—what have we here?"

A dark mass loomed in front of us, which proved as we approached to be four horses fastened by their bridles to the hedge.

"Cavalry horses, Captain Clarke!" cried one of the troopers who had sprung down to examine them. "They have the Government saddle and holsters. Here is a wooden gate which opens on a pathway leading to the house."

"We had best dismount, then," said Sir Gervas, jumping down and tying his horse beside the others. "Do you, lads, stay by the horses, and if we call for ye come to our aid. Sergeant Holloway, you can come with us. Bring your pistols with you!"

## 30. *Of the Swordsman with the Brown Jacket*

THE sergeant, who was a great raw-boned west-countryman, pushed the gate open, and we were advancing up the winding pathway, when a stream of yellow light flooded out from a suddenly opened door, and we saw a dark squat figure dart through it into the inside of the house. At the same moment there rose up a babel of sounds, followed by two pistol shots, and a roaring, gasping hubbub, with clash of swords and storm of oaths. At this sudden uproar we all three ran at our topmost speed up the pathway and peered in through the open door, where we saw a scene such as I shall never forget while this old memory of mine can conjure up any picture of the past.

The room was large and lofty, with long rows of hams and salted meats dangling from the smoke-browned rafters, as is usual in Somersetshire farmhouses. A high black clock ticked in a corner, and a rude table, with plates and dishes laid out as for a meal, stood in the centre. Right in front of the door a great fire of wood faggots was blazing, and before this, to our unutterable horror, there hung a man head downwards, suspended by a rope which was knotted round his ankles, and which, passing over a hook in a beam, had been made fast to a ring in the floor. The struggles of this unhappy man had caused the rope

to whirl round, so that he was spinning in front of the blaze like a joint of meat. Across the threshold lay a woman, the one whose cries had attracted us, but her rigid face and twisted body showed that our aid had come too late to save her from the fate which she had seen impending. Close by her two swarthy dragoons in the glaring red coats of the Royal army lay stretched across each other upon the floor, dark and scowling even in death. In the centre of the room two other dragoons were cutting and stabbing with their broadswords at a thick, short, heavy-shouldered man, clad in coarse brown kersey stuff, who sprang about among the chairs and round the table with a long basket-hilted rapier in his hand, parrying or dodging their blows with wonderful adroitness, and every now and then putting in a thrust in return. Hard pressed as he was, his set resolute face, firm mouth, and bright well-opened eyes spoke of a bold spirit within, while the blood which dripped from the sleeve of one of his opponents proved that the contest was not so unequal as it might appear. Even as we gazed he sprang back to avoid a fierce rush of the furious soldiers, and by a quick sharp side-stroke he severed the rope by which the victim was hung. The body fell with a heavy thud upon the brick floor, while the little swordsman danced off in a moment into another quarter of the room, still stopping or avoiding with the utmost ease and skill the shower of blows which rained upon him.

This strange scene held us spell-bound for a few seconds, but there was no time for delay, for a slip or trip would prove fatal to the gallant stranger. Rushing into the chamber, sword in hand, we fell upon the dragoons, who, outnumbered as they were, backed into a corner and struck out fiercely, knowing that they need expect no mercy after the devil's work in which they had been engaged. Holloway, our sergeant of horse, springing furiously in, laid himself open to a thrust which stretched him dead upon the ground. Before the dragoon could disengage his weapon, Sir Gervas cut him down, while at

the same moment the stranger got past the guard of his antagonist, and wounded him mortally in the throat. Of the four red-coats not one escaped alive, while the bodies of our sergeant and of the old couple who had been the first victims increased the horror of the scene.

"Poor Holloway is gone," said I, placing my hand over his heart. "Who ever saw such a shambles? I feel sick and ill."

"Here is eau-de-vie, if I mistake not," cried the stranger, clambering up on a chair and reaching a bottle from the shelf. "Good, too, by the smell. Take a sup, for you are as white as a new-bleached sheet."

"Honest warfare I can abide, but scenes like this make my blood run cold," I answered, taking a gulp from the flask. I was a very young soldier then, my dears, but I confess that to the end of my campaigns any form of cruelty had the same effect upon me. I give you my word that when I went to London last fall the sight of an overworked, raw-backed cart-horse straining with its load, and flogged for not doing that which it could not do, gave me greater qualms than did the field of Sedgemoor, or that greater day when ten thousand of the flower of France lay stretched before the earthworks of Landen.

"The woman is dead," said Sir Gervas, "and the man is also, I fear, past recovery. He is not burned, but suffers, I should judge, poor devil! from the rush of blood to the head."

"If that be all it may well be cured," remarked the stranger; and taking a small knife from his pocket, he rolled up the old man's sleeve and opened one of his veins. At first only a few sluggish black drops oozed from the wound, but presently the blood began to flow more freely, and the injured man showed signs of returning sense.

"He will live," said the little swordsman, putting his lancet back in his pocket. "And now, who may you be to whom I owe this interference which shortened the affair, though mayhap the result would have been the same had you left us to settle it amongst ourselves?"

"We are from Monmouth's army," I answered. "He lies at Bridgewater, and we are scouting and seeking supplies."

"And who are you?" asked Sir Gervas. "And how came you into this ruffle? S'bud, you are a game little rooster to fight four such great cockerels!"

"My name is Hector Marot," the man answered, cleaning out his empty pistols and very carefully reloading them. "As to who I am, it is a matter of small moment. Suffice it that I have helped to lessen Kirke's horse by four of his rogues. Mark their faces, so dusky and sun-dried even in death. These men have learned warfare fighting against the heathen in Africa, and now they practise on poor harmless English folk the devil's tricks which they have picked up amongst the savages. The Lord help Monmouth's men should they be beaten! These vermin are more to be feared than hangman's cord or headsman's axe."

"But how did you chance upon the spot at the very nick of time?" I asked.

"Why, marry, I was jogging down the road on my mare when I heard the clatter of hoofs behind me, and concealing myself in a field, as a prudent man would while the country is in its present state, I saw these four rogues gallop past. They made their way up to the farmhouse here, and presently from cries and other tokens I knew what manner of hell-fire business they had on hand. On that I left my mare in the field and ran up, when I saw them through the casement, tricing the good man up in front of his fire to make him confess where his wealth lay hidden, though indeed it is my own belief that neither he nor any other farmer in these parts hath any wealth left to hide, after two armies have been quartered in turn upon them. Finding that his mouth remained closed, they ran him up, as you saw, and would assuredly have toasted him like a snipe, had I not stepped in and winged two of them with my barkers. The others set upon me, but I pinked one through the forearm, and should doubt-

less have given a good account of both of them but for your incoming."

"Right gallantly done!" I exclaimed. "But where have I heard your name before, Mr. Hector Marot?"

"Nay," he answered, with a sharp, sidelong look, "I cannot tell that."

"It is familiar to mine ear," said I.

He shrugged his broad shoulders, and continued to look to the priming of his pistols, with a half-defiant and half-uneasy expression. He was a very sturdy, deep-chested man, with a stern, square-jawed face, and a white seam across his bronzed forehead as from a slash with a knife. He wore a gold-edged riding-cap, a jacket of brown sad-coloured stuff much stained by the weather, a pair of high rusty jack-boots, and a small bob-wig.

Sir Gervas, who had been staring very hard at the man, suddenly gave a start, and slapped his hand against his leg.

"Of course!" he cried. "Sink me, if I could remember where I had seen your face, but now it comes back to me very clearly."

The man glanced doggedly from under his bent brows at each of us in turn. "It seems that I have fallen among acquaintances," he said gruffly; "yet I have no memory of ye. Methinks, young sirs, that your fancy doth play ye false."

"Not a whit," the Baronet answered quietly, and, bending forward, he whispered a few words into the man's ear, which caused him to spring from his seat and take a couple of quick strides forward, as though to escape from the house.

"Nay, nay!" cried Sir Gervas, springing between him and the door, "you shall not run away from us. Pshaw, man! never lay your hand upon your sword. We have had bloody work enough for one night. Besides, we would not harm you."

"What mean ye, then? What would ye have?" he asked, glancing about like some fierce wild beast in a trap.

"I have a most kindly feeling to you, man, after this

night's work," cried Sir Gervas. "What is it to me how ye pick up a living, as long as you are a true man at heart? Let me perish if I ever forget a face which I have once seen, and your bonne mine, with the trade-mark upon your forehead, is especially hard to overlook."

"Suppose I be the same? What then?" the man asked suddenly.

"There is no suppose in the matter. I could swear to you. But I would not, lad—not if I caught you red-handed. You must know, Clarke, since there is none to overhear us, that in the old days I was a Justice of the Peace in Surrey, and that our friend here was brought up before me on a charge of riding somewhat late o' night, and of being plaguy short with travellers. You will understand me. He was referred to assizes, but got away in the meanwhile, and so saved his neck. Right glad I am of it, for you will agree with me that he is too proper a man to give a tight-rope dance at Tyburn."

"And I remember well now where I have heard your name," said I. "Were you not a captive in the Duke of Beaufort's prison at Badminton, and did you not succeed in escaping from the old Boteler dungeon?"

"Nay, gentlemen," he replied, seating himself on the edge of the table, and carelessly swinging his legs, "since ye know so much it would be folly for me to attempt to deceive ye. I am indeed the same Hector Marot who hath made his name a terror on the great Western road, and who hath seen the inside of more prisons than any man in the south. With truth, however, I can say that though I have been ten years upon the roads, I have never yet taken a groat from the poor, or injured any man who did not wish to injure me. On the contrary, I have often risked life and limb to save those who were in trouble."

"We can bear you out in that," I answered, "for if these four red-coat devils have paid the price of their crimes, it is your doing rather than ours."

"Nay, I can take little credit for that," our new acquaintance answered. "Indeed, I had other scores to

settle with Colonel Kirke's horse, and was but too glad to have this breather with them."

Whilst we were talking the men whom we had left with the horses had come up, together with some of the neighbouring farmers and cottagers, who were aghast at the scene of slaughter, and much troubled in their minds over the vengeance which might be exacted by the Royal troops next day.

"For Christ's zake, zur," cried one of them, an old ruddy-faced countryman, "move the bodies o' these soldier rogues into the road, and let it zeem as how they have perished in a chance fight wi' your own troopers loike. Should it be known as they have met their end within a varmhouse, there will not be a thatch left unlighted over t' whole countryside; as it is, us can scarce keep these murthering Tangiers devils from oor throats."

"His request is in reason," said the highwayman bluntly. "We have no right to have our fun, and then go our way leaving others to pay the score."

"Well, hark ye," said Sir Gervas, turning to the group of frightened rustics. "I'll strike a bargain with ye over the matter. We have come out for supplies, and can scarce go back empty-handed. If ye will among ye provide us with a cart, filling it with such breadstuffs and greens as ye may, with a dozen bullocks as well, we shall not only screen ye in this matter, but I shall promise payment at fair market rates if ye will come to the Protestant camp for the money."

"I'll spare the bullocks," quoth the old man whom we had rescued, who was now sufficiently recovered to sit up. "Zince my poor dame is foully murthered it matters little to me what becomes o' the stock. I shall zee her laid in Durston graveyard, and shall then vollow you to t' camp, where I shall die happy if I can but rid the earth o' one more o' these incarnate devils."

"You say well, gaffer!" cried Hector Marot; "you show the true spirit. Methinks I see an old birding-piece on yonder hooks, which, with a brace of slugs in it and a

bold man behind it, might bring down one of these fine birds for all their gay feathers."

"Her's been a true mate to me for mor'n thirty year," said the old man, the tears coursing down his wrinkled cheeks. "Thirty zeed-toimes and thirty harvests we've worked together. But this is a zeed-toime which shall have a harvest o' blood if my right hand can compass it."

"If you go to t' wars, Gaffer Swain, we'll look to your homestead," said the farmer who had spoken before. "As to t' green stuffs as this gentleman asks for he shall have not one wainload but three, if he will but gi' us half-an-hour to fill them up. If he does not take them t' others will, so we had raither that they go to the good cause. Here, Miles, do you wak the labourers, and zee that they throw the potato store wi' the spinach and the dried meats into the waggons wi' all speed."

"Then we had best set about our part of the contract," said Hector Marot. With the aid of our troopers he carried out the four dragoons and our dead sergeant, and laid them on the ground some way down the lane, leading the horses all round and between their bodies, so as to trample the earth, and bear out the idea of a cavalry skirmish. While this was doing, some of the labourers had washed down the brick floor of the kitchen and removed all traces of the tragedy. The murdered woman had been carried up to her own chamber, so that nothing was left to recall what had occurred, save the unhappy farmer, who sat moodily in the same place, with his chin resting upon his stringy work-worn hands, staring out in front of him with a stony, empty gaze, unconscious apparently of all that was going on around him.

The loading of the waggons had been quickly accomplished, and the little drove of oxen gathered from a neighbouring field. We were just starting upon our return journey when a young countryman rode up, with the news that a troop of the Royal Horse were between the camp and ourselves. This was grave tidings, for we

were but seven all told, and our pace was necessarily slow whilst we were hampered with the supplies.

"How about Hooker?" I suggested. "Should we not send after him and give him warning?"

"I'll goo at once," said the countryman. "I'm bound to zee him if he be on the Athelney road." So saying he set spurs to his horse and galloped off through the darkness.

"While we have such volunteer scouts as this," I remarked, "it is easy to see which side the country folk have in their hearts. Hooker hath still the better part of two troops with him, so surely he can hold his own. But how are we to make our way back?"

"Zounds, Clarke! let us extemporise a fortress," suggested Sir Gervas. "We could hold this farmhouse against all comers until Hooker returns, and then join our forces to his. Now would our redoubtable Colonel be in his glory, to have a chance of devising cross-fires, and flanking-fires, with all the other refinements of a well-conducted leaguer."

"Nay," I answered, "after leaving Major Hooker in a somewhat cavalier fashion, it would be a bitter thing to have to ask his help now that there is danger."

"Ho, ho!" cried the Baronet. "It does not take a very deep lead-line to come to the bottom of your stoical philosophy, friend Micah. For all your cold-blooded stolidity you are keen enough where pride or honour is concerned. Shall we then ride onwards, and chance it? I'll lay an even crown that we never so much as see a red-coat."

"If you will take my advice, gentlemen," said the highwayman, trotting up upon a beautiful bay mare, "I should say that your best course is to allow me to act as guide to you as far as the camp. It will be strange if I cannot find roads which shall baffle these blundering soldiers."

"A very wise and seasonable proposition," cried Sir Gervas. "Master Marot, a pinch from my snuff-box, which is ever a covenant of friendship with its owner. Adslidikins, man! though our acquaintance at present is limited to my having nearly hanged you on one occasion,

yet I have a kindly feeling towards you, though I wish you had some more savoury trade."

"So do many who ride o' night," Marot answered, with a chuckle. "But we had best start, for the east is whitening, and it will be daylight ere we come to Bridgewater."

Leaving the ill-omened farmhouse behind us we set off with all military precautions, Marot riding with me some distance in front, while two of the troopers covered the rear. It was still very dark, though a thin grey line on the horizon showed that the dawn was not far off. In spite of the gloom, however, our new acquaintance guided us without a moment's halt or hesitation through a network of lanes and bypaths, across fields and over bogs, where the waggons were sometimes up to their axles in bog, and sometimes were groaning and straining over rocks and stones. So frequent were our turnings, and so often did we change the direction of our advance, that I feared more than once that our guide was at fault; yet, when at last the first rays of the sun brightened the landscape we saw the steeple of Bridgewater parish church shooting up right in front of us.

"Zounds, man! you must have something of the cat in you to pick your way so in the dark," cried Sir Gervas, riding up to us. "I am right glad to see the town, for my poor waggons have been creaking and straining until my ears are weary with listening for the snap of the axle-bar. Master Marot, we owe you something for this."

"Is this your own particular district?" I asked, "or have you a like knowledge of every part of the south?"

"My range," said he, lighting his short, black pipe, "is from Kent to Cornwall, though never north of the Thames or Bristol Channel. Through that district there is no road which is not familiar to me, nor as much as a break of the hedge which I could not find in blackest midnight. It is my calling. But the trade is not what it was. If I had a son I should not bring him up to it. It hath been spoiled by the armed guards to the mail-coaches, and by the accursed goldsmiths, who have opened their

banks and so taken the hard money into their strong boxes, giving out instead slips of paper, which are as useless to us as an old newsletter. I give ye my word that only a week gone last Friday I stopped a grazier coming from Blandford fair, and I took seven hundred guineas off him in these paper cheques, as they call them—enough, had it been in gold, to have lasted me for a three-month rouse. Truly the country is coming to a pretty pass when such trash as that is allowed to take the place of the King's coinage."

"Why should you persevere in such a trade?" said I. "Your own knowledge must tell you that it can only lead to ruin and the gallows. Have you ever known one who has thriven at it?"

"That have I," he answered readily. "There was Kingston Jones, who worked Hounslow for many a year. He took ten thousand yellow boys on one job, and like a wise man, he vowed never to risk his neck again. He went into Cheshire, with some tale of having newly arrived from the Indies, bought an estate, and is now a flourishing country gentleman of good repute, and a Justice of the Peace into the bargain. Zounds, man! to see him on the bench, condemning some poor devil for stealing a dozen eggs, is as good as a comedy in the playhouse."

"Nay! but," I persisted, "you are a man, judging from what we have seen of your courage and skill in the use of your weapons, who would gain speedy preferment in any army. Surely it were better to use your gifts to the gaining of honour and credit, than to make them a stepping-stone to disgrace and the gallows?"

"For the gallows I care not a clipped shilling," the highwayman answered, sending up thick blue curls of smoke into the morning air. "We have all to pay nature's debt, and whether I do it in my boots or on a feather bed, in one year or in ten, matters little to me as to any soldier among you. As to disgrace it is a matter of opinion. I see no shame myself in taking a toll upon the wealth of the rich, since I freely expose my own skin in the doing of it."

"There is a right and there is a wrong," I answered, "which no words can do away with, and it is a dangerous and unprofitable trick to juggle with them."

"Besides, even if what you have said were true as to property," Sir Gervas remarked, "it would not hold you excused for that recklessness of human life which your trade begets."

"Nay! it is but hunting, save that your quarry may at any time turn round upon you, and become in turn the hunter. It is, as you say, a dangerous game, but two can play at it, and each has an equal chance. There is no loading of the dice, or throwing of fulhams. Now it was but a few days back that, riding down the high-road, I perceived three jolly farmers at full gallop across the fields with a leash of dogs yelping in front of them, and all in pursuit of one little harmless bunny. It was a bare and unpeopled countryside on the border of Exmoor, so I bethought me that I could not employ my leisure better than by chasing the chasers. Od's wouns! it was a proper hunt. Away went my gentlemen, whooping like madmen, with their coat skirts flapping in the breeze, chivying on the dogs, and having a rare morning's sport. They never marked the quiet horseman who rode behind them, and who without a 'yoick!' or 'hark-a-way!' was relishing his chase with the loudest of them. It needed but a posse of peace officers at my heels to make up a brave string of us, catch-who-catch-can, like the game the lads play on the village green."

"And what came of it?" I asked, for our new acquaintance was laughing silently to himself.

"Well, my three friends ran down their hare, and pulled out their flasks, as men who had done a good stroke of work. They were still hobnobbing and laughing over the slaughtered bunny, and one had dismounted to cut off its ears as the prize of their chase, when I came up at a hand-gallop. 'Good-morrow, gentlemen,' said I, 'we have had rare sport.' They looked at me blankly enough, I promise you, and one of them asked me what the devil

I did there, and how I dared to join in a private sport. 'Nay, I was not chasing your hare, gentlemen,' said I. 'What then, fellow?' asked one of them. 'Why, marry, I was chasing you,' I answered, 'and a better run I have not had for years.' With that I lugged out my persuaders, and made the thing clear in a few words, and I'll warrant you would have laughed could you have seen their faces as they slowly dragged the fat leather purses from their fobs. Seventy-one pounds was my prize that morning, which was better worth riding for than a hare's ears."

"Did they not raise the country on your track?" I asked.

"Nay! When Brown Alice is given her head she flies faster than the news. Rumour spreads quick, but the good mare's stride is quicker still."

"And here we are within our own outposts," quoth Sir Gervas. "Now, mine honest friend—for honest you have been to us, whatever others may say of you—will you not come with us, and strike in for a good cause? Zounds, man! you have many an ill deed to atone for, I'll warrant. Why not add one good one to your account, by risking your life for the reformed faith?"

"Not I," the highwayman answered, reining up his horse. "My own skin is nothing, but why should I risk my mare in such a fool's quarrel? Should she come to harm in the ruffle, where could I get such another? Besides, it matters nothing to her whether Papist or Protestant sits on the throne of England—does it, my beauty?"

"But you might chance to gain preferment," I said. "Our Colonel, Decimus Saxon, is one who loves a good swordsman, and his word hath power with King Monmouth and the council."

"Nay, nay!" cried Hector Marot gruffly. "Let every man stick to his own trade. Kirke's Horse I am ever ready to have a brush with, for a party of them hung old blind Jim Houston of Milverton, who was a friend of mine. I have sent seven of the red-handed rogues to their last account for it, and might work through the whole regiment had I time. But I will not fight against

King James, nor will I risk the mare, so let me hear no more of it. And now I must leave ye, for I have much to do. Farewell to you ! "

" Farewell, farewell ! " we cried, pressing his brown horny hands ; " our thanks to you for your guidance." Raising his hat, he shook his bridle and galloped off down the road in a rolling cloud of dust.

" Rat me, if I ever say a word against the thieves again !" said Sir Gervas. " I never saw a man wield sword more deftly in my life, and he must be a rare hand with a pistol to bring those two tall fellows down with two shots. But look over there, Clarke ! Can you not see bodies of red-coats ? "

" Surely I can," I answered, gazing out over the broad, reedy, dead-coloured plain, which extended from the other side of the winding Parret to the distant Polden Hills. " I can see them over yonder in the direction of Westonzoyland, as bright as the poppies among corn."

" There are more upon the left, near Chedzoy," quoth Sir Gervas. " One, two, three, and one yonder, and two others behind—six regiments of foot in all. Methinks I see breastplates of horse over there, and some sign of ordnance too ! Faith ! Monmouth must fight now, if he ever hopes to feel the gold rim upon his temples. The whole of King James's army hath closed upon him."

" We must get back to our command, then," I answered. " If I mistake not, I see the flutter of our standards in the market-place." We spurred our weary steeds forward, and made our way with our little party and the supplies which we had collected, until we found ourselves back in our quarters, where we were hailed by the lusty cheers of our hungry comrades. Before noon the drove of bullocks had been changed into joints and steaks, while our green stuff and other victuals had helped to furnish the last dinner which many of our men were ever destined to eat. Major Hooker came in shortly after with a good store of provisions, but in no very good case, for he had had a skirmish with the dragoons, and had lost eight or

ten of his men. He bore a complaint straightway to the council concerning the manner in which we had deserted him ; but great events were coming fast upon us now, and there was small time to inquire into petty matters of discipline. For myself, I freely confess, looking back on it, that as a soldier he was entirely in the right, and that from a strict military point of view our conduct was not to be excused. Yet I trust, my dears, even now, when years have weighed me down, that the scream of a woman in distress would be a signal which would draw me to her aid while these old limbs could bear me. For the duty which we owe to the weak overrides all other duties and is superior to all circumstances, and I for one cannot see why the coat of the soldier should harden the heart of the man.

## 31. *Of the Maid of the Marsh and the Bubble which rose from the Bog*

ALL Bridgewater was in a ferment as we rode in, for King James's forces were within four miles, on the Sedgemoor Plain, and it was likely that they would push on at once and storm the town. Some rude works had been thrown up on the Eastover side, behind which two brigades were drawn up in arms, while the rest of the army was held in reserve in the market-place and Castle Field. Towards afternoon, however, parties of our horse and peasants from the fen country came in with the news that there was no fear of an assault being attempted. The Royal troops had quartered themselves snugly in the little villages of the neighbourhood, and having levied contributions of cider and of beer from the farmers, they showed no sign of any wish to advance.

The town was full of women, the wives, mothers and sisters of our peasants, who had come in from far and near to see their loved once ones more. Fleet Street or Cheapside upon a busy day are not more crowded than were the narrow streets and lanes of the Somersetshire town. Jack-

booted, buff-coated troopers ; scarlet militiamen ; brown, stern-faced Tauntonians ; serge-clad pikemen ; wild, ragged miners ; smock-frocked yokels ; reckless, weather-tanned seamen ; gaunt cragsmen from the northern coast —all pushed and jostled each other in a thick, many-coloured crowd. Everywhere among them were the country women, straw-bonneted and loud-tongued, weeping, embracing and exhorting. Here and there amid the motley dresses and gleam of arms moved the dark, sombre figure of a Puritan minister, with sweeping sad-coloured mantle and penthouse hat, scattering abroad short fiery ejaculations and stern pithy texts of the old fighting order, which warmed the men's blood like liquor. Ever and anon a sharp fierce shout would rise from the people, like the yelp of a high-spirited hound which is straining at its leash and hot to be at the throat of its enemy.

Our regiment had been taken off duty whenever it was clear that Feversham did not mean to advance, and they were now busy upon the victuals which our night foray had furnished. It was a Sunday, fresh and warm, with a clear unclouded sky, and a gentle breeze, sweet with the smack of the country. All day the bells of the neighbouring villages rang out their alarm, pealing their music over the sunlit countryside. The upper windows and red-tiled roofs of the houses were crowded with pale-faced women and children, who peered out to eastward, where the splotches of crimson upon the dun-coloured moor marked the position of our enemies.

At four o'clock Monmouth held a last council of war upon the square tower out of which springs the steeple of Bridgewater parish church, whence a good view can be obtained of all the country round. Since my ride to Beaufort I had always been honoured with a summons to attend, in spite of my humble rank in the army There were some thirty councillors in all, as many as the space would hold, soldiers and courtiers, Cavaliers and Puritans, all drawn together now by the bond of a common danger. Indeed, the near approach of a crisis in their fortunes had

broken down much of the distinction of manner which had served to separate them. The sectary had lost something of his austerity and become flushed and eager at the prospect of battle, while the giddy man of fashion was hushed into unwonted gravity as he considered the danger of his position. Their old feuds were forgotten as they gathered on the parapet and gazed with set faces at the thick columns of smoke which rose along the skyline.

King Monmouth stood among his chiefs, pale and haggard, with the dishevelled, unkempt look of a man whose distress of mind has made him forgetful of the care of his person. He held a pair of ivory glasses, and as he raised them to his eyes his thin white hands shook and twitched until it was grievous to watch him. Lord Grey handed his own glasses to Saxon, who leaned his elbows upon the rough stone breastwork and stared long and earnestly at the enemy.

"They are the very men I have myself led," said Monmouth at last, in a low voice, as though uttering his thoughts aloud. "Over yonder at the right I see Dumbarton's foot. I know these men well. They will fight. Had we them with us all would be well."

"Nay, your Majesty," Lord Grey answered with spirit, "you do your brave followers an injustice. They too will fight to the last drop of their blood in your quarrel."

"Look down at them!" said Monmouth sadly, pointing at the swarming streets beneath us. "Braver hearts never beat in English breasts, yet do but mark how they brabble and clamour like clowns on a Saturday night. Compare them with the stern, orderly array of the trained battalions. Alas! that I should have dragged these honest souls from their little homes to fight so hopeless a battle!"

"Hark at that!" cried Wade. "They do not think it hopeless, nor do we." As he spoke a wild shout rose from the dense crowd beneath, who were listening to a preacher who was holding forth from a window.

"It is worthy Doctor Ferguson," said Sir Stephen Timewell, who had just come up. "He is as one inspired,

powerfully borne onwards in his discourse. Verily he is even as one of the prophets of old. He has chosen for his text, ' The Lord God of gods he knoweth and Israel he shall know. If it be in rebellion or if in transgression against the Lord, save us not this day.' "

" Amen, amen ! " cried several of the Puritan soldiers devoutly, while another hoarse burst of shouting from below, with the clashing of scythe-blades and the clatter of arms, showed how deeply the people were moved by the burning words of the fanatic.

" They do indeed seem to be hot for battle," said Monmouth, with a more sprightly look. " It may be that one who has commanded regular troops, as I have done, is prone to lay too much weight upon the difference which discipline and training make. These brave lads seem high of heart. What think you of the enemy's dispositions, Colonel Saxon ? "

" By my faith, I think very little of them, your Majesty," Saxon answered bluntly. " I have seen armies drawn up in array in many different parts of the world and under many commanders. I have likewise read the section which treats of the matter in the ' De re militari ' of Petrinus Bellus, and in the works of a Fleming of repute, yet I have neither seen nor heard anything which can commend the arrangements which we see before us."

" How call you the hamlet on the left—that with the square ivy-clad church tower ? " asked Monmouth, turning to the Mayor of Bridgewater, a small, anxious-faced man, who was evidently far from easy at the prominence which his office had brought upon him.

" Westonzoyland, your Honour—that is, your Grace—I mean, your Majesty," he stammered. " The other, two miles farther off, is Middlezoy, and away to the left, just on the far side of the rhine, is Chedzoy."

" The rhine, sir . What do you mean ? " asked the King, starting violently, and turning so fiercely upon the timid burgher, that he lost the little balance of wits which was left to him.

"Why, the rhine, your Grace, your Majesty," he quavered. "The rhine, which, as your Majesty's Grace cannot but perceive, is what the country folk call the rhine."

"It is a name, your Majesty, for the deep and broad ditches which drain off the water from the great morass of Sedgemoor," said Sir Stephen Timewell.

Monmouth turned white to his very lips, and several of the council exchanged significant glances, recalling the strange prophetic jingle which I had been the means of bringing to the camp. The silence was broken, however, by an old Cromwellian Major named Hollis, who had been drawing upon paper the position of the villages in which the enemy was quartered.

"If it please your Majesty, there is something in their order which recalls to my mind that of the army of the Scots upon the occasion of the battle of Dunbar. Cromwell lay in Dunbar even as we lie in Bridgewater. The ground around, which was boggy and treacherous, was held by the enemy. There was not a man in the army who would not own that, had old Leslie held his position, we should, as far as human wisdom could see, have had to betake us to our ships, leave our stores and ordnance, and so make the best of our way to Newcastle. He moved, however, through the blessing of Providence, in such a manner that a quagmire intervened between his right wing and the rest of his army, on which Cromwell fell upon that wing in the early dawn, and dashed it to pieces, with such effect that the whole army fled, and we had the execution of them to the very gates of Leith. Seven thousand Scots lost their lives, but not more than a hundred or so of the honest folk. Now, your Majesty will see through your glass that a mile of bogland intervenes between these villages, and that the nearest one, Chedzoy, as I think they call it, might be approached without ourselves entering the morass. Very sure I am that were the Lord-General with us now he would counsel us to venture some such attack."

"It is a bold thing with raw peasants to attack old

soldiers," quoth Sir Stephen Timewell. "Yet if it is to be done, I know well that there is not a man born within sound of the bells of St. Mary Magdalene who will flinch from it."

"You say well, Sir Stephen," said Monmouth. "At Dunbar Cromwell had veterans at his back, and was opposed to troops who had small experience of war."

"Yet there is much good sense in what Major Hollis has said," remarked Lord Grey. "We must either fall on, or be gradually girt round and starved out. That being so, why not take advantage at once of the chance which Feversham's ignorance or carelessness hath given us? To-morrow, if Churchill can prevail over his chief, I have little doubt that we shall find their camp rearranged, and so have cause to regret our lost opportunity."

"Their horse lie at Westonzoyland," said Wade. "The sun is so fierce now that we can scarce see for its glare and the haze which rises up from the marshes. Yet a little while ago I could make out through my glasses the long lines of horses picketed on the moor beyond the village. Behind, in Middlezoy, are two thousand militia, while in Chedzoy, where our attack would fall, there are five regiments of regular foot."

"If we could break those all would be well," cried Monmouth. "What is your advice, Colonel Buyse?"

"My advice is ever the same," the German answered. "We are here to fight, and the sooner we get to work at it the better."

"And yours, Colonel Saxon? Do you agree with the opinion of your friend?"

"I think with Major Hollis, your Majesty, that Feversham by his dispositions hath laid himself open to attack, and that we should take advantage of it forthwith. Yet, considering that trained men and a numerous horse have great advantage by daylight, I should be in favour of a camisado or night onfall."

"The same thought was in my mind," said Grey. "Our friends here know every inch of the ground, and

could guide us to Chedzoy as surely in the darkness as in the day."

"I have heard," said Saxon, "that much beer and cider, with wine and strong waters, have found their way into their camp. If this be so we may give them a rouse while their heads are still buzzing with the liquor, when they shall scarce know whether it is ourselves or the blue devils which have come upon them."

A general chorus of approval from the whole council showed that the prospect of at last coming to an engagement was welcome, after the weary marchings and delays of the last few weeks.

"Has any cavalier anything to say against this plan?" asked the King.

We all looked from one to the other, but though many faces were doubtful or desponding, none had a word to say against the night attack, for it was clear that our action in any case must be hazardous, and this had at least the merit of promising a better chance of success than any other. Yet, my dears, I dare say the boldest of us felt a sinking at the heart as we looked at our downcast, sad-faced leader, and asked ourselves whether this was a likely man to bring so desperate an enterprise to a success.

"If all are agreed," said he, "let our word be 'Soho,' and let us come upon them as soon after midnight as may be. What remains to be settled as to the order of battle may be left for the meantime. You will now, gentlemen, return to your regiments, and you will remember that be the upshot of this what it may, whether Monmouth be the crowned King of England or a hunted fugitive, his heart, while it can still beat, will ever bear in memory the brave friends who stood at his side in the hour of his trouble."

At this simple and kindly speech a flush of devotion, mingled in my own case at least with a heart-whole pity for the poor, weak gentleman, swept over us. We pressed round him with our hands upon the hilts of our swords, swearing that we would stand by him, though all the world stood between him and his rights. Even the rigid

and impassive Puritans were moved to a show of loyalty; while the courtiers, carried away by zeal, drew their rapiers and shouted until the crowd beneath caught the enthusiasm, and the air was full of the cheering. The light returned to Monmouth's eye and the colour to his cheek as he listened to the clamour. For a moment at least he looked like the King which he aspired to be.

"My thanks to ye, dear friends and subjects," he cried. "The issue rests with the Almighty, but what men can do will, I know well, be done by you this night. If Monmouth cannot have all England, six feet of her shall at least be his. Meanwhile, to your regiments, and may God defend the right!"

"May God defend the right!" cried the council solemnly, and separated, leaving the King with Grey to make the final dispositions for the attack.

"These popinjays of the Court are ready enough to wave their rapiers and shout when there are four good miles between them and the foe," said Saxon, as we made our way through the crowd. "I fear that they will scarce be as forward when there is a line of musqueteers to be faced, and a brigade of horse perhaps charging down upon their flank. But here comes friend Lockarby, with news written upon his face."

"I have a report to make, Colonel," said Reuben, hurrying breathlessly up to us. "You may remember that I and my company were placed on guard this day at the eastern gates?"

Saxon nodded.

"Being desirous of seeing all that I could of the enemy, I clambered up a lofty tree which stands just without the town. From this post, by the aid of a glass, I was able to make out their lines and camp. Whilst I was gazing I chanced to observe a man slinking along under cover of the birch-trees half-way between their lines and the town. Watching him, I found that he was indeed moving in our direction. Presently he came so near that I was able to distinguish who it was—for it was one whom I know—

but instead of entering the town by my gate he walked round under cover of the peat cuttings, and so made his way doubtless to some other entrance. He is a man, however, who I have reason to believe has no true love for the cause, and it is my belief that he hath been to the Royal camp with news of our doings, and hath now come back for further information."

"Aye!" said Saxon, raising his eyebrows. "And what is the man's name?"

"His name is Derrick, one time chief apprentice to Master Timewell at Taunton, and now an officer in the Taunton Foot."

"What, the young springald who had his eye upon pretty Mistress Ruth! Now, out on love, if it is to turn a true man into a traitor! But methought he was one of the elect? I have heard him hold forth to the pikemen. How comes it that one of his kidney should lend help to the Prelatist cause?"

"Love again," quoth I. "This same love is a pretty flower when it grows unchecked, but a sorry weed if thwarted."

"He hath an ill-feeling towards many in the camp," said Reuben, "and he would ruin the army to avenge himself on them, as a rogue might sink a ship in the hope of drowning one enemy. Sir Stephen himself hath incurred his hatred for refusing to force his daughter into accepting his suit. He has now returned into the camp, and I have reported the matter to you, that you may judge whether it would not be well to send a file of pikemen and lay him by the heels lest he play the spy once more."

"Perhaps it would be best so," Saxon answered, full of thought, "and yet no doubt the fellow would have some tale prepared which would outweigh our mere suspicions. Could we not take him in the very act?"

A thought slipped into my head. I had observed from the tower that there was a single lonely cottage about a third of the way to the enemy's camp, standing by the road at a place where there were marshes on either side.

Anyone journeying that way must pass it. If Derrick tried to carry our plans to Feversham he might be cut off at this point by a party placed to lie in wait for him.

"Most excellent!" Saxon exclaimed, when I had explained the project. "My learned Fleming himself could not have devised a better rusus belli. Do ye convey as many files as ye may think fit to this point, and I shall see that Master Derrick is primed up with some fresh news for my Lord Feversham."

"Nay, a body of troops marching out would set tongues wagging," said Reuben. "Why should not Micah and I go ourselves?"

"That would indeed be better," Saxon answered. "But ye must pledge your words, come what may, to be back at sundown, for your companies must stand to arms an hour before the advance."

We both gladly gave the desired promise; and having learned for certain that Derrick had indeed returned to the camp, Saxon undertook to let drop in his presence some words as to the plans for the night, while we set off at once for our post. Our horses we left behind, and slipping out through the eastern gate we made our way over bog and moor, concealing ourselves as best we could, until we came out upon the lonely roadway, and found ourselves in front of the house.

It was a plain, whitewashed, thatch-roofed cottage, with a small board above the door, whereon was written a notice that the occupier sold milk and butter. No smoke reeked up from the chimney, and the shutters of the window were closed, from which we gathered that the folk who owned it had fled away from their perilous position. On either side the marsh extended, reedy and shallow at the edge, but deeper at a distance, with a bright green scum which covered its treacherous surface. We knocked at the weather-blotched door, but receiving, as we expected, no reply, I presently put my shoulder against it and forced the staple from its fastenings.

There was but a single chamber within, with a straight

ladder in the corner, leading through a square hole in the ceiling to the sleeping chamber under the roof. Three or four chairs and stools were scattered over the earthen floor, and at the side a deal table with the broad brown milk basins upon it. Green blotches upon the wall and a sinking in of one side of the cottage showed the effect of its damp, marsh-girt position.

To our surprise it had still one inmate within its walls. In the centre of the room, facing the door as we entered, stood a little bright, golden-haired maid, five or six years of age. She was clad in a clean white smock, with trim leather belt and shining buckle about her waist. Two plump little legs with socks and leathern boots peeped out from under the dress, stoutly planted with right foot in advance as one who was bent upon holding her ground. Her tiny head was thrown back, and her large blue eyes were full of mingled wonder and defiance. As we entered the little witch flapped her kerchief at us, and shooed as though we were two of the intrusive fowl whom she was wont to chevy out of the house. Reuben and I stood on the threshold, uncertain and awkward, like a pair of overgrown school lads, looking down at this fairy queen whose realms we had invaded, in two minds whether to beat a retreat or to appease her wrath by soft and coaxing words.

"Go 'way!" she cried, still waving her hands and shaking her kerchief. "Go 'way! Granny told me to tell anyone that came to go 'way!"

"But if they would not go away, little mistress," asked Reuben, "what were you to do then?"

"I was to drive them 'way," she answered, advancing boldly against us with many flaps. "You bad man!" she continued, flashing out at me, "you have broken granny's bolt."

"Nay, I'll mend it again," I answered penitently, and catching up a stone I soon fastened the injured staple. "There, mistress, your grandam will never tell the difference."

"Ye must go 'way all the same," she persisted; "this is granny's house, not yours."

What were we to do with this resolute little dame of the marshes? That we should stay in the house was a crying need, for there was no other cover or shelter among the dreary bogs where we could hide ourselves. Yet she was bent upon driving us out with a decision and fearlessness which might have put Monmouth to shame.

"You sell milk," said Reuben. "We are tired and thirsty, so we have come to have a horn of it."

"Nay," she cried, breaking into smiles, "will ye pay me just as the folk pay granny? Oh, heart alive! but that will be fine!" She skipped up on to a stool and filled a pair of deep mugs from the basins upon the table. "A penny, please!" said she.

It was strange to see the little wife hide the coin away in her smock, with pride and joy in her innocent face at this rare stroke of business which she had done for her absent granny. We bore our milk away to the window, and having loosed the shutters we seated ourselves so as to have an outlook down the road.

"For the Lord's sake, drink slow!" whispered Reuben, under his breath. "We must keep on swilling milk or she will want to turn us out."

"We have paid toll now," I answered; "surely she will let us bide."

"If you have done you must go 'way," said she firmly.

"Were ever two men-at-arms so tyrannised over by a little dolly like this!" said I, laughing. "Nay, little one, we shall compound with you by paying you this shilling, which will buy all your milk. We can stay here and drink it at our ease."

"Jinny, the cow, is just across the marsh," quoth she. "It is nigh milking time, and I shall fetch her round if ye wish more."

"Now, God forbid!" cried Reuben. "It will end in our having to buy the cow. Where is your granny, little maid?"

"She hath gone into the town," the child answered. "There are bad men with red coats and guns coming to steal and to fight, but granny will soon make them go 'way. Granny has gone to set it all right."

"We are fighting against the men with the red coats, my chuck," said I; "we shall take care of your house with you, and let no one steal anything."

"Nay, then ye may stay," quoth she, climbing up upon my knee as grave as a sparrow upon a bough. "What a great boy you are!"

"And why not a man?" I asked.

"Because you have no beard upon your face. Why, granny hath more hair upon her chin than you. Besides, only boys drink milk. Men drink cider."

"Then if I am a boy I shall be your sweetheart," said I.

"Nay, indeed!" she cried, with a toss of her golden locks. "I have no mind to wed for a while, but Giles Martin of Gommatch is my sweetheart. What a pretty shining tin smock you have, and what a great sword! Why should people have these things to harm each other with when they are in truth all brothers?"

"Why are they all brothers, little mistress?" asked Reuben.

"Because granny says that they are all the children of the great Father," she answered. "If they have all one father they must be brothers, mustn't they?"

"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, Micah," quoth Reuben, staring out of the window.

"You are a rare little marsh flower," I said, as she clambered up to grasp at my steel cap. "Is it not strange to think, Reuben, that there should be thousands of Christian men upon either side of us, athirst for each other's lives, and here between them is a blue-eyed cherub who lisps out the blessed philosophy which would send us all to our homes with softened hearts and hale bodies?"

"A day of this child would sicken me for ever of soldiering," Reuben answered. "The cavalier and the butcher become too near of kin, as I listen to her."

"Perhaps both are equally needful," said I, shrugging my shoulders. "We have put our hands to the plough. But methinks I see the man for whom we wait coming down under the shadow of yonder line of pollard willows."

"It is he, sure enough," cried Reuben, peeping through the diamond-paned window.

"Then, little one, you must sit here," said I, raising her up from my knee and placing her on a chair in a corner. "You must be a brave lass and sit still, whatever may chance. Will you do so?"

She pursed up her rosy lips and nodded her head.

"He comes on apace, Micah," quoth my comrade, who was still standing by the casement. "Is he not like some treacherous fox or other beast of prey?"

There was indeed something in his lean, black-clothed figure and swift furtive movements which was like some cruel and cunning animal. He stole along under shadow of the stunted trees and withies, with bent body and gliding gait, so that from Bridgewater it would be no easy matter for the most keen-sighted to see him. Indeed, he was so far from the town that he might safely have come out from his concealment and struck across the moor, but the deep morass on either side prevented him from leaving the road until he had passed the cottage.

As he came abreast of our ambush we both sprang out from the open door and barred his way. I have heard the Independent minister at Emsworth give an account of Satan's appearance, but if the worthy man had been with us that day, he need not have drawn upon his fancy. The man's dark face whitened into a sickly and mottled pallor, while he drew back with a long sharp intaking of the breath and a venomous flash from his black eyes, glancing swiftly from right to left for some means of escape. For an instant his hand shot towards his sword-hilt, but his reason told him that he could scarce expect to fight his way past us. Then he glanced round, but any retreat would lead him back to the men whom he had betrayed. So he stood sullen and stolid, with heavy, downcast face and

shifting, restless eye, the very type and symbol of treachery.

"We have waited some time for you, Master John Derrick," said I. "You must now return with us to the town."

"On what grounds do you arrest me?" he asked, in hoarse, broken tones. "Where is your warranty? Who hath given you a commission to molest travellers upon the King's highway?"

"I have my Colonel's commission," I answered shortly. "You have been once already to Feversham's camp this morning."

"It is a lie," he snarled fiercely. "I do but take a stroll to enjoy the air."

"It is the truth," said Reuben. "I saw you myself on your return. Let us see that paper which peeps from your doublet."

"We all know why you should set this trap for me," Derrick cried bitterly. "You have set evil reports afloat against me, lest I stand in your light with the Mayor's daughter. What are you that you should dare to raise your eyes to her? A mere vagrant and masterless man, coming none know whence. Why should you aspire to pluck the flower which has grown up amongst us? What had you to do with her or with us? Answer me!"

"It is not a matter which I shall discuss, save at a more fitting time and place," Reuben answered quietly. "Do you give over your sword and come back with us. For my part, I promise to do what I can to save your life. Should we win this night, your poor efforts can do little to harm us. Should we lose, there may be few of us left to harm."

"I thank you for your kindly protection," he replied, in the same white, cold, bitter manner, unbuckling his sword as he spoke, and walking slowly up to my companion. "You can take this as a gift to Mistress Ruth," he said, presenting the weapon in his left hand, "and this!" he added, plucking a knife from his belt and burying it in my poor friend's side.

It was done in an instant—so suddenly that I had neither time to spring between, nor to grasp his intention before the wounded man sank gasping on the ground, and the knife tinkled upon the pathway at my feet. The villain set up a shrill cry of triumph, and bounding back in time to avoid the savage sword thrust which I made at him, he turned and fled down the road at the top of his speed. He was a far lighter man than I, and more scantily clad, yet I had, from my long wind and length of limb, been the best runner of my district, and he soon learned by the sound of my feet that he had no chance of shaking me off. Twice he doubled as a hare does when the hound is upon him, and twice my sword passed within a foot of him, for in very truth I had no more thought of mercy than if he had been a poisonous snake who had fastened his fangs into my friend before my eyes. I never dreamed of giving nor did he of claiming it. At last, hearing my steps close upon him and my breathing at his very shoulder, he sprang wildly through the reeds and dashed into the treacherous morass. Ankle-deep, knee-deep, thigh-deep, waist-deep, we struggled and staggered, I still gaining upon him, until I was within arm's reach of him, and had whirled up my sword to strike. It had been ordained, however, my dear children, that he should die not the death of a man, but that of the reptile which he was, for even as I closed upon him he sank of a sudden with a gurgling sound, and the green marsh scum met above his head. No ripple was there and no splash to mark the spot. It was sudden and silent, as though some strange monster of the marshes had seized him and dragged him down into the depths. As I stood with up-raised sword still gazing upon the spot, one single great bubble rose and burst upon the surface, and then all was still once more, and the dreary fens lay stretched before me, the very home of death and of desolation. I know not whether he had indeed come upon some sudden pit which had engulfed him, or whether in his despair he had cast himself down of set purpose. I do but know that there

in the great Sedgemoor morass are buried the bones of the traitor and the spy.

I made my way as best I could through the oozy clinging mud to the margin, and hastened back to where Reuben was lying. Bending over him I found that the knife had pierced through the side leather which connected his back and front plates, and that the blood was not only pouring out of the wound, but was trickling from the corner of his mouth. With trembling fingers I undid the straps and buckles, loosened the armour, and pressed my kerchief to his side to staunch the flow.

"I trust that you have not slain him, Micah," he said of a sudden, opening his eyes.

"A higher power than ours has judged him, Reuben," I answered.

"Poor devil! He has had much to embitter him," he murmured, and straightway fainted again. As I knelt over him, marking the lad's white face and laboured breathing, and bethought me of his simple, kindly nature and of the affection which I had done so little to deserve, I am not ashamed to say, my dears, albeit I am a man somewhat backward in my emotions, that my tears were mingled with his blood.

As it chanced, Decimus Saxon had found time to ascend the church tower for the purpose of watching us through his glass and seeing how we fared. Noting that there was something amiss, he had hurried down for a skilled chirurgeon, whom he brought out to us under an escort of scythesmen. I was still kneeling by my senseless friend, doing what an ignorant man might to assist him, when the party arrived and helped me to bear him into the cottage, out of the glare of the sun. The minutes were as hours while the man of physic with a grave face examined and probed the wound.

"It will scarce prove fatal," he said at last, and I could have embraced him for the words. "The blade has glanced on a rib though the lung is slightly torn. We shall bear him back with us to the town."

" You hear what he says," said Saxon kindly. " He is a man whose opinion is of weight—

' A skilful leech is better far,
Than half a hundred men of war.'

Cheer up, man ! You are as white as though it were your blood and not his which was drained away. Where is Derrick ? "

" Drowned in the marshes," I answered.

" 'Tis well ! It will save us six feet of good hemp. But our position here is somewhat exposed, since the Royal Horse might make a dash at us. Who is this little maid who sits so white and still in the corner ? "

" 'Tis the guardian of the house. Her granny has left her here."

" You had better come with us. There may be rough work here ere all is over."

" Nay, I must wait for granny," she answered, with the tears running down her cheeks.

" But how if I take you to granny, little one," said I. " We cannot leave you here." I held out my arms, and the child sprang into them and nestled up against my bosom, sobbing as though her heart would break. " Take me away," she cried ; " I'se frightened."

I soothed the little trembling thing as best I might, and bore her off with me upon my shoulder. The scythesmen had passed the handles of their long weapons through the sleeves of their jerkins in such a way as to form a couch or litter, upon which poor Reuben was laid. A slight dash of colour had come back to his cheeks in answer to some cordial given him by the chirurgeon, and he nodded and smiled at Saxon. Thus, pacing slowly, we returned to Bridgewater, where Reuben was carried to our quarters, and I bore the little maid of the marshes to kind townsfolk, who promised to restore her to her home when the troubles were over.

## 32. *Of the Onfall at Sedgemoor*

HOWEVER pressing our own private griefs and needs, we had little time now to dwell upon them, for the moment was at hand which was to decide for the time not only our own fates, but that of the Protestant cause in England. None of us made light of the danger. Nothing less than a miracle could preserve us from defeat, and most of us were of opinion that the days of the miracles were past. Others, however, thought otherwise. I believe that many of our Puritans, had they seen the heavens open that night, and the armies of the Seraphim and the Cherubim descending to our aid, would have looked upon it as by no means a wonderful or unexpected occurrence.

The whole town was loud with the preaching. Every troop or company had its own chosen orator, and sometimes more than one, who held forth and expounded. From barrels, from waggons, from windows, and even from housetops, they addressed the crowds beneath ; nor was their eloquence in vain. Hoarse, fierce shouts rose up from the streets, with broken prayers and ejaculations. Men were drunk with religion as with wine. Their faces were flushed, their speech thick, their gestures wild. Sir Stephen and Saxon smiled at each other as they watched them, for they knew, as old soldiers, that of all causes which make a man valiant in deed and careless of life, this religious fit is the strongest and the most enduring.

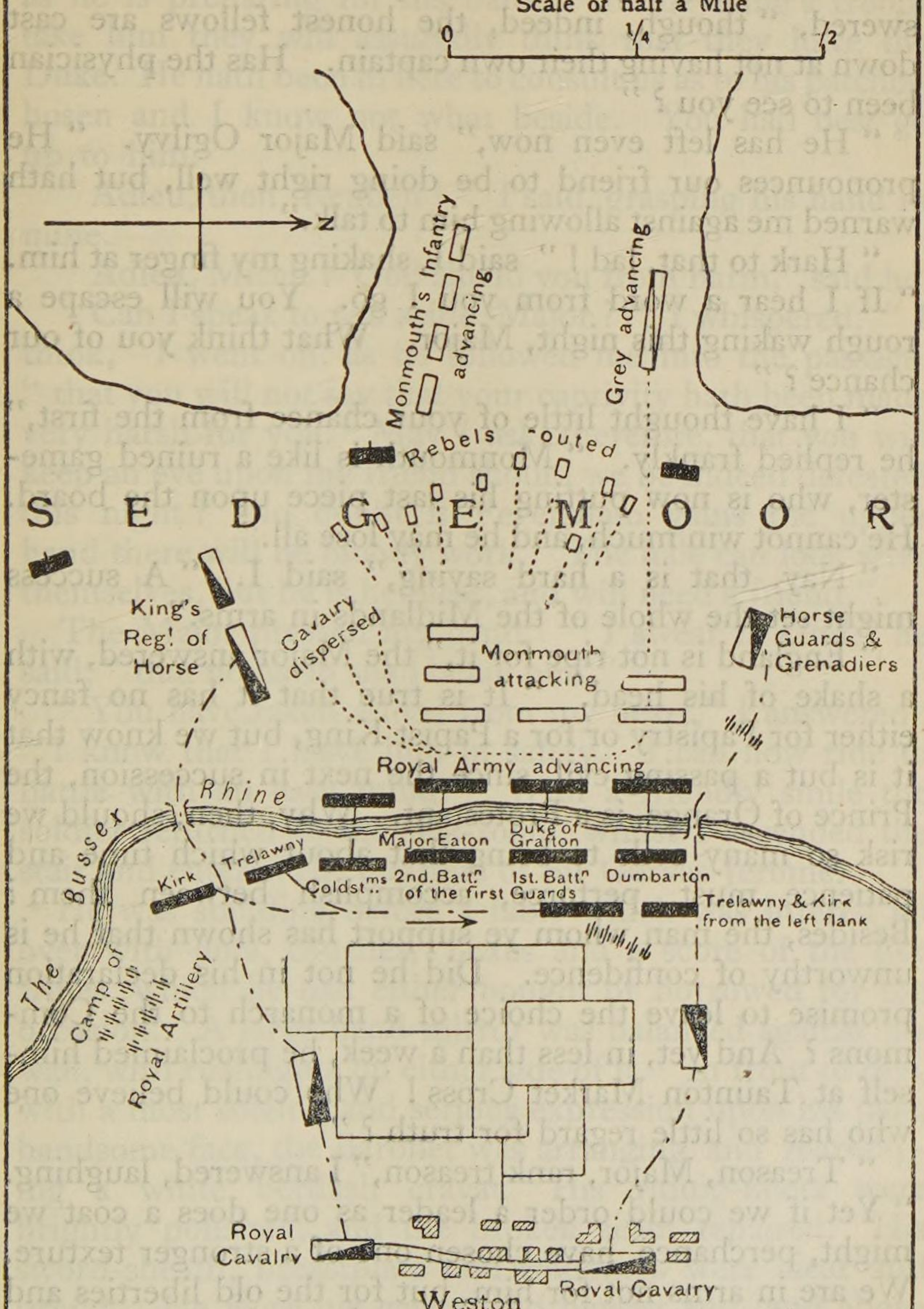
In the evening I found time to look in upon my wounded friend, and found him propped up with cushions upon his couch, breathing with some pain, but as bright and merry as ever. Our prisoner, Major Ogilvy, who had conceived a warm affection for us, sat by his side and read aloud to him out of an old book of plays.

"This wound hath come at an evil moment," said Reuben impatiently. "Is it not too much that a little prick like this should send my men captainless into battle,

Sketch of the

# BATTLE OF SEDGEMOOR

July 6th. 1685.




Emery Walker Ltd. sc.

(From Hale's *Fall of Stuarts.*)

after all our marching and drilling ? I have been present at the grace, and am cut off from the dinner."

" Your company hath been joined to mine," I answered, " though, indeed, the honest fellows are cast down at not having their own captain. Has the physician been to see you ? "

" He has left even now," said Major Ogilvy. " He pronounces our friend to be doing right well, but hath warned me against allowing him to talk."

" Hark to that, lad ! " said I, shaking my finger at him. " If I hear a word from you I go. You will escape a rough waking this night, Major. What think you of our chance ? "

" I have thought little of your chance from the first," he replied frankly. " Monmouth is like a ruined gamester, who is now putting his last piece upon the board. He cannot win much, and he may lose all."

" Nay, that is a hard saying," said I. " A success might set the whole of the Midlands in arms."

" England is not ripe for it," the Major answered, with a shake of his head. " It is true that it has no fancy either for Papistry or for a Papist King, but we know that it is but a passing evil, since the next in succession, the Prince of Orange, is a Protestant. Why, then, should we risk so many evils to bring that about which time and patience must, perforce, accomplish between them ? Besides, the man whom ye support has shown that he is unworthy of confidence. Did he not in his declaration promise to leave the choice of a monarch to the Commons ? And yet, in less than a week, he proclaimed himself at Taunton Market Cross ! Who could believe one who has so little regard for truth ? "

" Treason, Major, rank treason," I answered, laughing. " Yet if we could order a leader as one does a coat we might, perchance, have chosen one of a stronger texture. We are in arms not for him, but for the old liberties and rights of Englishmen. Have you seen Sir Gervas ? "

Major Ogilvy, and even Reuben, burst out laughing.

" You will find him in the room above," said our prisoner. " Never did a famous toast prepare herself for a court ball as he is preparing for his battle. If the King's troops take him they will assuredly think that they have the Duke. He hath been in here to consult us as to his patches, hosen and I know not what beside. You had best go up to him."

" Adieu, then, Reuben ! " I said, grasping his hand in mine.

" Adieu, Micah ! God shield you from harm," said he.

" Can I speak to you aside, Major ? " I whispered. " I think," I went on, as he followed me into the passage, " that you will not say that your captivity hath been made very harsh for you. May I ask, therefore, that you will keep an eye upon my friend should we be indeed defeated this night ? No doubt if Feversham gains the upper hand there will be bloody work. The hale can look after themselves, but he is helpless, and will need a friend."

The Major pressed my hand. " I swear to God," he said, " that no harm shall befall him."

" You have taken a load from my heart," I answered ; " I know that I leave him in safety. I can now ride to battle with an easy mind." With a friendly smile the soldier returned to the sick-room, whilst I ascended the stair and entered the quarters of Sir Gervas Jerome.

He was standing before a table which was littered all over with pots, brushes, boxes and a score of the like trifles, which he had either bought or borrowed for the occasion. A large hand-mirror was balanced against the wall, with rushlights on either side of it. In front of this, with a most solemn and serious expression upon his pale, handsome face, the Baronet was arranging and rearranging a white berdash cravat. His riding-boots were brightly polished, and the broken seam repaired. His sword-sheath, breastplate and trappings were clear and bright. He wore his gayest and newest suit, and above all he had donned a most noble and impressive full-bottomed periwig, which drooped down to his shoulders,

as white as powder could make it. From his dainty riding-hat to his shining spur there was no speck or stain upon him—a sad set-off to my own state, plastered as I was with a thick crust of the Sedgemoor mud, and disordered from having ridden and worked for two days without rest or repose.

"Split me, but you have come in good time!" he exclaimed, as I entered. "I have even now sent down for a flask of canary. Ah, and here it comes!" as a maid from the inn tripped upstairs with the bottle and glasses. "Here is a gold piece, my pretty dear, the very last that I have in the whole world. It is the only survivor of a goodly family. Pay mine host for the wine, little one, and keep the change for thyself, to buy ribbons for the next holiday. Now, curse me if I can get this cravat to fit unwrinkled!"

"There is nought amiss with it," I answered. "How can such trifles occupy you at such a time?"

"Trifles!" he cried angrily. "Trifles! Well, there, it boots not to argue with you. Your bucolic mind would never rise to the subtle import which may lie in such matters—the rest of mind which it is to have them right, and the plaguy uneasiness when aught is wrong. It comes, doubtless, from training, and it may be that I have it more than others of my class. I feel as a cat who would lick all day to take the least speck from her fur. Is not the patch over the eyebrow happily chosen? Nay, you cannot even offer an opinion; I would as soon ask friend Marot, the knight of the pistol. Fill up your glass!"

"Your company awaits you by the church," I remarked; "I saw them as I passed."

"How looked they?" he asked. "Were they powdered and clean?"

"Nay, I had little leisure to observe. I saw that they were cutting their matches and arranging their priming."

"I would that they had all snaphances," he answered, sprinkling himself with scented water; "the matchlocks are slow and cumbersome. Have you had wine enough?"

"I will take no more," I answered.

"Then mayhap the Major may care to finish it. It is not often I ask help with a bottle, but I would keep my head cool this night. Let us go down and see to our men."

It was ten o'clock when we descended into the street. The hubbub of the preachers and the shouting of the people had died away, for the regiments had fallen into their places, and stood silent and stern, with the faint light from the lamps and windows playing over their dark serried ranks. A cool, clear moon shone down upon us from amidst fleecy clouds, which drifted ever and anon across her face. Away in the north tremulous rays of light flickered up into the heavens, coming and going like long, quivering fingers. They were the northern lights, a sight rarely seen in the southland counties. It is little wonder that, coming at such a time, the fanatics should have pointed to them as signals from another world, and should have compared them to that pillar of fire which guided Israel through the dangers of the desert. The footpaths and the windows were crowded with women and children, who broke into shrill cries of fear or of wonder as the strange light waxed and waned.

"It is half after ten by St. Mary's clock," said Saxon, as we rode up to the regiment. "Have we nothing to give the men?"

"There is a hogshead of Zoyland cider in the yard of yonder inn," said Sir Gervas. "Here, Dawson, do you take these gold sleeve links and give them to mine host in exchange. Broach the barrel, and let each man have his horn full. Sink me, if they shall fight with nought but cold water in them."

"They will feel the need of it ere morning," said Saxon, as a score of pikemen hastened off to the inn. "The marsh air is chilling to the blood."

"I feel cold already, and Covenant is stamping with it," said I. "Might we not, if we have time upon our hands, canter our horses down the line?"

"Of a surety," Saxon answered gladly, "we could not do better"; so shaking our bridles we rode off, our horses' hoofs striking fire from the flint-paved streets as we passed.

Behind the horse, in a long line which stretched from the Eastover gate, across the bridge, along the High Street, up the Cornhill, and so past the church to the Pig Cross, stood our foot, silent and grim, save when some woman's voice from the windows called forth a deep, short answer from the ranks. The fitful light gleamed on scythes-blade or gun-barrel, and showed up the lines of rugged, hard set faces, some of mere children with never a hair upon their cheeks, others of old men whose grey beards swept down to their cross-belts, but all bearing the same stamp of a dogged courage and a fierce self-contained resolution. Here were still the fisher folk of the south. Here, too, were the fierce men from the Mendips, the wild hunters from Porlock Quay and Minehead, the poachers of Exmoor, the shaggy marsh-men of Axbridge, the mountain men from the Quantocks, the serge- and wool-workers of Devonshire, the graziers of Bampton, the red-coats from the Militia, the stout burghers of Taunton, and then, as the very bone and sinew of all, the brave smock-frocked peasants of the plains, who had turned up their jackets to the elbow, and exposed their brown and corded arms, as was their wont when good work had to be done. As I speak to you, dear children, fifty years rolls by like a mist in the morning and I am riding once more down the winding street, and see again the serried ranks of my gallant companions. Brave hearts! They showed to all time how little training it takes to turn an Englishman into a soldier, and what manner of men are bred in those quiet, peaceful hamlets which dot the sunny slopes of the Somerset and Devon downs. If ever it should be that England should be struck upon her knees, if those who fight her battles should have deserted her, and she should find herself unarmed in the presence of her enemy, let her take heart and remember that every village in the realm is a barrack, and

that her real standing army is the hardy courage and simple virtue which stand ever in the breast of the humblest of her peasants.

As we rode down the long line a buzz of greeting and welcome rose now and again from the ranks as they recognised through the gloom Saxon's tall, gaunt figure. The clock was on the stroke of eleven as we returned to our own men, and at that very moment King Monmouth rode out from the inn where he was quartered, and trotted with his staff down the High Street. All cheering had been forbidden, but waving caps and brandished arms spoke the ardour of his devoted followers. No bugle was to sound the march, but as each received the word the one in its rear followed its movements. The clatter and shuffle of hundreds of moving feet came nearer and nearer, until the Frome men in front of us began to march, and we found ourselves fairly started upon the last journey which many of us were ever to take in this world.

Our road lay across the Parret, through Eastover, and so along the winding track past the spot where Derrick met his fate, and the lonely cottage of the little maid. At the other side of this the road becomes a mere pathway over the plain. A dense haze lay over the moor, gathering thickly in the hollows, and veiling both the town which we had left and the villages which we were approaching. Now and again it would lift for a few moments, and then I could see in the moonlight the long black writhing line of the army, with the shimmer of steel playing over it, and the rude white standards flapping in the night breeze. Far on the right a great fire was blazing—some farmhouse, doubtless, which the Tangiers devils had made spoil of. Very slow our march was, and very careful, for the plain was, as Sir Stephen Timewell had told us, cut across by great ditches or rhines, which could not be passed save at some few places. These ditches were cut for the purpose of draining the marshes, and were many feet deep of water and of mud, so that even the horse could not cross them. The bridges were

narrow, and some time passed before the army could get over. At last, however, the two main ones, the Black Ditch and the Langmoor Rhine, were safely traversed, and a halt was called while the foot was formed in line, for we had reason to believe that no other force lay between the Royal camp and ourselves. So far our enterprise had succeeded admirably. We were within half a mile of the camp without mistake or accident, and none of the enemy's scouts had shown sign of their presence. Clearly they held us in such contempt that it had never occurred to them that we might open the attack. If ever a general deserved a beating it was Feversham that night. As we drew up upon the moor the clock of Chedzoy struck one.

"Is it not glorious!" whispered Sir Gervas, as we reined up upon the further side of the Langmoor Rhine. "What is there on earth to compare with the excitement of this?"

"You speak as though it were a cocking-match or a bull-baiting," I answered, with some little coldness. "It is a solemn and a sad occasion. Win who will, English blood must soak the soil of England this night."

"The more room for those who are left," said he lightly. "Mark over yonder the glow of their camp-fires amidst the fog. What was it that your seaman friend did recommend? Get the weather-gauge of them and board—eh? Have you told that to the Colonel?"

"Nay, this is no time for quips and cranks," I answered gravely; "the chances are that few of us will ever see to-morrow's sun rise."

"I have no great curiosity to see it," he remarked, with a laugh. "It will be much as yesterday's. Zounds! though I have never risen to see one in my life, I have looked on many a hundred ere I went to bed."

"I have told friend Reuben such few things as I should desire to be done in case I should fall," said I. "It has eased my mind much to know that I leave behind some word of farewell, and little remembrance to all whom I

have known. Is there no service of the sort which I can do for you ? "

" Hum ! " said he, musing. " If I go under, you can tell Araminta—nay, let the poor wench alone ! Why should I send her messages which may plague her ! Should you be in town, little Tommy Chichester would be glad to hear of the fun which we have had in Somerset. You will find him at the Coca Tree every day of the week between two and four of the clock. There is Mother Butterworth, too, whom I might commend to your notice. She was the queen of wet-nurses, but alas ! cruel time hath dried up her business, and she hath need of some little nursing herself."

" If I live and you should fall, I shall do what may be done for her," said I. " Have you aught else to say ? "

" Only that Hacker of Paul's Yard is the best for vests," he answered. " It is a small piece of knowledge, yet like most other knowledge it hath been bought and paid for. One other thing ! I have a trinket or two left which might serve as a gift for the pretty Puritan maid, should our friend lead her to the altar. Od's my life, but she will make him read some queer books ! How now, Colonel, why are we stuck out on the moor like a row of herons among the sedges ? "

" They are ordering the line for the attack," said Saxon, who had ridden up during our conversation. " Donnerblitz ! Who ever saw a camp so exposed to an onfall ? Oh for twelve hundred good horse—for an hour of Wessenburg's Pandours ! Would I not trample them down until their camp was like a field of young corn after a hail-storm ! "

" May not our horse advance ? " I asked.

The old soldier gave a deep snort of disdain. " If this fight is to be won it must be by our foot," said he ; " what can we hope for from such cavalry ? Keep your men well in hand, for we may have to bear the brunt of the King's dragoons. A flank attack would fall upon us, for we are in the post of honour."

"There are troops to the right of us," I answered, peering through the darkness.

"Aye! the Taunton burghers and the Frome peasants. Our brigade covers the right flank. Next us are the Mendip miners, nor could I wish for better comrades, if their zeal do not outrun their discretion. They are on their knees in the mud at this moment."

"They will fight none the worse for that," I remarked; "but surely the troops are advancing!"

"Aye, aye!" cried Saxon joyously, plucking out his sword, and tying his handkerchief round the handle to strengthen his grip. "The hour has come! Forwards!"

Very slowly and silently we crept on through the dense fog, our feet splashing and slipping in the sodden soil. With all the care which we could take, the advance of so great a number of men could not be conducted without a deep sonorous sound from the thousands of marching feet. Ahead of us were splotches of ruddy light twinkling through the fog which marked the Royal watch-fires. Immediately in front in a dense column our own horse moved forwards. Of a sudden out of the darkness there came a sharp challenge and a shout, with the discharge of a carbine and the sound of galloping hoofs. Away down the line we heard a ripple of shots. The first line of outposts had been reached. At the alarm our horse charged forward with a huzza, and we followed them as fast as our men could run. We had crossed two or three hundred yards of moor, and could hear the blowing of the Royal bugles quite close to us, when our horse came to a sudden halt, and our whole advance was at a standstill.

"Sancta Maria!" cried Saxon, dashing forward with the rest of us to find out the cause of the delay. "We must on at any cost! A halt now will ruin our camisado."

"Forwards, forwards!" cried Sir Gervas and I, waving our swords.

"It is no use, gentlemen," cried a cornet of horse, wringing his hands; "we are undone and betrayed.

There is a broad ditch without a ford in front of us, full twenty feet across ! "

" Give me room for my horse, and I shall show ye the way across ! " cried the Baronet, backing his steed. " Now, lads, who's for a jump ? "

" Nay, sir, for God's sake ! " said a trooper, laying his hand upon his bridle. " Sergeant Sexton hath sprung in even now, and horse and man have gone to the bottom ! "

" Let us see it, then ! " cried Saxon, pushing his way through the crowd of horsemen. We followed close at his heels, until we found ourselves on the borders of the vast trench which impeded our advance.

To this day I have never been able to make up my mind whether it was by chance or by treachery on the part of our guides that this fosse was overlooked until we stumbled upon it in the dark. There are some who say that the Bussex Rhine, as it is called, is not either deep or broad, and was, therefore, unmentioned by the moorsmen, but that the recent constant rains had swollen it to an extent never before known. Others say that the guides had been deceived by the fog, and taken a wrong course, whereas, had we followed another track, we might have been able to come upon the camp without crossing the ditch. However that may be, it is certain that we found it stretching in front of us, broad, black, and forbidding, full twenty feet from bank to bank, with the cap of the ill-fated sergeant just visible in the centre as a mute warning to all who might attempt to ford it.

" There must be a passage somewhere," cried Saxon furiously. " Every moment is worth a troop of horse to them. Where is my Lord Grey ? Hath the guide met with his deserts ? "

" Major Hollis hath hurled the guide into the ditch," the young cornet answered. " My Lord Grey hath ridden along the bank seeking for a ford."

I caught a pike out of a footman's hand, and probed into the black oozy mud, standing myself up to the waist in it, and holding Covenant's bridle in my left hand.

Nowhere could I touch bottom or find any hope of solid foothold.

"Here, fellow!" cried Saxon, seizing a trooper by the arm. "Make for the rear! Gallop as though the devil were behind you! Bring up a pair of ammunition waggons, and we shall see whether we cannot bridge this infernal puddle."

"If a few of us could make a lodgment upon the other side we might make it good until help came," said Sir Gervas, as the horseman galloped off upon his mission.

All down the rebel line a fierce low roar of disappointment and rage showed that the whole army had met the same obstacle which hindered our attack. On the other side of the ditch the drums beat, the bugles screamed, and the shouts and oaths of the officers could be heard as they marshalled their men. Glancing lights in Chedzoy, Westonzoyland, and the other hamlets to left and right, showed how fast the alarm was extending. Decimus Saxon rode up and down the edge of the fosse, pattering forth foreign oaths, grinding his teeth in his fury, and rising now and again in his stirrups to shake his gauntleted hands at the enemy.

"For whom are ye?" shouted a hoarse voice out of the haze.

"For the King!" roared the peasants in answer.

"For which King?" cried the voice.

"For King Monmouth!"

"Let them have it, lads!" and instantly a storm of musket bullets whistled and sung about our ears. As the sheet of flame sprang out of the darkness the maddened, half-broken horses dashed wildly away across the plain, resisting the efforts of the riders to pull them up. There are some, indeed, who say that those efforts were not very strong, and that our troopers, disheartened at the check at the ditch, were not sorry to show their heels to the enemy. As to my Lord Grey, I can say truly that I saw him in the dim light among the flying squadrons, doing all that a brave cavalier could do to bring them to a stand.

Away they went, however, thundering through the ranks of the foot and out over the moor, leaving their companions to bear the whole brunt of the battle.

"On to your faces, men!" shouted Saxon, in a voice which rose high above the crash of the musketry and the cries of the wounded. The pikemen and scythesmen threw themselves down at his command, while the musqueteers knelt in front of them, loading and firing, with nothing to aim at save the turning matches of the enemy's pieces, which could be seen twinkling through the darkness. All along, both to the right and the left, a rolling fire had broken out, coming in short, quick volleys from the soldiers, and in a continuous confused rattle from the peasants. On the further wing our four guns had been brought into play, and we could hear their dull growling in the distance.

"Sing, brothers, sing!" cried our stout-hearted chaplain, Master Joshua Pettigrue, bustling backwards and forwards among the prostrate ranks. "Let us call upon the Lord in our day of trial!" The men raised a loud hymn of praise, which swelled into a great chorus as it was taken up by the Taunton burghers upon our right and the miners upon our left. At the sound the soldiers on the other side raised a fierce huzza, and the whole air was full of clamour.

Our musqueteers had been brought to the very edge of the Bussex Rhine, and the Royal troops had also advanced as far as they were able, so that there were not five pikes'-lengths between the lines. Yet that short distance was so impassable that, save for the more deadly fire, a quarter of a mile might have divided us. So near were we that the burning wads from the enemy's muskets flew in flakes of fire over our heads, and we felt upon our faces the hot, quick flush of their discharges. Yet though the air was alive with bullets the aim of the soldiers was too high for our kneeling ranks, and very few of the men were struck. For our part, we did what we could to keep the barrels of our muskets from inclining upwards. Saxon,

Sir Gervas, and I walked our horses up and down without ceasing, pushing them level with our sword-blades, and calling on the men to aim steadily and slowly. The groans and cries from the other side of the ditch showed that some, at least, of our bullets had not been fired in vain.

"We hold our own in this quarter," said I to Saxon. "It seems to me that their fire slackens."

"It is their horse that I fear," he answered. "They can avoid the ditch, since they come from the hamlets on the flank. They may be upon us at any time."

"Hullo, sir!" shouted Sir Gervas, reining up his steed upon the very brink of the ditch, and raising his cap in salute to a mounted officer upon the other side. "Can you tell me if we have the honour to be opposed to the foot guards?"

"We are Dumbarton's regiment, sir," cried the other. "We shall give ye good cause to remember having met us."

"We shall be across presently to make your further acquaintance," Sir Gervas answered, and at the same moment rolled, horse and all, into the ditch, amid a roar of exultation from the soldiers. Half-a-dozen of his musqueteers sprang instantly, waist deep, into the mud, and dragged our friend out of danger, but the charger, which had been shot through the heart, sank without a struggle.

"There is no harm!" cried the Baronet, springing to his feet, "I would rather fight on foot like my brave musqueteers." The men broke out a-cheering at his words, and the fire on both sides became hotter than ever. It was a marvel to me, and to many more, to see these brave peasants with their mouths full of bullets, loading, priming, and firing as steadily as though they had been at it all their lives, and holding their own against a veteran regiment which has proved itself in other fields to be second to none in the army of England.

The grey light of morning was stealing over the moor,

and still the fight was undecided. The fog hung about us in feathery streaks, and the smoke from our guns drifted across in a dun-coloured cloud, through which the long lines of red-coats upon the other side of the rhine loomed up like a battalion of giants. My eyes ached and my lips pringled with the smack of the powder. On every side of me men were falling fast, for the increased light had improved the aim of the soldiers. Our good chaplain, in the very midst of a psalm, had uttered a great shout of praise and thanksgiving, and so passed on to join those of his parishioners who were scattered round him upon the moor. Hope-above William and Keeper Milson, under-officers, and among the stoutest men in the company, were both down, the one dead and the other sorely wounded, but still ramming down charges, and spitting bullets into his gun-barrel. The two Stukeleys of Somerton, twins, and lads of great promise, lay silently with grey faces turned to the grey sky, united in death as they had been in birth. Everywhere the dead lay thick amid the living. Yet no man flinched from his place, and Saxon still walked his horse among them with words of hope and praise, while his stern, deep-lined face and tall sinewy figure were a very beacon of hope to the simple rustics. Such of my scythesmen as could handle a musket were thrown forward into the fighting line, and furnished with the arms and pouches of those who had fallen.

Ever and anon as the light waxed I could note through the rifts in the smoke and the fog how the fight was progressing in other parts of the field. On the right the heath was brown with the Taunton and Frome men, who, like ourselves, were lying down to avoid the fire. Along the borders of the Bussex Rhine a deep fringe of their musqueteers were exchanging murderous volleys, almost muzzle to muzzle, with the left wing of the same regiment with which we were engaged, which was supported by a second regiment in broad white facings, which I believe to have belonged to the Wiltshire Militia.

On either bank of the black trench a thick line of dead, brown on the one side, and scarlet on the other, served as a screen to their companions, who sheltered themselves behind them and rested their musket-barrels upon their prostrate bodies. To the left amongst the withies lay five hundred Mendip and Bagworthy miners, singing lustily, but so ill-armed that they had scarce one gun among ten wherewith to reply to the fire which was poured into them. They could not advance, and they would not retreat, so they sheltered themselves as best they might, and waited patiently until their leaders might decide what was to be done. Further down for half a mile or more the long rolling cloud of smoke, with petulant flashes of flame spurting out through it, showed that every one of our raw regiments was bearing its part manfully. The cannon on the left had ceased firing. The Dutch gunners had left the Islanders to settle their own quarrels, and were scampering back to Bridgewater, leaving their silent pieces to the Royal Horse.

The battle was in this state when there rose a cry of "The King, the King!" and Monmouth rode through our ranks, bareheaded and wild-eyed, with Buyse, Wade and a dozen more beside him. They pulled up within a spear's-length of me, and Saxon, spurring forward to meet them, raised his sword to the salute. I could not but mark the contrast between the calm, grave face of the veteran, composed yet alert, and the half-frantic bearing of the man whom we were compelled to look upon as our leader.

"How think ye, Colonel Saxon?" he cried wildly. "How goes the fight? Is all well with ye? What an error, alas! what an error! Shall we draw off, eh? How say you?"

"We hold our own here, your Majesty," Saxon answered. "Methinks had we something after the nature of palisados or stockados, after the Swedish fashion, we might even make it good against the horse."

"Ah, the horse!" cried the unhappy Monmouth.

"If we get over this, my Lord Grey shall answer for it. They ran like a flock of sheep. What leader could do anything with such troops? Oh, lack-a-day, lack-a-day! Shall we not advance?"

"There is no reason to advance, your Majesty, now that the surprise has failed," said Saxon. "I had sent for carts to bridge over the trench, according to the plan which is commended in the treatise, *De vallis et fossis*, but they are useless now. We can but fight it out as we are."

"To throw troops across would be to sacrifice them," said Wade. "We have lost heavily, Colonel Saxon, but I think from the look of yonder bank that ye have given a good account of the red-coats."

"Stand firm! For God's sake, stand firm!" cried Monmouth distractedly. "The horse have fled, and the cannoniers also. Oh! what can I do with such men? What shall I do? Alas, alas!" He set spurs to his horse and galloped off down the line, still wringing his hands and uttering his dismal wailings. Oh, my children, how small, how very small a thing is death when weighed in the balance with dishonour! Had this man but borne his fate silently, as did the meanest footman who followed his banners, how proud and glad would we have been to have discoursed of him, our princely leader. But let him rest. The fears and agitations and petty fond emotions, which showed upon him as the breeze shows upon the water, are all stilled now for many a long year. Let us think of the kind heart and forget the feeble spirit.

As his escort trooped after him, the great German man-at-arms separated from them and turned back to us. "I am weary of trotting up and down like a lust-ritter at a fair," said he. "If I bide with ye I am like to have my share of any fighting which is going. So, steady, mein Liebchen. That ball grazed her tail, but she is too old a soldier to wince at trifles. Hullo, friend, where is your horse?"

"At the bottom of the ditch," said Sir Gervas, scraping the mud of his dress with his sword-blade. "'Tis now

half-past two," he continued, " and we have been at this child's-play for an hour and more. With a line regiment too ! It is not what I had looked forward to ! "

" You shall have something to console you anon," cried the German, with his eyes shining. " Mein Gott ! Is it not splendid ? Look to it, friend Saxon, look to it ! "

It was no light matter which had so roused the soldier's admiration. Out of the haze which still lay thick upon our right there twinkled here and there a bright gleam of silvery light, while a dull, thundering noise broke upon our ears like that of the surf upon a rocky shore. More and more frequent came the fitful flashes of steel, louder and yet louder grew the hoarse gathering tumult, until of a sudden the fog was rent, and the long lines of the Royal cavalry broke out from it, wave after wave, rich in scarlet and blue and gold, as grand a sight as ever the eye rested upon. There was something in the smooth, steady sweep of so great a body of horsemen which gave the feeling of irresistible power. Rank after rank, and line after line, with waving standards, tossing manes, and gleaming steel, they poured onwards, an army in themselves, with either flank still shrouded in the mist. As they thundered along, knee to knee and bridle to bridle, there came from them such a gust of deep-chested oaths with the jangle of harness, the clash of steel, and the measured beat of multitudinous hoofs, that no man who hath not stood up against such a whirlwind, with nothing but a seven-foot pike in his hand, can know how hard it is to face it with a steady lip and a firm grip.

But wonderful as was the sight, there was, as ye may guess, my dears, little time for us to gaze upon it. Saxon and the German flung themselves among the pikemen and did all that men could do to thicken their array. Sir Gervas and I did the same with the scythesmen, who had been trained to form a triple front after the German fashion, one rank kneeling, one stooping, and one standing erect, with weapons advanced. Close to us the Taunton men had hardened into a dark sullen

ring, bristling with steel, in the centre of which might be seen and heard their venerable Mayor, his long beard fluttering in the breeze, and his strident voice clanging over the field. Louder and louder grew the roar of the horse. "Steady, my brave lads," cried Saxon, in trumpet tones. "Dig the pike-butt into the earth! Rest it on the right foot! Give not an inch! Steady!" A great shout went up from either side, and then the living wave broke over us.

What hope is there to describe such a scene as that—the crashing of wood, the sharp gasping cries, the snorting of horses, the jar when the push of pike met with the sweep of sword! Who can hope to make another see that of which he himself carries away so vague and dim an impression? One who has acted in such a scene gathers no general sense of the whole combat, such as might be gained by a mere onlooker, but he has stamped for ever upon his mind just the few incidents which may chance to occur before his own eyes. Thus my memories are confined to a swirl of smoke with steel caps and fierce, eager faces breaking through it, with the red gaping nostrils of horses and their pawing fore-feet as they recoiled from the hedge of steel. I see, too, a young beardless lad, an officer of dragoons, crawling on hands and knees under the scythes, and I hear his groan as one of the peasants pinned him to the ground. I see a bearded, broad-faced trooper riding a grey horse just outside the fringe of the scythes, seeking for some entrance, and screaming the while with rage. Small things imprint themselves upon a man's notice at such a time. I even marked the man's strong white teeth and pink gums. At the same time I see a white-faced, thin-lipped man leaning far forward over his horse's neck and driving at me with his sword point, cursing the while as only a dragoon can curse. All these images start up as I think of that fierce rally, during which I hacked and cut and thrust at man and horse without a thought of parry or of guard. All round rose a fierce babel of shouts and cries,

godly ejaculations from the peasants and oaths from the horsemen, with Saxon's voice above all imploring his pikemen to stand firm. Then the cloud of horsemen recoiled, circling off over the plain, and the shout of triumph from my comrades, and an open snuff-box thrust out in front of me, proclaimed that we had seen the back of as stout squadrons as ever followed a kettledrum.

But if we could claim it as a victory, the army in general could scarce say as much. None but the very pick of the troops could stand against the flood of heavy horses and steel-clad men. The Frome peasants were gone, swept utterly from the field. Many had been driven by pure weight and pressure into the fatal mud which had checked our advance. Many others, sorely cut and slashed, lay in ghastly heaps all over the ground which they had held. A few by joining our ranks had saved themselves from the fate of their companions. Further off the men of Taunton still stood fast, though in sadly diminished numbers. A long ridge of horses and cavaliers in front of them showed how stern had been the attack and how fierce the resistance. On our left the wild miners had been broken at the first rush, but had fought so savagely, throwing themselves upon the ground and stabbing upwards at the stomachs of the horses, that they had at last beaten off the dragoons. The Devonshire militiamen, however, had been scattered, and shared the fate of the men of Frome. During the whole of the struggle the foot upon the further bank of the Bussex Rhine were pouring in a hail of bullets, which our musqueteers, having to defend themselves against the horse, were unable to reply to.

It needed no great amount of soldierly experience to see that the battle was lost, and that Monmouth's cause was doomed. It was broad daylight now, though the sun had not yet risen. Our cavalry was gone, our ordnance was silent, our line was pierced in many places, and more than one of our regiments had been destroyed. On the right flank the Horse Guards Blue, the Tangiers

Horse and two dragoon regiments were forming up for a fresh attack. On the left the foot-guards had bridged the ditch and were fighting hand to hand with the men from North Somerset. In front a steady fire was being poured into us, to which our reply was feeble and uncertain, for the powder carts had gone astray in the dark, and many were calling hoarsely for ammunition, while others were loading with pebbles instead of ball. Add to this that the regiments which still held their ground had all been badly shaken by the charge, and had lost a third of their number. Yet the brave clowns sent up cheer after cheer, and shouted words of encouragement and homely jests to each other, as though a battle were but some rough game which must as a matter of course be played out while there was a player left to join in it.

"Is Captain Clarke there?" cried Decimus Saxon, riding up with his sword-arm flecked with blood. "Ride over to Sir Stephen Timewell and tell him to join his men to ours. Apart we shall be broken—together we may stand another charge."

Setting spurs to Covenant I rode over to our companions and delivered the message. Sir Stephen, who had been struck by a petronel bullet, and wore a crimsoned kerchief bound round his snow-white head, saw the wisdom of the advice, and moved his townsmen as directed. His musqueteers being better provided with powder than ours did good service by keeping down for a time the deadly fire from across the fosse.

"Who would have thought it of him?" cried Sir Stephen, with flashing eyes, as Buyse and Saxon rode out to meet him. "What think ye now of our noble monarch, our champion of the Protestant cause?"

"He is no very great Krieger," said Buyse. "Yet perhaps it may be from want of habit as much as from want of courage."

"Courage!" cried the old Mayor, in a voice of scorn. "Look over yonder and behold your King." He pointed out over the moor with a finger which shook as much

from anger as from age. There, far away, showing up against the dark peat-coloured soil, rode a gaily-dressed cavalier, followed by a knot of attendants, galloping as fast as his horse would carry him from the field of battle. There was no mistaking the fugitive. It was the recreant Monmouth.

"Hush!" cried Saxon, as we all gave a cry of horror and execration; "do not dishearten our brave lads! Cowardice is catching and will run through an army like the putrid fever."

"Der Feigherzige!" cried Buyse, grinding his teeth. "And the brave country folk! It is too much."

"Stand to your pikes, men!" roared Saxon, in a voice of thunder, and we had scarce time to form our square and throw ourselves inside of it, before the whirlwind of horse was upon us once more. When the Taunton men had joined us a weak spot had been left in our ranks, and through this in an instant the Blue Guards smashed their way, pouring through the opening, and cutting fiercely to right and left. The burghers on the one side and our own men on the other replied by savage stabs from their pikes and scythes, which emptied many a saddle, but while the struggle was at its hottest the King's cannon opened for the first time with a deafening roar upon the other side of the rhine, and a storm of balls ploughed their way through our dense ranks, leaving furrows of dead and wounded behind them. At the same moment a great cry of "Powder! For Christ's sake, powder!" arose from the musqueteers whose last charge had been fired. Again the cannon roared, and again our men were mowed down as though Death himself with his scythe were amongst us. At last our ranks were breaking. In the very centre of the pikemen steel caps were gleaming, and broadswords rising and falling. The whole body was swept back two hundred paces or more, struggling furiously the while, and was there mixed with other like bodies which had been dashed out of all semblance of military order, and yet refused to fly. Men of Devon,

of Dorset, of Wiltshire and of Somerset, trodden down by horse, slashed by dragoons, dropping by scores under the rain of bullets, still fought on with a dogged, desperate courage for a ruined cause and a man who had deserted them. Everywhere as I glanced around me were set faces, clenched teeth, yells of rage and defiance, but never a sound of fear or of submission. Some clambered up upon the cruppers of the riders and dragged them backwards from their saddles. Others lay upon their faces and hamstrung the chargers with their scythe-blades, stabbing the horsemen before they could disengage themselves. Again and again the guards crashed through them from side to side, and yet the shattered ranks closed up behind them and continued the long-drawn struggle. So hopeless was it and so pitiable that I could have found it in my heart to wish that they would break and fly, were it not that on the broad moor there was no refuge which they could make for. And all this time, while they struggled and fought, blackened with powder and parched with thirst, spilling their blood as though it were water, the man who called himself their King was spurring over the countryside with a loose rein and a quaking heart, his thoughts centred upon saving his own neck, come what might to his gallant followers.

Large numbers of the foot fought to the death, neither giving nor receiving quarter; but at last, scattered, broken and without ammunition, the main body of the peasants dispersed and fled across the moor, closely followed by the horse. Saxon, Buyse and I had done all that we could to rally them once more, and had cut down some of the foremost of the pursuers, when my eye fell suddenly upon Sir Gervas, standing hatless with a few of his musqueteers in the midst of a swarm of dragoons. Spurring our horses we cut a way to his rescue, and laid our swords about us until we had cleared off his assailants for the moment.

"Jump up behind me!" I cried. "We can make good our escape."

He looked up smiling and shook his head. "I stay with my company," said he.

"Your company!" Saxon cried. "Why, man, you are mad! Your company is cut off to the last man."

"That's what I mean," he answered, flicking some dirt from his cravat. "Don't ye mind! Look out for yourselves. Good-bye, Clarke! Present my compliments to——" The dragoons charged down upon us again. We were all borne backwards, fighting desperately, and when we could look round the Baronet was gone for ever. We heard afterwards that the King's troops found upon the field a body which they mistook for that of Monmouth, on account of the effeminate grace of the features and richness of the attire. No doubt it was that of our undaunted friend, Sir Gervas Jerome, a name which shall ever be dear to my heart. When, ten years afterwards, we heard much of the gallantry of the young courtiers of the household of the French King, and of the sprightly courage with which they fought against us in the Lowlands at Steinkirk and elsewhere, I have always thought, from my recollection of Sir Gervas, that I knew what manner of men they were.

And now it was every man for himself. In no part of the field did the insurgents continue to resist. The first rays of the sun shining slantwise across the great dreary plain lit up the long line of the scarlet battalions, and glittered upon the cruel swords which rose and fell among the struggling drove of resistless fugitives. The German had become separated from us in the tumult, and we knew not whether he lived or was slain, though long afterwards we learned that he made good his escape, only to be captured with the ill-fated Duke of Monmouth. Grey, Wade, Ferguson and others had contrived also to save themselves, while Stephen Timewell lay in the midst of a stern ring of his hard-faced burghers, dying as he had lived, a gallant Puritan Englishman. All this we learned afterwards. At present we rode for our lives across the moor, followed by a few scattered bodies of horse, who soon

abandoned their pursuit in order to fasten upon some more easy prey.

We were passing a small clump of alder bushes when a loud manly voice raised in prayer attracted our attention. Pushing aside the branches, we came upon a man, seated with his back up against a great stone, cutting at his own arm with a broad-bladed knife, and giving forth the Lord's prayer the while, without a pause or a quiver in his tone. As he glanced up from his terrible task we both recognised him as one Hollis, whom I have mentioned as having been with Cromwell at Dunbar. His arm had been half severed by a cannon-ball, and he was quietly completing the separation in order to free himself from the dangling and useless limb. Even Saxon, used as he was to all the forms and incidents of war, stared open-eyed and aghast at this strange surgery ; but the man, with a short nod of recognition, went grimly forward with his task, until, even as we gazed, he separated the last shred which held it, and lay over with blanched lips which still murmured the prayer.[1] We could do little to help him, and indeed, might by our halt attract his pursuers to his hiding place ; so, throwing him down my flask half filled with water, we hastened on upon our way. Oh, war, my children, what a terrible thing it is ! How are men cozened and cheated by the rare trappings and prancing steeds, by the empty terms of honour and of glory, until they forget in the outward tinsel and show the real ghastly horror of the accursed thing ! Think not of the dazzling squadrons, nor of the spirit-stirring blare of the trumpets, but think of that lonely man under the shadow of the alders, and of what he was doing in a Christian age and a Christian land. Surely I, who have grown grey in harness, and who have seen as many fields as I have years of my life, should be the last to preach upon this subject, and yet I can clearly see that, in honesty, men must either give up war, or else they must confess that

[1] The incident is historically true, and may serve to show what sort of men they were who had learned their soldiering under Cromwell.

the words of the Redeemer are too lofty for them, and that there is no longer any use in pretending that His teaching can be reduced to practice. I have seen a Christian minister blessing a cannon which had just been founded, and another blessing a war-ship as it glided from the slips. They, the so-called representatives of Christ, blessed these engines of destruction which cruel man has devised to destroy and tear his fellow-worms. What would we say if we read in Holy Writ of our Lord having blessed the battering-rams and the catapults of the legions? Would we think that it was in agreement with His teaching? But there! As long as the heads of the Church wander away so far from the spirit of its teaching as to live in palaces and drive in carriages, what wonder if, with such examples before them, the lower clergy overstep at times the lines laid down by their great Master?

Looking back from the summit of the low hills which lie to the westward of the moor, we could see the cloud of horsemen streaming over the bridge of the Parret and into the town of Bridgewater, with the helpless drove of fugitives still flying in front of them. We had pulled up our horses, and were looking sadly and silently back at the fatal plain, when the thuds of hoofs fell upon our ears, and, turning round, we found two horsemen in the dress of the guards riding towards us. They had made a circuit to cut us off, for they were riding straight for us with drawn swords and eager gestures.

"More slaughter," I said wearily. "Why will they force us to it?"

Saxon glanced keenly from beneath his drooping lids at the approaching horsemen, and a grim smile wreathed his face in a thousand lines and wrinkles.

"It is our friend who set the hounds upon our track at Salisbury," he said. "This is a happy meeting. I have a score to settle with him."

It was, indeed, the hot-headed young cornet whom we had met at the outset of our adventures. Some evil

chance had led him to recognise the tall figure of my companion as we rode from the field, and to follow him, in the hope of obtaining revenge for the humiliation which he had met with at his hands. The other was a lance-corporal, a man of square, soldierly build, riding a heavy black horse with a white blaze upon its forehead.

Saxon rode slowly towards the officer, while the trooper and I fixed our eyes upon each other.

"Well, boy," I heard my companion say, "I trust that you have learned to fence since we met last."

The young guardsman gave a snarl of rage at the taunt, and an instant afterwards the clink of their sword-blades showed that they had met. For my own part I dared not spare a glance upon them, for my opponent attacked me with such fury that it was all that I could do to keep him off. No pistol was drawn upon either side. It was an honest contest of steel against steel. So constant were the corporal's thrusts, now at my face, now at my body, that I had never an opening for one of the heavy cuts which might have ended the matter. Our horses spun round each other, biting and pawing, while we thrust and parried, until at last, coming together knee to knee, we found ourselves within sword-point, and grasped each other by the throat. He plucked a dagger from his belt and struck it into my left arm, but I dealt him a blow with my gauntleted hand, which smote him off his horse and stretched him speechless upon the plain. Almost at the same moment the cornet dropped from his horse, wounded in several places. Saxon sprang from his saddle, and picking the soldier's dagger from the ground, would have finished them both had I not jumped down also and restrained him. He flashed round upon me with so savage a face that I could see that the wild-beast nature within him was fairly roused.

"What hast thou to do?" he snarled. "Let go!"

"Nay, nay! Blood enough hath been shed," said I. "Let them lie."

"What mercy would they have had upon us?" he

cried passionately, struggling to get his wrist free. "They have lost, and must pay forfeit."

"Not in cold blood," I said firmly. "I shall not abide it."

"Indeed, your lordship," he sneered, with the devil peeping out through his eyss. With a violent wrench, he freed himself from my grasp, and springing back picked up the sword which he had dropped.

"What then?" I asked, standing on my guard astride of the wounded man.

He stood for a minute or more looking at me from under his heavy-hung brows, with his whole face writhing with passion. Every instant I expected that he would fly at me, but at last, with a gulp in his throat, he sheathed his rapier with a sharp clang, and sprang back into the saddle.

"We part here," he said coldly. "I have twice been on the verge of slaying you, and the third time might be too much for my patience. You are no fit companion for a cavalier of fortune. Join the clergy, lad; it is your vocation."

"Is this Decimus Saxon who speaks, or is it Will Spotterbridge?" I asked, remembering his jest concerning his ancestry, but no answering smile came upon his rugged face. Gathering up his bridle in his left hand, he shot one last malignant glance at the bleeding officer, and galloped off along one of the tracks which led to the southward. I stood gazing after him, but he never sent so much as a hand-wave back, riding on with a rigid neck until he vanished in a dip in the moor.

"There goes one friend," thought I sadly, "and all forsooth because I will not stand by and see a helpless man's throat cut. Another friend is dead on the field. A third, the oldest and dearest of all, lies wounded at Bridgewater, at the mercy of a brutal soldiery. If I return to my home I do but bring trouble and danger to those whom I love. Whither shall I turn?" For some minutes I stood irresolute beside the prostrate guardsmen, while Covenant strolled slowly along cropping the scanty herbage, and turning his dark full eyes towards me from

time to time, as though to assure me that one friend at least was steadfast. Northward I looked at the Polden Hills, southwards at the Blackdowns, westward at the long blue range of the Quantocks, and eastward at the broad fen country; but nowhere could I see any hope of safety. Truth to say I felt sick at heart and cared little for the time whether I escaped or no.

A muttered oath followed by a groan roused me from my meditations. The corporal was sitting up rubbing his head with a look of stupid astonishment upon his face, as though he were not very sure either of where he was or how he came there. The officer, too, had opened his eyes and showed other signs of returning consciousness. His wounds were clearly of no very serious nature. There was no danger of their pursuing me even should they wish to do so, for their horses had trotted off to join the numerous other riderless steeds who were wandering all over the moorlands. I mounted, therefore, and rode slowly away, saving my good charger as much as possible, for the morning's work had already told somewhat heavily upon him.

There were many scattered bodies of horse riding hither and thither over the marshes, but I was able to avoid them, and trotted onwards, keeping to the waste country until I found myself eight or ten miles from the battlefield. The few cottages and houses which I passed were deserted, and many of them bore signs of having been plundered. Not a peasant was to be seen. The evil fame of Kirke's lambs had chased away all those who had not actually taken arms. At last, after riding for three hours, I bethought me that I was far enough from the main line of pursuit to be free from danger, so I chose out a sheltered spot where a clump of bushes overhung a little brook. There, seated upon a bank of velvet moss, I rested my weary limbs, and tried to wash the stains of battle from my person.

It was only now when I could look quietly at my own attire that it was brought home to me how terrible the en-

counter must have been in which I had been engaged, and how wonderful it was that I had come off so scathless. Of the blows which I had struck in the fight I had faint remembrance, yet they must have been many and terrible, for my sword edge was as jagged and turned as though I had hacked for an hour at an iron bar. From head to foot I was splashed and crimsoned with blood, partly my own, but mostly that of others. My headpiece was dinted with blows. A petronel bullet had glanced off my front plate, striking it at an angle, and had left a broad groove across it. Two or three other cracks and stars showed where the good sheet of proof steel had saved me. My left arm was stiff and well-nigh powerless from the corporal's stab, but on stripping off my doublet and examining the place, I found that though there had been much bleeding the wound was on the outer side of the bone, and was therefore of no great import. A kerchief dipped in water and bound tightly round it eased the smart and stanched the blood. Beyond this scratch I had no injuries, though from my own efforts I felt as stiff and sore all over as though I had been well cudgelled, and the slight wound got in Wells Cathedral had reopened and was bleeding. With a little patience and cold water, however, I was able to dress it and to tie myself up as well as any chirurgeon in the kingdom.

Having seen to my injuries I had now to attend to my appearance, for in truth I might have stood for one of those gory giants with whom the worthy Don Bellianis of Greece and other stout champions were wont to contend. No woman or child but would have fled at the sight of me, for I was as red as the parish butcher when Martinmas is nigh. A good wash, however, in the brook soon removed those traces of war, and I was able to get the marks off my breastplate and boots. In the case of my clothes, however, it was so hopeless to clean them that I gave it up in despair. My good old horse had been never so much as grazed by steel or bullet, so that with a little watering and tending he was soon as fresh as ever, and we

turned our backs on the streamlet a better-favoured pair than we had approached it.

It was now going on to mid-day, and I began to feel very hungry, for I had tasted nothing since the evening before. Two or three houses stood in a cluster upon the moor, but the blackened walls and scorched thatch showed that it was hopeless to expect anything from them. Once or twice I spied folk in the fields or on the roadway ; but at sight of an armed horseman they ran for their lives, diving into the brushwood like wild animals. At one place, where a high oak tree marked the meeting of three roads, two bodies dangling from one of the branches showed that the fears of the villagers were based upon experience. These poor men had in all likelihood been hanged because the amount of their little hoardings had not come up to the expectations of their plunderers ; or because, having given all to one band of robbers, they had nothing with which to appease the next. At last, when I was fairly weary of my fruitless search for food, I espied a windmill standing upon a green hill at the other side of some fields. Judging from its appearance that it had escaped the general pillage, I took the pathway which branched away to it from the high-road.[1]

## 33. *Of my Perilous Adventure at the Mill*

AT the base of the mill there stood a shed which was evidently used to stall the horses which brought the farmers' grain. Some grass was heaped up inside it, so I loosened Covenant's girths and left him to have a hearty meal. The mill itself appeared to be silent and empty. I climbed the steep wood ladder, and pushing the door open, walked into a round stone-flagged room, from which a second ladder led to the loft above. On one side of this chamber was a long wooden box, and all round the walls were ranged rows of sacks full of flour.

[1] Note J, Appendix.—Battle of Sedgemoor.

In the fireplace stood a pile of faggots ready for lighting, so with the aid of my tinder-box I soon had a cheerful blaze. Taking a large handful of flour from the nearest bag I moistened it with water from a pitcher, and having rolled it out into a flat cake, proceeded to bake it, smiling the while to think of what my mother would say to such rough cookery. Very sure I am that Patrick Lamb himself, whose book, the *Complete Court Cook*, was ever in the dear soul's left hand while she stirred and basted with her right, could not have turned out a dish which was more to my taste at the moment, for I had not even patience to wait for the browning of it, but snapped it up and devoured it half hot. I then rolled a second one, and having placed it before the fire, and drawn my pipe from my pocket, I set myself to smoke, waiting with all the philosophy which I could muster until it should be ready.

I was lost in thought, brooding sadly over the blow which the news would be to my father, when I was startled by a loud sneeze, which sounded as though it were delivered in my very ear. I started to my feet and gazed all round me, but there was nothing save the solid wall behind and the empty chamber before. I had almost come to persuade myself that I had been the creature of some delusion, when again a crashing sneeze, louder and more prolonged than the last, broke upon the silence. Could someone be hid in one of the bags? Drawing my sword I walked round pricking the great flour sacks, but without being able to find cause for the sound. I was still marvelling over the matter when a most extraordinary chorus of gasps, snorts and whistles broke out, with cries of "Oh, holy mother!" "Blessed Redeemer!" and other such exclamations. This time there could be no doubt as to whence the uproar came. Rushing up to the great chest upon which I had been seated, I threw back the heavy lid and gazed in.

It was more than half full of flour, in the midst of which was floundering some creature, which was so coated and

caked with the white powder, that it would have been hard to say that it was human were it not for the pitiable cries which it was uttering. Stooping down I dragged the man from his hiding-place, when he dropped upon his knees upon the floor and yelled for mercy, raising such a cloud of dust from every wriggle of his body that I began to cough and to sneeze. As the skin of powder began to scale off from him, I saw to my surprise that he was no miller or peasant, but was a man-at-arms, with a huge sword girt to his side, looking at present not unlike a frosted icicle, and a great steel-faced breastplate. His steel cap had remained behind in the flour-bin, and his bright red hair, the only touch of colour about him, stood straight up in the air with terror, as he implored me to spare his life. Thinking that there was something familiar about his voice, I drew my hand across his face, which set him yelling as though I had slain him. There was no mistaking the heavy cheeks and the little greedy eyes. It was none other than Master Tetheridge, the noisy town-clerk of Taunton.

But how much changed from the town-clerk whom we had seen strutting, in all the pomp and bravery of his office, before the good Mayor on the day of our coming to Somersetshire ! Where now was the ruddy colour like a pippin in September ? Where was the assured manner and the manly port ? As he knelt his great jack-boots clicked together with apprehension, and he poured forth in a piping voice, like that of a Lincoln's Inn mumper, a string of pleadings, excuses and entreaties, as though I were Feversham in person, and was about to order him to instant execution.

" I am but a poor scrivener man, your serene Highness," he bawled. " Indeed, I am a most unhappy clerk, your Honour, who has been driven into these courses by the tyranny of those above him. A more loyal man, your Grace, never wore neat's leather, but when the mayor says ' Yes,' can the clerk say ' No ' ? Spare me, your lordship ; spare a most penitent wretch,

whose only prayer is that he may be allowed to serve King James to the last drop of his blood ! "

" Do you renounce the Duke of Monmouth ? " I asked, in a stern voice.

" I do—from my heart ! " said he fervently.

" Then prepare to die ! " I roared, whipping out my sword, " for I am one of his officers."

At the sight of the steel the wretched clerk gave a perfect bellow of terror, and falling upon his face he wriggled and twisted, until looking up he perceived that I was laughing. On that he crawled up on to his knees once more, and from that to his feet, glancing at me askance, as though by no means assured of my intentions.

" You must remember me, Master Tetheridge," I said. " I am Captain Clarke, of Saxon's regiment of Wiltshire foot. I am surprised, indeed, that you should have fallen away from that allegiance to which you did not only swear yourself, but did administer the oath to so many others."

" Not a whit, Captain, not a whit ! " he answered, resuming his old bantam-cock manner as soon as he saw that there was no danger. " I am upon oath as true and as leal a man as ever I was."

" That I can fully believe," I answered.

" I did but dissimulate," he continued, brushing the flour from his person. " I did but practise that cunning of the serpent which should in every warrior accompany the courage of the lion. You have read your Homer, doubtless. Eh ? I too have had a touch of the humanities. I am no mere rough soldier, however stoutly I can hold mine own at sword-play. Master Ulysses is my type, even as thine, I take it, is Master Ajax."

" Methinks that Master Jack-in-the-box would fit you better," said I. " Wilt have a half of this cake ? How came you in the flour-bin ? "

" Why, marry, in this wise," he answered, with his mouth full of dough. " It was a wile or ruse, after the fashion of the greatest commanders, who have always been famous for concealing their movements, and lurking

where they were least expected. For when the fight was lost, and I had cut and hacked until my arm was weary and my edge blunted, I found that I was left alone alive of all the Taunton men. Were we on the field you could see where I had stood by the ring of slain which would be found within the sweep of my sword-arm. Finding that all was lost and that our rogues were fled, I mounted our worthy Mayor's charger, seeing that the gallant gentleman had no further need for it, and rode slowly from the field. I promise you that there was that in my eye and bearing which prevented their horse from making too close a pursuit of me. One trooper did indeed throw himself across my path, but mine old back-handed cut was too much for him. Alas, I have much upon my conscience! I have made both widows and orphans. Why will they brave me when—God of mercy, what is that?"

"'Tis but my horse in the stall below," I answered.

"I thought it was the dragoons," quoth the clerk, wiping away the drops which had started out upon his brow. "You and I would have gone forth and smitten them."

"Or climbed into the flour-bin," said I.

"I have not yet made clear to you how I came there," he continued. "Having ridden, then, some leagues from the field, and noting this windmill, it did occur to me that a stout man might single-handed make it good against a troop of horse. We have no great love of flight, we Tetheridges. It may be mere empty pride, and yet the feeling runs strong in the family. We have a fighting strain in us ever since my kinsman followed Ireton's army as a sutler. I pulled up, therefore, and had dismounted to take my observations, when my brute of a charger gave the bridle a twitch, jerked itself free, and was off in an instant over hedges and ditches. I had, therefore, only my good sword left to trust to. I climbed up the ladder, and was engaged in planning how the defence could best be conducted, when I heard the clank of hoofs, and on the top of it you did ascend from below. I retired at once into ambush, from which I should assuredly have made a

sudden outfall or sally, had the flour not so choked my breathing that I felt as though I had a two-pound loaf stuck in my gizzard. For myself, I am glad that it has so come about, for in my blind wrath I might unwittingly have done you an injury. Hearing the clank of your sword as you did come up the ladder, I did opine that you were one of King James's minions, the captain, perchance, of some troop in the fields below."

"All very clear and explicit, Master Tetheridge," said I, relighting my pipe. "No doubt your demeanour when I did draw you from your hiding-place was also a mere cloak for your valour. But enough of that. It is to the future that we have to look. What are your intentions?"

"To remain with you, Captain," said he.

"Nay, that you shall not," I answered; "I have no great fancy for your companionship. Your overflowing valour may bring me into ruffles which I had otherwise avoided."

"Nay, nay! I shall moderate my spirit," he cried. "In such troublous times you will find yourself none the worse for the company of a tried fighting man."

"Tried and found wanting," said I, weary of the man's braggart talk. "I tell you I will go alone."

"Nay, you need not be so hot about it," he exclaimed, shrinking away from me. "In any case, we had best stay here until nightfall, when we may make our way to the coast."

"That is the first mark of sense that you have shown," said I. "The King's horse will find enough to do with the Zoyland cider and the Bridgewater ale. If we can pass through, I have friends on the north coast who would give us a lift in their lugger as far as Holland. This help I will not refuse to give you, since you are my fellow in misfortune. I would that Saxon had stayed with me! I fear he will be taken!"

"If you mean Colonel Saxon," said the clerk, "I think that he also is one who hath much guile as well as valour. A stern, fierce soldier he was, as I know well, having fought back to back with him for forty minutes

by the clock, against a troop of Sarsfield's horse. Plain of speech he was, and perhaps a trifle inconsiderate of the honour of a cavalier, but in the field it would have been well for the army had they had more such commanders."

"You say truly," I answered; "but now that we have refreshed ourselves it is time that we bethought us of taking some rest, since we may have far to travel this night. I would that I could lay my hand upon a flagon of ale."

"I would gladly drink to our further acquaintanceship in the same," said my companion, "but as to the matter of slumber that may be readily arranged. If you ascend that ladder you will find in the loft a litter of empty sacks, upon which you can repose. For myself, I will stay down here for a while and cook myself another cake."

"Do you remain on watch for two hours, and then arouse me," I replied. "I shall then keep guard whilst you sleep." He touched the hilt of his sword as a sign that he would be true to his post, so not without some misgivings I climbed up into the loft, and throwing myself upon the rude couch was soon in a deep and dreamless slumber, lulled by the low, mournful groaning and creaking of the sails.

I was awoken by steps beside me, and found that the little clerk had come up the ladder and was bending over me. I asked him if the time had come for me to rouse, on which he answered in a strange quavering voice that I had yet an hour, and that he had come up to see if there was any service which he could render me. I was too weary to take much note of his slinking manner and pallid cheeks, so thanking him for his attention, I turned over and was soon asleep once more.

My next waking was a rougher and a sterner one. There came a sudden rush of heavy feet up the ladder, and a dozen red-coats swarmed into the room. Springing on to my feet I put out my hand for the sword which I had laid all ready by my side, but the trusty weapon had gone. It had been stolen whilst I slumbered. Unarmed and taken at a vantage, I was struck down and

pinioned in a moment. One held a pistol to my head, and swore that he would blow my brains out if I stirred, while the others wound a coil of rope round my body and arms, until Samson himself could scarce have got free. Feeling that my struggles were of no possible avail, I lay silent and waited for whatever was to come. Neither now nor at any time, dear children, have I laid great store upon my life, but far less then than now, for each of you are tiny tendrils which bind me to this world. Yet, when I think of the other dear ones who are waiting for me on the further shore, I do not think that even now death would seem an evil thing in my eyes. What a hopeless and empty thing would life be without it!

Having lashed my arms, the soldiers dragged me down the ladder, as though I had been a truss of hay, into the room beneath, which was also crowded with troopers. In one corner was the wretched scrivener, a picture of abject terror, with chattering teeth and trembling knees, only prevented from falling upon the floor by the grasp of a stalwart corporal. In front of him stood two officers, one a little hard brown man with dark twinkling eyes and an alert manner, the other tall and slender, with a long golden moustache, which drooped down half-way to his shoulders. The former had my sword in his hand, and they were both examining the blade curiously.

"It is a good bit of steel, Dick," said one, putting the point against the stone floor, and pressing down until he touched it with the handle. "See, with what a snap it rebounds! No maker's name, but the date 1638 is stamped upon the pommel. Where did you get it, fellow?" he asked, fixing his keen gaze upon my face.

"It was my father's before me," I answered.

"Then I trust that he drew it in a better quarrel than his son hath done," said the taller officer, with a sneer.

"In as good, though not in a better," I returned. "That sword hath always been drawn for the rights and liberties of Englishmen, and against the tyranny of kings and the bigotry of priests."

"What a tag for a playhouse, Dick," cried the officer. "How doth it run? 'The bigotry of kings and the tyranny of priests.' Why, if well delivered by Betterton close up to the footlights, with one hand upon his heart and the other pointing to the sky, I warrant the pit would rise at it."

"Very like," said the other, twirling his moustache. "But we have no time for fine speeches now. What are we to do with the little one?"

"Hang him," the other answered carelessly.

"No, no, your most gracious honours," howled Master Tetheridge, suddenly writhing out of the corporal's grip and flinging himself upon the floor at their feet. "Did I not tell ye where ye could find one of the stoutest soldiers of the rebel army? Did not I guide ye to him? Did not I even creep up and remove his sword lest any of the King's subjects be slain in the taking of him? Surely, surely, ye would not use me so scurvily when I have done ye these services? Have I not made good my words? Is he not as I described him, a giant in stature and of wondrous strength? The whole army will bear me out in it, that he was worth any two in single fight. I have given him over to ye. Surely ye will let me go!"

"Very well delivered—plaguily so!" quoth the little officer, clapping the palm of one hand softly against the back of the other. "The emphasis was just, and the enunciation clear. A little further back towards the wings, corporal, if you please. Thank you! Now, Dick, it is your cue."

"Nay, John, you are too absurd!" cried the other impatiently. "The mask and the buskins are well enough in their place, but you look upon the play as a reality and upon the reality as but a play. What this reptile hath said is true. We must keep faith with him if we wish that others of the country folk should give up the fugitives. There is no help for it!"

"For myself I believe in Jeddart law," his companion answered. "I would hang the man first and then discuss

the question of our promise. However, pink me if I will obtrude my opinion on any man ! "

" Nay, it cannot be," the taller said. " Corporal, do you take him down. Henderson will go with you. Take from him that plate and sword, which his mother would wear with as good a grace. And hark ye, corporal, a few touches of thy stirrup leathers across his fat shoulders might not be amiss, as helping him to remember the King's dragoons."

My treacherous companion was dragged off, struggling and yelping, and presently a series of piercing howls, growing fainter and fainter as he fled before his tormentors, announced that the hint had been taken. The two officers rushed to the little window of the mill and roared with laughter, while the troopers, peeping furtively over their shoulders, could not restrain themselves from joining in their mirth, from which I gathered that Master Tetheridge, as, spurred on by fear, he hurled his fat body through hedges and into ditches, was a somewhat comical sight.

" And now for the other," said the little officer, turning away from the window and wiping the tears of laughter from his face. " That beam over yonder would serve our purpose. Where is Hangman Broderick, the Jack Ketch of the Royals ? "

" Here I am, sir," responded a sullen, heavy-faced trooper, shuffling forward ; " I have a rope here with a noose."

" Throw it over the beam, then. What is amiss with your hand, you clumsy rogue, that you should wear linen round it ? "

" May it please you, sir," the man answered, " it was all through an ungrateful, prick-eared Presbyterian knave whom I hung at Gommatch. I had done all that could be done for him. Had he been at Tyburn he could scarce have met with more attention. Yet when I did put my hand to his neck to see that all was as it should be, he did fix me with his teeth, and hath gnawed a great piece from my thumb."

"I am sorry for you," said the officer. "You know, no doubt, that the human bite under such circumstances is as deadly as that of the mad dog, so that you may find yourself snapping and barking one of these fine mornings. Nay, turn not pale! I have heard you preach patience and courage to your victims. You are not afraid of death?"

"Not of any Christian death, your Honour. Yet, ten shillings a week is scarce enough to pay a man for an end like that!"

"Nay, it is all a lottery," remarked the Captain cheerily. "I have heard that in these cases a man is so drawn up that his heels do beat a tattoo against the back of his head. But, mayhap, it is not as painful as it would appear. Meanwhile, do you proceed to do your office."

Three or four troopers caught me by the arms, but I shook them off as best I might, and walked with, as I trust, a steady step and a cheerful face under the beam, which was a great smoke-blackened rafter passing from one side of the chamber to the other. The rope was thrown over this, and the noose placed round my neck with trembling fingers by the hangman, who took particular care to keep beyond the range of my teeth. Half-a-dozen dragoons seized the further end of the coil, and stood ready to swing me into eternity. Through all my adventurous life I have never been so close upon the threshold of death as at that moment, and yet I declare to you that, terrible as my position was, I could think of nothing but the tattoo marks upon old Solomon Sprent's arm, and the cunning fashion in which he had interwoven the red and the blue. Yet I was keenly alive to all that was going on around me. The scene of the bleak stone-floored room, the single narrow window, the two lounging elegant officers, the pile of arms in the corner, and even the texture of the coarse red serge and the patterns of the great brass buttons upon the sleeve of the man who held me, are all stamped clearly upon my mind.

"We must do our work with order," remarked the

taller Captain, taking a note-book from his pocket. "Colonel Sarsfield may desire some details. Let me see! This is the seventeenth, is it not?"

"Four at the farm and five at the cross-roads," the other answered, counting upon his fingers. "Then there was the one whom we shot in the hedge, and the wounded one who nearly saved himself by dying, and the two in the grove under the hill. I can remember no more, save those who were strung up in Bridgewater immediately after the action."

"It is well to do it in an orderly fashion," quoth the other, scribbling in his book. "It is very well for Kirke and his men, who are half Moors themselves, to hang and to slaughter without discrimination or ceremony, but we should set them a better example. What is your name, sirrah?"

"My name is Captain Micah Clarke," I answered.

The two officers looked at each other, and the smaller one gave a long whistle. "It is the very man!" said he. "This comes of asking questions! Rat me, if I had not misgivings that it might prove to be so. They said that he was large of limb."

"Tell me, sirrah, have you ever known one Major Ogilvy of the Horse Guards Blue?" asked the Captain.

"Seeing that I had the honour of taking him prisoner," I replied, "and seeing also that he hath shared soldier's fare and quarters with me ever since, I think I may fairly say that I do know him."

"Cast loose the cord!" said the officer, and the hangman reluctantly slipped the cord over my head once more. "Young man, you are surely reserved for something great, for you will never be nearer your grave until you do actually step into it. This Major Ogilvy hath made great interest both for you and for a wounded comrade of yours who lies at Bridgewater. Your name hath been given to the commanders of horse, with orders to bring you in unscathed should you be taken. Yet it is but fair to tell you that though the Major's good word may

save you from martial law, it will stand you in small stead before a civil judge, before whom ye must in the end take your trial."

"I desire to share the same lot and fortune as has befallen my companions-in-arms," I answered.

"Nay, that is but a sullen way to take your deliverance," cried the smaller officer. "The situation is as flat as sutler's beer. Otway would have made a better thing of it. Can you not rise to the occasion? Where is she?"

"She! Who?" I asked.

"She. The she. The woman. Your wife, sweetheart, betrothed, what you will."

"There is none such," I answered.

"There now! What can be done in a case like that?" cried he despairingly. "She should have rushed in from the wings and thrown herself upon your bosom. I have seen such a situation earn three rounds from the pit. There is good material spoiling here for want of someone to work it up."

"We have something else to work up, Jack," exclaimed his companion impatiently. "Sergeant Gredder, do you with two troopers conduct the prisoner to Gommatch Church. It is time that we were once more upon our way, for in a few hours the darkness will hinder the pursuit."

At the word of command the troopers descended into the field where their horses were picketed, and were speedily on the march once more, the tall Captain leading them, and the stage-struck cornet bringing up the rear. The sergeant to whose care I had been committed—a great square-shouldered, dark-browed man—ordered my own horse to be brought out, and helped me to mount it. He removed the pistols from the holsters, however, and hung them with my sword at his own saddle-bow.

"Shall I tie his feet under the horse's belly?" asked one of the dragoons.

"Nay, the lad hath an honest face," the sergeant answered. "If he promises to be quiet we shall cast free his arms."

"I have no desire to escape," said I.

"Then untie the rope. A brave man in misfortune hath ever my goodwill, strike me dumb else! Sergeant Gredder is my name, formerly of Mackay's and now of the Royals—as hard-worked and badly-paid a man as any in his Majesty's service. Right wheel, and down the pathway! Do ye ride on either side, and I behind! Our carbines are primed, friend, so stand true to your promise!"

"Nay, you can rely upon it," I answered.

"Your little comrade did play you a scurvy trick," said the sergeant, "for seeing us ride down the road he did make across to us, and bargained with the Captain that his life should be spared, on condition that he should deliver into our hands what he described as one of the stoutest soldiers in the rebel army. Truly you have thews and sinews enough, though you are surely too young to have seen much service."

"This hath been my first campaign," I answered.

"And is like to be your last," he remarked, with soldierly frankness. "I hear that the Privy Council intend to make such an example as will take the heart out of the Whigs for twenty years to come. They have a lawyer coming from London whose wig is more to be feared than our helmets. He will slay more men in a day than a troop of horse in a ten-mile chase. Faith! I would sooner they took this butcher-work into their own hands. See those bodies on yonder tree. It is an evil season when such acorns grow upon English oaks."

"It is an evil season," said I, "when men who call themselves Christians inflict such vengeance upon poor simple peasants, who have done no more than their conscience urged them. That the leaders and officers should suffer is but fair. They stood to win in case of success, and should pay forfeit now that they have lost. But it goes to my heart to see those poor godly country folk so treated."

"Aye, there is truth in that," said the sergeant. "Now

if it were some of these snuffle-nosed preachers, the old lank-haired bell-wethers who have led their flocks to the devil, it would be another thing. Why can they not conform to the Church, and be plagued to them? It is good enough for the King, so surely it is good enough for them; or are their souls so delicate that they cannot satisfy themselves with that on which every honest Englishman thrives? The main road to Heaven is too common for them. They must needs have each a bypath of their own, and cry out against all who will not follow it."

"Why," said I, "there are pious men of all creeds. If a man lead a life of virtue, what matter what he believes?"

"Let a man keep his virtue in his heart," quoth Sergeant Gredder. "Let him pack it deep in the knapsack of his soul. I suspect godliness which shows upon the surface, the snuffling talk, the rolling eyes, the groaning and the hawking. It is like the forged money, which can be told by its being more bright and more showy than the real."

"An apt comparison!" said I. "But how comes it, sergeant, that you have given attention to these matters? Unless they are much belied, the Royal Dragoons find other things to think of."

"I was one of Mackay's foot," he answered shortly.

"I have heard of him," said I. "A man, I believe, both of parts and of piety."

"That, indeed, he is," cried Sergeant Gredder warmly. "He is a man stern and soldierly to the outer eye, but with the heart of a saint within him. I promise you there was little need of the strapado in his regiment, for there was not a man who did not fear the look of sorrow in his Colonel's eyes far more than he did the provost-marshal."

During the whole of our long ride I found the worthy sergeant a true follower of the excellent Colonel Mackay, for he proved to be a man of more than ordinary intelligence, and of serious and thoughtful habit. As to the two troopers, they rode on either side of me as silent as statues; for the common dragoons of those days could

but talk of wine and women, and were helpless and speechless when aught else was to the fore. When we at last rode into the little village of Gommatch, which overlooks the plain of Sedgemoor, it was with regret on each side that I bade my guardian adieu. As a parting favour I begged him to take charge of Covenant for me, promising to pay a certain sum by the month for his keep, and commissioning him to retain the horse for his own use should I fail to claim him within the year. It was a load off my mind when I saw my trusty companion led away, staring back at me with questioning eyes, as though unable to understand the separation. Come what might, I knew now that he was in the keeping of a good man who would see that no harm befell him.

## 34. *Of the Coming of Solomon Sprent*

THE church of Gommatch was a small ivy-clad building with a square Norman tower, standing in the centre of the hamlet of that name. Its great oaken doors, studded with iron, and high narrow windows, fitted it well for the use to which it was now turned. Two companies of Dumbarton's Foot had been quartered in the village, with a portly major at their head, to whom I was handed over by Sergeant Gredder, with some account of my capture, and of the reasons which had prevented my summary execution.

Night was now drawing in, but a few dim lamps, hung here and there upon the walls, cast an uncertain, flickering light over the scene. A hundred or more prisoners were scattered about upon the stone floor, many of them wounded, and some evidently dying. The hale had gathered in silent, subdued groups round their stricken friends, and were doing what they could to lessen their sufferings. Some had even removed the greater part of their clothing in order to furnish head-rests and pallets for the wounded. Here and there in the shadows dark

kneeling figures might be seen, and the measured sound of their prayers rang through the aisles, with a groan now and again, or a choking gasp as some poor sufferer battled for breath. The dim yellow light streaming over the earnest pain-drawn faces, and the tattered mud-coloured figures, would have made it a fitting study for any of those Low Country painters whose pictures I saw long afterwards at The Hague.

On Thursday morning, the third day after the battle, we were all conveyed into Bridgewater, where we were confined for the remainder of the week in St. Mary's Church, the very one from the tower of which Monmouth and his commanders had inspected Feversham's position. The more we heard of the fight from the soldiers and others, the more clear it became that, but for the most unfortunate accidents, there was every chance that our night attack might have succeeded. There was scarcely a fault which a General could commit which Feversham had not been guilty of. He had thought too lightly of his enemy, and left his camp entirely open to a surprise. When the firing broke out he sprang from his couch, but failing to find his wig, he had groped about his tent while the battle was being decided, and only came out when it was well-nigh over. All were agreed that had it not been for the chance of the Bussex Rhine having been overlooked by our guides and scouts, we should have been among the tents before the men could have been called to arms. Only this and the fiery energy of John Churchill, the second in command, afterwards better known under a higher name, both to French and to English history, prevented the Royal army from meeting with a reverse which might have altered the result of the campaign.[1] Should ye hear or read, then, my dear children, that Monmouth's rising was easily put down, or that it was hopeless from the first, remember that I, who was concerned in it, say confidently that it really trembled in the balance, and that this handful of resolute peasants

[1] Note K, Appendix.—Ferguson's Account.

with their pikes and their scythes were within an ace of altering the whole course of English history. The ferocity of the Privy Council, after the rebellion was quelled, arose from their knowledge of how very close it had been to success.

I do not wish to say too much of the cruelty and barbarity of the victors, for it is not good for your childish ears to hear of such doings. The sluggard Feversham and the brutal Kirke have earned themselves a name in the West, which is second only to that of the arch villain who came after them. As for their victims, when they had hanged and quartered and done their wicked worst upon them, at least they left their names in their own little villages, to be treasured up and handed from generation to generation, as brave men and true who had died for a noble cause. Go now to Milverton, or to Wiveliscombe, or to Minehead, or to Colyford, or to any village through the whole breadth and length of Somerset-shire, and you will find that they have not forgotten what they proudly call their martyrs. But where now is Kirke and where is Feversham? Their names are preserved, it is true, but preserved in a county's hatred. Who can fail to see now that these men in punishing others brought a far heavier punishment upon themselves? Their sin hath indeed found them out.

They did all that wicked and callous-hearted men could do, knowing well that such deeds were acceptable to the cold-blooded, bigoted hypocrite who sat upon the throne. They worked to win his favour, and they won it. Men were hanged and cut down and hanged again. Every cross-road in the country was ghastly with gibbets. There was not an insult or a contumely which might make the pangs of death more unendurable, which was not heaped upon these long-suffering men; yet it is proudly recounted in their native shire that of all the host of victims there was not one who did not meet his end with a firm lip, protesting that if the thing were to do again he was ready to do it.

At the end of a week or two news came of the fugitives. Monmouth, it seems, had been captured by Portman's yellow-coats when trying to make his way to the New Forest, whence he hoped to escape to the Continent. He was dragged, gaunt, unshaven and trembling, out of a bean-field in which he had taken refuge, and was carried to Ringwood, in Hampshire. Strange rumours reached us concerning his behaviour—rumours which came to our ears through the coarse jests of our guards. Some said that he had gone on his knees to the yokels who had seized him. Others that he had written to the King offering to do anything, even to throw over the Protestant cause, to save his head from the scaffold.[1] We laughed at these stories at the time, and set them down as inventions of our enemies. It seemed too impossible that, at a time when his supporters were so sternly and so loyally standing true to him, he, their leader, with the eyes of all men upon him, should be showing less courage than every little drummer-boy displays, who trips along at the head of his regiment upon the field of battle. Alas! time showed that the stories were indeed true, and that there was no depth of infamy to which this unhappy man would not descend, in the hope of prolonging for a few years that existence which had proved a curse to so many who trusted him.

Of Saxon no news had come, good or bad, which encouraged me to hope that he had found a hiding-place for himself. Reuben was still confined to his couch by his wound, and was under the care and protection of Major Ogilvy. The good gentleman came to see me more than once, and endeavoured to add to my comfort, until I made him understand that it pained me to find myself upon a different footing to the brave fellows with whom I had shared the perils of the campaign. One great favour he did me in writing to my father, and informing him that I was well and in no pressing danger. In reply to this letter I had a stout Christian answer from

[1] Note L, Appendix.—Monmouth's attitude.

the old man, bidding me to be of good courage, and quoting largely from a sermon on patience by the Reverend Josiah Seaton of Petersfield. My mother, he said, was in deep distress at my position, but was held up by her confidence in the decrees of Providence. He enclosed a draft for Major Ogilvy, commissioning him to use it in whatever way I should suggest. This money, together with the small hoard which my mother had sewed into my collar, proved to be invaluable, for when the gaol fever broke out amongst us I was able to get fitting food for the sick, and also to pay for the services of physicians, so that the disease was stamped out ere it had time to spread.

Early in August we were brought from Bridgewater to Taunton, where we were thrown with hundreds of others into the same wool storehouse where our regiment had been quartered in the early days of the campaign. We gained little by the change, save that we found that our new guards were somewhat more satiated with cruelty than our old ones, and were therefore less exacting upon their prisoners. Not only were friends allowed in occasionally to see us, but books and papers could be obtained by the aid of a small present to the sergeant on duty. We were able, therefore, to spend our time with some degree of comfort during the month or more which passed before our trial.

One evening I was standing listlessly with my back against the wall, looking up at a thin slit of blue sky which showed itself through the narrow window, and fancying myself back in the meadows of Havant once more, when a voice fell upon my ear which did, indeed, recall me to my Hampshire home. Those deep, husky tones, rising at times into an angry roar, could belong to none other than my old friend the seaman. I approached the door from which the uproar came, and all doubt vanished as I listened to the conversation.

"Won't let me pass, won't ye?" he was shouting. "Let me tell you I've held on my course when better

men than you have asked me to veil topsails. I tell you I have the admiral's permit, and I won't clew up for a bit of a red-painted cockboat; so move from athwart my hawse, or I may chance to run you down."

"We don't know nothing about admirals here," said the sergeant of the guard. "The time for seeing prisoners is over for the day, and if you do not take your ill-favoured body out of this I may try the weight o' my halberd on your back."

"I have taken blows and given them ere you were ever thought of, you land-swab," roared old Solomon. "I was yardarm and yardarm with De Ruyter when you were learning to suck milk; but, old as I am, I would have you know that I am not condemned yet, and that I am fit to exchange broadsides with any lobster-tailed piccaroon that ever was triced up to a triangle and had the King's diamonds cut in his back. If I tack back to Major Ogilvy and signal him the way that I have been welcomed, he'll make your hide redder than ever your coat was."

"Major Ogilvy!" exclaimed the sergeant, in a more respectful voice. "If you had said that your permit was from Major Ogilvy it would have been another thing, but you did rave of admirals and commodores, and God knows what other outlandish talk!"

"Shame on your parents that they should have reared you with so slight a knowledge o' the King's English!" grumbled Solomon. "In truth, friend, it is a marvel to me why sailor men should be able to show a lead to those on shore in the matter of lingo. For out of seven hundred men in the ship *Worcester*—the same that sank in the Bay of Funchal—there was not so much as a powder-boy but could understand every word that I said, whereas on shore there is many a great jolterhead, like thyself, who might be a Portugee for all the English that he knows, and who stares at me like a pig in a hurricane if I do but ask him what he makes the reckoning, or how many bells have gone."

"Whom is it that you would see?" asked the sergeant gruffly. "You have a most infernally long tongue."

"Aye, and a rough one, too, when I have fools to deal with," returned the seaman. "If I had you in my watch, lad, for a three years' cruise, I would make a man of you yet."

"Pass the old man through!" cried the sergeant furiously, and the sailor came stumping in, with his bronzed face all screwed up and twisted, partly with amusement at his victory over the sergeant, and partly from a great chunk of tobacco which he was wont to stow within his cheek. Having glanced round without perceiving me, he put his hands to his mouth and bellowed out my name, with a string of "Ahoys!" which rang through the building.

"Here I am, Solomon," said I, touching him on the shoulder.

"God bless you, lad! God bless you!" he cried, wringing my hand. "I could not see you, for my port eye is as foggy as the Newfoundland banks, and has been ever since Long Sue Williams of the Point hove a quart pot at it in the Tiger inn nigh thirty year agone. How are you? All sound, alow and aloft?"

"As well as might be," I answered. "I have little to complain of."

"None of your standing rigging shot away?" said he. "No spars crippled? No shots between wind and water, eh? You have not been hulled, nor raked, nor laid aboard of?"

"None of these things," said I, laughing.

"Faith! you are leaner than of old, and have aged ten years in two months. You did go forth as smart and trim a fighting ship as ever answered helm, and now you are like the same ship when the battle and the storm have taken the gloss from her sides and torn the love-pennants from her peak. Yet am I right glad to see you sound in wind and limb."

"I have looked upon sights," said I, "which might well add ten years to a man's age."

"Aye, aye!" he answered, with a hollow groan, shaking his head from side to side. "It is a most accursed affair. Yet, bad as the tempest is, the calm will ever come afterwards if you will but ride it out with your anchor placed deep in Providence. Ah, lad, that is good holding ground! But if I know you aright, your grief is more for these poor wretches around you than for yourself."

"It is, indeed, a sore sight to see them suffer so patiently and uncomplainingly," I answered, "and for such a man, too!"

"Aye, the chicken-livered swab!" growled the seaman, grinding his teeth.

"How are my mother and my father," I asked, "and how came you so far from home?"

"Nay, I should have grounded on my beef bones had I waited longer at my moorings. I cut my cable, therefore, and, making a northerly tack as far as Salisbury, I ran down with a fair wind. Thy father hath set his face hard, and goes about his work as usual, though much troubled by the Justices, who have twice had him up to Winchester for examination, but have found his papers all right and no charge to be brought against him. Your mother, poor soul, hath little time to mope or to pipe her eye, for she hath such a sense of duty that, were the ship to founder under her, it is a plate galleon to a china orange that she would stand fast in the caboose curing marigolds or rolling pastry. They have taken to prayer as some would to rum, and warm their hearts with it when the wind of misfortune blows chill. They were right glad that I should come down to you, and I gave them the word of a sailor that I would get you out of the bilboes if it might anyhow be done."

"Get me out, Solomon!" said I; "nay, that may be put outside the question. How could you get me out?"

"There are many ways," he answered, sinking his voice to a whisper, and nodding his grizzled head as one

who talks upon what has cost him much time and thought.

"There is scuttling."

"Scuttling?"

"Aye, lad! When I was quartermaster of the galley *Providence* in the second Dutch war, we were caught betwixt a lee shore and Van Tromp's squadron, so that after fighting until our sticks were shot away and our scuppers were arun with blood, we were carried by boarding and sent as prisoners to the Texel. We were stowed away in irons in the afterhold, amongst the bilge water and the rats, with hatches battened down and guards atop, but even then they could not keep us, for the irons got adrift, and Will Adams, the carpenter's mate, picked a hole in the seams so that the vessel nearly foundered, and in the confusion we fell upon the prize crew, and, using our fetters as cudgels, regained possession of the vessel. But you smile, as though there were little hopes from any such plan!"

"If this wool-house were the galley *Providence* and Taunton Deane were the Bay of Biscay, it might be attempted," I said.

"I have indeed got out o' the channel," he answered, with a wrinkled brow. "There is, however, another most excellent plan which I have conceived, which is to blow up the building."

"To blow it up!" I cried.

"Aye! A brace of kegs and a slow match would do it any dark night. Then where would be these walls which now shut ye in?"

"Where would be the folk that are now inside them?" I asked. "Would you not blow them up as well?"

"Plague take it, I had forgot that," cried Solomon. "Nay, then, I leave it with you. What have you to propose? Do but give your sailing orders, and, with or without a consort, you will find that I will steer by them as long as this old hulk can answer to her helm."

"Then my advice is, my dear old friend," said I, "that you leave matters to take their course, and hie back to

Havant with a message from me to those who know me, telling them to be of good cheer, and to hope for the best. Neither you nor any other man can help me now, for I have thrown in my lot with these poor folk, and I would not leave them if I could. Do what you can to cheer my mother's heart, and commend me to Zachary Palmer. Your visit hath been a joy to me, and your return will be the same to them. You can serve me better so than by biding here."

"Sink me if I like going back without a blow struck," he growled. "Yet if it is your will there is an end of the matter. Tell me, lad. Has that lank-sparred, slab-sided, herring-gutted friend of yours played you false? for if he has, by the eternal, old as I am, my hanger shall scrape acquaintance with the longshore tuck which hangs at his girdle. I know where he hath laid himself up, moored stem and stern, all snug and shipshape, waiting for the turn of the tide."

"What, Saxon!" I cried. "Do you indeed know where he is? For God's sake speak low, for it would mean a commission and five hundred good pounds to any one of these soldiers could he lay hands upon him."

"They are scarce like to do that," said Solomon. "On my journey hither I chanced to put into port at a place called Bruton, where there is an inn that will compare with most, and the skipper is a wench with a glib tongue and a merry eye. I was drinking a glass of spiced ale, as is my custom about six bells of the middle watch, when I chanced to notice a great lanky carter, who was loading up a waggon in the yard with a cargo o' beer casks. Looking closer it seemed to me that the man's nose, like the beak of a goshawk, and his glinting eyes with the lids only half-reefed, were known to me, but when I overheard him swearing to himself in good High Dutch, then his figure-head came back to me in a moment. I put out into the yard, and touched him on the shoulder. Zounds, lad! you should have seen him spring back and spit at me like a wildcat with every hair of his head in a bristle. He

whipped a knife from under his smock, for he thought, doubtless, that I was about to earn the reward by handing him over to the red-coats. I told him that his secret was safe with me, and I asked him if he had heard that you were laid by the heels. He answered that he knew it, and that he would be answerable that no harm befell you, though in truth it seemed to me that he had his hands full in trimming his own sails, without acting as pilot to another. However, there I left him, and there I shall find him again if so be as he has done you an injury."

"Nay," I answered, "I am right glad that he has found this refuge. We did separate upon a difference of opinion, but I have no cause to complain of him. In many ways he hath shown me both kindness and good-will."

"He is as crafty as a purser's clerk," quoth Solomon. "I have seen Reuben Lockarby, who sends his love to you. He is still kept in his bunk from his wound, but he meets with good treatment. Major Ogilvy tells me that he has made such interest for him that there is every chance that he will gain his discharge, the more particularly since he was not present at the battle. Your own chance of pardon would, he thinks, be greater if you had fought less stoutly, but you have marked yourself as a dangerous man, more especially as you have the love of many of the common folk among the rebels."

The good old seaman stayed with me until late in the night, listening to my adventures, and narrating in return the simple gossip of the village, which is of more interest to the absent wanderer than the rise and fall of empires. Before he left he drew a great handful of silver pieces from his pouch, and went round amongst the prisoners, listening to their wants, and doing what he could with rough sailor talk and dropping coins to lighten their troubles. There is a language in the kindly eye and the honest brow which all men may understand; and though the seaman's speeches might have been in Greek, for all that they conveyed to the Somersetshire peasants, yet

they crowded round him as he departed and called blessings upon his head. I felt as though he had brought a whiff of his own pure ocean breezes into our close and noisome prison, and left us the sweeter and the healthier.

Late in August the judges started from London upon that wicked journey which blighted the lives and the homes of so many, and hath left a memory in the counties through which they passed which shall never fade while a father can speak to a son. We heard reports of them from day to day, for the guards took pleasure in detailing them with many coarse and foul jests, that we might know what was in store for us, and lose none of what they called the pleasures of anticipation. At Winchester the sainted and honoured Lady Alice Lisle was sentenced by Chief Justice Jeffreys to be burned alive, and the exertions and prayers of her friends could scarce prevail upon him to allow her the small boon of the axe instead of the faggot. Her graceful head was hewn from her body amidst the groans and the cries of a weeping multitude in the market-place of the town. At Dorchester the slaughter was wholesale. Three hundred were condemned to death, and seventy-four were actually executed, until the most loyal and Tory of the country squires had to complain of the universal presence of the dangling bodies. Thence the judges proceeded to Exeter and thence to Taunton, which they reached in the first week of September, more like furious and ravenous beasts which have tasted blood and cannot quench their cravings for slaughter, than just-minded men, trained to distinguish the various degrees of guilt, or to pick out the innocent and screen him from injustice. A rare field was open for their cruelty, for in Taunton alone there lay a thousand hapless prisoners, many of whom were so little trained to express their thoughts, and so hampered by the strange dialect in which they spoke, that they might have been born dumb for all the chance they had of making either judge or counsel understand the pleadings which they wished to lay before them.

It was on a Monday evening that the Lord Chief Justice made his entry. From one of the windows of the room in which we were confined I saw him pass. First rode the dragoons with their standards and kettledrums, then the javelin-men with their halberds, and behind them the line of coaches full of the high dignitaries of the law. Last of all, drawn by six long-tailed Flemish mares, came a great open coach, thickly crusted with gold, in which, reclining amidst velvet cushions, sat the infamous Judge, wrapped in a cloak of crimson plush with a heavy white periwig upon his head, which was so long that it dropped down over his shoulders. They say that he wore scarlet in order to strike terror into the hearts of the people, and that his courts were for the same reason draped in the colour of blood. As for himself, it hath ever been the custom, since his wickedness hath come to be known to all men, to picture him as a man whose expression and features were as monstrous and as hideous as was the mind behind them. This is by no means the case. On the contrary, he was a man who, in his younger days, must have been remarkable for his extreme beauty.[1] He was not, it is true, very old, as years go, when I saw him, but debauchery and low living had left their traces upon his countenance, without, however, entirely destroying the regularity and the beauty of his features. He was dark, more like a Spaniard than an Englishman, with black eyes and olive complexion. His expression was lofty and noble, but his temper was so easily aflame that the slightest cross or annoyance would set him raving like a madman, with blazing eyes and foaming mouth. I have seen him myself with the froth upon his lips and his whole face twitching with passion, like one who hath the falling sickness. Yet his other emotions were under as little control, for I have heard say that a very little would cause him to sob and to weep, more especially

[1] The painting of Jeffreys in the National Portrait Gallery more than bears out Micah Clarke's remarks. He is the handsomest man in the collection.

when he had himself been slighted by those who were above him. He was, I believe, a man who had great powers either for good or for evil, but by pandering to the darker side of his nature and neglecting the other, he brought himself to be as near a fiend as it is possible for a man to be. It must indeed have been an evil government where so vile and foul-mouthed a wretch was chosen out to hold the scales of justice. As he drove past, a Tory gentleman riding by the side of his coach drew his attention to the faces of the prisoners looking out at him. He glanced up at them with a quick, malicious gleam of his white teeth, then settled down again amongst the cushions. I observed that as he passed not a hat was raised among the crowd, and that even the rude soldiers appeared to look upon him half in terror, half in disgust, as a lion might look upon some foul, blood-sucking bat which battened upon the prey which he had himself struck down.

## 35. *Of the Devil in Wig and Gown*

THERE was no delay in the work of slaughter. That very night the great gallows was erected outside the White Hart inn. Hour after hour we could hear the blows of mallets and the sawing of beams, mingled with the shoutings and the ribald choruses of the Chief Justice's suite, who were carousing with the officers of the Tangiers regiment in the front room, which overlooked the gibbet. Amongst the prisoners the night was passed in prayer and meditation, the stout-hearted holding forth to their weaker brethren, and exhorting them to play the man, and to go to their death in a fashion which should be an example to true Protestants throughout the world. The Puritan divines had been mostly strung up off-hand immediately after the battle, but a few were left to sustain the courage of their flocks, and to show them the way upon the scaffold. Never have I

seen anything so admirable as the cool and cheerful bravery wherewith these poor clowns faced their fate. Their courage on the battlefield paled before that which they showed in the shambles of the law. So amid the low murmur of prayer and appeals for mercy to God from tongues which never yet asked mercy from man, the morning broke, the last morning which many of us were to spend upon earth.

The court should have opened at nine, but my Lord Chief Justice was indisposed, having sat up somewhat late with Colonel Kirke. It was nearly eleven before the trumpeters and criers announced that he had taken his seat. One by one my fellow-prisoners were called out by name, the more prominent being chosen first. They went out from amongst us amid handshakings and blessings, but we saw and heard no more of them, save that a sudden fierce rattle of kettledrums would rise up now and again, which was, as our guards told us, to drown any dying words which might fall from the sufferers and bear fruit in the breasts of those who heard them. With firm steps and smiling faces the roll of marytrs went forth to their fate during the whole of that long autumn day, until the rough soldiers of the guard stood silent and awed in the presence of a courage which they could not but recognise as higher and nobler than their own. Folk may call it a trial that they received, and a trial it really was, but not in the sense that we Englishmen use it. It was but being haled before a Judge, and insulted before being dragged to the gibbet. The court-house was the thorny path which led to the scaffold. What use to put a witness up, when he was shouted down, cursed at, and threatened by the Chief Justice, who bellowed and swore until the frightened burghers in Fore Street could hear him? I have heard from those who were there that day that he raved like a demoniac, and that his black eyes shone with a vivid vindictive brightness which was scarce human. The jury shrank from him as from a venomous thing when he turned his baleful glance upon

them. At times, as I have been told, his sternness gave place to a still more terrible merriment, and he would lean back in his seat of justice and laugh until the tears hopped down upon his ermine. Nearly a hundred were either executed or condemned to death upon that opening day.

I had expected to be amongst the first of those called, and no doubt I should have been so but for the exertions of Major Ogilvy. As it was, the second day passed, but I still found myself overlooked. On the third and fourth days the slaughter was slackened, not on account of any awakening grace on the part of the Judge, but because the great Tory landowners, and the chief supporters of the Government, had still some bowels of compassion, which revolted at this butchery of defenceless men. Had it not been for the influence which these gentlemen brought to bear upon the Judge, I have no doubt at all that Jeffreys would have hung the whole eleven hundred prisoners then confined in Taunton. As it was, two hundred and fifty fell victims to this accursed monster's thirst for human blood.

On the eighth day of the assizes there were but fifty of us left in the wool warehouse. For the last few days prisoners had been tried in batches of ten and twenty, but now the whole of us were taken in a drove, under escort, to the courthouse, where as many as could be squeezed in were ranged in the dock, while the rest were penned, like calves in the market, in the body of the hall. The Judge reclined in a high chair, with a scarlet daïs above him, while two other Judges, in less elevated seats, were stationed on either side of him. On the right hand was the jury-box, containing twelve carefully picked men—Tories of the old school—firm upholders of the doctrines of non-resistance and the divine right of kings. Much care had been taken by the Crown in the choice of these men, and there was not one of them but would have sentenced his own father had there been so much as a suspicion that he leaned to Presbyterianism or to Whig-

gery. Just under the Judge was a broad table, covered with green cloth and strewn with papers. On the right hand of this were a long array of Crown lawyers, grim, ferret-faced men, each with a sheaf of papers in his hands, which they sniffed through again and again, as though they were so many bloodhounds picking up the trail along which they were to hunt us down. On the other side of the table sat a single fresh-faced young man, in silk gown and wig, with a nervous, shuffling manner. This was the barrister, Master Helstrop, whom the Crown in its clemency had allowed us for our defence, lest any should be bold enough to say that we had not had every fairness in our trial. The remainder of the court was filled with the servants of the Justices' retinue and the soldiers of the garrison, who used the place as their common lounge, looking on the whole thing as a mighty cheap form of sport, and roaring with laughter at the rude banter and coarse pleasantries of his Lordship.

The clerk having gabbled through the usual form that we, the prisoners at the bar, having shaken off the fear of God, had unlawfully and traitorously assembled, and so onwards, the Lord Justice proceeded to take matters into his own hands, as was his wont.

"I trust that we shall come well out of this!" he broke out. "I trust that no judgment will fall upon this building! Was ever so much wickedness fitted into one court-house before? Who ever saw such an array of villainous faces? Ah, rogues, I see a rope ready for every one of ye! Art not afraid of judgment? Art not afraid of hell-fire? You grey-bearded rascal in the corner, how comes it that you have not had more of the grace of God in you than to take up arms against your most gracious and loving sovereign?"

"I have followed the guidance of my conscience, my Lord," said the venerable cloth-worker of Wellington, to whom he spoke.

"Ha, your conscience!" howled Jeffreys. "A ranter with a conscience! Where has your conscience been

these two months back, you villain and rogue? Your conscience will stand you in little stead, sirrah, when you are dancing on nothing with a rope round your neck. Was ever such wickedness? Who ever heard such effrontery? And you, you great hulking rebel, have you not grace enough to cast your eyes down, but must needs look justice in the face as though you were an honest man? Are you not afeard, sirrah? Do you not see death close upon you?"

"I have seen that before now, my Lord, and I was not afeard," I answered.

"Generation of vipers!" he cried, throwing up his hands. "The best of fathers! The kindest of kings! See that my words are placed upon the record, clerk! The most indulgent of parents! But wayward children must, with all kindness, be flogged into obedience." Here he broke into a savage grin. "The King will save your own natural parents all further care on your account. If they had wished to keep ye, they should have brought ye up in better principles. Rogues, we shall be merciful to ye—oh, merciful, merciful! How many are here, recorder?"

"Fifty and one, my Lord."

"Oh, sink of villainy! Fifty and one as arrant knaves as ever lay on a hurdle! Oh, what a mass of corruption have we here! Who defends the villains?"

"I defend the prisoners, your Lordship," replied the young lawyer.

"Master Helstrop, Master Helstrop!" cried Jeffreys, shaking his great wig until the powder flew out of it; "you are in all these dirty cases, Master Helstrop. You might find yourself in a parlous condition, Master Helstrop. I think sometimes that I see you yourself in the dock, Master Helstrop. You may yourself soon need the help of a gentleman of the long robe, Master Helstrop. Oh, have a care! Have a care!"

"The brief is from the Crown, your Lordship," the lawyer answered, in a quavering voice.

"Must I be answered back, then?" roared Jeffreys, his black eyes blazing with the rage of a demon. "Am I to be insulted in my own court? Is every five-groat piece of a pleader, because he chance to have a wig and a gown, to browbeat the Lord Justice, and to fly in the face of the ruling of the Court? Oh, Master Helstrop, I fear that I shall live to see some evil come upon you!"

"I crave your Lordship's pardon!" cried the faint-hearted barrister, with his face the colour of his brief.

"Keep a guard upon your words and upon your actions!" Jeffreys answered, in a menacing voice. "See that you are not too zealous in the cause of the scum of the earth. How now, then? What do these one and fifty villains desire to say for themselves? What is their lie? Gentlemen of the jury, I beg that ye will take particular notice of the cut-throat faces of these men. 'Tis well that Colonel Kirke hath afforded the Court a sufficient guard, for neither justice nor the Church is safe at their hands."

"Forty of them desire to plead guilty to the charge of taking up arms against the King," replied our barrister.

"Ah!" roared the Judge. "Was ever such unparalleled impudence? Was there ever such brazen effrontery? Guilty, quotha! Have they expressed their repentance for this sin against a most kind and long-suffering monarch? Put down those words on the record, clerk!"

"They have refused to express repentance, your Lordship!" replied the counsel for the defence.

"Oh, the parricides! Oh, the shameless rogues!" cried the Judge. "Put the forty together on this side of the enclosure. Oh, gentlemen, have ye ever seen such a concentration of vice? See how baseness and wickedness can stand with head erect! Oh, hardened monsters! But the other eleven. How can they expect us to believe this transparent falsehood—this palpable device? How can they foist it upon the Court?"

"My Lord, their defence hath not yet been advanced!" stammered Master Helstrop.

"I can sniff a lie before it is uttered," roared the Judge, by no means abashed. "I can read it as quick as ye can think it. Come, come, the Court's time is precious. Put forward a defence, or seat yourself, and let judgment be passed."

"These men, my Lord," said the counsel, who was trembling until the parchment rattled in his hand. "These eleven men, my Lord——"

"Eleven devils, my Lord," interrupted Jeffreys.

"They are innocent peasants, my Lord, who love God and the King, and have in no wise mingled themselves in this recent business. They have been dragged from their homes, my Lord, not because there was suspicion against them, but because they could not satisfy the greed of certain common soldiers who were balked of plunder in——"

"Oh, shame, shame!" cried Jeffreys, in a voice of thunder. "Oh, threefold shame, Master Helstrop! Are you not content with bolstering up rebels, but you must go out of your way to slander the King's troops? What is the world coming to? What, in a word, is the defence of these rogues?"

"An alibi, your Lordship."

"Ha! The common plea of every scoundrel. Have they witnesses?"

"We have here a list of forty witnesses, your Lordship. They are waiting below, many of them having come great distances, and with much toil and trouble."

"Who are they? What are they?" cried Jeffreys.

"They are country folk, your Lordship. Cottagers and farmers, the neighbours of these poor men, who knew them well, and can speak as to their doings."

"Cottagers and farmers!" the Judge shouted. "Why then, they are drawn from the very class from which these men come. Would you have us believe the oath of those who are themselves Whigs, Presbyterians, Somersetshire

ranters, the pothouse companions of the men whom we are trying? I warrant they have arranged it all snugly over their beer—snugly, snugly, the rogues!"

"Will you not hear the witnesses, your Lordship?" cried our counsel, shamed into some little sense of manhood by this outrage.

"Not a word from them, sirrah," said Jeffreys. "It is a question whether my duty towards my kind master the King—write down 'kind master,' clerk—doth not warrant me in placing all your witnesses in the dock as the aiders and abetters of treason."

"If it please your Lordship," cried one of the prisoners, "I have for witnesses Mr. Johnson, of Nether Stowey, who is a good Tory, and also Mr. Shepperton, the clergyman."

"The more shame to them to appear in such a cause," replied Jeffreys. "What are we to say, gentlemen of the jury, when we see county gentry and the clergy of the Established Church supporting treason and rebellion in this fashion? Surely the last days are at hand! You are a most malignant and dangerous Whig to have so far drawn them from their duty."

"But hear me, my Lord!" cried one of the prisoners.

"Hear you, you bellowing calf!" shouted the Judge. "We can hear nought else. Do you think that you are back in your conventicle, that you should dare to raise your voice in such a fashion? Hear you, quotha! We shall hear you at the end of a rope, ere many days."

"We scarce think, your Lordship," said one of the Crown lawyers, springing to his feet amid a great rustling of papers, "we scarce think that it is necessary for the Crown to state any case. We have already heard the whole tale of this most damnable and execrable attempt many times over. The men in the dock before your Lordship have for the most part confessed to their guilt, and of those who hold out there is not one who has given us any reason to believe that he is innocent of the foul crime laid to his charge. The gentlemen of the long

robe are therefore unanimously of opinion that the jury may at once be required to pronounce a single verdict upon the whole of the prisoners."

"Which is——?" asked Jeffreys, glancing round at the foreman—

"Guilty, your Lordship," said he, with a grin, while his brother jurymen nodded their heads and laughed to one another.

"Of course, of course! guilty as Judas Iscariot!" cried the Judge, looking down with exultant eyes at the throng of peasants and burghers before him. "Move them a little forwards, ushers, that I may see them to more advantage. Oh, ye cunning ones! Are ye not taken? Are ye not compassed around? Where now can ye fly? Do ye not see hell opening at your feet? Eh? Are ye not afraid? Oh, short, short shall be your shrift!" The very devil seemed to be in the man, for as he spoke he writhed with unholy laughter, and drummed his hand upon the red cushion in front of him. I glanced round at my companions, but their faces were all as though they had been chiselled out of marble. If he had hoped to see a moist eye or a quivering lip, the satisfaction was denied him.

"Had I my way," said he, "there is not one of ye but should swing for it. Aye, and if I had my way, some of those whose stomachs are too nice for this work, and who profess to serve the King with their lips while they intercede for his worst enemies, should themselves have cause to remember Taunton assizes. Oh, most ungrateful rebels! Have ye not heard how your most soft-hearted and compassionate monarch, the best of men—put it down in the record, clerk—on the intercession of that great and charitable statesman, Lord Sunderland—mark it down, clerk—hath had pity on ye? Hath it not melted ye? Hath it not made ye loathe yourselves? I declare, when I think of it"—here, with a sudden catching of the breath, he burst out a-sobbing, the tears running down his cheeks—"when I think of it, the

Christian forbearance, the ineffable mercy, it doth bring forcibly to my mind that great Judge before whom all of us—even I—shall one day have to render an account. Shall I repeat it, clerk, or have you it down ? "

" I have it down, your Lordship."

" Then write ' sobs ' in the margin. 'Tis well that the King should know our opinion on such matters. Know, then, you most traitorous and unnatural rebels, that this good father whom ye have spurned has stepped in between yourselves and the laws which ye have offended. At his command we withhold from ye the chastisement which ye have merited. If ye can indeed pray, and if your soul-cursing conventicles have not driven all grace out of ye, drop on your knees and offer up thanks when I tell ye that he hath ordained that ye shall all have a free pardon." Here the Judge rose from his seat as though about to descend from the tribunal, and we gazed upon each other in the utmost astonishment at this most unlooked-for end to the trial. The soldiers and lawyers were equally amazed, while a hum of joy and applause rose up from the few country folk who had dared to venture within the accursed precincts.

" This pardon, however," continued Jeffreys, turning round with a malicious smile upon his face, " is coupled with certain conditions and limitations. Ye shall all be removed from here to Poole, in chains, where ye shall find a vessel awaiting ye. With others ye shall be stowed away in the hold of the said vessel, and conveyed at the King's expense to the Plantations, there to be sold as slaves. God send ye masters who will know by the free use of wood and leather to soften your stubborn thoughts and incline your mind to better things." He was again about to withdraw, when one of the Crown lawyers whispered something across to him.

" Well thought of, coz," cried the Judge. " I had forgot. Bring back the prisoners, ushers ! Perhaps ye think that by the Plantations I mean his Majesty's American dominions. Unhappily, there are too many of

your breed in that part already. Ye would fall among friends who might strengthen ye in your evil courses, and so risk your salvation. To send ye there would be to add one brand to another and yet hope to put out the fire. By the Plantations, therefore, I mean Barbadoes and the Indies, where ye shall live with the other slaves, whose skins may be blacker than yours, but I dare warrant that their souls are more white." With this concluding speech the trial ended, and we were led back through the crowded streets to the prison from which we had been brought. On either side of the street, as we passed, we could see the limbs of former companions dangling in the wind, and their heads grinning at us from the tops of poles and pikes. No savage country in the heart of heathen Africa could have presented a more dreadful sight than did the old English town of Taunton when Jeffreys and Kirke had the ordering of it. There was death in the air, and the townsfolk crept silently about, scarcely daring to wear black for those whom they had loved and lost, lest it should be twisted into an act of treason.

We were scarce back in the wool-house once more when a file of guards with a sergeant entered, escorting a long, pale-faced man with protruding teeth, whose bright blue coat and white silk breeches, gold-headed sword and glancing shoe-buckles, proclaimed him to be one of those London exquisites whom interest or curiosity had brought down to the scene of the rebellion. He tripped along upon his tiptoes like a French dancing-master, waving his scented kerchief in front of his thin high nose, and inhaling aromatic salts from a blue phial which he carried in his left hand.

"By the Lard!" he cried, "but the stench of these filthy wretches is enough to stap one's breath. It is, by the Lard! Smite my vitals if I would venture among them if I were not a very rake hell. Is there a danger of prison fever, sergeant? Heh?"

"They are all sound as roaches, your honour," said the under-officer, touching his cap.

"Heh, heh!" cried the exquisite, with a shrill treble laugh. "It is not often ye have a visit from a person of quality, I'll warrant. It is business, sergeant, business! 'Auri sacra fames'—you remember what Virgilius Maro says, sergeant?"

"Never heard the gentleman speak, sir—at least not to my knowledge, sir," said the sergeant.

"Heh, heh! Never heard him speak, heh? That will do for Slaughter's, sergeant. That will set them all in a titter at Slaughter's. Pink my soul! but when I venture on a story the folk complain that they can't get served, for the drawers laugh until there is no work to be got out of them. Oh, lay me bleeding, but these are a filthy and most ungodly crew! Let the musqueteers stand close, sergeant, lest they fly at me."

"We shall see to that, your honour."

"I have a grant of a dozen of them, and Captain Pogram hath offered me twelve pounds a head. But they must be brawny rogues—strong and brawny, for the voyage kills many, sergeant, and the climate doth also tell upon them. Now here is one whom I must have. Yes, in very truth he is a young man, and hath much life in him and much strength. Tick him off, sergeant, tick him off!"

"His name is Clarke," said the soldier. "I have marked him down."

"If this is the clerk I would I had a parson to match him," cried the fop, sniffing at his bottle. "Do you see the pleasantry, sergeant. Heh, heh! Does your sluggish mind rise to the occasion? Strike me purple, but I am in excellent fettle! There is yonder man with the brown face, you can mark him down. And the young man beside him, also. Tick him off. Ha, he waves his hand towards me! Stand firm, sergeant! Where are my salts? What is it, man, what is it?"

"If it plaize your han'r," said the young peasant, "if so be as you have chose me to be of a pairty, I trust that you will allow my vaither yander to go with us also."

"Pshaw, pshaw!" cried the fop, "you are beyond reason, you are indeed! Who ever heard of such a thing? Honour forbids it! How could I foist an old man upon mine honest friend, Captain Pogram. Fie, fie! Split me asunder if he would not say that I had choused him! There is yonder lusty fellow with the red head, sergeant! The blacks will think he is a-fire. Those, and these six stout yokels, will make up my dozen."

"You have indeed the pick of them," said the sergeant.

"Aye, sink me, but I have a quick eye for horse, man or woman! I'll pick the best of a batch with most. Twelve twelves, close on a hundred and fifty pieces, sergeant, and all for a few words, my friend, all for a few words. I did but send my wife, a demmed handsome woman, mark you, and dresses in the mode, to my good friend the secretary to ask for some rebels. 'How many?' says he. 'A dozen will do,' says she. It was all done in a penstroke. What a cursed fool she was not to have asked for a hundred! But what is this, sergeant, what is this?"

A small, brisk, pippin-faced fellow in a riding-coat and high boots had come clanking into the wool-house with much assurance and authority, with a great old-fashioned sword trailing behind him, and a riding-whip switching in his hand.

"Morning, sergeant!" said he, in a loud, overbearing voice. "You may have heard my name? I am Master John Wooton, of Langmere House, near Dulverton, who bestirred himself so for the King, and hath been termed by Mr. Godolphin, in the House of Commons, one of the local pillars of the State. Those were his words. Fine, were they not? Pillars, mark ye, the conceit being that the State was, as it were, a palace or a temple, and the loyal men so many pillars, amongst whom I also was one. I am a local pillar. I have received a Royal permit, sergeant, to choose from amongst your prisoners ten sturdy rogues whom I may sell as a reward to me for my exertions. Draw them up, therefore, that I may make my choice!"

"Then, sir, we are upon the same errand," quoth the Londoner, bowing with his hand over his heart, until his sword seemed to point straight up to the ceiling. "The Honourable George Dawnish, at your service! Your very humble and devoted servant, sir! Yours to command in any or all ways. It is a real joy and privilege to me, sir, to make your distinguished acquaintance. Hem!"

The country squire appeared to be somewhat taken aback at this shower of London compliments. "Ahem, sir! Yes, sir!" said he, bobbing his head. "Glad to see you, sir! Most damnably so! But these men, sergeant? Time presses, for to-morrow is Shepton market, and I would fain see my old twenty-score boar once more before he is sold. There is a beefy one. I'll have him."

"Ged, I've forestalled you," cried the courtier. "Sink me, but it gives me real pain. He is mine."

"Then this," said the other, pointing with his whip.

"He is mine, too. Heh, heh, heh! Strike me stiff, but this is too funny!"

"Od's wounds! How many are yours?" cried the Dulverton squire.

"A dozen. Heh, heh! A round dozen. All those who stand upon this side. Pink me, but I have got the best of you there! The early bird—you know the old saw?"

"It is a disgrace," the squire cried hotly. "A shame and a disgrace. We must needs fight for the King and risk our skins, and then when all is done, down come a drove of lacqueys in waiting, and snap up the pickings before their betters are served."

"Lacqueys in waiting, sir!" shrieked the exquisite. "S'death, sir! This toucheth mine honour very nearly! I have seen blood flow, yes, sir, and wounds gape on less provocation. Retract, sir, retract!"

"Away, you clothes-pole!" cried the other contemptuously. "You are come like the other birds of

carrion when the fight is o'er. Have you been named in full Parliament ? Are you a local pillar ? Away, away, you tailor's dummy ! "

" You insolent clodhopper ! " cried the fop. " You most foul-mouthed bumpkin ! The only local pillar that you have ever deserved to make acquaintance with is the whipping-post. Ha, sergeant, he lays his hand upon his sword ! Stop him, sergeant, stop him, or I may do him an injury."

" Nay, gentlemen," cried the under-officer. " This quarrel must not continue here. We must have no brawling within the prison. Yet there is a level turf without, and as fine elbow-room as a gentleman could wish for a breather."

This proposal did not appear to commend itself to either of the angry gentlemen, who proceeded to exchange the length of their swords, and to promise that each should hear from the other before sunset. Our owner, as I may call him, the fop, took his departure at last, and the country squire having chosen the next ten swaggered off, cursing the courtiers, the Londoners, the sergeant, the prisoners, and above all, the ingratitude of the Government which had made him so small a return for his exertions. This was but the first of many such scenes, for the Government, in endeavouring to satisfy the claims of its supporters, had promised many more than there were prisoners. I am grieved to say that I have seen not only men, but even my own countrywomen, and ladies of title to boot, wringing their hands and bewailing themselves because they were unable to get any of the poor Somersetshire folk to sell as slaves. Indeed, it was only with difficulty that they could be made to see that their claim upon Government did not give them the right of seizing any burgher or peasant who might come in their way, and shipping him right off for the Plantations.

Well, my dear grandchildren, from night to night through this long and weary winter I have taken you back with me into the past, and made you see scenes the

players in which are all beneath the turf, save that perhaps here and there some greybeard like myself may have a recollection of them. I understand that you, Joseph, have every morning set down upon paper that which I have narrated the night before. It is as well that you should do so, for your own children and your children's children may find it of interest, and even perhaps take a pride in hearing that their ancestors played a part in such scenes. But now the spring is coming, and the green is bare of snow, so that there are better things for you to do than to sit listening to the stories of a garrulous old man. Nay, nay, you shake your heads, but indeed those young limbs want exercising and strengthening and knitting together, which can never come from sitting toasting round the blaze. Besides, my story draws quickly to an end now, for I had never intended to tell you more than the events connected with the Western rising. If the closing part hath been of the dreariest, and if all doth not wind up with the ringing of bells and the joining of hands, like the tales in the chap-books, you must blame history and not me. For Truth is a stern mistress, and when one hath once started off with her one must follow on after the jade, though she lead in flat defiance of all the rules and conditions which would fain turn that tangled wilderness the world into the trim Dutch garden of the story-tellers.

Three days after our trial we were drawn up in North Street in front of the Castle with others from the other prisons who were to share our fate. We were placed four abreast, with a rope connecting each rank, and of these ranks I counted fifty, which would bring our total to two hundred. On each side of us rode dragoons, and in front and behind were companies of musqueteers to prevent any attempt at rescue or escape. In this order we set off upon the tenth day of September, amidst the weeping and wailing of the townsfolk, many of whom saw their sons or brothers marching off into exile without their being able to exchange a last word or embrace with

them. Some of these poor folk, doddering old men and wrinkled, decrepit women, toiled for miles after us down the high-road, until the rearguard of foot faced round upon them, and drove them away with curses and blows from their ramrods.

That day we made our way through Yeovil and Sherborne, and on the morrow proceeded over the North Downs as far as Blandford, where we were penned together like cattle and left for the night. On the third day we resumed our march through Wimbourne and a line of pretty Dorsetshire villages—the last English villages which most of us were destined to see for many a long year to come. Late in the afternoon the spars and rigging of the shipping in Poole Harbour rose up before us, and in another hour we had descended the steep and craggy path which leads to the town. Here we were drawn up upon the quay opposite the broad-decked, heavy-sparred brig which was destined to carry us into slavery. Through all this march we met with the greatest kindness from the common people, who flocked out from their cottages with fruit and with milk, which they divided amongst us. At other places, at the risk of their lives, Dissenting ministers came forth and stood by the wayside, blessing us as we passed, in spite of the rough jeers and oaths of the soldiers.

We were marched aboard and led below by the mate of the vessel, a tall red-faced seaman with ear-rings in his ears, while the captain stood on the poop with his legs apart and a pipe in his mouth, checking us off one by one by means of a list which he held in his hand. As he looked at the sturdy build and rustic health of the peasants, which even their long confinement had been unable to break down, his eyes glistened, and he rubbed his big red hands together with delight.

"Show them down, Jem!" he kept shouting to the mate. "Stow them safe, Jem! There's lodgings for a duchess down there, s'help me, there's lodgings for a duchess! Pack 'em away!"

One by one we passed before the delighted captain, and down the steep ladder which led into the hold. Here we were led along a narrow passage, on either side of which opened the stalls which were prepared for us. As each man came opposite to the one set aside for him he was thrown into it by the brawny mate, and fastened down with anklets of iron by the seaman and armourer in attendance. It was dark before we were all secured, but the captain came round with lanthorn to satisfy himself that all his property was really safe. I could hear the mate and him reckoning the value of each prisoner, and counting what he would fetch in the Barbadoes market.

"Have you served out their fodder, Jem?" he asked, flashing his light into each stall in turn. "Have you seen that they had their rations?"

"A rye bread loaf and a pint o' water," answered the mate.

"Fit for a duchess, s'help me!" cried the captain. "Look to this one, Jem. He is a lusty rogue. Look to his great hands. He might work for years in the rice-swamps ere the land crabs have the picking of him."

"Aye, we'll have smart bidding amid the settlers for this lot. 'Cod, captain, but you have made a bargain of it! Od's bud! you have done these London fools to some purpose."

"What is this?" roared the captain. "Here is one who hath not touched his allowance. How now, sirrah, art too dainty in the stomach to eat what your betters have eaten before you?"

"I have no hairt for food, zur," the prisoner answered.

"What, you must have your whims and fancies! You must pick and you must choose! I tell you, sirrah, that you are mine, body and soul! Twelve good pieces I paid for you, and now, forsooth, I am to be told that you will not eat! Turn to it at this instant, you saucy rogue, or I shall have you triced to the triangles!"

"Here is another," said the mate, "who sits ever with his head sunk upon his breast without spirit or life."

"Mutinous, obstinate dog!" cried the captain. "What ails you then? Why have you a face like an underwriter in a tempest?"

"If it plaize you, zur," the prisoner answered, "Oi do but think o' m' ould mother at Wellington, and woonder who will kape her now that Oi'm gone!"

"And what is that to me?" shouted the brutal seaman. "How can you arrive at your journey's end sound and hearty if you sit like a sick fowl upon a perch? Laugh, man, and be merry, or I will give you something to weep for. Out on you, you chicken-hearted swab, to sulk and fret like a babe new weaned! Have you not all that heart could desire? Give him a touch with the rope's-end, Jem, if ever you do observe him fretting. It is but to spite us that he doth it."

"If it please your honour," said a seaman, coming hurriedly down from the deck, "there is a stranger upon the poop who will have speech with your honour."

"What manner of man, sirrah?"

"Surely he is a person of quality, your honour. He is as free wi' his words as though he were the captain o' the ship. The boatswain did but jog against him, and he swore so woundily at him and stared at him so, wi' een like a tiger-cat, that Job Harrison says we have shipped the devil himsel'. The men don't like the look of him, your honour!"

"Who the plague can this spark be?" said the skipper. "Go on deck, Jem, and tell him that I am counting my live stock, and that I shall be with him anon."

"Nay, your honour! There will trouble come of it unless you come up. He swears that he will not bear to be put off, and that he must see you on the instant."

"Curse his blood, whoever he be!" growled the seaman. "Every cock on his own dunghill. What doth the rogue mean? Were he the Lord High Privy Seal, I would have him to know that I am lord of my own quarter-deck!" So saying, with many snorts of indignation, the mate and the captain withdrew together up the ladder,

banging the heavy hatchways down as they passed through.

A single oil-lamp swinging from a beam in the centre of the gangway which led between the rows of cells was the only light which was vouchsafed us. By its yellow, murky glimmer we could dimly see the great wooden ribs of the vessel, arching up on either side of us, and crossed by the huge beams which held the deck. A grievous stench from foul bilge water poisoned the close, heavy air. Every now and then, with a squeak and a clutter, a rat would dart across the little zone of light and vanish in the gloom upon the farther side. Heavy breathing all round me showed that my companions, wearied out by their journey and their sufferings, had dropped into a slumber. From time to time one could hear the dismal clank of fetters, and the start and incatching of the breath as some poor peasant, fresh from dreams of his humble homestead amid the groves of the Mendips, awoke of a sudden to see the great wooden coffin around him, and to breathe the venomous air of the prison ship.

I lay long awake full of thought both for myself and for the poor souls around me. At last, however, the measured swash of the water against the side of the vessel and the slight rise and fall had lulled me into a sleep, from which I was suddenly aroused by the flashing of a light in my eyes. Sitting up, I found several sailors gathered about me, and a tall man with a black cloak swathed round him swinging a lanthorn over me.

"That is the man," he said.

"Come, mate, you are to come on deck!" said the seaman armourer. With a few blows from his hammer he knocked the irons from my feet.

"Follow me!" said the tall stranger, and led the way up the hatchway ladder. It was heavenly to come out into the pure air once more. The stars were shining brightly overhead. A fresh breeze blew from the shore, and hummed a pleasant tune among the cordage. Close beside us the lights of the town gleamed yellow and

cheery. Beyond, the moon was peeping over the Bournemouth hills.

"This way, sir," said the sailor, "right aft into the cabin, sir."

Still following my guide, I found myself in the low cabin of the brig. A square shining table stood in the centre, with a bright swinging lamp above it. At the farther end in the glare of the light sat the captain—his face shining with greed and expectation. On the table stood a small pile of gold pieces, a rum-flask, glasses, a tobacco-box and two long pipes.

"My compliments to you, Captain Clarke," said the skipper, bobbing his round bristling head. "An honest seaman's compliments to you. It seems that we are not to be shipmates this voyage, after all."

"Captain Micah Clarke must do a voyage of his own," said the stranger.

At the sound of his voice I sprang round in amazement. "Good Heavens!" I cried, "Saxon!"

"You have nicked it," said he, throwing down his mantle and showing the well-known face and figure of the soldier of fortune. "Zounds, man! if you can pick me out of the Solent, I suppose that I may pick you out of this accursed rat-trap in which I find you. Tie and tie, as we say at the green table. In truth, I was huffed with you when last we parted, but I have had you in my mind for all that."

"A seat and a glass, Captain Clarke," cried the skipper. "Od's bud! I should think that you would be glad to raise your little finger and wet your whistle after what you have gone through."

I seated myself by the table with my brain in a whirl. "This is more than I can fathom," said I. "What is the meaning of it, and how comes it about?"

"For my own part, the meaning is as clear as the glass of my binnacle," quoth the seaman. "Your good friend Colonel Saxon, as I understand his name to be, has offered me as much as I could hope to gain by selling you

in the Indies. Sink it, I may be rough and ready, but my heart is in the right place! Aye, aye! I would not maroon a man if I could set him free. But we have all to look for ourselves, and trade is dull."

"Then I am free!" said I.

"You are free," he answered. "There is your purchase-money upon the table. You can go where you will, save only upon the land of England, where you are still an outlaw under sentence."

"How have you done this, Saxon?" I asked. "Are you not afraid for yourself?"

"Ho, ho!" laughed the old soldier. "I am a free man, my lad! I hold my pardon, and care not a maravedi for spy or informer. Who should I meet but Colonel Kirke a day or so back. Yes, lad! I met him in the street, and I cocked my hat in his face. The villain laid his hand upon his hilt, and I should have out bilbo and sent his soul to hell had they not come between us. I care not the ashes of this pipe for Jeffreys or any other of them. I can snap this finger and thumb at them, so! They would rather see Decimus Saxon's back than his face, I promise ye!"

"But how comes this about?" I asked.

"Why, marry, it is no mystery. Cunning old birds are not to be caught with chaff. When I left you I made for a certain inn where I could count upon finding a friend. There I lay by for a while, en cachette, as the Messieurs call it, while I could work out the plan that was in my head. Donner wetter! but I got a fright from that old seaman friend of yours, who should be sold as a picture, for he is of little use as a man. Well, I bethought me early in the affair of your visit to Badminton, and of the Duke of B. We shall mention no names, but you can follow my meaning. To him I sent a messenger, to the effect that I purposed to purchase my own pardon by letting out all that I knew concerning his double dealing with the rebels. The message was carried to him secretly, and his answer was that I should meet him at a certain

spot by night. I sent my messenger instead of myself, and he was found in the morning stiff and stark, with more holes in his doublet than ever the tailor made. On this I sent again, raising my demands, and insisting upon a speedy settlement. He asked my conditions. I replied, a free pardon and a command for myself. For you, money enough to land you safely in some foreign country where you can pursue the noble profession of arms. I got them both, though it was like drawing teeth from his head. His name hath much power at Court just now, and the King can refuse him nothing. I have my pardon and a command of troops in New England. For you I have two hundred pieces, of which thirty have been paid in ransom to the captain, while twenty are due to me for my disbursements over the matter. In this bag you will find the odd hundred and fifty, of which you will pay fifteen to the fishermen who have promised to see you safe to Flushing."

I was, as you may readily believe, my dear children, bewildered by this sudden and most unlooked-for turn which events had taken. When Saxon had ceased to speak I sat as one stunned, trying to realise what he had said to me. There came a thought into my head, however, which chilled the glow of hope and of happiness which had sprung up in me at the thought of recovering my freedom. My presence had been a support and a comfort to my unhappy companions. Would it not be a cruel thing to leave them in their distress? There was not one of them who did not look to me in his trouble, and to the best of my poor power I had befriended and consoled them. How could I desert them now?

"I am much beholden to you, Saxon," I said at last, speaking slowly and with some difficulty, for the words were hard to utter. "But I fear that your pains have been thrown away. These poor country folk have none to look after or assist them. They are as simple as babes, and as little fitted to be landed in a strange country. I cannot find it in my heart to leave them!"

Saxon burst out laughing, and leaned back in his seat with his long legs stretched straight out and his hands in his breeches pockets.

"This is too much!" he said at last. "I saw many difficulties in my way, yet I did not foresee this one. You are in very truth the most contrary man that ever stood in neat's leather. You have ever some outlandish reason for jibbing and shying like a hot-blooded, half-broken colt. Yet I think that I can overcome these strange scruples of yours by a little persuasion."

"As to the prisoners, Captain Clarke," said the seaman, "I'll be as good as a father to them. S'help me, I will, on the word of an honest sailor! If you should choose to lay out a trifle of twenty pieces upon their comfort, I shall see that their food is such as mayhap many of them never got at their own tables. They shall come on deck, too, in watches, and have an hour or two o' fresh air in the day. I can't say fairer!"

"A word or two with you on deck!" said Saxon. He walked out of the cabin and I followed him to the far end of the poop, where we stood leaning against the bulwarks. One by one the lights had gone out in the town, until the black ocean beat against a blacker shore.

"You need not have any fear of the future of the prisoners," he said, in a low whisper. "They are not bound for the Barbadoes, nor will this skinflint of a captain have the selling of them, for all that he is so cocksure. If he can bring his own skin out of the business, it will be more than I expect. He hath a man aboard his ship who would think no more of giving him a tilt over the side than I should."

"What mean you, Saxon?" I cried.

"Hast ever heard of a man named Marot?"

"Hector Marot! Yes, surely I knew him well. A highwayman he was, but a mighty stout man with a kind heart beneath a thief's jacket."

"The same. He is as you say a stout man and a resolute swordsman, though from what I have seen of his

play he is weak in stoccado, and perhaps somewhat too much attached to the edge, and doth not give prominence enough to the point, in which respect he neglects the advice and teaching of the most noteworthy fencers in Europe. Well, well, folk differ on this as on every other subject ! Yet it seems to me that I would sooner be carried off the field after using my weapon secundum artem, than walk off unscathed after breaking the laws d'escrime Quarte, tierce and saccoon, say I, and the devil take your estramacons and passados ! "

" But what of Marot ? " I asked impatiently.

" He is aboard," said Saxon. " It appears that he was much disturbed in his mind over the cruelties which were inflicted on the country folk after the battle at Bridge-water. Being a man of a somewhat stern and fierce turn of mind, his disapproval did vent itself in actions rather than words. Soldiers were found here and there over the countryside pistolled or stabbed, and no trace left of their assailant. A dozen of more were cut off in this way, and soon it came to be whispered about that Marot the highwayman was the man that did it, and the chase became hot at his heels."

" Well, and what then ? " I asked, for Saxon had stopped to light his pipe at the same old metal tinder-box which he had used when first I met him. When I pictured Saxon to myself it is usually of that moment that I think, when the red glow beat upon his hard, eager, hawk-like face, and showed up the thousand little seams and wrinkles which time and care had imprinted upon his brown, weather-beaten skin. Sometimes in my dreams that face in the darkness comes back to me, and his half-closed eyelids and shifting, blinky eyes are turned to-wards me in his sidelong fashion, until I find myself sitting up and holding out my hand into empty space, half expecting to feel another thin, sinewy hand close round it. A bad man he was in many ways, my dears, cunning and wily, with little scruple or conscience ; and yet so strange a thing is human nature, and so difficult

is it for us to control our feelings, that my heart warms when I think of him, and that fifty years have increased rather than weakened the kindliness which I bear to him.

"I had heard," quoth he, puffing slowly at his pipe, "that Marot was a man of this kidney, and also that he was so compassed round that he was in peril of capture. I sought him out, therefore, and held council with him. His mare, it seems, had been slain by some chance shot, and as he was much attached to the brute, the accident made him more savage and more dangerous than ever. He had no heart, he said, to continue in his old trade. Indeed, he was ripe for anything—the very stuff out of which useful tools are made. I found that in his youth he had had a training for the sea. When I heard that, I saw my way in the snap of a petronel."

"What then?" I asked. "I am still in the dark."

"Nay, it is surely plain enough to you now. Marot's end was to baffle his pursuers and to benefit the exiles. How could he do this better than by engaging as a seaman aboard this brig, the *Dorothy Fox*, and sailing away from England in her? There are but thirty of a crew. Below hatches are close on two hundred men, who, simple as they may be, are, as you and I know, second to none in the cut-and-thrust work, without order or discipline, which will be needed in such an affair. Marot has but to go down amongst them some dark night, knock off their anklets, and fit them up with a few stanchions or cudgels. Ho, ho, Micah! what think you? The planters may dig their plantations themselves for all the help they are like to get from West countrymen this bout."

"It is, indeed, a well-conceived plan," said I. "It is a pity, Saxon, that your ready wit and quick invention hath not had a fair field. You are, as I know well, as fit to command armies and to order campaigns as any man that ever bore a truncheon."

"Mark ye there!" whispered Saxon, grasping me by the arm. "See where the moonlight falls beside the hatchway! Do you not see that short squat seaman who

stands alone, lost in thought, with his head sunk upon his breast? It is Marot! I tell you that if I were Captain Pogram I would rather have the devil himself, horns, hoofs and tail, for my first mate and bunk companion, than have that man aboard my ship. You need not concern yourself about the prisoners, Micah. Their future is decided."

"Then, Saxon," I answered, "it only remains for me to thank you, and to accept the means of safety which you have placed within my reach."

"Spoken like a man," said he; "is there aught which I may do for thee in England? though, by the Mass, I may not be here very long myself, for, as I understand, I am to be entrusted with the command of an expedition that is fitting out against the Indians, who have ravaged the plantations of our settlers. It will be good to get to some profitable employment, for such a war, without either fighting or plunder, I have never seen. I give you my word that I have scarce fingered silver since the beginning of it. I would not for the sacking of London go through with it again."

"There is a friend whom Sir Gervas Jerome did commend to my care," I remarked; "I have, however, already taken measures to have his wishes carried out. There is nought else save to assure all in Havant that a King who hath battened upon his subjects, as this one of ours hath done, is not one who is like to keep his seat very long upon the throne of England. When he falls I shall return, and perhaps it may be sooner than folk think."

"These doings in the West have indeed stirred up much ill-feeling all over the country," said my companion. "On all hands I hear that there is more hatred of the King and of his ministers than before the outbreak. What ho, Captain Pogram, this way! We have settled the matter, and my friend is willing to go."

"I thought he would tack round," the captain said, staggering towards us with a gait which showed that he

had made the rum bottle his companion since we had left him. "S'help me, I was sure of it! Though, by the Mass, I don't wonder that he thought twice before leaving the *Dorothy Fox*, for she is fitted up fit for a duchess, s'help me! Where is your boat?"

"Alongside," replied Saxon; "my friend joins with me in hoping that you, Captain Pogram, will have a pleasant and profitable voyage."

"I am cursedly beholden to him," said the captain, with a flourish of his three-cornered hat.

"Also that you will reach Barbadoes in safety."

"Little doubt of that!" quoth the captain.

"And that you will dispose of your wares in a manner which will repay you for your charity and humanity."

"Nay, these are handsome words," cried the captain. "Sir, I am your debtor."

A fishing-boat was lying alongside the brig. By the murky light of the poop lanterns I could see the figures upon her deck, and the great brown sail all ready for hoisting. I climbed the bulwark and set my foot upon the rope-ladder which led down to her.

"Good-bye, Decimus!" said I.

"Good-bye, my lad! You have your pieces all safe?"

"I have them."

"Then I have one other present to make you. It was brought to me by a sergeant of the Royal Horse. It is that, Micah, on which you must now depend for food, lodging, raiment and all which you would have. It is that to which a brave man can always look for his living. It is the knife wherewith you can open the world's oyster. See, lad, it is your sword!"

"The old sword! My father's sword!" I cried in delight, as Saxon drew from under his mantle and handed to me the discoloured, old-fashioned leathern sheath with the heavy brass hilt which I knew so well.

"You are now," said he, "one of the old and honourable guild of soldiers of fortune. While the Turk is still snarling at the gates of Vienna there will ever be work for

strong arms and brave hearts. You will find that among these wandering, fighting men, drawn from all climes and nations, the name of Englishman stands high. Well I know that it will stand none the lower for your having joined the brotherhood. I would that I could come with you, but I am promised pay and position which it would be ill to set aside. Farewell, lad, and may fortune go with you!"

I pressed the rough soldier's horny hand, and descended into the fishing-boat. The rope that held us was cast off, the sail mounted up, and the boat shot out across the bay. Onward she went and on, through the gathering gloom—a gloom as dark and impenetrable as the future towards which my life's bark was driving. Soon the long rise and fall told us that we were over the harbour bar and out in the open channel. On the land, scattered twinkling lights at long stretches marked the line of the coast. As I gazed backwards a cloud trailed off from the moon, and I saw the hard lines of the brig's rigging stand out against the white cold disk. By the shrouds stood the veteran, holding to a rope with one hand, and waving the other in farewell and encouragement. Another great cloud blurred out the light, and that lean sinewy figure with its long extended arm was the last which I saw for a weary time of the dear country where I was born and bred.

## 36. *Of the End of it All*

AND so, my dear children, I come to the end of the history of a failure—a brave failure and a noble one, but a failure none the less. In three more years England was to come to herself, to tear the fetters from her free limbs, and to send James and his poisonous brood flying from her shores even as I was flying then. We had made the error of being before our time. Yet there came days when folk thought kindly of the lads who had fought so stoutly in the West, and when their

limbs, gathered from many a hangman's pit and waste place, were borne amid the silent sorrow of a nation to the pretty country burial-grounds where they would have chosen to lie. There, within the sound of the bell which from infancy had called them to prayer, beneath the turf over which they had wandered, under the shadow of those Mendip and Quantock Hills which they loved so well, these brave hearts lie still and peaceful, like tired children in the bosom of their mother. *Requiescant—requiescant in pace!*

Not another word about myself, dear children. This narrative doth already bristle with I's, as though it were an Argus—which is a flash of wit, though I doubt if ye will understand it. I set myself to tell ye the tale of the war in the West, and that tale ye have heard, nor will I be coaxed or cajoled into one word farther. Ah! ye know well how garrulous the old man is, and that if you could but get to Flushing with him he would take ye to the wars of the Empire, to William's Court, and to the second invasion of the West, which had a better outcome than the first. But not an inch farther will I budge. On to the green, ye young rogues! Have ye not other limbs to exercise besides your ears, that ye should be so fond of squatting round grandad's chair? If I am spared to next winter, and if the rheumatiz keeps away, it is like that I may take up once more the broken thread of my story.

Of the others I can only tell ye what I know. Some slipped out of my ken entirely. Of others I have heard vague and incomplete accounts. The leaders of the insurrection got off much more lightly than their followers, for they found that the passion of greed was even stronger than the passion of cruelty. Grey, Buyse, Wade and others bought themselves free at the price of all their possessions. Ferguson escaped. Monmouth was executed on Tower Hill, and showed in his last moments some faint traces of that spirit which spurted up now and again from his feeble nature, like the momentary flash of an expiring fire.

My father and my mother lived to see the Protestant religion regain its place once more, and to see England become the champion of the reformed faith upon the Continent. Three years later I found them in Havant much as I had left them, save that there were more silver hairs amongst the brown braided tresses of my mother, and that my father's great shoulders were a trifle bowed and his brow furrowed with the lines of care. Hand in hand they passed onwards down life's journey, the Puritan and the Church woman, and I have never despaired of the healing of religious feud in England since I have seen how easy it is for two folks to retain the strongest belief in their own creeds, and yet to bear the heartiest love and respect for the professor of another. The days may come when the Church and the Chapel may be as a younger and an elder brother, each working to one end, and each joying in the other's success. Let the contest between them be not with pike and pistol, not with court and prison ; but let the strife be which shall lead the higher life, which shall take the broader view, which shall boast the happiest and best cared-for poor. Then their rivalry shall be not a curse, but a blessing to this land of England.

Reuben Lockarby was ill for many months, but when he at last recovered he found a pardon awaiting him through the interest of Major Ogilvy. After a time, when the troubles were all blown over, he married the daughter of Mayor Timewell, and he still lives in Taunton, a well-to-do and prosperous citizen. Thirty years ago there was a little Micah Lockarby, and now I am told that there is another, the son of the first, who promises to be as arrant a little Roundhead as ever marched to the tuck of drum.

Of Saxon I have heard more than once. So skilfully did he use his hold over the Duke of Beaufort, that he was appointed through his interest to the command of an expedition which had been sent to chastise the savages of Virginia, who had wrought great cruelties upon the settlers. There he did so out-ambush their ambushes,

and out-trick their most cunning warriors, that he hath left a great name among them, and is still remembered there by an Indian word which signifieth "The long-legged wily one with the eye of a rat." Having at last driven the tribes far into the wilderness he was presented with a tract of country for his services, where he settled down. There he married, and spent the rest of his days in rearing tobacco and in teaching the principles of war to a long line of gaunt and slab-sided children. They tell me that a great nation of exceeding strength and of wondrous size promises some day to rise up on the other side of the water. If this should indeed come to pass, it may perhaps happen that these young Saxons or their children may have a hand in the building of it. God grant that they may never let their hearts harden to the little isle of the sea, which is and must ever be the cradle of their race.

Solomon Sprent married and lived for many years as happily as his friends could wish. I had a letter from him when I was abroad, in which he said that though his consort and he had started alone on the voyage of wedlock, they were now accompanied by a jolly-boat and a gig. One winter's night when the snow was on the ground he sent down for my father, who hurried up to his house. He found the old man sitting up in bed, with his flask of rumbo within reach, his tobacco-box beside him, and a great brown Bible balanced against his updrawn knees. He was breathing heavily, and was in sore distress.

"I've strained a plank, and have nine feet in the well," said he. "It comes in quicker than I can put it out. In truth, friend, I have not been seaworthy this many a day, and it is time that I was condemned and broken up."

My father shook his head sadly as he marked his dusky face and laboured breathing. "How of your soul?" he asked.

"Aye!" said Solomon, "that's a cargo that we carry under our hatches, though we can't see it, and had no hand in the stowing of it. I've been overhauling the sailing orders here, and the ten articles of war, but I can't

find that I've gone so far out of my course that I may not hope to come into the channel again."

"Trust not in yourself, but in Christ," said my father.

"He is the pilot, in course," replied the old seaman. "When I had a pilot aboard o' my ship, however, it was my way always to keep my own weather eye open, d'ye see, and so I'll do now. The pilot don't think none the worse of ye for it. So I'll throw my own lead line, though I hear as how there are no soundings in the ocean of God's mercy. Say, friend, d'ye think this very body, this same hull o' mine, will rise again?"

"So we are taught," my father answered.

"I'd know it anywhere from the tattoo marks," said Solomon. "They was done when I was with Sir Christopher in the West Indies, and I'd be sorry to part with them. For myself, d'ye see, I've never borne ill-will to any one, not even to the Dutch lubbers, though I fought three wars wi' them, and they carried off one of my spars, and be hanged to them! If I've let daylight into a few of them, d'ye see, it's all in good part and by way of duty. I've drunk my share—enough to sweeten my bilge-water—but there are few that have seen me cranky in the upper rigging or refusing to answer to my helm. I never drew pay or prize-money that my mate in distress was not welcome to the half of it. As to the Polls, the less said the better. I've been a true consort to my Phœbe since she agreed to look to me for signals. Those are my papers, all clear and aboveboard. If I'm summoned aft this very night by the great Lord High Admiral of all, I ain't afeard that He'll clap me into the bilboes, for though I'm only a poor sailor-man, I've got His promise in this here book, and I'm not afraid of His going back from it."

My father sat with the old man for some hours and did all that he could to comfort and assist him, for it was clear that he was sinking rapidly. When he at last left him, with his faithful wife beside him, he grasped the brown but wasted hand which lay above the clothes.

"I'll see you again soon," he said.

"Yes. In the latitude of heaven," replied the dying seaman.

His foreboding was right, for in the early hours of the morning his wife, bending over him, saw a bright smile upon his tanned, weather-beaten face. Raising himself upon his pillow he touched his forelock, as is the habit of sailor-men, and so sank slowly and peacefully back into the long sleep which wakes when the night has ceased to be.

You will ask me doubtless what became of Hector Marot and of the strange shipload which had set sail from Poole Harbour. There was never a word heard of them again, unless indeed a story which was spread some months afterwards by Captain Elias Hopkins, of the Bristol ship *Caroline*, may be taken as bearing upon their fate. For Captain Hopkins relates that, being on his homeward voyage from our settlements, he chanced to meet with thick fogs and a head wind in the neighbourhood of the great cod banks. One night as he was beating about, with the weather so thick that he could scarce see the truck of his own mast, a most strange passage befell him. For as he and others stood upon the deck, they heard to their astonishment the sound of many voices joined in a great chorus, which was at first faint and distant, but which presently waxed and increased until it appeared to pass within a stone-throw of his vessel, when it slowly died away once more and was lost in the distance. There were some among the crew who set the matter down as the doing of the evil one, but, as Captain Elias Hopkins was wont to remark, it was a strange thing that the foul fiend should choose West-country hymns for his nightly exercise, and stranger still that the dwellers in the pit should sing with a strong Somersetshire burr. For myself, I have little doubt that it was indeed the *Dorothy Fox* which had swept past in the fog, and that the prisoners, having won their freedom, were celebrating their delivery in true Puritan style. Whether they were

driven on to the rocky coast of Labrador, or whether they found a home in some desolate land whence no kingly cruelty could harry them, is what must remain for ever unknown.

Zachariah Palmer lived for many years, a venerable and honoured old man, before he, too, was called to his fathers. A sweet and simple village philosopher he was, with a child's heart in his aged breast. The very thought of him is to me as the smell of violets ; for if in my views of life and in my hopes of the future I differ somewhat from the hard and gloomy teaching of my father, I know that I owe it to the wise words and kindly training of the carpenter. If, as he was himself wont to say, deeds are everything in this world and dogma is nothing, then his sinless, blameless life might be a pattern to you and to all. May the dust lie light upon him !

One word of another friend—the last mentioned, but not the least valued. When Dutch William had been ten years upon the English throne there was still to be seen in the field by my father's house a tall, strong-boned horse, whose grey skin was flecked with dashes of white. And it was ever observed that, should the soldiers be passing from Portsmouth, or should the clank of trumpet or the rattle of drum break upon his ear, he would arch his old neck, throw out his grey-streaked tail, and raise his stiff knees in a pompous and pedantic canter. The country folk would stop to watch these antics of the old horse, and then the chances are that one of them would tell the rest how that charger had borne one of their own village lads to the wars, and how, when the rider had to fly the country, a kindly sergeant in the King's troops had brought the steed as a remembrance of him to his father at home. So Covenant passed the last years of his life, a veteran among steeds, well fed and cared for, and much given, mayhap, to telling in equine language to all the poor, silly country steeds the wonderful passages which had befallen him in the West.

# *Appendix*

## NOTE A.—*Hatred of Learning among the Puritans.*

In spite of the presence in their ranks of such ripe scholars as John Milton, Colonel Hutchinson and others, there was among the Independents and Anabaptists a profound distrust of learning, which is commented upon by writers of all shades of politics. Dr. South in his sermons remarks that "All learning was cried down, so that with them the best preachers were such as could not read, and the best divines such as could not write. In all their preachments they so highly pretended to the Spirit, that some of them could hardly spell a letter. To be blind with them was a proper qualification of a spiritual guide, and to be book-learned, as they called it, and to be irreligious, were almost convertible terms. None save tradesmen and mechanics were allowed to have the Spirit, and those only were accounted like St. Paul who could work with their hands, and were able to make a pulpit before preaching in it."

In the collection of loyal ballads reprinted in 1731, the Royalist bard harps upon the same characteristic:

"We'll down with universities
Where learning is professed,
Because they practise and maintain
The language of the beast.
We'll drive the doctors out of doors,
And parts, whate'er they be,
We'll cry all parts and learning down,
And heigh, then up go we!"

## NOTE B.—*On the Speed of Couriers.*

It is difficult for us in these days of steam and electricity to realise how long it took to despatch a message in the seventeenth century, even when the occasion was most pressing. Thus, Monmouth landed at Lyme on the morning of Thursday, the 11th of June. Gregory Alford, the Tory mayor of Lyme, instantly fled to Honiton, whence he despatched a messenger to the Privy Council. Yet it was five o'clock in the morning of Saturday, the 13th, before the news reached London, though the distance is but 156 miles.

## NOTE C.—*On the Claims of the Lender of a Horse.*

The difficulty touched upon by Decimus Saxon, as to the claim of the lender of a horse upon the booty gained by the rider, is one frequently discussed by writers of that date upon the usages of war. One distinguished authority says: Præfectus turmæ equitum Hispanorum, cum prœlio tuba caneret, unum ex equitibus suæ turmæ obvium habuit; qui questus est quod paucis ante diebus equum suum in certamine amiserat, propter quod non poterat imminenti prœlio interesse; unde jussit Præfectus ut unum ex suis equis conscenderet et ipsum comitaretur. Miles, equo conscenso, inter fugandum hostes, incidit in ipsum ducem hostilis exercitus, quem cepit et consignavit Duci

exercitus Hispani, qui a captivo vicena aureorum millia est consequutus. Dicebat Præfectus partem pretii hujus redemptionis sibi debere, quod miles equo suo dimicaverat, qui alias prœlio interesse non potuit. Petrinus Bellus affirmat se, cum esset Bruxellis in curia Hispaniarum Regis de hac quæstione consultum, et censuisse, pro Præfecto facere æquitatem quæ præcipue respicitur inter milites, quorum controversiæ ex æquo et bono dirimendæ sunt ; unde ultra conventa quis obligatur ad id quod alterum alteri præstare oportet." The case, it appears, ultimately went against the horse-lending præfect.

## NOTE D.—*On the Pronunciation of Exquisites.*

The substitution of the *a* for the *o* was a common affectation in the speech of the fops of the period, as may be found in Vanbrugh's *Relapse*. The notorious Titus Oates, in his efforts to be in the mode, pushed this trick to excess, and his cries of " Oh Lard ! Oh Lard ! " were familiar sounds in Westminster Hall at the time when the Salamanca doctor was at the flood of his fortune.

## NOTE E.—*Hour-glasses in Pulpits.*

In those days it was customary to have an hour-glass stationed in a frame of iron at the side of the pulpit, and visible to the whole congregation. It was turned up as soon as the text was announced, and a minister earned a name as a lazy preacher if he did not hold out until the sand had ceased to run. If, on the other hand, he exceeded that limit, his audience would signify by gapes and yawns that they had had as much spiritual food as they could digest. Sir Roger L'Estrange (*Fables*, Part II. Fab. 262) tells of a notorious spin-text who, having exhausted his glass and being half-way through a second one, was at last arrested in his career by a valiant sexton, who rose and departed, remarking as he did so, " Pray, sir, be pleased when you have done to leave the key under the door."

## NOTE F.—*Disturbances at the old Gast House of Little Burton.*

The circumstances referred to by the Mayor of Taunton in his allusion to the Drummer of Tedsworth are probably too well known to require elucidation. The haunting of the old Gast House at Burton would, however, be fresh at that time in the minds of Somersetshire folk, occurring as it did in 1677. Some short account from documents of that date may be of interest.

" The first night that I was there, with Hugh Mellmore and Edward Smith, they heard as it were the washing of water over their heads. Then, taking the candle and going up the stairs, there was a wet cloth thrown at them, but it fell on the stairs. They going up further, there was another thrown as before. And when they were come up into the chamber there stood a bowl of water, looking white, as though soap had been used in it. The bowl just before was in the kitchen, and could not be carried up but through the room where they were. The next thing was a terrible noise, like a clap of thunder, and shortly afterwards they heard a great scratching about the bedstead, and after that great knocking with a hammer against the bed's-head, so that the two maids that were in bed cried out for help. Then they

ran up the stairs, and there lay the hammer on the bed, and on the bed's-head there were near a thousand prints of the hammer. The maids said that they were scratched and pinched with a hand which had exceeding long nails.

" The second night that James Sherring and Thomas Hillary were there, James Sherring sat down in the chimney to fill a pipe of tobacco. He used the tongs to lift a coal to light his pipe, and by-and-by the tongs were drawn up the stairs and were cast upon the bed. The same night one of the maids left her shoes by the fire, and they were carried up into the chamber, and the old man's brought down and set in their places. As they were going upstairs there were many things thrown at them which were just before in the low room, and when they went down the stairs the old man's breeches were thrown down after them.

" On another night a saddle did come into the house from a pin in the entry, and did hop about the place from table to table. It was very troublesome to them, until they broke it into small pieces and threw it out into the roadway. So for some weeks the haunting continued, with rappings, scratching, movements of heavy articles, and many other strange things, as are attested by all who were in the village, until at last they ceased as suddenly as they had begun."

## NOTE G.—*Monmouth's Progress in the West.*

During his triumphal progress through the western shires, some years before the rebellion, Monmouth first ventured to exhibit upon his escutcheon the lions of England and the lilies of France, without the bâton sinister. A still more ominous sign was that he ventured to touch for the king's evil. The appended letter, extracted from the collection of tracts in the British Museum, may be of interest as first-hand evidence of the occasional efficacy of that curious ceremony.

" His Grace the Duke of Monmouth honoured in his progress in the West of England, in an account of an extraordinary cure of the king's evil.

" Given in a letter from Crewkhorn, in Somerset, from the minister of the parish and many others.

" We, whose names are underwritten, do certify the miraculous cure of a girl of this town, about twenty, by name Elizabeth Parcet, a poor widow's daughter, who hath languished under sad affliction from that distemper of the king's evil termed the joint evil, being said to be the worst evil. For about ten or twelve years' time she had in her right hand four running wounds, one on the inside, three on the back of her hand, as well as two more in the same arm, one above her hand-wrist, the other above the bending of her arm. She had betwixt her arm-pits a swollen bunch, which the doctors said fed those six running wounds. She had the same distemper also on her left eye, so she was almost blind. Her mother, despairing of preserving her sight, and being not of ability to send her to London to be touched by the king, being miserably poor, having many poor children, and this girl not being able to work, her mother, desirous to have her daughter cured, sent to the chirurgeons for help, who tampered with it for some time, but could do no good. She went likewise ten or eleven miles to a seventh

son, but all in vain. No visible hopes remained, and she expected nothing but the grave.

"But now, in this the girl's great extremity, God, the great physician, dictates to her, then languishing in her miserable, hopeless condition, what course to take and what to do for a cure, which was to go and touch the Duke of Monmouth. The girl told her mother that if she could but touch the Duke she would be well. The mother reproved her for her foolish conceit, but the girl did often persuade her mother to go to Lackington to the Duke, who then lay with Mr. Speaks. 'Certainly,' said she, 'I should be well if I could touch him.' The mother slighted these pressing requests, but the more she slighted and reproved, the more earnest the girl was for it. A few days after, the girl having noticed that Sir John Sydenham intended to treat the Duke at White Lodge in Henton Park, this girl with many of her neighbours went to the said park. She being there timely waited the Duke's coming. When first she observed the Duke she pressed in among a crowd of people and caught him by the hand, his glove being on, and she likewise having a glove to cover her wounds. She not being herewith satisfied at the first attempt of touching his glove only, but her mind was she must touch some part of his bare skin, she, weighing his coming forth, intended a second attempt. The poor girl, thus between hope and fear, waited his motion. On a sudden there was news of the Duke's coming, on which she to be prepared rent off her glove, that was clung to the sores, in such haste that she broke her glove, and brought away not only the sores but the skin. The Duke's glove, as Providence would have it, the upper part hung down, so that his hand-wrist was bare. She pressed on, and caught him by the bare hand-wrist with her running hand, crying, 'God bless your highness!' and the Duke said 'God bless you!' The girl, not a little transported at her good success, came and assured her friends that she would now be well. She came home to her mother in great joy, and told her that she had touched the Duke's hand. The mother, hearing what she had done, reproved her sharply for her boldness, asked how she durst do such a thing, and threatened to beat her for it. She cried out, 'Oh, mother, I shall be well again, and healed of my wounds!' And as God Almighty would have it, to the wonder and admiration of all, the six wounds were speedily dried up, the eye became perfectly well, and the girl was in good health. All which has been discovered to us by the mother and daughter, and by neighbours that know her.

"Henry Clark, minister; Captain James Bale, &c. &c. Whoever doubts the truth of this relation may see the original under the hands of the persons mentioned at the Amsterdam Coffee House, Bartholomew Lane, Royal Exchange."

In spite of the uncouth verbiage of the old narrative, there is a touch of human pathos about it which makes it worthy of reproduction.

### Note H.—*Monmouth's Contention of Legitimacy.*

Sir Patrick Hume, relating a talk with Monmouth before his expedition, says: "I urged if he considered himself as lawful son of King Charles, late deceased. He said he did. I asked him if he were able to make out and prove the marriage of his mother to King Charles,

and whether he intended to lay claim to the crown. He answered that he had been able lately to prove the marriage, and if some persons are not lately dead, of which he would inform himself, he would yet be able to prove it. As for his claiming the crown, he intended not to do it unless it were advised to be done by those who should concern themselves and join for the delivery of the nations."

It may be remarked that in Monmouth's commission to be general, dated April 1668, he is styled "our most entirely beloved and natural son." Again, in a commission for the government of Hull, April 1673, he is "our well-beloved natural son."

## NOTE I.—*Dragooners and Chargers.*

The dragoons, being really mounted infantry, were provided with very inferior animals to the real cavalry. From a letter of Cromwell's (*Squire Correspondence*, April 3, 1643), it will be seen that a dragooner was worth twenty pieces, while a charger could not be obtained under sixty.

## NOTE J.—*Battle of Sedgemoor.*

A curious little sidelight upon the battle is afforded by the two following letters exhibited to the Royal Archæological Institute by the Rev. C. W. Bingham.

"*To Mrs. Chaffin at Chettle House.*

"*Monday, about ye forenoon, July* 6, 1685.

"My dearest creature,—This morning about one o'clock the rebbells fell upon us whilest we were in our tents in King's Sedgemoor, with their whole army. . . . We have killed and taken at least 1000 of them. They are fled into Bridgewater. It is said that we have taken all their cannon, but sure it is that most are, if all be not. A coat with stars on 't is taken. 'Tis run through the back. By some 'tis thought that the Duke rebbell had it on and is killed, but most doe think that a servant wore it. I wish he were called, that the wars may be ended. It's thought he'll never be able to make his men fight again. I thank God I am very well without the least hurt, soe are our Dorsetshire friends. Prithee let Biddy know this by the first opportunity. I am thyne onely deare, TOSSEY."

BRIDGEWATER: *July* 7, 1685.

"We have totally routed the enemies of God and the King, and can't hear of fifty men together of the whole rebel army. We pick them up every houre in cornfields and ditches. Williams, the late Duke's valet de chambre, is taken, who gives a very ingenious account of the whole affair, which is too long to write. The last word that he said to him was at the time when his army fled, that he was undone and must shift for himself. We think to march with the General this day to Wells, on his way homeward. At present he is 2 miles off at the camp, soe I can't certainly tell whether he intends for Wells. I shall be home certainly on Saturday at farthest. I believe my deare Nan would for £500 that her Tossey had served the King to the end of the war. I am thyne, my deare childe, for ever."

NOTE K.—*Lord Grey and the Horse at Sedgemoor.*

It is only fair to state that Ferguson is held by many to have been as doughty a soldier as he was zealous in religion. His own account of Sedgemoor is interesting, as showing what was thought by those who were actually engaged on the causes of their failure.

"Now besides these two troops, whose officers though they had no great skill yet had courage enough to have done something honourably, had they not for want of a guide met with the aforesaid obstruction, there was no one of all the rest of our troops that ever advanced to charge or approached as near to the enemy as to give or receive a wound. Mr. Hacker, one of our captains, came no sooner within view of their camp than he villainously fired a pistol to give them notice of our approach, and then forsook his charge and rode off with all the speed he could, to take the benefit of a proclamation emitted by the King, offering pardon to all such as should return home within such a time. And this he pleaded at his tryal, but was answered by Jeffreys 'that he above all other men deserved to be hanged, and that for his treachery to Monmouth as well as his treason to the King.' And though no other of our officers acted so villainously, yet they were useless and unserviceable, as never once attempting to charge, nor so much as keeping their men in a body. And I dare affirm that if our horse had never fired a pistol, but only stood in a posture to have given jealousy and apprehension to the enemy, our foot alone would have carried the day and been triumphant. But our horse standing scattered and disunited, and flying upon every approach of a squadron of theirs, commanded by Oglethorpe, gave that body of their cavalry an advantage, after they had hovered up and down in the field without thinking it necessary to attack those whom their own fears had dispersed, to fall in at last in the rear of our battalions, and to wrest that victory out of their hands which they were grasping at, and stood almost possessed of. Nor was that party of their horse above three hundred at most, whereas we had more than enough had they had any courage, and been commanded by a gallant man, to have attacked them with ease both in front and flank. These things I can declare with more certainty, because I was a doleful spectator of them; for having contrary to my custom left attending upon the Duke, who advanced with the foot, I betook myself to the horse, because the first of that morning's action was expected from them, which was to break in and disorder the enemy's camp. Against the time that our battalions should come up, I endeavoured whatsoever I was capable of performing, for I not only struck at several troopers who had forsaken their station, but upbraided divers of the captains for being wanting in their duty. But I spoke with great warmth to my Lord Grey, and conjured him to charge, and not suffer the victory, which our foot had in a manner taken hold of, to be ravished from us. But instead of hearkening, he not only as an unworthy man and cowardly poltroon deserted that part of the field and forsook his command, but rode with the utmost speed to the Duke, telling him that all was lost and it was more than time to shift for himself. Wherebye, as an addition to all the mischief he had been the occasion of before, he drew the easy and unfortunate gentleman to leave the battalions while they were courageously disputing on which side the victory should fall. And this fell

most unhappily out, while a certain person was endeavouring to find out the Duke to have begged of him to come and charge at the head of his own troops. However, this I dare affirm, that if the Duke had been but master of two hundred horse, well mounted, completely armed, personally valiant, and commanded by experienced officers, they would have been victorious. This is acknowledged by our enemies, who have often confessed they were ready to fly through the impressions made upon them by our foot, and must have been beaten had our horse done their part, and not tamely looked on till their cavalry retrieved the day by falling into the rear of our battalions. Nor was the fault in the private men, who had courage to have followed their leaders, but it was in those who led them, particularly my Lord Grey, in whom, if cowardice may be called treachery, we may safely charge him with betraying our cause."

Extract from MS. of Dr. Ferguson, quoted in *Ferguson the Plotter*, an interesting work by his immediate descendant, an advocate of Edinburgh.

## NOTE L.—*Monmouth's Attitude after Capture.*

The following letter, written by Monmouth to the Queen from the Tower, is indicative of his abject state of mind.

"Madam,—I would not take the boldness of writing to your Majesty till I had shown the King how I do abhor the thing that I have done, and how much I desire to live to serve him. I hope, madam, by what I have said to the King to-day will satisfy how sincere I am, and how much I detest all those people who have brought me to this. Having done this, madam, I thought I was in a fitt condition to beg your intercession, which I am sure you never refuse to the distressed, and I am sure, madam, that I am an object of your pity, having been cousened and cheated into this horrid business. Did I wish, madam, to live for living sake I would never give you this trouble, but it is to have life to serve the King, which I am able to doe, and will doe beyond what I can express. Therefore, madam, upon such an account as that I may take the boldness to press you and beg of you to intersaid for me, for I am sure, madam, the King will hearken to you. Your prairs can never be refused, especially when it is begging for a life only to serve the King. I hope, madam, by the King's generosity and goodness, and your intercession, I may hope for my life, which if I have shall be ever employed in showing to your Majesty all the sense immadginable of grattitude, and in serving of the King like a true subject. And ever be your Majesty's most dutiful and obedient servant, MONMOUTH."

# THE REFUGEES

# PART I

## *IN THE OLD WORLD*

### I. *The Man from America*

IT was the sort of window which was common in Paris about the end of the seventeenth century. It was high, mullioned, with a broad transom across the centre, and above the middle of the transom a tiny coat of arms—three caltrops gules upon a field argent—let into the diamond-paned glass. Outside there projected a stout iron rod, from which hung a gilded miniature of a bale of wool which swung and squeaked with every puff of wind. Beyond that again were the houses of the other side, high, narrow and prim, slashed with diagonal wood-work in front, and topped with a bristle of sharp gables and corner turrets. Between were the cobble-stones of the Rue St. Martin and the clatter of innumerable feet.

Inside, the window was furnished with a broad bancal of brown stamped Spanish leather, where the family might recline and have an eye from behind the curtains on all that was going forward in the busy world beneath them. Two of them sat there now, a man and a woman, but their backs were turned to the spectacle, and their faces to the large and richly furnished room. From time to time they stole a glance at each other, and their eyes told that they needed no other sight to make them happy.

Nor was it to be wondered at, for they were a well-favoured pair. She was very young, twenty at the most, with a face which was pale, indeed, and yet of a brilliant pallor, which was so clear and fresh, and carried with it

such a suggestion of purity and innocence, that one would not wish its maiden grace to be marred by an intrusion of colour. Her features were delicate and sweet, and her blue-black hair and long dark eyelashes formed a piquant contrast to her dreamy grey eyes and her ivory skin. In her whole expression there was something quiet and subdued, which was accentuated by her simple dress of black taffeta, and by the little jet brooch and bracelet which were her sole ornaments. Such was Adèle Catinat, the only daughter of the famous Huguenot cloth-merchant.

But if her dress was sombre, it was atoned for by the magnificence of her companion. He was a man who might have been ten years her senior, with a keen soldier face, small well-marked features, a carefully trimmed black moustache, and a dark hazel eye which might harden to command a man, or soften to supplicate a woman, and be successful at either. His coat was of sky-blue, slashed across with silver braidings, and with broad silver shoulder straps on either side. A vest of white calamanca peeped out from beneath it, and knee-breeches of the same disappeared into high polished boots with gilt spurs upon the heels. A silver-hilted rapier and a plumed cap lying upon a settle beside him completed a costume which was a badge of honour to the wearer, for any Frenchman would have recognised it as being that of an officer in the famous Blue Guard of Louis the Fourteenth. A trim, dashing soldier he looked, with his curling black hair and well-poised head. Such he had proved himself before now in the field, too, until the name of Amory de Catinat had become conspicuous among the thousands of the valiant lesser *noblesse* who had flocked into the service of the king.

They were first cousins, these two, and there was just sufficient resemblance in the clear-cut features to recall the relationship. De Catinat was sprung from a noble Huguenot family, but having lost his parents early he had joined the army, and had worked his way without influence and against all odds to his present position. His father's

younger brother, however, finding every path to fortune barred to him through the persecution to which men of his faith were already subjected, had dropped the " de " which implied his noble descent, and had taken to trade in the city of Paris, with such success that he was now one of the richest and most prominent citizens of the town. It was under his roof that the guardsman now sat, and it was his only daughter whose white hand he held in his own.

" Tell me, Adèle," said he, " why do you look troubled ? "

" I am not troubled, Amory."

" Come, there is just one little line between those curving brows. Ah, I can read you, you see, as a shepherd reads the sky."

" It is nothing, Amory, but——"

" But what ? "

" You leave me this evening."

" But only to return to-morrow."

" And must you really, really go to-night ? "

" It would be as much as my commission is worth to be absent. Why, I am on duty to-morrow morning outside the king's bedroom ! After chapel-time Major de Brissac will take my place, and then I am free once more."

" Ah, Amory, when you talk of the king and the court and the grand ladies, you fill me with wonder."

" And why with wonder ? "

" To think that you who live amid such splendour should stoop to the humble room of a mercer."

" Ah, but what does the room contain ? "

" There is the greatest wonder of all. That you who pass your days amid such people, so beautiful, so witty, should think me worthy of your love, me, who am such a quiet little mouse, all alone in this great house, so shy and so backward ! It is wonderful ! "

" Every man has his own taste," said her cousin, stroking the tiny hand. " It is with women as with flowers. Some may prefer the great brilliant sunflower, or the rose, which is so bright and large that it must ever

catch the eye. But give me the little violet which hides among the mosses, and yet is so sweet to look upon, and sheds its fragrance round it. But still that line upon your brow, dearest."

"I was wishing that father would return."

"And why? Are you so lonely, then?"

Her pale face lit up with a quick smile. "I shall not be lonely until to-night. But I am always uneasy when he is away. One hears so much now of the persecution of our poor brethren."

"Tut! my uncle can defy them."

"He has gone to the provost of the Mercer Guild about this notice of the quartering of the dragoons."

"Ah, you have not told me of that."

"Here it is." She rose and took up a slip of blue paper with a red seal dangling from it which lay upon the table. His strong, black brows knitted together as he glanced at it.

"Take notice," it ran, "that you, Théophile Catinat, cloth-mercer of the Rue St. Martin, are hereby required to give shelter and rations to twenty men of the Languedoc Blue Dragoons under Captain Dalbert until such time as you receive a further notice. [Signed] De Beaupré (Commissioner of the King)."

De Catinat knew well how this method of annoying Huguenots had been practised all over France, but he had flattered himself that his own position at court would have ensured his kinsman from such an outrage. He threw the paper down with an exclamation of anger.

"When do they come?"

"Father said to-night."

"Then they shall not be here long. To-morrow I shall have an order to remove them. But the sun has sunk behind St. Martin's Church, and I should already be upon my way."

"No, no; you must not go yet."

"I would that I could give you into your father's charge first, for I fear you alone when these troopers may

come. And yet no excuse will avail me if I am not at Versailles. But see, a horseman has stopped before the door. He is not in uniform. Perhaps he is a messenger from your father."

The girl ran eagerly to the window, and peered out, with her hand resting upon her cousin's silver-corded shoulder.

"Ah!" she cried, "I had forgotten. It is the man from America. Father said that he would come to-day."

"The man from America!" repeated the soldier, in a tone of surprise, and they both craned their necks from the window. The horseman, a sturdy, broad-shouldered young man, clean-shaven and crop-haired, turned his long, swarthy face and his bold features in their direction as he ran his eyes over the front of the house. He had a soft-brimmed grey hat of a shape which was strange to Parisian eyes, but his sombre clothes and high boots were such as any citizen might have worn. Yet his general appearance was so unusual that a group of townsfolk had already assembled round him, staring with open mouth at his horse and himself. A battered gun with an extremely long barrel was fastened by the stock to his stirrup, while the muzzle stuck up into the air behind him. At each holster was a large dangling black bag, and a gaily coloured red-slashed blanket was rolled up at the back of his saddle. His horse, a strong-limbed dapple-grey, all shiny with sweat above, and all caked with mud beneath, bent its fore knees as it stood, as though it were overspent. The rider, however, having satisfied himself as to the house, sprang lightly out of his saddle and disengaging his gun, his blanket and his bags, pushed his way unconcernedly through the gaping crowd and knocked loudly at the door.

"Who is he, then?" asked De Catinat. "A Canadian? I am almost one myself. I had as many friends on one side of the sea as on the other. Perchance I know him. There are not so many white faces yonder, and in two years there was scarce one from the Saguenay to Nipissing that I had not seen."

"Nay, he is from the English provinces, Amory. But he speaks our tongue. His mother was of our blood."

"And his name?"

"Is Amos—Amos—ah, those names! Yes, Green, that was it—Amos Green. His father and mine have done much trade together, and now his son, who, as I understand, has lived ever in the woods, is sent here to see something of men and cities. Ah, my God! what can have happened now?"

A sudden chorus of screams and cries had broken out from the passage beneath, with the shouting of a man and the sound of rushing steps. In an instant De Catinat was half-way down the stairs, and was staring in amazement at the scene in the hall beneath.

Two maids stood, screaming at the pitch of their lungs, at either side. In the centre the aged man-servant Pierre, a stern old Calvinist, whose dignity had never before been shaken, was spinning round, waving his arms, and roaring so that he might have been heard at the Louvre. Attached to the grey worsted stocking which covered his fleshless calf was a fluffy black hairy ball, with one little red eye glancing up, and the gleam of two white teeth where it held its grip. At the shrieks, the young stranger, who had gone out to his horse, came rushing back, and plucking the creature off, he slapped it twice across the snout, and plunged it head-foremost back into the leather bag from which it had emerged.

"It is nothing," said he, speaking in excellent French; "it is only a bear."

"Ah, my God!" cried Pierre, wiping the drops from his brow. "Ah, it has aged me five years! I was at the door, bowing to monsieur, and in a moment it had me from behind."

"It was my fault for leaving the bag loose. The creature was but pupped the day we left New York, six weeks come Tuesday. Do I speak with my father's friend, Monsieur Catinat?"

"No, monsieur," said the guardsman, from the stair-

case. " My uncle is out, but I am Captain de Catinat, at your service, and here is Mademoiselle Catinat, who is your hostess."

The stranger ascended the stair, and paid his greetings to them both with the air of a man who was as shy as a wild deer, and yet who had steeled himself to carry a thing through. He walked with them to the sitting-room, and then in an instant was gone again, and they heard his feet thudding upon the stairs. Presently he was back, with a lovely glossy skin in his hands. " The bear is for your father, mademoiselle," said he. " This little skin I have brought from America for you. It is but a trifle, and yet it may serve to make a pair of mocassins or a pouch."

Adèle gave a cry of delight as her hands sank into the depths of its softness. She might well admire it, for no king in the world could have had a finer skin. " Ah, it is beautiful, monsieur," she cried ; " and what creature is it ; and where did it come from ? "

" It is a black fox. I shot it myself last fall up near the Iroquois villages at Lake Oneida."

She pressed it to her cheek, her white face showing up like marble against its absolute blackness. " I am sorry my father is not here to welcome you, monsieur," she said ; " but I do so very heartily in his place. Your room is above. Pierre will show you to it, if you wish."

" My room ? For what ? "

" Why, monsieur, to sleep in ! "

" And must I sleep in a room ? "

De Catinat laughed at the gloomy face of the American.

" You shall not sleep there if you do not wish," said he.

The other brightened at once, and stepped across to the farther window, which looked down upon the court-yard.

" Ah," he cried. " There is a beech-tree there, mademoiselle, and if I might take my blanket out yonder, I should like it better than any room. In winter, indeed, one must do it, but in summer I am smothered with a ceiling pressing down upon me."

" You are not from a town then ? " said De Catinat.

"My father lives in New York—two doors from the house of Peter Stuyvesant, of whom you must have heard. He is a very hardy man, and he can do it, but I—even a few days of Albany or of Schenectady are enough for me. My life has been in the woods."

"I am sure that my father would wish you to sleep where you like and to do what you like, as long as it makes you happy."

"I thank you, mademoiselle. Then I shall take my things out there, and I shall groom my horse."

"Nay, there is Pierre."

"I am used to doing it myself."

"Then I will come with you," said De Catinat, "for I would have a word with you. Until to-morrow, then, Adèle, farewell!"

"Until to-morrow, Amory."

The two young men passed downstairs together, and the guardsman followed the American out into the yard.

"You have had a long journey," he said.

"Yes; from Rouen."

"Are you tired?"

"No; I am seldom tired."

"Remain with the lady, then, until her father comes back."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I have to go, and she might need a protector."

The stranger said nothing, but he nodded, and throwing off his black coat, set to work vigorously rubbing down his travel-stained horse.

## 2. *A Monarch in Déshabille*

IT was the morning after the guardsman had returned to his duties. Eight o'clock had struck on the great clock of Versailles, and it was almost time for the monarch to rise. Through all the long corridors and

frescoed passages of the monster palace there was a subdued hum and rustle, with a low muffled stir of preparation, for the rising of the king was a great state function in which many had a part to play. A servant with a steaming silver saucer hurried past, bearing it to Monsieur de St. Quentin, the state barber. Others, with clothes thrown over their arms, bustled down the passage which led to the ante-chamber. The knot of guardsmen in their gorgeous blue and silver coats straightened themselves up and brought their halberds to attention, while the young officer, who had been looking wistfully out of the window at some courtiers who were laughing and chatting on the terraces, turned sharply upon his heel, and strode over to the white and gold door of the royal bedroom.

He had hardly taken his stand there before the handle was very gently turned from within, the door revolved noiselessly upon its hinges, and a man slid silently through the aperture, closing it again behind him.

"Hush!" said he, with his finger to his thin, precise lips, while his whole clean-shaven face and high-arched brows were an entreaty and a warning. "The king still sleeps."

The words were whispered from one to another among the group who had assembled outside the door. The speaker, who was Monsieur Bontems, head *valet de chambre*, gave a sign to the officer of the guard, and led him into the window alcove from which he had lately come.

"Good-morning, Captain de Catinat," said he, with a mixture of familiarity and respect in his manner.

"Good-morning, Bontems. How has the king slept?"

"Admirably."

"But it is his time."

"Hardly."

"You will not rouse him yet?"

"In seven and a half minutes." The valet pulled out the little round watch which gave the law to the man

who *was* the law to twenty millions of people. "Who commands at the main guard?"

"Major de Brissac."

"And you will be here?"

"For four hours I attend the king."

"Very good. He gave me some instructions for the officer of the guard, when he was alone last night after the *petit coucher*. He bade me to say that Monsieur de Vivonne was not to be admitted to the *grand lever*. You are to tell him so."

"I shall do so."

"Then, should a note come from *her*—you understand me, the new one——"

"Madame de Maintenon?"

"Precisely. But it is more discreet not to mention names. Should she send a note, you will take it and deliver it quietly when the king gives you an opportunity."

"It shall be done."

"But if the other should come, as is possible enough—the other, you understand me, the former——"

"Madame de Montespan."

"Ah, that soldierly tongue of yours, captain! Should she come, I say, you will gently bar her way, with courteous words, you understand, but on no account is she to be permitted to enter the royal room."

"Very good, Bontems."

"And now we have but three minutes."

He strode through the rapidly increasing group of people in the corridor with an air of proud humility, as befitted a man who, if he was a valet, was at least the king of valets by being the valet of the king. Close by the door stood a line of footmen, resplendent in their powdered wigs, red plush coats and silver shoulder-knots.

"Is the officer of the oven here?" asked Bontems.

"Yes, sir," replied a functionary who bore in front of him an enamelled tray heaped with pine shavings.

"The opener of the shutters?"

"Here, sir."

"The remover of the taper?"

"Here, sir."

"Be ready for the word." He turned the handle once more, and slipped into the darkened room.

It was a large square apartment, with two high windows upon the farther side, curtained across with priceless velvet hangings. Through the chinks the morning sun shot a few little gleams, which widened as they crossed the room to break in bright blurs of light upon the primrose-tinted wall. A large arm-chair stood by the side of the burned-out fire, shadowed over by the huge marble mantelpiece, the back of which was carried up, twining and curving into a thousand arabesque and armorial devices until it blended with the richly painted ceiling. In one corner a narrow couch with a rug thrown across it showed where the faithful Bontems had spent the night.

In the very centre of the chamber there stood a large four-post bed, with curtains of Gobelin tapestry looped back from the pillow. A square of polished rails surrounded it, leaving a space some five feet in width all round between the enclosure and the bedside. Within this enclosure, or *ruelle*, stood a small round table, covered over with a white napkin, upon which lay a silver platter and an enamelled cup, the one containing a little Frontiniac wine and water, the other bearing three slices of the breast of a chicken, in case the king should hunger during the night.

As Bontems passed noiselessly across the room, his feet sinking into the moss-like carpet, there was the heavy close smell of sleep in the air, and he could hear the long thin breathing of the sleeper. He passed through the opening in the rails, and stood, watch in hand, waiting for the exact instant when the iron routine of the court demanded that the monarch should be roused. Beneath him, from under the costly green coverlet of Oriental silk, half buried in the fluffy Valenciennes lace which edged the pillow, there protruded a round black bristle of close-cropped hair, with the profile of a curving nose

and petulant lip outlined against the white background. The valet snapped his watch, and bent over the sleeper.

"I have the honour to inform your Majesty that it is half-past eight," said he.

"Ah!" The king slowly opened his large dark-brown eyes, made the sign of the cross, and kissed a little dark reliquary which he drew from under his night-dress. Then he sat up in bed, and blinked about him with the air of a man who is collecting his thoughts.

"Did you give my orders to the officer of the guard, Bontems?" he asked.

"Yes, sire."

"Who is on duty?"

"Major de Brissac at the main guard, and Captain de Catinat in the corridor."

"De Catinat! Ah, the young man who stopped my horse at Fontainebleau. I remember him. You may give the signal, Bontems."

The chief valet walked swiftly across to the door and threw it open. In rushed the officer of the ovens and the four red-coated, white-wigged footmen, ready-handed, silent-footed, each intent upon his own duties. The one seized upon Bontems' rug and couch, and in an instant had whipped them off into an ante-chamber; another had carried away the "*en cas*" meal and the silver taper-stand; while a third drew back the great curtains of stamped velvet and let a flood of light into the apartment. Then, as the flames were already flickering among the pine shavings in the fireplace, the officer of the ovens placed two round logs crosswise above them, for the morning air was chilly, and withdrew with his fellow-servants.

They were hardly gone before a more august group entered the bed-chamber. Two walked together in front, the one a youth little over twenty years of age, middle-sized, inclining to stoutness, with a slow, pompous bearing, a well-turned leg, and a face which was comely enough in a mask-like fashion, but which was devoid of any shadow of expression, except perhaps of an occasional lurking

gleam of mischievous humour. He was richly clad in plum-coloured velvet, with a broad band of blue silk across his breast, and the glittering edge of the order of St. Louis protruding from under it. His companion was a man of forty, swarthy, dignified and solemn, in a plain but rich dress of black silk with slashes of gold at the neck and sleeves. As the pair faced the king there was sufficient resemblance between the three faces to show that they were of one blood, and to enable a stranger to guess that the older was Monsieur, the younger brother of the king, while the other was Louis the Dauphin, his only legitimate child, and heir to a throne to which in the strange workings of Providence neither he nor his sons were destined to ascend.

Strong as was the likeness between the three faces, each with the curving Bourbon nose, the large full eye, and the thick Hapsburg under-lip, their common heritage from Anne of Austria, there was still a vast difference of temperament and character stamped upon their features. The king was now in his six-and-fortieth year, and the cropped black head was already thinning a little on the top, and shading away to grey over the temples. He still, however, retained much of the beauty of his youth, tempered by the dignity and sternness which increased with his years. His dark eyes were full of expression, and his clear-cut features were the delight of the sculptor and the painter. His firm and yet sensitive mouth and his thick, well-arched brows gave an air of authority and power to his face, while the more subdued expression which was habitual to his brother marked the man whose whole life had been spent in one long exercise of deference and self-effacement. The dauphin, on the other hand, with a more regular face than his father, had none of that quick play of feature when excited, or that kingly serenity when composed, which had made a shrewd observer say that Louis, if he were not the greatest monarch that ever lived, was at least the best fitted to act the part.

Behind the king's son and the king's brother there entered a little group of notables and of officials whom duty had called to this daily ceremony. There was the grand master of the robes, the first lord of the bed-chamber, the Duc du Maine, a pale youth clad in black velvet, limping heavily with his left leg, and his little brother, the young Comte de Toulouse, both of them the illegitimate sons of Madame de Montespan and the king. Behind them, again, was the first valet of the wardrobe, followed by Fagon, the first physician, Telier, the head surgeon, and three pages in scarlet and gold who bore the royal clothes. Such were the partakers in the family entry, the highest honour which the court of France could aspire to.

Bontems had poured on the king's hands a few drops of spirits of wine, catching them again in a silver dish; and the first lord of the bed-chamber had presented the bowl of holy water with which he made the sign of the cross, muttering to himself the short office of the Holy Ghost. Then, with a nod to his brother and a short word of greeting to the dauphin and to the Duc du Maine, he swung his legs over the side of the bed, and sat in his long silken night-dress, his little white feet dangling from beneath it—a perilous position for any man to assume, were it not that he had so heart-felt a sense of his own dignity that he could not realise that under any circumstances it might be compromised in the eyes of others. So he sat, the master of France, and yet the slave to every puff of wind, for a wandering draught had set him shivering and shaking. Monsieur de St. Quentin, the noble barber, flung purple dressing-gown over the royal shoulders, and placed a long many-curled court wig upon his head, while Bontems drew on his red stockings and laid before him his slippers of embroidered velvet. The monarch thrust his feet into them, tied his dressing-gown, and passed out to the fireplace, where he settled himself down in his easy-chair, holding out his thin delicate hands towards the blazing logs, while the others stood

round in a semicircle, waiting for the *grand lever* which was to follow.

"How is this, messieurs?" the king asked suddenly, glancing round him with a petulant face. "I am conscious of a smell of scent. Surely none of you would venture to bring perfume into the presence, knowing, as you must all do, how offensive it is to me."

The little group glanced from one to the other with protestations of innocence. The faithful Bontems, however, with his stealthy step, had passed along behind them, and had detected the offender.

"My lord of Toulouse, the smell comes from you," he said.

The Comte de Toulouse, a little ruddy-cheeked lad, flushed up at the detection.

"If you please, sire, it is possible that Mademoiselle de Grammont may have wet my coat with her casting-bottle when we all played together at Marly yesterday," he stammered. "I had not observed it, but if it offends your Majesty——''

"Take it away! take it away!" cried the king. "Pah! it chokes and stifles me! Open the lower casement, Bontems. No; never heed, now that he is gone. Monsieur de St. Quentin, is this not our shaving morning?"

"Yes, sire; all is ready."

"Then why not proceed? It is three minutes after the accustomed time. To work, sir; and you, Bontems, give word for the *grand lever*."

It was obvious that the king was not in a very good humour that morning. He darted little quick questioning glances at his brother and at his sons, but whatever complaint or sarcasm may have trembled upon his lips, was effectually stifled by De St. Quentin's ministrations. With the nonchalance born of long custom, the official covered the royal chin with soap, drew the razor swiftly round it, and sponged over the surface with spirits of wine. A nobleman then helped to draw on the king's

black velvet *haut-de-chausses*, a second assisted in arranging them, while a third drew the night-gown over the shoulders, and handed the royal shirt, which had been warming before the fire. His diamond-buckled shoes, his gaiters, and his scarlet inner vest were successively fastened by noble courtiers, each keenly jealous of his own privilege, and over the vest was placed the blue ribbon with the cross of the Holy Ghost in diamonds, and that of St. Louis tied with red. To one to whom the sight was new, it might have seemed strange to see the little man, listless, passive, with his eyes fixed thoughtfully on the burning logs, while this group of men, each with a historic name, bustled round him, adding a touch here and a touch there, like a knot of children with a favourite doll. The black undercoat was drawn on, the cravat of rich lace adjusted, the loose overcoat secured, two handkerchiefs of costly point carried forward upon an enamelled saucer, and thrust by separate officials into each side pocket, the silver and ebony cane laid to hand, and the monarch was ready for the labours of the day.

During the half-hour or so which had been occupied in this manner there had been a constant opening and closing of the chamber door, and a muttering of names from the captain of the guard to the attendant in charge, and from the attendant in charge to the first gentleman of the chamber, ending always in the admission of some new visitor. Each as he entered bowed profoundly three times, as a salute to majesty, and then attached himself to his own little clique or coterie, to gossip in a low voice over the news, the weather and the plans of the day. Gradually the numbers increased, until by the time the king's frugal first breakfast of bread and twice-watered wine had been carried in, the large square chamber was quite filled with a throng of men, many of whom had helped to make the epoch the most illustrious of French history. Here, close by the king, was the harsh but energetic Louvois, all-powerful now since the death of his rival Colbert, discussing a question of military

organisation with two officers, the one a tall and stately soldier, the other a strange little figure, undersized and misshapen, but bearing the insignia of a marshal of France, and owning a name which was of evil omen over the Dutch frontier, for Luxembourg was looked upon already as the successor of Condé, even as his companion Vauban was of Turenne. Beside them, a small white-haired clerical with a kindly face, Père la Chaise, confessor to the king, was whispering his views upon Jansenism to the portly Bossuet, the eloquent Bishop of Meaux, and to the tall thin young Abbé de Fénélon, who listened with a clouded brow, for it was suspected that his own opinions were tainted with the heresy in question. There, too, was Le Brun, the painter, discussing art in a small circle which contained his fellow-workers Verrio and Laguerre, the architects Blondel and Le Nôtre, and sculptors Girardon, Puget, Desjardins and Coysevox, whose works had done so much to beautify the new palace of the king. Close to the door, Racine, with his handsome face wreathed in smiles, was chatting with the poet Boileau and the architect Mansard, the three laughing and jesting with the freedom which was natural to the favourite servants of the king, the only subjects who might walk unannounced and without ceremony into and out of his chamber.

"What is amiss with him this morning?" asked Boileau in a whisper, nodding his head in the direction of the royal group. "I fear that his sleep has not improved his temper,"

"He becomes harder and harder to amuse," said Racine, shaking his head. "I am to be at Madame de Maintenon's room at three to see whether a page or two of the *Phèdre* may not work a change."

"My friend," said the architect, "do you not think that madame herself might be a better consoler than your *Phèdre?*"

"Madame is a wonderful woman. She has brains, she has heart, she has tact—she is admirable."

"And yet she has one gift too many."

"And that is?"

"Age."

"Pooh! What matter her years when she can carry them like thirty? What an eye! What an arm! And besides, my friends, he is not himself a boy any longer."

"Ah, but that is another thing."

"A man's age is an incident, a woman's a calamity."

"Very true. But a young man consults his eye, and an older man his ear. Over forty, it is the clever tongue which wins; under it, the pretty face."

"Ah, you rascal! Then you have made up your mind that five-and-forty years with tact will hold the field against nine-and-thirty with beauty. Well, when your lady has won, she will doubtless remember who were the first to pay court to her."

"But I think that you are wrong, Racine."

"Well, we shall see."

"And if you are wrong——"

"Well, what then?"

"Then it may be a little serious for you."

"And why?"

"The Marquise de Montespan has a memory."

"Her influence may soon be nothing more."

"Do not rely too much upon it, my friend. When the Fontanges came up from Provence, with her blue eyes and her copper hair, it was in every man's mouth that Montespan had had her day. Yet Fontanges is six feet under a church crypt, and the marquise spent two hours with the king last week. She has won once, and may again."

"Ah, but this is a very different rival. This is no slip of a country girl, but the cleverest woman in France."

"Pshaw, Racine, you know our good master well, or you should, for you seem to have been at his elbow since the days of the Fronde. Is he a man, think you, to be amused for ever by sermons, or to spend his days at the feet of a lady of that age, watching her at her tapestry-

work, and fondling her poodle, when all the fairest faces and brightest eyes of France are as thick in his *salons* as the tulips in a Dutch flower-bed ? No, no, it will be the Montespan, or if not she, some younger beauty."

" My dear Boileau, I say again that her sun is setting. Have you not heard the news ? "

" Not a word."

" Her brother, Monsieur de Vivonne, has been refused the *entrée*."

" Impossible ! "

" But it is a fact."

" And when ? "

" This very morning."

" From whom had you it ? "

" From De Catinat, the captain of the guard. He had his orders to bar the way to him."

" Ha ! then the king does indeed mean mischief. That is why his brow is so cloudy this morning, then. By my faith, if the marquise has the spirit with which folk credit her, he may find that it was easier to win her than to slight her."

" Aye ; the Mortemarts are no easy race to handle."

" Well, heaven send him a safe way out of it ! But who is this gentleman ? His face is somewhat grimmer than those to which the court is accustomed. Ha ! the king catches sight of him, and Louvois beckons to him to advance. By my faith, he is one who would be more at his ease in a tent than under a painted ceiling."

The stranger who had attracted Racine's attention was a tall thin man, with a high aquiline nose, stern fierce grey eyes, peeping out from under tufted brows, and a countenance so lined and marked by age, care and stress of weather that it stood out amid the prim courtier faces which surrounded it as an old hawk might in a cage of birds of gay plumage. He was clad in a sombre-coloured suit which had become usual at court since the king had put aside frivolity and Fontanges, but the sword which hung from his waist was no fancy rapier, but a good brass-

hilted blade in a stained leather-sheath, which showed every sign of having seen hard service. He had been standing near the door, his black-feathered beaver in his hand, glancing with a half-amused, half-disdainful expression at the groups of gossips around him, but at the sign from the minister of war he began to elbow his way forward, pushing aside in no very ceremonious fashion all who barred his passage.

Louis possessed in a high degree the royal faculty of recognition. "It is years since I have seen him, but I remember his face well," said he, turning to his minister. "It is the Comte de Frontenac, is it not?"

"Yes, sire," answered Louvois; "it is indeed Louis de Buade, Comte de Frontenac, and formerly governor of Canada."

"We are glad to see you once more at our *lever*," said the monarch, as the old nobleman stooped his head and kissed the white hand which was extended to him. "I hope that the cold of Canada has not chilled the warmth of your loyalty."

"Only death itself, sire, would be cold enough for that."

"Then I trust that it may remain to us for many long years. We would thank you for the care and pains which you have spent upon our province, and if we have recalled you, it is chiefly that we would fain hear from your own lips how all things go there. And first, as the affairs of God take precedence of those of France, how does the conversion of the heathen prosper?"

"We cannot complain, sire. The good fathers, both Jesuits and Récollets, have done their best, though indeed they are both rather ready to abandon the affairs of the next world in order to meddle with those of this."

"What say you to that, father?" asked Louis, glancing, with a twinkle of the eyes, at his Jesuit confessor.

"I say, sire, that when the affairs of this world have a bearing upon those of the next, it is indeed the duty of a good priest, as of every other good Catholic, to guide them right."

"That is very true, sire," said De Frontenac, with an angry flush upon his swarthy cheek; "but as long as your Majesty did me the honour to intrust those affairs to my own guidance, I would brook no interference in the performance of my duties, whether the meddler were clad in coat or cassock."

"Enough, sir, enough!" said Louis sharply. "I had asked you about the missions."

"They prosper, sire. There are Iroquois at the Sault and the mountain, Hurons at Lorette, and Algonquins along the whole river *côtes* from Tadousac in the East to Sault la Marie, and even the great plains of the Dakotas, who have all taken the cross as their token. Marquette has passed down the river of the West to preach among the Illinois, and Jesuits have carried the Gospel to the warriors of the Long House in their wigwams at Onondaga."

"I may add, your Majesty," said Père la Chaise, "that in leaving the truth there, they have too often left their lives with it."

"Yes, sire, it is very true," cried De Frontenac cordially. "Your Majesty has many brave men within your domains, but none braver than these. They have come back up the Richelieu River, from the Iroquois villages with their nails gone, their fingers torn out, a cinder where their eye should be, and the scars of pine splinters as thick upon their bodies as the *fleurs-de-lis* on yonder curtain. Yet, with a month of nursing from the good Ursulines, they have used their remaining eye to guide them back to the Indian country once more, where even the dogs have been frightened at their haggled faces and twisted limbs."

"And you have suffered this?" cried Louis hotly. "You allow these infamous assassins to live?"

"I have asked for troops, sire."

"And I have sent some."

"One regiment."

"The Carignan-Salière. I have no better in my service."

" But more is needed, sire."

" There are the Canadians themselves. Have you not a militia ? Could you not raise force enough to punish these rascally murderers of God's priests ! I had always understood that you were a soldier."

De Frontenac's eyes flashed, and a quick answer seemed for an instant to tremble upon his lips, but with an effort the fiery old man restrained himself. " Your Majesty will learn best whether I am a soldier or not," said he, " by asking those who have seen me at Seneffe, Mulhausen, Salzbach and half a score of other places where I had the honour of upholding your Majesty's cause."

" Your services have not been forgotten."

" It is just because I am a soldier and have seen something of war that I know how hard it is to penetrate into a country much larger than the Lowlands, all thick with forest and bog, with a savage lurking behind every tree, who, if he has not learned to step in time or to form line, can at least bring down the running caribou at two hundred paces, and travel three leagues to your one. And then when you have at last reached their villages, and burned their empty wigwams and a few acres of maize fields, what the better are you then ? You can but travel back again to your own land with a cloud of unseen men lurking behind you, and a scalp-yell for every straggler. You are a soldier yourself, sire. I ask you if such a war is an easy task for a handful of soldiers, with a few *censitaires* straight from the plough, and a troop of *coureurs-de-bois* whose hearts all the time are with their traps and their beaver-skins."

" No, no ; I am sorry if I spoke too hastily," said Louis. " We shall look into the matter at our council."

" Then it warms my heart to hear you say so," cried the old governor. " There will be joy down the long St. Lawrence, in white hearts and in red, when it is known that their great father over the waters has turned his mind towards them."

"And yet you must not look for too much, for Canada has been a heavy cost to us, and we have many calls in Europe."

"Ah, sire, I would that you could see that great land. When your Majesty has won a campaign over here, what may come of it? Glory, a few miles of land, Luxembourg, Strassburg, one more city in the kingdom; but over there, with a tenth of the cost and a hundredth part of the force, there is a world ready to your hand. It is so vast, sire, so rich, so beautiful! Where are there such hills, such forests, such rivers! And it is all for us if we will but take it. Who is there to stand in our way? A few nations of scattered Indians and a thin strip of English farmers and fishermen. Turn your thoughts there, sire, and in a few years you would be able to stand upon your citadel at Quebec, and to say there is one great empire here from the snows of the North to the warm Southern gulf, and from the waves of the ocean to the great plains beyond Marquette's river, and the name of this empire is France, and her king is Louis, and her flag is the *fleurs-de-lis*."

Louis's cheek had flushed at this ambitious picture, and he had leaned forward in his chair, with flashing eyes, but he sank back again as the governor concluded.

"On my word, count," said he, "you have caught something of this gift of Indian eloquence of which we have heard. But about these English folk. They are Huguenots, are they not?"

"For the most part. Especially in the North."

"Then it might be a service to Holy Church to send them packing. They have a city there, I am told. New—New —— How do they call it?"

"New York, sire. They took it from the Dutch."

"Ah, New York. And have I not heard of another? Bos—Bos——"

"Boston, sire."

"That is the name. The harbours might be of service to us. Tell me, now, Frontenac," lowering his voice so that his words might be audible only to the count, Louvois

and the royal circle, "what force would you need to clear these people out? One regiment, two regiments, and perhaps a frigate or two?"

But the ex-governor shook his grizzled head. "You do not know them, sire," said he. "They are stern folk, these. We in Canada, with all your gracious help, have found it hard to hold our own. Yet these men have had no help, but only hindrance, with cold and disease, and barren lands, and Indian wars, but they have thriven and multiplied until the woods thin away in front of them like ice in the sun, and their church bells are heard where but yesterday the wolves were howling. They are peaceful folk, and slow to war, but when they have set their hands to it, though they may be slack to begin, they are slacker still to cease. To put New England into your Majesty's hands, I would ask fifteen thousand of your best troops and twenty ships of the line."

Louis sprang impatiently from his chair, and caught up his cane. "I wish," said he, "that you would imitate these people who seem to you to be so formidable, in their excellent habit of doing things for themselves. The matter may stand until our council. Reverend father, it has struck the hour of chapel, and all else may wait until we have paid our duties to heaven." Taking a missal from the hands of an attendant, he walked as fast as his very high heels would permit him, towards the door, the court forming a lane through which he might pass, and then closing up behind to follow him in order of precedence.

## 3. *The Holding of the Door*

WHILST Louis had been affording his court that which he had openly stated to be the highest of human pleasures—the sight of the royal face—the young officer of the guard outside had been very busy passing on the titles of the numerous applicants for

admission, and exchanging usually a smile or a few words of greeting with them, for his frank handsome face was a well-known one at the court. With his merry eyes and his brisk bearing, he looked like a man who was on good terms with fortune. Indeed, he had good cause to be so, for she had used him well. Three years ago he had been an unknown subaltern bushfighting with Algonquins and Iroquois in the wilds of Canada. An exchange had brought him back to France and into the regiment of Picardy, but the lucky chance of having seized the bridle of the king's horse one winter's day in Fontainebleau when the creature was plunging within a few yards of a deep gravel-pit had done for him what ten campaigns might have failed to accomplish. Now as a trusted officer of the king's guard, young, gallant and popular, his lot was indeed an enviable one. And yet, with the strange perversity of human nature, he was already surfeited with the dull if magnificent routine of the king's household and looked back with regret to the rougher and freer days of his early service. Even there at the royal door his mind had turned away from the frescoed passage and the groups of courtiers to the wild ravines and foaming rivers of the West, when suddenly his eyes lit upon a face which he had last seen among those very scenes.

"Ah, Monsieur de Frontenac!" he cried. "You cannot have forgotten me."

"What! De Catinat! Ah, it is a joy indeed to see a face from over the water. But there is a long step between a subaltern in the Carignan and a captain in the guards. You have risen rapidly."

"Yes; and yet I may be none the happier for it. There are times when I would give it all to be dancing down the Lachine Rapids in a birch canoe, or to see the red and the yellow on those hill-sides once more at the fall of the leaf."

"Aye," sighed De Frontenac. "You know that my fortunes have sunk as yours have risen. I have been recalled, and De la Barre is in my place. But there will be a storm there which such a man as he can never stand

against. With the Iroquois all dancing the scalp-dance, and Dongan behind them in New York to whoop them on, they will need me, and they will find me waiting when they send. I will see the king now, and try if I cannot rouse him to play the great monarch there as well as here. Had I but his power in my hands, I should change the world's history."

"Hush! No treason to the captain of the guard," cried De Catinat, laughing, while the stern old soldier strode past him into the king's presence.

A gentleman very richly dressed in black and silver had come up during this short conversation, and advanced, as the door opened, with the assured air of a man whose rights are beyond dispute. Captain de Catinat, however, took a quick step forward, and barred him off from the door.

"I am very sorry, Monsieur de Vivonne," said he, "but you are forbidden the presence."

"Forbidden the presence! I? You are mad!" He stepped back with grey face and staring eyes, one shaking hand half raised in protest.

"I assure you that it is his order."

"But it is incredible. It is a mistake."

"Very possibly."

"Then you will let me past."

"My orders leave me no discretion."

"If I could have one word with the king."

"Unfortunately, monsieur, it is impossible."

"Only one word."

"It really does not rest with me, monsieur."

The angry nobleman stamped his foot, and stared at the door as though he had some thoughts of forcing a passage. Then turning on his heel, he hastened away down the corridor with the air of a man who has come to a decision.

"There, now," grumbled De Catinat to himself, as he pulled at his thick dark moustache, "he is off to make some fresh mischief. I'll have his sister here presently, as like as not, and a pleasant little choice between breaking

my orders and making an enemy of her for life. I'd rather hold Fort Richelieu against the Iroquois than the king's door against an angry woman. By my faith, here *is* a lady, as I feared! Ah, heaven be praised! it is a friend, and not a foe. Good-morning, Mademoiselle Nanon."

"Good-morning, Captain de Catinat."

The new-comer was a tall, graceful brunette, her fresh face and sparkling black eyes the brighter in contrast with her plain dress.

"I am on guard, you see. I cannot talk with you."

"I cannot remember having asked monsieur to talk with me."

"Ah, but you must not pout in that pretty way, or else I cannot help talking to you," whispered the captain. "What is this in your hand, then?"

"A note from Madame de Maintenon to the king. You will hand it to him, will you not?"

"Certainly, mademoiselle. And how is madame, your mistress?"

"Oh, her director has been with her all the morning, and his talk is very, very good; but it is also very, very sad. We are not very cheerful when Monsieur Godet has been to see us. But I forget monsieur is a Huguenot, and knows nothing of directors."

"Oh, but I do not trouble about such differences. I let the Sorbonne and Geneva fight it out between them. Yet a man must stand by his family, you know."

"Ah! if monsieur could talk to Madame de Maintenon a little! She would convert him."

"I would rather talk to Mademoiselle Nanon, but if——"

"Oh!" There was an exclamation, a whisk of dark skirts, and the soubrette had disappeared down a side passage.

Along the broad, lighted corridor was gliding a very stately and beautiful lady, tall, graceful and exceedingly haughty. She was richly clad in a bodice of gold-coloured camlet and a skirt of grey silk trimmed with gold and silver lace. A handkerchief of priceless Genoa point

half hid and half revealed her beautiful throat, and was fastened in front by a cluster of pearls, while a rope of the same, each one worth a bourgeois' income, was coiled in and out through her luxuriant hair. The lady was past her first youth, it is true, but the magnificent curves of her queenly figure, the purity of her complexion, the brightness of her deep-lashed blue eyes, and the clear regularity of her features enabled her still to claim to be the most handsome as well as the most sharp-tongued woman in the court of France. So beautiful was her bearing, the carriage of her dainty head upon her proud white neck, and the sweep of her stately walk, that the young officer's fears were overpowered in his admiration, and he found it hard, as he raised his hand in salute, to retain the firm countenance which his duties demanded.

"Ah, it is Captain de Catinat," said Madame de Montespan, with a smile which was more embarrassing to him than any frown could have been.

"Your humble servant, marquise."

"I am fortunate in finding a friend here, for there has been some ridiculous mistake this morning."

"I am concerned to hear it."

"It was about my brother, Monsieur de Vivonne. It is almost too laughable to mention, but he was actually refused admission to the *lever*."

"It was my misfortune to have to refuse him, madame."

"You, Captain de Catinat? And by what right?" She had drawn up her superb figure, and her large blue eyes were blazing with indignant astonishment.

"The king's order, madame."

"The king! Is it likely that the king would cast a public slight upon my family? From whom had you this preposterous order?"

"Direct from the king through Bontems."

"Absurd! Do you think that the king would venture to exclude a Mortemart through the mouth of a valet? You have been dreaming, captain."

"I trust that it may prove so, madame."

"But such dreams are not very fortunate to the dreamer. Go, tell the king that I am here, and would have a word with him."

"Impossible, madame."

"And why?"

"I have been forbidden to carry a message."

"To carry any message?"

"Any from you, madame."

"Come, captain, you improve. It only needed this insult to make the thing complete. You may carry a message to the king from any adventuress, from any decayed governess"—she laughed shrilly at her description of her rival—"but none from Françoise de Mortemart, Marquise de Montespan?"

"Such are my orders, madame. It pains me deeply to be compelled to carry them out."

"You may spare your protestations, captain. You may yet find that you have every reason to be deeply pained. For the last time, do you refuse to carry my message to the king?"

"I must, madame."

"Then I carry it myself."

She sprang forward at the door, but he slipped in front of her with outstretched arms.

"For God's sake, consider yourself, madame!" he entreated. "Other eyes are upon you."

"Pah! Canaille!" She glanced at the knot of Switzers, whose sergeant had drawn them off a few paces, and who stood open-eyed, staring at the scene. "I tell you that I *will* see the king."

"No lady has ever been at the morning *lever*."

"Then I shall be the first."

"You will ruin me if you pass."

"And none the less, I shall do so."

The matter looked serious. De Catinat was a man of resource, but for once he was at his wit's end. Madame de Montespan's resolution, as it was called in her presence, or effrontery, as it was termed behind her back, was

proverbial. If she attempted to force her way, would he venture to use violence upon one who only yesterday had held the fortunes of the whole court in the hollow of her hand, and who, with her beauty, her wit and her energy, might very well be in the same position to-morrow? If she passed him, then his future was ruined with the king, who never brooked the smallest deviation from his orders. On the other hand, if he thrust her back, he did that which could never be forgiven, and which would entail some deadly vengeance should she return to power. It was an unpleasant dilemma. But a happy thought flashed into his mind at the very moment when she, with clenched hand and flashing eyes, was on the point of making a fresh attempt to pass him.

"If madame would deign to wait," said he soothingly, "the king will be on his way to the chapel in an instant."

"It is not yet time."

"I think the hour has just gone."

"And why should I wait like a lackey?"

"It is but a moment, madame."

"No, I shall not wait." She took a step forward towards the door.

But the guardsman's quick ear had caught the sound of moving feet from within, and he knew that he was master of the situation.

"I will take madame's message," said he.

"Ah, you have recovered your senses! Go, tell the king that I wish to speak with him."

He must gain a little time yet. "Shall I say it through the lord in waiting?"

"No; yourself."

"Publicly?"

"No, no; for his private ear."

"Shall I give a reason for your request?"

"Oh, you madden me! Say what I have told you, and at once."

But the young officer's dilemma was happily over. At that instant the double doors were swung open, and Louis

appeared in the opening, strutting forwards on his high-heeled shoes, his stick tapping, his broad skirts flapping, and his courtiers spreading out behind him. He stopped as he came out, and turned to the captain of the guard.

"You have a note for me?"

"Yes, sire."

The monarch slipped it into the pocket of his scarlet undervest, and was advancing once more when his eyes fell upon Madame de Montespan standing very stiff and erect in the middle of the passage. A dark flush of anger shot to his brow, and he walked swiftly past her without a word; but she turned and kept pace with him down the corridor.

"I had not expected this honour, madame," said he.

"Nor had I expected this insult, sire."

"An insult, madame? You forget yourself."

"No; it is you who have forgotten me, sire."

"You intrude upon me."

"I wished to hear my fate from your own lips," she whispered. "I can bear to be struck myself, sire, even by him who has my heart. But it is hard to hear that one's brother has been wounded through the mouths of valets and Huguenot soldiers for no fault of his, save that his sister has loved too fondly."

"It is no time to speak of such things."

"When can I see you, then, sire?"

"In your chamber."

"At what hour?"

"At four."

"Then I shall trouble your Majesty no further."

She swept him one of the graceful courtesies for which she was famous, and turned away down a side passage with triumph shining in her eyes. Her beauty and her spirit had never failed her yet, and now that she had the monarch's promise of an interview she never doubted that she could do as she had done before, and win back the heart of the man, however much against the conscience of the king.

## 4. *The Father of His People*

LOUIS had walked on to his devotions in no very charitable frame of mind, as was easily to be seen from his clouded brow and compressed lips. He knew his late favourite well, her impulsiveness, her audacity, her lack of all restraint when thwarted or opposed. She was capable of making a hideous scandal, of turning against him that bitter tongue which had so often made him laugh at the expense of others, perhaps even of making some public exposure which would leave him the butt and gossip of Europe. He shuddered at the thought. At all costs such a catastrophe must be averted. And yet how could he cut the tie which bound them? He had broken other such bonds as these; but the gentle La Vallière had shrunk into a convent at the very first glance which had told her of waning love. That was true affection. But this woman would struggle hard, fight to the bitter end, before she would quit the position which was so dear to her. She spoke of her wrongs. What were her wrongs? In his intense selfishness, nurtured by the eternal flattery which was the very air he breathed, he could not see that the fifteen years of her life which he had absorbed, or the loss of the husband whom he had supplanted, gave her any claim upon him. In his view he had raised her to the highest position which a subject could occupy. Now he was weary of her, and it was her duty to retire with resignation, nay, even with gratitude for past favours. She should have a pension, and the children should be cared for. What could a reasonable woman ask for more?

And then his motives for discarding her were so excellent. He turned them over in his mind as he knelt listening to the Archbishop of Paris reciting the mass, and the more he thought, the more he approved. His conception of the deity was as a larger Louis, and of heaven as a more gorgeous Versailles. If he exacted obedience from his twenty millions, then he must show it also to

this one who had a right to demand it of him. On the whole, his conscience acquitted him. But in this one matter he had been lax. From the first coming of his gentle and forgiving young wife from Spain, he had never once permitted her to be without a rival. Now that she was dead, the matter was no better. One favourite had succeeded another, and if De Montespan had held her own so long, it was rather from her audacity than from his affection. But now Father La Chaise and Bossuet were ever reminding him that he had topped the summit of his life, and was already upon that downward path which leads to the grave. His wild outburst over the unhappy Fontanges had represented the last flicker of his passions. The time had come for gravity and for calm, neither of which was to be expected in the company of Madame de Montespan.

But he had found out where they were to be enjoyed. From the day when De Montespan had introduced the stately and silent widow as a governess for his children, he had found a never-failing and ever-increasing pleasure in her society. In the early days of her coming he had sat for hours in the rooms of his favourite, watching the tact and sweetness of temper with which her dependent controlled the mutinous spirits of the petulant young Duc du Maine and the mischievous little Comte de Toulouse. He had been there nominally for the purpose of superintending the teaching, but he had confined himself to admiring the teacher. And then in time he too had been drawn into the attraction of that strong sweet nature, and had found himself consulting her upon points of conduct, and acting upon her advice with a docility which he had never shown before to minister or mistress. For a time he had thought that her piety and her talk of principle might be a mere mask, for he was accustomed to hypocrisy all round him. It was surely unlikely that a woman who was still beautiful, with as bright an eye and as graceful a figure as any in his court, could, after a life spent in the gayest circles, preserve the spirit of a nun.

But on this point he was soon undeceived, for when his own language had become warmer than that of friendship, he had been met by an iciness of manner and a brevity of speech which had shown him that there was one woman at least in his dominions who had a higher respect for herself than for him. And perhaps it was better so. The placid pleasures of friendship were very soothing after the storms of passion. To sit in her room every afternoon, to listen to talk which was not tainted with flattery, and to hear opinions which were not framed to please his ear, were the occupations now of his happiest hours. And then her influence over him was all so good! She spoke of his kingly duties, of his example to his subjects, of his preparation for the world beyond, and of the need for an effort to snap the guilty ties which he had formed. She was as good as a confessor—a confessor with a lovely face and a perfect arm.

And now he knew that the time had come when he must choose between her and De Montespan. Their influences were antagonistic. They could not continue together. He stood between virtue and vice, and he must choose. Vice was very attractive too, very comely, very witty, and holding him by that chain of custom which is so hard to shake off. There were hours when his nature swayed strongly over to that side, and when he was tempted to fall back into his old life. But Bossuet and Père La Chaise were ever at his elbows to whisper encouragement, and, above all, there was Madame de Maintenon to remind him of what was due to his position and to his six-and-forty years. Now at last he had braced himself for a supreme effort. There was no safety for him while his old favourite was at court. He knew himself too well to have any faith in a lasting change so long as she was there ever waiting for his moment of weakness. She must be persuaded to leave Versailles, if without a scandal it could be done. He would be firm when he met her in the afternoon, and make her understand once for all that her reign was for ever over.

Such were the thoughts which ran through the king's head as he bent over the rich crimson cushion which topped his *prie-dieu* of carved oak. He knelt in his own enclosure to the right of the altar, with his guards and his immediate household around him, while the court, ladies and cavaliers, filled the chapel. Piety was a fashion now, like dark overcoats and lace cravats, and no courtier was so worldly-minded as not to have had a touch of grace since the king had taken to religion. Yet they looked very bored, these soldiers and seigneurs, yawning and blinking over the missals, while some who seemed more intent upon their devotions were really dipping into the latest romance of Scudéry or Calpernedi, cunningly bound up in a sombre cover. The ladies, indeed, were more devout, and were determined that all should see it, for each had lit a tiny taper, which she held in front of her on the plea of lighting up her missal, but really that her face might be visible to the king, and inform him that hers was a kindred spirit. A few there may have been, here and there, whose prayers rose from their hearts, and who were there of their own free will ; but the policy of Louis had changed his noblemen into courtiers and his men of the world into hypocrites, until the whole court was like one gigantic mirror which reflected his own likeness a hundredfold.

It was the habit of Louis, as he walked back from the chapel, to receive petitions or to listen to any tales of wrong which his subjects might bring to him. His way, as he returned to his rooms, lay partly across an open space, and here it was that the suppliants were wont to assemble. On this particular morning there were but two or three—a Parisian, who conceived himself injured by the provost of his guild, a peasant whose cow had been torn by a huntsman's dog, and a farmer who had had hard usage from his feudal lord. A few questions, and then a hurried order to his secretary disposed of each case, for if Louis was a tyrant himself, he had at least the merit that he insisted upon being the only one within his kingdom. He was about to resume his way again, when an elderly man, clad

in the garb of a respectable citizen, and with a strong deep-lined face which marked him as a man of character, darted forward, and threw himself down upon one knee in front of the monarch.

"Justice, sire, justice!" he cried.

"What is this, then?" asked Louis. "Who are you, and what is it that you want?"

"I am a citizen of Paris, and I have been cruelly wronged."

"You seem a very worthy person. If you have indeed been wronged you shall have redress. What have you to complain of?"

"Twenty of the Blue Dragoons of Languedoc are quartered in my house, with Captain Dalbert at their head. They have devoured my food, stolen my property, and beaten my servants, yet the magistrates will give me no redress."

"On my life, justice seems to be administered in a strange fashion in our city of Paris!" exclaimed the king wrathfully.

"It is indeed a shameful case," said Bossuet.

"And yet there may be a very good reason for it," suggested Père La Chaise. "I would suggest that your Majesty should ask this man his name, his business and why it was that the dragoons were quartered upon him."

"You hear the reverend father's question."

"My name, sire, is Catinat, by trade I am a merchant in cloth, and I am treated in this fashion because I am of the Reformed Church."

"I thought as much!" cried the confessor.

"That alters matters," said Bossuet.

The king shook his head and his brow darkened. "You have only yourself to thank, then. The remedy is in your hands."

"And how, sire?"

"By embracing the only true faith."

"I am already a member of it, sire."

The king stamped his foot angrily. "I can see that

you are a very insolent heretic," said he. "There is but one Church in France, and that is my Church. If you are outside that, you cannot look to me for aid."

"My creed is that of my father, sire, and of my grandfather."

"If they have sinned it is no reason why you should. My own grandfather erred also before his eyes were opened."

"But he nobly atoned for his error," murmured the Jesuit.

"Then you will not help me, sire?"

"You must first help yourself."

The old Huguenot stood up with a gesture of despair, while the king continued on his way, the two ecclesiastics, on either side of him, murmuring their approval into his ears.

"You have done nobly, sire."

"You are truly the first son of the Church."

"You are the worthy successor of St. Louis."

But the king bore the face of a man who was not absolutely satisfied with his own action.

"You do not think, then, that these people have too hard a measure?" said he.

"Too hard? Nay, your Majesty errs on the side of mercy."

"I hear that they are leaving my kingdom in great numbers."

"And surely it is better so, sire; for what blessing can come upon a country which has such stubborn infidels within its boundaries?"

"Those who are traitors to God can scarce be loyal to the king," remarked Bossuet. "Your Majesty's power would be greater if there were no temple, as they call their dens of heresy, within your dominions."

"My grandfather promised them protection. They are shielded, as you well know, by the edict which he gave at Nantes."

"But it lies with your Majesty to undo the mischief that has been done."

" And how ? "

" By recalling the edict."

" And driving into the open arms of my enemies two millions of my best artisans and of my bravest servants. No, no, father, I have, I trust, every zeal for Mother-Church, but there is some truth in what De Frontenac said this morning of the evil which comes from mixing the affairs of this world with those of the next. How say you, Louvois ? "

" With all respect to the Church, sire, I would say that the devil has given these men such cunning of hand and of brain that they are the best workers and traders in your Majesty's kingdom. I know not how the state coffers are to be filled if such tax-payers go from among us. Already many have left the country and taken their trades with them. If all were to go, it would be worse for us than a lost campaign."

" But," remarked Bossuet, " if it were once known that the king's will had been expressed, your Majesty may rest assured that even the worst of his subjects bear him such love that they would hasten to come within the pale of Holy Church. As long as the edict stands, it seems to them that the king is lukewarm and that they may abide in their error."

The king shook his head. " They have always been stubborn folk," said he.

" Perhaps," remarked Louvois, glancing maliciously at Bossuet, " were the bishops of France to make an offering to the state of the treasurers of their sees, we might then do without these Huguenot taxes."

" All that the Church has is at the king's service," answered Bossuet curtly.

" The kingdom is mine and all that is in it," remarked Louis, as they entered the *Grand Salon*, in which the court assembled after chapel, " yet I trust that it may be long before I have to claim the wealth of the Church."

" We trust so, sire," echoed the ecclesiastics.

" But we may reserve such topics for our council

chamber. Where is Mansard? I must see his plans for the new wing at Marly." He crossed to a side table, and was buried in an instant in his favourite pursuit, inspecting the gigantic plans of the great architect, and inquiring eagerly as to the progress of the work.

"I think," said Père La Chaise, drawing Bossuet aside, "that your Grace has made some impression upon the king's mind."

"With your powerful assistance, father."

"Oh, you may rest assured that I shall lose no opportunity of pushing on the good work."

"If you take it in hand, it is done."

"But there is another who has more weight than I."

"The favourite, De Montespan?"

"No, no; her day is gone. It is Madame de Maintenon."

"I hear that she is very devout."

"Very. But she has no love for my Order. She is a Sulpitian. Yet we may all work to one end. Now if you were to speak to her, your Grace."

"With all my heart."

"Show her how good a service it would be could she bring about the banishment of the Huguenots."

"I shall do so."

"And offer her in return that we will promote——" he bent forward and whispered into the prelate's ear.

"What! He would not do it!"

"And why? The queen is dead."

"The widow of the poet Scarron!"

"She is of good birth. Her grandfather and his were dear friends."

"It is impossible!"

"But I know his heart, and I say it is possible."

"You certainly know his heart, father, if any can. But such a thought had never entered my head."

"Then let it enter and remain there. If she will serve the Church, the Church will serve her. But the king beckons, and I must go."

The thin dark figure hastened off through the throng of courtiers, and the great Bishop of Meaux remained standing with his chin upon his breast, sunk in reflection.

By this time all the court was assembled in the *Grand Salon* and the huge room was gay from end to end with the silks, the velvets and the brocades of the ladies, the glitter of jewels, the flirt of painted fans, and the sweep of plume or aigrette. The greys, blacks and browns of the men's coats toned down the mass of colour, for all must be dark, when the king was dark, and only the blues of the officers' uniforms, and the pearl and grey of the musketeers of the guard, remained to call back those early days of the reign when the men had vied with the women in the costliness and brilliancy of their wardrobes. And if dresses had changed, manners had done so even more. The old levity and the old passions lay doubtless very near the surface, but grave faces and serious talk were the fashion of the hour. It was no longer the lucky *coup* at the lansquenet table, the last comedy of Molière, or the new opera of Lully about which they gossiped, but it was on the evils of Jansenism, on the expulsion of Arnauld from the Sorbonne, on the insolence of Pascal, or on the comparative merits of two such popular preachers as Bourdaloue and Massilon. So, under a radiant ceiling and over a many-coloured floor, surrounded by immortal paintings, set thickly in gold and ornament, there moved these nobles and ladies of France, all moulding themselves upon the one little dark figure in their midst, who was himself so far from being his own master that he hung balanced even now between two rival women, who were playing a game in which the future of France and his own destiny were the stakes.

# 5. *Children of Belial*

THE elderly Huguenot had stood silent after his repulse by the king, with his eyes cast moodily downwards, and a face in which doubt, sorrow and anger contended for the mastery. He was a very large, gaunt man, rawboned and haggard, with a wide forehead, a large, fleshy nose, and a powerful chin. He wore neither wig nor powder, but Nature had put her own silvering upon his thick grizzled locks, and the thousand puckers which clustered round the edges of his eyes, or drew at the corners of his mouth, gave a set gravity to his face which needed no device of the barber to increase it. Yet, in spite of his mature years, the swift anger with which he had sprung up when the king refused his plaint, and the keen fiery glance which he had shot at the royal court as they filed past him with many a scornful smile and whispered gibe at his expense, all showed that he had still preserved something of the strength and of the spirit of his youth. He was dressed as became his rank, plainly and yet well, in a sad-coloured brown kersey coat with silver-plated buttons, knee-breeches of the same, and white woollen stockings, ending in broad-toed black leather shoes cut across with a great steel buckle. In one hand he carried his low felt hat, trimmed with gold edging, and in the other a little cylinder of paper containing a recital of his wrongs, which he had hoped to leave in the hands of the king's secretary.

His doubts as to what his next step should be were soon resolved for him in a very summary fashion. These were days when, if the Huguenot was not absolutely forbidden in France, he was at least looked upon as a man who existed upon sufferance, and who was unshielded by the laws which protected his Catholic fellow-subjects. For twenty years the stringency of the persecution had increased until there was no weapon which bigotry could employ, short of absolute expulsion, which had not been

turned against him. He was impeded in his business, elbowed out of all public employment, his house filled with troops, his children encouraged to rebel against him, and all redress refused him for the insults and assaults to which he was subjected. Every rascal who wished to gratify his personal spite, or to gain favour with his bigoted superiors, might do his worst upon him without fear of the law. Yet, in spite of all, these men clung to the land which disowned them, and, full of the love for their native soil which lies so deep in a Frenchman's heart, preferred insult and contumely at home to the welcome which would await them beyond the seas. Already, however, the shadow of those days was falling upon them when the choice should no longer be theirs.

Two of the king's big blue-coated guardsmen were on duty at that side of the palace, and had been witnesses to his unsuccessful appeal. Now they tramped across together to where he was standing, and broke brutally into the current of his thoughts.

"Now, Hymn-books," said one gruffly, "get off again about your business."

"You're not a very pretty ornament to the king's path-way," cried the other, with a hideous oath. "Who are you, to turn up your nose at the king's religion, curse you?"

The old Huguenot shot a glance of anger and contempt at them, and was turning to go, when one of them thrust at his ribs with the butt end of his halberd.

"Take that, you dog!" he cried. "Would you dare to look like that at the king's guard!"

"Children of Belial," cried the old man, with his hand pressed to his side, "were I twenty years younger you would not have dared to use me so."

"Ha! you would still spit your venom, would you? That is enough, André! He has threatened the king's guard. Let us seize him and drag him to the guard-room."

The two soldiers dropped their halberds and rushed

upon the old man, but, tall and strong as they were, they found it no easy matter to secure him. With his long sinewy arms and his wiry frame, he shook himself clear of them again and again, and it was only when his breath had failed him that the two, torn and panting, were able to twist round his wrists, and so secure him. They had hardly won their pitiful victory, however, before a stern voice and a sword flashing before their eyes, compelled them to release their prisoner once more.

It was Captain de Catinat, who, his morning duties over, had strolled out on to the terrace and had come upon this sudden scene of outrage. At the sight of the old man's face he gave a violent start, and drawing his sword, had rushed forward with such fury that the two guardsmen not only dropped their victim, but, staggering back from the threatening sword point, one of them slipped and the other rolled over him, a revolving mass of blue coat and white kersey.

"Villains!" roared De Catinat. "What is the meaning of this?"

The two had stumbled on to their feet again, very shamefaced and ruffled.

"If you please, captain," said one, saluting, "this is a Huguenot who abused the royal guard."

"His petition had been rejected by the king, captain, and yet he refused to go."

De Catinat was white with fury. "And so, when a French citizen has come to have a word with the great master of his country, he must be harassed by two Swiss dogs like you?" he cried. "By my faith, we shall soon see about that!"

He drew a little silver whistle from his pocket, and at the shrill summons an old sergeant and half a dozen soldiers came running from the guard-room.

"Your names?" asked the captain sternly.

"André Meunier."

"And yours?"

"Nicholas Klopper."

"Sergeant, you will arrest these men, Meunier and Klopper."

"Certainly, captain," said the sergeant, a dark grizzled old soldier of Condé and Turenne.

"See that they are tried to-day."

"And on what charge, captain?"

"For assaulting an aged and respected citizen who had come on business to the king."

"He was a Huguenot on his own confession," cried the culprits together.

"Hum!" The sergeant pulled doubtfully at his long moustache. "Shall we put the charge in that form, captain? Just as the captain pleases." He gave a little shrug of his epauletted shoulders to signify his doubt whether any good could arise from it.

"No," said De Catinat, with a sudden happy thought. "I charge them with laying their halberds down while on duty, and with having their uniforms dirty and disarranged."

"That is better," answered the sergeant, with the freedom of a privileged veteran. "Thunder of God, but you have disgraced the guards! An hour on the wooden horse with a musket at either foot may teach you that halberds were made for a soldier's hand, and not for the king's grass-plot. Seize them! Attention! Right half turn! March!"

And away went the little clump of guardsmen with the sergeant in the rear.

The Huguenot had stood in the background, grave and composed, without any sign of exultation, during this sudden reversal of fortune; but when the soldiers were gone, he and the young officer turned warmly upon each other.

"Amory, I had not hoped to see you!"

"Nor I you, uncle. What, in the name of wonder, brings you to Versailles?"

"My wrongs, Amory. The hand of the wicked is heavy upon us, and whom can we turn to, save only the king?"

The young officer shook his head. "The king is at heart a good man," said he. "But he can only see the world through the glasses which are held before him. You have nothing to hope from him."

"He spurned me from his presence."

"Did he ask your name?"

"He did, and I gave it."

The young guardsman whistled. "Let us walk to the gate," said he. "By my faith, if my kinsmen are to come and bandy arguments with the king, it may not be long before my company finds itself without its captain."

"The king would not couple us together. But indeed, nephew, it is strange to me how you can live in this house of Baal and yet bow down to no false gods."

"I keep my belief in my own heart."

The older man shook his head gravely.

"Your ways lie along a very narrow path," said he, "with temptation and danger ever at your feet. It is hard for you to walk with the Lord, Amory, and yet go hand in hand with the persecutors of His people."

"Tut, uncle!" said the young man impatiently. "I am a soldier of the king's, and I am willing to let the black gown and the white surplice settle these matters between them. Let me live in honour and die in my duty, and I am content to wait to know the rest."

"Content, too, to live in palaces, and eat from fine linen," said the Huguenot bitterly, "when the hands of the wicked are heavy upon your kinsfolk, and there is a breaking of phials, and a pouring forth of tribulation, and a wailing and a weeping through the land."

"What is amiss, then?" asked the young soldier, who was somewhat mystified by the scriptural language in use among the French Calvinists of the day.

"Twenty men of Moab have been quartered upon me with one Dalbert, their captain, who has long been a scourge to Israel."

"Captain Claude Dalbert, of the Languedoc Dragoons? I have already some small score to settle with him."

"Aye, and the scattered remnant has also a score against this murderous dog and self-seeking Ziphite."

"What has he done, then?"

"His men are over my house like moths in a cloth bale. No place is free from them. He sits in the room which should be mine, his great boots on my Spanish-leather chairs, his pipe in his mouth, his wine-pot at his elbow, and his talk a hissing and an abomination. He has beaten old Pierre of the warehouse."

"Ha!"

"And thrust me into the cellar."

"Ha!"

"Because I have dragged him back when in his drunken love he would have thrown his arms about your cousin Adèle."

"Oh!" The young man's colour had been rising and his brows knitted at each successive charge, but at this last his anger boiled over, and he hurried forward with fury in his face, dragging his elderly companion by the elbow. They had been passing through one of those winding paths, bordered by high hedges, which thinned away every here and there to give a glimpse of some prowling faun or weary nymph who slumbered in marble amid the foliage. The few courtiers who met them gazed with surprise at so ill-assorted a pair of companions. But the young soldier was too full of his own plans to waste a thought upon their speculations. Still hurrying on, he followed a crescent path which led past a dozen stone dolphins shooting water out of their mouths over a group of Tritons, and so through an avenue of great trees which looked as if they had grown there for centuries, and yet had in truth been carried over that very year by incredible labour from St. Germain and Fontainebleau. Beyond this point a small gate led out of the grounds, and it was through it that the two passed, the elder man puffing and panting with this unusual haste.

"How did you come, uncle?"

"In a calèche."

"Where is it?"

"That is it, beyond the auberge."

"Come, let us make for it."

"And you, Amory, are you coming?"

"My faith, it is time that I came, from what you tell me. There is room for a man with a sword at his side in this establishment of yours."

"But what would you do?"

"I would have a word with this Captain Dalbert."

"Then I have wronged you, nephew, when I said even now that you were not whole-hearted towards Israel."

"I know not about Israel," cried De Catinat impatiently. "I only know that if my Adèle chose to worship the thunder like an Abenaqui squaw, or turned her innocent prayers to the Mitche Manitou, I should like to set eyes upon the man who would dare to lay a hand upon her. Ha, here comes our calèche! Whip up, driver, and five livres to you if you pass the gate of the Invalides within the hour."

It was no light matter to drive fast in an age of springless carriages and deeply rutted roads, but the driver lashed at his two rough unclipped horses, and the calèche jolted and clattered upon its way. As they sped on, with the road-side trees dancing past the narrow windows, and the white dust streaming behind them, the guardsman drummed his fingers upon his knees, and fidgeted in his seat with impatience, shooting an occasional question across at his grim companion.

"When was all this, then?"

"It was yesterday night."

"And where is Adèle now?"

"She is at home."

"And this Dalbert?"

"Oh, he is there also!"

"What! you have left her in his power while you came away to Versailles?"

"She is locked in her room."

"Pah! what is a lock?" The young man raved with his hands in the air at the thought of his own impotence.

"And Pierre is there."

"He is useless."

"And Amos Green."

"Ah, that is better. He is a man, by the look of him."

"His mother was one of our own folk from Staten Island, near Manhattan. She was one of those scattered lambs who fled early before the wolves, when first it was seen that the king's hand waxed heavy upon Israel. He speaks French, and yet he is neither French to the eye, nor are his ways like our ways."

"He has chosen an evil time for his visit."

"Some wise purpose may lie hid in it."

"And you have left him in the house?"

"Yes; he was sat with this Dalbert, smoking with him, and telling him strange tales."

"What guard could he be? He is a stranger in a strange land. You did ill to leave Adèle thus, uncle."

"She is in God's hands, Amory."

"I trust so. Oh, I am on fire to be there!'

He thrust his head through the cloud of dust which rose from the wheels, and craned his neck to look upon the long curving river and broad-spread city, which was already visible before them, half hid by a thin blue haze, through which shot the double tower of Notre Dame, with the high spire of St. Jacques and a forest of other steeples and minarets, the monuments of eight hundred years of devotion. Soon, as the road curved down to the river-bank, the city wall grew nearer and nearer, until they had passed the southern gate, and were rattling over the stony causeway, leaving the broad Luxembourg upon their right, and Colbert's last work, the Invalides, upon their left. A sharp turn brought them on to the river quays, and crossing over the Pont Neuf, they skirted the stately Louvre, and plunged into the labyrinth of narrow but important streets which extended to the northward. The young officer had his head still thrust out of the

window, but his view was obscured by a broad gilded carriage which lumbered heavily along in front of them. As the road broadened, however, it swerved to one side, and he was able to catch a glimpse of the house to which they were making.

It was surrounded on every side by an immense crowd.

## 6. *A House of Strife*

THE house of the Huguenot merchant was a tall, narrow building standing at the corner of the Rue St. Martin and the Rue de Biron. It was four stories in height, grim and grave like its owner, with high peaked roof, long diamond-paned windows, a frame-work of black wood, with grey plaster filling the interstices, and five stone steps which led up to the narrow and sombre door. The upper story was but a warehouse in which the trader kept his stock, but the second and third were furnished with balconies edged with stout wooden balustrades. As the uncle and the nephew sprang out of the calèche, they found themselves upon the outskirts of a dense crowd of people, who were swaying and tossing with excitement, their chins all thrown forwards and their gaze directed upwards. Following their eyes, the young officer saw a sight which left him standing bereft of every sensation save amazement.

From the upper balcony there was hanging head downwards a man clad in the bright blue coat and white breeches of one of the king's dragoons His hat and wig had dropped off, and his close-cropped head swung slowly backwards and forwards a good fifty feet above the pavement. His face was turned towards the street, and was of a deadly whiteness, while his eyes were screwed up as though he dared not open them upon the horror which faced them. His voice, however, resounded over the whole place until the air was filled with his screams for mercy.

Above him, at the corner of the balcony, there stood a young man who leaned with a bent back over the balustrades, and who held the dangling dragoon by either ankle. His face, however, was not directed towards his victim, but was half turned over his shoulder to confront a group of soldiers who were clustering at the long, open window which led out into the balcony. His head, as he glanced at them, was poised with a proud air of defiance, while they surged and oscillated in the opening, uncertain whether to rush on or to retire.

Suddenly the crowd gave a groan of excitement. The young man had released his grip upon one of the ankles, and the dragoon hung now by one only, his other leg flapping helplessly in the air. He grabbed aimlessly with his hands at the wall and the wood-work behind him, still yelling at the pitch of his lungs.

"Pull me up, son of the devil, pull me up!" he screamed. "Would you murder me, then? Help, good people, help!"

"Do you want to come up, captain?" said the strong clear voice of the young man above him, speaking excellent French, but in an accent which fell strangely upon the ears of the crowd beneath.

"Yes, sacred name of God, yes!"

"Order off your men, then."

"Away, you dolts, you imbeciles! Do you wish to see me dashed to pieces? Away, I say! Off with you!"

"That is better," said the youth, when the soldiers had vanished from the window. He gave a tug at the dragoon's leg as he spoke, which jerked him up so far that he could twist round and catch hold of the lower edge of the balcony. "How do you find yourself now?" he asked.

"Hold me, for heaven's sake, hold me!"

"I have you quite secure."

"Then pull me up!"

"Not so fast, captain. You can talk very well where you are."

"Let me up, sir, let me up!"

"All in good time. I fear that it is inconvenient to you to talk with your heels in the air."

"Ah, you would murder me!"

"On the contrary, I am going to pull you up."

"Heaven bless you!"

"But only on conditions."

"Oh, they are granted! I am slipping!"

"You will leave this house—you and your men. You will not trouble this old man or this young girl any further. Do you promise?"

"Oh yes; we shall go."

"Word of honour?"

"Certainly. Only pull me up!"

"Not so fast. It may be easier to talk to you like this. I do not know how the laws are over here. Maybe this sort of thing is not permitted. You will promise me that I shall have no trouble over the matter."

"None, none. Only pull me up!"

"Very good. Come along!"

He dragged at the dragoon's leg while the other gripped his way up the balustrade until, amid a buzz of congratulation from the crowd, he tumbled all in a heap over the rail on to the balcony, where he lay for a few moments as he had fallen. Then staggering to his feet, without a glance at his opponent, he rushed, with a bellow of rage, through the open window.

While this little drama had been enacted overhead, the young guardsman had shaken off his first stupor of amazement, and had pushed his way through the crowd with such vigour that he and his companion had nearly reached the bottom of the steps. The uniform of the king's guard was in itself a passport anywhere, and the face of old Catinat was so well known in the district that everyone drew back to clear a path for him towards his house. The door was flung open for them, and an old servant stood wringing his hands in the dark passage.

"Oh, master! Oh, master!" he cried. "Such doings, such infamy! They will murder him!"

"Whom, then?"

"This brave monsieur from America. Oh, my God, hark to them now!"

As he spoke, a clatter and shouting which had burst out again upstairs ended suddenly in a tremendous crash, with volleys of oaths and a prolonged bumping and smashing, which shook the old house to its foundations. The soldier and the Huguenot rushed swiftly up the first flight of stairs, and were about to ascend the second one, from the head of which the uproar seemed to proceed, when a great eight-day clock came hurtling down, springing four steps at a time, and ending with a leap across the landing and a crash against the wall, which left it a shattered heap of metal wheels and wooden splinters. An instant afterwards four men, so locked together that they formed but one rolling bundle, came thudding down amid a debris of splintered stair-rails, and writhed and struggled upon the landing, staggering up, falling down and all breathing together like a wind in a chimney. So twisted and twined were they that it was hard to pick one from the other, save that the innermost was clad in black Flemish cloth, while the three who clung to him were soldiers of the king. Yet so strong and vigorous was the man whom they tried to hold that as often as he could find his feet he dragged them after him from end to end of the passage, as a boar might pull the curs which had fastened on to his haunches. An officer, who had rushed down at the heels of the brawlers, thrust his hands in to catch the civilian by the throat, but he whipped them back again with an oath as the man's strong white teeth met in his left thumb. Clapping the wound to his mouth, he flashed out his sword and was about to drive it through the body of his unarmed opponent, when De Catinat sprang forward and caught him by the wrist.

"You villain, Dalbert!" he cried.

The sudden appearance of one of the king's own bodyguard had a magic effect upon the brawlers. Dalbert sprang back, with his thumb still in his mouth, and his

sword drooping, scowling darkly at the new-comer. His long sallow face was distorted with anger, and his small black eyes blazed with passion and with the hell-fire light of unsatisfied vengeance. His troopers had released their victim, and stood panting in a line, while the young man leaned against the wall, brushing the dust from his black coat, and looking from his rescuer to his antagonists.

"I had a little account to settle with you before, Dalbert," said De Catinat, unsheathing his rapier.

"I am on the king's errand," snarled the other.

"No doubt. On guard, sir!"

"I am here on duty, I tell you!"

"Very good. Your sword, sir!"

"I have no quarrel with you."

"No?" De Catinat stepped forward and struck him across the face with his open hand. "It seems to me that you have one now," said he.

"Hell and furies!" screamed the captain. "To your arms, men! Holà, there, from above! Cut down this fellow, and seize your prisoner! Holà! in the king's name!"

At his call a dozen more troopers came hurrying down the stairs, while the three upon the landing advanced upon their former antagonist. He slipped by them, however, and caught out of the old merchant's hand the thick oak stick which he carried.

"I am with you, sir," said he, taking his place beside the guardsman.

"Call off your canaille, and fight me like a gentleman," cried De Catinat.

"A gentleman! Hark to the bourgeois Huguenot, whose family peddles cloth!"

"You coward! I will write liar on you with my sword point!"

He sprang forward, and sent in a thrust which might have found its way to Dalbert's heart had the heavy sabre of a dragoon not descended from the side and shorn his more delicate weapon short off close to the hilt. With a

shout of triumph, his enemy sprang furiously upon him with his rapier shortened, but was met by a sharp blow from the cudgel of the young stranger which sent his weapon tinkling on to the ground. A trooper, however, on the stair had pulled out a pistol, and clapping it within a foot of the guardsman's head, was about to settle the combat, once and for ever, when a little old gentleman, who had quietly ascended from the street, and who had been looking on with an amused and interested smile at this fiery sequence of events, took a sudden step forward, and ordered all parties to drop their weapons with a voice so decided, so stern, and so full of authority, that the sabre points all clinked down together upon the parquet flooring as though it were a part of their daily drill.

"Upon my word, gentlemen, upon my word!" said he, looking sternly from one to the other. He was a very small, dapper man, as thin as a herring, with projecting teeth and a huge drooping many-curled wig, which cut off the line of his skinny neck and the slope of his narrow shoulders. His dress was a long overcoat of mouse-coloured velvet slashed with gold, beneath which were high leather boots, which, with his little gold-laced, three-cornered hat, gave a military tinge to his appearance. In his gait and bearing he had a dainty strut and backward cock of the head, which, taken with his sharp black eyes, his high thin features, and his assured manner, would impress a stranger with the feeling that this was a man of power. And, indeed, in France or out of it there were few to whom this man's name was not familiar, for in all France the only figure which loomed up as large as that of the king was this very little gentleman who stood now, with gold snuff-box in one hand, and deep-laced hand-kerchief in the other, upon the landing of the Huguenot's house. For, who was there who did not know the last of the great French nobles, the bravest of French captains, the beloved Condé, victor of Recroy and hero of the Fronde? At the sight of his pinched, sallow face the

dragoons and their leader had stood staring, while De Catinat raised the stump of his sword in a salute.

"Heh, heh!" cried the old soldier, peering at him. "You were with me on the Rhine—heh? I know your face, captain. But the household was with Turenne."

"I was in the regiment of Picardy, your Highness. De Catinat is my name."

"Yes, yes. But you, sir, who the devil are you?"

"Captain Dalbert, your Highness, of the Languedoc Blue Dragoons."

"Heh! I was passing in my carriage, and I saw you standing on your head in the air. The young man let you up on conditions, as I understood."

"He swore he would go from the house," cried the young stranger. "Yet when I had let him up, he set his men upon me, and we all came downstairs together."

"My faith, you seem to have left little behind you," said Condé, smiling, as he glanced at the litter which was strewed all over the floor. "And so you broke your parole, Captain Dalbert?"

"I could not hold treaty with a Huguenot and an enemy of the king," said the dragoon sulkily.

"You could hold treaty, it appears, but not keep it. And why did you let him go, sir, when you had him at such a vantage?"

"I believed his promise."

"You must be of a trusting nature."

"I have been used to deal with Indians."

"Heh! And you think an Indian's word is better than that of an officer in the king's dragoons?"

"I did not think so an hour ago."

"Hem!" Condé took a large pinch of snuff, and brushed the wandering grains from his velvet coat with his handkerchief of point.

"You are very strong, monsieur," said he, glancing keenly at the broad shoulders and arching chest of the young stranger. "You are from Canada, I presume?"

"I have been there, sir. But I am from New York."

Condé shook his head. "An island?"

"No sir; a town."

"In what province?"

"The province of New York."

"The chief town, then?"

"Nay; Albany is the chief town."

"And how came you to speak French?"

"My mother was of French blood."

"And how long have you been in Paris?"

"A day."

"Heh! And you already begin to throw your mother's country-folk out of windows!"

"He was annoying a young maid, sir, and I asked him to stop, whereon he whipped out his sword, and would have slain me had I not closed with him, upon which he called upon his fellows to aid him. To keep them off, I swore that I would drop him over if they moved a step. Yet when I let him go, they set upon me again, and I know not what the end might have been had this gentleman not stood my friend."

"Hem! You did very well. You are young, but you have resource."

"I was reared in the woods, sir."

"If there are many of your kidney, you may give my friend De Frontenac some work ere he found this empire of which he talks. But how is this, Captain Dalbert? What have you to say?"

"The king's orders, your Highness."

"Heh! Did he order you to molest the girl? I have never yet heard that his Majesty erred by being too *harsh* with a woman." He gave a little dry chuckle in his throat, and took another pinch of snuff.

"The orders are, your Highness, to use every means which may drive these people into the true Church."

"On my word, you look a very fine apostle and a pretty champion for a holy cause," said Condè, glancing sardonically out of his twinkling black eyes at the brutal face of the dragoon. "Take your men out of this, sir, and

never venture to set your foot again across this threshold."

"But the king's command, your Highness."

"I will tell the king when I see him that I left soldiers and that I find brigands. Not a word, sir! Away! You take your shame with you, and you leave your honour behind." He had turned in an instant from the sneering, strutting old beau to the fierce soldier with set face and eye of fire. Dalbert shrank back from his baleful gaze, and muttering an order to his men, they filed off down the stair with clattering feet and clank of sabres.

"Your Highness," said the old Huguenot, coming forward and throwing open one of the doors which led from the landing, "you have indeed been a saviour of Israel and a stumbling-block to the froward this day. Will you not deign to rest under my roof, and even to take a cup of wine ere you go onwards?"

Condé raised his thick eyebrows at the scriptural fashion of the merchant's speech, but he bowed courteously to the invitation, and entered the chamber, looking around him in surprise and admiration at its magnificence. With its panelling of dark shining oak, its polished floor, its stately marble chimney-piece, and its beautifully moulded ceiling, it was indeed a room which might have graced a palace.

"My carriage waits below," said he, "and I must not delay longer. It is not often that I leave my castle of Chantilly to come to Paris, and it was a fortunate chance which made me pass in time to be of service to honest men. When a house hangs out such a sign as an officer of dragoons with his heels in the air, it is hard to drive past without a question. But I fear that as long as you are a Huguenot, there will be no peace for you in France, monsieur."

"The law is indeed heavy upon us."

"And will be heavier if what I hear from court is correct. I wonder that you do not fly the country."

"My business and my duty lie here."

"Well, every man knows his own affairs best. Would it not be wise to bend to the storm, heh?"

The Huguenot gave a gesture of horror.

" Well, well, I meant no harm. And where is this fair maid who has been the cause of the broil ? "

" Where is Adèle, Pierre ? " asked the merchant of the old servant, who had carried in the silver tray with a squat flask and tinted Venetian glasses.

" I locked her in my room, master."

" And where is she now ? "

" I am here, father." The young girl sprang into the room, and threw her arms round the old merchant's neck. " Oh, I trust these wicked men have not hurt you, love ! "

" No, no, dear child ; none of us have been hurt, thanks to his Highness the Prince of Condé here."

Adèle raised her eyes, and quickly drooped them again before the keen questioning gaze of the old soldier. " May God reward your Highness ! " she stammered. In her confusion the blood rushed to her face, which was perfect in feature and expression. With her sweetly delicate contour, her large grey eyes, and the sweep of the lustrous hair, setting off with its rich tint the little shell-like ears and the alabaster whiteness of the neck and throat, even Condé, who had seen all the beauties of three courts and of sixty years defile before him, stood staring in admiration at the Huguenot maiden.

" Hey ! On my word, mademoiselle, you make me wish that I could wipe forty years from my account." He bowed, and sighed in the fashion that was in vogue when Buckingham came to the wooing of Anne of Austria, and the dynasty of cardinals was at its height.

" France could ill spare those forty years, your Highness."

" Heh, heh ! So quick of tongue too ? Your daughter has a courtly wit, monsieur."

" God forbid, your Highness ! She is as pure and good——"

" Nay, that is but a sorry compliment to the court. Surely, mademoiselle, you would love to go out into the great world, to hear sweet music, see all that is lovely, and

wear all that is costly, rather than look out ever upon the Rue St. Martin, and bide in this great dark house until the roses wither upon your cheeks."

"Where my father is, I am happy at his side," said she, putting her two hands upon his sleeve. "I ask nothing more than I have got."

"And I think it best that you go up to your room again," said the old merchant shortly, for the prince, in spite of his age, bore an evil name among women. He had come close to her as he spoke, and had even placed one yellow hand upon her shrinking arm, while his little dark eyes twinkled with an ominous light.

"Tut, tut!" said he, as she hastened to obey. "You need not fear for your little dove. This hawk, at least, is far past the stoop, however tempting the quarry. But indeed, I can see that she is as good as she is fair, and one could not say more than that if she were from heaven direct. My carriage waits, gentlemen, and I wish you all a very good day!" He inclined his bewigged head, and strutted off in his dainty, dandified fashion. From the window De Catinat could see him step into the same gilded chariot which had stood in his way as he drove from Versailles.

"By my faith," said he, turning to the young American, "we all owe thanks to the prince, but it seems to me, sir, that we are your debtors even more. You have risked your life for my cousin, and but for your cudgel, Dalbert would have had his blade through me when he had me at a vantage. Your hand, sir! These are things which a man cannot forget."

"Aye, you may well thank him, Amory," broke in the old Huguenot, who had returned after escorting his illustrious guest to the carriage. "He has been raised up as a champion for the afflicted, and as a helper for those who are in need. An old man's blessing upon you, Amos Green, for my own son could not have done for me more than you, a stranger."

But their young visitor appeared to be more embar-

rassed by their thanks than by any of his preceding adventures. The blood flushed to his weather-tanned, clear-cut face, as smooth as that of a boy, and yet marked by a firmness of lip and a shrewdness in the keen blue eyes which spoke of a strong and self-reliant nature.

"I have a mother and two sisters over the water," said he diffidently.

"And you honour women for their sake?"

"We always honour women over there. Perhaps it is that we have so few. Over in these old countries you have not learned what it is to be without them. I have been away up the lakes for furs, living for months on end the life of a savage among the wigwams of the Sacs and the Foxes, foul livers and foul talkers, ever squatting like toads around their fires. Then when I have come back to Albany where my folk then dwelt, and have heard my sisters play upon the spinet and sing, and my mother talk to us of the France of her younger days and of her childhood, and of all that they had suffered for what they thought was right, then I have felt what a good woman is, and how, like the sunshine, she draws out of one's soul all that is purest and best."

"Indeed, the ladies should be very much obliged to monsieur, who is as eloquent as he is brave," said Adèle Catinat, who, standing in the open door, had listened to the latter part of his remarks.

He had forgotten himself for the instant, and had spoken freely and with energy. At the sight of the girl, however, he coloured up again, and cast down his eyes.

"Much of my life has been spent in the woods," said he, "and one speaks so little there that one comes to forget how to do it. It was for this that my father wished me to stay some time in France, for he would not have me grow up a mere trapper and trader."

"And how long do you stop in Paris?" asked the guardsman.

"Until Ephraim Savage comes for me."

"And who is he?"

"The master of the *Golden Rod*."

"And that is your ship?"

"My father's ship. She has been to Bristol, is now at Rouen, and then must go to Bristol again. When she comes back once more, Ephraim comes to Paris for me, and it will be time for me to go."

"And how like you Paris?"

The young man smiled. "They told me ere I came that it was a very lively place, and truly from the little that I have seen this morning, I think that it is the liveliest place that I have seen."

"By my faith," said De Catinat, "you came down those stairs in a very lively fashion, four of you together, with a Dutch clock as an *avant-courier*, and a whole train of wood-work at your heels. And you have not seen the city yet?"

"Only as I journeyed through it yester-evening on my way to this house. It is a wondrous place, but I was pent in for lack of air as I passed through it. New York is a great city. There are said to be as many as three thousand folk living there, and they say that they could send out four hundred fighting-men, though I can scarce bring myself to believe it. Yet from all parts of the city one may see something of God's handiwork—the trees, the green of the grass, and the shine of the sun upon the bay and the rivers. But here it is stone and wood, and wood and stone, look where you will. In truth, you must be very hardy people to keep your health in such a place."

"And to us it is you who seem so hardy, with your life in the forest and on the river," cried the young girl. "And then the wonder that you can find your path through those great wildernesses, where there is nought to guide you."

"Well, there again! I marvel how you can find your way among these thousands of houses. For myself, I trust that it will be a clear night to-night."

"And why?"

"That I may see the stars."

"But you will find no change in them."

"That is it. If I can but see the stars, it will be easy for me to know how to walk when I would find this house again. In the daytime I can carry a knife and notch the door-posts as I pass, for it might be hard to pick up one's trail again, with so many folk ever passing over it."

De Catinat burst out laughing again. "By my faith, you will find Paris livelier than ever," said he, "if you blaze your way through on the door-posts as you would on the trees of a forest. But perchance it would be as well that you should have a guide at first; so, if you have two horses ready in your stables, uncle, our friend and I might shortly ride back to Versailles together, for I have a spell of guard again before many hours are over. Then for some days he might bide with me there, if he will share a soldier's quarters, and so see more than the Rue St. Martin can offer. How would that suit you, Monsieur Green?"

"I should be right glad to come out with you, if we may leave all here in safety."

"Oh, fear not for that," said the Huguenot. "The order of the Prince of Condé will be as a shield and a buckler to us for many a day. I will order Pierre to saddle the horses."

"And I must use the little time I have," said the guardsman, as he turned away to where Adèle waited for him in the window.

## 7. *The New World and the Old*

THE young American was soon ready for the expedition, but De Catinat lingered until the last possible minute. When at last he was able to tear himself away, he adjusted his cravat, brushed his brilliant coat, and looked very critically over the sombre suit of his companion.

"Where got you those?" he asked.

"In New York, ere I left."

"Hem! There is nought amiss with the cloth, and indeed the sombre colour is the mode, but the cut is strange to our eyes."

"I only know that I wish that I had my fringed hunting tunic and leggings on once more."

"This hat, now. We do not wear our brims flat like that. See if I cannot mend it." He took the beaver, and looping up one side of the brim, he fastened it with a golden brooch taken from his own shirt front. "There is a martial cock," said he, laughing, "and would do credit to the King's Own Musketeers. The black broadcloth and silk hose will pass, but why have you not a sword at your side?"

"I carry a gun when I ride out."

"*Mon Dieu*, you will be laid by the heels as a bandit?"

"I have a knife, too."

"Worse and worse! Well, we must dispense with the sword, and with the gun too, I pray! Let me re-tie your cravat. So! Now if you are in the mood for a ten-mile gallop, I am at your service."

They were indeed a singular contrast as they walked their horses together through the narrow and crowded causeways of the Parisian streets. De Catinat, who was the older by five years, with his delicate small-featured face, his sharply trimmed moustache, his small but well-set and dainty figure, and his brilliant dress, looked the very type of the great nation to which he belonged.

His companion, however, large-limbed and strong, turning his bold and yet thoughtful face from side to side, and eagerly taking in all the strange, new life amidst which he found himself, was also a type, unfinished it is true, but bidding fair to be the higher of the two. His close yellow hair, blue eyes and heavy build showed that it was the blood of his father, rather than that of his mother, which ran in his veins; and even the sombre coat and swordless belt, if less pleasing to the eye, were true badges of a race which found its fiercest battles and its most

glorious victories in bending nature to its will upon the seas and in the waste places of the earth.

"What is yonder great building?" he asked, as they emerged into a broader square.

"It is the Louvre, one of the palaces of the king."

"And is he there?"

"Nay; he lives at Versailles."

"What! Fancy that a man should have two such houses!"

"Two! He has many more—St. Germain, Marly, Fontainebleau, Clugny."

"But to what end? A man can but live at one at a time."

"Nay; he can now come or go as the fancy takes him."

"It is a wondrous building. I have seen the Seminary of St. Sulpice at Montreal, and thought that it was the greatest of all houses, and yet what is it beside this?"

"You have been to Montreal, then? You remember the fort?"

"Yes, and the Hôtel Dieu, and the wooden houses in a row, and eastward the great mill with the wall; but what do you know of Montreal?"

"I have soldiered there, and at Quebec, too. Why, my friend, you are not the only man of the woods in Paris, for I give you my word that I have worn the caribou mocassins, the leather jacket, and the fur cap with the eagle feather for six months at a stretch, and I care not how soon I do it again."

Amos Green's eyes shone with delight at finding that his companion and he had so much in common, and he plunged into a series of questions which lasted until they had crossed the river and reached the south-westerly gate of the city. By the moat and walls long lines of men were busy at their drill.

"Who are those, then?" he asked, gazing at them with curiosity.

"They are some of the king's soldiers."

"But why so many of them? Do they await some enemy?"

"Nay; we are at peace with all the world. Worse luck!"

"At peace. Why, then, all these men?"

"That they may be ready."

The young man shook his head in bewilderment. "They might be as ready in their own homes surely. In our country every man has his musket in his chimney corner, and is ready enough, yet he does not waste his time when all is at peace."

"Our king is very great, and he has many enemies."

"And who made the enemies?"

"Why, the king, to be sure."

"Then would it not be better to be without him?"

The guardsman shrugged his epaulettes in despair. "We shall both wind up in the Bastille or Vincennes at this rate," said he. "You must know that it is in serving the country that he has made these enemies. It is but five years since he made a peace at Nimeguen, by which he tore away sixteen fortresses from the Spanish Low-lands. Then, also, he had laid his hands upon Strassburg and upon Luxembourg, and has chastised the Genoans, so that there are many who would fall upon him if they thought that he was weak."

"And why has he done all this?"

"Because he is a great king, and for the glory of France."

The stranger pondered over this answer for some time as they rode on between the high, thin poplars, which threw bars across the sunlit road.

"There was a great man in Schenectady once," said he at last. "They are simple folk up yonder, and they all had great trust in each other. But after this man came among them they began to miss—one a beaver-skin and one a bag of ginseng, and one a belt of wampum, until at last old Pete Hendricks lost his chestnut three-year-old. Then there was a search and a fuss until they found all that had been lost in the stable of the new-comer, so we

took him, I and some others, and we hung him up on a tree, without ever thinking what a great man he had been."

De Catinat shot an angry glance at his companion. "Your parable, my friend, is scarce polite," said he. "If you and I are to travel in peace you must keep a closer guard upon your tongue."

"I would not give you offence, and it may be that I am wrong," answered the American, "but I speak as the matter seems to me, and it is the right of a free man to do that."

De Catinat's frown relaxed as the other turned his earnest blue eyes upon him. "By my soul, where would the court be if every man did that?" said he. "But what in the name of heaven is amiss now?"

His companion had hurled himself off his horse, and was stooping low over the ground, with his eyes bent upon the dust. Then, with quick, noiseless steps, he zigzagged along the road, ran swiftly across a grassy bank, and stood peering at the gap of a fence, with his nostrils dilated, his eyes shining and his whole face aglow with eagerness.

"The fellow's brain is gone," muttered De Catinat, as he caught at the bridle of the riderless horse. "The sight of Paris has shaken his wits. What in the name of the devil ails you, that you should stand glaring there?"

"A deer has passed," whispered the other, pointing down at the grass. "Its trail lies along there and into the wood. It could not have been long ago, and there is no slur to the track, so that it was not going fast. Had we but fetched my gun, we might have followed it, and brought the old man back a side of venison."

"For God's sake get on your horse again?" cried De Catinat distractedly. "I fear that some evil will come upon you ere I get you safe to the Rue St. Martin again!"

"And what is wrong now?" asked Amos Green, swinging himself into the saddle.

"Why, man, these woods are the king's preserves, and you speak as coolly of slaying his deer as though you were on the shores of Michigan!"

"Preserves! They are tame deer!" An expression of deep disgust passed over his face, and spurring his horse, he galloped onwards at such a pace that De Catinat, after vainly endeavouring to keep up, had to shriek to him to stop.

"It is not usual in this country to ride so madly along the roads," he panted.

"It is a very strange country," cried the stranger, in perplexity. "Maybe it would be easier for me to re-remember what *is* allowed. It was but this morning that I took my gun to shoot a pigeon that was flying over the roofs in yonder street, and old Pierre caught my arm with a face as though it were the minister that I was aiming at. And then there is that old man—why, they will not even let him say his prayers."

De Catinat laughed. "You will come to know our ways soon," said he. "This is a crowded land, and if all men rode and shot as they listed, much harm would come from it. But let us talk rather of your own country. You have lived much in the woods from what you tell me."

"I was but ten when first I journeyed with my uncle to Sault la Marie, where the three great lakes meet, to trade with the Chippewas and the tribes of the west."

"I know not what La Salle or De Frontenac would have said to that. The trade in those parts belongs to France."

"We were taken prisoners, and so it was that I came to see Montreal and afterwards Quebec. In the end we were sent back because they did not know what they could do with us."

"It was a good journey for a first."

"And ever since I have been trading—first, on the Kennebec with the Abenaquis, in the great forests of Maine, and with the Micmac fish-eaters over the Penobscot. Then later with the Iroquois, as far west as the country of the Senecas. At Albany and Schenectady we stored our pelts, and so on to New York, where my father shipped them over the sea."

"But he could ill spare you, surely?"

"Very ill. But as he was rich, he thought it best that I should learn some things that are not to be found in the woods. And so he sent me in the *Golden Rod*, under the care of Ephraim Savage."

"Who is also of New York?"

"Nay; he is the first man that ever was born at Boston."

"I cannot remember the names of all these villages."

"And yet there may come a day when their names shall be as well known as that of Paris."

De Catinat laughed heartily. "The woods may have given you much, but not the gift of prophecy, my friend. Well, my heart is often over the water even as yours is, and I would ask nothing better than to see the palisades of Point Levi again, even if all the Five Nations were raving upon the other side of them. But now, if you will look there in the gap of the tree, you will see the king's new palace."

The two young men pulled up their horses, and looked down at the widespreading building in all the beauty of its dazzling whiteness, and at the lovely grounds, dotted with fountain and with statue, and barred with hedge and with walk, stretching away to the dense woods which clustered round them. It amused De Catinat to watch the swift play of wonder and admiration which flashed over his companion's features.

"Well, what do you think of it?" he asked at last.

"I think that God's best work is in America, and man's in Europe."

"Aye, and in all Europe there is no such palace as that, even as there is no such king as he who dwells within it."

"Can I see him, think you?"

"Who, the king? No, no; I fear that you are scarce made for a court."

"Nay, I should show him all honour."

"How, then? What greeting would you give him?"

"I would shake him respectfully by the hand, and ask as to his health and that of his family."

"On my word, I think that such a greeting might please him more than the bent knee and the rounded back, and yet, I think, my son of the woods, that it were best not to lead you into paths where you would be lost, as would any of the courtiers if you dropped them in the gorge of the Saguenay. But holà! what comes here? It looks like one of the carriages of the court."

A white cloud of dust, which had rolled towards them down the road, was now so near that the glint of gilding and the red coat of the coachman could be seen breaking out through it. As the two cavaliers reined their horses aside to leave the roadway clear, the coach rumbled heavily past them, drawn by two dapple greys, and the horsemen caught a glimpse, as it passed, of a beautiful but haughty face which looked out at them. An instant afterwards a sharp cry had caused the driver to pull up his horses, and a white hand beckoned to them through the carriage window.

"It is Madame de Montespan, the proudest woman in France," whispered De Catinat. "She would speak with us, so do as I do."

He touched his horse with the spur, gave a *gambade* which took him across to the carriage, and then, sweeping off his hat, he bowed to his horse's neck; a salute in which he was imitated, though in a somewhat ungainly fashion, by his companion.

"Ha, captain!" said the lady, with no very pleasant face, "we meet again."

"Fortune has ever been good to me, madame."

"It was not so this morning."

"You say truly. It gave me a hateful duty to perform."

"And you performed it in a hateful fashion."

"Nay, madame, what could I do more?"

The lady sneered, and her beautiful face turned as bitter as it could upon occasion.

"You thought that I had no more power with the king.

You thought that my day was past. No doubt it seemed to you that you might reap favour with the new by being the first to cast a slight upon the old."

"But, madame——"

"You may spare your protestations. I am one who judges by deeds and not by words. Did you, then, think that my charm had so faded, that any beauty which I ever have had is so withered?"

"Nay, madame, I were blind to think that."

"Blind as a noontide owl," said Amos Green with emphasis.

Madame de Montespan arched her eyebrows and glanced at her singular admirer. "Your friend at least speaks that which he really feels," said she. "At four o'clock to-day we shall see whether others are of the same mind; and if they are, then it may be ill for those who mistook what was but a passing shadow for a lasting cloud." She cast another vindictive glance at the young guardsman, and rattled on once more upon her way.

"Come on!" cried De Catinat curtly, for his companion was staring open-mouthed after the carriage. "Have you never seen a woman before?"

"Never such a one as that."

"Never one with so railing a tongue, I dare swear," said De Catinat.

"Never one with so lovely a face. And yet there is a lovely face at the Rue St. Martin also."

"You seem to have a nice taste in beauty, for all your woodland training."

"Yes, for I have been cut away from women so much that when I stand before one I feel that she is something tender and sweet and holy."

"You may find dames at the court who are both tender and sweet, but you will long look, my friend, before you find the holy one. This one would ruin me if she can, and only because I have done what it was my duty to do. To keep oneself in this court is like coming down the La

Chine Rapids where there is a rock to right, and a rock to left, and another perchance in front, and if you so much as graze one, where are you and your birch canoe? But our rocks are women, and in our canoe we bear all our worldly fortunes. Now here is another who would sway me over to her side, and indeed I think it may prove to be the better side too."

They had passed through the gateway of the palace, and the broad sweeping drive lay in front of them, dotted with carriages and horsemen. On the gravel walks were many gaily dressed ladies, who strolled among the flower-beds or watched the fountains with the sunlight glinting upon their high water sprays. One of these, who had kept her eyes turned upon the gate, came hastening forward the instant that De Catinat appeared. It was Mademoiselle Nanon, the *confidante* of Madame de Maintenon.

"I am so pleased to see you, captain," she cried, "and I have waited so patiently. Madame would speak with you. The king comes to her at three, and we have but twenty minutes. I heard that you had gone to Paris, and so I stationed myself here. Madame has something which she would ask you."

"Then I will come at once. Ah, De Brissac, it is well met!"

A tall, burly officer was passing in the same uniform which De Catinat wore. He turned at once, and came smiling towards his comrade.

"Ah, Amory, you have covered a league or two from the dust on your coat!"

"We are fresh from Paris. But I am called on business. This is my friend, Monsieur Amos Green. I leave him in your hands, for he is a stranger from America, and would fain see all that you can show. He stays with me at my quarters. And my horse, too, De Brissac. You can give it to the groom."

Throwing the bridle to his brother officer, and pressing the hand of Amos Green, De Catinat sprang from his

horse, and followed at the top of his speed in the direction which the young lady had already taken.

## 8. *The Rising Sun*

THE rooms which were inhabited by the lady who had already taken so marked a position at the court of France were as humble as were her fortunes at the time when they were allotted to her, but with that rare tact and self-restraint which were the leading features in her remarkable character, she had made no change in her living with the increase of her prosperity, and forbore from provoking envy and jealousy by any display of wealth or of power. In a side wing of the palace, far from the central *salons*, and only to be reached by long corridors and stairs, were the two or three small chambers upon which the eyes, first of the court, then of France, and finally of the world, were destined to be turned. In such rooms had the destitute widow of the poet Scarron been housed when she had first been brought to court by Madame de Montespan as the governess of the royal children, and in such rooms she still dwelt, now that she had added to her maiden Françoise d'Aubigny the title of Marquise de Maintenon, with the pension and estate which the king's favour had awarded her. Here it was that every day the king would lounge, finding in the conversation of a clever and virtuous woman a charm and a pleasure which none of the professed wits of his sparkling court had ever been able to give to him, and here, too, the more sagacious of the courtiers were beginning to understand, was the point, formerly to be found in the magnificent *salons* of De Montespan, whence flowed those impulses and tendencies which were so eagerly studied, and so keenly followed up by all who wished to keep the favour of the king. It was a simple creed, that of the court. Were the king pious, then let all turn to their missals and their rosaries. Were

he rakish, then who so rakish as his devoted followers? But woe to the man who was rakish when he should be praying, or who pulled a long face when the king wore a laughing one! And thus it was that keen eyes were ever fixed upon him, and upon every influence that came near him, so that the wary courtier, watching the first subtle signs of a coming change, might so order his conduct as to seem to lead rather than to follow.

The young guardsman had scarce ever exchanged a word with this powerful lady, for it was her taste to isolate herself, and to appear with the court only at the hours of devotion. It was therefore with some feelings both of nervousness and of curiosity that he followed his guide down the gorgeous corridors, where art and wealth had been strewn with so lavish a hand. The lady paused in front of the chamber door, and turned to her companion.

"Madame wishes to speak to you of what occurred this morning," said she. "I should advise you to say nothing to madame about your creed, for it is the only thing upon which her heart can be hard." She raised her finger to emphasise the warning, and tapping at the door, she pushed it open. "I have brought Captain de Catinat, madame," said she.

"Then let the captain step in." The voice was firm, and yet sweetly musical.

Obeying the command, De Catinat found himself in a room which was no larger and but little better furnished than that which was allotted to his own use. Yet, though simple, everything in the chamber was scrupulously neat and clean, betraying the dainty taste of a refined woman. The stamped-leather furniture, the La Savonnière carpet, the pictures of sacred subjects, exquisite from an artist's point of view, the plain but tasteful curtains, all left an impression half religious and half feminine but wholly soothing. Indeed, the soft light, the high white statue of the Virgin in a canopied niche, with a perfumed red lamp burning before it, and the wooden *prie-dieu* with the red-edged prayer-book upon the top of it, made the

apartment look more like a private chapel than a fair lady's boudoir.

On each side of the empty fireplace was a little green-covered arm-chair, the one for madame and the other reserved for the use of the king. A small three-legged stool between them was heaped with her work-basket and her tapestry. On the chair which was furthest from the door, with her back turned to the light, madame was sitting as the young officer entered. It was her favourite position, and yet there were few women of her years who had so little reason to fear the sun, for a healthy life and active habits had left her with a clear skin and delicate bloom which any young beauty of the court might have envied. Her figure was graceful and queenly, her gestures and pose full of a natural dignity, and her voice, as he had already remarked, most sweet and melodious. Her face was handsome rather than beautiful, set in a statuesque classical mould, with broad white forehead, firm, delicately sensitive mouth, and a pair of large serene grey eyes, earnest and placid in repose, but capable of reflecting the whole play of her soul, from the merry gleam of humour to the quick flash of righteous anger. An elevating serenity was, however, the leading expression of her features, and in that she presented the strongest contrast to her rival, whose beautiful face was ever swept by the emotion of the moment, and who gleamed one hour and shadowed over the next like a corn-field in the wind. In wit and quickness of tongue it is true that De Montespan had the advantage, but the strong common-sense and the deeper nature of the elder woman might prove in the end to be the better weapon. De Catinat, at the moment, without having time to notice details, was simply conscious that he was in the presence of a very handsome woman, and that her large pensive eyes were fixed critically upon him, and seemed to be reading his thoughts as they had never been read before.

"I think that I have already seen you, sir, have I not?"

"Yes, madame, I have once or twice had the honour

of attending upon you, though it may not have been my good fortune to address you."

"My life is so quiet and retired that I fear that much of what is best and worthiest at the court is unknown to me. It is the curse of such places that evil flaunts itself before the eye and cannot be overlooked, while the good retires in its modesty, so that at times we scarce dare hope that it is there. You have served, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame. In the Lowlands, on the Rhine and in Canada."

"In Canada! Ah! What nobler ambition could woman have than to be a member of that sweet sisterhood which was founded by the holy Marie de l'Incarnation and the sainted Jeanne le Ber at Montreal? It was but the other day that I had an account of them from Father Godet des Marais. What joy to be one of such a body, and to turn from the blessed work of converting the heathen to the even more precious task of nursing back health and strength into those of God's warriors who have been struck down in the fight with Satan!"

It was strange to De Catinat, who knew well the sordid and dreadful existence led by these same sisters threatened ever with misery, hunger and the scalping-knife, to hear this lady, at whose feet lay all the good things of this earth, speaking enviously of their lot.

"They are very good women," said he shortly, remembering Mademoiselle Nanon's warning and fearing to trench upon the dangerous subject.

"And doubtless you have had the privilege also of seeing the holy Bishop Laval?"

"Yes, madame, I have seen Bishop Laval."

"And I trust that the Sulpitians still hold their own against the Jesuits?"

"I have heard, madame, that the Jesuits are the stronger at Quebec, and the others at Montreal."

"And who is your own director, monsieur?"

De Catinat felt that the worst had come upon him.

"I have none, madame."

" Ah, it is too common to dispense with a director, and yet I know not how I could guide my steps in the difficult path which I tread if it were not for mine. Who is your confessor, then ? "

" I have none. I am of the Reformed Church, madame."

The lady gave a gesture of horror, and a sudden hardening showed itself in mouth and eye. " What, in the court itself," she cried, " and in the neighbourhood of the king's own person ! "

De Catinat was lax enough in matters of faith, and held his creed rather as a family tradition than from any strong conviction, but it hurt his self-esteem to see himself regarded as though he had confessed to something that was loathsome and unclean. " You will find, madame," said he sternly, " that members of my faith have not only stood around the throne of France, but have even seated themselves upon it."

" God has for His own all-wise purposes permitted it, and none should know it better than I, whose grandsire, Théodore d'Aubigny, did so much to place a crown upon the head of the great Henry. But Henry's eyes were opened ere his end came, and I pray—oh, from my heart I pray—that yours may be also."

She rose, and throwing herself down upon the *prie-dieu*, sunk her face in her hands for some few minutes, during which the object of her devotions stood in some perplexity in the middle of the room, hardly knowing whether such an attention should be regarded as an insult or as a favour. A tap at the door brought the lady back to this world again, and her devoted attendant answered her summons to enter.

" The king is in the Hall of Victories, madame," said she. " He will be here in five minutes."

" Very well. Stand outside, and let me know when he comes. Now, sir," she continued, when they were alone once more, " you gave a note of mine to the king this morning ? "

" I did, madame."

" And, as I understand, Madame de Montespan was refused admittance to the *grand lever ?* "

" She was, madame."

" But she waited for the king in the passage ? "

" She did."

" And wrung from him a promise that he would see her to-day ? "

" Yes, madame."

" I would not have you tell me that which it may seem to you a breach of your duty to tell. But I am fighting now against a terrible foe, and for a great stake. Do you understand me ? "

De Catinat bowed.

" Then what do I mean ? "

" I presume that what madame means is that she is fighting for the king's favour with the lady you mentioned."

" As heaven is my judge, I have no thought of myself. I am fighting with the devil for the king's soul."

" 'Tis the same thing, madame."

The lady smiled. " If the king's body were in peril, I could call on the aid of his faithful guards, and not less so now, surely, when so much more is at stake. Tell me, then, at what hour was the king to meet the marquise in her room ? "

" At four, madame."

" I thank you. You have done me a service, and I shall not forget it."

" The king comes, madame," said Mademoiselle Nanon, again protruding her head.

" Then you must go, captain. Pass through the other room, and so into the outer passage. And take this. It is Bossuet's statement of the Catholic faith. It has softened the hearts of others, and may yours. Now, adieu ! "

De Catinat passed out through another door, and as he did so he glanced back. The lady had her back to him, and her hand was raised to the mantelpiece. At the

instant that he looked she moved her neck, and he could see what she was doing. She was pushing back the long hand of the clock.

## 9. *Le Roi s'Amuse*

CAPTAIN DE CATINAT had hardly vanished through the one door before the other was thrown open by Mademoiselle Nanon, and the king entered the room. Madame de Maintenon rose with a pleasant smile and courtesied deeply, but there was no answering light upon her visitor's face, and he threw himself down upon the vacant arm-chair with a pouting lip and a frown upon his forehead.

"Nay, now this is a very bad compliment," she cried, with the gaiety which she could assume whenever it was necessary to draw the king from his blacker humours. "My poor little dark room has already cast a shadow over you."

"Nay; it is Father La Chaise and the Bishop of Meaux who have been after me all day like two hounds on a stag, with talk of my duty and my position and my sins, with judgment and hell-fire ever at the end of their exhortations."

"And what would they have your Majesty do?"

"Break the promise which I made when I came upon the throne, and which my grandfather made before me. They wish me to recall the Edict of Nantes, and drive the Huguenots from the kingdom."

"Oh, but your Majesty must not trouble your mind about such matters."

"You would not have me to do it, madame?"

"Not if it is to be a grief to your Majesty."

"You have, perchance, some soft feeling for the religion of your youth?"

"Nay, sire; I have nothing but hatred for heresy."

"And yet you would not have them thrust out?"

"Bethink you, sire, that the Almighty can Himself incline their hearts to better things if He is so minded, even as mine was inclined. May you not leave it in His hands?"

"On my word," said Louis, brightening, "it is well put. I shall see if Father La Chaise can find an answer to that. It is hard to be threatened with eternal flames because one will not ruin one's kingdom. Eternal torment! I have seen the face of a man who had been in the Bastille for fifteen years. It was like a dreadful book with a scar or a wrinkle to mark every hour of that death in life. But Eternity!" He shuddered, and his eyes were filled with the horror of his thought. The higher motives had but little power over his soul, as those about him had long discovered, but he was ever ready to wince at the image of the terrors to come.

"Why should you think of such things, sire?" said the lady, in her rich, soothing voice. "What have you to fear, you who have been the first son of the Church!"

"You think that I am safe, then!"

"Surely, sire."

"But I have erred, and erred deeply. You have yourself said as much."

"But that is all over, sire. Who is there who is without stain? You have turned away from temptation. Surely, then, you have earned your forgiveness."

"I would that the queen were living once more. She would find me a better man."

"I would that she were, sire."

"And she should know that it was to you that she owed the change. Oh, Françoise, you are surely my guardian angel, who has taken bodily form! How can I thank you for what you have done for me!" He leaned forward and took her hand, but at the touch a sudden fire sprang into his eyes, and he would have passed his other arm round her had she not risen hurriedly to avoid the embrace.

"Sire!" said she, with a rigid face and one finger upraised.

"You are right, you are right, Françoise. Sit down and I will control myself. Still at the same tapestry, then! My workers at the Gobelins must look to their laurels." He raised one border of the glossy roll, while she, having reseated herself, though not without a quick questioning glance at her companion, took the other end into her lap and continued her work.

"Yes, sire. It is a hunting scene in your forests at Fontainebleau. A stag of ten tines, you see, and the hounds in full cry, and a gallant band of cavaliers and ladies. Has your Majesty ridden to-day?"

"No. How is it, Françoise, that you have such a heart of ice?"

"I would it were so, sire. Perhaps you have hawked, then?"

"No. But surely no man's love has ever stirred you! And yet you have been a wife."

"A nurse, sire, but never a wife. See the lady in the park! It is surely mademoiselle. I did not know that she had come up from Choisy."

But the king was not to be distracted from his subject.

"You did not love this Scarron, then?" he persisted. "He was old, I have heard, and as lame as some of his verses."

"Do not speak lightly of him, sire. I was grateful to him; I honoured him; I liked him."

"But you did not love him."

"Why should you seek to read the secrets of a woman's heart?"

"You did not love him, Françoise?"

"At least, I did my duty towards him."

"Has that nun's heart never yet been touched by love, then?"

"Sire, do not question me."

"Has it never——"

"Spare me, sire, I beg of you!"

"But I must ask, for my own peace hangs upon your answer."

"Your words pain me to the soul."

"Have you never, Françoise, felt in your heart some little flicker of the love which glows in mine?" He rose with his hands outstretched, a pleading monarch, but she, with half-turned head, still shrank away from him.

"Be assured of one thing, sire," said she, "that even if I loved you as no woman ever loved a man yet, I should rather spring from that window on to the stone terraces beneath than ever by word or sign confess as much to you."

"And why, Françoise?"

"Because, sire, it is my highest hope upon earth that I have been chosen to lift up your mind towards loftier things—that mind the greatness and nobility of which none know more than I."

"And is my love so base, then?"

"You have wasted too much of your life and of your thoughts upon woman's love. And now, sire, the years steal on and the day is coming when even you will be called upon to give an account of your actions, and of the inner-most thoughts if your heart. I would see you spend the time that is left to you, sire, in building up the Church, in showing a noble example to your subjects, and in repairing any evil which that example may have done in the past."

The king sank back into his chair with a groan. "For ever the same," said he. "Why, you are worse than Father La Chaise and Bossuet."

"Nay, nay," said she gaily, with the quick tact in which she never failed. "I have wearied you, when you have stooped to honour my little room with your presence. That is indeed ingratitude, and it were a just punishment if you were to leave me in solitude to-morrow, and so cut off all the light of my day. But tell me, sire, how go the works at Marly? I am all on fire to know whether the great fountain will work."

"Yes, the fountain plays well, but Mansard has thrown the right wing too far back. I have made him a good architect, but I have still much to teach him. I showed

him his fault on the plan this morning, and he promised to amend it."

"And what will the change cost, sire?"

"Some millions of livres, but then the view will be much improved from the south side. I have taken in another mile of ground in that direction, for there were a number of poor folk living there, and their hovels were far from pretty."

"And why have you not ridden to-day, sire?"

"Pah! it brings me no pleasure. There was a time when my blood was stirred by the blare of the horn and the rush of the hoofs, but now it is all wearisome to me."

"And hawking too?"

"Yes; I shall hawk no more."

"But, sire, you must have amusement."

"What is so dull as an amusement which has ceased to amuse? I know not how it is. When I was but a lad, and my mother and I were driven from place to place, with the Fronde at war with us and Paris in revolt, with our throne and even our lives in danger, all life seemed to be so bright, so new and so full of interest. Now that there is no shadow, and that my voice is the first in France, as France's is in Europe, all is dull and lacking in flavour. What use is it to have all pleasure before me, when it turns to wormwood when it is tasted?"

"True pleasure, sire, lies rather in the inward life, the serene mind, the easy conscience. And then, as we grow older, is it not natural that our minds should take a graver bent? We might well reproach ourselves if it were not so, for it would show that we had not learned the lesson of life."

"It may be so, and yet it is sad and weary when nothing amuses. But who is there?"

"It is my companion knocking. What is it, mademoiselle?"

"Monsieur Corneille, to read to the king," said the young lady, opening the door.

"Ah, yes, sire; I know how foolish is a woman's

tongue, and so I have brought a wiser one than mine here to charm you. Monsieur Racine was to have come, but I hear that he has had a fall from his horse and he sends his friend in his place. Shall I admit him ? "

" Oh, as you like, madame, as you like," said the king listlessly. At a sign from Mademoiselle Nanon a little peaky man with a shrewd petulant face, and long grey hair falling back over his shoulders, entered the room. He bowed profoundly three times, and then seated himself nervously on the very edge of the stool, from which the lady had removed her work-basket. She smiled and nodded to encourage the poet, while the monarch leaned back in his chair with an air of resignation.

" Shall it be a comedy, or a tragedy, or a burlesque pastoral ? " Corneille asked timidly.

" Not the burlesque pastoral," said the king with decision. " Such things may be played, but cannot be read, since they are for the eye rather than the ear."

The poet bowed his acquiescence.

" And not the tragedy, monsieur," said Madame de Maintenon, glancing up from her tapestry. " The king has enough that is serious in his graver hours, and so I trust that you will use your talent to amuse him."

" Aye, let it be a comedy," said Louis ; " I have not had a good laugh since poor Molière passed away."

" Ah, your Majesty has indeed a fine taste," cried the courtier poet. " Had you condescended to turn your own attention to poetry, where should we all have been then ? "

Louis smiled, for no flattery was too gross to please him.

" Even as you have taught our generals war and our builders art, so you would have set your poor singers a loftier strain. But Mars would hardly deign to share the humbler laurels of Apollo."

" I have sometimes thought that I had some such power," answered the king complacently ; " though amid my toils and the burdens of state I have had, as you say, little time for the softer arts."

" But you have encouraged others to do what you could so well have done yourself, sire. You have brought out poets as the sun brings out flowers. How many have we not seen—Molière, Boileau, Racine, one greater than the other. And the others, too, the smaller ones—Scarron, so scurrilous and yet so witty—— Oh, holy Virgin ! what have I said ? "

Madame had laid down her tapestry, and was staring in intense indignation at the poet, who writhed on his stool under the stern rebuke of those cold grey eyes.

" I think, Monsieur Corneille, that you had better go on with your reading," said the king dryly.

" Assuredly, sire. Shall I read my play about Darius ? "

" And who was Darius ? " asked the king, whose education had been so neglected by the crafty policy of Cardinal Mazarin that he was ignorant of everything save what had come under his own personal observation.

" Darius was King of Persia, sire."

" And where is Persia ? "

" It is a kingdom of Asia."

" Is Darius still king there ? "

" Nay, sire ; he fought against Alexander the Great."

" Ah, I have heard of Alexander. He was a famous king and general, was he not ? "

" Like your Majesty, he both ruled wisely and led his armies victoriously."

" And was King of Persia, you say ? "

" No, sire ; of Macedonia. It was Darius who was King of Persia."

The king frowned, for the slightest correction was offensive to him.

" You do not seem very clear about the matter, and I confess that it does not interest me deeply," said he. " Pray turn to something else."

" There is my *Pretended Astrologer*."

" Yes, that will do."

Corneille commenced to read his comedy, while Madame de Maintenon's white and delicate fingers

picked among the many-coloured silks which she was weaving into her tapestry. From time to time she glanced across, first at the clock and then at the king, who was leaning back, with his lace handkerchief thrown over his face. It was twenty minutes to four now, but she knew that she had put it back half an hour, and that the true time was ten minutes past.

"Tut! tut!" cried the king suddenly. "There is something amiss there. The second last line has a limp in it, surely." It was one of his foibles to pose as a critic, and the wise poet would fall in with his corrections, however unreasonable they might be.

"Which line, sire? It is indeed an advantage to have one's faults made clear."

"Read the passage again."

> "Et si, quand je lui dis le secret de mon âme,
> Avec moins de rigueur elle eût traité ma flamme,
> Dans ma façon de vivre, et suivant mon humeur,
> Une autre eût eu bientôt le présent de mon cœur."

"Yes, the third line has a foot too many. Do you not remark it, madame?"

"No; but I fear that I should make a poor critic."

"Your Majesty is perfectly right," said Corneille unblushingly. "I shall mark the passage, and see that it is corrected."

"I thought that it was wrong. If I do not write myself, you can see that I have at least got the correct ear. A false quantity jars upon me. It is the same in music. Although I know little of the matter I can tell a discord where Lully himself would miss it. I have often shown him errors of the sort in his operas, and I have always convinced him that I was right."

"I can readily believe it, your Majesty." Corneille had picked up his book again, and was about to resume his reading when there came a sharp tap at the door.

"It is his Highness the minister, Monsieur de Louvois," said Mademoiselle Nanon.

"Admit him," answered Louis. "Monsieur Corneille, I am obliged to you for what you have read, and I regret that an affair of state will now interrupt your comedy. Some other day perhaps I may have the pleasure of hearing the rest of it." He smiled in the gracious fashion which made all who came within his personal influence forget his faults and remember him only as the impersonation of dignity and of courtesy.

The poet, with his book under his arm, slipped out, while the famous minister, tall, heavily wigged, eagle-nosed and commanding, came bowing into the little room. His manner was that of exaggerated politeness, but his haughty face marked only too plainly his contempt for such a chamber and for the lady who dwelt there. She was well aware of the feeling with which he regarded her, but her perfect self-command prevented her from ever by word or look returning his dislike.

"My apartments are indeed honoured to-day," said she, rising with outstretched hand. "Can monsieur condescend to a stool, since I have no fitter seat to offer you in this little doll's house? But perhaps I am in the way, if you wish to talk of state affairs to the king. I can easily withdraw into my boudoir."

"No, no, nothing of the kind, madame," cried Louis. "It is my wish that you should remain here. What is it, Louvois?"

"A messenger arrived from England with despatches, your Majesty," answered the minister, his ponderous figure balanced upon the three-legged stool. "There is very ill feeling there, and there is some talk of a rising. The letter from Lord Sunderland wished to know whether, in case the Dutch took the side of the malcontents, the king might look to France for help. Of course, knowing your Majesty's mind, I answered unhesitatingly that he might."

"You did what!"

"I answered, sire, that he might."

King Louis flushed with anger, and he caught up the

tongs from the grate with a motion as though he would have struck his minister with them. Madame sprang from her chair, and laid her hand upon his arm with a soothing gesture. He threw down the tongs again, but his eyes still flashed with passion as he turned them upon Louvois.

"How dared you!" he cried.

"But, sire——"

"How dared you, I say! What! You venture to answer such a message without consulting me! How often am I to tell you that I am the state—I alone; that all is to come from me; and that I am answerable to God only! What are you? My instrument! my tool! And you venture to act without my authority!"

"I thought that I knew your wishes, sire," stammered Louvois, whose haughty manner had quite deserted him, and whose face was as white as the ruffles of his shirt.

"You are not there to think about my wishes, sir. You are there to consult them and to obey them. Why is it that I have turned away from my old nobility, and have committed the affairs of my kingdom to men whose names have never been heard of in the history of France, such men as Colbert and yourself? I have been blamed for it. There was the Duc de St. Simon, who said, the last time that he was at the court, that it was a bourgeois government. So it is. But I wished it to be so, because I knew that the nobles have a way of thinking for themselves, and I ask for no thought but mine in the governing of France. But if my bourgeois are to receive messages and give answers to embassies, then indeed I am to be pitied. I have marked you of late, Louvois. You have grown beyond your station. You take too much upon yourself. See to it that I have not again to complain to you upon this matter."

The humiliated minister sat as one crushed, with his chin sunk upon his breast. The king muttered and frowned for a few minutes, but the cloud cleared gradually

from his face, for his fits of anger were usually as short as they were fierce and sudden.

"You will detain that messenger, Louvois," he said at last, in a calm voice.

"Yes, sire."

"And we shall see at the council meeting to-morrow that a fitting reply be sent to Lord Sunderland. It would be best perhaps not to be too free with our promises in the matter. These English have ever been a thorn in our sides. If we could leave them among their own fogs with such a quarrel as would keep them busy for a few years, then indeed we might crush this Dutch prince at our leisure. Their last civil war lasted ten years, and their next may do as much. We could carry our frontier to the Rhine long ere that. Eh, Louvois?"

"Your armies are ready, sire, on the day that you give the word."

"But war is a costly business. I do not wish to have to sell the court plate, as we did the other day. How are the public funds?"

"We are not very rich, sire. But there is one way in which money may very readily be gained. There was some talk this morning about the Huguenots, and whether they should dwell any longer in this Catholic kingdom. Now, if they are driven out, and if their property were taken by the state, then indeed your Majesty would at once become the richest monarch in Christendom."

"But you were against it this morning, Louvois?"

"I had not had time to think of it, sire."

"You mean that Father La Chaise and the bishop had not had time to get at you," said Louis sharply. "Ah, Louvois, I have not lived with a court round me all these years without learning how things are done. It is a word to him, and so on to another, and so to a third, and so to the king. When my good fathers of the Church have set themselves to bring anything to pass, I see traces of them at every turn, as one traces a mole by the dirt which it has thrown up. But I will not be moved against my own

reason to do wrong to those who, however mistaken they may be, are still the subjects whom God has given me."

"I would not have you do so, sire," cried Louvois in confusion. The king's accusation had been so true that he had been unable at the moment even to protest.

"I know but one person," continued Louis, glancing across at Madame de Maintenon, "who has no ambitions, who desires neither wealth nor preferment, and who can therefore never be bribed to sacrifice my interests. That is why I value that person's opinion so highly." He smiled at the lady as he spoke, while his minister cast a glance at her which showed the jealousy which ate into his soul.

"It was my duty to point this out to you, sire, not as a suggestion, but as a possibility," said he, rising. "I fear that I have already taken up too much of your Majesty's time, and I shall now withdraw." Bowing slightly to the lady, and profoundly to the monarch, he walked from the room.

"Louvois grows intolerable," said the king. "I know not where his insolence will end. Were it not that he is an excellent servant, I should have sent him from the court before this. He has his own opinions upon everything. It was but the other day that he would have it that I was wrong when I said that one of the windows in the Trianon was smaller than any of the others. It was the same size, said he. I brought Le Nôtre with his measures, and of course the window was, as I had said, too small. But I see by your clock that it is four o'clock. I must go."

"My clock, sire, is half an hour slow."

"Half an hour!" The king look dismayed for an instant, and then began to laugh. "Nay, in that case," said he, "I had best remain where I am, for it is too late to go, and I can say with a clear conscience that it was the clock's fault rather than mine."

"I trust that it was nothing of very great importance, sire," said the lady, with a look of demure triumph in her eyes.

"By no means."

"No state affair?"

"No, no; it was only that it was the hour at which I had intended to rebuke the conduct of a presumptuous person. But perhaps it is better as it is. My absence will in itself convey my message, and in such a sort that I trust I may never see that person's face more at my court. But, ah, what is this?"

The door had been flung open, and Madame de Montespan, beautiful and furious, was standing before them.

## 10. *An Eclipse at Versailles*

MADAME DE MAINTENON was a woman who was always full of self-restraint and of cool resource. She had risen in an instant, with an air as if she had at last seen the welcome guest for whom she had pined in vain. With a frank smile of greeting, she advanced with outstretched hand.

"This is indeed a pleasure," said she.

But Madame de Montespan was very angry, so angry that she was evidently making strong efforts to keep herself within control, and to avoid breaking into a furious outburst. Her face was very pale, her lips compressed, and her blue eyes had the set stare and the cold glitter of a furious woman. So for an instant they faced each other, the one frowning, the other smiling, two of the most beautiful and queenly women in France. Then De Montespan, disregarding her rival's outstretched hand, turned towards the king, who had been looking at her with a darkening face.

"I fear that I intrude, sire."

"Your entrance, madame, is certainly somewhat abrupt."

"I must crave pardon if it is so. Since this lady has been the governess of my children I have been in the habit of coming into her room unannounced."

"As far as I am concerned, you are most welcome to do so," said her rival, with perfect composure.

"I confess that I had not even thought it necessary to ask your permission, madame," the other answered coldly.

"Then you shall certainly do so in the future, madame," said the king sternly. "It is my express order to you that every possible respect is to be shown in every way to this lady."

"Oh, to *this* lady!" with a wave of her hand in her direction. "Your Majesty's commands are of course our laws. But I must remember that it *is* this lady, for sometimes one may get confused as to which name it is that your Majesty has picked out for honour. To-day it is De Maintenon; yesterday it was Fontanges; to-morrow—— Ah, well, who can say who it may be to-morrow?"

She was superb in her pride and her fearlessness as she stood, with her sparkling blue eyes and her heaving bosom, looking down upon her royal lover. Angry as he was, his gaze lost something of its sternness as it rested upon her round full throat and the delicate lines of her shapely shoulders. There was something very becoming in her passion, in the defiant pose of her dainty head, and the magnificent scorn with which she glanced at her rival.

"There is nothing to be gained, madame, by being insolent," said he.

"Nor is it my custom, sire."

"And yet I find your words so."

"Truth is always mistaken for insolence, sire, at the court of France."

"We have had enough of this.

"A very little truth is enough."

"You forget yourself, madame. I beg that you will leave the room."

"I must first remind your Majesty that I was so far honoured as to have an appointment this afternoon. At four o'clock I had your royal promise that you would come to me. I cannot doubt that your Majesty will keep

that promise in spite of the fascinations which you may find here."

"I should have come, madame, but the clock, as you may observe, is half an hour slow, and the time had passed before I was aware of it."

"I beg, sire, that you will not let that distress you. I am returning to my chamber, and five o'clock will suit me as well as four."

"I thank you, madame, but I have not found this interview so pleasant that I should seek another."

"Then your Majesty will not come?"

"I should prefer not."

"In spite of your promise!"

"Madame!"

"You will break your word!"

"Silence, madame; this is intolerable."

"It is indeed intolerable!" cried the angry lady, throwing all discretion to the winds. "Oh, I am not afraid of you, sire. I have loved you, but I have never feared you. I leave you here. I leave you with your conscience and your—your lady confessor. But one word of truth you shall hear before I go. You have been false to your wife, and you have been false to your mistress, but it is only now that I find that you can be false also to your word." She swept him an indignant courtesy, and glided, with head erect, out of the room.

The king sprang from his chair as if he had been stung. Accustomed as he was to his gentle little wife, and the even gentler La Vallière, such language as this had never before intruded itself upon the royal ears. It was like a physical blow to him. He felt stunned, humiliated, bewildered, by so unwonted a sensation. What odour was this which mingled for the first time with the incense amid which he lived? And then his whole soul rose up in anger at her, at the woman who had dared to raise her voice against him. That she should be jealous of and insult another woman, that was excusable. It was, in fact, an indirect compliment to himself. But that she should turn upon *him*,

as if they were merely man and woman, instead of monarch and subject, that was too much. He gave an inarticulate cry of rage, and rushed to the door.

"Sire!" Madame de Maintenon, who had watched keenly the swift play of his emotions over his expressive face, took two quick steps forward, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"I will go after her."

"And why, sire?"

"To forbid her the court."

"But, sire——"

"You heard her! It is infamous! I shall go."

"But, sire, could you not write?"

"No, no; I shall see her." He pulled open the door.

"Oh, sire, be firm, then!" It was with an anxious face that she watched him start off, walking rapidly, with angry gestures, down the corridor. Then she turned back, and dropping upon her knees on the *prie-dieu*, bowed her head in prayer for the king, for herself and for France.

De Catinat, the guardsman, had employed himself in showing his young friend from over the water all the wonders of the great palace, which the other had examined keenly, and had criticised or admired with an independence of judgment and a native correctness of taste natural to a man whose life had been spent in freedom amid the noblest works of nature. Grand as were the mighty fountains and the artificial cascades, they had no overwhelming effect on one who had travelled up from Erie to Ontario, and had seen the Niagara River hurl itself over its precipice, nor were the long level swards so very large to eyes which had rested upon the great plains of the Dakotas. The building itself, however, its extent, its height and the beauty of its stone, filled him with astonishment.

"I must bring Ephraim Savage here," he kept repeating. "He would never believe else that there was one

house in the world which would weigh more than all Boston and New York put together."

De Catinat had arranged that the American should remain with his friend Major de Brissac, as the time had come round for his own second turn of guard. He had hardly stationed himself in the corridor when he was astonished to see the king, without escort or attendants, walking swiftly down the passage. His delicate face was disfigured with anger, and his mouth was set grimly, like that of a man who had taken a momentous resolution.

"Officer of the guard," said he shortly.

"Yes, sire."

"What! You again, Captain de Catinat? You have not been on duty since morning?"

"No, sire. It is my second guard."

"Very good. I wish your assistance."

"I am at your command, sire."

"Is there a subaltern here?"

"Lieutenant de la Tremouille is at the side guard."

"Very well. You will place him in command."

"Yes, sire."

"You will yourself go to Monsieur de Vivonne. You know his apartments?"

"Yes, sire."

"If he is not there, you must go and seek him. Wherever he is, you must find him within the hour."

"Yes, sire."

"You will give him an order from me. At six o'clock he is to be in his carriage at the east gate of the palace. His sister, Madame de Montespan, will await him there, and he is charged by me to drive her to the Château of Petit Bourg. You will tell him that he is answerable to me for her arrival there."

"Yes, sire." De Catinat raised his sword in salute, and started upon his mission.

The king passed on down the corridor, and opened a door which led him into a magnificent anteroom, all one blaze of mirrors and gold, furnished to a marvel with the

most delicate ebony and silver suite, on a deep red carpet of Aleppo, as soft and yielding as the moss of a forest. In keeping with the furniture was the sole occupant of this stately chamber—a little negro boy in a livery of velvet picked out with silver tinsel, who stood as motionless as a small swart statuette against the door which faced that through which the king entered.

"Is your mistress there?"

"She has just returned, sire."

"I wish to see her."

"Pardon, sire, but she——"

"Is everyone to thwart me to-day?" snarled the king, and taking the little page by his velvet collar, he hurled him to the other side of the room. Then, without knocking, he opened the door, and passed on into the lady's boudoir.

It was a large and lofty room, very different to that from which he had just come. Three long windows from ceiling to floor took up one side, and through the delicate pink-tinted blinds the evening sun cast a subdued and dainty light. Great gold candelabra glittered between the mirrors upon the wall, and Le Brun had expended all his wealth of colouring upon the ceiling, where Louis himself, in the character of Jove, hurled down his thunderbolts upon a writhing heap of Dutch and Palatine Titans. Pink was the prevailing tone in tapestry, carpet and furniture, so that the whole room seemed to shine with the sweet tints of the inner side of a shell, and when lit up, as it was then, formed such a chamber as some fairy hero might have built up for his princess. At the further side, prone upon an ottoman, her face buried in the cushion, her beautiful white arms thrown over it, the rich coils of her brown hair hanging in disorder across the long curve of her ivory neck, lay, like a drooping flower, the woman whom he had come to discard.

At the sound of the closing door she had glanced up, and then, at the sight of the king, she sprang to her feet and ran towards him, her hands out, her blue eyes be-

dimmed with tears, her whole beautiful figure softening into womanliness and humility.

"Ah, sire," she cried, with a pretty little sunburst of joy through her tears, "then I have wronged you! I have wronged you cruelly! You have kept your promise. You were but trying my faith! Oh, how could I have said such words to you—how could I pain that noble heart! But you have come after me to tell me that you have forgiven me!" She put her arms forward with the trusting air of a pretty child who claims an embrace as her due, but the king stepped swiftly back from her, and warned her away from him with an angry gesture.

"All is over for ever between us," he cried harshly. "Your brother will await you at the east gate at six o'clock, and it is my command that you wait there until you receive my further orders."

She staggered back as if he had struck her.

"Leave you!" she cried.

"You must leave the court."

"The court! Aye, willingly, this instant! But you! Ah, sire, you ask what is impossible."

"I do not ask, madame; I order. Since you have learned to abuse your position, your presence has become intolerable. The united kings of Europe have never dared to speak to me as you have spoken to-day. You have insulted me in my own palace—me, Louis, the king. Such things are not done twice, madame. Your insolence has carried you too far this time. You thought that because I was forbearing, I was therefore weak. It appeared to you that if you only humoured me one moment, you might treat me as if I were your equal the next, for that this poor puppet of a king could always be bent this way or that. You see your mistake now. At six o'clock you leave Versailles for ever." His eyes flashed, and his small upright figure seemed to swell in the violence of his indignation, while she leaned away from him, one hand across her eyes and one thrown forward, as if to screen her from that angry gaze.

"Oh, I have been wicked!" she cried. "I know it, I know it!"

"I am glad, madame, that you have the grace to acknowledge it."

"How could I speak to you so! How could I! Oh, that some blight may come upon this unhappy tongue! I, who have had nothing but good from you! I to insult you, who are the author of all my happiness! Oh, sire, forgive me, forgive me! for pity's sake forgive me!"

Louis was by nature a kind-hearted man. His feelings were touched, and his pride also was flattered by the abasement of this beautiful and haughty woman. His other favourites had been amiable to all, but this one was so proud, so unyielding, until she felt his master-hand. His face softened somewhat in its expression as he glanced at her, but he shook his head, and his voice was as firm as ever as he answered.

"It is useless, madame," said he. "I have thought this matter over for a long time, and your madness to-day has only hurried what must in any case have taken place. You must leave the palace."

"I will leave the palace. Say only that you forgive me. Oh, sire, I cannot bear your anger. It crushes me down. I am not strong enough. It is not banishment, it is death to which you sentence me. Think of our long years of love, sire, and say that you forgive me. I have given up all for your sake—husband, honour, everything. Oh, will you not give your anger up for mine? My God, he weeps! Oh, I am saved, I am saved!"

"No, no, madame," cried the king, dashing his hand across his eyes. "You see the weakness of the man, but you shall also see the firmness of the king. As to your insults to-day, I forgive them freely, if that will make you more happy in your retirement. But I owe a duty to my subjects also, and that duty is to set them an example. We have thought too little of such things. But a time has come when it is necessary to review our past life, and to prepare for that which is to come."

"Ah, sire, you pain me. You are not yet in the prime of your years, and you speak as though old age were upon you. In a score of years from now it may be time for folk to say that age has made a change in your life."

The king winced. "Who says so?" he cried angrily.

"Oh, sire, it slipped from me unawares. Think no more of it. Nobody says so. Nobody."

"You are hiding something from me. Who is it who says this?"

"Oh, do not ask me, sire."

"You said that it was reported that I had changed my life not through religion, but through stress of years. Who said so?"

"Oh, sire, it was but foolish court gossip, all unworthy of your attention. It was but the empty common talk of cavaliers who had nothing else to say to gain a smile from their ladies."

"The common talk?" Louis flushed crimson. "Have I, then, grown so aged? You have known me for nearly twenty years. Do you see such changes in me?"

"To me, sire, you are as pleasing and as gracious as when you first won the heart of Mademoiselle Tonnay-Charente."

The king smiled as he looked at the beautiful woman before him.

"In very truth," said he, "I can say that there has been no such great change in Mademoiselle Tonnay-Charente either. But still it is best that we should part, Françoise."

"If it will add aught to your happiness, sire, I shall go through it, be it to my death."

"Now that is the proper spirit."

"You have but to name the place, sire—Petit Bourg, Chargny or my own convent of St. Joseph in the Faubourg St. Germain. What matter where the flower withers, when once the sun has for ever turned from it? At least, the past is my own, and I shall live in the remembrance of the days when none had come between us, and when your sweet love was all my own. Be happy, sire, be happy,

and think no more of what I said about the foolish gossip, of the court. Your life lies in the future. Mine is in the past. Adieu, dear sire, adieu ! " She threw forward her hands, her eyes dimmed over, and she would have fallen had Louis not sprung forward and caught her in his arms. Her beautiful head drooped upon his shoulder, her breath was warm upon his cheek, and the subtle scent of her hair was in his nostrils. His arm, as he held her, rose and fell with her bosom and he felt her heart, beneath his hand, fluttering like a caged bird. Her broad white throat was thrown back, her eyes almost closed, her lips just parted enough to show the line of pearly teeth, her beautiful face not three inches from his own. And then suddenly the eyelids quivered, and the great blue eyes looked up at him, lovingly, appealingly, half deprecating, half challenging, her whole soul in a glance. Did he move ? or was it she ? Who could tell ? But their lips had met in a long kiss, and then in another, and plans and resolutions were streaming away from Louis like autumn leaves in the west wind.

" Then I am not to go ? You would not have the heart to send me away, would you ? "

" No, no ; but you must not annoy me, Françoise."

" I had rather die than cause you an instant of grief. Oh, sire, I have seen so little of you lately ! And I love you so ! It has maddened me. And then that dreadful woman——"

" Who, then ? "

" Oh, I must not speak against her. I will be civil for your sake even to her, the widow of old Scarron."

" Yes, yes, you must be civil. I cannot have any unpleasantness."

" But you will stay with me, sire ? " Her supple arms coiled themselves round his neck. Then she held him for an instant at arm's length to feast her eyes upon his face, and then drew him once more towards her. " You will not leave me, dear sire. It is so long since you have been here."

The sweet face, the pink glow in the room, the hush of the evening, all seemed to join in their sensuous influence. Louis sank down upon the settee.

"I will stay," said he.

"And that carriage, dear sire, at the east door?"

"I have been very harsh with you, Françoise. You will forgive me. Have you paper and pencil, that I may countermand the order?"

"They are here, sire, upon the side table. I have also a note which, if I may leave you for an instant, I will write in the anteroom."

She swept out with triumph in her eyes. It had been a terrible fight, but all the greater the credit of her victory. She took a little pink slip of paper from an inlaid desk, and dashed off a few words upon it. They were: "Should Madame de Maintenon have any message for his Majesty, he will be for the next few hours in the room of Madame de Montespan." This she addressed to her rival, and it was sent on the spot, together with the king's order, by the hands of the little black page.

## II. *The Sun Reappears*

FOR nearly a week the king was constant to his new humour. The routine of his life remained unchanged, save that it was the room of the frail beauty, rather than of Madame de Maintenon, which attracted him in the afternoon. And in sympathy with this sudden relapse into his old life, his coats lost something of their sombre hue, and fawn-colour, buff-colour and lilac began to replace the blacks and the blues. A little gold lace budded out upon his hats also and at the trimmings of his pockets, while for three days on end his *prie-dieu* at the royal chapel had been unoccupied. His walk was brisker, and he gave a youthful flourish to his cane as a defiance to those who had seen in his reformation the first symptoms of age. Madame had known her man well when she threw out that artful insinuation.

And as the king brightened, so all the great court brightened too. The *salons* began to resume their former splendour, and gay coats and glittering embroidery which had lain in drawers for years were seen once more in the halls of the palace. In the chapel, Bourdaloue preached in vain to empty benches, but a ballet in the grounds was attended by the whole court, and received with a frenzy of enthusiasm. The Montespan anteroom was crowded every morning with men and women who had some suit to be urged, while her rival's chambers were as deserted as they had been before the king first turned a gracious look upon her. Faces which had been long banished the court began to reappear in the corridors and gardens unchecked and unrebuked, while the black cassock of the Jesuit and the purple soutane of the bishop were less frequent colours in the royal circle.

But the Church party, who, if they were the champions of bigotry, were also those of virtue, were never seriously alarmed at this relapse. The grave eyes of priest or of prelate followed Louis in his escapade as wary huntsmen might watch a young deer which gambols about in the meadow under the impression that it is masterless, when every gap and path is netted, and it is in truth as much in their hands as though it were lying bound before them. They knew how short a time it would be before some ache, some pain, some chance word, would bring his mortality home to him again, and envelop him once more in those superstitious terrors which took the place of religion in his mind. They waited, therefore, and they silently planned how the prodigal might best be dealt with on his return.

To this end it was that his confessor, Père La Chaise, and Bossuet, the great Bishop of Meaux, waited one morning upon Madame de Maintenon in her chamber. With a globe beside her, she was endeavouring to teach geography to the lame Duc du Maine and the mischievous little Comte de Toulouse, who had enough of their

father's disposition to make them averse to learning, and of their mother's to cause them to hate any discipline or restraint. Her wonderful tact, however, and her unwearying patience had won the love and confidence even of these little perverse princes, and it was one of Madame de Montespan's most bitter griefs that not only her royal lover, but even her own children, turned away from the brilliancy and riches of her *salon* to pass their time in the modest apartment of her rival.

Madame de Maintenon dismissed her two pupils, and received the ecclesiastics with the mixture of affection and respect which was due to those who were not only personal friends, but great lights of the Gallican Church. She had suffered the minister Louvois to sit upon a stool in her presence, but the two chairs were allotted to the priests now, and she insisted upon reserving the humbler seat for herself. The last few days had cast a pallor over her face which spiritualised and refined the features, but she wore unimpaired the expression of sweet serenity which was habitual to her.

"I see, my dear daughter, that you have sorrowed," said Bossuet, glancing at her with a kindly and yet searching eye.

"I have indeed, your Grace. All last night I spent in prayer that this trial may pass away from us."

"And yet you have no need for fear, madame—none, I assure you. Others may think that your influence has ceased; but we, who know the king's heart, we think otherwise. A few days may pass, a few weeks at the most, and once more it will be upon your rising fortunes that every eye in France will turn."

The lady's brow clouded, and she glanced at the prelate as though his speech were not altogether to her taste. "I trust that pride does not lead me astray," she said. "But if I can read my own soul aright, there is no thought of myself in the grief which now tears my heart. What is power to me? What do I desire? A little room, leisure for my devotions, a pittance to save me from want—what more

can I ask for? Why, then, should I covet power? If I am sore at heart, it is not for any poor loss which I have sustained. I think no more of it than of the snapping of one of the threads on yonder tapestry frame. It is for the king I grieve—for the noble heart, the kindly soul, which might rise so high, and which is dragged so low, like a royal eagle with some foul weight which ever hampers its flight. It is for him and for France that my days are spent in sorrow and my nights upon my knees."

"For all that, my daughter, you are ambitious."

It was the Jesuit who had spoken. His voice was clear and cold, and his piercing grey eyes seemed to read into the depths of her soul.

"You may be right, father. God guard me from self-esteem. And yet I do not think that I am. The king, in his goodness, has offered me titles—I have refused them; money—I have returned it. He has deigned to ask my advice in matter of state, and I have withheld it. Where, then, is my ambition?"

"In your heart, my daughter. But it is not a sinful ambition. It is not an ambition of this world. Would you not love to turn the king towards good?"

"I would give my life for it."

"And there is your ambition. Ah, can I not read your noble soul? Would you not love to see the Church reign pure and serene over all this realm—to see the poor housed, the needy helped, the wicked turned from their ways, and the king ever the leader in all that is noble and good? Would you not love that, my daughter?"

Her cheeks had flushed, and her eyes shone as she looked at the grey face of the Jesuit, and saw the picture which his words had conjured up before her. "Ah, that would be joy indeed?" she cried.

"And greater joy still to know, not from the mouths of the people, but from the voice of your own heart in the privacy of your chamber, that you had been the cause of it, that your influence had brought this blessing upon the king and upon the country."

"I would die to do it."

"We wish you to do what may be harder. We wish you to live to do it."

"Ah!" She glanced from one to the other with questioning eyes.

"My daughter," said Bossuet solemnly, leaning forward with his broad white hand outstretched and his purple pastoral ring sparkling in the sunlight, "it is time for plain speaking. It is in the interests of the Church that we do it. None hear, and none shall ever hear, what passes between us now. Regard us, if you will, as two confessors, with whom your secret is inviolable. I call it a secret, and yet it is none to us, for it is our mission to read the human heart. You love the king."

"Your Grace!" She started, and a warm blush, mantling up in her pale cheeks, deepened and spread until it tinted her white forehead and her queenly neck.

"You love the king."

"Your Grace—father!" She turned in confusion from one to the other.

"There is no shame in loving, my daughter. The shame lies only in yielding to love. I say again that you love the king."

"At least I have never told him so," she faltered.

"And will you never?"

"May heaven wither my tongue first!"

"But consider, my daughter. Such love in a soul like yours is heaven's gift, and sent for some wise purpose. This human love is too often but a noxious weed which blights the soil it grows in, but here it is a gracious flower, all fragrant with humility and virtue."

"Alas! I have tried to tear it from my heart."

"Nay; rather hold it firmly rooted there. Did the king but meet with some tenderness from you, some sign that his own affection met with an answer from your heart, it might be that this ambition which you profess would be secured, and that Louis, strengthened by the intimate companionship of your noble nature, might live in the

spirit as well as in the forms of the Church. All this might spring from the love which you hide away as though it bore the brand of shame."

The lady half rose, glancing from the prelate to the priest with eyes which had a lurking horror in their depths.

" Can I have understood you ! " she gasped. " What meaning lies behind these words ? You cannot counsel me to——"

The Jesuit had risen, and his spare figure towered above her.

" My daughter, we give no counsel which is unworthy of our office. We speak for the interests of Holy Church, and those interests demand that you should marry the king."

" Marry the king ! " The little room swam round her. " Marry the king ! "

" There lies the best hope for the future. We see in you a second Jeanne d'Arc, who will save both France and France's king."

Madame sat silent for a few moments. Her face had regained its composure, and her eyes were bent vacantly upon her tapestry frame as she turned over in her mind all that was involved in the suggestion.

" But surely—surely this could never be," she said at last. " Why should we plan that which can never come to pass ? "

" And why ? "

" What King of France has married a subject ? See how every princess of Europe stretches out her hand to him. The Queen of France must be of queenly blood, even as the last was."

" All this may be overcome."

" And then there are the reasons of state. If the king marry, it should be to form a powerful alliance, to cement a friendship with a neighbour nation, or to gain some province which may be the bride's dowry. What is my dowry ? A widow's pension and a work-box." She

laughed bitterly, and yet glanced eagerly at her companions, as one who wished to be confuted.

"Your dowry, my daughter, would be those gifts of body and of mind with which heaven has endowed you. The king has money enough, and the king has provinces enough. As to the state, how can the state be better served than by the assurance that the king will be saved in future from such sights as are to be seen in this palace to-day?"

"Oh, if it could be so! But think, father, think of those about him—the dauphin, monsieur his brother, his ministers. You know how little this would please them, and how easy it is for them to sway his mind. No, no; it is a dream, father, and it can never be."

The faces of the two ecclesiastics, who had dismissed her other objections with a smile and a wave, clouded over at this, as though she had at last touched upon the real obstacle.

"My daughter," said the Jesuit gravely, "that is a matter which you may leave to the Church. It may be that we, too, have some power over the king's mind, and that we may lead him in the right path, even though those of his own blood would fain have it otherwise. The future only can show with whom the power lies. But you? Love and duty both draw you one way now, and the Church may count upon you."

"To my last breath, father."

"And you upon the Church. It will serve you, if you in turn will but serve it."

"What higher wish could I have?"

"You will be our daughter, our queen, our champion, and you will heal the wounds of the suffering Church."

"Ah! if I could!"

"But you can. While there is heresy within the land there can be no peace or rest for the faithful. It is the speck of mould which will in time, if it be not pared off, corrupt the whole fruit."

"What would you have, then, father?"

"The Huguenots must go. They must be driven forth. The goats must be divided from the sheep. The king is already in two minds. Louvois is our friend now. If you are with us, then all will be well."

"But, father, think how many there are!"

"The more reason that they should be dealt with."

"And think, too, of their sufferings should they be driven forth."

"Their cure lies in their own hands."

"That is true. And yet my heart softens for them."

Père La Chaise and the bishop shook their heads. Nature had made them both kind and charitable men, but the heart turns to flint when the blessing of religion is changed to the curse of sect.

"You would befriend God's enemies, then?"

"No, no; not if they are indeed so."

"Can you doubt it? Is it possible that your heart still turns towards the heresy of your youth?"

"No, father; but it is not in nature to forget that my father and my grandfather——"

"Nay, they have answered for their own sins. Is it possible that the Church has been mistaken in you? Do you then refuse the first favour which she asks of you? You would accept her aid, and yet you would give none in return."

Madame de Maintenon rose with the air of one who has made her resolution. "You are wiser than I," said she, "and to you have been committed the interests of the Church. I will do what you advise."

"You promise it?"

"I do."

Her two visitors threw up their hands together. "It is a blessed day," they cried, "and generations yet unborn will learn to deem it so."

She sat half stunned by the prospect which was opening out in front of her. Ambitious she had, as the Jesuit had surmised, always been—ambitious for the power which would enable her to leave the world better than she found

it. And this ambition she had already to some extent been able to satisfy, for more than once she had swayed both king and kingdom. But to marry the king—to marry the man for whom she would gladly lay down her life, whom in the depths of her heart she loved in as pure and as noble a fashion as woman ever yet loved man—that was indeed a thing above her utmost hopes. She knew her own mind, and she knew his. Once his wife, she could hold him to good, and keep every evil influence away from him. She was sure of it. She should be no weak Maria Theresa, but rather, as the priest had said, a new Jeanne d'Arc, come to lead France and France's king into better ways. And if, to gain this aim, she had to harden her heart against the Huguenots, at least the fault, if there were one, lay with those who made this condition rather than with herself. The king's wife! The heart of the woman and the soul of the enthusiast both leaped at the thought.

But close at the heels of her joy there came a sudden revulsion to doubt and despondency. Was not all this fine prospect a mere day dream? and how could these men be so sure that they held the king in the hollow of their hand? The Jesuit read the fears which dulled the sparkle of her eyes, and answered her thoughts before she had time to put them into words.

"The Church redeems its pledges swiftly," said he. "And you, my daughter, you must be as prompt when your own turn comes."

"I have promised, father."

"Then it is for us to perform. You will remain in your room all evening."

"Yes, father."

"The king already hesitates. I spoke with him this morning, and his mind was full of blackness and despair. His better self turns in disgust from his sins, and it is now when the first hot fit of repentance is just coming upon him that he may best be moulded to our ends. I have to see and speak with him once more, and I go from

your room to his. And when I have spoken, he will come from his room to yours, or I have studied his heart for twenty years in vain. We leave you now, and you will not see us, but you will see the effects of what we do, and you will remember your pledge to us." They bowed low to her both together, and left her to her thoughts.

An hour passed, and then a second one, as she sat in her *fauteuil*, her tapestry before her, but her hands listless upon her lap, waiting for her fate. Her life's future was now being settled for her, and she was powerless to turn it in one way or the other. Daylight turned to the pearly light of evening, and that again to dusk, but she still sat waiting in the shadow. Sometimes as a step passed in the corridor she would glance expectantly towards the door, and the light of welcome would spring up in her grey eyes, only to die away again into disappointment. At last, however, there came a quick sharp tread, crisp and authoritative, which brought her to her feet with flushed cheeks and her heart beating wildly. The door opened, and she saw outlined against the grey light of the outer passage the erect and graceful figure of the king.

"Sire! One instant, and mademoiselle will light the lamp."

"Do not call her." He entered and closed the door behind him. "Françoise, the dusk is welcome to me, because it screens me from the reproaches which must lie in your glance, even if your tongue be too kindly to speak them."

"Reproaches, sire! God forbid that I should utter them!"

"When I last left you, Françoise, it was with a good resolution in my mind. I tried to carry it out, and I failed—I failed. I remember that you warned me. Fool that I was not to follow your advice!"

"We are all weak and mortal, sire. Who has not fallen? Nay, sire, it goes to my heart to see you thus."

He was standing by the fireplace, his face buried in his hands, and she could tell by the catch of his breath that he

was weeping. All the pity of her woman's nature went out to that silent and repenting figure dimly seen in the failing light. She put out her hand with a gesture of sympathy, and it rested for an instant upon his velvet sleeve. The next he had clasped it between his own, and she made no effort to release it.

"I cannot do without you, Françoise," he cried. "I am the loneliest man in all this world, like one who lives on a great mountain-peak, with none to bear him company. Who have I for a friend? Whom can I rely upon? Some are for the Church; some are for their families; most are for themselves. But who of them all is single-minded? You are my better self, Françoise; you are my guardian angel. What the good father says is true, and the nearer I am to you the further am I from all that is evil. Tell me, Françoise, do you love me?"

"I have loved you for years, sire." Her voice was low but clear—the voice of a woman to whom coquetry was abhorrent.

"I had hoped it, Françoise, and yet it thrills me to hear you say it. I know that wealth and title have no attraction for you, and that your heart turns rather towards the convent than the palace. Yet I ask you to remain in the palace, and to reign there. Will you be my wife, Françoise?"

And so the moment had in very truth come. She paused for an instant, only an instant, before taking this last great step; but even that was too long for the patience of the king.

"Will you not, Françoise?" he cried, with a ring of fear in his voice.

"May God make me worthy of such an honour, sire!" said she. "And here I swear that if heaven double my life, every hour shall be spent in the one endeavour to make you a happier man!"

She had knelt down, and the king, still holding her hand, knelt down beside her.

"And I swear too," he cried, "that if my days also are

doubled, you will now and for ever be the one and only woman for me."

And so their double oath was taken, an oath which was to be tested in the future, for each did live almost double their years, and yet neither broke the promise made hand in hand on that evening in the shadow-girt chamber.

## 12. *The King Receives*

IT may have been that Mademoiselle Nanon, the faithful *confidante* of Madame de Maintenon, had learned something of this interview, or it may be that Père La Chaise, with the shrewdness for which his Order is famous, had come to the conclusion that publicity was the best means of holding the king to his present intention; but whatever the source, it was known all over the court next day that the old favourite was again in disgrace, and that there was talk of a marriage between the king and the governess of his children. It was whispered at the *petit lever*, confirmed at the *grand entrée*, and was common gossip by the time that the king had returned from chapel. Back into wardrobe and drawer went the flaring silks and the feathered hats, and out once more came the sombre coat and the matronly dress. Scudéry and Calpernedi gave place to the missal and St. Thomas à Kempis, while Bourdaloue, after preaching for a week to empty benches, found his chapel packed to the last seat with weary gentlemen and taper-bearing ladies. By midday there was none in the court who had not heard the tidings, save only Madame de Montespan, who, alarmed by her lover's absence, had remained in haughty seclusion in her room, and knew nothing of what had passed. Many there were who would have loved to carry her the tidings; but the king's changes had been frequent of late, and who would dare to make a mortal enemy of one who might ere many weeks were past have the lives and fortunes of the whole court in the hollow of her hand?

Louis, in his innate selfishness, had been so accustomed

to regard every event entirely from the side of how it would affect himself, that it had never struck him that his long-suffering family, who had always yielded to him the absolute obedience which he claimed as his right, would venture to offer any opposition to his new resolution. He was surprised, therefore, when his brother demanded a private interview that afternoon, and entered his presence without the complaisant smile and humble air with which he was wont to appear before him.

Monsieur was a curious travesty of his elder brother. He was shorter, but he wore enormously high boot-heels which brought him to a fair stature. In figure he had none of that grace which marked the king, nor had he the elegant hand and foot which had been the delight of sculptors. He was fat, waddled somewhat in his walk, and wore an enormous black wig, which rolled down in rows and rows of curls over his shoulders. His face was longer and darker than the king's, and his nose more prominent, though he shared with his brother the large brown eyes which each had inherited from Anne of Austria. He had none of the simple and yet stately taste which marked the dress of the monarch, but his clothes were all tagged over with fluttering ribbons, which rustled behind him as he walked, and clustered so thickly over his feet as to conceal them from view. Crosses, stars, jewels, and insignia were scattered broadcast over his person, and the broad blue ribbon of the Order of the Holy Ghost was slashed across his coat, and was gathered at the end into a great bow, which formed the incongruous support of a diamond-hilted sword. Such was the figure which rolled towards the king, bearing in his right hand his many-feathered beaver, and appearing in his person, as he was in his mind, an absurd burlesque of the monarch.

"Why, monsieur, you seem less gay than usual to-day," said the king, with a smile. "Your dress, indeed, is bright, but your brow is clouded. I trust that all is well with madame and with the Duc de Chartres?"

"Yes, sire, they are well; but they are sad like myself, and from the same cause."

"Indeed! and why?"

"Have I ever failed in my duty as your younger brother, sire?"

"Never, Philippe, never!" said the king, laying his hand affectionately upon the other's shoulder. "You have set an excellent example to my subjects."

"Then why set a slight upon me?"

"Philippe!"

"Yes, sire, I say it is a slight. We are of royal blood, and our wives are of royal blood also. You married the Princess of Spain; I married the Princess of Bavaria. It was a condescension, but still I did it. My first wife was the Princess of England. How can we admit into a house which has formed such alliances as these a woman who is the widow of a hunchback singer, a mere lampooner, a man whose name is a byword through Europe?"

The king had stared in amazement at his brother, but his anger now overcame his astonishment.

"Upon my word!" he cried; "upon my word! I have said just now that you have been an excellent brother, but I fear that I spoke a little prematurely. And so you take upon yourself to object to the lady whom I select as my wife!"

"I do, sire."

"And by what right?"

"By the right of the family honour, sire, which is as much mine as yours."

"Man," cried the king furiously, "have you not yet learned that within this kingdom I am the fountain of honour, and that whomsoever I may honour becomes by that very fact honourable? Were I to take a cinder-wench out of the Rue Poissonnière, I could at my will raise her up until the highest in France would be proud to bow down before her. Do you not know this?"

"No, I do not," cried his brother, with all the obstinacy of a weak man who has at last been driven to bay. "I

look upon it as a slight upon me and a slight upon my wife."

"Your wife! I have every respect for Charlotte Elizabeth of Bavaria, but how is she superior to one whose grandfather was the dear friend and comrade in arms of Henry the Great? Enough! I will not condescend to argue such a matter with you! Begone, and do not return to my presence until you have learned not to interfere in my affairs."

"For all that, my wife shall not know her!" snarled monsieur; and then, as his brother took a fiery step or two towards him, he turned and scuttled out of the room as fast as his awkward gait and high heels would allow him.

But the king was to have no quiet that day. If Madame de Maintenon's friends had rallied to her yesterday, her enemies were active to-day. Monsieur had hardly disappeared before there rushed into the room a youth who bore upon his rich attire every sign of having just arrived from a dusty journey. He was pale-faced and auburn-haired, with features which would have been strikingly like the king's if it were not that his nose had been disfigured in his youth. The king's face had lighted up at the sight of him, but it darkened again as he hurried forward and threw himself down at his feet.

"Oh, sire," he cried, "spare us this grief!—spare us this humiliation! I implore you to pause before you do what will bring dishonour upon yourself and upon us!"

The king started back from him, and paced angrily up and down the room.

"This is intolerable!" he cried. "It was bad from my brother, but worse from my son. You are in a conspiracy with him, Louis. Monsieur has told you to act this part."

The dauphin rose to his feet and looked steadfastly at his angry father.

"I have not seen my uncle," he said. "I was at Meudon when I heard this news—this dreadful news—and I sprang upon my horse, sire, and galloped over to

implore you to think again before you drag our royal house so low."

"You are insolent, Louis."

"I do not mean to be so, sire. But consider, sire, that my mother was a queen, and that it would be strange indeed if for a step-mother I had a——"

The king raised his hand with a gesture of authority which checked the word upon his lips.

"Silence!" he cried, "or you may say that which would for ever set a gulf between us. Am I to be treated worse than my humblest subject, who is allowed to follow his own bent in his private affairs?"

"This is not your own private affair, sire; all that you do reflects upon your family. The great deeds of your reign have given a new glory to the name of Bourbon. Oh, do not mar it now, sire! I implore it of you upon my bended knees!"

"You talk like a fool!" cried his father roughly. "I propose to marry a virtuous and charming lady of one of the oldest noble families of France, and you talk as if I were doing something degrading and unheard-of. What is your objection to this lady?"

"That she is the daughter of a man whose vices were well known, that her brother is of the worst repute, that she has led the life of an adventuress, is the widow of a deformed scribbler, and that she occupies a menial position in the palace."

The king had stamped with his foot upon the carpet more than once during this frank address, but his anger blazed into a fury at its conclusion.

"Do you dare," he cried, with flashing eyes, "to call the charge of my children a menial position? I say that there is no higher in the kingdom. Go back to Meudon, sir, this instant, and never dare to open your mouth again on the subject. Away, I say! When, in God's good time, you are king of this country, you may claim your own way, but until then do not venture to cross the plans of one who is both your parent and your monarch."

The young man bowed low, and walked with dignity from the chamber ; but he turned with his hand upon the door.

" The Abbé Fénélon came with me, sire. Is it your pleasure to see him ? "

" Away ! away ! " cried the king furiously, still striding up and down the room with angry face and flashing eyes. The dauphin left the cabinet, and was instantly succeeded by a tall thin priest, some forty years of age, strikingly handsome, with a pale refined face, large well-marked features, and the easy deferential bearing of one who has had a long training in courts. The king turned sharply upon him, and looked hard at him with a distrustful eye.

" Good-day, Abbé Fénélon," said he. " May I ask what the object of this interview is ? "

" You have had the condescension, sire, on more than one occasion, to ask my humble advice, and even to express yourself afterwards as being pleased that you had acted upon it."

" Well ? Well ? Well ? " growled the monarch.

" If rumour says truly, sire, you are now at a crisis when a word of impartial counsel might be of value to you. Need I say that it would——"

" Tut ! tut ! Why all these words ? " cried the king. " You have been sent here by others to try and influence me against Madame de Maintenon."

" Sire, I have had nothing but kindness from that lady, I esteem and honour her more than any lady in France."

" In that case, abbé, you will, I am sure, be glad to hear that I am about to marry her. Good-day, abbé. I regret that I have not longer time to devote to this very interesting conversation."

" But, sire——"

" When my mind is in doubt, abbé, I value your advice very highly. On this occasion, my mind is happily *not* in doubt. I have the honour to wish you a very good-day."

The king's first hot anger had died away by now, and had left behind it a cold, bitter spirit which was even

more formidable to his antagonists. The abbé, glib of tongue and fertile of resource as he was, felt himself to be silenced and overmatched. He walked backwards, with three long bows, as was the custom of the court, and departed.

But the king had little breathing-space. His assailants knew that with persistence they had bent his will before, and they trusted that they might do so again. It was Louvois, the minister, now who entered the room, with his majestic port, his lofty bearing, his huge wig and his aristocratic face, which, however, showed some signs of trepidation as it met the baleful eye of the king.

"Well, Louvois, what now?" he asked impatiently. "Has some new state matter arisen?"

"There is but one new state matter which has arisen, sire, but it is of such importance as to banish all others from our mind."

"What then?"

"Your marriage, sire."

"You disapprove of it?"

"Oh, sire, can I help it?"

"Out of my room, sir! Am I to be tormented to death by your importunities? What! You dare to linger when I order you to go!" The king advanced angrily upon the minister, but Louvois suddenly flashed out his rapier. Louis sprang back with alarm and amazement upon his face, but it was the hilt and not the point which was presented to him.

"Pass it through my heart, sire!" the minister cried, falling upon his knees, his whole great frame in a quiver with emotion. "I will not live to see your glory fade!"

"Great heaven!" shrieked Louis, throwing the sword down upon the ground, and raising his hands to his temples, "I believe that this is a conspiracy to drive me mad. Was ever a man so tormented in this life? This will be a private marriage, man, and it will not affect the state in the least degree. Do you hear me? Have you understood me? What more do you want?"

Louvois gathered himself up, and shot his rapier back into its sheath.

"Your Majesty is determined?" he said.

"Absolutely."

"Then I say no more. I have done my duty." He bowed his head as one in deep dejection when he departed, but in truth his heart was lightened within him, for he had the king's assurance that the woman whom he hated would, even though his wife, not sit on the throne of the Queens of France.

These repeated attacks, if they had not shaken the king's resolution, had at least irritated and exasperated him to the utmost. Such a blast of opposition was a new thing to a man whose will had been the one law of the land. It left him ruffled and disturbed, and without regretting his resolution, he still, with unreasoning petulance, felt inclined to visit the inconvenience to which he had been put upon those whose advice he had followed. He wore accordingly no very cordial face when the usher in attendance admitted the venerable figure of Father La Chaise, his confessor.

"I wish you all happiness, sire," said the Jesuit, "and I congratulate you from my heart that you have taken the great step which must lead to content both in this world and the next."

"I have had neither happiness nor contentment yet, father," answered the king peevishly. "I have never been so pestered in my life. The whole court has been on its knees to me to entreat me to change my intention."

The Jesuit looked at him anxiously out of his keen grey eyes.

"Fortunately, your Majesty is a man of strong will," said he, "and not to be so easily swayed as they think."

"No, no, I did not give an inch. But still, it must be confessed that it is very unpleasant to have so many against one. I think that most men would have been shaken."

"Now is the time to stand firm, sire; Satan rages to see you passing out of his power, and he stirs up all his friends and sends all his emissaries to endeavour to detain you."

But the king was not in a humour to be easily consoled.

"Upon my word, father," said he, "you do not seem to have much respect for my family. My brother and my son, with the Abbé Fénélon and the minister of war, are the emissaries to whom you allude."

"Then there is the more credit to your Majesty for having resisted them. You have done nobly, sire. You have earned the praise and blessing of Holy Church."

"I trust that what I have done is right, father," said the king gravely. "I should be glad to see you again later in the evening, but at present I desire a little leisure for solitary thought."

Father La Chaise left the cabinet with a deep distrust of the king's intentions. It was obvious that the powerful appeals which had been made to him had shaken if they had failed to alter his resolution. What would be the result if more were made? And more would be made; that was as certain as that darkness follows light. Some master-card must be played now which would bring the matter to a crisis at once, for every day of delay was in favour of their opponents. To hesitate was to lose. All must be staked upon one final throw.

The Bishop of Meaux was waiting in the anteroom, and Father La Chaise in a few brief words let him see the danger of the situation, and the means by which they should meet it. Together they sought Madame de Maintenon in her room. She had discarded the sombre widow's dress which she had chosen since her first coming to court, and wore now, as more in keeping with her lofty prospects, a rich yet simple costume of white satin with bows of silver serge. A single diamond sparkled in the thick coils of her dark tresses. The change had taken years from a face and figure which had always looked much younger than her age, and as the two plotters looked upon her perfect complexion, her regular features, so calm and yet so full of refinement, and the exquisite grace of her figure and bearing, they could not but feel that if they failed in their ends, it was not for want of having a perfect tool at their command.

She had risen at their entrance, and her expression showed that she had read upon their faces something of the anxiety which filled their minds.

"You have evil news!" she cried.

"No, no, my daughter." It was the bishop who spoke. "But we must be on our guard against our enemies, who would turn the king away from you if they could."

Her face shone at the mention of her lover.

"Ah, you do not know!" she cried. "He has made a vow. I would trust him as I would trust myself. I know that he will be true."

But the Jesuit's intellect was arrayed against the intuition of the woman.

"Our opponents are many and strong," said he, shaking his head. "Even if the king remain firm, he will be annoyed at every turn, so that he will feel his life is darker instead of lighter, save, of course, madame, for that brightness which you cannot fail to bring with you. We must bring the matter to an end."

"And how, father?"

"The marriage must be at once!"

"At once!"

"Yes. This very night, if possible."

"Oh, father, you ask too much. The king would never consent to such a proposal."

"It is he that will propose it."

"And why?"

"Because we shall force him to. It is only thus that all the opposition can be stopped. When it is done, the court will accept it. Until it is done, they will resist it."

"What would you have me do, then, father?"

"Resign the king."

"Resign him!" She turned as pale as a lily, and looked at him in bewilderment.

"It is the best course, madame."

"Ah, father, I might have done it last month, last week, even yesterday morning. But now—oh, it would break my heart!"

"Fear not, madame. We advise you for the best. Go to the king now, at once. Say to him that you have heard that he has been subjected to much annoyance upon your account, that you cannot bear to think that you should be a cause of dissension in his own family, and therefore you will release him from his promise, and will withdraw yourself from the court for ever."

"Go now? At once?"

"Yes, without loss of an instant."

She cast a light mantle about her shoulders.

"I follow your advice," she said. "I believe that you are wiser than I. But, oh, if he should take me at my word."

"He will not take you at your word."

"It is a terrible risk."

"But such an end as this cannot be gained without risks. Go, my child, and may heaven's blessing go with you!"

## 13. *The King has Ideas*

THE king had remained alone in his cabinet, wrapped in somewhat gloomy thoughts, and pondering over the means by which he might carry out his purpose and yet smooth away the opposition which seemed to be so strenuous and so universal. Suddenly there came a gentle tap at the door, and there was the woman who was in his thoughts, standing in the twilight before him. He sprang to his feet and held out his hands with a smile which would have reassured her had she doubted his constancy.

"Françoise! You here! Then I have at last a welcome visitor, and it is the first one to-day."

"Sire, I fear that you have been troubled."

"I have indeed, Françoise."

"But I have a remedy for it."

"And what is that?"

"I shall leave the court, sire, and you shall think no

more of what has passed between us. I have brought discord where I meant to bring peace. Let me retire to St. Cyr, or to the Abbey of Fontevrault, and you will no longer be called upon to make such sacrifices for my sake."

The king turned deathly pale, and clutched at her shawl with a trembling hand, as though he feared that she was about to put her resolution into effect that very instant. For years his mind had accustomed itself to lean upon hers. He had turned to her whenever he needed support, and even when, as in the last week, he had broken away from her for a time, it was still all-important to him to know that she was there, the faithful friend, ever forgiving, ever soothing, waiting for him with her ready counsel and sympathy. But that she should leave him now, leave him altogether, such a thought had never occurred to him, and it struck him with a chill of surprised alarm.

"You cannot mean it, Françoise," he cried, in a trembling voice. "No, no, it is impossible that you are in earnest."

"It would break my heart to leave you, sire, but it breaks it also to think that for my sake you are estranged from your own family and ministers."

"Tut! Am I not the king? Shall I not take my own course without heed to them? No, no, Françoise, you must not leave me! You must stay with me and be my wife." He could hardly speak for agitation, and he still grasped at her dress to detain her. She had been precious to him before, but was far more so now that there seemed to be a possibility of losing her. She felt the strength of her position, and used it to the utmost.

"Some time must elapse before our wedding, sire. Yet during all that interval you will be exposed to these annoyances. How can I be happy when I feel that I have brought upon you so long a period of discomfort?"

"And why should it be so long, Françoise?"

"A day would be too long, sire, for you to be unhappy through my fault. It is a misery to me to think of it. Believe me, it would be better that I should leave you."

"Never! You shall not! Why should we even wait a day, Françoise? I am ready. You are ready. Why should we not be married now?"

"At once! Oh, sire!"

"We shall. It is my wish. It is my order. That is my answer to those who would drive me. They shall know nothing of it until it is done, and then let us see which of them will dare to treat my wife with anything but respect. Let it be done secretly, Françoise. I will send in a trusty messenger this very night for the Archbishop of Paris, and I swear that, if all France stand in the way, he shall make us man and wife before he departs."

"Is it your will, sire?"

"It is; and ah, I can see by your eyes that it is yours also! We shall not lose a moment, Françoise. What a blessed thought of mine, which will silence their tongues for ever! When it is ready they may know, but not before. To your room, then, dearest of friends and truest of women! When we meet again, it will be to form a band which all this court and all this kingdom shall not be able to loose."

The king was all on fire with the excitement of this new resolution. He had lost his air of doubt and discontent, and he paced swiftly about the room with a smiling face and shining eyes. Then he touched a small gold bell, which summoned Bontems, his private body-servant.

"What o'clock is it, Bontems?"

"It is nearly six, sire."

"Hum!" The king considered for some moments. "Do you know where Captain de Catinat is, Bontems?"

"He was in the grounds, sire, but I heard that he would ride back to Paris to-night."

"Does he ride alone?"

"He has one friend with him."

"Who is this friend? An officer of the guards?"

"No, sire; it is a stranger from over the seas, from America, as I understand, who has stayed with him of late, and to whom Monsieur de Catinat has been showing the wonders of your Majesty's palace."

"A stranger! So much the better. Go, Bontems, and bring them both to me."

"I trust that they have not started, sire. I will see." He hurried off, and was back in ten minutes in the cabinet once more.

"Well?"

"I have been fortunate, sire. Their horses had been led out and their feet were in the stirrups when I reached them."

"Where are they, then?"

"They await your Majesty's orders in the anteroom."

"Show them in, Bontems, and give admission to none, not even to the minister, until they have left me."

To De Catinat an audience with the monarch was a common incident of his duties, but it was with profound astonishment that he learned from Bontems that his friend and companion was included in the order. He was eagerly endeavouring to whisper into the young American's ear some precepts and warnings as to what to do and what to avoid, when Bontems reappeared and ushered them into the presence.

It was with a feeling of curiosity, not unmixed with awe, that Amos Green, to whom Governor Dongan, of New York, had been the highest embodiment of human power, entered the private chamber of the greatest monarch in Christendom. The magnificence of the antechamber in which he had waited, the velvets, the paintings, the gildings, with the throng of gaily dressed officials and of magnificent guardsmen, had all impressed his imagination, and had prepared him for some wondrous figure robed and crowned, a fit centre for such a scene. As his eyes fell upon a quietly dressed, bright-eyed man, half a head shorter than himself, with a trim dapper figure and an erect carriage, he could not help glancing round the room to see if this were indeed the monarch, or if it were some other of those endless officials who interposed themselves between him and the other world. The reverent salute of his companion, however, showed him that this

must indeed be the king, so he bowed and then drew himself erect with the simple dignity of a man who has been trained in Nature's school.

" Good-evening, Captain de Catinat," said the king, with a pleasant smile. " Your friend, as I understand, is a stranger to this country. I trust, sir, that you have found something here to interest and to amuse you ? "

" Yes, your Majesty. I have seen your great city, and it is a wonderful one. And my friend has shown me this palace, with its woods and its grounds. When I go back to my own country I will have much to say of what I have seen in your beautiful land."

" You speak French, and yet you are not a Canadian."

" No, sire ; I am from the English provinces."

The king looked with interest at the powerful figure, the bold features and the free bearing of the young foreigner, and his mind flashed back to the dangers which the Comte de Frontenac had foretold from these same colonies. If this were indeed a type of his race, they must in truth be a people whom it would be better to have as friends than as enemies. His mind, however, ran at present on other things than statecraft, and he hastened to give De Catinat his orders for the night.

" You will ride into Paris on my service. Your friend can go with you. Two are safer than one when they bear a message of state. I wish you, however, to wait until nightfall before you start."

" Yes, sire."

" Let none know your errand, and see that none follow you. You know the house of Archbishop Harlay, prelate of Paris ? "

" Yes, sire."

" You will bid him drive out hither and be at the north-west side postern by midnight. Let nothing hold him back. Storm or fine, he must be here to-night. It is of the first importance."

" He shall have your order, sire."

" Very good. Adieu, captain. Adieu, monsieur. I

trust that your stay in France may be a pleasant one." He waved his hand, smiling with the fascinating grace which had won so many hearts, and so dismissed the two friends to their new mission.

## 14. *The Last Card*

MADAME DE MONTESPAN still kept her rooms, uneasy in mind at the king's disappearance, but unwilling to show her anxiety to the court by appearing among them, or by making any inquiry as to what had occurred. While she thus remained in ignorance of the sudden and complete collapse of her fortunes, she had one active and energetic agent who had lost no incident of what had occurred, and who watched her interests with as much zeal as if they were his own. And indeed they were his own ; for her brother, Monsieur de Vivonne, had gained everything for which he yearned, money, lands and preferment, through his sister's notoriety, and he well knew that the fall of her fortunes must be very rapidly followed by that of his own. By nature bold, unscrupulous and resourceful, he was not a man to lose the game without playing it out to the very end with all the energy and cunning of which he was capable. Keenly alert to all that passed, he had, from the time that he first heard the rumour of the king's intention, haunted the antechamber and drawn his own conclusions from what he had seen. Nothing had escaped him—the disconsolate faces of monsieur and of the dauphin, the visit of Père La Chaise and Bossuet to the lady's room, her return, the triumph which shone in her eyes as she came away from the interview. He had seen Bontems hurry off and summon the guardsman and his friend. He had heard them order their horses to be brought out in a couple of hours' time, and finally, from a spy whom he employed among the servants, he learned that an unwonted bustle was going forward in Madame de Maintenon's room, that

Mademoiselle Nanon was half wild with excitement, and that two court milliners had been hastily summoned to madame's apartment. It was only, however, when he heard from the same servant that a chamber was to be prepared for the reception that night of the Archbishop of Paris that he understood how urgent was the danger.

Madame de Montespan had spent the evening stretched upon a sofa, in the worst possible humour with everyone around her. She had read, but had tossed aside the book. She had written, but had torn up the paper. A thousand fears and suspicions chased each other through her head. What had become of the king, then? He had seemed cold yesterday, and his eyes had been for ever sliding round to the clock. And to-day he had not come at all. Was it his gout, perhaps? Or was it possible that she was again losing her hold upon him? Surely it could not be that! She turned upon her couch and faced the mirror which flanked the door. The candles had just been lit in her chamber, two score of them, each with silver backs which reflected their light until the room was as bright as day. There in the mirror was the brilliant chamber, the deep red ottoman, and the single figure in its gauzy dress of white and silver. She leaned upon her elbow, admiring the deep tint of her own eyes with their long dark lashes, the white curve of her throat, and the perfect oval of her face. She examined it all carefully, keenly, as though it were her rival that lay before her, but nowhere could she see a scratch of Time's malicious nails. She still had her beauty, then. And if it had once won the king, why should it not suffice to hold him? Of course it would do so. She reproached herself for her fears. Doubtless he was indisposed, or perhaps he would come still. Ha! there was the sound of an opening door and of a quick step in her anteroom. Was it he, or at least his messenger with a note from him?

But no, it was her brother, with the haggard eyes and drawn face of a man who is weighed down with his own evil tidings. He turned as he entered, fastened the door,

and then, striding across the room, locked the other one which led to her boudoir.

"We are safe from interruption," he panted. "I have hastened here, for every second may be invaluable. Have you heard anything from the king?"

"Nothing." She had sprung to her feet, and was gazing at him with a face which was as pale as his own.

"The hour has come for action, Françoise. It is the hour at which the Mortemarts have always shown at their best. Do not yield to the blow, then, but gather yourself to meet it."

"What is it?" She tried to speak in her natural tone, but only a whisper came to her dry lips.

"The king is about to marry Madame de Maintenon."

"The *gouvernante!* The widow Scarron! It is impossible!"

"It is certain."

"To marry? Did you say to marry?"

"Yes, he will marry her."

The woman flung out her hands in a gesture of contempt, and laughed loud and bitterly.

"You are easily frightened, brother," said she. "Ah, you do not know your little sister. Perchance if you were not my brother you might rate my powers more highly. Give me a day, only one little day, and you will see Louis, the proud Louis, down at the hem of my dress to ask my pardon for this slight. I tell you that he cannot break the bonds that hold him. One day is all I ask to bring him back."

"But you cannot have it."

"What?"

"The marriage is to-night."

"You are mad, Charles."

"I am certain of it." In a few broken sentences he shot out all that he had seen and heard. She listened with a grim face, and hands which closed ever tighter and tighter as he proceeded. But he had said the truth about the Mortemarts. They came of a contentious blood, and were

ever at their best at a moment of action. Hate rather than dismay filled her heart as she listened, and the whole energy of her nature gathered and quickened to meet the crisis.

"I shall go and see him," she cried, sweeping towards the door.

"No, no, Françoise. Believe me you will ruin everything if you do. Strict orders have been given to the guard to admit no one to the king."

"But I shall insist upon passing them."

"Believe me, sister, it is worse than useless. I have spoken with the officer of the guard, and the command is a stringent one."

"Ah, I shall manage."

"No, you shall not." He put his back against the door. "I know that it is useless, and I will not have my sister make herself the laughing-stock of the court, trying to force her way into the room of a man who repulses her."

His sister's cheeks flushed at the words, and she paused irresolute.

"Had I only a day, Charles, I am sure that I could bring him back to me. There has been some other influence here, that meddlesome Jesuit or the pompous Bossuet, perhaps. Only one day to counteract their wiles! Can I not see them waving hell-fire before his foolish eyes, as one swings a torch before a bull to turn it? Oh, if I could but baulk them to-night! That woman! that cursed woman! The foul viper which I nursed in my bosom! Oh, I had rather see Louis in his grave than married to her! Charles, Charles, it must be stopped; I say it must be stopped! I will give anything, everything, to prevent it!"

"What will you give, my sister?"

She looked at him aghast. "What! you do not wish me to buy you?" she said.

"No; but I wish to buy others."

"Ha! You see a chance, then!"

"One, and one only. But time presses. I want money."

"How much?"

"I cannot have too much. All that you can spare."

With hands which trembled with eagerness she unlocked a secret cupboard in the wall in which she concealed her valuables. A blaze of jewellery met her brother's eyes as he peered over her shoulder. Great rubies, costly emeralds, deep ruddy beryls, glimmering diamonds, were scattered there in one brilliant shimmering many-coloured heap, the harvest which she had reaped from the king's generosity during more than fifteen years. At one side were three drawers, the one over the other. She drew out the lowest one. It was full to the brim of glittering *louis d'ors*.

"Take what you will!" she said. "And now your plan! Quick!"

He stuffed the money in handfuls into the side pockets of his coat. Coins slipped between his fingers and tinkled and wheeled over the floor, but neither cast a glance at them.

"Your plan?" she repeated.

"We must prevent the archbishop from arriving here. Then the marriage would be postponed until to-morrow night, and you would have time to act."

"But how prevent it?"

"There are a dozen good rapiers about the court which are to be bought for less than I carry in one pocket. There is De la Touche, young Turberville, old Major Despard, Raymond de Carnac and the four Latours. I will gather them together, and wait on the road."

"And waylay the archbishop?"

"No; the messengers."

"Oh, excellent! You are a prince of brothers! If no message reach Paris, we are saved. Go; go; do not lose a moment, my dear Charles."

"It is very well, Françoise; but what are we to do with them when we get them? We may lose our heads over the matter, it seems to me. After all, they are the king's messengers, and we can scarce pass our swords through them."

"No?"

"There would be no forgiveness for that."

"But consider that before the matter is looked into I shall have regained my influence with the king."

"All very fine, my little sister, but how long is your influence to last? A pleasant life for us if at every change of favour we have to fly the country! No, no, Françoise; the most that we can do is to detain the messengers."

"Where can you detain them?"

"I have an idea. There is the castle of the Marquis de Montespan at Portillac."

"Of my husband!"

"Precisely."

"Of my most bitter enemy! Oh! Charles, you are not serious."

"On the contrary, I was never more so. The marquis was away in Paris yesterday, and has not yet returned. Where is the ring with his arms?"

She hunted among her jewels and picked out a gold ring with a broad engraved face.

"This will be our key. When good Marceau, the steward, sees it, every dungeon in the castle will be at our disposal. It is that or nothing. There is no other place where we can hold them safe."

"But when my husband returns?"

"Ah, he may be a little puzzled as to his captives. And the complaisant Marceau may have an evil quarter of an hour. But that may not be for a week, and by that time, my little sister, I have confidence enough in you to think that you really may have finished the campaign. Not another word, for every moment is of value. Adieu, Françoise! We shall not be conquered without a struggle. I will send a message to you to-night to let you know how fortune uses us." He took her fondly in his arms, kissed her, and then hurried from the room.

For hours after his departure she paced up and down with noiseless steps upon the deep soft carpet, her hands still clenched, her eyes flaming, her whole soul wrapped and consumed with jealousy and hatred of her rival. Ten

struck, and eleven, and midnight, but still she waited, fierce and eager, straining her ears for every foot-fall which might be the herald of news. At last it came. She heard the quick step in the passage, the tap at the anteroom door, and the whispering of her black page. Quivering with impatience, she rushed in and took the note herself from the dusty cavalier who had brought it. It was but six words scrawled roughly upon a wisp of dirty paper, but it brought the colour back to her cheeks and the smile to her lips. It was her brother's writing, and it ran, " The archbishop will not come to-night."

## 15. *The Midnight Mission*

DE CATINAT in the meanwhile was perfectly aware of the importance of the mission which had been assigned to him. The secrecy which had been enjoined by the king, his evident excitement, and the nature of his orders, all confirmed the rumours which were already beginning to buzz round the court. He knew enough of the intrigues and antagonisms with which the court was full to understand that every precaution was necessary in carrying out his instructions. He waited, therefore, until night had fallen before ordering his soldier-servant to bring round the two horses to one of the less public gates of the grounds. As he and his friend walked together to the spot, he gave the young American a rapid sketch of the situation at the court, and of the chance that this nocturnal ride might be an event which would affect the future history of France.

" I like your king," said Amos Green, " and I am glad to ride in his service. He is a slip of a man to be the head of a great nation, but he has the eye of a chief. If one met him alone in a Maine forest, one would know him as a man who was different to his fellows. Well, I am glad that he is going to marry again, though it's a great house for any woman to have to look after."

De Catinat smiled at his comrade's idea of a queen's duties.

"Are you armed?" he asked. "You have no sword or pistols?"

"No; if I may not carry my gun, I had rather not be troubled by tools that I have never learned to use. I have my knife. But why do you ask?"

"Because there may be danger."

"And how?"

"Many have an interest in stopping this marriage. All the first men of the kingdom are bitterly against it. If they could stop *us*, they would stop *it*, for to-night at least."

"But I thought it was a secret?"

"There is no such thing at a court. There is the dauphin, or the king's brother, either of them, or any of their friends, would be right glad that we should be in the Seine before we reach the archbishop's house this night. But who is this?"

A burly figure had loomed up through the gloom on the path upon which they were going. As it approached, a coloured lamp dangling from one of the trees shone upon the blue and silver of an officer of the guards. It was Major de Brissac, of De Catinat's own regiment.

"Hullo! Whither away?" he asked.

"To Paris, major."

"I go there myself within an hour. Will you not wait, that we may go together?"

"I am sorry, but I ride on a matter of urgency. I must not lose a minute."

"Very good. Good-night, and a pleasant ride."

"Is he a trusty man, our friend the major?" asked Amos Green, glancing back.

"True as steel."

"Then I would have a word with him." The American hurried back along the way they had come, while De Catinat stood chafing at this unnecessary delay. It was a full five minutes before his companion joined him, and the

fiery blood of the French soldier was hot with impatience and anger.

"I think that perhaps you had best ride into Paris at your leisure, my friend," said he. "If I go upon the king's service I cannot be delayed whenever the whim takes you."

"I am sorry," answered the other quietly. "I had something to say to your major, and I thought that maybe I might not see him again."

"Well, here are the horses," said the guardsman as he pushed open the postern-gate. "Have you fed and watered them, Jacques?"

"Yes, my captain," answered the man who stood at their head.

"Boot and saddle, then, friend Green, and we shall not draw rein again until we see the lights of Paris in front of us."

The soldier-groom peered through the darkness after them with a sardonic smile upon his face. "You won't draw rein, won't you?" he muttered as he turned away. "Well, we shall see about that, my captain; we shall see about that."

For a mile or more the comrades galloped along, neck to neck and knee to knee. A wind had sprung up from the westward, and the heavens were covered with heavy grey clouds, which drifted swiftly across, a crescent moon peeping fitfully from time to time between the rifts. Even during these moments of brightness the road, shadowed as it was by heavy trees, was very dark, but when the light was shut off it was hard, but for the loom upon either side, to tell where it lay. De Catinat at least found it so, and he peered anxiously over his horse's ears, and stooped his face to the mane in his efforts to see his way.

"What do you make of the road?" he asked at last.

"It looks as if a good many carriage wheels had passed over it to-day."

"What! *Mon Dieu!* Do you mean to say that you can see carriage wheels there?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

"Why, man, I cannot see the road at all."

Amos Green laughed heartily. "When you have travelled in the woods by night as often as I have," said he, "when to show a light may mean to lose your hair, one comes to learn to use one's eyes."

"Then you had best ride on, and I shall keep just behind you. So! Holà! What is the matter now?"

There had been the sudden sharp snap of something breaking, and the American had reeled for an instant in the saddle.

"It's one of my stirrup leathers. It has fallen."

"Can you find it?"

"Yes; but I can ride as well without it. Let us push on."

"Very good. I can just see you now."

They had galloped for about five minutes in this fashion, De Catinat's horse's head within a few feet of the other's tail, when there was a second snap, and the guardsman rolled out of the saddle on to the ground. He kept his grip of the reins, however, and was up in an instant at his horse's head, sputtering out oaths as only an angry Frenchman can.

"A thousand thunders of heaven!" he cried. "What was it that happened then?"

"Your leather has gone too."

"Two stirrup leathers in five minutes? It is not possible."

"It is not possible that it should be chance," said the American gravely, swinging himself off his horse. "Why, what is this? My other leather is cut, and hangs only by a thread."

"And so does mine. I can feel it when I pass my hand along. Have you a tinder-box? Let us strike a light."

"No, no; the man who is in the dark is in safety. I let the other folk strike lights. We can see all that is needful to us."

"My rein is cut also."

"And so is mine."

"And the girth of my saddle."

"It is a wonder that we came so far with whole bones. Now, who has played us this little trick?"

"Who could it be but that rogue, Jacques! He has had the horses in his charge. By my faith, he shall know what the strappado means when I see Versailles again."

"But why should he do it?"

"Ah, he has been set on to it. He has been a tool in the hands of those who wished to hinder our journey."

"Very like. But they must have had some reason behind. They knew well that to cut our straps would not prevent us from reaching Paris, since we could ride bareback, or, for that matter, could run it if need be."

"They hoped to break our necks."

"One neck they might break, but scarce those of two, since the fate of the one would warn the other."

"Well, then, what do you think that they meant?" cried De Catinat impatiently. "For heaven's sake, let us come to some conclusion, for every minute is of importance."

But the other was not to be hurried out of his cool, methodical fashion of speech and of thought.

"They could not have thought to stop us," said he. "What did they mean, then? They could only have meant to delay us. And why should they wish to delay us? What could it matter to them if we gave our message an hour or two sooner or an hour or two later? It could not matter."

"For heaven's sake——" broke in De Catinat impetuously.

But Amos Green went on hammering the matter slowly out.

"Why should they wish to delay us, then? There's only one reason that I can see. In order to give other folk time to get in front of us and stop us. That is it, captain. I'd lay you a beaver-skin to a rabbit-pelt that I'm on the track. There's been a party of a dozen horsemen along this ground since the dew began to fall. If we were delayed, they would have time to form their plans before we came."

"By my faith, you may be right," said De Catinat thoughtfully, "What would you propose?"

"That we ride back, and go by some less direct way."

"It is impossible. We should have to ride back to Meudon cross-roads, and then it would add ten miles to our journey."

"It is better to get there an hour later than not to get there at all."

"Pshaw! we are surely not to be turned from our path by a mere guess. There is the St. Germain cross-road about a mile below. When we reach it we can strike to the right along the south side of the river, and so change our course."

"But we may not reach it."

"If anyone bars our way we shall know how to treat with them."

"You would fight, then?"

"Yes."

"What! with a dozen of them?"

"A hundred, if we are on the king's errand."

Amos Green shrugged his shoulders.

"You are surely not afraid?"

"Yes, I am, mighty afraid. Fighting's good enough when there's no help for it. But I call it a fool's plan to ride stright into a trap when you might go round it."

"You may do what you like," said De Catinat angrily. "My father was a gentleman, the owner of a thousand arpents of land, and his son is not going to flinch in the king's service."

"My father," answered Amos Green, "was a merchant, the owner of a thousand skunk-skins, and his son knows a fool when he sees one."

"You are insolent, sir," cried the guardsman. "We can settle this matter at some more fitting opportunity. At present I continue my mission, and you are very welcome to turn back to Versailles if you are so inclined." He raised his hat with punctilious politeness, sprang on to his horse, and rode on down the road.

Amos Green hesitated a little, and then mounting, he soon overtook his companion. The latter, however, was still in no very sweet temper, and rode with a rigid neck without a glance or a word for his comrade. Suddenly his eyes caught something in the gloom which brought a smile back to his face. Away in front of them, between two dark tree clumps, lay a vast number of shimmering, glittering yellow points, as thick as flowers in a garden. They were the lights of Paris.

"See!" he cried, pointing. "There is the city, and close here must be the St. Germain road. We shall take it, so as to avoid any danger."

"Very good! But you should not ride too fast, when your girth may break at any moment."

"Nay, come on; we are close to our journey's end. The St. Germain road opens just round this corner, and then we shall see our way, for the lights will guide us."

He cut his horse with his whip, and they galloped together round the curve. Next instant they were both down in one wild heap of tossing heads and struggling hoofs, De Catinat partly covered by his horse, and his comrade hurled twenty paces, where he lay silent and motionless in the centre of the road.

## 16. "*When the Devil Drives*"

MONSIEUR DE VIVONNE had laid his ambuscade with discretion. With a closed carriage and a band of chosen ruffians he had left the palace a good half-hour before the king's messengers and by the aid of his sister's gold he had managed that their journey should not be a very rapid one. On reaching the branch road he had ordered the coachman to drive some little distance along it, and had tethered all the horses to a fence under his charge. He had then stationed one of the band as a sentinel some distance up the main highway to flash a light when the two couriers were approaching. A stout

cord had been fastened eighteen inches from the ground to the trunk of a wayside sapling, and on receiving the signal the other end was tied to a gate-post upon the further side. The two cavaliers could not possibly see it, coming as it did at the very curve of the road, and as a consequence their horses fell heavily to the ground, and brought them down with them. In an instant the dozen ruffians, who had lurked in the shadow of the trees, sprang out upon them, sword in hand ; but there was no movement from either of their victims. De Catinat lay breathing heavily, one leg under his horse's neck, and the blood trickling in a thin stream down his pale face, and falling, drop by drop, on to his silver shoulder-straps. Amos Green was unwounded, but his injured girth had given way in the fall, and he had been hurled from his horse on to the hard road with a violence which had driven every particle of breath from his body.

Monsieur de Vivonne lit a lantern, and flashed it upon the faces of the two unconscious men. " This is a bad business, Major Despard," said he to the man next him. " I believe that they are both gone."

"Tut! tut! By my soul, men did not die like that when I was young ! " answered the other, leaning forward his fierce grizzled face into the light of the lantern. " I've been cast from my horse as often as there are tags to my doublet, but, save for the snap of a bone or two, I never had any harm from it. Pass your rapier under the third rib of the horses, De la Touche ; they will never be fit to set hoof to ground again." Two sobbing gasps, and the thud of their straining necks falling back to earth told that the two steeds had come to the end of their troubles.

" Where is Latour ? " asked Monsieur de Vivonne. " Achille Latour has studied medicine at Montpellier. Where is he ? "

" Here I am, your excellency. It is not for me to boast, but I am as handy a man with a lancet as with a rapier, and it was an evil day for some sick folk when I first took to buff and bandolier. Which would you have me look to ? "

"This one in the road."

The trooper bent over Amos Green. "He is not long for this world," said he. "I can tell it by the catch of his breath."

"And what is his injury?"

"A subluxation of the epigastrium. Ah, the words of learning will still come to my tongue, but it is hard to put into common terms. Methinks that it were well for me to pass my dagger through his throat, for his end is very near."

"Not for your life!" cried the leader. "If he die without wound, they cannot lay it to our charge. Turn now to the other."

The man bent over De Catinat, and placed his hand upon his heart. As he did so the soldier heaved a long sigh, opened his eyes, and gazed about him with the face of one who knows neither where he is nor how he came there. De Vivonne, who had drawn his hat down over his eyes, and muffled the lower part of his face in his mantle, took out his flask, and poured a little of the contents down the injured man's throat. In an instant a dash of colour had come back into the guardsman's bloodless cheeks, and the light of memory into his eyes. He struggled up on to his feet, and strove furiously to push away those who held him. But his head still swam, and he could scarce hold himself erect.

"I must to Paris!" he gasped; "I must to Paris! It is the king's mission. You stop me at your peril!"

"He has no hurt save a scratch," said the ex-doctor.

"Then hold him fast. And first carry the dying man to the carriage."

The lantern threw but a small ring of yellow light, so that when it had been carried over to De Catinat, Amos Green was left lying in the shadow. Now they brought the light back to where the young man lay. But there was no sign of him. He was gone.

For a moment the little group of ruffians stood staring, the light of their lantern streaming up upon their plumed

hats, their fierce eyes and savage faces. Then a burst of oaths broke from them, and De Vivonne caught the false doctor by the throat, and hurling him down, would have choked him upon the spot, had the others not dragged them apart.

"You lying dog!" he cried. "Is this your skill? The man has fled, and we are ruined!"

"He has done it in his death-struggle," gasped the other hoarsely, sitting up and rubbing his throat. "I tell you that he was *in extremis*. He cannot be far off."

"That is true. He cannot be far off," cried De Vivonne. "He has neither horse nor arms. You, Despard and Raymond de Carnac, guard the other, that he play us no trick. Do you, Latour, and you, Turberville, ride down the road, and wait by the south gate. If he enter Paris at all, he must come in that way. If you get him, tie him before you on your horse, and bring him to the rendezvous. In any case, it matters little, for he is a stranger, this fellow, and only here by chance. Now lead the other to the carriage, and we shall get away before an alarm is given."

The two horsemen rode off in pursuit of the fugitive, and De Catinat, still struggling desperately to escape, was dragged down the St. Germain road and thrust into the carriage, which had waited at some distance while these incidents were being enacted. Three of the horsemen rode ahead, the coachman was curtly ordered to follow them, and De Vivonne, having despatched one of the band with a note to his sister, followed after the coach with the remainder of his desperadoes.

The unfortunate guardsman had now entirely recovered his senses, and found himself with a strap round his ankles, and another round his wrists, a captive inside a moving prison which lumbered heavily along the country road. He had been stunned by the shock of his fall, and his leg was badly bruised by the weight of his horse; but the cut on his forehead was a mere trifle, and the bleeding had already ceased. His mind, however, pained him more

than his body. He sank his head into his pinioned hands, and stamped madly with his feet, rocking himself to and fro in his despair. What a fool, a treble fool, he had been ! He, an old soldier who had seen something of war, to walk with open eyes into such a trap ! The king had chosen him, of all men, as a trusty messenger, and yet he had failed him—and failed him so ignominiously, without shot fired or sword drawn. He was warned, too, warned by a young man who knew nothing of court intrigue, and who was guided only by the wits which Nature had given him. De Catinat dashed himself down upon the leather cushion in the agony of his thoughts.

But then came a return of that common-sense which lies so very closely beneath the impetuosity of the Celt. The matter was done now, and he must see if it could not be mended. Amos Green had escaped. That was one grand point in his favour. And Amos Green had heard the king's message, and realised its importance. It was true that he knew nothing of Paris, but surely a man who could pick his way at night through the forests of Maine would not be baulked in finding so well known a house as that of the Archbishop of Paris. But then there came a sudden thought which turned De Catinat's heart to lead. The city gates were locked at eight o'clock in the evening. It was now nearly nine. It would have been easy for him, whose uniform was a voucher for his message, to gain his way through. But how could Amos Green, a foreigner and a civilian, hope to pass ? It was impossible, clearly impossible. And yet, somehow, in spite of the impossibility, he still clung to a vague hope that a man so full of energy and resource might find some way out of the difficulty.

And then the thought of escape occurred to his mind. Might he not even now be in time, perhaps, to carry his own message ? Who were these men who had seized him ? They had said nothing to give him a hint as to whose tools they were. Monsieur and the dauphin occurred to his mind. Probably one or the other. He had only recognised one of them, old Major Despard, a man who fre-

quented the low wine-shops of Versailles, and whose sword was ever at the disposal of the longest purse. And where were these people taking him to? It might be to his death. But if they wished to do away with him, why should they have brought him back to consciousness? and why this carriage and drive? Full of curiosity, he peered out of the windows.

A horseman was riding close up on either side; but there was glass in front of the carriage, and through this he could gain some idea as to his whereabouts. The clouds had cleared now, and the moon was shining brightly, bathing the whole wide landscape in its shimmering light. To the right lay the open country, broad plains with clumps of woodland, and the towers of castles pricking out from above the groves. A heavy bell was ringing in some monastery, and its dull booming came and went with the breeze. On the left, but far away, lay the glimmer of Paris. They were leaving it rapidly behind. Whatever his destination, it was neither the capital nor Versailles. Then he began to count the chances of escape. His sword had been removed, and his pistols were still in the holsters beside his unfortunate horse. He was unarmed, then, even if he could free himself, and his captors were at least a dozen in number. There were three on ahead, riding abreast along the white, moonlit road. Then there was one on each side, and he should judge by the clatter of hoofs that there could not be fewer than half a dozen behind. That would make exactly twelve, including the coachman, too many, surely, for an unarmed man to hope to baffle. At the thought of the coachman he had glanced through the glass front at the broad back of the man, and he had suddenly, in the glimmer of the carriage lamp, observed something which struck him with horror.

The man was evidently desperately wounded. It was strange indeed that he could still sit there and flick his whip with so terrible an injury. In the back of his great red coat, just under the left shoulder-blade, was a gash in the cloth, where some weapon had passed, and all round was a

wide patch of dark scarlet which told its own tale. Nor was this all. As he raised his whip, the moonlight shone upon his hand, and De Catinat saw with a shudder that it also was splashed and clogged with blood. The guardsman craned his neck to catch a glimpse of the man's face; but his broad-brimmed hat was drawn low, and the high collar of his driving-coat was raised, so that his features were in the shadow. This silent man in front of him, with the horrible marks upon his person, sent a chill to De Catinat's valiant heart, and he muttered over one of Marot's Huguenot psalms; for who but the foul fiend himself would drive a coach with those crimsoned hands and with a sword driven through his body?

And now they had come to a spot where the main road ran onwards, but a smaller side track wound away down the steep slope of a hill, and so in the direction of the Seine. The advance-guard had kept to the main road, and the two horsemen on either side were trotting in the same direction, when, to De Catinat's amazement, the carriage suddenly swerved to one side, and in an instant plunged down the steep incline, the two stout horses galloping at their topmost speed, the coachman standing up and lashing furiously at them, and the clumsy old vehicle bounding along in a way which threw him backwards and forwards from one seat to the other. Behind him he could hear a shout of consternation from the escort, and then the rush of galloping hoofs. Away they flew, the roadside poplars dancing past at either window, the horses thundering along with their stomachs to the earth, and that demon driver still waving those horrible red hands in the moonlight and screaming out to the maddened steeds. Sometimes the carriage jolted one way, sometimes another, swaying furiously, and running on two side wheels as though it must every instant go over. And yet, fast as they went, their pursuers went faster still. The rattle of their hoofs was at their very backs, and suddenly at one of the windows there came into view the red, distended nostrils of a horse. Slowly it drew for-

ward, the muzzle, the eye, the ears, the mane, coming into sight as the rider still gained upon them, and then above them the fierce face of Despard and the gleam of a brass pistol barrel.

"At the horse, Despard, at the horse!" cried an authoritative voice from behind.

The pistol flashed, and the coach lurched over as one of the horses gave a convulsive spring. But the driver still shrieked and lashed with his whip, while the carriage bounded onwards.

But now the road turned a sudden curve, and there, right in front of them, not a hundred paces away, was the Seine, running cold and still in the moonshine. The bank on either side of the highway ran straight down without any break to the water's edge. There was no sign of a bridge, and a black shadow in the centre of the stream showed where the ferry boat was returning after conveying some belated travellers across. The driver never hesitated, but gathering up the reins, he urged the frightened creatures into the river. They hesitated, however, when they first felt the cold water about their hocks, and even as they did so one of them, with a low moan, fell over upon her side. Despard's bullet had found its mark. Like a flash the coachman hurled himself from the box and plunged into the stream; but the pursuing horsemen were all round him before this, and half a dozen hands had seized him ere he could reach deep water, and had dragged him to the bank. His broad hat had been struck off in the struggle, and De Catinat saw his face in the moonshine. Great heavens! It was Amos Green.

## 17. *The Dungeon of Portillac*

THE desperadoes were as much astonished as was De Catinat when they found that they had recaptured in this extraordinary manner the messenger whom they had given up for lost. A volley of

oaths and exclamations broke from them, as, in tearing off the huge red coat of the coachman, they disclosed the sombre dress of the young American.

"A thousand thunders!" cried one. "And this is the man whom that devil's brat Latour would make out to be dead!"

"And how came he here?"

"And where is Étienne Arnaud?"

"He has stabbed Étienne. See the great cut in the coat!"

"Aye; and see the colour of his hand! He has stabbed him, and taken his coat and hat."

"What! while we were all within stone's cast!"

"Aye; there is no other way out of it."

"By my soul!" cried old Despard, "I had never much love for old Étienne, but I have emptied a cup of wine with him before now, and I shall see that he has justice. Let us cast these reins round the fellow's neck and hang him upon this tree."

Several pairs of hands were already unbuckling the harness of the dead horse, when De Vivonne pushed his way into the little group, and with a few curt words checked their intended violence.

"It is as much as your lives are worth to touch him," said he.

"But he has slain Étienne Arnaud."

"That score may be settled afterwards. To-night he is the king's messenger. Is the other all safe?"

"Yes, he is here."

"Tie this man, and put him in beside him. Unbuckle the traces of the dead horse. So! Now, De Carnac, put your own into the harness. You can mount the box and drive, for we have not very far to go."

The changes were rapidly made; Amos Green was thrust in beside De Catinat, and the carriage was soon toiling up the steep incline which it had come down so precipitately. The American had said not a word since his capture, and had remained absolutely stolid, with

his hands crossed over his chest whilst his fate was under discussion. Now that he was alone once more with his comrade, however, he frowned and muttered like a man who feels that fortune has used him badly.

"Those infernal horses!" he grumbled. "Why, an American horse would have taken to the water like a duck. Many a time have I swum my old stallion Sagamore across the Hudson. Once over the river, we should have had a clear lead to Paris."

"My dear friend," cried De Catinat, laying his manacled hands upon those of his comrade, "can you forgive me for speaking as I did upon the way from Versailles?"

"Tut, man! I never gave it a thought."

"You were right a thousand times, and I was, as you said, a fool—a blind, obstinate fool. How nobly you have stood by me! But how came you there? Never in my life have I been so astonished as when I saw your face."

Amos Green chuckled to himself. "I thought that maybe it would be a surprise to you if you knew who was driving you," said he. "When I was thrown from my horse I lay quiet, partly because I wanted to get a grip of my breath, and partly because it seemed to me to be more healthy to lie than to stand with all those swords clinking in my ears. Then they all got round you, and I rolled into the ditch, crept along it, got on the cross-road in the shadow of the trees, and was beside the carriage before ever they knew that I was gone. I saw in a flash that there was only one way by which I could be of use to you. The coachman was leaning round with his head turned to see what was going on behind him. I out with my knife, sprang up on the front wheel and stopped his tongue for ever."

"What! without a sound!"

"I have not lived among the Indians for nothing."

"And then?"

"I pulled him down into the ditch, and I got into his coat and his hat. I did not scalp him."

"Scalp him? Great heavens! Such things are only done among savages."

"Ah! I thought that maybe it was not the custom of the country. I am glad now that I did not do it. I had hardly got the reins before they were all back and bundled you into the coach. I was not afraid of their seeing me, but I was scared lest I should not know which road to take, and so set them on the trail. But they made it easy to me by sending some of their riders in front, so I did well until I saw that by-track and made a run for it. We'd have got away, too, if that rogue hadn't shot the horse, and if the beasts had faced the water."

The guardsman again pressed his comrade's hands. "You have been as true to me as hilt to blade," said he. "It was a bold thought and a bold deed."

"And what now?" asked the American.

"I do not know who these men are, and I do not know whither they are taking us."

"To their villages, likely, to burn us."

De Catinat laughed in spite of his anxiety. "You will have it that we are back in America again," said he. "They don't do things in that way in France."

"They seem free enough with hanging in France. I tell you, I felt like a smoked-out 'coon when that trace was round my neck."

"I fancy that they are taking us to some place where they can shut us up until this business blows over."

"Well, they'll need to be smart about it."

"Why?"

"Else maybe they won't find us when they want us."

"What do you mean?"

For answer, the American, with a twist and a wriggle, drew his two hands apart, and held them in front of his comrade's face.

"Bless you, it is the first thing they teach the papooses in an Indian wigwam. I've got out of a Huron's thongs of raw hide before now, and it ain't very likely that a stiff

stirrup leather will hold me. Put your hands out." With a few dexterous twists he loosened De Catinat's bonds, until he also was able to slip his hands free. "Now for your feet, if you'll put them up. They'll find that we are easier to catch than to hold."

But at that moment the carriage began to slow down, and the clank of the hoofs of the riders in front of them died suddenly away. Peeping through the windows, the prisoners saw a huge dark building stretching in front of them, so high and so broad that the night shrouded it in upon every side. A great archway hung above them, and the lamps shone on the rude wooden gate, studded with ponderous clamps and nails. In the upper part of the door was a small square iron grating, and through this they could catch a glimpse of the gleam of a lantern and of a bearded face which looked out at them. De Vivonne, standing in his stirrups, craned his head up towards the grating, so that the two men most interested could hear little of the conversation which followed. They saw only that the horseman held a gold ring up in the air, and that the face above, which had begun by shaking and frowning, was now nodding and smiling. An instant later the head disappeared, the door swung open upon screaming hinges, and the carriage drove on into the courtyard beyond, leaving the escort, with the exception of De Vivonne, outside. As the horses pulled up, a knot of rough fellows clustered round, and the two prisoners were dragged roughly out. In the light of the torches which flared around them they could see that they were hemmed in by high turreted walls upon every side. A bulky man with a bearded face, the same whom they had seen at the grating, was standing in the centre of the group of armed men issuing his orders.

"To the upper dungeon, Simon!" he cried. "And see that they have two bundles of straw and a loaf of bread until we learn our master's will."

"I know not who your master may be," said De Catinat, "but I would ask you by what warrant he dares

to stop two messengers of the king while travelling in his service ? "

" By St. Denis, if my master play the king a trick, it will be but tie and tie," the stout man answered, with a grin. " But no more talk ! Away with them, Simon, and you answer to me for their safe-keeping."

It was in vain that De Catinat raved and threatened, invoking the most terrible menaces upon all who were concerned in detaining him. Two stout knaves thrusting him from behind and one dragging in front forced him through a narrow gate and along a stone-flagged passage, a small man in black buckram with a bunch of keys in one hand and a swinging lantern in the other leading the way. Their ankles had been so tied that they could but take steps of a foot in length. Shuffling along, they made their way down three successive corridors and through three doors, each of which was locked and barred behind them. Then they ascended a winding stone stair, hollowed out in the centre by the feet of generations of prisoners and of jailers, and finally they were thrust into a small square dungeon, and two trusses of straw were thrown in after them. An instant later a heavy key turned in the lock, and they were left to their own meditations.

Very grim and dark those meditations were in the case of De Catinat. A stroke of good luck had made him at court, and now this other of ill fortune had destroyed him. It would be in vain that he should plead his own powerlessness. He knew his royal master well. He was a man who was munificent when his orders were obeyed, and inexorable when they miscarried. No excuse availed with him. An unlucky man was as abhorrent to him as a negligent one. In this great crisis the king had trusted him with an all-important message, and that message had not been delivered. What could save him now from disgrace and from ruin ? He cared nothing for the dim dungeon in which he found himself, nor for the uncertain fate which hung over his head, but his heart turned to lead when he thought of his blasted career, and of the

triumph of those whose jealousy had been aroused by his rapid promotion. There were his people in Paris, too —his sweet Adèle, his old uncle, who had been as good as a father to him. What protector would they have in their troubles now that he had lost the power that might have shielded them ? How long would it be before they were exposed once more to the brutalities of Dalbert and his dragoons ? He clenched his teeth at the thought, and threw himself down with a groan upon the litter of straw dimly visible in the faint light which streamed through the single window.

But his energetic comrade had yielded to no feeling of despondency. The instant that the clang of the prison door had assured him that he was safe from interruption he had slipped off the bonds which held him and had felt all round the walls and flooring to see what manner of place this might be. His search had ended in the discovery of a small fireplace at one corner, and of two great clumsy billets of wood, which seemed to have been left there to serve as pillows for the prisoners. Having satisfied himself that the chimney was so small that it was utterly impossible to pass even his head up it, he drew the two blocks of wood over to the window, and was able, by placing one above the other and standing on tiptoe on the highest, to reach the bars which guarded it. Drawing himself up, and fixing one toe in an inequality of the wall, he managed to look out on to the courtyard which they had just quitted. The carriage and De Vivonne were passing out through the gate as he looked, and he heard a moment later the slam of the heavy door and the clatter of hoofs from the troop of horsemen outside. The seneschal and his retainers had disappeared ; the torches, too, were gone, and, save for the measured tread of a pair of sentinels in the yard twenty feet beneath him, all was silent throughout the great castle.

And a very great castle it was. Even as he hung there with straining hands his eyes were running in admiration and amazement over the huge wall in front of him, with its

fringe of turrets and pinnacles and battlements all lying so still and cold in the moonlight. Strange thoughts will slip into a man's head at the most unlikely moments. He remembered suddenly a bright summer day over the water when first he had come down from Albany, and how his father had met him on the wharf by the Hudson, and had taken him through the water-gate to see Peter Stuyvesant's house, as a sign of how great this city was which had passed from the Dutch to the English. Why, Peter Stuyvesant's house and Peter Stuyvesant's bowery villa put together would not make one wing of this huge pile, which was itself a mere dog-kennel beside the mighty palace at Versailles. He would that his father were here now ; and then, on second thoughts, he would not, for it came back to him that he was a prisoner in a far land, and that his sight-seeing was being done through the bars of a dungeon window.

The window was large enough to pass his body through if it were not for those bars. He shook them and hung his weight upon them, but they were as thick as his thumb and firmly welded. Then, getting some strong hold for his other foot, he supported himself by one hand while he picked with his knife at the setting of the iron. It was cement, as smooth as glass and as hard as marble. His knife turned when he tried to loosen it. But there was still the stone. It was sandstone, not so very hard. If he could cut grooves in it, he might be able to draw out bars, cement and all. He sprang down to the floor again, and was thinking how he should best set to work, when a groan drew his attention to his companion.

" You seem sick, friend," said he.

" Sick in mind," moaned the other. " Oh, the cursed fool that I have been ! It maddens me ! "

" Something on your mind ? " said Amos Green, sitting down upon his billets of wood. " What was it, then ? "

The guardsman made a movement of impatience. " What was it ? How can you ask me, when you know as well as I do the wretched failure of my mission. It was

the king's wish that the archbishop should marry them. The king's wish is the law. It must be the archbishop or none. He should have been at the palace by now. Ah, my God! I can see the king's cabinet, I can see him waiting, I can see madame waiting, I can hear them speak of the unhappy De Catinat——" He buried his face in his hands once more.

"I see all that," said the American stolidly, "and I see something more."

"What then?"

"I see the archbishop tying them up together."

"The archbishop! You are raving."

"Maybe. But I see him."

"He could not be at the palace."

"On the contrary, he reached the palace about half an hour ago."

De Catinat sprang to his feet. "At the palace!" he screamed. "Then who gave him the message?"

"I did," said Amos Green.

## 18. *A Night of Surprises*

IF the American had expected to surprise or delight his companion by this curt announcement he was woefully disappointed, for De Catinat approached him with a face which was full of sympathy and trouble, and laid his hand caressingly upon his shoulder.

"My dear friend," said he, "I have been selfish and thoughtless. I have made too much of my own little troubles and too little of what you have gone through for me. That fall from your house has shaken you more than you think. Lie down upon this straw, and see if a little sleep may not——"

"I tell you that the bishop is there!" cried Amos Green impatiently.

"Quite so. There is water in this jug, and if I dip my scarf into it and tie it round your brow——"

"Man alive! Don't you hear me! The bishop is there."

"He is, he is," said De Catinat soothingly. "He is most certainly there. I trust that you have no pain?"

The American waved in the air with his knotted fists. "You think that I'm crazed," he cried, "and, by the eternal, you are enough to make me so! When I say that I sent the bishop, I mean that I saw to the job. You remember when I stepped back to your friend the major?"

It was the soldier's turn to grow excited now. "Well?" he cried, gripping the other's arm.

"Well, when we send a scout into the woods, if the matter is worth it, we send a second one at another hour, and so one or other comes back with his hair on. That's the Iroquois fashion, and a good fashion too."

"My God! I believe that you have saved me!"

"You needn't grip on to my arm like a fish-eagle on a trout! I went back to the major, then, and I asked him when he was in Paris to pass by the archbishop's door."

"Well? Well?"

"I showed him this lump of chalk. 'If we've been there,' said I, 'you'll see a great cross on the left side of the doorpost. If there's no cross, then pull the latch and ask the bishop if he'll come up to the palace as quick as his horses can bring him.' The major started an hour after us; he would be in Paris by half-past ten; the bishop would be in his carriage by eleven, and he would reach Versailles half an hour ago, that is to say, about half-past twelve. By the Lord, I think I've driven him off his head!"

It was no wonder that the young woodsman was alarmed at the effect of his own announcement. His slow and steady nature was incapable of the quick, violent variations of the fiery Frenchman. De Catinat, who had thrown off his bonds before he had lain down, spun round the cell now, waving his arms and his legs, with his shadow capering up the wall behind him, all distorted

in the moonlight. Finally he threw himself into his comrade's arms with a torrent of thanks and ejaculations and praises and promises, patting him with his hands and hugging him to his breast.

"Oh, if I could but do something for you!" he exclaimed. "If I could do something for you!"

"You can, then. Lie down on that straw and go to sleep."

"And to think that I sneered at you! I! Oh, you have had your revenge!"

"For the Lord's sake, lie down and go to sleep!" By persuasions and a little pushing he got his delighted companion on to his couch again, and heaped the straw over him to serve as a blanket. De Catinat was wearied out by the excitements of the day, and this last great reaction seemed to have absorbed all his remaining strength. His lids drooped heavily over his eyes, his head sank deeper into the soft straw, and his last remembrance was that the tireless American was seated cross-legged in the moonlight, working furiously with his long knife upon one of the billets of wood.

So weary was the young guardsman that it was long past noon, and the sun was shining out of a cloudless blue sky, before he awoke. For a moment, enveloped as he was in straw, and with the rude arch of the dungeon meeting in four rough-hewn groinings above his head, he stared about him in bewilderment. Then in an instant the doings of the day before, his mission, the ambuscade, his imprisonment, all flashed back to him, and he sprang to his feet. His comrade, who had been dozing in the corner, jumped up also at the first movement, with his hand on his knife, and a sinister glance directed towards the door.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said he. "I thought it was the man."

"Has someone been in, then?"

"Yes; they brought those two loaves and a jug of water, just about dawn, when I was settling down for a rest."

"And did he say anything?"

"No; it was the little black one."

"Simon, they called him."

"The same. He laid the things down and was gone. I thought that maybe if he came again we might get him to stop."

"How, then?"

"Maybe if we get these stirrup leathers round his ankles he would not get them off quite as easy as we have done."

"And what then?"

"Well, he would tell us where we are, and what is to be done with us."

"Pshaw! what does it matter, since our mission is done?"

"It may not matter to you—there's no accounting for tastes—but it matters a good deal to me. I'm not used to sitting in a hole, like a bear in a trap, waiting for what other folks choose to do with me. It's new to me. I found Paris a pretty close sort of place, but it's a prairie compared to this. It don't suit a man of my habits, and I am going to come out of it."

"There's no help but patience, my friend."

"I don't know that. I'd get more help out of a bar and a few pegs." He opened his coat, and took out a short piece of rusted iron, and three small thick pieces of wood, sharpened at one end.

"Where did you get those, then?"

"These are my night's work. The bar is the top one of the grate. I had a job to loosen it, but there it is. The pegs I whittled out of that log."

"And what are they for?"

"Well, you see, peg number one goes in here, where I have picked a hole between the stones. Then I've made this other log into a mallet, and with two cracks there it is firm fixed, so that you can put your weight on it. Now these two go in the same way into the holes above here. So! Now, you see, you can stand up there and look out

of that window without asking too much of your toe joint. Try it."

De Catinat sprang up and looked eagerly out between the bars.

"I do not know the place," said he, shaking his head. "It may be any one of thirty castles which lie upon the south side of Paris, and within six or seven leagues of it. Which can it be? And who has any interest in treating us so? I would that I could see a coat of arms, which might help us. Ah! there is one yonder in the centre of the mullion of the window. But I can scarce read it at the distance. I warrant that your eyes are better than mine, Amos, and that you can read what is on yonder escutcheon."

"On what?"

"On the stone slab in the centre window."

"Yes, I see it plain enough. It looks to me like three turkey-buzzards sitting on a barrel of molasses."

"Three allurions in chief over a tower proper, maybe. Those are the arms of the Provence De Hautevilles. But it cannot be that. They have no château within a hundred leagues. No, I cannot tell where we are."

He was dropping back to the floor, and put his weight upon the bar. To his amazement, it came away in his hand.

"Look, Amos, look!" he cried.

"Ah, you've found it out! Well, I did that during the night."

"And how? With your knife?"

"No; I could make no way with my knife; but when I got the bar out of the grate, I managed faster. I'll put this one back now, or some of those folks down below may notice that we have got it loose."

"Are they all loose?"

"Only the one at present, but we'll get the other two out during the night. You can take that bar out and work with it, while I use my own picker at the other. You see, the stone is soft, and by grinding it you soon make a

groove along which you can slip the bar. It will be mighty queer if we can't clear a road for ourselves before morning."

"Well, but even if we could get out into the court-yard, where could we turn to then?"

"One thing at a time, friend. You might as well stick at the Kennebec because you could not see how you would cross the Penobscot. Anyway, there is more air in the yard than in here, and when the window is clear we shall soon plan out the rest."

The two comrades did not dare to do any work during the day, for fear they should be surprised by the jailer, or observed from without. No one came near them, but they ate their loaves and drank their water with the appetite of men who had often known what it was to be without even such simple food as that. The instant that night fell they were both up upon the pegs, grinding away at the hard stone and tugging at the bars. It was a rainy night, and there was a sharp thunder-storm, but they could see very well, while the shadow of the arched window prevented their being seen. Before midnight they had loosened one bar and the other was just beginning to give, when some slight noise made them turn their heads, and there was their jailer standing, open-mouthed, in the middle of the cell, staring up at them.

It was De Catinat who observed him first, and he sprang down at him in an instant with his bar; but at his movement the man rushed for the door, and drew it after him just as the American's tool whizzed past his ear and down the passage. As the door slammed, the two comrades looked at each other. The guardsman shrugged his shoulders and the other whistled.

"It is scarce worth while to go on," said De Catinat.

"We may as well be doing that as anything else. If my picker had been an inch lower I'd have had him. Well, maybe he'll get a stroke, or break his neck down those stairs. I've nothing to work with now, but a few rubs

with your bar will finish the job. Ah, dear! You are right, and we are fairly treed!"

A great bell had begun to ring in the château, and there was a loud buzz of voices and a clatter of feet upon the stones. Hoarse orders were shouted, and there was the sound of turning keys. All this coming suddenly in the midst of the stillness of the night showed only too certainly that the alarm had been given. Amos Green threw himself down in the straw, with his hands in his pockets, and De Catinat leaned sulkily against the wall, waiting for whatever might come to him. Five minutes passed, however, and yet another five minutes, without anyone appearing. The hubbub in the courtyard continued, but there was no sound in the corridor which led to their cell.

"Well, I'll have that bar out, after all," said the American at last, rising and stepping over to the window. "Anyhow, we'll see what all this caterwauling is about." He climbed up on his pegs as he spoke, and peeped out.

"Come up!" he cried excitedly to his comrade. "They've got some other game going on here, and they are all a deal too busy to bother their heads about us."

De Catinat clambered up beside him, and the two stood staring down into the courtyard. A brazier had been lit at each corner, and the place was thronged with men, many of whom carried torches. The yellow glare played fitfully over the grim grey walls, flickering up sometimes until the highest turrets shone golden against the black sky, and then, as the wind caught them, dying away until they scarce threw a glow upon the cheek of their bearer. The main gate was open, and a carriage, which had apparently just driven in, was standing at a small door immediately in front of their window. The wheels and sides were brown with mud and the two horses were reeking and heavy-headed, as though their journey had been both swift and long. A man wearing a plumed hat and enveloped in a riding-coat had stepped from the carriage, and then, turning round, had dragged a second

person out after him. There was a scuffle, a cry, a push, and the two figures had vanished through the door. As it closed, the carriage drove away, the torches and braziers were extinguished, the main gate was closed once more, and all was as quiet as before this sudden interruption.

"Well!" gasped De Catinat. "Is this another king's messenger they've got?"

"There will be lodgings for two more here in a short time," said Amos Green. "If they only leave us alone, this cell won't hold us long."

"I wonder where that jailer has gone?"

"He may go where he likes, as long as he keeps away from here. Give me your bar again. This thing is giving. It won't take us long to have it out." He set to work furiously trying to deepen the groove in the stone, through which he hoped to drag the staple. Suddenly he ceased, and strained his ears.

"By thunder!" said he, "there's someone working on the other side."

They both stood listening. There were the thud of hammers, the rasping of a saw, and the clatter of wood from the other side of the wall.

"What can they be doing?"

"I can't think."

"Can you see them?"

"They are too near the wall."

"I think I can manage," said De Catinat. "I am slighter than you." He pushed his head and neck and half of one shoulder through the gap between the bars, and there he remained until his friend thought that perhaps he had stuck, and pulled at his legs to extricate him. He writhed back, however, without any difficulty.

"They are building something," he whispered.

"Building!"

"Yes; there are four of them, with a lantern."

"What can they be building, then?"

"It's a shed, I think. I can see four sockets in the ground, and they are fixing four uprights into them."

"Well, we can't get away as long as there are four men just under our window."

"Impossible."

"But we may as well finish our work, for all that."

The gentle scrapings of his iron were drowned amid the noise which swelled ever louder from without. The bar loosened at the end, and he drew it slowly towards him. At that instant, however, just as he was disengaging it, a round head appeared between him and the moonlight, a head with a great shock of tangled hair and a woollen cap upon the top of it. So astonished was Amos Green at the sudden apparition that he let go his grip upon the bar, which, falling outwards, toppled over the edge of the window-sill.

"You great fool!" shrieked a voice from below, "are your fingers ever to be thumbs, then, that you should fumble your tools so? A thousand thunders of heaven! You have broken my shoulder."

"What is it, then?" cried the other. "My faith, Pierre, if your fingers went as fast as your tongue, you would be the first joiner in France."

"What is it, you ape! You have dropped your tool upon me."

"I! I have dropped nothing."

"Idiot! Would you have me believe that iron falls from the sky? I say that you have struck me, you foolish, clumsy-fingered lout."

"I have not struck you yet," cried the other, "but, by the Virgin, if I have more of this I will come down the ladder to you!"

"Silence, you good-for-noughts!" said a third voice sternly. "If the work be not done by daybreak, there will be a heavy reckoning for somebody."

And again the steady hammering and sawing went forward. The head still passed and repassed, its owner walking apparently upon some platform which they had constructed beneath their window, but never giving a glance or a thought to the black square opening beside

him. It was early morning, and the first cold light was beginning to steal over the courtyard before the work was at last finished and the workmen had left. Then at last the prisoners dared to climb up and to see what it was which had been constructed during the night. It gave them a catch of the breath as they looked at it. It was a scaffold.

There it lay, the ill-omened platform of dark greasy boards newly fastened together, but evidently used often before for the same purpose. It was buttressed up against their wall, and extended a clear twenty feet out, with a broad wooden stair leading down from the further side. In the centre stood a headsman's block, all haggled at the top, and smeared with rust-coloured stains.

"I think it is time that we left," said Amos Green.

"Our work is all in vain, Amos," said De Catinat sadly. "Whatever our fate may be—and this looks ill enough—we can but submit to it like brave men."

"Tut, man; the window is clear! Let us make a rush for it."

"It is useless. I can see a line of armed men along the further side of the yard."

"A line! At this hour!"

"Yes; and here come more. See, at the centre gate. Now what in the name of heaven is this?"

As he spoke the door which faced them opened, and a singular procession filed out. First came two dozen footmen, walking in pairs, all carrying halberds, and clad in the same maroon-coloured liveries. After them a huge bearded man, with his tunic off, and the sleeves of his coarse shirt rolled up over his elbows, strode along with a great axe over his left shoulder. Behind him, a priest with an open missal pattered forth prayers, and in his shadow was a woman, clad in black, her neck bared, and a black shawl cast over her head and drooping in front of her bowed face. Within grip of her walked a tall, thin, fierce-faced man, with harsh red features, and a great jutting nose. He wore a flat velvet cap with a single

eagle feather fastened into it by a diamond clasp, which gleamed in the morning light. But bright as was his gem, his dark eyes were brighter still, and sparkled from under his bushy brows with a mad brilliancy which bore with it something of menace and of terror. His limbs jerked as he walked, his features twisted, and he carried himself like a man who strives hard to hold himself in when his whole soul is aflame with exultation. Behind him again twelve more maroon-clad retainers brought up the rear of this singular procession.

The woman had faltered at the foot of the scaffold, but the man behind her had thrust her forward with such force that she stumbled over the lower step, and would have fallen had she not clutched at the arm of the priest. At the top of the ladder her eyes met the dreadful block, and she burst into a scream, and shrunk backwards. But again the man thrust her on, and two of the followers caught her by either wrist and dragged her forwards.

"Oh, Maurice! Maurice!" she screamed. "I am not fit to die! Oh, forgive me, Maurice, as you hope for forgiveness yourself! Maurice! Maurice!" She strove to get towards him, to clutch at his wrist, at his sleeve, but he stood with his hand on his sword, gazing at her with a face which was all wreathed and contorted with merriment. At the sight of that dreadful mocking face the prayers froze upon her lips. As well pray for mercy to the dropping stone or to the rushing stream. She turned away, and threw back the mantle which had shrouded her features.

"Ah, sire!" she cried. "Sire! If you could see me now!"

And at the cry and at the sight of that fair pale face, De Catinat, looking down from the window, was stricken as though by a dagger; for there standing beside the headsman's block was she who had been the most powerful, as well as the wittiest and the fairest, of the women of France—none other than Françoise de Montespan, so lately the favourite of the king.

## 19. *In the King's Cabinet*

ON the night upon which such strange chances had befallen his messengers, the king sat alone in his cabinet. Over his head a perfumed lamp, held up by four little flying Cupids of crystal, who dangled by golden chains from the painted ceiling, cast a brilliant light upon the chamber, which was flashed back twenty-fold by the mirrors upon the wall. The ebony and silver furniture, the dainty carpet of La Savonnière, the silks of Tours, the tapestries of the Gobelins, the gold-work and the delicate chinaware of Sèvres—the best of all that France could produce was centred between these four walls. Nothing had ever passed through that door which was not a masterpiece of its kind. And amid all this brillance the master of it sat, his chin resting upon his hands, his elbows upon the table, with eyes which stared vacantly at the wall, a moody and a solemn man.

But though his dark eyes were fixed upon the wall, they saw nothing of it. They looked rather down the long vista of his own life, away to those early years when what we dream and what we do shade so mistily into one another. Was it a dream or was it a fact, those two men who used to stoop over his baby crib, the one with the dark coat and the star upon his breast, whom he had been taught to call father, and the other one with the long red gown and the little twinkling eyes? Even now, after more than forty years, that wicked, astute, powerful face flashed up, and he saw once more old Richelieu, the great unanointed king of France. And then the other cardinal, the long lean one who had taken his pocket-money, and had grudged him his food, and had dressed him in old clothes. How well he could recall the day when Mazarin had rouged himself for the last time, and how the court had danced with joy at the news that he was no more! And his mother, too, how beautiful she was, and how masterful! Could he not remember how bravely she had borne her-

self during that war in which the power of the great nobles had been broken, and how she had at last lain down to die, imploring the priests not to stain her cap-strings with their holy oils ! And then he thought of what he had done himself, how he had shorn down his great subjects until, instead of being like a tree among saplings, he had been alone, far above all others, with his shadow covering the whole land. Then there were his wars and his laws and his treaties. Under his care France had overflowed her frontiers both on the north and on the east, and yet had been so welded together internally that she had but one voice, with which she spoke through him. And then there was that line of beautiful faces which wavered up in front of him. There was Olympe de Mancini, whose Italian eyes had first taught him that there is a power which can rule over a king ; her sister, too, Marie de Mancini ; his wife, with her dark little sun-browned face ; Henrietta of England, whose death had first shown him the horrors which lie in life ; La Vallière, Montespan, Fontanges. Some were dead ; some were in convents. Some who had been wicked and beautiful were now only wicked. And what had been the outcome of all this troubled, striving life of his ? He was already at the outer verge of his middle years ; he had lost his taste for the pleasures of his youth ; gout and vertigo were ever at his foot and at his head to remind him that between them lay a kingdom which he could not hope to govern. And after all these years he had not won a single true friend, not one, in his family, in his court, in his country, save only this woman whom he was to wed that night. And she, how patient she was, how good, how lofty ! With her he might hope to wipe off by the true glory of his remaining years all the sin and the folly of the past. Would that the archbishop might come, that he might feel that she was indeed his, that he held her with hooks of steel which would bind them as long as life should last !

There came a tap at the door. He sprang up eagerly,

thinking that the ecclesiastic might have arrived. It was, however, only his personal attendant, to say that Louvois would crave an interview. Close at his heels came the minister himself, high-nosed and heavy-chinned. Two leather bags were dangling from his hand.

"Sire," said he, when Bontems had retired, "I trust that I do not intrude upon you."

"No, no, Louvois. My thoughts were in truth beginning to be very indifferent company, and I am glad to be rid of them."

"Your Majesty's thoughts can never, I am sure, be anything but pleasant," said the courtier. "But I have brought you here something which I trust may make them even more so."

"Ah! What is that?"

"When so many of our young nobles went into Germany and Hungary, you were pleased in your wisdom to say that you would like well to see what reports they sent home to their friends; also what news was sent out from the court to them."

"Yes."

"I have them here—all that the courier has brought in, and all that are gathered to go out, each in its own bag. The wax has been softened in spirit, the fastenings have been steamed, and they are now open."

The king took out a handful of the letters and glanced at the addresses.

"I should indeed like to read the hearts of these people," said he. "Thus only can I tell the true thoughts of those who bow and simper before my face. I suppose," with a sudden flash of suspicion from his eyes, "that you have not yourself looked into these?"

"Oh, sire, I had rather die!"

"You swear it?"

"As I hope for salvation!"

"Hum! There is one among these which I see is from your own son."

Louvois changed colour, and stammered as he looked at

the envelope. "Your Majesty will find that he is as loyal out of your presence as in it, else he is no son of mine," said he.

"Then we shall begin with his. Ha! it is but ten lines long. 'Dearest Achille, how I long for you to come back! The court is as dull as a cloister now that you are gone. My ridiculous father still struts about like a turkey-cock, as if all his medals and crosses could cover the fact that he is but a head lackey, with no more real power than I have. He wheedles a good deal out of the king, but what he does with it I cannot imagine, for little comes my way. I still owe those ten thousand livres to the man in the Rue Orfévre. Unless I have some luck at lansquenet, I shall have to come out soon and join you.' Hem! I did you an injustice, Louvois. I see that you have *not* looked over these letters."

The minister had sat with a face which was the colour of beetroot, and eyes which projected from his head, while this epistle was being read. It was with relief that he came to the end of it, for at least there was nothing which compromised him seriously with the king; but every nerve in his great body tingled with rage as he thought of the way in which his young scapegrace had alluded to him. "The viper!" he cried. "Oh, the foul snake in the grass! I will make him curse the day that he was born."

"Tut, tut, Louvois!" said the king. "You are a man who has seen much of life, and you should be a philosopher. Hot-headed youth says ever more than it means. Think no more of the matter. But what have we here? A letter from my dearest girl to her husband, the Prince de Conti. I would pick her writing out of a thousand. Ah, dear soul, she little thought that my eyes would see her artless prattle! Why should I read it, since I already know every thought of her innocent heart?" He unfolded the sheet of pink scented paper with a fond smile upon his face, but it faded away as his eyes glanced down the page, and he sprang to his feet

with a snarl of anger, his hand over his heart and his eyes still glued to the paper. "Minx!" he cried, in a choking voice. "Impertinent, heartless minx! Louvois, you know what I have done for the princess. You know she has been the apple of my eye. What have I ever grudged her? What have I ever denied her?"

"You have been goodness itself, sire," said Louvois, whose own wounds smarted less now that he saw his master writhing.

"Hear what she says of me: 'Old Father Grumpy is much as usual, save that he gives a little at the knees. You remember how we used to laugh at his airs and graces! Well, he has given up all that, and though he stills struts about on great high heels, like a Landes peasant on his stilts, he has no brightness at all in his clothes. Of course, all the court follow his example, so you can imagine what a nightmare-place this is. Then this woman still keeps in favour, and her frocks are as dismal as Grumpy's coats; so when you come back we shall go into the country together, and you shall dress in red velvet, and I shall wear blue silk, and we shall have a little coloured court of our own in spite of my majestic papa.'"

Louis sank his face in his hands.

"You hear how she speaks of me, Louvois."

"It is infamous, sire; infamous!"

"She calls me names—*me*, Louvois!"

"Atrocious, sire."

"And my knees! One would think that I was an old man!"

"Scandalous. But, sire, I would beg to say that it is a case in which your Majesty's philosophy may well soften your anger. Youth is ever hot-headed, and says more than it means. Think no more of the matter."

"You speak like a fool, Louvois. The child that I have loved turns upon me, and you ask me to think no more of it. Ah, it is one more lesson that a king can trust least of all those who have his own blood in their veins. What writing is this? It is the good Cardinal de

Bouillon. One may not have faith in one's own kin, but this sainted man loves me, not only because I have placed him where he is, but because it is his nature to look up to and love those whom God has placed above him. I will read you his letter, Louvois, to show you that there is still such a thing as loyalty and gratitude in France. 'My dear Prince de la Roche-sur-Yon.' Ah, it is to him he writes. 'I promised when you left that I would let you know from time to time how things were going at court, as you consulted me about bringing your daughter up from Anjou, in the hope that she might catch the king's fancy.' What! What! Louvois! What villainy is this? 'The sultan goes from bad to worse. The Fontanges was at least the prettiest woman in France, though between ourselves there was just a shade too much of the red in her hair—an excellent colour in a cardinal's gown, my dear duke, but nothing brighter than chestnut is permissible in a lady. The Montespan, too, was a fine woman in her day, but fancy his picking up now with a widow who is older than himself, a woman, too, who does not even try to make herself attractive, but kneels at her *prie-dieu* or works at her tapestry from morning to night. They say that December and May make a bad match, but my own opinion is that two Novembers make an even worse one.' Louvois! Louvois! I can read no more! Have you a *lettre de cachet?*"

"There is one here, sire."

"For the Bastille?"

"No; for Vincennes."

"That will do very well. Fill it up, Louvois! Put this villain's name in it! Let him be arrested to-night, and taken there in his own calèche. The shameless, ungrateful, foul-mouthed villain! Why did you bring me these letters, Louvois? Oh, why did you yield to my foolish whim? My God, is there no truth, or honour, or loyalty in the world!" He stamped his feet, and shook his clenched hands in the air in the frenzy of his anger and disappointment.

"Shall I, then, put back the others?" asked Louvois eagerly. He had been on thorns since the king had begun to read them, not knowing what disclosures might come next.

"Put them back, but keep the bag."

"Both bags?"

"Ah! I had forgot the other one. Perhaps if I have hypocrites around me, I have at least some honest subjects at a distance. Let us take one haphazard. Who is this from? Ah! it is from the Duc de la Rochefoucauld. He has ever seemed to be a modest and dutiful young man. What has he to say? The Danube—Belgrade—the grand vizier—— Ah!" He gave a cry as if he had been stabbed.

"What, then, sire?" The minister had taken a step forward, for he was frightened by the expression upon the king's face.

"Take them away, Louvois! Take them away!" he cried, pushing the pile of papers away from him. "I would that I had never seen them! I will look at them no more! He gibes even at my courage, I who was in the trenches when he was in his cradle! 'This war would not suit the king,' he says. 'For there are battles, and none of the nice little safe sieges which are so dear to him.' By God, he shall pay to me with his head for that jest! Aye, Louvois, it will be a dear gibe to him. But take them away. I have seen as much as I can bear."

The minister was thrusting them back into the bag when suddenly his eye caught the bold, clear writing of Madame de Maintenon upon one of the letters. Some demon whispered to him that here was a weapon which had been placed in his hands, with which he might strike one whose very name filled him with jealousy and hatred. Had she been guilty of some indiscretion in this note, then he might even now, at this last hour, turn the king's heart against her. He was an astute man, and in an instant he had seen his chance and grasped it.

"Ha!" said he, "it was hardly necessary to open this one."

"Which, Louvois? Whose is it?"

The minister pushed forward the letter, and Louis started as his eyes fell upon it.

"Madame's writing!" he gasped.

"Yes; it is to her nephew in Germany."

Louis took it in his hand. Then, with a sudden motion, he threw it down among the others, and then yet again his hand stole towards it. His face was grey and haggard, and beads of moisture had broken out upon his brow. If this too were to prove to be as the others! He was shaken to the soul at the very thought. Twice he tried to pluck it out, and twice his trembling fingers fumbled with the paper. Then he tossed it over to Louvois. "Read it to me," said he.

The minister opened the letter out and flattened it upon the table, with a malicious light dancing in his eyes, which might have cost him his position had the king but read it aright.

"'My dear nephew,'" he read, "'what you ask me in your last is absolutely impossible. I have never abused the king's favour so far as to ask for any profit for myself, and I should be equally sorry to solicit any advance for my relatives. No one would rejoice more than I to see you rise to be major in your regiment, but your valour and your loyalty must be the cause, and you must not hope to do it through any word of mine. To serve such a man as the king is its own reward, and I am sure that whether you remain a cornet or rise to some higher rank, you will be equally zealous in his cause. He is surrounded, unhappily, by many base parasites. Some of these are mere fools, like Lauzun; others are knaves, like the late Fouquet; and some seem to be both fools and knaves, like Louvois, the minister of war.'" Here the reader choked with rage, and sat gurgling and drumming his fingers upon the table.

"Go on, Louvois, go on," said Louis, smiling up at the ceiling.

"'These are the clouds which surround the sun, my

dear nephew ; but the sun is, believe me, shining brightly behind them. For years I have known that noble nature as few others can know it, and I can tell you that his virtues are his own, but that if ever his glory is for an instant dimmed over, it is because his kindness of heart has allowed him to be swayed by those who are about him. We hope soon to see you back at Versailles, staggering under the weight of your laurels. Meanwhile accept my love and every wish for your speedy promotion, although it cannot be obtained in the way which you suggest.' "

" Ah," cried the king, his love shining in his eyes, " how could I for an instant doubt her ! And yet I had been so shaken by the others ! Françoise is as true as steel. Was it not a beautiful letter, Louvois ? "

" Madame is a very clever woman," said the minister evasively.

" And such a reader of hearts ! Has she not seen my character aright ? "

" At least she has not read mine, sire."

There was a tap at the door, and Bontems peeped in. " The archbishop has arrived, sire."

" Very well, Bontems. Ask madame to be so good as to step this way. And order the witnesses to assemble in the anteroom."

As the valet hastened away, Louis turned to his minister : " I wish you to be one of the witnesses, Louvois."

" To what, sire ? "

" To my marriage."

The minister started. " What, sire ! Already ? "

" Now, Louvois ; within five minutes."

" Very good, sire." The unhappy courtier strove hard to assume a more festive manner ; but the night had been full of vexation to him, and to be condemned to assist in making this woman the king's wife was the most bitter drop of all.

" Put these letters away, Louvois. The last one has made up for all the rest. But these rascals shall smart

for it, all the same. By-the-way, there is that young nephew to whom madame wrote. Gérard d'Aubigny is his name, is it not ? "

" Yes, sire."

" Make him out a colonel's commission, and give him the next vacancy, Louvois."

" A colonel, sire ! Why, he is not yet twenty."

" Aye, Louvois. Pray, am I the chief of the army, or are you ? Take care, Louvois ! I have warned you once before. I tell you, man, that if I choose to promote one of my jack-boots to be the head of a brigade, you shall not hesitate to make out the papers. Now go into the ante-room, and wait with the other witnesses until you are wanted."

There had meanwhile been busy goings-on in the small room where the red lamp burned in front of the Virgin. Françoise de Maintenon stood in the centre, a little flush of excitement on her cheeks, and an unwonted light in her placid grey eyes. She was clad in a dress of shining white brocade, trimmed and slashed with silver serge, and fringed at the throat and arms with costly point-lace. Three women, grouped around her, rose and stooped and swayed, putting a touch here and a touch there, gathering in, looping up and altering until all was to their taste.

" There ! " said the head dressmaker, giving a final pat to a rosette of grey silk ; " I think that will do, your Majes—that is to say, madame."

The lady smiled at the adroit slip of the courtier dress-maker.

" My tastes lean little towards dress," said she, " yet I would fain look as he would wish me to look."

" Ah, it is easy to dress madame. Madame has a figure. Madame has a carriage. What costume would not look well with such a neck and waist and arm to set it off ? But, ah, madame, what are we to do when we have to make the figure as well as the dress ? There was the Princess Charlotte Elizabeth. It was but yesterday that we cut her gown. She was short, madame, but

thick. Oh, it is incredible how thick she was! She uses more cloth than madame, though she is two hand-breadths shorter. Ah, I am sure that the good God never meant people to be as thick as that. But then, of course, she is Bavarian and not French."

But madame was paying little heed to the gossip of the dressmaker. Her eyes were fixed upon the statue in the corner, and her lips were moving in prayer—prayer that she might be worthy of this great destiny which had come so suddenly upon her, a poor governess; that she might walk straight among the pitfalls which surrounded her upon every side; that this night's work might bring a blessing upon France and upon the man whom she loved. There came a discreet tap at the door to break in upon her prayer.

"It is Bontems, madame," said Mademoiselle Nanon. "He says that the king is ready."

"Then we shall not keep him waiting. Come, mademoiselle, and may God shed His blessing upon what we are about to do!"

The little party assembled in the king's anteroom, and started from there to the private chapel. In front walked the portly bishop, clad in a green vestment, puffed out with the importance of the function, his missal in his hand, and his fingers between the pages at the service *de matrimoniis*. Beside him strode his almoner, and two little servitors of the court in crimson cassocks bearing lighted torches. The king and Madame de Maintenon walked side by side, she quiet and composed, with gentle bearing and downcast eyes, he with a flush on his dark cheeks, and a nervous, furtive look in his eyes, like a man who knows that he is in the midst of one of the great crises of his life. Behind them, in solemn silence, followed a little group of chosen witnesses, the lean, silent Père La Chaise, Louvois, scowling heavily at the bride, the Marquis de Charmarante, Bontems and Mademoiselle Nanon.

The torches shed a strong yellow light upon this small

band as they advanced slowly through the corridors and *salons* which led to the chapel, and they threw a garish glare upon the painted walls and ceilings, flashing back from gold-work and from mirror, but leaving long trailing shadows in the corners. The king glanced nervously at these black recesses, and at the portraits of his ancestors and relations which lined the walls. As he passed that of his late queen, Maria Theresa, he started and gasped with horror.

"My God!" he whispered; "she frowned and spat at me!"

Madame laid her cool hand upon his wrist. "It is nothing, sire," she murmured, in her soothing voice. "It was but the light flickering over the picture."

Her words had their usual effect upon him. The startled look died away from his eyes, and taking her hand in his he walked resolutely forwards. A minute later they were before the altar, and the words were being read which should bind them for ever together. As they turned away again, her new ring blazing upon her finger, there was a buzz of congratulation around her. The king only said nothing, but he looked at her, and she had no wish that he should say more. She was still calm and pale, but the blood throbbed in her temples. "You are Queen of France, now," it seemed to be humming—"queen, queen, queen!"

But a sudden shadow had fallen across her, and a low voice was in her ear. "Remember your promise to the Church," it whispered. She started, and turned to see the pale, eager face of the Jesuit beside her.

"Your hand has turned cold, Françoise," said Louis. "Let us go, dearest. We have been too long in this dismal church."

## 20. *The Two Françoises*

MADAME DE MONTESPAN had retired to rest, easy in her mind, after receiving the message from her brother. She knew Louis as few others knew him, and she was well aware of that obstinacy in trifles which was one of his characteristics. If he had said that he would be married by the archbishop, then the archbishop it must be ; to-night, at least, there should be no marriage. To-morrow was a new day, and if it did not shake the king's plans, then indeed she must have lost her wit as well as her beauty.

She dressed herself with care in the morning, putting on her powder, her little touch of rouge, her one patch near the dimple of her cheek, her loose robe of violet velvet, and her casconet of pearls with all the solicitude of a warrior who is bracing on his arms for a life and death contest. No news had come to her of the great event of the previous night, although the court already rang with it, for her haughtiness and her bitter tongue had left her without a friend or intimate. She rose, therefore, in the best of spirits, with her mind set on the one question as to how best she should gain an audience with the king.

She was still in her boudoir putting the last touches to her toilet when her page announced to her that the king was waiting in her *salon*. Madame de Montespan could hardly believe in such good fortune. She had racked her brain all morning as to how she should win her way to him, and here he was waiting for her. With a last glance at the mirror, she hastened to meet him.

He was standing with his back turned, looking up at one of Snyders's paintings, when she entered ; but as she closed the door, he turned and took two steps towards her. She had run forward with a pretty little cry of joy, her white arms outstretched, and love shining on her face ; but he put out his hand, gently and yet with decision, with a gesture which checked her approach. Her hands

dropped to her side, her lip trembled, and she stood looking at him with her grief and her fears all speaking loudly from her eyes. There was a look upon his features which she had never seen before, and already something was whispering at the back of her soul that to-day at least his spirit was stronger than her own.

"You are angry with me again," she cried.

He had come with every intention of beginning the interview by telling her bluntly of his marriage; but now, as he looked upon her beauty and her love, he felt that it would have been less brutal to strike her down at his feet. Let someone else tell her, then. She would know soon enough. Besides, there would be less chance then of a scene, which was a thing abhorrent to his soul. His task was, in any case, quite difficult enough. All this ran swiftly through his mind, and she as swiftly read it off in the brown eyes which gazed at her.

"You have something you came to say, and now you have not the heart to say it. God bless the kindly heart which checks the cruel tongue!"

"No, no, madame," said Louis; "I would not be cruel. I cannot forget that my life has been brightened and my court made brilliant during all these years by your wit and your beauty. But times change, madame, and I owe a duty to the world which overrides my own personal inclinations. For every reason I think that it is best that we should arrange in the way which we discussed the other day, and that you should withdraw yourself from the court."

"Withdraw, sire! For how long?"

"It must be a permanent withdrawal, madame."

She stood with clenched hands and a pale face staring at him.

"I need not say that I shall make your retirement a happy one as far as in me lies. Your allowance shall be fixed by yourself; a palace shall be erected for you in whatever part of France you may prefer, provided that it is twenty miles from Paris. An estate also——"

"Oh, sire, how can you think that such things as these would compensate me for the loss of your love?" Her heart had turned to lead within her breast. Had he spoken hotly and angrily she might have hoped to turn him as she had done before; but this gentle and yet firm bearing was new to him, and she felt that all her arts were vain against it. His coolness enraged her, and yet she strove to choke down her passion and to preserve the humble attitude which was least natural to her haughty and vehement spirit; but soon the effort became too much for her.

"Madame," said he, "I have thought well over this matter, and it must be as I say. There is no other way at all. Since we must part, the parting had best be short and sharp. Believe me, it is no pleasant matter for me either. I have ordered your brother to have his carriage at the postern at nine o'clock, for I thought that perhaps you would wish to retire after nightfall."

"To hide my shame from a laughing court! It was thoughtful of you, sire. And yet, perhaps, this too was a duty, since we hear so much of duties nowadays, for who was it but you——"

"I know, madame, I know. I confess it. I have wronged you deeply. Believe me that every atonement which is in my power shall be made. Nay, do not look so angrily at me, I beg. Let our last sight of each other be one which may leave a pleasant memory behind it."

"A pleasant memory!" All the gentleness and humility had fallen from her now, and her voice had the hard ring of contempt and of anger. "A pleasant memory! It may well be pleasant to you, who are released from the woman whom you ruined, who can turn now to another without any pale face to be seen within the *salons* of your court to remind you of your perfidy. But to me, pining in some lonely country house, spurned by my husband, despised by my family, the scorn and jest of France, far from all which gave a charm to life, far from the man for whose love I have

sacrificed everything—this will be a very pleasant memory to me, you may be sure ! ”

The king's eyes had caught the angry gleam which shot from hers, and yet he strove hard to set a curb upon his temper. When such a matter had to be discussed between the proudest man and the haughtiest woman in all France, one or the other must yield a point He felt that it was for him to do so, and yet it did not come kindly to his imperious nature.

“ There is nothing to be gained, madame,” said he, “ by using words which are neither seemly for your tongue nor for my ears. You will do me the justice to confess that where I might command I am now entreating, and that instead of ordering you as my subject, I am persuading you as my friend.”

“ Oh, you show too much consideration, sire ! Our relations of twenty years or so can scarce suffice to explain such forbearance from you. I should indeed be grateful that you have not set your archers of the guard upon me, or marched me from the palace between a file of your mousqueteers. Sire, how can I thank you for this forbearance ? ” She courtesied low, with her face set in a mocking smile.

“ Your words are bitter, madame.”

“ My heart is bitter, sire.”

“ Nay, Françoise, be reasonable, I implore you. We have both left our youth behind.”

“ The allusion to my years comes gracefully from your lips.”

“ Ah, you distort my words. Then I shall say no more. You may not see me again, madame. Is there no question which you would wish to ask me before I go ? ”

“ Good God ! ” she cried ; “ is this a man ? Has it a heart ? Are these the lips which have told me so often that he loved me ? Are these the eyes which have looked so fondly into mine ? Can you then thrust away a woman whose life has been yours as you put away the St. Germain palace when a more showy one was ready

for you? And this is the end of all those vows, those sweet whispers, those persuasions, those promises—— This!"

"Nay, madame, this is painful to both of us."

"Pain! Where is the pain in your face? I see anger in it because I have dared to speak truth; I see joy in it because you feel that your vile task is done. But where is the pain? Ah, when I am gone all will be so easy to you —will it not? You can go back then to your governness——"

"Madame!"

"Yes, yes, you cannot frighten me! What do I care for all that you can do? But I know all. Do not think that I am blind. And so you would even have married her! You, the descendant of St. Louis, and she the Scarron widow, the poor drudge whom in charity I took into my household! Ah, how your courtiers will smile! how the little poets will scribble! how the wits will whisper! You do not hear of these things, of course, but they are a little painful for your friends."

"My patience can bear no more," cried the king furiously. "I leave you, madame, and for ever."

But her fury had swept all fear and discretion from her mind. She stepped between the door and him, her face flushed, her eyes blazing, her face thrust a little forward, one small white satin slipper tapping upon the carpet.

"You are in haste, sire! She is waiting for you, doubtless."

"Let me pass, madame."

"But it was a disappointment last night, was it not, my poor sire? Ah, and for the governess, what a blow! Great heaven, what a blow! No archbishop! No marriage! All the pretty plan gone wrong! Was it not cruel?"

Louis gazed at the beautiful furious face in bewilderment, and it flashed across his mind that perhaps her grief had turned her brain. What else could be the meaning of this wild talk of the archbishop and the dis-

appointment? It would be unworthy of him to speak harshly to one who was so afflicted. He must soothe her, and, above all, he must get away from her.

"You have had the keeping of a good many of my family jewels," said he. "I beg that you will still retain them as a small sign of my regard."

He had hoped to please her and to calm her, but in an instant she was over at her treasure-cupboard hurling double handfuls of precious stones down at his feet. They clinked and rattled, the little pellets of red and yellow and green, rolling, glinting over the floor and rapping up against the oak panels at the base of the walls.

"They will do for the governess if the archbishop comes at last," she cried.

He was more convinced than ever that she had lost her wits. A thought struck him by which he might appeal to all that was softer and more gentle in her nature. He stepped swiftly to the door, pushed it half open, and gave a whispered order. A youth with long golden hair waving down over his black velvet doublet entered the room. It was her youngest son, the Count of Toulouse.

"I thought that you would wish to bid him farewell," said Louis.

She stood staring as though unable to realise the significance of his words. Then it was borne suddenly in upon her that her children as well as her lover were to be taken from her, that this other woman should see them and speak with them and win their love while she was far away. All that was evil and bitter in the woman flashed suddenly up in her, until for the instant she was what the king had thought her. If her son was not for her, then he should be for none. A jewelled knife lay among her treasures, ready to her hand. She caught it up and rushed at the cowering lad. Louis screamed and ran forward to stop her; but another had been swifter than he. A woman had darted through the open door, and had caught the upraised wrist. There was a moment's struggle, two queenly figures swayed and strained, and

the knife dropped between their feet. The frightened Louis caught it up, and seizing his little son by the wrist, he rushed from the apartment. Françoise de Montespan staggered back against the ottoman to find herself confronted by the steady eyes and set face of that other Françoise, the woman whose presence fell like a shadow at every turn of her life.

"I have saved you, madame, from doing that which you would have been the first to bewail."

"Saved me! It is you who have driven me to this!"

The fallen favourite leaned against the high back of the ottoman, her hands resting behind her upon the curve of the velvet. Her lids were half closed on her flashing eyes, and her lips just parted to show a gleam of her white teeth. Here was the true Françoise de Montespan, a feline creature crouching for a spring, very far from that humble and soft-spoken Françoise who had won the king back by her gentle words. Madame de Maintenon's hand had been cut in the struggle, and the blood was dripping down from the end of her fingers, but neither woman had time to spare a thought upon that. Her firm grey eyes were fixed upon her former rival as one fixes them upon some weak and treacherous creature who may be dominated by a stronger will.

"Yes, it is you who have driven me to this—you, whom I picked up when you were hard pressed for a crust of bread or a cup of sour wine. What had you? You had nothing—nothing except a name which was a laughing-stock. And what did I give you? I gave you everything. You know that I gave you everything. Money, position, the entrance to the court. You had them all from me. And now you mock me!"

"Madame, I do not mock you. I pity you from the bottom of my heart."

"Pity? Ha! ha! A Mortemart is pitied by the widow Scarron! Your pity may go where your gratitude is, and where your character is. We shall be troubled with it no longer then."

"Your words do not pain me."

"I can believe that you are not sensitive."

"Not when my conscience is at ease."

"Ah! it has not troubled you, then?"

"Not upon this point, madame."

"My God! How terrible must those other points have been!"

"I have never had an evil thought towards you."

"None towards me? Oh, woman, woman!"

"What have I done, then? The king came to my room to see the children taught. He stayed. He talked. He asked my opinion on this and that. Could I be silent? or could I say other than what I thought?"

"You turned him against me!"

"I should be proud indeed if I thought that I had turned him to virtue."

"The word comes well from your lips."

"I would that I heard it upon yours."

"And so, by your own confession, you stole the king's love from me, most virtuous of widows!"

"I had all gratitude and kindly thought for you. You have, as you have so often reminded me, been my benefactress. It was not necessary for you to say it, for I had never for an instant forgotten it. Yet if the king has asked me what I thought, I will not deny to you that I have said that sin is sin, and that he would be a worthier man if he shook off the guilty bonds which held him."

"Or exchanged them for others."

"For those of duty."

"Pah! Your hypocrisy sickens me! If you pretend to be a nun, why are you not where the nuns are? You would have the best of two worlds—would you not?—have all that the court can give, and yet ape the manners of the cloister. But you need not do it with me! I know you as your inmost heart knows you. I was honest, and what I did, I did before the world. You, behind your priests and your directors and your *prie-dieus* and

your missals—do you think that you deceive me, as you deceive others ? ”

Her antagonist's grey eyes sparkled for the first time, and she took a quick step forward, with one white hand half lifted in rebuke.

“ You may speak as you will of me,” said she. “ To me it is no more than the foolish paroquet that chatters in your anteroom. But do not touch upon things which are sacred. Ah, if you would but raise your own thoughts to such things—if you would but turn them inwards, and see, before it is too late, how vile and foul is this life which you have led ! What might you not have done ? His soul was in your hands like clay for the potter. If you had raised him up, if you had led him on the higher path, if you had brought out all that was noble and good within him, how your name would have been loved and blessed, from the château to the cottage ! But no ; you dragged him down ; you wasted his youth ; you drew him from his wife ; you marred his manhood. A crime in one so high begets a thousand others in those who look to him for an example ; and all, all are upon your soul. Take heed, madame, for God's sake take heed ere it be too late ! For all your beauty, there can be for you, as for me, a few short years of life. Then, when that brown hair is white, when that white cheek is sunken, when that bright eye is dimmed—ah, then God pity the sin-stained soul of Françoise de Montespan ! ”

Her rival had sunk her head for the moment before the solemn words and the beautiful eyes. For an instant she stood silent, cowed for the first time in all her life ; but then the mocking, defiant spirit came back to her, and she glanced up with a curling lip.

“ I am already provided with a spiritual director, thank you,” said she. “ Oh, madame, you must not think to throw dust in my eyes ! I know you, and know you well ! ”

“ On the contrary, you seem to know less than I had expected. If you know me so well, pray what am I ? ”

All her rival's bitterness and hatred rang in the tones of her answer. " You are," said she, " the governess of my children, and the secret mistress of the king."

" You are mistaken," answered Madame de Maintenon serenely. " I am the governess of your children, and I am the king's wife."

## 21. *The Man in the Calèche*

OFTEN had De Montespan feigned a faint in the days when she wished to disarm the anger of the king. So she had drawn his arms round her, and won the pity which is the twin sister of love. But now she knew what it was to have the senses struck out of her by a word. She could not doubt the truth of what she heard. There was that in her rival's face, in her steady eye, in her quiet voice, which carried absolute conviction with it. She stood stunned for an instant, panting, her outstretched hands feeling at the air, her defiant eyes dulling and glazing. Then, with a short sharp cry, the wail of one who has fought hard and yet knows that she can fight no more, her proud head drooped, and she fell forward senseless at the feet of her rival.

Madame de Maintenon stooped and raised her up in her strong white arms. There was true grief and pity in her eyes as she looked down at the snow-pale face which lay against her bosom, all the bitterness and pride gone out of it, and nothing left save the tear which sparkled under the dark lashes, and the petulant droop of the lip, like that of a child which had wept itself to sleep. She laid her on the ottoman and placed a silken cushion under her head. Then she gathered together and put back into the open cupboard all the jewels which were scattered about the carpet. Having locked it, and placed the key on a table where its owner's eye would readily fall upon it, she struck a gong, which summoned the little black page.

" Your mistress is indisposed," said she. " Go and

bring her maids to her." And so, having done all that lay with her to do, she turned away from the great silent room, where, amid the velvet and the gilding, her beautiful rival lay like a crushed flower, helpless and hopeless.

Helpless enough, for what could she do ? and hopeless too, for how could fortune aid her ? The instant that her senses had come back to her she had sent away her waiting-women, and lay with clasped hands and a drawn face planning out her own weary future. She must go ; that was certain. Not merely because it was the king's order, but because only misery and mockery remained for her now in the palace where she had reigned supreme. It was true that she had held her position against the queen before, but all her hatred could not blind her to the fact that her rival was a very different woman to poor meek little Maria Theresa. No ; her spirit was broken at last. She must accept defeat, and she must go.

She rose from the couch, feeling that she had aged ten years in an hour. There was much to be done, and little time in which to do it. She had cast down her jewels when the king had spoken as though they would atone for the loss of his love ; but now that the love was gone, there was no reason why the jewels should be lost too. If she had ceased to be the most powerful, she might still be the richest woman in France. There was her pension, of course. That would be a munificent one, for Louis was always generous. And then there was all the spoil which she had collected during these long years, the jewels, the pearls, the gold, the vases, the pictures, the crucifixes, the watches, the trinkets—together they represented many millions of livres. With her own hands she packed away the more precious and portable of them, while she arranged with her brother for the safe-keeping of the others. All day she was at work in a mood of feverish energy, doing anything and everything which might distract her thoughts from her own defeat and her rival's victory. By evening all was ready, and she had arranged

that her property should be sent after her to Petit Bourg, to which castle she intended to retire.

It wanted half an hour of the time fixed for her departure, when a young cavalier, whose face was strange to her, was ushered into the room.

He came with a message from her brother.

"Monsieur de Vivonne regrets, madame, that the rumour of your departure has got abroad among the court."

"What do I care for that, monsieur?" she retorted, with all her old spirit.

"He says, madame, that the courtiers may assemble at the west gate to see you go; that Madame de Neuilly will be there, and the Duchesse de Chambord, and Mademoiselle de Rohan, and——"

The lady shrank with horror at the thought of such an ordeal. To drive away from the palace, where she had been more than queen, under the scornful eyes and bitter gibes of so many personal enemies! After all the humiliations of the day, that would be the crowning cup of sorrow. Her nerve was broken. She could not face it.

"Tell my brother, monsieur, that I should be much obliged if he would make fresh arrangements, by which my departure might be private."

"He bade me say that he had done so, madame."

"Ah! at what hour, then?"

"Now. As soon as possible."

"I am ready. At the west gate, then?"

"No; at the east. The carriage waits."

"And where is my brother?"

"We are to pick him up at the park gate."

"And why that?"

"Because he is watched; and were he seen beside the carriage, all would be known."

"Very good. Then, monsieur, if you will take my cloak and this casket we may start at once."

They made their way by a circuitous route through the less-used corridors, she hurrying on like a guilty creature,

a hood drawn over her face, and her heart in a flutter at every stray footfall. But fortune stood her friend. She met no one, and soon found herself at the eastern postern-gate. A couple of phlegmatic Swiss guardsmen leaned upon their muskets upon either side, and the lamp above shone upon the carriage which awaited her. The door was open, and a tall cavalier swathed in a black cloak handed her into it. He then took the seat opposite to her, slammed the door, and the calèche rattled away down the main drive.

It had not surprised her that this man should join her inside the coach, for it was usual to have a guard there, and he was doubtless taking the place which her brother would afterwards occupy. That was all natural enough. But when ten minutes passed by, and he had neither moved nor spoken, she peered at him through the gloom with some curiosity. In the glance which she had of him, as he handed her in, she had seen that he was dressed like a gentleman, and there was that in his bow and wave as he did it which told her experienced senses that he was a man of courtly manners. But courtiers, as she had known them, were gallant and garrulous, and this man was so very quiet and still. Again she strained her eyes through the gloom. His hat was pulled down and his cloak was still drawn across his mouth, but from out of the shadow she seemed to get a glimpse of two eyes which peered at her even as she did at him.

At last the silence impressed her with a vague uneasiness. It was time to bring it to an end.

" Surely, monsieur, we have passed the park gate where we were to pick up my brother."

Her companion neither answered nor moved. She thought that perhaps the rumble of the heavy calèche had drowned her voice.

" I say, monsieur," she repeated, leaning forward, " that we have passed the place where we were to meet Monsieur de Vivonne."

He took no notice.

" Monsieur," she cried, " I again remark that we have passed the gates."

There was no answer.

A thrill ran through her nerves. Who or what could he be, this silent man ? Then suddenly it struck her that he might be dumb.

" Perhaps monsieur is afflicted," she said. " Perhaps monsieur cannot speak. If that be the cause of your silence, will you raise your hand, and I shall understand." He sat rigid and silent.

Then a sudden mad fear came upon her, shut up in the dark with this dreadful voiceless thing. She screamed in her terror, and strove to pull down the window and open the door. But a grip of steel closed suddenly round her wrist and forced her back into her seat. And yet the man's body had not moved, and there was no sound save the lurching and rasping of the carriage and the clatter of the flying horses. They were already out on the country roads far beyond Versailles. It was darker than before, heavy clouds had banked over the heavens, and the rumbling of thunder was heard low down on the horizon.

The lady lay back panting upon the leather cushions of the carriage. She was a brave woman, and yet this sudden strange horror coming upon her at the moment when she was weakest had shaken her to the soul. She crouched in the corner, staring across with eyes which were dilated with terror at the figure on the other side. If he would but say something ! Any revelation, any menace, was better than this silence. It was so dark now that she could hardly see his vague outline, and every instant, as the storm gathered, it became still darker. The wind was blowing in little short angry puffs, and still there was that far-off rattle and rumble. Again the strain of the silence was unbearable. She must break it at any cost.

" Sir," said she, " there is some mistake here. I do not know by what right you prevent me from pulling down the window and giving my directions to the coachman."

He said nothing.

"I repeat, sir, that there is some mistake. This is the carriage of my brother, Monsieur de Vivonne, and he is not a man who will allow his sister to be treated uncourteously."

A few heavy drops of rain splashed against one window. The clouds were lower and denser. She had quite lost sight of that motionless figure, but it was all the more terrible to her now that it was unseen. She screamed with sheer terror, but her scream availed no more than her words.

"Sir," she cried, clutching forward with her hands and grasping his sleeve, "you frighten me. You terrify me. I have never harmed you. Why should you wish to hurt an unfortunate woman? Oh, speak to me; for God's sake, speak!"

Still the patter of rain upon the window, and no other sound save her own sharp breathing.

"Perhaps you do not know who I am!" she continued, endeavouring to assume her usual tone of command, and talking now to an absolute and impenetrable darkness. "You may learn when it is too late that you have chosen the wrong person for this pleasantry. I am the Marquise de Montespan, and I am not one who forgets a slight. If you know anything of the court, you must know that my word has some weight with the king. You may carry me away in this carriage, but I am not a person who can disappear without speedy inquiry, and speedy vengeance if I have been wronged. If you would—— Oh, Jesus! Have mercy!"

A livid flash of lightning had burst from the heart of the cloud, and, for an instant, the whole countryside and the interior of the calèche were as light as day. The man's face was within a hand's breadth of her own, his mouth wide open, his eyes mere shining slits, convulsed with silent merriment. Every detail flashed out clear in that vivid light—his red quivering tongue, the lighter pink beneath it, the broad white teeth, the short brown beard cut into a peak and bristling forward.

But it was not the sudden flash, it was not the laughing, cruel face, which shot an ice-cold shudder through Françoise de Montespan. It was that, of all men upon earth, this was he whom she most dreaded, and whom she had least thought to see.

"Maurice!" she screamed. "Maurice! it is you!"

"Yes, little wifie, it is I. We are restored to each other's arms, you see, after this interval."

"Oh, Maurice, how you have frightened me! How could you be so cruel? Why would you not speak to me?"

"Because it was so sweet to sit in silence and to think that I really had you to myself after all these years, with none to come between. Ah, little wifie, I have often longed for this hour."

"I have wronged you, Maurice; I have wronged you! Forgive me!"

"We do not forgive in our family, my darling Françoise. Is it not like old days to find ourselves driving together? And in this carriage, too. It is the very one which bore us back from the cathedral where you made your vows so prettily. I sat as I sit now, and you sat there, and I took your hand like this, and I pressed it, and——"

"Oh, villain, you have twisted my wrist! You have broken my arm!"

"Oh, surely not, my little wifie! And then you remember that, as you told me how truly you would love me, I leaned forward to your lips, and——"

"Oh, help! Brute, you have cut my mouth! You have struck me with your ring."

"Struck you! Now who would have thought that spring day when we planned out our futures, that this also was in the future waiting for me and you? And this! and this!"

He struck savagely at her face in the darkness. She threw herself down, her head pressed against the cushions. With the strength and fury of a maniac he showered his blows above her, thudding upon the leather or crashing

upon the wood-work, heedless of his own splintered hands.

"So I have silenced you," said he at last. "I have stopped your words with my kisses before now. But the world goes on, Françoise, and times change, and women grow false, and men grow stern."

"You may kill me if you will," she moaned.

"I will," said he simply.

Still the carriage flew along, jolting and staggering in the deeply-rutted country roads. The storm had passed, but the growl of the thunder and the far-off glint of a lightning-flash were to be heard and seen on the other side of the heavens. The moon shone out with its clear-cold light, silvering the broad, hedgeless, poplar-fringed plains, and shining through the window of the carriage upon the crouching figure and her terrible companion. He leaned back now, his arms folded upon his chest, his eyes gloating upon the abject misery of the woman who had wronged him.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked at last.

"To Portillac, my little wifie."

"And why there? What would you do to me?"

"I would silence that little lying tongue for ever. It shall deceive no more men."

"You would murder me?"

"If you call it that."

"You have a stone for a heart."

"My other was given to a woman."

"Oh, my sins are indeed punished."

"Rest assured that they will be."

"Can I do nothing to atone?"

"I will see that you atone."

"You have a sword by your side, Maurice. Why do you not kill me, then, if you are so bitter against me? Why do you not pass it through my heart?"

"Rest assured that I would have done so had I not an excellent reason."

"Why, then?"

"I will tell you. At Portillac I have the right of the high justice, the middle and the low. I am seigneur there, and can try, condemn and execute. It is my lawful privilege. This pitiful king will not even know how to avenge you, for the right is mine, and he cannot gainsay it without making an enemy of every seigneur in France."

He opened his mouth again and laughed at his own device, while she, shivering in every limb, turned away from his cruel face and glowing eyes, and buried her face in her hands. Once more she prayed to God to forgive her for her poor sinful life. So they whirled through the night behind the clattering horses, the husband and the wife, saying nothing, but with hatred and fear raging in their hearts, until a brazier fire shone down upon them from the angle of a keep, and the shadow of the huge pile loomed vaguely up in front of them in the darkness. It was the Castle of Portillac.

## 22. *The Scaffold of Portillac*

AND thus it was that Amory de Catinat and Amos Green saw from their dungeon window the midnight carriage which discharged its prisoner before their eyes. Hence, too, came that ominous planking and that strange procession in the early morning. And thus it also happened that they found themselves looking down upon Françoise de Montespan as she was led to her death, and that they heard that last piteous cry for aid at the instant when the heavy hand of the ruffian with the axe fell upon her shoulder, and she was forced down upon her knees beside the block. She shrank screaming from the dreadful, red-stained, greasy billet of wood, but the butcher heaved up his weapon, and the seigneur had taken a step forward with hand outstretched to seize the long auburn hair and to drag the dainty head down with it when suddenly he was struck motionless with astonishment, and stood with his foot advanced and his hand still

out, his mouth half open, and his eyes fixed in front of him.

And, indeed, what he had seen was enough to fill any man with amazement. Out of the small square window which faced him a man had suddenly shot head-foremost, pitching on to his outstretched hands and then bounding to his feet. Within a foot of his heels came the head of a second one, who fell more heavily than the first, and yet recovered himself as quickly. The one wore the blue coat with silver facings of the king's guard ; the second had the dark coat and clean-shaven face of a man of peace ; but each carried a short rusty iron bar in his hand. Not a word did either of them say, but the soldier took two quick steps forward and struck at the headsman while he was still poising himself for a blow at the victim. There was a thud, with a crackle like a breaking egg, and the bar flew into pieces. The headsman gave a dreadful cry, and dropped his axe, clapped his two hands to his head, and running zigzag across the scaffold, fell over, a dead man, into the courtyard beneath.

Quick as a flash De Catinat had caught up the axe, and faced De Montespan with the heavy weapon slung over his shoulder and a challenge in his eyes.

" Now ! " said he.

The seigneur had for the instant been too astounded to speak. Now he understood at least that these strangers had come between him and his prey.

" Seize these men ! " he shrieked, turning to his followers.

" One moment ! " cried De Catinat, with a voice and manner which commanded attention. " You see by my coat what I am. I am the body-servant of the king. Who touches me touches him. Have a care to yourselves. It is a dangerous game ! "

" On, you cowards ! " roared De Montespan.

But the men-at-arms hesitated, for the fear of the king was as a great shadow which hung over all France. De Catinat saw their indecision, and he followed up his advantage.

"This woman," he cried, "is the king's own favourite, and if any harm come to a lock of her hair, I tell you that there is not a living soul within this porticullis who will not die a death of torture. Fools, will you gasp out your lives upon the rack, or writhe in boiling oil, at the bidding of this madman?"

"Who are these men, Marceau?" cried the seigneur furiously.

"They are prisoners, your excellency."

"Prisoners! Whose prisoners?"

"Yours, your excellency."

"Who ordered you to detain them?"

"You did. The escort brought your signet-ring."

"I never saw the men. There is devilry in this. But they shall not beard me in my own castle, nor stand between me and my own wife. No, *par dieu!* they shall not and live! You men, Marceau, Étienne, Gilbert, Jean, Pierre, all you who have eaten my bread, on to them, I say!"

He glanced round with furious eyes, but they fell only upon hung heads and averted faces. With a hideous curse he flashed out his sword and rushed at his wife, who knelt half insensible beside the block. De Catinat sprang between them to protect her; but Marceau, the bearded seneschal, had already seized his master round the waist. With the strength of a maniac, his teeth clenched and the foam churning from the corners of his lips, De Montespan writhed round in the man's grasp, and shortening his sword, he thrust it through the brown beard and deep into the throat behind it. Marceau fell back with a choking cry, the blood bubbling from his mouth and his wound; but before his murderer could disengage his weapon, De Catinat and the American, aided by a dozen of the retainers, had dragged him down on to the scaffold, and Amos Green had pinioned him so securely that he could but move his eyes and his lips, with which he lay glaring and spitting at them. So savage were his own followers against him—for Marceau was

well loved amongst them—that, with axe and block so ready, justice might very swiftly have had her way, had not a long clear bugle call, rising and falling in a thousand little twirls and flourishes, clanged out suddenly in the still morning air. De Catinat pricked up his ears at the sound of it like a hound at the huntsman's call.

"Did you hear, Amos?"

"It was a trumpet."

"It was the guards' bugle call. You, there, hasten to the gate! Throw up the portcullis and drop the drawbridge! Stir yourselves, or even now you may suffer for your master's sins! It has been a narrow escape, Amos!"

"You may say so, friend. I saw him put out his hand to her hair, even as you sprang from the window. Another instant and he would have had her scalped. But she is a fair woman, the fairest that ever my eyes rested upon, and it is not fit that she should kneel here upon these boards." He dragged her husband's long black cloak from him, and made a pillow for the senseless woman with a tenderness and delicacy which came strangely from a man of his build and bearing.

He was still stooping over her when there came the clang of the falling bridge, and an instant later the clatter of the hoofs of a troop of cavalry, who swept with wave of plumes, toss of manes and jingle of steel into the courtyard. At the head was a tall horseman in the full dress of the guards, with a curling feather in his hat, high buff gloves, and his sword gleaming in the sunlight. He cantered forward towards the scaffold, his keen dark eyes taking in every detail of the group which awaited him there. De Catinat's face brightened at the sight of him, and he was down in an instant beside his stirrup.

"De Brissac!"

"De Catinat! Now where in the name of wonder did you come from?"

"I have been a prisoner. Tell me, De Brissac, did you leave the message in Paris?"

"Certainly I did."

"And the archbishop came?"

"He did."

"And the marriage?"

"Took place as arranged. That is why this poor woman whom I see yonder has had to leave the palace."

"I thought as much."

"I trust that no harm has come to her?"

"My friend and I were just in time to save her. Her husband lies there. He is a fiend, De Brissac."

"Very likely; but an angel might have grown bitter had he had the same treatment."

"We have him pinioned here. He has slain a man, and I have slain another."

"On my word, you have been busy."

"How did you know that we were here?"

"Nay, that is an unexpected pleasure."

"You did not come for us, then?"

"No; we came for the lady."

"And how did this fellow get hold of her?"

"Her brother was to have taken her in his carriage. Her husband learned it, and by a lying message he coaxed her into his own, which was at another door. When De Vivonne found that she did not come, and that her rooms were empty, he made inquiries, and soon learned how she had gone. De Montespan's arms had been seen on the panel, and so the king sent me here with my troop as fast as we could gallop."

"Ah, and you would have come too late had a strange chance not brought us here. I know not who it was who waylaid us, for this man seemed to know nothing of the matter. However, all that will be clearer afterwards. What is to be done now?"

"I have my own orders. Madame is to be sent to Petit Bourg, and any who are concerned in offering her violence are to be kept until the king's pleasure is known. The castle, too, must be held for the king. But you, De Catinat, you have nothing to do now?"

"Nothing, save that I would like well to ride into Paris to see that all is right with my uncle and his daughter."

"Ah, that sweet little cousin of thine! By my soul, I do not wonder that the folk know you well in the Rue St. Martin. Well, I have carried a message for you once, and you shall do as much for me now."

"With all my heart. And whither?"

"To Versailles. The king will be on fire to know how we have fared. You have the best right to tell him, since without you and your friend yonder it would have been but a sorry tale."

"I will be there in two hours."

"Have you horses?"

"Ours were slain."

"You will find some in the stables here. Pick the best, since you have lost your own in the king's service."

The advice was too good to be overlooked. De Catinat, beckoning to Amos Green, hurried away with him to the stables, while De Brissac, with a few short sharp orders, disarmed the retainers, stationed his guardsmen all over the castle, and arranged for the removal of the lady and for the custody of her husband. An hour later the two friends were riding swiftly down the country road, inhaling the sweet air, which seemed the fresher for their late experience of the dank foul vapours of their dungeon. Far behind them a little dark pinnacle jutting over a grove of trees marked the château which they had left, while on the extreme horizon to the west there came a quick shimmer and sparkle where the level rays of the early sun gleamed upon the magnificent palace which was their goal.

## 23. *The Fall of the Catinats*

TWO days after Madame de Maintenon's marriage to the king there was held within the humble walls of her little room a meeting which was destined to cause untold misery to many hundreds of thousands

of people, and yet, in the wisdom of Providence, to be an instrument in carrying French arts and French ingenuity and French sprightliness among those heavier Teutonic peoples who have been the stronger and the better ever since for the leaven which which they then received. For in history great evils have sometimes arisen from a virtue, and most beneficent results have often followed hard upon a crime.

The time had come when the Church was to claim her promise from madame, and her pale cheek and sad eyes showed how vain it had been for her to try and drown the pleadings of her tender heart by the arguments of the bigots around her. She knew the Huguenots of France. Who could know them better, seeing that she was herself from their stock, and had been brought up in their faith? She knew their patience, their nobility, their independence, their tenacity. What chance was there that they would conform to the king's wish? A few great nobles might, but the others would laugh at the galleys, the jail or even the gallows when the faith of their fathers was at stake. If their creed were no longer tolerated, then, and if they remained true to it, they must either fly from the country or spend a living death tugging at an oar or working in a chain-gang upon the roads. It was a dreadful alternative to present to a people who were so numerous that they made a small nation in themselves. And most dreadful of all that she who was of their own blood should cast her voice against them. And yet her promise had been given, and now the time had come when it must be redeemed.

The eloquent Bishop Bossuet was there, with Louvois, the minister of war, and the famous Jesuit, Father La Chaise, each piling argument upon argument to overcome the reluctance of the king. Beside them stood another priest, so thin and so pale that he might have risen from his bed of death, but with a fierce light burning in his large dark eyes, and with a terrible resolution in his drawn brows and in the set of his grim, lanky jaw. Madame

bent over her tapestry and weaved her coloured silks in silence, while the king leaned upon his hand and listened with the face of a man who knows that he is driven, and yet can hardly turn against the goads. On the low table lay a paper, with pen and ink beside it. It was the order for the revocation, and it only needed the king's signature to make it the law of the land.

" And so, father, you are of opinion that if I stamp out heresy in this fashion I shall assure my own salvation in the next world ? " he asked.

" You will have merited a reward."

" And you think so too, Monsieur Bishop ? "

" Assuredly, sire."

" And you, Abbé du Chayla ? "

The emaciated priest spoke for the first time, a tinge of colour creeping into his corpse-like cheeks, and a more lurid light in his deep-set eyes.

" I know not about assuring your salvation, sire. I think it would take very much more to do that. But there cannot be a doubt as to your damnation if you do not do it."

The king started angrily, and frowned at the speaker.

" Your words are somewhat more curt than I am accustomed to," he remarked.

" In such a matter it were cruel indeed to leave you in doubt. I say again that your soul's fate hangs upon the balance. Heresy is a mortal sin. Thousands of heretics would turn to the Church if you did but give the word. Therefore these thousands of mortal sins are all upon your soul. What hope for it then, if you do not amend ? "

" My father and my grandfather tolerated them."

" Then, without some special extension of the grace of God, your father and your grandfather are burning in hell."

" Insolent ! " The king sprang from his seat.

" Sire, I will say what I hold to be the truth were you fifty times a king. What care I for any man when I know that I speak for the King of kings ? See ; are these the limbs of one who would shrink from testifying to truth ? "

With a sudden movement he threw back the long sleeves of his gown and shot out his white fleshless arms. The bones were all knotted and bent and screwed into the most fantastic shapes. Even Louvois, the hardened man of the court, and his two brother priests, shuddered at the sight of those dreadful limbs. He raised them above his head and turned his burning eyes upwards.

"Heaven has chosen me to testify for the faith before now," said he. "I heard that blood was wanted to nourish the young Church of Siam, and so to Siam I journeyed. They tore me open; they crucified me; they wrenched and split my bones. I was left as a dead man, yet God has breathed the breath of life back into me that I may help in this great work of the regeneration of France."

"Your sufferings, father," said Louis, resuming his seat, "give you every claim, both upon the Church and upon me, who am its special champion and protector. What would you counsel, then, father, in the case of those Huguenots who refuse to change?"

"They would change," cried Du Chayla, with a drawn smile upon his ghastly face. "They must bend or they must break. What matter if they be ground to powder, if we can but build up a complete Church in the land?" His deep-set eyes glowed with ferocity, and he shook one bony hand in savage wrath above his head.

"The cruelty with which you have been used, then, has not taught you to be more tender to others."

"Tender! To heretics! No, sire, my own pains have taught me that the world and the flesh are as nothing, and that the truest charity to another is to capture his soul at all risks to his vile body. I should have these Huguenot souls, sire, though I turned France into a shambles to gain them."

Louis was evidently deeply inpressed by the fearless words and the wild earnestness of the speaker. He leaned his head upon his hand for a little time, and remained sunk in the deepest thought.

"Besides, sire," said Père La Chaise softly, "there would be little need for these stronger measures of which the good abbé speaks. As I have already remarked to you, you are so beloved in your kingdom that the mere assurance that you had expressed your will upon the subject would be enough to turn them all to the true faith."

"I wish that I could think so, father, I wish that I could think so. But what is this?"

It was his valet who had half opened the door.

"Captain de Catinat is here, who desires to see you at once, sire."

"Ask the captain to enter. Ah!" A happy thought seemed to have struck him. "We shall see what love for me will do in such a matter, for if it is anywhere to be found it must be among my own body-servants."

The guardsman had arrived that instant from his long ride, and leaving Amos Green with the horses, he had come on at once, all dusty and travel-stained, to carry his message to the king. He entered now, and stood with the quiet ease of a man who is used to such scenes, his hand raised in a salute.

"What news, captain?"

"Major de Brissac bade me tell you, sire, that he held the Castle of Portillac, that the lady is safe, and that her husband is a prisoner."

Louis and his wife exchanged a quick glance of relief.

"That is well," said he. "By the way, captain, you have served me in many ways of late, and always with success. I hear, Louvois, that De la Salle is dead of the small-pox."

"He died yesterday, sire."

"Then I desire that you make out the vacant commission of major to Monsieur de Catinat. Let me be the first to congratulate you, major, upon your promotion, though you will need to exchange the blue coat for the pearl and grey of the mousquetaires. We cannot spare you from the household, you see."

De Catinat kissed the hand which the monarch held out to him.

"May I be worthy of your kindness, sire!"

"You would do what you could to serve me, would you not?"

"My life is yours, sire."

"Very good. Then I shall put your fidelity to the proof."

"I am ready for any proof."

"It is not a very severe one. You see this paper upon the table. It is an order that all the Huguenots in my dominions shall give up their errors, under pain of banishment or captivity. Now I have hopes that there are many of my faithful subjects who are at fault in this matter, but who will abjure it when they learn that it is my clearly expressed wish that they should do so. It would be a great joy to me to find that it was so, for it would be a pain to me to use force against any man who bears the name of Frenchman. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, sire." The young man had turned deadly pale, and he shifted his feet, and opened and clasped his hands. He had faced death a dozen times and under many different forms, but never had he felt such a sinking of the heart as came over him now.

"You are yourself a Huguenot, I understand. I would gladly have you, then, as the first fruit of this great measure. Let us hear from your own lips that you, for one, are ready to follow the lead of your king in this as in other things."

The young guardsman still hesitated, though his doubts were rather as to how he should frame his reply than as to what its substance should be. He felt that in an instant Fortune had wiped out all the good turns which she had done him during his past life, and that now, far from being in her debt, he held a heavy score against her. The king arched his eyebrows and drummed his fingers impatiently as he glanced at the downcast face and dejected bearing.

"Why all this thought?" he cried. "You are a man

whom I have raised and whom I will raise. He who has a major's epaulettes at thirty may carry a marshal's bâton at fifty. Your past is mine and your future shall be no less so. What other hopes have you ? "

" I have none, sire, outside your service."

" Why this silence, then ? Why do you not give the assurance which I demand ? "

" I cannot do it, sire."

" You cannot do it ! "

" It is impossible. I should have no more peace in my mind, or respect for myself, if I knew that for the sake of position or wealth I had given up the faith of my fathers."

" Man, you are surely mad ! There is all that a man could covet upon one side, and what is there upon the other ? "

" There is my honour."

" And is it, then, a dishonour to embrace my religion ? "

" It would be a dishonour to me to embrace it for the sake of gain without believing in it."

" Then believe it."

" Alas, sire, a man cannot force himself to believe. Belief is a thing which must come to him, not he to it."

" On my word, father," said Louis, glancing with a bitter smile at his Jesuit confessor, " I shall have to pick the cadets of the household from your seminary, since my officers have turned casuists and theologians. So, for the last time, you refuse to obey my request ? "

" Oh, sire——" De Catinat took a step forward with outstretched hands and tears in his eyes.

But the king checked him with a gesture. " I desire no protestations," said he. " I judge a man by his acts. Do you abjure or not ? "

" I cannot, sire."

" You see," said Louis, turning again to the Jesuit, " it will not be as easy as you think."

" This man is obstinate, it is true, but many others will be more yielding."

The king shook his head. " I would that I knew what

to do," said he. "Madame, I know that you, at least, will ever give me the best advice. You have heard all that has been said. What do you recommend?"

She kept her eyes still fixed upon her tapestry, but her voice was firm and clear as she answered:

"You have yourself said that you are the eldest son of the Church. If the eldest son desert her, then who will do her bidding? And there is truth, too, in what the holy abbé has said. You may imperil your own soul by condoning this sin of heresy. It grows and flourishes, and if it be not rooted out now, it may choke the truth as weeds and briers choke the wheat."

"There are districts in France now," said Bossuet, "where a church is not to be seen in a day's journey, and where all the folk, from the nobles to the peasants, are of the same accursed faith. So it is in the Cévennes, where the people are as fierce and rugged as their own mountains. Heaven guard the priests who have to bring them back from their errors."

"Whom should I send on so perilous a task?" asked Louis.

The Abbé du Chayla was down in an instant upon his knees with his gaunt hands outstretched. "Send me, sire! Me!" he cried. "I have never asked a favour of you, and never will again. But I am the man who could break this people. Send me with your message to the people of the Cévennes."

"God help the people of the Cévennes!" muttered Louis as he looked with mingled respect and loathing at the emaciated face and fiery eyes of the fanatic. "Very well, abbé," he added aloud; "you shall go to the Cévennes."

Perhaps for an instant there came upon the stern priest some premonition of that dreadful morning when, as he crouched in a corner of his burning home, fifty daggers were to rasp against each other in his body. He sunk his face in his hands, and a shudder passed over his gaunt frame. Then he rose, and folding his arms, he resumed

his impassive attitude. Louis took up the pen from the table, and drew the paper towards him.

"I have the same counsel, then, from all of you," said he, "from you, bishop; from you, father; from you, madame; from you, abbé; and from you, Louvois. Well, if ill come from it, may it not be visited upon me! But what is this?"

De Catinat had taken a step forward with his hand outstretched. His ardent, impetuous nature had suddenly broken down all the barriers of caution, and he seemed for the instant to see that countless throng of men, women, and children of his own faith, all unable to say a word for themselves, and all looking to him as their champion and spokesman. He had thought little of such matters when all was well, but now, when danger threatened, the deeper side of his nature was moved, and he felt how light a thing is life and fortune when weighed against a great abiding cause and principle.

"Do not sign it, sire," he cried. "You will live to wish that your hand had withered ere it grasped that pen. I know it, sire; I am sure of it. Consider all these helpless folk—the little children, the young girls, the old and the feeble. Their creed is themselves. As well ask the leaves to change the twigs on which they grow. They could not change. At most you could but hope to turn them from honest folk into hypocrites. And why should you do it? They honour you. They love you. They harm none. They are proud to serve in your armies, to fight for you, to work for you, to build up the greatness of your kingdom. I implore you, sire, to think again before you sign an order which will bring misery and desolation to so many."

For a moment the king had hesitated as he listened to the short abrupt sentences in which the soldier pleaded for his fellows, but his face hardened again as he remembered how even his own personal entreaty had been unable to prevail with this young dandy of the court.

"France's religion should be that of France's king,"

said he, " and if my own guardsmen thwart me in such a matter, I must find others who will be more faithful. That major's commission in the mousquetaires must go to Captain de Belmont, Louvois."

" Very good, sire."

" And De Catinat's commission may be transferred to Lieutenant Labadoyère."

" Very good, sire."

" And I am to serve you no longer ? "

" You are too dainty for my service."

De Catinat's arms fell listlessly to his side, and his head sunk forward upon his breast. Then, as he realised the ruin of all the hopes of his life, and the cruel injustice with which he had been treated, he broke into a cry of despair, and rushed from the room with the hot tears of impotent anger running down his face. So, sobbing, gesticulating, with coat unbuttoned and hat awry, he burst into the stable where placid Amos Green was smoking his pipe and watching with critical eyes the grooming of the horses.

" What in thunder is the matter now ? " he asked, holding his pipe by the bowl, while the blue wreaths curled up from his lips.

" This sword," cried the Frenchman—— " I have no right to wear it ! I shall break it ! "

" Well, and I'll break my knife too if it will hearten you up."

" And these," cried De Catinat, tugging at his silver shoulder-straps, " they must go."

" Ah, you draw ahead of me there, for I never had any. But come, friend, let me know the trouble, that I may see if it may not be mended."

" To Paris ! to Paris ! " shouted the guardsman, frantically. " If I am ruined, I may yet be in time to save them. The horses, quick ! "

It was clear to the American that some sudden calamity had befallen, so he aided his comrade and the grooms to saddle and bridle.

Five minutes later they were flying on their way and in little more than an hour their steeds, all reeking and foam-flecked, were pulled up outside the high house in the Rue St. Martin. De Catinat sprang from his saddle and rushed upstairs, while Amos followed in his own leisurely fashion.

The old Huguenot and his beautiful daughter were seated at one side of the great fireplace, her hand in his, and they sprang up together, she to throw herself with a glad cry into the arms of her lover, and he to grasp the hand which his nephew held out to him.

At the other side of the fireplace, with a very long pipe in his mouth and a cup of wine upon a settle beside him, sat a strange-looking man, with grizzled hair and beard, a fleshy red projecting nose, and two little grey eyes, which twinkled out from under huge brindled brows. His long thin face was laced and seamed with wrinkles, crossing and recrossing everywhere, but fanning out in hundreds from the corners of his eyes. It was set in an unchanging expression, and as it was of the same colour all over, as dark as the darkest walnut, it might have been some quaint figure-head cut out of a coarse-grained wood. He was clad in a blue serge jacket, a pair of red breeches smeared at the knees with tar, clean grey worsted stockings, large steel buckles over his coarse square-toed shoes, and beside him, balanced upon the top of a thick oaken cudgel, was a weather-stained silver-laced hat. His grey-shot hair was gathered up behind into a short stiff tail, and a seaman's hanger, with a brass handle, was girded to his waist by a tarnished leather belt.

De Catinat had been too occupied to take notice of this singular individual, but Amos Green gave a shout of delight at the sight of him, and ran forward to greet him. The other's wooden face relaxed so far as to show two tobacco-stained fangs, and, without rising, he held out a great red hand, of the size and shape of a moderate spade.

"Why, Captain Ephraim," cried Amos in English, "who ever would have thought of finding you here?

De Catinat, this is my old friend Ephraim Savage, under whose charge I came here."

"Anchor's apeak, lad, and the hatches down," said the stranger, in the peculiar drawling voice which the New Englanders had retained from their ancestors, the English Puritans.

"And when do you sail?"

"As soon as your foot is on her deck, if Providence serve us with wind and tide. And how has all gone with thee, Amos?"

"Right well. I have much to tell you of."

"I trust that you have held yourself apart from all their popish devilry."

"Yes, yes, Ephraim."

"And have had no truck with the scarlet woman."

"No, no; but what is it now?"

The grizzled hair was bristling with rage, and the little grey eyes were gleaming from under the heavy tufts. Amos, following their gaze, saw that De Catinat was seated with his arm round Adèle, while her head rested upon his shoulder.

"Ah, if I but knew their snip-snap, lippetty-chippetty lingo! Saw one ever such a sight! Amos, lad, what is the French for a 'shameless hussy'?"

"Nay, nay, Ephraim. Surely one may see such a sight, and think no harm of it, on our side of the water."

"Never, Amos. In no godly country."

"Tut! I have seen folks courting in New York."

"Ah, New York! I said in no godly country. I cannot answer for New York or Virginia. South of Cape Cod, or of New Haven at the furthest, there is no saying what folk will do. Very sure I am that in Boston or Salem or Plymouth she would see the bridewell and he the stocks for half as much. Ah!" He shook his head and bent his brows at the guilty couple.

But they and their old relative were far too engrossed with their own affairs to give a thought to the Puritan seaman. De Catinat had told his tale in a few short,

bitter sentences, the injustice that had been done to him, his dismissal from the king's service, and the ruin which had come upon the Huguenots of France. Adèle, as is the angel instinct of woman, thought only of her lover and his misfortunes as she listened to his story, but the old merchant tottered to his feet when he heard of the revocation of the edict, and stood with shaking limbs, staring about him in bewilderment.

"What am I to do?" he cried. "What am I to do? I am too old to begin my life again."

"Never fear, uncle," said De Catinat heartily. "There are other lands beyond France."

"But not for me. No, no; I am too old. Lord, but Thy hand is heavy upon Thy servants. Now is the vial opened, and the carved work of the sanctuary thrown down. Ah, what shall I do, and whither shall I turn?" He wrung his hands in his perplexity.

"What is amiss with him, then, Amos?" asked the seaman. "Thourgh I know nothing of what he says, yet I can see that he flies a distress signal."

"He and his must leave the country, Ephraim."

"And why?"

"Because they are Protestants, and the king will not abide their creed."

Ephraim Savage was across the room in an instant, and had enclosed the old merchant's thin hand in his own great knotted fist. There was a brotherly sympathy in his strong grip and rugged weather-stained face which held up the other's courage as no words could have done.

"What is the French for 'the scarlet woman,' Amos?" he asked, glancing over his shoulder. "Tell this man that we shall see him through. Tell him that we've got a country where he'll just fit in like a bung in a barrel. Tell him that religion is free to all there, and not a papist nearer than Baltimore or the Capuchins of the Penobscot. Tell him that if he wants to come, the *Golden Rod* is waiting with her anchor apeak and her cargo aboard. Tell him what you like, so long as you make him come."

"Then we must come at once," said De Catinat, as he listened to the cordial message which was conveyed to his uncle. "To-night the orders will be out, and to-morrow it may be too late."

"But my business!" cried the merchant.

"Take what valuables you can and leave the rest. Better that than lose all, and liberty into the bargain."

And so at last it was arranged. That very night, within five minutes of the closing of the gates, there passed out of Paris a small party of five, three upon horseback, and two in a closed carriage which bore several weighty boxes upon the top. They were the first leaves flying before the hurricane, the earliest of that great multitude who were within the next few months to stream along every road which led from France, finding their journey's end too often in galley, dungeon and torture chamber, and yet flooding over the frontiers in numbers sufficient to change the industries and modify the characters of all the neighbouring peoples. Like the Israelites of old, they had been driven from their homes at the bidding of an angry king, who, even while he exiled them, threw every difficulty in the way of their departure. Like them, too, there were none of them who could hope to reach their promised land without grievous wanderings, penniless, friendless and destitute. What passages befell these pilgrims in their travels, what dangers they met and overcame in the land of the Swiss, on the Rhine, among the Walloons, in England, in Ireland, in Berlin, and even in far-off Russia, has still to be written. This one little group, however, whom we know, we may follow in their venturesome journey, and see the chances which befell them upon that great continent which had lain fallow for so long, sown only with the weeds of humanity, but which was now at last about to quicken into such glorious life.

# PART II

## *IN THE NEW WORLD*

## 24. *The Start of the* Golden Rod

THANKS to the early tidings which the guardsman had brought with him, his little party was now ahead of the news. As they passed through the village of Louvier in the early morning they caught a glimpse of a naked corpse upon a dunghill, and were told by a grinning watchman that it was that of a Huguenot who had died impenitent, but that was a common enough occurrence already and did not mean that there had been any change in the law. At Rouen all was quiet, and Captain Ephraim Savage before evening had brought both them and such property as they had saved aboard of his brigantine, the *Golden Rod*. It was but a little craft, some seventy tons burden, but at a time when so many were putting out to sea in open boats, preferring the wrath of Nature to that of the king, it was a refuge indeed. The same night the seaman drew up his anchor and began to slowly make his way down the winding river.

And very slow work it was. There was half a moon shining and a breeze from the east, but the stream writhed and twisted and turned until sometimes they seemed to be sailing up rather than down. In the long reaches they set the yard square and ran, but often they had to lower their two boats and warp her painfully along, Tomlinson of Salem, the mate, and six grave, tobacco-chewing, New England seamen with their broad palmetto hats, tugging and straining at the oars. Amos Green, De Catinat and

even the old merchant had to take their spell ere morning, when the sailors were needed aboard for the handling of the canvas. At last, however, with the early dawn the river broadened out and each bank trended away leaving a long funnel-shaped estuary between. Ephraim Savage snuffed the air and paced the deck briskly with a twinkle in his keen grey eyes. The wind had fallen away, but there was still enough to drive them slowly upon their course.

" Where's the gal ? " he asked.

" She is in my cabin," said Amos Green. " I thought that maybe she could manage there until we got across."

" Where will you sleep yourself, then ? "

" Tut, a litter of spruce boughs and a sheet of birch bark over me have been enough all these years. What would I ask better than this deck of soft white pine, and my blanket ? "

" Very good. The old man and his nephew, him with the blue coat, can have the two empty bunks. But you must speak to that man, Amos. I'll have no philandering aboard my ship, lad—no whispering or cuddling or any such foolishness. Tell him that this ship is just a bit broke off from Boston, and he'll have to put up with Boston ways until he gets off her. They've been good enough for better men than him. You give me the French for ' no philandering,' and I'll bring him up with a round turn when he drifts."

" It's a pity we left so quick or they might have been married before we started. She's a good girl, Ephraim, and he is a fine man, for all that their ways are not the same as ours. They don't seem to take life so hard as we, and maybe they get more pleasure out of it."

" I never heard tell that we were put here to get pleasure out of it," said the old Puritan, shaking his head. " The valley of the shadow of death don't seem to me to be the kind o' name one would give to a playground. It is a trial and a chastening, that's what it is, the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. We're bad from

the beginning, like a stream that runs from a tamarack swamp, and we've enough to do to get ourselves to rights without any fool's talk about pleasure."

"It seems to me to be all mixed up," said Amos, "like the fat and the lean in a bag of pemmican. Look at that sun just pushing its edge over the trees, and see the pink flush on the clouds and the river like a rosy ribbon behind us. It's mighty pretty to our eyes, and very pleasing to us, and it wouldn't be so to my mind if the Creator hadn't wanted it to be. Many a time when I have lain in the woods in the fall and smoked my pipe, and felt how good the tobacco was and how bright the yellow maples were, and the purple ash, and the red tupelo blazing among the bushwood, I've felt that the real fool's talk was with the man who could doubt that all this was meant to make the world happier for us."

"You've been thinking too much in them woods," said Ephraim Savage, gazing at him uneasily. "Don't let your sail be too great for your boat, lad, nor trust to your own wisdom. Your father was from the Bay, and you were raised from a stock that cast the dust of England from their feet rather than bow down to Baal. Keep a grip on the Word and don't think beyond it. But what is the matter with the old man? He don't seem easy in his mind."

The old merchant had been leaning over the bulwarks looking back with a drawn face and weary eyes at the red curving track behind them which marked the path to Paris. Adèle had come up now, with not a thought to spare upon the dangers and troubles which lay in front of her as she chafed the old man's thin cold hands, and whispered words of love and comfort into his ears. But they had come to the point where the gentle still-flowing river began for the first time to throb to the beat of the sea. The old man gazed forward with horror at the bowsprit as he saw it rise slowly upwards into the air, and clung frantically at the rail as it seemed to slip away from beneath him.

"We are always in the hollow of God's hand," he

whispered, " but oh, Adèle, it is a dreadful thing to feel His fingers moving under us."

" Come with me, uncle," said De Catinat, passing his arm under that of the old man. " It is long since you have rested. And you, Adèle, I pray that you will go and sleep, my poor darling, for it has been a weary journey. Go now, to please me, and when you wake, both France and your troubles will lie behind you."

When father and daughter had left the deck, De Catinat made his way aft again to where Amos Green and the captain were standing.

" I am glad to get them below, Amos," said he, " for I fear that we may have trouble yet."

" And how ? "

" You see the white road which runs by the southern bank of the river. Twice within the last half-hour I have seen horsemen spurring for dear life along it. Where the spires and smoke are yonder is Honfleur, and thither it was that these men went. I know not who could ride so madly at such an hour unless they were the messengers of the king. Oh, see, there is a third one ! "

On the white band which wound among the green meadows a black dot could be seen which moved along with great rapidity, vanished behind a clump of trees and then reappeared again, making for the distant city. Captain Savage drew out his glass and gazed at the rider.

" Aye, aye," said he, as he snapped it up again. " It is a soldier sure enough. I can see the glint of the scabbard which he carries on his larboard side. I think we shall have more wind soon. With a breeze we can show our heels to anything in French waters, but a galley or an armed boat would overhaul us now."

De Catinat, who, though he could speak little English, had learned in America to understand it pretty well, looked anxiously at Amos Green. " I fear that we shall bring trouble on this good captain," said he, " and that the loss of his cargo and ship may be his reward for having befriended us. Ask him whether he would not prefer

to land us on the north bank. With our money we might make our way into the Lowlands."

Ephraim Savage looked at his passenger with eyes which had lost something of their sternness. "Young man," said he, "I see that you can understand something of my talk."

De Catinat nodded.

"I tell you then that I am a bad man to beat. Any man that was ever shipmates with me would tell you as much. I just jam my helm and keep my course as long as God will let me. D'ye see?"

De Catinat again nodded, though in truth the seaman's metaphors left him with but a very general sense of his meaning.

"We're comin' abreast of that there town, and in ten minutes we shall know if there is any trouble waiting for us. But I'll tell you a story as we go that'll show you what kind o' man you've shipped with. It was ten years ago that I speak of, when I was in the *Speedwell*, sixty-ton brig, tradin' betwixt Boston and Jamestown, goin' south with lumber and skins and fixin's, d'ye see, and north again with tobacco and molasses. One night, blowin' half a gale from the south'ard, we ran on a reef two miles to the east of Cape May, and down we went with a hole in our bottom like as if she'd been spitted on the steeple o' one o' them Honfleur churches. Well, in the morning there I was washin' about, nigh out of sight of land, clingin' on to half the foreyard, without a sign either of my mates or of wreckage. I wasn't so cold, for it was early fall, and I could get three parts of my body on to the spar, but I was hungry and thirsty and bruised, so I just took in two holes of my waist-belt, and put up a hymn, and had a look round for what I could see. Well, I saw more than I cared for. Within five paces of me there was a great fish, as long pretty nigh as the spar that I was grippin'. It's a mighty pleasant thing to have your legs in the water and a beast like that all ready for a nibble at your toes."

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried the French soldier. "And he have not eat you!"

Ephraim Savage's little eyes twinkled at the reminiscence.

"I ate him," said he.

"What!" cried Amos.

"It's a mortal fact. I'd a jack-knife in my pocket, same as this one, and I kicked my legs to keep the brute off, and I whittled away at the spar until I'd got a good jagged bit off, sharp at each end, same as a nigger told me once down Delaware way. Then I waited for him, and stopped kicking, so he came at me like a hawk on a chick-a-dee. When he turned up his belly I jammed my left hand with the wood right into his great grinnin' mouth, and I let him have it with my knife between the gills. He tried to break away then, but I held on, d'ye see, though he took me so deep I thought I'd never come up again. I was nigh gone when we got to the surface, but he was floatin' with the white up, and twenty holes in his shirt front. Then I got back to my spar, for we'd gone a long fifty fathoms under water, and when I reached it I fainted dead away."

"And then?"

"Well, when I came to, it was calm, and there was the dead shark floatin' beside me. I paddled my spar over to him and I got loose a few yards of halliard that were hangin' from one end of it. I made a clove-hitch round his tail, d'ye see, and got the end of it slung over the spar and fastened, so as I couldn't lose him. Then I set to work and I ate him in a week right up to his back fin, and I drank the rain that fell on my coat, and when I was picked up by the *Gracie* of Gloucester, I was that fat that I could scarce climb aboard. That's what Ephraim Savage means, my lad, when he says that he is a baddish man to beat."

Whilst the Puritan seaman had been detailing his reminiscence, his eye had kept wandering from the clouds to the flapping sails and back. Such wind as there was

came in little short puffs, and the canvas either drew full or was absolutely slack. The fleecy shreds of cloud above, however, travelled swiftly across the blue sky. It was on these that the captain fixed his gaze, and he watched them like a man who is working out a problem in his mind. They were abreast of Honfleur now, and about half a mile out from it. Several sloops and brigs were lying there in a cluster, and a whole fleet of brown-sailed fishing boats were tacking slowly in. Yet all was quiet on the curving quay and on the half-moon fort over which floated the white flag with the golden fleurs-de-lis. The port lay on their quarter now and they were drawing away more quickly as the breeze freshened. De Catinat glancing back had almost made up his mind that their fears were quite groundless when they were brought back in an instant and more urgently than ever.

Round the corner of the mole a great dark boat had dashed into view, ringed round with foam from her flying prow, and from the ten pairs of oars which swung from either side of her. A dainty white ensign drooped over her stern and in her bows the sun's light was caught by a heavy brass carronade. She was packed with men, and the gleam which twinkled every now and again from amongst them told that they were armed to the teeth. The captain brought his glass to bear upon them and whistled. Then he glanced up at the clouds once more.

"Thirty men," said he, "and they go three paces to our two. You, sir, take your blue coat off this deck or you'll bring trouble upon us. The Lord will look after His own if they'll only keep from foolishness. Get these hatches off, Tomlinson. So! Where's Jim Sturt and Hiram Jefferson? Let them stand by to clap them on again when I whistle. Starboard! Starboard! Keep her as full as she'll draw. Now, Amos, and you, Tomlinson, come here until I have a word with you."

The three stood in consultation upon the poop, glancing back at their pursuers. There could be no doubt that the wind was freshening; it blew briskly in their faces

as they looked back, but it was not steady yet, and the boat was rapidly overhauling them. Already they could see the faces of the marines who sat in the stern, and the gleam of the lighted linstock which the gunner held in his hand.

" Holà ! " cried an officer in excellent English. " Lay her to or we fire ! "

" Who are you, and what do you want ? " shouted Ephraim Savage, in a voice that might have been heard from the bank.

" We come in the king's name, and we want a party of Huguenots from Paris who came on board of your vessel at Rouen."

" Brace back the foreyard and lay her to," shouted the captain. " Drop a ladder over the side there and look smart ! So ! Now we are ready for them."

The yard was swung round and the vessel lay quietly rising and falling on the waves. The boat dashed alongside, her brass cannon trained upon the brigantine, and her squad of marines with their fingers upon their triggers ready to open fire. They grinned and shrugged their shoulders when they saw that their sole opponents were three unarmed men upon the poop. The officer, a young active fellow with a bristling moustache, like the whiskers of a cat, was on deck in an instant with his drawn sword in his hand.

" Come up, two of you ! " he cried. " You stand here at the head of the ladder, sergeant. Throw up a rope and you can fix it to this stanchion. Keep awake down there and be all ready to fire ! You come with me, Corporal Lemoine. Who is captain of this ship ? "

" I am, sir," said Ephraim Savage submissively.

" You have three Huguenots aboard ? "

" Tut ! Tut ! Huguenots, are they ? I thought they were very anxious to get away, but as long as they paid their passage it was no business of mine. An old man, his daughter, and a young fellow about your age in some sort of livery."

"In uniform, sir? The uniform of the king's guard. Those are the folk I have come for."

"And you wish to take them back?'

"Most certainly."

"Poor folk! I am sorry for them."

"And so am I, but orders are orders and must be done."

"Quite so. Well, the old man is in his bunk asleep. The maid is in a cabin below. And the other is sleeping down the hold there where we had to put him, for there is no room elsewhere."

"Sleeping, you say? We had best surprise him."

"But think you that you dare do it alone! He has no arms, it is true, but he is a well-grown young fellow. Will you not have twenty men up from the boat?"

Some such thought had passed through the officer's head, but the captain's remark put him upon his mettle.

"Come with me, corporal," said he. "Down this ladder, you say?"

"Yes, down the ladder and straight on. He lies between those two cloth bales." Ephraim Savage looked up with a smile playing about the corners of his grim mouth. The wind was whistling now in the rigging, and the stays of the mast were humming like two harp strings. Amos Green lounged beside the French sergeant who guarded the end of the rope ladder, while Tomlinson, the mate, stood with a bucket of water in his hand exchanging remarks in very bad French with the crew of the boat beneath him.

The officer made his way slowly down the ladder which led into the hold, and the corporal followed him, and had his chest level with the deck when the other had reached the bottom. It may have been something in Ephraim Savage's face, or it may have been the gloom around him which startled the young Frenchman, but a sudden suspicion flashed into his mind.

"Up again, corporal!" he shouted, "I think that you are best at the top."

"And I think that you are best down below, my friend," said the Puritan, who gathered the officer's meaning from his gesture. Putting the sole of his boot against the man's chest he gave a shove which sent both him and the ladder crashing down on to the officer beneath him. As he did so he blew his whistle, and in a moment the hatch was back in its place and clamped down on each side with iron bars.

The sergeant had swung round at the sound of the crash, but Amos Green, who had waited for the movement, threw his arms about him and hurled him overboard into the sea. At the same instant the connecting rope was severed, the foreyard creaked back into position again, and the bucketful of salt water soused down over the gunner and his gun, putting out his linstock and wetting his priming. A shower of balls from the marines piped through the air or rapped up against the planks, but the boat was tossing and jerking in the short choppy waves and to aim was impossible. In vain the men tugged and strained at their oars while the gunner worked like a maniac to relight his linstock and to replace his priming. The boat had lost its weigh, while the brigantine was flying along now with every sail bulging and swelling to bursting-point. Crack! went the carronade at last, and five little slits in the mainsail showed that her charge of grape had flown high. Her second shot left no trace behind it, and at the third she was at the limit of her range. Half an hour afterwards a little dark dot upon the horizon with a golden speck at one end of it was all that could be seen of the Honfleur guard-boat. Wider and wider grew the low-lying shores, broader and broader was the vast spread of blue waters ahead, the smoke of Havre lay like a little cloud upon the northern horizon, and Captain Ephraim Savage paced his deck with his face as grim as ever, but with a dancing light in his grey eyes.

"I knew that the Lord would look after His own," said he complacently. "We've got her beak straight now and

there's not as much as a dab of mud betwixt this and the three hills of Boston. You've had too much of these French wines of late, Amos, lad. Come down and try a real Boston brewing with a double stroke of malt in the mash tub."

## 25. *A Boat of the Dead*

FOR two days the *Golden Rod* lay becalmed close to the Cape La Hague, with the Breton coast extending along the whole of the southern horizon. On the third morning, however, came a sharp breeze, and they drew rapidly away from land, until it was but a vague dim line which blended with the cloud banks. Out there on the wide free ocean, with the wind on their cheeks and the salt spray pringling upon their lips, these hunted folk might well throw off their sorrows and believe that they had left for ever behind them all tokens of those strenuous men whose earnest piety had done more harm than frivolity and wickedness could have accomplished. And yet even now they could not shake off their traces, for the sin of the cottage is bounded by the cottage door, but that of the palace spreads its evil over land and sea.

"I am frightened about my father, Amory," said Adèle, as they stood together by the shrouds and looked back at the dim cloud upon the horizon which marked the position of that France which they were never to see again.

"But he is out of danger now."

"Out of danger from cruel laws, but I fear that he will never see the promised land."

"What do you mean, Adèle? My uncle is hale and hearty."

"Ah, Amory, his very heart roots were fastened in the Rue St. Martin, and when they were torn his life was torn also. Paris and his business, they were the world to him."

"But he will accustom himself to this new life."

"If it only could be so! But I fear, I fear, that he is over old for such a change. He says not a word of complaint. But I read upon his face that he is stricken to the heart. For hours together he will gaze back at France with the tears running silently down his cheeks. And his hair has turned from grey to white within the week."

De Catinat also had noticed that the gaunt old Huguenot had grown gaunter, that the lines upon his stern face were deeper, and that his head fell forward upon his breast as he walked. He was about, however, to suggest that the voyage might restore the merchant's health, when Adèle gave a cry of surprise and pointed out over the port quarter. So beautiful was she at the instant with her raven hair blown back by the wind, a glow of colour struck into her pale cheeks by the driving spray, her lips parted in her excitement and one white hand shading her eyes, that he stood beside her with all his thoughts bent upon her grace and her sweetness.

"Look!" she cried. "There is something floating upon the sea. I saw it upon the crest of a wave."

He looked in the direction in which she pointed, but at first he saw nothing. The wind was still behind them, and a brisk sea was running of a deep rich green colour, with long creamy curling caps to the larger waves. The breeze would catch these foam-crests from time to time, and then there would be a sharp spatter upon the decks, with a salt smack upon the lips, and a pringling in the eyes. Suddenly as he gazed, however, something black was tilted up upon the sharp summit of one of the seas, and swooped out of view again upon the further side. It was so far from him that he could make nothing of it, but sharper eyes than his had caught a glance of it. Amos Green had seen the girl point and observed what it was which had attracted her attention.

"Captain Ephraim," cried he, "there's a boat on the starboard quarter."

The New England seaman whipped up his glass and steadied it upon the bulwark.

"Aye, it's a boat," said he, "but an empty one. Maybe it's been washed off from some ship, or gone adrift from shore. Put her hard down, Mr. Tomlinson, for it just so happens that I am in need of a boat at present."

Half a minute later the *Golden Rod* had swung round and was running swiftly down towards the black spot which still bobbed and danced upon the waves. As they neared her they could see that something was projecting over her side.

"It's a man's head!" cried Amos Green.

But Ephraim Savage's grim face grew grimmer. "It's a man's foot," said he. "I think that you had best take the gal below to the cabin."

Amid a solemn hush they ran alongside this lonely craft which hung out so sinister a signal. Within ten yards of her the foreyard was hauled aback and they gazed down upon her terrible crew.

She was a little thirteen-foot cockle-shell, very broad for her length and so flat in the bottom that she had been meant evidently for river or lake work. Huddled together beneath the seats were three folk, a man in the dress of a respectable artisan, a woman of the same class, and a little child about a year old. The boat was half full of water and the woman and child were stretched with their faces downwards, the fair curls of the infant and the dark locks of the mother washing to and fro like water-weeds upon the surface. The man lay with a slate-coloured face, his chin cocking up towards the sky, his eyes turned upwards to the whites, and his mouth wide open showing a leathern crinkled tongue like a rotting leaf. In the bows, all huddled in a heap, and with a single paddle still grasped in his hand, there crouched a very small man clad in black, an open book lying across his face, and one stiff leg jutting upwards with the heel of the foot resting between the rowlocks. So this strange company swooped and tossed upon the long green Atlantic rollers.

A boat had been lowered by the *Golden Rod* and the unfortunates were soon conveyed upon deck. No particle of either food or drink was to be found, nor anything save the single paddle and the open Bible which lay across the small man's face. Man, woman and child had all been dead a day at the least, and so with the short prayers used upon the seas they were buried from the vessel's side. The small man had at first seemed also to be lifeless, but Amos had detected some slight flutter of his heart, and the faintest haze was left upon the watch glass which was held before his mouth. Wrapped in a dry blanket he was laid beside the mast and the mate forced a few drops of rum every few minutes between his lips until the little spark of life which still lingered in him might be fanned to a flame. Meanwhile Ephraim Savage had ordered up the two prisoners whom he had entrapped at Honfleur. Very foolish they looked as they stood blinking and winking in the daylight from which they had been so long cut off.

"Very sorry, captain," said the seaman, "but either you had to come with us, d'ye see, or we had to stay with you. They're waiting for me over at Boston, and in truth I really couldn't tarry."

The French soldier shrugged his shoulders, and looked around him with a lengthening face. He and his corporal were limp with sea-sickness, and as miserable as a Frenchman is when first he finds that France has vanished from his view.

"Which would you prefer, to go on with us to America, or go back to France?"

"Back to France, if I can find my way. Oh, I must get to France again if only to have a word with that fool of a gunner."

"Well, we emptied a bucket of water over his linstock and priming, d'ye see, so maybe he did all he could. But there's France, where that thickening is over yonder."

"I see it! I see it! Ah, if my feet were only upon it once more."

"There is a boat beside us, and you may take it."

"My God, what happiness! Corporal Lemoine, the boat! Let us push off at once."

"But you need a few things first. Good Lord, who ever heard of a man pushing off like that! Mr. Tomlinson, just sling a keg of water and a barrel of meat and of biscuit into this boat. Hiram Jefferson, bring two oars aft. It's a long pull with the wind in your teeth, but you'll be there by to-morrow night, and the weather is set fair."

The two Frenchmen were soon provided with all that they were likely to require and pushed off with a waving of hats and a shouting of *bon voyage*. The foreyard was swung round again and the *Golden Rod* turned her bowsprit for the west. For hours a glimpse could be caught of the boat, dwindling away on the wave-tops, until at last it vanished into the haze, and with it vanished the very last link which connected them with the great world which they were leaving behind them.

But whilst these things had been done, the senseless man beneath the mast had twitched his eyelids, had drawn a little gasping breath, and then finally had opened his eyes. His skin was like grey parchment drawn tightly over his bones, and the limbs which thrust out from his clothes were those of a sickly child. Yet, weak as he was, the large black eyes with which he looked about him were full of dignity and power. Old Catinat had come upon deck, and at the sight of the man and of his dress he had run forward, and had raised his head reverently and rested it in his own arms.

"He is one of the faithful," he cried, "he is one of our pastors. Ah, now indeed a blessing will be upon our journey!"

But the man smiled gently and shook his head. "I fear that I may not come this journey with you," said he, "for the Lord has called me upon a further journey of my own. I have had my summons and I am ready. I am indeed the pastor of the temple at Isigny, and when we heard the orders of the wicked king, I and two of the

faithful with their little one put forth in the hope that we might come to England. But on the first day there came a wave which swept away one of our oars and all that was in the boat, our bread, our keg, and we were left with no hope save in Him. And then He began to call us to Him one at a time, first the child, and then the woman, and then the man, until I only am left, though I feel that my own time is not long. But since ye are also of the faithful, may I not serve you in any way before I go ? "

The merchant shook his head, and then suddenly a thought flashed upon him, and he ran with joy upon his face and whispered eagerly to Amos Green. Amos laughed, and strode across to the captain.

" It's time," said Ephraim Savage grimly.

Then the whisperers went to De Catinat. He sprang in the air and his eyes shone with delight. And then they went down to Adèle in her cabin, and she started and blushed, and turned her sweet face away, and patted her hair with her hands as woman will when a sudden call is made upon her. And so, since haste was needful, and since even there upon the lonely sea there was one coming who might at any moment snap their purpose, they found themselves in a few minutes, this gallant man and this pure woman, kneeling hand in hand before the dying pastor, who raised his thin arm feebly in benediction as he muttered the words which should make them for ever one.

Adèle had often pictured her wedding to herself, as what young girl has not ? Often in her dreams she had knelt before the altar with Amory in the temple of the Rue St. Martin. Or sometimes her fancy had taken her to some of those smaller churches in the provinces, those little refuges where a handful of believers gathered together, and it was there that her thoughts had placed the crowning act of a woman's life. But when had she thought of such a marriage as this with the white deck swaying beneath them, the ropes humming above, their only choristers the gulls which screamed around them,

and their wedding hymn the world-old anthem which is struck from the waves by the wind? And when could she forget the scene? The yellow masts and the bellying sails, the grey drawn face and the cracked lips of the castaway, her father's gaunt earnest features as he knelt to support the dying minister, De Catinat in his blue coat, already faded and weather-stained, Captain Savage with his wooden face turned towards the clouds, and Amos Green with his hands in his pockets and a quiet twinkle in his blue eyes! Then behind all the lanky mate and the little group of New England seamen with their palmetto hats and their serious faces!

And so it was done amid kindly words in a harsh foreign tongue, and the shaking of rude hands hardened by the rope and the oar. De Catinat and his wife leaned together by the shrouds when all was over and watched the black side as it rose and fell, and the green water which raced past them.

"It is all so strange and so new," she said. "Our future seems as vague and dark as yonder cloud banks which gather in front of us."

"If it rest with me," he answered, "your future will be as merry and bright as the sunlight that glints on the crest of these waves. The country that drove us forth lies far behind us, but out there is another and a fairer country, and every breath of wind wafts us nearer to it. Freedom awaits us there, and we bear with us youth and love, and what could man or woman ask for more?"

So they stood and talked while the shadows deepened into twilight and the first faint gleam of the stars broke out in the darkening heavens above them. But ere those stars had waned again one more toiler had found rest aboard the *Golden Rod*, and the scattered flock from Isigny had found their little pastor once more.

## 26. *The Last Port*

FOR three weeks the wind kept at east or north-east, always at a brisk breeze and freshening sometimes into half a gale. The *Golden Rod* sped merrily upon her way with every sail drawing, alow and aloft, so that by the end of the third week Amos and Ephraim Savage were reckoning out the hours before they would look upon their native land once more. To the old seaman who was used to meeting and to parting it was a small matter, but Amos, who had never been away before, was on fire with impatience, and would sit smoking for hours with his legs astride the shank of the bowsprit, staring ahead at the skyline, in the hope that his friend's reckoning had been wrong, and that at any moment he might see the beloved coast line looming up in front of him.

"It's no use, lad," said Captain Ephraim, laying his great red hand upon his shoulder. "They that go down to the sea in ships need a power of patience, and there's no good eatin' your heart out for what you can't get."

"There's a feel of home about the air, though," Amos answered. "It seems to whistle through your teeth with a bite to it that I never felt over yonder. Ah, it will take three months of the Mohawk Valley before I feel myself to rights."

"Well," said his friend, thrusting a plug of Trinidado tobacco into the corner of his cheek, "I've been on the sea since I had hair to my face, mostly in the coast trade, d'ye see, but over the water as well, as far as those navigation laws would let me. Except the two years that I came ashore for the King Philip business, when every man that could carry a gun was needed on the border, I've never been three casts of a biscuit from salt water, and I tell you that I never knew a better crossing than the one we have just made."

"Aye, we have come along like a buck before a forest

fire. But it is strange to me how you find your way so clearly out here with never track nor trail to guide you. It would puzzle me, Ephraim, to find America, to say nought of the Narrows of New York."

"I am somewhat too far to the north, Amos. We have been on or about the fiftieth since we sighted Cape La Hague. To-morrow we should make land, by my reckonin'."

"Ah, to-morrow! And what will it be? Mount Desert? Cape Cod? Long Island?"

"Nay, lad, we are in the latitude of the St. Lawrence, and are more like to see the Arcadia coast. Then with this wind a day should carry us south, or two at the most. A few more such voyages and I shall buy myself a fair brick house in Green Lane of North Boston, where I can look down on the bay, or on the Charles or the Mystic, and see the ships comin' and goin'. So I would end my life in peace and quiet."

All day Amos Green, in spite of his friend's assurance, strained his eyes in the fruitless search for land, and when at last the darkness fell he went below and laid out his fringed hunting tunic, his leather gaiters, and his raccoon-skin cap, which were very much more to his taste than the broadcloth coat in which the Dutch mercer of New York had clad him. De Catinat had also put on the dark coat of civil life, and he and Adèle were busy preparing all things for the old man who had fallen so weak that there was little which he could do for himself. A fiddle was screaming in the forecastle, and half the night through hoarse bursts of homely song mingled with the dash of the waves and the whistle of the wind, as the New England men in their own grave and stolid fashion made merry over their home-coming.

The mate's watch that night was from twelve to four, and the moon was shining brightly for the first hour of it. In the early morning, however, it clouded over, and the *Golden Rod* plunged into one of those dim clammy mists which lie on all that tract of ocean. So thick was it that

from the poop one could just make out the loom of the foresail, but could see nothing of the fore-topmast stay-sail or the jib. The wind was north-east with a very keen edge to it, and the dainty brigantine lay over, scudding along with her lee rails within hand's touch of the water. It had suddenly turned very cold—so cold that the mate stamped up and down the poop, and his four seamen shivered together under the shelter of the bulwarks. And then in a moment one of them was up, thrusting with his forefinger into the air and screaming, while a huge white wall sprang out of the darkness at the very end of the bowsprit and the ship struck with a force which snapped her two masts like dried reeds in a wind, and changed her in an instant to a crushed and shapeless heap of spars and wreckage.

The mate had shot the length of the poop at the shock, and had narrowly escaped from the falling mast, while of his four men two had been hurled through the huge gap which yawned in the bows, while a third had dashed his head to pieces against the stock of the anchor. Tomlinson staggered forwards to find the whole front part of the vessel driven inwards, and a single seaman sitting dazed amid splintered spars, flapping sails and writhing, lashing cordage. It was still as dark as pitch, and save the white crest of a leaping wave nothing was to be seen beyond the side of the vessel. The mate was peering round him in despair at the ruin which had come so suddenly upon them when he found Captain Ephraim at his elbow, half clad, but as wooden and as serene as ever.

"An iceberg," said he, sniffing at the chill air. "Did you not smell it, friend Tomlinson?"

"Truly I found it cold, Captain Savage, but I set it down to the mist."

"There is a mist ever set around them, though the Lord in His wisdom knows best why, for it is a sore trial to poor sailor men. She makes water fast, Mr. Tomlinson. She is down by the bows already."

The other watch had swarmed upon deck and one of

them was measuring the well. "There is three feet of water," he cried, "and the pumps sucked dry yesterday at sundown."

"Hiram Jefferson and John Moreton to the pumps!" cried the captain. "Mr. Tomlinson, clear away the long boat and let us see if we may set her right, though I fear that she is past mending."

"The long boat has stove two planks," cried a seaman.

"The jolly boat, then?"

"She is in three pieces."

The mate tore his hair, but Ephraim Savage smiled like a man who is gently tickled by some coincidence.

"Where is Amos Green?"

"Here, Captain Ephraim. What can I do?"

"And I?" asked De Catinat eagerly. Adèle and her father had been wrapped in mantles and placed for shelter in the lee of the round house.

"Tell him he can take his spell at the pumps," said the captain to Amos. "And you, Amos you are a handy man with a tool. Get into yonder longboat with a lantern and see if you cannot patch her up."

For half an hour Amos Green hammered and trimmed and caulked, while the sharp measured clanking of the pumps sounded above the dash of the seas. Slowly, very slowly the bows of the brigantine were settling down, and her stern cocking up.

"You've not much time, Amos, lad," said the captain quietly.

"She'll float now, though she's not quite water-tight."

"Very good. Lower away! Keep up the pumpin' there! Mr. Tomlinson, see that provisions and water are ready, as much as she will hold. Come with me, Hiram Jefferson."

The seaman and the captain swung themselves down into the tossing boat, the latter with a lantern strapped to his waist. Together they made their way until they were under her mangled bows. The captain shook his head when he saw the extent of the damage.

" Cut away the foresail and pass it over," said he.

Tomlinson and Amos Green cut away the lashings with their knives and lowered the corner of the sail. Captain Ephraim and the seaman seized it, and dragged it across the mouth of the huge gaping leak. As he stooped to do it, however, the ship heaved up upon a swell and the captain saw in the yellow light of his lantern sinuous black cracks which radiated away backwards from the central hole.

" How much in the well ? " he asked.

" Five and a half feet."

" Then the ship is lost. I could put my finger between her planks as far as I can see back. Keep the pumps going there ! Have you the food and water, Mr. Tomlinson ? "

" Here, sir."

" Lower them over the bows. This boat cannot live more than an hour or two. Can you see anything of the berg ? "

" The fog is lifting on the starboard quarter," cried one of the men. " Yes, there is the berg, quarter of a mile to leeward ! "

The mist had thinned away suddenly, and the moon glimmered through once more upon the great lonely sea and the stricken ship. There, like a huge sail, was the monster piece of ice upon which they had shattered themselves, rocking slowly to and fro with the wash of the waves.

" You must make for her," said Captain Ephraim. " There is no other chance. Lower the gal over the bows ! Well, then, her father first, if she likes it better. Tell them to sit still, Amos, and that the Lord will bear us up if we keep clear of foolishness. So ! You're a brave lass for all your niminy-piminy lingo. Now the keg and the barrel, and all the wraps and cloaks you can find. Now the other man, the Frenchman. Aye, aye, passengers first and you have got to come. Now, Amos ! Now the seamen, and you last, friend Tomlinson."

It was well that they had not very far to go, for the boat was weighed down almost to the edge, and it took the baling of two men to keep in check the water which leaked in between the shattered planks. When all were safely in their places, Captain Ephraim Savage swung himself aboard again, which was but too easy now that every minute brought the bows nearer to the water. He came back with a bundle of clothing which he threw into the boat.

"Push off!" he cried.

"Jump in, then."

"Ephraim Savage goes down with his ship," said he quietly. "Friend Tomlinson, it is not my way to give my orders more than once. Push off, I say!"

The mate thrust her out with a boat-hook. Amos and De Catinat gave a cry of dismay, but the stolid New Englanders settled down to their oars and pulled off for the iceberg.

"Amos! Amos! Will you suffer it?" cried the guardsman in French. "My honour will not permit me to leave him thus. I should feel it a stain for ever."

"Tomlinson, you would not leave him! Go on board and force him to come."

"The man is not living who could force him to do what he had no mind for."

"He may change his purpose."

"He never changes his purpose."

"But you cannot leave him, man! You must at least lie by and pick him up."

"The boat leaks like a sieve," said the mate. "I will take her to the berg, leave you all there, if we can find footing, and go back for the captain. Put your heart into it, my lads, for the sooner we are there the sooner we shall get back."

But they had not taken fifty strokes before Adèle gave a sudden scream.

"My God!" she cried, "the ship is going down!"

She had settled lower and lower in the water, and sud-

denly with a sound of rending planks she thrust down her bows like a diving water-fowl, and her stern flew up into the air, and with a long sucking noise she shot down swifter and swifter until the leaping waves closed over her high poop lantern. With one impulse the boat swept round again and made backwards as fast as willing arms could pull it. But all was quiet at the scene of the disaster. Not even a fragment of wreckage was left upon the surface to show where the *Golden Rod* had found her last harbour. For a long quarter of an hour they pulled round and round in the moonlight, but not a glimpse could they see of the Puritan seaman, and at last, when in spite of the balers the water was washing round their ankles, they put her head about once more and made their way in silence and with heavy hearts to their dreary island of refuge.

Desolate as it was, it was their only hope now, for the leak was increasing and it was evident that the boat could not be kept afloat long. As they drew nearer they saw with dismay that the side which faced them was a solid wall of ice sixty feet high without a flaw or crevice in its whole extent. The berg was a large one, fifty paces at least each way, and there was a hope that the other side might be more favourable. Baling hard they paddled round the corner, but only to find themselves faced by another gloomy ice-crag. Again they went round, and again they found that the berg increased rather than diminished in height. There remained only one other side, and they knew as they rowed round to it that their lives hung upon the result, for the boat was almost settling down beneath them. They shot out from the shadow into the full moonlight and looked upon a sight which none of them would forget until their dying day.

The cliff which faced them was as precipitous as any of the others, and it glimmered and sparkled all over where the silver light fell upon the thousand facets of ice. Right in the centre, however, on a level with the water's edge

there was what appeared to be a huge hollowed-out cave which marked the spot where the *Golden Rod* had, in shattering herself, dislodged a huge boulder, and so amid her own ruin prepared a refuge for those who had trusted themselves to her. This cavern was of the richest emerald green, light and clear at the edges, but toning away into the deepest purples and blues at the back. But it was not the beauty of this grotto, nor was it the assurance of rescue which brought a cry of joy and of wonder from every lip, but it was that, seated upon an ice boulder and placidly smoking a long corn-cob pipe, there was perched in front of them no less a person than Captain Ephraim Savage of Boston. For a moment the castaways could almost have believed that it was his wraith, were wraiths ever seen in so homely an attitude, but the tones of his voice very soon showed that it was indeed he, and in no very Christian temper either.

"Friend Tomlinson," said he, "when I tell you to row for an iceberg I mean you to row right away there, d'ye see, and not to go philandering about over the ocean. It's not your fault that I am not froze, and so I would have been if I hadn't some dry tobacco and my tinder-box to keep myself warm."

Without stopping to answer his commander's reproaches the mate headed for the ledge, which had been cut into a slope by the bows of the brigantine, so that the boat was run up easily on to the ice. Captain Savage seized his dry clothes and vanished into the back of the cave, to return presently warmer in body, and more contented in mind. The long boat had been turned upside down for a seat, the gratings and thwarts taken out and covered with wraps to make a couch for the lady, and the head knocked out of the keg of biscuits.

"We were frightened for you, Ephraim," said Amos Green. "I had a heavy heart this night when I thought that I should never see you more."

"Tut, Amos, you should have known me better."

"But how come you here, captain?" asked Tomlinson.

"I thought that maybe you had been taken down by the suck of the ship."

"And so I was. It is the third ship in which I have gone down, but they have never kept me down yet. I went deeper to-night than when the *Speedwell* sank, but not so deep as in the *Governor Winthrop*. When I came up I swam to the berg, found this nook, and crawled in. Glad I was to see you, for I feared that you had foundered."

"We put back to pick you up and we passed you in the darkness. And what should we do now?"

"Rig up that boat-sail and make quarters for the gal. Then get our supper and such rest as we can, for there is nothing to be done to-night, and there may be much in the morning."

## 27. *A Dwindling Island*

AMOS GREEN was aroused in the morning by a hand upon his shoulder, and springing to his feet, found De Catinat standing beside him. The survivors of the crew were grouped about the upturned boat, slumbering heavily after their labours of the night. The red rim of the sun had just pushed itself above the water-line, and sky and sea were one blaze of scarlet and orange from the dazzling gold of the horizon to the lightest pink at the zenith. The first rays flashed directly into their cave, sparkling and glimmering upon the ice crystals and tinging the whole grotto with a rich warm light. Never was a fairy's palace more lovely than this floating refuge which Nature had provided for them.

But neither the American nor the Frenchman had time now to give a thought to the novelty and beauty of their situation. The latter's face was grave, and his friend read danger in his eyes.

"What is it, then?"

"The berg. It is coming to pieces."

"Tut, man, it is as solid as an island."

"I have been watching it. You see that crack which extends backwards from the end of our grotto. Two hours ago I could scarce put my hand into it. Now I can slip through it with ease. I tell you that she is splitting across."

Amos Green walked to the end of the funnel-shaped recess and found, as his friend had said, that a green sinuous crack extended away backwards into the iceberg, caused either by the tossing of the waves, or by the terrific impact of their vessel. He roused Captain Ephraim and pointed out the danger to him.

"Well, if she springs a leak we are gone," said he. "She's been thawing pretty fast as it is."

They could see now that what had seemed in the moonlight to be smooth walls of ice were really furrowed and wrinkled like an old man's face by the streams of melted water which were continually running down them. The whole huge mass was brittle and honey-combed and rotten. Already they could hear all round them the ominous drip, drip, and the splash and tinkle of the little rivulets as they fell into the ocean.

"Hullo!" cried Amos Green, "what's that?"

"What then?"

"Did you hear nothing?"

"No."

"I could have sworn that I heard a voice."

"Impossible. We are all here."

"It must have been my fancy, then."

Captain Ephraim walked to the seaward face of the cave and swept the ocean with his eyes. The wind had quite fallen away now, and the sea stretched away to the eastward, smooth and unbroken save for a single great black spar which floated near the spot where the *Golden Rod* had foundered.

"We should lie in the track of some ships," said the captain thoughtfully. "There's the codders and the herring-busses. We're over far south for them, I reckon. But we can't be more'n two hundred mile from Port

Royal in Arcadia, and we're in the line of the St. Lawrence trade. If I had three white mountain pines, Amos, and a hundred yards of stout canvas I'd get up on the top of this thing, d'ye see, and I'd rig such a jury-mast as would send her humming into Boston Bay. Then I'd break her up and sell her for what she was worth, and turn a few pieces over the business. But she's a heavy old craft, and that's a fact, though even now she might do a knot or two an hour if she had a hurricane behind her. But what is it, Amos?"

The young hunter was standing with his ear slanting, his head bent forwards, and his eyes glancing sideways, like a man who listens intently. He was about to answer when De Catinat gave a cry and pointed to the back of the cave.

"Look at the crack now."

It had widened by a foot since they had noticed it last, until it was now no longer a crack. It was a pass.

"Let us go through," said the captain.

"It can but come out on the other side."

"Then let us see the other side."

He led the way and the other two followed him. It was very dark as they advanced with high dripping ice walls on either side, and one little zigzagging slit of blue sky above their heads. Tripping and groping their way they stumbled along until suddenly the passage grew wider and opened out into a large square of flat ice. The berg was level in the centre and sloped upwards from that point to the high cliffs which bounded it on each side. In three directions this slope was very steep, but in one it slanted up quite gradually, and the constant thawing had grooved the surface with a thousand irregularities by which an active man could ascend. With one impulse they began all three to clamber up until a minute later they were standing not far from the edge of the summit, seventy feet above the sea, with a view which took in a good fifty miles of water. In all that fifty miles there was no sign of life, nothing but the endless glint of the sun upon the waves.

Captain Ephraim whistled. "We are out of luck," said he.

Amos Green looked about him with startled eyes. "I cannot understand it," said he. "I could have sworn —— By the eternal, listen to that!"

The clear call of a military bugle rang out in the morning air. With a cry of amazement they all three craned forward and peered over the edge.

A large ship was lying under the very shadow of the iceberg. They looked straight down upon her snow-white decks, fringed with shining brass cannon, and dotted with seamen. A little clump of soldiers stood upon the poop going through the manual exercise, and it was from them that the call had come which had sounded so unexpectedly in the ears of the castaways. Standing back from the edge they had not only looked over the topmasts of this welcome neighbour, but they had themselves been invisible from her decks. Now the discovery was mutual, as was shown by a chorus of shouts and cries from beneath them.

But the three did not wait an instant. Sliding and scrambling down the wet, slippery incline, they rushed shouting through the crack and into the cave where their comrades had just been startled by the bugle call while in the middle of their cheerless breakfast. A few hurried words and the leaky long boat had been launched, their possessions had been bundled in, and they were afloat once more. Pulling round a promontory of the berg, they found themselves under the stern of a fine corvette, the sides of which were lined with friendly faces, while from the peak there drooped a huge white banner mottled over with the golden lilies of France. In a very few minutes their boat had been hauled up and they found themselves on board the *St. Christophe* man-of-war, conveying Marquis de Denonville, the new Governor-General of Canada, to take over his duties.

## 28. *In the Pool of Quebec*

A SINGULAR colony it was of which the shipwrecked party found themselves now to be members. The *St. Christophe* had left Rochelle three weeks before with four small consorts conveying five hundred soldiers to help the struggling colony on the St. Lawrence. The squadron had become separated, however, and the governor was pursuing his way alone in the hope of picking up the others in the river. Aboard he had a company of the regiment of Quercy, the staff of his own household, Saint Vallier, the new Bishop of Canada, with several of his attendants, three Recollet friars, and five Jesuits bound for the fatal Iroquois mission, half a dozen ladies on their way out to join their husbands, two Ursuline nuns, ten or twelve gallants whom love of adventure and the hope of bettering their fortunes had drawn across the seas, and lastly some twenty peasant maidens of Anjou who were secure of finding husbands waiting for them upon the beach, if only for the sake of the sheets, the pot, the tin plates and the kettle which the king would provide for each of his humble wards.

To add a handful of New England Independents, a Puritan of Boston, and three Huguenots to such a gathering, was indeed to bring fire-brand and powder-barrel together. And yet all aboard were so busy with their own concerns that the castaways were left very much to themselves. Thirty of the soldiers were down with fever and scurvy, and both priests and nuns were fully taken up in nursing them. Denonville, the governor, a pious-minded dragoon, walked the deck all day reading the Psalms of David, and sat up half the night with maps and charts laid out before him, planning out the destruction of the Iroquois who were ravaging his dominions. The gallants and the ladies flirted, the maidens of Anjou made eyes at the soldiers of Quercy and the bishop Saint Vallier read his offices and lectured his clergy. Ephraim

Savage used to stand all day glaring at the good man as he paced the deck with his red-edged missal in his hand, and muttering about the "abomination of desolation," but his little ways were put down to his exposure upon the iceberg, and to the fixed idea in the French mind that men of the Anglo-Saxon stock are not to be held accountable for their actions.

There was peace between England and France at present, though feeling ran high between Canada and New York, the French believing, and with some justice, that the English colonists were whooping on the demons who attacked them. Ephraim and his men were therefore received hospitably on board, though the ship was so crowded that they had to sleep wherever they could find cover and space for their bodies. The Catinats, too, had been treated in an even more kindly fashion, the weak old man and the beauty of his daughter arousing the interest of the governor himself. De Catinat had, during the voyage, exchanged his uniform for a plain sombre suit, so that, except for his military bearing, there was nothing to show that he was a fugitive from the army. Old Catinat was now so weak that he was past the answering of questions, his daughter was for ever at his side, and the soldier was diplomatist enough, after a training at Versailles, to say much without saying anything, and so their secret was still preserved. De Catinat had known what it was to be a Huguenot in Canada before the law was altered. He had no wish to try it after.

On the day after the rescue they sighted Cape Breton in the south, and soon running swiftly before an easterly wind, saw the loom of the east end of Anticosti. Then they sailed up the mighty river, though from mid-channel the banks upon either side were hardly to be seen. As the shores narrowed in, they saw the wild gorge of the Saguenay River upon the right, with the smoke from the little fishing and trading station of Tadousac streaming up above the pine trees. Naked Indians with their faces daubed with red clay, Algonquins and Abenakis, clustered

round the ship in their birchen canoes with fruit and vegetables from the land which brought fresh life to the scurvy-stricken soldiers. Thence the ship tacked on up the river past Mal Bay, the Ravine of the Eboulements and the Bay of St. Paul with its broad valley and wooded mountains all in a blaze with their beautiful autumn dress, their scarlets, their purples and their golds, from the maple, the ash, the young oak and the saplings of the birch. Amos Green, leaning on the bulwarks, stared with longing eyes at these vast expanses of virgin woodland, hardly traversed save by an occasional wandering savage, or hardy *coureur-de-bois*. Then the bold outline of Cape Tourmente loomed up in front of them; they passed the rich placid meadows of Laval's seigneury of Beaupré, and, skirting the settlements of the Island of Orleans, they saw the broad pool stretch out in front of them, the falls of Montmorenci, the high palisades of Cape Levi, the cluster of vessels, and upon the right that wonderful rock with its diadem of towers and its township huddled round its base, the centre and stronghold of French power in America. Cannon thundered from the bastions above, and were echoed back by the warship, while ensigns dipped, hats waved and a swarm of boats and canoes shot out to welcome the new governor, and to convey the soldiers and passengers to shore.

The old merchant had pined away since he had left French soil, like a plant which has been plucked from its roots. The shock of the shipwreck and the night spent in their bleak refuge upon the iceberg had been too much for his years and strength. Since they had been picked up he had lain amid the scurvy-stricken soldiers with hardly a sign of life save for his thin breathing and the twitching of his scraggy throat. Now, however, at the sound of the cannon and the shouting he opened his eyes, and raised himself slowly and painfully upon his pillow.

"What is it, father? What can we do for you?" cried Adèle. "We are in America, and here is Amory and here am I, your children."

But the old man shook his head. "The Lord has brought me to the promised land, but He has not willed that I should enter into it," said he. "May His will be done, and blessed be His name for ever! But at least I should wish, like Moses, to gaze upon it, if I cannot set foot upon it. Think you, Amory, that you could lend me your arm and lead me on to the deck?"

"If I have another to help me," said De Catinat, and, ascending to the deck, he brought Amos Green back with him. "Now, father, if you will lay a hand upon the shoulder of each, you need scarce put your feet to the boards."

A minute later, the old merchant was on deck, and the two young men had seated him upon a coil of rope with his back against the mast, where he should be away from the crush. The soldiers were already crowding down into the boats, and all were so busy over their own affairs that they paid no heed to the little group of refugees who gathered round the stricken man. He turned his head painfully from side to side, but his eyes brightened as they fell upon the broad blue stretch of water, the flash of the distant falls, the high castle, and the long line of purple mountains away to the north-west.

"It is not like France," said he. "It is not green and peaceful and smiling, but it is grand and strong and stern like Him who made it. As I have weakened, Adèle, my soul has been less clogged by my body, and I have seen clearly much that has been dim to me. And it has seemed to me, my children, that all this country of America, not Canada alone, but the land where you were born also, Amos Green, and all that stretches away towards yonder setting sun, will be the best gift of God to man. For this has He held it concealed through all the ages, that now His own high purpose may be wrought upon it. For here is a land which is innocent, which has no past guilt to atone for, no feud, nor ill custom, nor evil of any kind. And as the years roll on all the weary and homeless ones, all who are stricken and landless and wronged, will turn

their faces to it, even as we have done. And hence will come a nation which will surely take all that is good and leave all that is bad, moulding and fashioning itself into the highest. Do I not see such a mighty people—a people who will care more to raise their lowest than to exalt their richest—who will understand that there is more bravery in peace than in war, who will see that all men are brothers, and whose hearts will not narrow themselves down to their own frontiers, but will warm in sympathy with every noble cause the whole world through? That is what I see, Adèle, as I lie here beside a shore upon which I shall never set my feet, and I say to you that if you and Amory go to the building of such a nation then indeed your lives are not misspent. It will come, and when it comes, may God guard it, may God watch over it and direct it!" His head had sunk gradually lower upon his breast and his lids had fallen slowly over his eyes which had been looking away out past Point Levi at the rolling woods and the far-off mountains. Adèle gave a quick cry of despair and threw her arms round the old man's neck.

"He is dying, Amory, he is dying!" she cried.

A stern Franciscan friar, who had been telling his beads within a few paces of them, heard the cry and was beside them in an instant.

"He is indeed dying," he said, as he gazed down at the ashen face. "Has the old man had the sacraments of the Church?"

"I do not think that he needs them," answered De Catinat evasively.

"Which of us do not need them, young man!" said the friar sternly. "And how can a man hope for salvation without them! I shall myself administer them without delay."

But the old Huguenot had opened his eyes, and with a last flicker of strength he pushed away the grey-hooded figure which bent over him.

"I left all that I love rather than yield to you," he

cried, "and think you that you can overcome me now?"

The Franciscan started back at the words, and his hard suspicious eyes shot from De Catinat to the weeping girl.

"So!" said he. "You are Huguenots, then!"

"Hush! Do not wrangle before a man who is dying!" cried De Catinat in a voice as fierce as his own.

"Before a man who is dead," said Amos Green solemnly.

As he spoke the old man's face had relaxed, his thousand wrinkles had been smoothed suddenly out, as though an invisible hand had passed over them, and his head fell back against the mast. Adèle remained motionless with her arms still clasped round his neck and her cheek pressed against his shoulder. She had fainted.

De Catinat raised his wife and bore her down to the cabin of one of the ladies who had already shown them some kindness. Deaths were no new thing aboard the ship, for they had lost ten soldiers upon the outward passage, so that amid the joy and bustle of the disembarking there were few who had a thought to spare upon the dead pilgrim, and the less so when it was whispered abroad that he had been a Huguenot. A brief order was given that he should be buried in the river that very night, and then, save for a sailmaker who fastened the canvas round him, mankind had done its last for Theophile Catinat. With the survivors, however, it was different, and when the troops were all disembarked, they were mustered in a little group upon the deck, and an officer of the governor's suite decided upon what should be done with them. He was a portly, good-humoured, ruddy-cheeked man, but De Catinat saw with apprehension that the friar walked by his side as he advanced along the deck, and exchanged a few whispered remarks with him. There was a bitter smile upon the monk's dark face which boded little good for the heretics.

"It shall be seen to, good father, it shall be seen to," said the officer impatiently, in answer to one of these

whispered injunctions. "I am as zealous a servant of Holy Church as you are."

"I trust that you are, Monsieur de Bonneville. With so devout a governor as Monsieur de Denonville, it might be an ill thing even in this world for the officers of his household to be lax."

The soldier glanced angrily at his companion, for he saw the threat which lurked under the words.

"I would have you remember, father," said he, "that if faith is a virtue, charity is no less so." Then, speaking in English: "Which is Captain Savage?"

"Ephraim Savage of Boston."

"And Master Amos Green?"

"Amos Green of New York."

"And Master Tomlinson?"

"John Tomlinson of Salem."

"And master mariners Hiram Jefferson, Joseph Cooper, Seek-grace Spaulding, and Paul Cushing, all of Massachusetts Bay?"

"We are all here."

"It is the governor's orders that all whom I have named shall be conveyed at once to the trading brig *Hope*, which is yonder ship with the white paint line. She sails within the hour for the English provinces."

A buzz of joy broke from the castaway mariners at the prospect of being so speedily restored to their homes, and they hurried away to gather together the few possessions which they had saved from the wreck. The officer put his list in his pocket and stepped across to where De Catinat leaned moodily against the bulwarks.

"Surely you remember me," he said. "I could not forget your face, even though you have exchanged a blue coat for a black one."

De Catinat grasped the hand which was held out to him.

"I remember you well, De Bonneville, and the journey that we made together to Fort Frontenac, but it was not for me to claim your friendship, now that things have gone amiss with me."

"Tut, man, once my friend always my friend."

"I feared, too, that my acquaintance would do you little good with yonder dark-cowled friar who is glowering behind you."

"Well, well, you know how it is with us here. Frontenac could keep them in their place, but De la Barre was as clay in their hands, and this new one promises to follow in his steps. What with the Sulpitians at Montreal and the Jesuits here, we poor devils are between the upper and the nether stones. But I am grieved from my heart to give such a welcome as this to an old comrade, and still more to his wife."

"What is to be done, then?"

"You are to be confined to the ship until she sails, which will be in a week at the furthest."

"And then?"

"You are to be carried home in her, and handed over to the Governor of Rochelle to be sent back to Paris. Those are Monsieur de Denonville's orders, and if they be not carried out to the letter, then we shall have the whole hornet's nest about our ears."

De Catinat groaned as he listened. After all their strivings and trials and efforts, to return to Paris, the scorn of his enemies, and an object of pity to his friends, was too deep a humiliation. He flushed with shame at the very thought. To be led back like the home-sick peasant who has deserted from his regiment! Better one spring into the broad blue river beneath him, were it not for little pale-faced Adèle who had none but him to look to. It was so tame! So ignominious! And yet in this floating prison, with a woman whose fate was linked with his own, what hope was there of escape?

De Bonneville had left him, with a few blunt words of sympathy, but the friar still paced the deck with a furtive glance at him from time to time, and two soldiers who were stationed upon the poop passed and repassed within a few yards of him. They had orders evidently to mark his movements. Heart-sick he leaned over the side

watching the Indians in their paint and feathers shooting backwards and forwards in their canoes, and staring across at the town where the gaunt gable ends of houses and charred walls marked the effect of the terrible fire which a few years before had completely destroyed the lower part.

As he stood gazing, his attention was drawn away by the swish of oars, and a large boat full of men passed immediately underneath where he stood.

It held the New Englanders who were being conveyed to the ship which was to take them home. There were the four seamen huddled together, and there in the sheets were Captain Ephraim Savage and Amos Green, conversing together and pointing to the shipping. The grizzled face of the old Puritan and the bold features of the woodsman were turned more than once in his direction, but no word of farewell and no kindly wave of the hand came back to the lonely exile. They were so full of their own future and their own happiness that they had not a thought to spare upon his misery. He could have borne anything from his enemies, but this sudden neglect from his friends came too heavily after his other troubles. He stooped his face to his arms and burst in an instant into a passion of sobs. Before he raised his eyes again the brig had hoisted her anchor, and was tacking under full canvas out of the Quebec basin.

## 29. *The Voice at the Port-hole*

THAT night old Theophile Catinat was buried from the ship's side, his sole mourners the two who bore his own blood in their veins. The next day De Catinat spent upon deck, amid the bustle and confusion of the unlading, endeavouring to cheer Adèle by light chatter which came from a heavy heart. He pointed out to her the places which he had known so well, the citadel where he had been quartered, the college of the

Jesuits, the cathedral of Bishop Laval, the magazine of the old company, dismantled by the great fire, and the house of Aubert de la Chesnaye, the only private one which had remained standing in the lower part. From where they lay they could see not only the places of interest, but something also of that motley population which made the town so different to all others save only its younger sister, Montreal. Passing and repassing along the steep path with the picket fence which connected the two quarters they saw the whole panorama of Canadian life moving before their eyes, the soldiers with their slouched hats, their plumes and their bandoleers, habitants from the river *côtes* in their rude peasant dresses, little changed from their forefathers of Brittany or Normandy, and young rufflers from France or from the seigneuries, who cocked their hats and swaggered in what they thought to be the true Versailles fashion. There, too, might be seen little knots of the men of the woods, *coureurs-de-bois* or *voyageurs*, with leathern hunting tunics, fringed leggings and fur cap with eagle feather, who came back once a year to the cities, leaving their Indian wives and children in some up-country wigwam. Redskins, too, were there, leather-faced Algonquin fishers and hunters, wild Micmacs from the east, and savage Abenakis from the south, while everywhere were the dark habits of the Franciscans, and the black cassocks and broad hats of the Recollets, and Jesuits, the moving spirits of the whole.

Such were the folk who crowded the streets of the capital of this strange offshoot of France which had been planted along the line of the great river, a thousand leagues from the parent country. And it was a singular settlement, the most singular perhaps that has ever been made. For a long twelve hundred miles it extended, from Tadousac in the east, away to the trading stations upon the borders of the great lakes, limiting itself for the most part to narrow cultivated strips upon the margins of the river, banked in behind by wild forests and unexplored mountains which for ever tempted the peasant

from his hoe and his plough to the freer life of the paddle and the musket. Thin scattered clearings, alternating with little palisaded clumps of log-hewn houses, marked the line where civilisation was forcing itself in upon the huge continent, and barely holding its own against the rigour of a northern climate and the ferocity of merciless enemies. The whole white population of this mighty district, including soldiers, priests and woodmen, with all women and children, was very far short of twenty thousand souls, and yet so great was their energy, and such the advantage of the central government under which they lived, that they had left their trace upon the whole continent. When the prosperous English settlers were content to live upon their acres, and when no axe had rung upon the farther side of the Alleghanies, the French had pushed their daring pioneers, some in the black robe of the missionary, and some in the fringed tunic of the hunter, to the uttermost ends of the continent. They had mapped out the lakes and had bartered with the fierce Sioux on the great plains where the wooden wigwam gave place to the hide tee-pee. Marquette had followed the Illinois down to the Mississippi, and had traced the course of the great river until, first of all white men, he looked upon the turbid flood of the rushing Missouri. La Salle had ventured even farther, had passed the Ohio, and had made his way to the Mexican Gulf, raising the French arms where the city of New Orleans was afterwards to stand. Others had pushed on to the Rocky Mountains, and to the huge wilderness of the north-west, preaching, bartering, cheating, baptising, swayed by many motives and holding only in common a courage which never faltered and a fertility of resource which took them in safety past every danger. Frenchmen were to the north of the British settlements, Frenchmen were to the west of them, and Frenchmen were to the south of them, and if all the continent is not now French, the fault assuredly did not rest with that iron race of early Canadians.

All this De Catinat explained to Adèle during the autumn day, trying to draw her thoughts away from the troubles of the past, and from the long dreary voyage which lay before her. She, fresh from the staid life of the Parisian street and from the tame scenery of the Seine, gazed with amazement at the river, the woods and the mountains, and clutched her husband's arm in horror when a canoeful of wild skin-clad Algonquins, their faces striped with white and red paint, came flying past with the foam dashing from their paddles. Again the river turned from blue to pink, again the old citadel was bathed in the evening glow, and again the two exiles descended to their cabins with cheering words for each other and heavy thoughts in their own hearts.

De Catinat's bunk was next to a port-hole, and it was his custom to keep this open, as the caboose was close to him in which the cooking was done for the crew, and the air was hot and heavy. That night he found it impossible to sleep, and he lay tossing under his blanket, thinking over every possible means by which they might be able to get away from this cursed ship. But even if they got away, where could they go to then? All Canada was sealed to them. The woods to the south were full of ferocious Indians. The English settlements would, it was true, grant them freedom to use their own religion, but what would his wife and he do, without a friend, strangers among folk who spoke another tongue? Had Amos Green remained true to them, then, indeed, all would have been well. But he had deserted them. Of course there was no reason why he should not. He was no blood relation of theirs. He had already benefited them many times. His own people and the life that he loved were waiting for him at home. Why should he linger here for the sake of folk whom he had known but a few months? It was not to be expected, and yet De Catinat could not realise it, could not understand it.

But what was that? Above the gentle lapping of the river he had suddenly heard a sharp clear "Hist!"

Perhaps it was some passing boatman or Indian. Then it came again, that eager, urgent summons. He sat up and stared about him. It certainly must have come from the open port-hole. He looked out, but only to see the broad basin, with the loom of the shipping, and the distant twinkle from the lights on Point Levi. As his head dropped back upon the pillow something fell upon his chest with a little tap, and rolling off, rattled along the boards. He sprang up, caught a lantern from a hook and flashed it upon the floor. There was the missile which had struck him—a little golden brooch. As he lifted it up and looked closer at it, a thrill passed through him. It had been his own, and he had given it to Amos Green upon the second day that he had met him, when they were starting together for Versailles.

This was a signal, then, and Amos Green had not deserted them after all. He dressed himself, all in a tremble with excitement, and went upon deck. It was pitch dark, and he could see no one, but the sound of regular footfalls somewhere in the fore part of the ship showed that the sentinels were still there. The guardsman walked over to the side and peered down into the darkness. He could see the loom of a boat.

"Who is there?" he whispered.

"Is that you, De Catinat?"

"Yes."

"We have come for you."

"God bless you, Amos."

"Is your wife there?"

"No, but I can rouse her."

"Good! But first catch this cord. Now pull up the ladder!"

De Catinat gripped the line which was thrown to him, and on drawing it up found that it was attached to a rope ladder furnished at the top with two steel hooks to catch on to the bulwarks. He placed them in position, and then made his way very softly to the cabin amidships in the ladies' quarters which had been allotted to his wife.

She was the only woman aboard the ship now, so that he was able to tap at her door in safety, and to explain in a few words the need for haste and for secrecy. In ten minutes Adèle had dressed, and with her valuables in a little bundle, had slipped out from her cabin. Together they made their way upon deck once more and crept aft under the shadow of the bulwarks. They were almost there when De Catinat stopped suddenly and ground out an oath through his clenched teeth. Between them and the rope ladder there was standing in a dim patch of murky light the grim figure of a Franciscan friar. He was peering through the darkness, his heavy cowl shadowing his face, and he advanced slowly as if he had caught a glimpse of them. A lantern hung from the mizzen shrouds above him. He unfastened it and held it up to cast its light upon them.

But De Catinat was not a man with whom it was safe to trifle. His life had been one of quick resolve and prompt action. Was this vindictive friar at the last moment to stand between him and freedom? It was a dangerous position to take. The guardsman pulled Adèle into the shadow of the mast, and then, as the monk advanced, he sprang out upon him and seized him by the gown. As he did so the other's cowl was pushed back, and instead of the harsh features of the ecclesiastic, De Catinat saw with amazement in the glimmer of the lantern the shrewd grey eyes and strong stern face of Ephraim Savage. At the same instant another figure appeared over the side, and the warm-hearted Frenchman threw himself into the arms of Amos Green.

"It's all right," said the young hunter, disengaging himself with some embarrassment from the other's embrace.

"We've got him in the boat with a buckskin glove jammed into his gullet!"

"Who then?"

"The man whose cloak Captain Ephraim there has put round him. He came on us when you were away rousing

your lady, but we got him to be quiet between us. Is the lady there ? "

" Here she is."

" As quick as you can, then, for someone may come along."

Adèle was helped over the side, and seated in the stern of a birch bark canoe. The three men unhooked the ladder, and swung themselves down by a rope, while two Indians, who held the paddles, pushed silently off from the ship's side, and shot swiftly up the stream. A minute later a dim loom behind them and the glimmer of two yellow lights was all that they could see of the *St. Christophe*.

" Take a paddle, Amos, and I'll take one," said Captain Savage, stripping off his monk's gown. " I felt safer in this on the deck of yon ship, but it don't help in a boat. I believe we might have fastened the hatches and taken her, brass guns and all, had we been so minded."

" And been hanged as pirates at the yard-arm next morning," said Amos. " I think we have done better to take the honey and leave the tree. I hope, madame, that all is well with you."

" Nay, I can hardly understand what has happened, or where we are."

" Nor can I, Amos."

" Did you not expect us to come back for you, then ? "

" I did not know what to expect."

" Well, now, but surely you could not think that we would leave you without a word."

" I confess that I was cut to the heart by it."

" I feared that you were when I looked at you with the tail of my eye, and saw you staring so blackly over the bulwarks at us. But if we had been seen talking or planning they would have been upon our trail at once. As it was they had not a thought of suspicion, save only this fellow whom we have in the bottom of the boat here."

" And what did you do ? "

" We left the brig last night, got ashore on the Beaupré

side, arranged for this canoe, and lay dark all day. Then to-night we got alongside and I roused you easily, for I knew where you slept. The friar nearly spoiled all when you were below, but we gagged him and passed him over the side. Ephraim popped on his gown so that he might go forward to help you without danger, for we were scared at the delay."

"Ah! it is glorious to be free once more. What do I not owe you, Amos?"

"Well, you looked after me when I was in your country, and I am going to look after you now."

"And where are we going?"

"Ah! there you have me. It is this way or none, for we can't get down to the sea. We must make our way over land as best we can, and we must leave a good stretch between Quebec citadel and us before the day breaks, for from what I hear they would rather have a Huguenot prisoner than an Iroquois sagamore. By the eternal, I cannot see why they should make such a fuss over how a man chooses to save his own soul, though here is old Ephraim just as fierce upon the other side, so all the folly is not one way."

"What are you saying about me?" asked the seaman, pricking up his ears at the mention of his own name.

"Only that you are a good stiff old Protestant."

"Yes, thank God. My motto is freedom to conscience, d'ye see, except just for Quakers, and Papists, and—and I wouldn't stand Anne Hutchinsons and women testifying and suchlike foolishness."

Amos Green laughed. "The Almighty seems to pass it over, so why should you take it to heart?" said he.

"Ah, you're young and callow yet. You'll live to know better. Why, I shall hear you saying a good word soon, even for such unclean spawn as this," prodding the prostate friar with the handle of his paddle.

"I daresay he's a good man, accordin' to his lights."

"And I daresay a shark is a good fish accordin' to its lights. No, lad, you won't mix up light and dark for me

in that sort of fashion. You may talk until you unship your jaw, d'ye see, but you will never talk a foul wind into a fair one. Pass over the pouch and the tinder-box, and maybe our friend here will take a turn at my paddle."

All night they toiled up the great river, straining every nerve to place themselves beyond the reach of pursuit. By keeping well into the southern bank, and so avoiding the force of the current, they sped swiftly along, for both Amos and De Catinat were practised hands with the paddle, and the two Indians worked as though they were wire and whipcord instead of flesh and blood. An utter silence reigned over all the broad stream, broken only by the lap-lap of the water against their curving bow, the whirring of the night hawk above them, and the sharp high barking of foxes away in the woods. When at last morning broke, and the black shaded imperceptibly into grey, they were far out of sight of the citadel and of all trace of man's handiwork. Virgin woods in their wonderful many-coloured autumn dress flowed right down to the river edge on either side and in the centre was a little island with a rim of yellow sand and an out-flame of scarlet tupelo and sumach in one bright tangle of colour in the centre.

"I've passed here before," said De Catinat. "I remember marking that great maple with the blaze on its trunk, when last I went with the governor to Montreal. That was in Frontenac's day, when the king was first and the bishop second."

The redskins, who had sat like terra-cotta figures without a trace of expression upon their set hard faces, pricked up their ears at the sound of that name.

"My brother has spoken of the great Onontio," said one of them, glancing round. "We have listened to the whistling of evil birds who tell us that he will never come back to his children across the seas."

"He is with the great white father," answered De Catinat. "I have myself seen him in his council, and

he will assuredly come across the great water if his people have need of him."

The Indian shook his shaven head.

"The rutting month is past, my brother," said he, speaking in broken French, "but ere the month of the bird laying has come there will be no white man upon this river save only behind stone walls."

"What, then? We have heard little! Have the Iroquois broken out so fiercely?"

"My brother, they said that they would eat up the Hurons, and where are the Hurons now? They turned their faces upon the Eries, and where are the Eries now? They went westward against the Illinois, and who can find an Illinois village? They raised the hatchet against the Andastes, and their name is blotted from the earth. And now they have danced a dance and sung a song which will bring little good to my white brothers."

"Where are they, then?"

The Indian waved his hand along the whole southern and western horizon.

"Where are they not? The woods are rustling with them. They are like a fire among dry grass, so swift and so terrible!"

"On my life," said De Catinat, "if these devils are indeed unchained, they will need old Frontenac back if they are not to be swept into the river."

"Aye," said Amos, "I saw him once when I was brought before him with the others for trading on what he called French ground. His mouth set like a skunk trap and he looked at us as if he would have liked our scalps for his leggings. But I could see that he was a chief and a brave man."

"He was an enemy of the Church, and the right hand of the foul fiend in this country," said a voice from the bottom of the canoe.

It was the friar who had succeeded in getting rid of the buckskin glove and belt with which the two Americans had gagged him. He was lying huddled

up now, glaring savagely at the party with his fiery dark eyes.

"His jaw-tackle has come adrift," said the seaman. "Let me brace it up again."

"Nay, why should we take him farther?" asked Amos. "He is but weight for us to carry, and I cannot see that we profit by his company. Let us put him out."

"Aye, sink or swim," cried old Ephraim with enthusiasm.

"Nay, upon the bank."

"And have him maybe in front of us warning the black jackets."

"On that island, then."

"Very good. He can hail the first of his folk who pass."

They shot over to the island and landed the friar, who said nothing, but cursed them with his eye. They left with him a small supply of biscuit and of flour to last him until he should be picked up. Then, having passed a bend in the river, they ran their canoe ashore in a little cove where the whortleberry and cranberry bushes grew right down to the water's edge, and the sward was bright with the white euphorbia, the blue gentian, and the purple balm. There they laid out their small stock of provisions, and ate a hearty breakfast while discussing what their plans should be for the future.

## 30. *Inland Waters*

THEY were not badly provided for their journey. The captain of the Gloucester brig in which the Americans had started from Quebec knew Ephraim Savage well, as who did not upon the New England coast? He had accepted his bill therefore at three months' date, at as high a rate of interest as he could screw out of him, and he had let him have in return three excellent guns, a good supply of ammunition, and enough

money to provide for all his wants. In this way he had hired the canoe and the Indians, and had fitted her with meat and biscuit to last them for ten days at the least.

" It's like the breath of life to me to feel the heft of a gun and to smell the trees round me." said Amos. " Why, it cannot be more than a hundred leagues from here to Albany or Schenectady, right through the forest."

" Aye, lad, but how is the gal to walk a hundred leagues through a forest. No, no, let us keep water under our keel, and lean on the Lord."

" Then there is only one way for it. We must make the Richelieu River, and keep right along to Lake Champlain and Lake St. Sacrament. There we should be close by the headwaters of the Hudson."

" It is a dangerous road," said De Catinat, who understood the conversation of his companions, even when he was unable to join in it. " We should need to skirt the country of the Mohawks."

" It's the only way, I guess. It's that or nothing."

" And I have a friend upon the Richelieu River who, I am sure, would help us on our way," said De Catinat with a smile. " Adèle, you have heard me talk of Charles de la Noue, seigneur de Sainte Marie ? "

" He whom you used to call the Canadian duke, Amory ? "

" Precisely. His seigneury lies on the Richelieu, a little south of Fort St. Louis, and I am sure that he would speed us upon our way."

" Good ! " cried Amos. " If we have a friend there we shall do well. That clenches it, then, and we shall hold fast by the river. Let's get to our paddles, then, for that friar will make mischief for us if he can."

And so for a long week the little party toiled up the great water-way, keeping ever to the southern bank where there were fewer clearings. On both sides of the stream the woods were thick, but every here and there they would curve away, and a narrow strip of cultivated land would

skirt the bank with the yellow stubble to mark where the wheat had grown. Adèle looked with interest at the wooden houses with their jutting stories and quaint gable-ends, at the solid, stone-built manor-houses of the seigneurs, and at the mills in every hamlet, which served the double purpose of grinding flour, and of a loopholed place of retreat in case of attack. Horrible experience had taught the Canadians what the English settlers had yet to learn, that in a land of savages it is a folly to place isolated farm-houses in the centre of their own fields. The clearings then radiated out from the villages, and every cottage was built with an eye to the military necessities of the whole, so that the defence might make a stand at all points, and might finally centre upon the stone manor-house and the mill. Now at every bluff and hill near the villages might be seen the gleam of the muskets of the watchers, for it was known that the scalping parties of the Five Nations were out, and none could tell where the blow would fall, save that it must come where they were least prepared to meet it.

Indeed, at every step in this country, whether the traveller were on the St. Lawrence, or west upon the lakes, or down upon the banks of the Mississippi, or south in the country of the Cherokees and of the Creeks, he would still find the inhabitants in the same state of dreadful expectancy, and from the same cause. The Iroquois, as they were named by the French, or the Five Nations as they called themselves, hung like a cloud over the whole great continent. Their confederation was a natural one, for they were of the same stock and spoke the same language, and all attempts to separate them had been in vain. Mohawks, Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas and Senecas were each proud of their own totems and their own chiefs, but in war they were Iroquois, and the enemy of one was the enemy of all. Their numbers were small, for they were never able to put two thousand warriors in the field, and their country was limited, for their villages were scattered over the

tract which lies between Lake Champlain and Lake Ontario. But they were united, they were cunning, they were desperately brave and they were fiercely aggressive and energetic. Holding a central position they struck out upon each side in turn, never content with simply defeating an adversary but absolutely annihilating and destroying him, while holding all the others in check by their diplomacy. War was their business, and cruelty their amusement. One by one they had turned their arms against the various nations, until, for a space of over a thousand square miles, none existed save by sufferance. They had swept away Hurons and Huron missions in one fearful massacre. They had destroyed the tribes of the north-west, until even the distant Sacs and Foxes trembled at their name. They had scoured the whole country to westward until their scalping parties had come into touch with their kinsmen the Sioux, who were lords of the great plains, even as they were of the great forests. The New England Indians in the east, and the Shawnees and Delawares farther south, paid tribute to them, and the terror of their arms had extended over the borders of Maryland and Virginia. Never, perhaps, in the world's history has so small a body of men dominated so large a district and for so long a time.

For half a century these tribes had nursed a grudge towards the French since Champlain and some of his followers had taken part with their enemies against them. During all these years they had brooded in their forest villages, flashing out now and again in some border outrage, but waiting for the most part until their chance should come. And now it seemed to them that it had come. They had destroyed all the tribes who might have allied themselves with the white men. They had isolated them. They had supplied themselves with good guns and plenty of ammunition from the Dutch and English of New York. The long thin line of French settlements lay naked before them. They were gathered in the woods, like hounds in leash, waiting for the orders of

their chiefs, which should precipitate them with torch and with tomahawk upon the belt of villages.

Such was the situation as the little party of refugees paddled along the bank of the river, seeking the only path which could lead them to peace and to freedom. Yet it was, as they well knew, a dangerous road to follow. All down the Richelieu River were the outposts and block-houses of the French, for when the feudal system was grafted upon Canada the various seigneurs or native *noblesse* were assigned their estates in the positions which would be of most benefit to the settlement. Each seigneur with his tenants under him, trained as they were in the use of arms, formed a military force exactly as they had done in the Middle Ages, the farmer holding his fief upon condition that he mustered when called upon to do so. Hence the old officers of the regiment of Carignan and the more hardy of the settlers had been placed along the line of the Richelieu, which runs at right angles to the St. Lawrence towards the Mohawk country. The block-houses themselves might hold their own, but to the little party who had to travel down from one to the other the situation was full of deadly peril. It was true that the Iroquois were not at war with the English, but they would discriminate little when on the warpath, and the Americans, even had they wished to do so, could not separate their fate from that of their two French companions.

As they ascended the St. Lawrence they met many canoes coming down. Sometimes it was an officer or an official on his way to the capital from Three Rivers or Montreal, sometimes it was a load of skins, with Indians or *coureurs-de-bois* conveying them down to be shipped to Europe, and sometimes it was a small canoe which bore a sunburned grizzly-haired man, with rusty weather-stained black cassock, who zigzagged from bank to bank, stopping at every Indian hut upon his way. If aught were amiss with the Church in Canada the fault lay not with men like these village priests, who toiled and worked

and spent their very lives in bearing comfort and hope, and a little touch of refinement too, through all those wilds. More than once these wayfarers wished to have speech with the fugitives, but they pushed onwards, disregarding their signs and hails. From below nothing overtook them, for they paddled from early morning until late at night, drawing up the canoe when they halted, and building a fire of dry wood, for already the nip of the coming winter was in the air.

It was not only the people and their dwellings which were stretched out before the wondering eyes of the French girl as she sat day after day in the stern of the canoe. Her husband and Amos Green taught her also to take notice of the sights of the woodlands, and as they skirted the bank, they pointed out a thousand things which her own senses would never have discerned. Sometimes it was the furry face of a raccoon peeping out from some tree-cleft, or an otter swimming under the overhanging brushwood with the gleam of a white fish in its mouth. Or, perhaps, it was the wild cat crouching along a branch with its wicked yellow eyes fixed upon the squirrels which played at the farther end, or else with a scuttle and rush the Canadian porcupine would thrust its way among the yellow blossoms of the resin weed and the tangle of the whortleberry bushes. She learned, too, to recognise the pert sharp cry of the tiny chick-a-dee, the call of the bluebird, and the flash of its wings amid the foliage, the sweet chirpy note of the black and white bobolink, and the long-drawn mewing of the catbird. On the breast of the broad blue river, with Nature's sweet concert ever sounding from the bank, and with every colour that artist could devise spread out before her eyes on the foliage of the dying woods, the smile came back to her lips and her cheeks took a glow of health which France had never been able to give. De Catinat saw the change in her, but her presence weighed him down with fear, for he knew that while Nature had made these woods a heaven, man had changed it into a hell, and that

a nameless horror lurked behind all the beauty of the fading leaves and of the woodland flowers. Often as he lay at night beside the smouldering fire upon his couch of spruce boughs, and looked at the little figure muffled in the blanket and slumbering peacefully by his side, he felt that he had no right to expose her to such peril, and that in the morning they should turn the canoe eastward again and take what fate might bring them at Quebec. But ever with the daybreak there came the thought of the humiliation, the dreary homeward voyage, the separation which would await them in galley and dungeon, to turn him from his purpose.

On the seventh day they rested at a point but a few miles from the mouth of the Richelieu River, where a large blockhouse, Fort Richelieu, had been built by M. de Saurel. Once past this they had no great distance to go to reach the seigneury of De Catinat's friend of the *noblesse* who would help them upon their way. They had spent the night upon a little island in midstream, and at early dawn they were about to thrust the canoe out again from the sand-lined cove in which she lay, when Ephraim Savage growled in his throat and pointed out across the water.

A large canoe was coming up the river, flying along as quick as a dozen arms could drive it. In the stern sat a dark figure which bent forward with every swing of the paddles, as though consumed by eagerness to push onwards. Even at that distance there was no mistaking it. It was the fanatical monk whom they had left behind them.

Concealed among the brushwood they watched their pursuers fly past and vanish round a curve in the stream. Then they looked at one another in perplexity.

"We'd have done better either to put him overboard or to take him as ballast," said Ephraim. "He's hull down in front of us now, and drawing full."

"Well, we can't take the back track anyhow," remarked Amos.

"And yet how can we go on?" said De Catinat despondently. "This vindictive devil will give word at the fort and at every other point along the river. He has been back to Quebec. It is one of the governor's own canoes, and goes three paces to our two."

"Let me cipher it out." Amos Green sat on a fallen maple with his head sunk upon his hands. "Well," said he presently, "if it's no good going on, and no good going back, there's only one way, and that is to go to one side. That's so, Ephraim, is it not?"

"Aye, aye, lad, if you can't run you must tack, but it seems shoal water on either bow."

"We can't go to the north, so it follows that we must go to the south."

"Leave the canoe?"

"It's our only chance. We can cut through the woods and come out near this friendly house on the Richelieu. The friar will lose our trail then, and we'll have no more trouble with him, if he stays on the St. Lawrence."

"There's nothing else for it," said Captain Ephraim ruefully. "It's not my way to go by land if I can get by water, and I have not been a fathom deep in a wood since King Philip came down on the province, so you must lay the course and keep her straight, Amos."

"It is not far and it will not take us long. Let us get over to the southern bank and we shall make a start. If madame tires, De Catinat, we shall take turns to carry her."

"Ah, monsieur, you cannot think what a good walker I am. In this splendid air one might go on for ever."

"We will cross, then."

In a very few minutes they were at the other side and had landed at the edge of the forest. There the guns and ammunition were allotted to each man, and his share of the provisions and of the scanty baggage. Then having paid the Indians, and having instructed them to say nothing of their movements, they turned their backs upon the river and plunged into the silent woods.

## 31. *The Hairless Man*

ALL day they pushed on through the woodlands, walking in single file, Amos Green first, then the seaman, then the lady, and De Catinat bringing up the rear. The young woodsman advanced cautiously, seeing and hearing much that was lost to his companions, stopping continually and examining the signs of leaf and moss and twig. Their route lay for the most part through open glades amid a huge pine forest, with a green sward beneath their feet, made beautiful by the white euphorbia, the golden rod and the purple aster. Sometimes, however, the great trunks closed in upon them, and they had to grope their way in a dim twilight, or push a path through the tangled brushwood of green sassafras or scarlet sumach. And then again the woods would shred suddenly away in front of them, and they would skirt marshes, overgrown with wild rice and dotted with little dark clumps of alder bushes, or make their way past silent woodland lakes, all streaked and barred with the tree shadows which threw their crimsons and clarets and bronzes upon the fringe of the deep blue sheet of water. There were streams, too, some clear and rippling, where the trout flashed and the king-fisher gleamed, others dark and poisonous from the tamarack swamps, where the wanderers had to wade over their knees and carry Adèle in their arms. So all day they journeyed 'mid the great forests, with never a hint or token of their fellow-man.

But if man were absent, there was at least no want of life. It buzzed and chirped and chattered all round them from marsh and stream and brushwood. Sometimes it was the dun coat of a deer which glanced between the distant trunks, sometimes the badger which scuttled for its hole at their approach. Once the long in-toed track of a bear lay marked in the soft earth before them, and once Amos picked a great horn from amid the bushes which some moose had shed the month before. Little

red squirrels danced and clattered above their heads and every oak was a choir with a hundred tiny voices piping from the shadow of its foliage. As they passed the lakes the heavy grey stork flapped up in front of them, and they saw the wild duck whirring off in a long V against the blue sky, or heard the quavering cry of the loon from amid the reeds.

That night they slept in the woods, Amos Green lighting a dry wood fire in a thick copse where at a dozen paces it was invisible. A few drops of rain had fallen, so with the quick skill of the practised woodsman he made two little sheds of elm and basswood bark, one to shelter the two refugees, and the other for Ephraim and himself. He had shot a wild goose, and this, with the remains of their biscuit, served them both for supper and for breakfast. Next day at noon they passed a little clearing, in the centre of which were the charred embers of a fire. Amos spent half an hour in reading all that sticks and ground could tell him. Then, as they resumed their way, he explained to his companions that the fire had been lit three weeks before, that a white man and two Indians had camped there, that they had been journeying from west to east, and that one of the Indians had been a squaw. No other traces of their fellow-mortals did they come across, until late in the afternoon Amos halted suddenly in the heart of a thick grove, and raised his hand to his ear.

"Listen!" he cried.

"I hear nothing," said Ephraim.

"Nor I," added De Catinat.

"Ah, but I do!" cried Adèle gleefully. "It is a bell—and at the very time of day when bells all sound in Paris!"

"You are right, madame. It is what they call the Angelus bell."

"Ah, yes, I hear it now!" cried De Catinat. "It was drowned by the chirping of the birds. But whence comes a bell in the heart of a Canadian forest?"

'We are near the settlements on the Richelieu. It must be the bell of the chapel at the fort."

"Fort St. Louis! Ah, then, we are no great way from my friend's seigneury."

"Then we may sleep there to-night, if you think that he is indeed to be trusted."

"Yes. He is a strange man, with ways of his own, but I would trust him with my life."

"Very good. We shall keep to the south of the fort and make for his house. But something is putting up the birds over yonder. Ah, I hear the sound of steps! Crouch down here among the sumach, until we see who it is who walks so boldly through the woods."

They stooped all four among the brushwood, peeping out between the tree trunks at a little glade towards which Amos was looking. For a long time the sound which the quick ears of the woodsman had detected was inaudible to the others, but at last they too heard the sharp snapping of twigs as someone forced his passage through the undergrowth. A moment later a man pushed his way into the open, whose appearance was so strange and so ill-suited to the spot, that even Amos gazed upon him with amazement.

He was a very small man, so dark and weather-stained that he might have passed for an Indian were it not that he walked and was clad as no Indian had ever been. He wore a broad-brimmed hat, frayed at the edges, and so discoloured that it was hard to say what its original tint had been. His dress was of skins rudely cut and dangling loosely from his body, and he wore the high boots of a dragoon, as tattered and stained as the rest of his raiment. On his back he bore a huge bundle of canvas with two long sticks projecting from it, and under each arm he carried what appeared to be a large square painting.

"He's no Injun," whispered Amos, "and he's no woodsman either. Blessed if I ever saw the match of him!"

"He's neither *voyageur*, nor soldier, nor *coureur-de-bois*," said De Catinat.

"'Pears to me to have a jurymast rigged upon his back, and fore and main staysails set under each of his arms," said Captain Ephraim.

"Well, he seems to have no consorts, so we may hail him without fear."

They rose from their ambush, and as they did so the stranger caught sight of them. Instead of showing the uneasiness which any man might be expected to feel at suddenly finding himself in the presence of strangers in such a country he promptly altered his course and came towards them. As he crossed the glade, however, the sounds of the distant bell fell upon his ears, and he instantly whipped off his hat and sunk his head in prayer. A cry of horror rose, not only from Adèle but from every one of the party, at the sight which met their eyes.

The top of the man's head was gone. Not a vestige of hair or of white skin remained, but in place of it was a dreadful crinkled discoloured surface with a sharp red line running across his brow and round over his ears.

"By the eternal!" cried Amos, "the man has lost his scalp!"

"My God!" said De Catinat. "Look at his hands!"

He had raised them in prayer. Two or three little stumps projecting upwards showed where the fingers had been.

"I've seen some queer figureheads in my life, but never one like that," said Captain Ephraim.

It was indeed a most extraordinary face which confronted them as they advanced. It was that of a man who might have been of any age and of any nation, for the features were so distorted that nothing could be learned from them. One eyelid was drooping with a puckering and flatness which showed that the ball was gone. The other, however, shot as bright and merry and kindly a glance as ever came from a chosen favourite of fortune. His face was flecked over with peculiar brown spots

which had a most hideous appearance, and his nose had been burst and shattered by some terrific blow. And yet, in spite of this dreadful appearance, there was something so noble in the carriage of the man, in the pose of his head and in the expression which still hung, like the scent from a crushed flower, round his distorted features, that even the blunt Puritan seaman was awed by it.

"Good evening, my children," said the stranger, picking up his pictures again and advancing towards them. "I presume that you are from the fort, though I may be permitted to observe that the woods are not very safe for ladies at present."

"We are going to the manor-house of Charles de la Noue at Sainte Marie," said De Catinat, "and we hope soon to be in a place of safety. But I grieve, sir, to see how terribly you have been mishandled."

"Ah, you have observed my little injuries, then! They know no better, poor souls. They are but mischievous children—merry-hearted but mischievous. Tut, tut, it is laughable indeed that a man's vile body should ever clog his spirit, and yet here am I full of the will to push forward, and yet I must even seat myself on this log and rest myself, for the rogues have blown the calves of my legs off."

"My God! Blown them off! The devils!"

"Ah, but they are not to be blamed. No, no, it would be uncharitable to blame them. They are ignorant, poor folk, and the prince of darkness is behind them to urge them on. They sank little charges of powder into my legs and then they exploded them, which makes me a slower walker than ever, though I was never very brisk. 'The Snail' was what I was called at school in Tours, yes, and afterwards at the seminary I was always 'the Snail.'"

"Who are you, then, sir, and who is it who has used you so shamefully?" asked De Catinat.

"Oh, I am a very humble person. I am Ignatius Morat, of the Society of Jesus, and as to the people who

have used me a little roughly, why, if you are sent upon the Iroquois mission, of course you know what to expect. I have nothing at all to complain of. Why, they have used me very much better than they did Father Jogues, Father Brebœuf and a good many others whom I could mention. There were times, it is true, when I was quite hopeful of martyrdom, especially when they thought my tonsure was too small, which was their merry way of putting it. But I suppose I was not worthy of it ; indeed I know that I was not, so it only ended in just a little roughness."

" Where are you going, then ? " asked Amos, who had listened in amazement to the man's words.

" I am going to Quebec. You see I am such a useless person that, until I have seen the bishop, I can really do no good at all."

" You mean that you will resign your mission into the bishop's hands ? " said De Catinat.

" Oh, no. That would be quite the sort of thing which I should do if I were left to myself, for it is incredible how cowardly I am. You would not think it possible that a priest of God could be so frightened as I am sometimes. The mere sight of a fire makes me shrink all into myself ever since I went through the ordeal of the lighted pine splinters, which have left all these ugly stains upon my face. But then, of course, there is the Order to be thought of, and members of the Order do not leave their posts for trifling causes. But it is against the rules of Holy Church that a maimed man should perform the rites, and so, until I have seen the bishop and had his dispensation, I shall be even more useless than ever."

" And what will you do then ? "

" Oh, then, of course, I will go back to my flock."

" To the Iroquois ? "

" That is where I am stationed."

" Amos," said De Catinat, " I have spent my life among brave men, but I think that this is the bravest man that I have ever met ! "

"On my word," said Amos, "I have seen some good men, too, but never one that I thought was better than this. You are weary, father. Have some of our cold goose, and there is still a drop of cognac in my flask."

"Tut, tut, my son, if I take anything but the very simplest living it makes me so lazy that I become a snail indeed."

"But you have no gun and no food. How do you live?"

"Oh, the good God has placed plenty of food in these forests for a traveller who dare not eat very much. I have had wild plums, and wild grapes, and nuts and cranberries, and a nice little dish of *tripe-de-mére* from the rocks."

The woodsman made a wry face at the mention of this delicacy.

"I had as soon eat a pot of glue," said he. "But what is this which you carry on your back?"

"It is my church. Ah, I have everything here, tent, altar, surplice, everything. I cannot venture to celebrate service myself without the dispensation, but surely this venerable man is himself in orders and will solemnise the most blessed function."

Amos with a sly twinkle of the eyes translated the proposal to Ephraim, who stood with his huge red hands clenched, mumbling about the saltless pottage of papacy. De Catinat replied briefly, however, that they were all of the laity, and that if they were to reach their destination before nightfall, it was necessary that they should push on.

"You are right, my son," said the little Jesuit. "These poor people have already left their villages and in a few days the woods will be full of them, though I do not think that any have crossed the Richelieu yet. There is one thing, however, which I would have you do for me."

"And what is that?"

"It is but to remember that I have left with Father Lamberville at Onondaga the dictionary which I have made of the Iroquois and French languages. There also

is my account of the copper mines of the Great Lakes which I visited two years ago, and also an orrery which I have made to show the northern heavens with the stars of each month as they are seen from this meridian. If aught were to go amiss with Father Lamberville or with me—and we do not live very long on the Iroquois mission —it would be well that someone else should profit from my work."

"I will tell my friend to-night. But what are these great pictures, father, and why do you bear them through the wood?" He turned them over as he spoke, and the whole party gathered round them, staring in amazement.

They were very rough daubs, crudely coloured and gaudy. In the first, a red man was reposing serenely upon what appeared to be a range of mountains, with a musical instrument in his hand, a crown upon his head, and a smile upon his face. In the second, a similar man was screaming at the pitch of his lungs, while half-a-dozen black creatures were battering him with poles and prodding him with lances.

"It is a damned soul and a saved soul," said Father Ignatius Morat, looking at his pictures with some satisfaction. "These are clouds upon which the blessed spirit reclines, basking in all the joys of paradise. It is well done, this picture, but it has no good effect, because there are no beaver in it and they have not painted in a tobacco-pipe. You see they have little reason, these poor folk, and so we have to teach them as best we can through their eyes and their foolish senses. This other is better. It has converted several squaws and more than one Indian. I shall not bring back the saved soul when I come in the spring, but I shall bring five damned souls, which will be one for each nation. We must fight Satan with such weapons as we can get, you see. And now, my children, if you must go, let me first call down a blessing upon you!"

And then occurred a strange thing, for the beauty of this man's soul shone through all the wretched clouds of

sect, and, as he raised his hand to bless them, down went those Protestant knees to earth, and even old Ephraim found himself with a softened heart and a bent head listening to the half-understood words of this crippled, half-blinded little stranger.

"Farewell, then," said he, when they had risen. "May the sunshine of Sainte Eulalie be upon you, and may Sainte Anne of Beaupré shield you at the moment of your danger."

And so they left him, a grotesque and yet heroic figure staggering along through the woods with his tent, his pictures and his mutilation. If the Church of Rome should ever be wrecked it may come from her weakness in high places, where all Churches are at their weakest, or it may be because with what is very narrow she tries to explain that which is very broad, but assuredly it will never be through the fault of her rank and file, for never upon earth have men and women spent themselves more lavishly and more splendidly than in her service.

## 32. *The Lord of Sainte Marie*

LEAVING Fort St. Louis, whence the bells had sounded, upon their right, they pushed onwards as swiftly as they could, for the sun was so low in the heavens that the bushes in the clearings threw shadows like trees. Then suddenly as they peered in front of them between the trunks, the green of the sward turned to the blue of the water, and they saw a broad river running swiftly before them. In France it would have seemed a mighty stream, but, coming fresh from the vastness of the St. Lawrence, their eyes were used to great sheets of water. But Amos and De Catinat had both been upon the bosom of the Richelieu before, and their hearts bounded as they looked upon it, for they knew that this was the straight path which led them, the one to home, and the other to peace and freedom. A few

days' journeying down there, a few more along the lovely island-studded lakes of Champlain and Saint Sacrament, under the shadow of the tree-clad Adirondacks, and they would be at the headquarters of the Hudson, and their toils and their dangers be but a thing of gossip for the winter evenings.

Across the river was the terrible Iroquois country, and at two points they could see the smoke of fires curling up into the evening air. They had the Jesuit's word for it that none of the war-parties had crossed yet, so they followed the track which led down the eastern bank. As they pushed onwards, however, a stern military challenge suddenly brought them to a stand, and they saw the gleam of two musket barrels which covered them from a thicket overlooking the path.

"We are friends," cried De Catinat.

"Whence come you, then?" asked an invisible sentinel.

"From Quebec."

"And whither are you going?"

"To visit Monsieur Charles de la Noue, seigneur of Sainte Marie."

"Very good. It is quite safe, Du Lhut. They have a lady with them, too. I greet you, madame, in the name of my father."

Two men had emerged from the bushes, one of whom might have passed as a full-blooded Indian, had it not been for these courteous words which he uttered in excellent French. He was a tall, slight young man, very dark, with piercing black eyes, and a grim square relentless mouth which could only have come with Indian descent. His coarse flowing hair was gathered up into a scalp-lock, and the eagle feather which he wore in it was his only head-gear. A rude suit of fringed hide with cariboo-skin mocassins might have been the fellow to the one which Amos Green was wearing, but the gleam of a gold chain from his belt, the sparkle of a costly ring upon his finger, and the delicate richly-inlaid musket which he

carried, all gave a touch of grace to his equipment. A broad band of yellow ochre across his forehead and a tomahawk at his belt added to the strange inconsistency of his appearance.

The other was undoubtedly a pure Frenchman, elderly, dark and wiry, with a bristling black beard and a fierce eager face. He, too, was clad in hunter's dress, but he wore a gaudy striped sash round his waist into which a brace of long pistols had been thrust. His buckskin tunic had been ornamented over the front with dyed porcupine quills and Indian bead-work, while his leggings were scarlet with a fringe of raccoon tails hanging down from them. Leaning upon his long brown gun he stood watching the party, while his companion advanced towards them.

"You will excuse our precautions," said he. "We never know what device these rascals may adopt to entrap us. I fear, madame, that you have had a long and very tiring journey."

Poor Adèle, who had been famed for neatness even among housekeepers of the Rue St. Martin, hardly dared to look down at her own stained and tattered dress. Fatigue and danger she had endured with a smiling face, but her patience almost gave way at the thought of facing strangers in this attire.

"My mother will be very glad to welcome you, and to see to every want," said he quickly, as though he had read her thoughts. "But you, sir, I have surely seen you before."

"And I you," cried the guardsman. "My name is Amory de Catinat, once of the regiment of Picardy. Surely you are Achille de la Noue de Sainte Marie, whom I remember when you came with your father to the government *levées* at Quebec."

"Yes, it is I," the young man answered, holding out his hand and smiling in a somewhat constrained fashion. "I do not wonder that you should hesitate, for when you saw me last I was in a very different dress to this."

De Catinat did indeed remember him as one of the band of the young *noblesse* who used to come up to the capital once a year, where they inquired about the latest modes, chatted over the year-old gossip of Versailles, and for a few weeks at least lived a life which was in keeping with the traditions of their order. Very different was he now, with scalp-lock and war-paint, under the shadow of the great oaks, his musket in his hand and his tomahawk at his belt.

"We have one life for the forest and one for the cities," said he, "though indeed my good father will not have it so, and carries Versailles with him wherever he goes. You know him of old, monsieur, and I need not explain my words. But it is time for our relief, and so we may guide you home."

Two men in the rude dress of Canadian *censitaires* or farmers, but carrying their muskets in a fashion which told De Catinat's trained senses that they were disciplined soldiers, had suddenly appeared upon the scene. Young De la Noue gave them a few curt injunctions, and then accompanied the refugees along the path.

"You may not know my friend here," said he, pointing to the other sentinel, "but I am quite sure that his name is not unfamiliar to you. This is Greysolon du Lhut."

Both Amos and De Catinat looked with the deepest curiosity and interest at the famous leader of *coureurs-de-bois*, a man whose whole life had been spent in pushing westward, ever westward, saying little, writing nothing, but always the first wherever there was danger to meet or difficulty to overcome. It was not religion and it was not hope to gain which led him away into those western wildernesses, but pure love of nature and of adventure, with so little ambition that he had never cared to describe his own travels, and none knew where he had been or where he had stopped. For years he would vanish from the settlements away into the vast plains of the Dacotah, or into the huge wilderness of the north-west, and then

at last some day would walk back into Sault Ste. Marie, or any other outpost of civilisation, a little leaner, a little browner and as taciturn as ever. Indians from the furthest corners of the continent knew him as they knew their own sachem. He could raise tribes and bring a thousand painted cannibals to the help of the French who spoke a tongue which none knew, and came from the shores of rivers which no one else had visited. The most daring French explorers, when, after a thousand dangers, they had reached some country which they believed to be new, were as likely as not to find Du Lhut sitting by his camp fire there, some new squaw by his side, and his pipe between his teeth. Or again, when in doubt and danger, with no friends within a thousand miles, the traveller might suddenly meet this silent man, with one or two tattered wanderers of his own kidney, who would help him from his peril, and then vanish as unexpectedly as he came. Such was the man who now walked by their sides along the bank of the Richelieu, and both Amos and De Catinat knew that his presence there had a sinister meaning, and that the place which Greysolon du Lhut had chosen was the place where the danger threatened.

"What do you think of those fires over yonder, Du Lhut?" asked young De la Noue.

The adventurer was stuffing his pipe with rank Indian tobacco which he pared from a plug with a scalping knife. He glanced over at the two little plumes of smoke which stood straight up against the red evening sky.

"I don't like them," said he.

"They are Iroquois, then?"

"Yes."

"Well, at least it proves that they are on the other side of the river."

"It proves that they are on this side."

"What!"

Du Lhut lit his pipe from a tinder paper. "The Iroquois are on this side," said he. "They crossed to the south of us."

"And you never told us. How do you know that they crossed, and why did you not tell us?"

"I did not know until I saw the fires over yonder."

"And how did they tell you?"

"Tut, an Indian papoose could have told," said Du Lhut impatiently. "Iroquois on the trail do nothing without an object. They have an object, then, in showing that smoke. If their war-parties were over yonder there would be no object. Therefore their braves must have crossed the river. And they could not get over to the north without being seen from the fort. They have got over on the south, then."

Amos nodded with intense appreciation. "That's it!" said he, "that's Injun ways. I'll lay that he is right."

"Then they may be in the woods round us. We may be in danger," cried De la Noue.

Du Lhut nodded and sucked at his pipe.

De Catinat cast a glance round him at the grand tree trunks, the fading foliage, the smooth sward underneath with the long evening shadows barred across it. How difficult it was to realise that behind all this beauty there lurked a danger so deadly and horrible that a man alone might well shrink from it, far more one who had the woman whom he loved walking within hand's touch of him. It was with a long heart-felt sigh of relief that he saw a wall of stockade in the midst of a large clearing in front of him, with the stone manor-house rising above it. In a line from the stockade were a dozen cottages with cedar-shingled roofs turned up in the Norman fashion, in which dwelt the habitants under the protection of the seigneur's château—a strange little graft of the feudal system in the heart of an American forest. Above the main gate as they approached was a huge shield of wood with a coat of arms painted upon it, a silver ground with a chevron ermine between three coronets gules. At either corner a small brass cannon peeped through an embrasure. As they passed the gate the guard inside

closed it and placed the huge wooden bars into position. A little crowd of men, women and children were gathered round the door of the château, and a man appeared to be seated on a high-backed chair upon the threshold.

"You know my father," said the young man with a shrug of his shoulders. "He will have it that he has never left his Norman castle, and that he is still the Seigneur de la Noue, the greatest man within a day's ride of Rouen, and of the richest blood of Normandy. He is now taking his dues and his yearly oaths from his tenants, and he would not think it becoming, if the governor himself were to visit him, to pause in the middle of so august a ceremony. But if it would interest you, you may step this way and wait until he has finished. You, madame, I will take at once to my mother, if you will be so kind as to follow me."

The sight was, to the Americans at least, a novel one. A triple row of men, women and children were standing round in a semicircle, the men rough and sunburned, the women homely and clean, with white caps upon their heads, the children open-mouthed and round-eyed, awed into an unusual quiet by the reverent bearing of their elders. In the centre, on his high-backed carved chair, there sat an elderly man very stiff and erect, with an exceedingly solemn face. He was a fine figure of a man, tall and broad, with large strong features, clean-shaven and deeply-lined, a huge beak of a nose, and strong shaggy eyebrows which arched right up to the great wig, which he wore full and long as it had been worn in France in his youth. On his wig was placed a white hat cocked jauntily at one side with a red feather streaming round it, and he wore a coat of cinnamon-coloured cloth with silver at the neck and pockets, which was still very handsome, though it bore signs of having been frayed and mended more than once. This, with black velvet knee breeches and high, well-polished boots, made a costume such as De Catinat had never before seen in the wilds of Canada.

As they watched, a rude husbandman walked forwards from the crowd, and kneeling down upon a square of carpet placed his hands between those of the seigneur.

"Monsieur de Sainte Marie, Monsieur de Sainte Marie, Monsieur de Sainte Marie," said he three times, "I bring you the faith and homage which I am bound to bring you on account of my fief Herbert, which I hold as a man of faith of your seigneury."

"Be true, my son. Be valiant and true!" said the old nobleman solemnly, and then with a sudden change of tone: "What in the name of the devil has your daughter got there?"

A girl had advanced from the crowd with a large strip of bark in front of her on which was heaped a pile of dead fish.

"It is your eleventh fish which I am bound by my oath to render to you," said the *censitaire*. "There are seventy-three in the heap, and I have caught eight hundred in the month."

"*Peste!*" cried the nobleman. "Do you think, André Dubois, that I will disorder my health by eating three-and-seventy fish in this fashion? Do you think that I and my body-servants and my personal retainers and the other members of my household have nothing to do but to eat your fish! In future, you will pay your tribute not more than five at a time. Where is the major-domo? Theuriet, remove the fish to our central storehouse, and be careful that the smell does not penetrate to the blue tapestry chamber or to my lady's suite."

A man in very shabby black livery, all stained and faded, advanced with a large tin platter and carried off the pile of white fish. Then, as each of the tenants stepped forward to pay their old-world homage, they all left some share of their industry for their lord's maintenance. With some it was a bundle of wheat, with some a barrel of potatoes, while others had brought skins of deer or of beaver. All these were carried off by the major-domo, until each had paid his tribute, and the singular ceremony

was brought to a conclusion. As the seigneur rose, his son, who had returned, took De Catinat by the sleeve and led him through the throng.

"Father," said he, "this is Monsieur de Catinat, whom you may remember some years ago at Quebec."

The seigneur bowed with much condescension, and shook the guardsman by the hand.

"You are extremely welcome to my estates, both you and your body-servants——"

"They are my friends, monsieur. This is Monsieur Amos Green and Captain Ephraim Savage. My wife is travelling with me, but your courteous son has kindly taken her to your lady."

"I am honoured—honoured indeed!" cried the old man, with a bow and a flourish. "I remember you very well, sir, for it is not so common to meet men of quality in this country. I remember your father also, for he served with me at Rocroy, though he was in the Foot, and I in the Red Dragoons of Grissot. Your arms are a martlet in fess upon a field azure, and now that I think of it, the second daughter of your great-grandfather married the son of one of the La Noues of Andelys, which is one of our cadet branches. Kinsman, you are welcome!" He threw his arms suddenly round De Catinat and slapped him three times on the back.

The young guardsman was only too delighted to find himself admitted to such an intimacy.

"I will not intrude long upon your hospitality," said he. "We are journeying down to Lake Champlain, and we hope in a day or two to be ready to go on."

"A suite of rooms shall be laid at your disposal as long as you do me the honour to remain here. *Peste!* It is not every day that I can open my gates to a man with good blood in his veins! Ah, sir, that is what I feel most in my exile, for who is there with whom I can talk as equal to equal? There is the governor, the intendant, perhaps, one or two priests, three or four officers, but how many of the *noblesse?* Scarcely one. They buy their titles over

here as they buy their pelts, and it is better to have a canoe-load of beaver skins than a pedigree from Roland. But I forget my duties. You are weary and hungry, you and your friends. Come up with me to the tapestried *salon*, and we shall see if my stewards can find anything for your refreshment. You play piquet, if I remember right? Ah, my skill is leaving me, and I should be glad to try a hand with you."

The manor-house was high and strong, built of grey stone in a frame-work of wood. The large iron-clamped door through which they entered was pierced for musketry fire and led into a succession of cellars and store-houses in which the beets, carrots, potatoes, cabbages, cured meat, dried eels and other winter supplies were placed. A winding stone staircase led them through a huge kitchen, flagged and lofty, from which branched the rooms of the servants, or retainers as the old nobleman preferred to call them. Above this again was the principal suite, centring in the dining-hall with its huge fireplace and rude home-made furniture. Rich rugs formed of bear- or deer-skin were littered thickly over the brown-stained floor, and antlered heads bristled out from among the rows of muskets which were arranged along the wall. A broad rough-hewn maple table ran down the centre of this apartment, and on this there was soon set a venison pie, a side of calvered salmon and a huge cranberry tart, to which the hungry travellers did full justice. The seigneur explained that he had already supped, but having allowed himself to be persuaded into joining them, he ended by eating more than Ephraim Savage, drinking more than Du Lhut, and finally by singing a very amorous little French *chanson* with a tra-le-ra chorus, the words of which, fortunately for the peace of the company, were entirely unintelligible to the Bostonian.

"Madame is taking her refection in my lady's boudoir," he remarked, when the dishes had been removed. "You may bring up a bottle of Frontiniac from bin thirteen, Theuriet. Oh, you will see, gentlemen, that even in the

wilds we have a little, a very little, which is perhaps not altogether bad. And so you come from Versailles, De Catinat? It was built since my day, but how I remember the old life of the court at St. Germain, before Louis turned serious! Ah, what innocent happy days they were when Madame de Nevailles had to bar the windows of the maids of honour to keep out the king, and we all turned out eight deep on to the grass plot for our morning duel! By Saint Denis, I have not quite forgotten the trick of the wrist yet, and, old as I am, I should be none the worse for a little breather." He strutted in his stately fashion over to where a rapier and dagger hung upon the wall, and began to make passes at the door, darting in and out, warding off imaginary blows with his poniard, and stamping his feet with little cries of "Punto! reverso! stoccata! dritta! mandritta!" and all the jargon of the fencing schools. Finally he rejoined them, breathing heavily and with his wig awry.

"That was our old exercise," said he. "Doubtless you young bloods have improved upon it, and yet it was good enough for the Spaniards at Rocroy and at one or two other places which I could mention. But they still see life at the court, I understand. There are still love passages and blood lettings. How has Lauzun prospered in his wooing of Mademoiselle de Montpensier? Was it proved that Madame de Clermont had bought a phial from Le Vie, the poison woman, two days before the soup disagreed so violently with monsieur? What did the Duc de Biron do when his nephew ran away with the duchess? Is it true that he raised his allowance to fifty thousand livres for having done it?" Such were the two-year-old questions which had not been answered yet upon the banks of the Richelieu River. Long into the hours of the night, when his comrades were already snoring under their blankets, De Catinat, blinking and yawning, was still engaged in trying to satisfy the curiosity of the old courtier, and to bring him up to date in all the most minute gossip of Versailles.

## 33. *The Slaying of Brown Moose*

TWO days were spent by the travellers at the seigneury of Sainte Marie, and they would very willingly have spent longer, for the quarters were comfortable and the welcome warm, but already the reds of autumn were turning to brown, and they knew how suddenly the ice and snow come in those northern lands, and how impossible it would be to finish their journey if winter were once fairly upon them. The old nobleman had sent his scouts by land and by water, but there were no signs of the Iroquois upon the eastern banks, so that it was clear that Du Lhut had been mistaken. Over on the other side, however, the high grey plumes of smoke still streamed up above the trees as a sign that their enemies were not very far off. All day from the manor-house windows and from the stockade they could see those danger signals which reminded them that a horrible death lurked ever at their elbow.

The refugees were rested now and refreshed, and of one mind about pushing on.

"If the snow comes, it will be a thousand times more dangerous," said Amos, "for we shall leave a track then that a papoose could follow."

"And why should we fear?" urged old Ephraim. "Truly this is a desert of salt, even though it lead to the vale of Hinnom, but we shall be borne up against these sons of Jeroboam. Steer a straight course, lad, and jam your helm, for the pilot will see you safe."

"And I am not frightened, Amory, and I am quite rested now," said Adèle. "We shall be so much more happy when we are in the English Provinces, for even now, how do we know that that dreadful monk may not come with orders to drag us back to Quebec and Paris?"

It was indeed very possible that the vindictive Franciscan, when satisfied that they had not ascended to

Montreal, or remained at Three Rivers, might seek them on the banks of the Richelieu. When De Catinat thought of how he passed them in his great canoe that morning, his eager face protruded, and his dark body swinging in time to the paddles, he felt that the danger which his wife suggested was not only possible but imminent. The seigneur was his friend, but the seigneur could not disobey the governor's order. A great hand, stretching all the way from Versailles, seemed to hang over them, even here in the heart of the virgin forest, ready to snatch them up and carry them back into degradation and misery. Better all the perils of the woods than that!

But the seigneur and his son, who knew nothing of their pressing reasons for haste, were strenuous in urging De Catinat the other way, and in this they were supported by the silent Du Lhut, whose few muttered words were always more weighty than the longest speech, for he never spoke save about that of which he was a master.

"You have seen my little place," said the old nobleman, with a wave of his beruffled ring-covered hand. "It is not what I should wish it, but such as it is, it is most heartily yours for the winter, if you and your comrades would honour me by remaining. As to madame, I doubt not that my own dame and she will find plenty to amuse and occupy them, which reminds me, De Catinat, that you have not yet been presented. Theuriet, go to your mistress and inform her that I request her to be so good as to come to us in the hall of the dais."

De Catinat was too seasoned to be easily startled, but he was somewhat taken aback when the lady, to whom the old nobleman always referred in terms of exaggerated respect, proved to be as like a full-blooded Indian squaw as the hall of the dais was to a French barn. She was dressed, it was true, in a bodice of scarlet taffeta with a black skirt, silver buckled shoes and a scented pomander ball dangling by a silver chain from her girdle, but her face was of the colour of the bark of the Scotch fir, while her strong nose and harsh mouth, with the two plaits of coarse

black hair which dangled down her back, left no possible doubt as to her origin.

"Allow me to present you, Monsieur de Catinat," said the Seigneur de Sainte Marie solemnly, "to my wife, Onega de la Noue de Sainte Marie, chatelaine by right of marriage to this seigneury, and also to the Château d'Andelys in Normandy, and to the estate of Varennes in Provence, while retaining in her own right the hereditary chieftainship on the distaff side of the nation of the Onondagas. My angel, I have been endeavouring to persuade our friends to remain with us at Sainte Marie instead of journeying on to Lake Champlain."

"At least leave your White Lily at Sainte Marie," said the dusky princess, speaking in excellent French, and clasping with her ruddy fingers the ivory hand of Adèle. "We will hold her safe for you until the ice softens, and the leaves and the partridge berries come once more. I know my people, monsieur, and I tell you that the woods are full of murder, and that it is not for nothing that the leaves are the colour of blood, for death lurks behind every tree."

De Catinat was more moved by the impressive manner of his hostess than by any of the other warnings which he had received. Surely she, if anyone, must be able to read the signs of the times.

"I know not what to do!" he cried in despair. "I must go on, and yet how can I expose her to these perils? I would fain stay the winter, but you must take my word for it, sir, that it is not possible."

"Du Lhut, you know how things should be ordered," said the seigneur. "What should you advise my friend to do, since he is so set upon getting to the English Provinces before the winter comes?"

The dark, silent pioneer stroked his beard with his hand as he pondered over the question.

"There is but one way," said he at last, "though even in it there is danger. The woods are safer than the river, for the reeds are full of *cachèd* canoes. Five leagues from

here is the blockhouse of Poitou, and fifteen miles beyond, that of Auvergne. We will go to-morrow to Poitou through the woods and see if all be safe. I will go with you, and I give you my word that if the Iroquois are there, Greysolon du Lhut will know it. The lady we shall leave here, and if we find that all is safe we shall come back for her. Then in the same fashion we shall advance to Auvergne, and there you must wait until you hear where their war-parties are. It is in my mind that it will not be very long before we know."

"What! You would part us!" cried Adèle aghast.

"It is best, my sister," said Onega, passing her arm caressingly round her. "You cannot know the danger, but we know it and we will not let our White Lily run into it. You will stay here to gladden us, while the great chief Du Lhut, and the French soldier, your husband, and the old warrior who seems so wary, and the other chief with limbs like the wild deer, go forward through the woods and see that all is well before you venture."

And so it was at last agreed, and Adèle, still protesting, was consigned to the care of the lady of Sainte Marie, while De Catinat swore that without a pause he would return from Poitou to fetch her. The old nobleman and his son would fain have joined them in their adventure, but they had their own charge to watch and the lives of many in their keeping, while a small party were safer in the woods than a larger one would be. The seigneur provided them with a letter for De Lannes, the governor of the Poitou blockhouse, and so in the early dawn the four of them crept like shadows from the stockade-gate, amid the muttered good wishes of the guard within, and were lost in an instant in the blackness of the vast forest.

From La Noue to Poitou was but twelve miles down the river, but by the woodland route where creeks were to be crossed, reed-girt lakes to be avoided, and paths to be picked among swamps where the wild rice grew higher than their heads, the distance was more than doubled.

They walked in single file, Du Lhut leading, with the swift silent tread of some wild creature, his body bent forward, his gun ready in the bend of his arm, and his keen dark eyes shooting little glances to right and left, observing everything from the tiniest mark upon the ground or tree trunk to the motion of every beast and bird of the brushwood. De Catinat walked behind, then Ephraim Savage, and then Amos, all with their weapons ready and with every sense upon the alert. By midday they were more than half-way, and halted in a thicket for a scanty meal of bread and cheese, for Du Lhut would not permit them to light a fire.

"They have not come as far as this," he whispered, "and yet I am sure that they have crossed the river. Ah, Governor de la Barre did not know what he did when he stirred these men up, and this good dragoon whom the king has sent us now knows even less."

"I have seen them in peace," remarked Amos. "I have traded to Onondaga and to the country of the Senecas. I know them as fine hunters, and brave men."

"They are fine hunters, but the game that they hunt best are their fellow-men. I have myself led their scalping parties, and I have fought against them, and I tell you that when a general comes out from France who hardly knows enough to get the sun behind him in a fight, he will find that there is little credit to be gained from them. They talk of burning their villages! It would be as wise to kick over the wasps' nest, and think that you have done with the wasps. You are from New England, monsieur?"

"My comrade is from New England; I am from New York."

"Ah, yes. I could see from your step and your eye that the woods were as a home to you. The New England man goes on the waters and he slays the cod with more pleasure than the cariboo. Perhaps that is why his face is so sad. I have been on the great water, and I remember that my face was sad also. There is little wind, and so

I think that we may light our pipes without danger. With a good breeze I have known a burning pipe fetch up a scalping party from two miles' distance, but the trees stop scent, and the Iroquois noses are less keen than the Sioux and the Dacotah. God help you, monsieur, if you should ever have an Indian war. It is bad for us, but it would be a thousand times worse for you."

"And why?"

"Because we have fought the Indians from the first, and we have them always in our mind when we build. You see how along this river every house and every hamlet supports its neighbour? But you, by Sainte Anne of Beaupré, it made my scalp tingle when I came on your frontiers and saw the lonely farm-houses and little clearings out in the woods with no help for twenty leagues around. An Indian war is a purgatory for Canada, but it would be a hell for the English Provinces!"

"We are good friends with the Indians," said Amos. "We do not wish to conquer."

"Your people have a way of conquering although they say that they do not wish to do it," remarked Du Lhut, "Now, with us, we bang our drums, and wave our flags, and make a stir, but no very big thing has come of it yet. We have never had but two great men in Canada. One was Monsieur de la Salle who was shot last year by his own men down the great river, and the other, old Frontenac, will have to come back again if New France is not to be turned into a desert by the Five Nations. It would surprise me little if by this time two years the white and gold flag flew only over the rock of Quebec. But I see that you look at me impatiently, Monsieur de Catinat, and I know that you count the hours until we are back at Sainte Marie again. Forward, then, and may the second part of our journey be as peaceful as the first."

For an hour or more they picked their way through the woods, following in the steps of the old French pioneer. It was a lovely day with hardly a cloud in the heavens, and the sun streaming down through the thick

foliage covered the shaded sward with a delicate network of gold. Sometimes where the woods opened they came out into the pure sunlight, but only to pass into thick glades beyond, where a single ray, here and there, was all that could break its way through the vast leafy covering. It would have been beautiful, these sudden transitions from light to shade, but with the feeling of impending danger, and of a horror ever lurking in these shadows, the mind was tinged with awe rather than admiration. Silently, lightly, the four men picked their steps among the great tree trunks.

Suddenly Du Lhut dropped upon his knees and stooped his ear to the ground. He rose, shook his head, and walked on with a grave face, casting quick little glances into the shadows in every direction.

"Did you hear something?" whispered Amos.

Du Lhut put his finger to his lips, and then in an instant was down again upon his face with his ear fixed to the ground. He sprang up with the look of a man who has heard what he expected to hear.

"Walk on," said he quietly, "and behave exactly as you have done all day."

"What is it, then?"

"Indians."

"In front of us?"

"No, behind us."

"What are they doing?"

"They are following us."

"How many of them?"

"Two, I think."

The friends glanced back involuntarily over their shoulders into the dense blackness of the forest. At one point a single broad shaft of light slid down between two pines and cast a golden blotch upon their track. Save for this one vivid spot all was sombre and silent.

"Do not look round," whispered Du Lhut sharply. "Walk on as before."

"Are they enemies?"

"They are Iroquois."

"And pursuing us?"

"No, we are now pursuing them."

"Shall we turn, then?"

"No, they would vanish like shadows."

"How far off are they?"

"About two hundred paces, I think."

"They cannot see us, then?"

"I think not, but I cannot be sure. They are following our trail, I think."

"What shall we do, then?"

"Let us make a circle and get behind them."

Turning sharp to the left he led them in a long curve through the woods, hurrying swiftly and yet silently under the darkest shadows of the trees. Then he turned again, and presently halted.

"This is our own track," said he.

"Aye, and two redskins have passed over it," cried Amos, bending down, and pointing to marks which were entirely invisible to Ephraim Savage or De Catinat.

"A full-grown warrior and a lad on his first war-path," said Du Lhut. "They were moving fast, you see, for you can hardly see the heel marks of their mocassins. They walked one behind the other. Now let us follow them as they followed us, and see if we have better luck."

He sped swiftly along the trail with his musket cocked in his hand, the others following hard upon his heels, but there was no sound, and no sign of life from the shadowy woods in front of them. Suddenly Du Lhut stopped and grounded his weapon.

"They are still behind us," he said.

"Still behind us?"

"Yes. This is the point where we branched off. They have hesitated a moment, as you can see by their footmarks, and then they have followed on."

"If we go round again and quicken our pace we may overtake them."

"No, they are on their guard now. They must know that it could only be on their account that we went back on our tracks. Lie here behind the fallen log and we shall see if we can catch a glimpse of them."

A great rotten trunk, all green with mould and blotched with pink and purple fungi, lay to one side of where they stood. Behind this the Frenchman crouched, and his three companions followed his example, peering through the brushwood screen in front of them. Still the one broad sheet of sunshine poured down between the two pines, but all else was as dim and as silent as a vast cathedral with pillars of wood and roof of leaf. Not a branch that creaked, nor a twig that snapped, nor any sound at all save the sharp barking of a fox somewhere in the heart of the forest. A thrill of excitement ran through the nerves of De Catinat. It was like one of those games of hide-and-seek which the court used to play, when Louis was in a sportive mood, among the oaks and yew hedges of Versailles. But the forfeit there was a carved fan, or a box of bonbons, and here it was death.

Ten minutes passed and there was no sign of any living thing behind them.

"They are over in yonder thicket," whispered Du Lhut, nodding his head towards a dense clump of brushwood, two hundred paces away.

"Have you seen them?"

"No."

"How do you know, then?"

"I saw a squirrel come from his hole in the great white beech tree yonder. He scuttled back again as if something had scared him. From his hole he can see down into that brushwood."

"Do you think that they know that we are here?"

"They cannot see us. But they are suspicious. They fear a trap."

"Shall we rush for the brushwood?"

"They would pick two of us off, and be gone like

shadows through the woods. No, we had best go on our way."

"But they will follow us."

"I hardly think that they will. We are four and they are only two, and they know now that we are on our guard, and that we can pick up a trail as quickly as they can themselves. Get behind these trunks where they cannot see us. So! Now stoop until you are past the belt of alder bushes. We must push on fast now, for where there are two Iroquois there are likely to be two hundred not very far off."

"Thank God that I did not bring Adèle!" cried De Catinat.

"Yes, monsieur, it is well for a man to make a comrade of his wife, but not on the borders of the Iroquois country, nor of any other Indian country either."

"You do not take your own wife with you when you travel, then?" asked the soldier.

"Yes, but I do not let her travel from village to village. She remains in the wigwam."

"Then you leave her behind?"

"On the contrary, she is always there to welcome me. By Sainte Anne, I should be heavy-hearted if I came to any village between this and the Bluffs of the Illinois, and did not find my wife waiting to greet me."

"Then she must travel before you."

Du Lhut laughed heartily, without, however, emitting a sound.

"A fresh village, a fresh wife," said he. "But I never have more than one in each, for it is a shame for a Frenchman to set an evil example when the good fathers are spending their lives so freely in preaching virtue to them. Ah, here is the Ajidaumo Creek, where the Indians set the sturgeon nets. It is still seven miles to Poitou."

"We shall be there before nightfall, then?"

"I think that we had best wait for nightfall before we make our way in. Since the Iroquois scouts are out as far as this, it is likely that they lie thick round Poitou, and we

may find the last step the worst unless we have a care, the more so if these two get in front if us to warn the others." He paused a moment with slanting head and sidelong ear. "By Sainte Anne," he muttered, "we have not shaken them off. They are still upon our trail!"

"You hear them?"

"Yes, they are no great way from us. They will find that they have followed us once too often this time. Now, I will show you a little bit of woodcraft which may be new to you. Slip off your mocassins, monsieur."

De Catinat pulled off his shoes as directed, and Du Lhut did the same.

"Put them on as if they were gloves," said the pioneer, and an instant later Ephraim Savage and Amos had their comrades' shoes upon their hands.

"You can sling your muskets over your back. So! Now down on all-fours, bending yourselves double, with your hands pressing hard upon the earth. That is excellent. Two men can leave the trail of four! Now come with me, monsieur."

He flitted from tree to tree on a line which was parallel to, but a few yards distant from, that of their comrades. Then suddenly he crouched behind a bush and pulled De Catinat down beside him.

"They must pass us in a few minutes," he whispered. "Do not fire if you can help it." Something gleamed in Du Lhut's hand, and his comrade, glancing down, saw that he had drawn a keen little tomahawk from his belt. Again the mad wild thrill ran through the soldier's blood, as he peered through the tangled branches and waited for whatever might come out of the dim silent aisles of tree-boles.

And suddenly he saw something move. It flitted like a shadow from one trunk to the other so swiftly that De Catinat could not have told whether it were beast or human. And then again he saw it, and yet again, sometimes one shadow, sometimes two shadows, silent, furtive, like the *loup-garou* with which his nurse had

scared him in his childhood. Then for a few moments all was still once more, and then in an instant there crept out from among the bushes the most terrible-looking creature that ever walked the earth, an Iroquois chief upon the war-trail.

He was a tall, powerful man, and his bristle of scalp-locks and eagle feathers made him look a giant in the dim light, for a good eight feet lay between his beaded mocassin and the topmost plume of his headgear. One side of his face was painted in soot, ochre and vermilion to resemble a dog, and the other half as a fowl, so that the front view was indescribably grotesque and strange. A belt of wampum was braced round his loin-cloth, and a dozen scalp-locks fluttered out as he moved from the fringe of his leggings. His head was sunk forward, his eyes gleamed with a sinister light, and his nostrils dilated and contracted like those of an excited animal. His gun was thrown forward, and he crept along with bended knees, peering, listening, pausing, hurrying on, a breathing image of caution. Two paces behind him walked a lad of fourteen, clad and armed in the same fashion, but without the painted face and without the horrid dried trophies upon the leggings. It was his first campaign, and already his eyes shone and his nostrils twitched with the same lust for murder which burned within his elder. So they advanced, silent, terrible, creeping out of the shadows of the wood as their race had come out of the shadows of history, with bodies of iron and tiger souls.

They were just abreast of the bush when something caught the eye of the younger warrior, some displaced twig or fluttering leaf, and he paused with suspicion in every feature. Another instant and he had warned his companion, but Du Lhut sprang out and buried his little hatchet in the skull of the older warrior. De Catinat heard a dull crash, as when an axe splinters its way into a rotten tree, and the man fell like a log, laughing horribly, and kicking and striking with his powerful limbs. The younger warrior sprang like a deer over his fallen comrade

and dashed on into the wood, but an instant later there was a gunshot among the trees in front, followed by a faint wailing cry.

"That is his death-whoop," said Du Lhut composedly. "It was a pity to fire, and yet it was better than letting him go."

As he spoke the two others came back, Ephraim ramming a fresh charge into his musket.

"Who was laughing?" asked Amos.

"It was he," said Du Lhut, nodding towards the dying warrior, who lay with his head in a horrible puddle, and his grotesque features contorted into a fixed smile. "It's a custom they have when they get their death-blow. I've known a Seneca chief laugh for six hours on end at the torture-stake. Ah, he's gone!"

As he spoke, the Indian gave a last spasm with his hands and feet, and lay rigid, grinning up at the slit of blue sky above him.

"He's a great chief," said Du Lhut. "He is Brown Moose of the Mohawks, and the other is his second son. We have drawn first blood, but I do not think that it will be the last, for the Iroquois do not allow their war-chiefs to die unavenged. He was a mighty fighter, as you may see by looking at his neck."

He wore a peculiar necklace which seemed to De Catinat to consist of blackened bean pods set upon a string. As he stooped over it he saw to his horror that they were not bean pods, but withered human fingers.

"They are all right fore-fingers," said Du Lhut, "so every one represents a life. There are forty-two in all. Eighteen are of men whom he has slain in battle, and the other twenty-four have been taken and tortured."

"How do you know that?"

"Because only eighteen have their nails on. If the prisoner of an Iroquois be alive, he begins always by biting his nails off. You see that they are missing from four-and-twenty."

De Catinat shuddered. What demons were these

amongst whom an evil fate had drifted him? And was it possible that his Adèle should fall into the hands of such fiends? No, no, surely the good God, for whose sake they had suffered so much, would not permit such an infamy! And yet as evil a fate had come upon other women as tender as Adèle—upon other men as loving as he. What hamlet was there in Canada which had not such stories in their record? A vague horror seized him as he stood there. We know more of the future than we are willing to admit, away down in those dim recesses of the soul where there is no reason, but only instincts and impressions. Now some impending terror cast its cloud over him. The trees around with their great protruding limbs were like shadowy demons thrusting out their gaunt arms to seize him. The sweat burst from his fore-head, and he leaned heavily upon his musket.

"By Sainte Eulalie," said Du Lhut, "for an old soldier you turn very pale, monsieur, at a little bloodshed."

"I am not well. I should be glad of a sup from your cognac bottle."

"Here it is, comrade, and welcome! Well, I may as well have this fine scalp that we may have something to show for our walk." He held the Indian's head between his knees, and in an instant, with a sweep of his knife, had torn off the hideous dripping trophy.

"Let us go!" cried De Catinat, turning away in disgust.

"Yes, we shall go. But I shall also have this wampum belt marked with the totem of the Bear. So! And the gun too. Look at the 'London' printed upon the lock. Ah, Monsieur Green, Monsieur Green, it is not hard to see where the enemies of France get their arms."

So at last they turned away, Du Lhut bearing his spoils, leaving the red grinning figure stretched under the silent trees. As they passed on they caught a glimpse of the lad lying doubled up among the bushes where he had fallen. The pioneer walked very swiftly until he came to a little stream which prattled down to the big river. Here he

slipped off his boots and leggings, and waded down it with his companions for half a mile or so.

"They will follow our tracks when they find him," said he, "but this will throw them off, for it is only on running water that an Iroquois can find no trace. And now we shall lie in this clump until nightfall, for we are little over a mile from Fort Poitou, and it is dangerous to go forward, for the ground becomes more open."

And so they remained concealed among the alders whilst the shadows turned from short to long, and the white drifting clouds above them were tinged with the pink of the setting sun. Du Lhut coiled himself into a ball with his pipe between his teeth and dropped into a light sleep, pricking up his ears and starting at the slightest sound from the woods around them. The two Americans whispered together for a long time, Ephraim telling some long story about the cruise of the brig *Industry*, bound to Jamestown for sugar and molasses, but at last the soothing hum of a gentle breeze through the branches lulled them off also, and they slept. De Catinat alone remained awake, his nerves still in a tingle from that strange sudden shadow which had fallen upon his soul. What could it mean? Not surely that Adèle was in danger? He had heard of such warnings, but had he not left her in safety behind cannons and stockades? By the next evening at latest he would see her again. As he lay looking up through the tangle of copper leaves at the sky beyond, his mind drifted like the clouds above him and he was back once more in the jutting window in the Rue St. Martin, sitting on the broad *bancal*, with its Spanish leather covering, with the gilt wool-bale creaking outside, and his arm round shrinking, timid Adèle, she who had compared herself to a little mouse in an old house, and who yet had courage to stay by his side through all this wild journey. And then again he was back at Versailles. Once more he saw the brown eyes of the king, the fair bold face of De Montespan, the serene features of De Maintenon—once more he rode on

his midnight mission, was driven by the demon coachman, and sprang with Amos upon the scaffold to rescue the most beautiful woman in France. So clear it was and so vivid that it was with a start that he came suddenly to himself, and found that the night was creeping on in an American forest, and that Du Lhut had roused himself and was ready for a start.

"Have you been awake?" asked the pioneer.

"Yes."

"Have you heard anything?"

"Nothing but the hooting of the owl."

"It seemed to me that in my sleep I heard a gunshot in the distance."

"In your sleep?"

"Yes, I hear as well asleep as awake and remember what I hear. But now you must follow me close, and we shall be in the fort soon."

"You have wonderful ears, indeed," said De Catinat, as they picked their way through the tangled wood. "How could you hear that these men were following us to-day? I could make out no sound when they were within hand-touch of us."

"I did not hear them at first."

"You saw them?"

"No, nor that either."

"Then how could you know that they were there?"

"I heard a frightened jay flutter among the trees after we were past it. Then ten minutes later I heard the same thing. I knew then that there was someone on our trail, and I listened."

"*Peste!* you are a woodsman indeed!"

"I believe that these woods are swarming with Iroquois although we have had the good fortune to miss them. So great a chief as Brown Moose would not start on the path with a small following nor for a small object. They must mean mischief upon the Richelieu. You are not sorry now that you did not bring madame?"

"I thank God for it!"

"The woods will not be safe, I fear, until the partridge berries are out once more. You must stay at Sainte Marie until then, unless the seigneur can spare men to guard you."

"I had rather stay there for ever than expose my wife to such devils."

"Aye, devils they are, if ever devils walked upon earth. You winced, monsieur, when I took Brown Moose's scalp, but when you have seen as much of the Indians as I have done your heart will be as hardened as mine. And now we are on the very borders of the clearing, and the block-house lies yonder among the clump of maples. They do not keep very good watch, for I have been expecting during these last ten minutes to hear the *qui vive*. You did not come as near to Sainte Marie unchallenged, and yet De Lannes is as old a soldier as La Noue. We can scarce see now, but yonder, near the river, is where he exercises his men."

"He does so now," said Amos. "I see a dozen of them drawn up in a line at their drill."

"No sentinels, and all the men at drill!" cried Du Lhut in contempt. "It is as you say, however, for I can see them myself with their ranks open, and each as stiff and straight as a pine stump. One would think to see them stand so still that there was not an Indian nearer than Orange. We shall go across to them, and by Sainte Anne, I shall tell their commander what I think of his arrangements."

Du Lhut advanced from the bushes as he spoke, and the four men crossed the open ground in the direction of the line of men who waited silently for them in the dim twilight. They were within fifty paces, and yet none of them had raised hand or voice to challenge their approach. There was something uncanny in the silence, and a change came over Du Lhut's face as he peered in front of him. He craned his head round and looked up the river.

"My God!" he screamed. "Look at the fort!"

They had cleared the clump of trees, and the outline of

the blockhouse should have shown up in front of them. There was no sign of it. It was gone!

## 34. *The Men of Blood*

So unexpected was the blow that even Du Lhut, hardened from his childhood to every shock and danger, stood shaken and dismayed. Then, with an oath, he ran at the top of his speed towards the line of figures, his companions following at his heels.

As they drew nearer they could see through the dusk that it was not indeed a line. A silent and motionless officer stood out some twenty paces in front of his silent and motionless men. Further, they could see that he wore a very high and singular head-dress. They were still rushing forward, breathless with apprehension, when to their horror this head-dress began to lengthen and broaden, and a great bird flapped heavily up and dropped down again on the nearest tree trunk. Then they knew that their worst fears were true, and that it was the garrison of Poitou which stood before them.

They were lashed to low posts with willow withies, some twenty of them, naked all, and twisted and screwed into every strange shape which an agonised body could assume. In front where the buzzard had perched was the grey-headed commandant with two cinders thrust into his sockets and his flesh hanging from him like a beggar's rags. Behind was the line of men, each with his legs charred off to the knees, and his body so haggled and scorched and burst that the willow bands alone seemed to hold it together. For a moment the four comrades stared in silent horror at the dreadful group. Then each acted as his nature bade him. De Catinat staggered up against a tree trunk and leaned his head upon his arm, deadly sick. Du Lhut fell down upon his knees and said something to heaven, with his two clenched hands shaking up at the darkening sky. Ephraim Savage examined the

priming of his gun with a tightened lip and a gleaming eye, while Amos Green, without a word, began to cast round in circles in search of a trail.

But Du Lhut was on his feet again in a moment, and running up and down like a sleuth-hound, noting a hundred things which even Amos would have overlooked. He circled round the bodies again and again. Then he ran a little way towards the edge of the woods, and then came back to the charred ruins of the blockhouse, from some of which a thin reek of smoke was still rising.

"There is no sign of the women and children," said he.

"My God! There were women and children?"

"They are keeping the children to burn at their leisure in their villages. The women they may torture or may adopt as the humour takes them. But what does the old man want?"

"I want you to ask him, Amos," said the seaman, "why we are yawing and tacking here when we should be cracking on all sail to stand after them?"

Du Lhut smiled and shook his head. "Your friend is a brave man," said he, "if he thinks that with four men we can follow a hundred and fifty."

"Tell him, Amos, that the Lord will bear us up," said the other excitedly. "Say that He will be with us against the children of Jeroboam, and we will cut them off utterly and they shall be destroyed. What is the French for 'slay and spare not'? I had as soon go about with my jaw braced up, as with folk who cannot understand a plain language."

But Du Lhut waved aside the seaman's suggestions. "We must have a care now," said he, "or we shall lose our own scalps, and be the cause of those at Sainte Marie losing theirs as well."

"Sainte Marie!" cried De Catinat. "Is there then danger at Saint Marie?"

"Aye, they are in the wolf's mouth now. This business was done last night. The place was stormed by a war-party of a hundred and fifty men. This morning

they left and went north upon foot. They have been *cachéd* among the woods all day between Poitou and Sainte Marie."

"Then we have come through them?"

"Yes, we have come through them. They would keep their camp to-day and send out scouts. Brown Moose and his son were among them and struck our trail. To-night——"

"To-night they will attack Sainte Marie!"

"It is possible. And yet with so small a party I should scarce have thought that they would have dared. Well, we can but hasten back as quickly as we can, and give them warning of what is hanging over them."

And so they turned for their weary backward journey, though their minds were too full to spare a thought upon the leagues which lay behind them or those which were before. Old Ephraim, less accustomed to walking than his younger comrades, was already limping and footsore, but, for all his age, he was as tough as hickory and full of endurance. Du Lhut took the lead again and they turned their faces once more towards the north.

The moon was shining brightly in the sky, but it was little aid to the travellers in the depths of the forest. Where it had been shadowy in the daytime it was now so absolutely dark that De Catinat could not see the tree trunks against which he brushed. Here and there they came upon an open glade bathed in the moonshine, or perhaps a thin shaft of silver light broke through between the branches, and cast a great white patch upon the ground, but Du Lhut preferred to avoid these more open spaces, and to skirt the glades rather than to cross them. The breeze had freshened a little and the whole air was filled with the rustle and sough of the leaves. Save for this dull never-ceasing sound all would have been silent had not the owl hooted sometimes from among the tree-tops, and the nightjar whirred above their heads.

Dark as it was Du Lhut walked as swiftly as during the sunlight, and never hesitated about the track. His com-

rades could see, however, that he was taking them a different way to that which they had gone in the morning, for twice they caught a sight of the glimmer of the broad river upon their left, while before they had only seen the streams which flowed into it. On the second occasion he pointed to where, on the farther side, they could see dark shadows flitting over the water.

"Iroquois canoes," he whispered. "There are ten of them with eight men in each. They are another party and they are also going north."

"How do you know that they are another party?"

"Because we have crossed the trail of the first within the hour."

De Catinat was filled with amazement at this marvellous man who could hear in his sleep and could detect a trail when the very tree-trunks were invisible to ordinary eyes. Du Lhut halted a little to watch the canoes, and then turned his back to the river, and plunged into the woods once more. They had gone a mile or two when suddenly he came to a dead stop, snuffing at the air like a hound on a scent.

"I smell burning wood," said he. "There is a fire within a mile of us in that direction."

"I smell it too," said Amos. "Let us creep up that way and see their camp."

"Be careful, then," whispered Du Lhut, "for your lives may hang from a cracking twig."

They advanced very slowly and cautiously until suddenly the red flare of a leaping fire twinkled between the distant trunks. Still slipping through the brushwood they worked round until they had found a point from which they could see without a risk of being seen.

A great blaze of dry logs crackled and spurtled in the centre of a small clearing. The ruddy flames roared upwards, and the smoke spread out above it until it looked like a strange tree with grey foliage and trunk of fire. But no living being was in sight and the huge fire roared and swayed in absolute solitude in the midst of the silent

woodlands. Nearer they crept and nearer, but there was no movement save the rush of the flames, and no sound but the snapping of the sticks.

"Shall we go up to it?" whispered De Catinat.

The wary old pioneer shook his head. "It may be a trap," said he.

"Or an abandoned camp?"

"No, it has not been lit more than an hour."

"Besides, it is far too great for a camp fire," said Amos.

"What do you make of it?" asked Du Lhut.

"A signal."

"Yes, I daresay that you are right. This light is not a safe neighbour, so we shall edge away from it and then make a straight line for Sainte Marie."

The flames were soon but a twinkling point behind them, and at last vanished behind the trees. Du Lhut pushed on rapidly until they came to the edge of a moon-lit clearing. He was about to skirt this, as he had done others, when suddenly he caught De Catinat by the shoulder and pushed him down behind a clump of sumach, while Amos did the same with Ephraim Savage.

A man was walking down the other side of the open space. He had just emerged and was crossing it diagonally, making in the direction of the river. His body was bent double, but as he came out from the shadow of the trees they could see that he was an Indian brave in full war-paint, with leggings, loin-cloth and musket. Close at his heels came a second, and then a third and a fourth, on and on until it seemed as if the wood were full of men, and that the line would never come to an end. They flitted past like shadows in the moonlight, in absolute silence, all crouching and running in the same swift stealthy fashion. Last of all came a man in the fringed tunic of a hunter with a cap and feather upon his head. He passed across like the others, and they vanished into the shadows as silently as they had appeared. It was five minutes before Du Lhut thought it safe to rise from their shelter.

"By Saint Anne," he whispered, "did you count them?"

"Three hundred and ninety-six," said Amos.

"I made it four hundred and two."

"And you thought that there were only a hundred and fifty of them!" cried De Catinat.

"Ah, you do not understand. This is a fresh band. The others who took the blockhouse must be over there, for their trail lies between us and the river."

"They could not be the same," said Amos, "for there was not a fresh scalp among them."

Du Lhut gave the young hunter a glance of approval, "On my word," said he, "I did not know that your woodsmen are good as they seem to be. You have eyes, monsieur, and it may please you some day to remember that Greysolon du Lhut told you so."

Amos felt a flush of pride at these words from a man whose name was honoured wherever trader or trapper smoked round a camp fire. He was about to make some answer when a dreadful cry broke suddenly out of the woods, a horrible screech, as from someone who was goaded to the very last pitch of human misery. Again and again, as they stood with blanched cheeks in the darkness, they heard that awful cry swelling up from the night and ringing drearily through the forest.

"They are torturing the women," said Du Lhut. "Their camp lies over there."

"Can we do nothing to aid them?" cried Amos.

"Aye, aye, lad," said the captain in English. "We can't pass distress signals without going out of our course. Let us put about and run down yonder."

"In that camp," said Du Lhut slowly, "there are now nearly six hundred warriors. We are four. What you say has no sense. Unless we warn them at Sainte Marie, these devils will lay some trap for them. Their parties are assembling by land and by water and there may be a thousand before daybreak. Our duty is to push on and give our warning."

"He speaks the truth," said Amos to Ephraim. "Nay, but you must not go alone!" He seized the stout old seaman by the arm and held him by main force to prevent him from breaking off through the woods.

"There is one thing which we can do to spoil their night's amusement," said Du Lhut. "The woods are as dry as powder, and there has been no drop of rain for a long three months."

"Yes?"

"And the wind blows straight for their camp, with the river on the other side of it."

"We should fire the woods!"

"We cannot do better."

In an instant Du Lhut had scraped together a little bundle of dry twigs, and had heaped them up against a withered beech tree which was as dry as tinder. A stroke of flint and steel was enough to start a little smoulder of flame, which lengthened and spread until it was leaping along the white strips of hanging bark. A quarter of a mile farther on Du Lhut did the same again, and once more beyond that, until at three different points the forest was in a blaze. As they hurried onwards they could hear the dull roaring of the flames behind them, and at last, as they neared Sainte Marie, they could see, looking back, the long rolling wave of fire travelling ever westward towards the Richelieu, and flashing up into great spouts of flame as it licked up a clump of pines as if it were a bundle of faggots. Du Lhut chuckled in his silent way as he looked back at the long orange glare in the sky.

"They will need to swim for it, some of them," said he. "They have not canoes to take them all off. Ah, if I had but two hundred of my *coureurs-de-bois* on the river at the farther side of them not one would have got away."

"They had one who was dressed like a white man," remarked Amos.

"Aye, and the most deadly of the lot. His father was a Dutch trader, his mother an Iroquois, and he goes by the name of the Flemish Bastard. Ah, I know him

well, and I tell you that if they want a king in hell they will find one all ready in his wigwam. By Sainte Anne, I have a score to settle with him, and I may pay it before this business is over. Well, there are the lights of Sainte Marie shining down below there. I can understand that sigh of relief, monsieur, for, on my word, after what we found at Poitou I was uneasy myself until I should see them."

## 35. *The Tapping of Death*

DAY was just breaking as the four comrades entered the gate of the stockade, but early as it was the *censitaires* and their families were all afoot staring at the prodigious fire which raged to the south of them. De Catinat burst through the throng and rushed upstairs to Adèle, who had herself flown down to meet him, so that they met in each other's arms half way up the great stone staircase with a burst of those little inarticulate cries which are the true unwritten language of love. Together, with his arm round her, they ascended to the great hall where old De la Noue with his son were peering out of the window at the wonderful spectacle.

"Ah, monsieur," said the old nobleman with his courtly bow, "I am indeed rejoiced to see you safe under my roof again, not only for your own sake, but for that of madame's eyes, which, if she will permit an old man to say so, are much too pretty to spoil by straining them all day in the hopes of seeing someone coming out of the forest. You have done forty miles, Monsieur de Catinat, and are doubtless hungry and weary. When you are yourself again I must claim my revenge in piquet, for the cards lay against me the other night."

But Du Lhut had entered at De Catinat's heels with his tidings of disaster.

"You will have another game to play, Monsieur de Sainte Marie," said he. "There are six hundred

Iroquois in the woods and they are preparing to attack."

"Tut, tut, we cannot allow our arrangements to be altered by a handful of savages," said the seigneur. "I must apologise to you, my dear De Catinat, that you should be annoyed by such people while you are upon my estate. As regards the piquet, I cannot but think that your play from king and knave is more brilliant than safe. Now when I played piquet last with De Lannes of Poitou——"

"De Lannes of Poitou is dead, and all his people," said Du Lhut. "The blockhouse is a heap of smoking ashes."

The seigneur raised his eyebrows and took a pinch of snuff, tapping the lid of his little round gold box.

"I always told him that his fort would be taken unless he cleared away those maple trees which grew up to the very walls. They are all dead, you say?"

"Every man."

"And the fort burned?"

"Not a stick was left standing."

"Have you seen these rascals?"

"We saw the trail of a hundred and fifty. Then there were a hundred in canoes, and a war-party of four hundred passed us under the Flemish Bastard. Their camp is five miles down the river, and there cannot be less than six hundred."

"You were fortunate in escaping them."

"But they were not so fortunate in escaping us. We killed Brown Moose and his son, and we fired the woods so as to drive them out of their camp."

"Excellent! Excellent!" said the seigneur, clapping gently with his dainty hands. "You have done very well indeed, Du Lhut! You are, I presume, very tired?"

"I am not often tired. I am quite ready to do the journey again."

"Then perhaps you would pick a few men and go back into the woods to see what these villains are doing?"

"I shall be ready in five minutes."

"Perhaps you would like to go also, Achille?"

His son's dark eyes and Indian face lit up with a fierce joy.

"Yes, I shall go also," he answered.

"Very good, and we shall make all ready in your absence. Madame, you will excuse these little annoyances which mar the pleasure of your visit. Next time that you do me the honour to come here I trust that we shall have cleared all these vermin from my estate. We have our advantages. The Richelieu is a better fish pond and these forests are a finer deer preserve than any of which the king can boast. But on the other hand we have, as you see, our little troubles. You will excuse me now, as there are one or two things which demand my attention. De Catinat, you are a tried soldier and I should be glad of your advice. Onega, give me my lace handkerchief and my cane of clouded amber, and take care of madame until her husband and I return."

It was bright daylight now, and the square enclosure within the stockade was filled with an anxious crowd who had just learned the evil tidings. Most of the *censitaires* were old soldiers and trappers who had served in many Indian wars, and whose swarthy faces and bold bearing told their own story. They were sons of a race which with better fortune or with worse has burned more powder than any other nation upon earth, and as they stood in little groups discussing the situation and examining their arms, a leader could have asked for no more hardy or more war-like following. The women, however, pale and breathless, were hurrying in from the outlying cottages, dragging their children with them, and bearing over their shoulders the more precious of their household goods. The confusion, the hurry, the cries of the children, the throwing down of bundles and the rushing back for more, contrasted sharply with the quiet and the beauty of the woods which encircled them, all bathed in the bright morning sunlight. It was strange to look upon the fairy loveliness of their many-tinted

foliage, and to know that the spirit of murder and cruelty was roaming unchained behind that lovely screen.

The scouting party under Du Lhut and Achille de la Noue had already left, and at the order of the seigneur the two gates were now secured with huge bars of oak fitted into iron staples on either side. The children were placed in the lower store-room with a few women to watch them, while the others were told off to attend to the fire buckets, and to reload the muskets. The men had been paraded, fifty-two of them in all, and they were divided into parties now for the defence of each part of the stockade. On one side it had been built up to within a few yards of the river, which not only relieved them from the defence of that face, but enabled them to get fresh water by throwing a bucket at the end of a rope from the stockade. The boats and canoes of Sainte Marie were drawn up on the bank just under the wall, and were precious now as offering a last means of escape should all else fail. The next fort, St. Louis, was but a few leagues up the river, and De la Noue had already sent a swift messenger to them with news of the danger. At least it would be a point on which they might retreat should the worst come to the worst.

And that the worst might come to the worst was very evident to so experienced a woodsman as Amos Green. He had left Ephraim Savage snoring in a deep sleep upon the floor, and was now walking round the defences with his pipe in his mouth, examining with a critical eye every detail in connection with them. The stockade was very strong, nine feet high and closely built of oak stakes which were thick enough to turn a bullet. Half way up it was loop-holed in long narrow slits for the fire of the defenders. But on the other hand the trees grew up to within a hundred yards of it, and formed a screen for the attack, while the garrison was so scanty that it could not spare more than twenty men at the utmost for each face. Amos knew how daring and dashing were the Iroquois warriors, how cunning and fertile of resource, and his face darkened as he thought of the young wife who had

come so far in their safe-keeping, and of the women and children whom he had seen crowding into the fort.

"Would it not be better if you could send them up the river?" he suggested to the seigneur.

"I should very gladly do so, monsieur, and perhaps if we are all alive we may manage it to-night if the weather should be cloudy. But I cannot spare the men to guard them, and I cannot send them without a guard when we know that Iroquois canoes are on the river and their scouts are swarming on the banks."

"You are right. It would be madness."

"I have stationed you on this eastern face with your friends and with fifteen men. Monsieur de Catinat, will you command the party?"

"Willingly."

"I will take the south face as it seems to be the point of danger. Du Lhut can take the north, and five men should be enough to watch the river side."

"Have we food and powder?"

"I have flour and smoked eels enough to see this matter through. Poor fare, my dear sir, but I daresay you learned in Holland that a cup of ditch water after a brush may have a better smack than the blue-sealed Frontiniac which you helped me to finish the other night. As to powder, we have all our trading stores to draw upon."

"We have not time to clear any of these trees?" asked the soldier.

"Impossible. They would make better shelter down than up."

"But at least I might clear that patch of brushwood round the birch sapling which lies between the east face and the edge of the forest. It is good cover for their skirmishers."

"Yes, that should be fired without delay."

"Nay, I think that I might do better," said Amos. "We might bait a trap for them there. Where is this powder of which you spoke?"

"Theuriet, the major-domo, is giving out powder in the main store-house."

"Very good." Amos vanished upstairs, and returned with a large linen bag in his hand. This he filled with powder, and then, slinging it over his shoulder, he carried it out to the clump of bushes and placed it at the base of the sapling, cutting a strip out of the bark immediately above the spot. Then with a few leafy branches and fallen leaves he covered the powder bag very carefully over so that it looked like a little hillock of earth. Having arranged all to his satisfaction he returned, clambering over the stockade and dropping down upon the other side.

"I think that we are all ready for them now," said the seigneur. "I would that the women and children were in a safe place, but we may send them down the river to-night if all goes well. Has anyone heard anything of Du Lhut?"

"Jean has the best ears of any of us, your excellency," said one man from beside the brass corner cannon. "He thought that he heard shots a few minutes ago."

"Then he has come into touch with them. Etienne, take ten men and go to the withered oak to cover them if they are retreating, but do not go another yard on any pretext. I am too short-handed already. Perhaps, De Catinat, you wish to sleep?"

"No, I could not sleep."

"We can do no more down here. What do you say to a round or two of piquet? A little turn of the cards will help us to pass the time."

They ascended to the upper hall where Adèle came and sat by her husband, while the swarthy Onega crouched by the window looking keenly out into the forest. De Catinat had little thought to spare upon the cards, as his mind wandered to the danger which threatened them and to the woman whose hand rested upon his own. The old nobleman, on the other hand, was engrossed by the play, and cursed under his breath, or chuckled and grinned as

the luck swayed one way or the other. Suddenly as they played there came two sharp raps from without.

"Someone is tapping," cried Adèle.

"It is death that is tapping," said the Indian woman at the window.

"Aye, aye, it was the patter of two spent balls against the woodwork. The wind is against our hearing the report. The cards are shuffled. It is my cut and your deal. The capot, I think, was mine."

"Men are rushing from the woods," cried Onega.

"Tut! It grows serious!" said the nobleman. "We can finish the game later. Remember that the deal lies with you. Let us see what it all means."

De Catinat had already rushed to the window. Du Lhut, young Achille de la Noue and eight of the covering party were running with their heads bent towards the stockade, the door of which had been opened to admit them. Here and there from behind the trees came little blue puffs of smoke, and one of the fugitives who wore white calico breeches began suddenly to hop instead of running and a red splotch showed upon the white cloth. Two others threw their arms round him and the three rushed in abreast while the gate swung into its place behind them. An instant later the brass cannon at the corner gave a flash and a roar while the whole outline of the wood was traced in a rolling cloud, and the shower of bullets rapped up against the wooden wall like sleet on a window.

## 36. *The Taking of the Stockade*

HAVING left Adèle to the care of her Indian hostess, and warned her for her life to keep from the windows, De Catinat seized his musket and rushed downstairs. As he passed a bullet came piping through one of the narrow embrasures and starred itself in a little blotch of lead upon the opposite wall.

The seigneur had already descended and was conversing with Du Lhut beside the door.

"A thousand of them, you say?"

"Yes, we came on a fresh trail of a large war-party, three hundred at the least. They are all Mohawks and Cayugas with a sprinkling of Oneidas. We had a running fight for a few miles, and we have lost five men."

"All dead, I trust."

"I hope so, but we were hard pressed to keep from being cut off. Jean Mance is shot through the leg."

"I saw that he was hit."

"We had best have all ready to retire to the house if they carry the stockade. We can scarce hope to hold it when they are twenty to one."

"All is ready."

"And with our cannon we can keep their canoes from passing, so we might send our women away to-night."

"I had intended to do so. Will you take charge of the north side? You might come across to me with ten of your men now, and I shall go back to you if they change their attack."

The firing came in one continuous rattle now from the edges of the wood, and the air was full of bullets. The assailants were all trained shots, men who lived by their guns, and to whom a shaking hand or a dim eye meant poverty and hunger. Every slit and crack and loop-hole was marked and a cap held above the stockade was blown in an instant from the gun barrel which supported it. On the other hand, the defenders were also skilled in Indian fighting, and wise in every trick and lure which could protect themselves or tempt their enemies to show. They kept well to the sides of the loop-holes, watching through little crevices of the wood, and firing swiftly when a chance offered. A red leg sticking straight up into the air from behind a log showed where one bullet at least had gone home, but there was little to aim at save a puff and flash from among the leaves, or the shadowy figure of a warrior seen for an instant as he darted from

one tree-trunk to the other. Seven of the Canadians had already been hit, but only three were mortally wounded, and the other four still kept manfully to their loop-holes, though one who had been struck through the jaw was spitting his teeth with his bullets down into his gun barrel. The women sat in a line upon the ground, beneath the level of the loop-holes, each with a saucerful of bullets and a canister of powder, passing up the loaded guns to the fighting men at the points where a quick fire was most needful.

At first the attack had been all upon the south face, but as fresh bodies of the Iroquois came up their line spread and lengthened until the whole east face was girt with fire, which gradually enveloped the north also. The fort was ringed in by a great loop of smoke, save only where the broad river flowed past them. Over near the further bank the canoes were lurking, and one, manned by ten warriors, attempted to pass up the stream, but a good shot from the brass gun dashed in her side and sank her, while a second of grape left only four of the swimmers whose high scalp-locks stood out above the water like the back-fins of some strange fish. On the inland side, however, the seigneur had ordered the cannon to be served no more, for the broad embrasures drew the enemy's fire, and of the men who had been struck half were among those who worked the guns.

The old nobleman strutted about with his white ruffles and his clouded cane behind the line of parched smoke-grimed men, tapping his snuff box, shooting out his little jests, and looking very much less concerned than he had done over his piquet.

"What do you think of it, Du Lhut?" he asked.

"I think very badly of it. We are losing men much too fast."

"Well, my friend, what can you expect? When a thousand muskets are all turned upon a little place like this, someone must suffer for it. Ah, my poor fellow, so you are done for too!"

The man nearest him had suddenly fallen with a crash, lying quite still with his face in a platter of the sagamite which had been brought out by the women. Du Lhut glanced at him and then looked round.

" He is in a line with no loop-hole, and it took him in the shoulder," said he. " Where did it come from, then ? Ah, by Sainte Anne, look there ! " He pointed upwards to a little mist of smoke which hung round the summit of a high oak.

" The rascal overlooks the stockade. But the trunk is hardly thick enough to shield him at that height. This poor fellow will not need his musket again, and I see that it is ready primed." De la Noue laid down his cane, turned back his ruffles, picked up the dead man's gun, and fired at the lurking warrior. Two leaves fluttered out from the tree and a grinning vermilion face appeared for an instant with a yell of derision. Quick as a flash Du Lhut brought his musket to his shoulder and pulled the trigger. The man gave a tremendous spring and crashed down through the thick foliage. Some seventy or eighty feet below him a single stout branch shot out and on to this he fell with the sound of a great stone dropping into a bog, and hung there doubled over it, swinging slowly from side to side like a red rag, his scalp-lock streaming down between his feet. A shout of exultation rose from the Canadians at the sight, which was drowned in the murderous yell of the savages.

" His limbs twitch. He is not dead," cried De la Noue.

" Let him die there," said the old pioneer callously, ramming a fresh charge into his gun. " Ah, there is the grey hat again. It comes ever when I am unloaded."

" I saw a plumed hat among the brushwood."

" It is the Flemish Bastard. I had rather have his scalp than those of his hundred best warriors."

" Is he so brave, then ? "

" Yes, he is brave enough. There is no denying it, for how else could he be an Iroquois war-chief ? But he is clever and cunning, and cruel—— Ah, my God, if all the

stories told are true, his cruelty is past believing. I should fear that my tongue would wither if I did but name the things which this man has done. Ah, he is there again."

The grey hat with the plume had shown itself once more in a rift of the smoke. De la Noue and Du Lhut both fired together, and the cap fluttered up into the air. At the same instant the bushes parted and a tall warrior sprang out into full view of the defenders. His face was that of an Indian, but a shade or two lighter, and a pointed black beard hung down over his hunting tunic. He threw out his hands with a gesture of disdain, stood for an instant looking steadfastly at the fort, and then sprang back into cover amid a shower of bullets which chipped away the twigs all round him.

"Yes, he is brave enough," Du Lhut repeated with an oath. "Your *censitaires* have had their hoes in their hands more often than their muskets, I should judge from their shooting. But they seem to be drawing closer upon the east face, and I think that they will make a rush there before long."

The fire had indeed grown very much fiercer upon the side which was defended by De Catinat, and it was plain that the main force of the Iroquois were gathered at that point. From every log, and trunk, and cleft, and bush came the red flash with the grey halo, and the bullets sang in a continuous stream through the loop-holes. Amos had whittled a little hole for himself about a foot above the ground, and lay upon his face loading and firing in his own quiet methodical fashion. Beside him stood Ephraim Savage, his mouth set grimly, his eyes flashing from under his down-drawn brows, and his whole soul absorbed in the smiting of the Amalekites. His hat was gone, his grizzled hair flying in the breeze, great splotches of powder mottled his mahogany face and a weal across his right cheek showed where an Indian bullet had grazed him. De Catinat was bearing himself like an experienced soldier, walking up and down among his men with short

words of praise or of precept, those fire-words rough and blunt which bring a glow to the heart and a flush to the cheek. Seven of his men were down, but as the attack grew fiercer upon his side it slackened upon the others, and the seigneur with his son and Du Lhut brought ten men to reinforce him. De la Noue was holding out his snuff box to De Catinat when a shrill scream from behind them made them both look round. Onega the Indian wife was wringing her hands over the body of her son. A glance showed that the bullet had pierced his heart and that he was dead.

For an instant the old nobleman's thin face grew a shade paler, and the hand which held out the little gold box shook like a branch in the wind. Then he thrust it into his pocket again and mastered the spasm which had convulsed his features.

"The De la Noues always die upon the field of honour," he remarked. "I think that we should have some more men in the angle by the gun."

And now it became clear why it was that the Iroquois had chosen the eastern face for their main attack. It was there that the clump of cover lay midway between the edge of the forest and the stockade. A storming party could creep as far as that and gather there for the final rush. First one crouching warrior, and then a second and then a third darted across the little belt of open space, and threw themselves down among the bushes. The fourth was hit and lay with his back broken a few paces out from the edge of the wood, but a stream of warriors continued to venture the passage, until thirty-six had got across and the little patch of underwood was full of lurking savages. Amos Green's time had come.

From where he lay he could see the white patch where he had cut the bark from the birch sapling, and he knew that immediately underneath it lay the powder bag. He sighted the mark, and then slowly lowered his barrel until he had got to the base of the little trees as nearly as he could guess it among the tangle of bushes. The first

shot produced no result, however, and the second was aimed a foot lower. The bullet penetrated the bag and there was an explosion which shook the manor-house, and swayed the whole line of stout stockades as though they were corn-stalks in a breeze. Up to the highest summits of the trees went the huge column of blue smoke, and after the first roar there was a deathly silence which was broken by the patter and thud of falling bodies. Then came a wild cheer from the defenders, and a furious answering whoop from the Indians, while the fire from the woods burst out with greater fury than ever.

But the blow had been a heavy one. Of the thirty-six warriors, all picked for their valour, only four regained the shelter of the woods, and those so torn and shattered that they were spent men. Already the Indians had lost heavily, and this fresh disaster made them reconsider their plan of attack, for the Iroquois were as wary as they were brave, and he was esteemed the best war-chief who was most chary of the lives of his followers. Their fire gradually slackened, and at last, save for a dropping shot here and there, it died away altogether.

"Is it possible that they are going to abandon the attack?" cried De Catinat joyously. "Amos, I believe that you have saved us."

But the wily Du Lhut shook his head. "A wolf would as soon leave a half-gnawed bone as an Iroquois such a prize as this."

"But they have lost heavily."

"Aye, but not so heavily as ourselves in proportion to our numbers. They have fifty out of a thousand, and we twenty out of threescore. No, no, they are holding a council, and we shall soon hear from them again. But it may be some hours first, and if you will take my advice you will have an hour's sleep, for you are not, as I can see by your eyes, as used to doing without it as I am, and there may be little rest for any of us this night."

De Catinat was indeed weary to the last pitch of human endurance. Amos Green and the seaman had already

wrapt themselves in their blankets and sunk to sleep under the shelter of the stockade. The soldier rushed upstairs to say a few words of comfort to the trembling Adèle, and then throwing himself down upon a couch he slept the dreamless sleep of an exhausted man. When at last he was roused by a fresh sputter of musketry fire from the woods the sun was already low in the heavens and the mellow light of evening tinged the bare walls of the room. He sprang from his couch, seized his musket and rushed downstairs. The defenders were gathered at their loop-holes once more, while Du Lhut, the seigneur and Amos Green were whispering eagerly together. He noticed as he passed that Onega still sat crooning by the body of her son without having changed her position since morning.

"What is it, then? Are they coming on?" he asked.

"They are up to some devilry," said Du Lhut, peering out at the corner of the embrasure. "They are gathering thickly at the east fringe, and yet the firing comes from the south. It is not the Indian way to attack across the open, and yet if they think help is coming from the fort they might venture it."

"The wood in front of us is alive with them," said Amos. "They are as busy as beavers among the under-wood."

"Perhaps they are going to attack from this side, and cover the attack by a fire from the flank."

"That is what I think," cried the seigneur. "Bring the spare guns up here and all the men except five for each side."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a shrill yell burst from the wood, and in an instant a cloud of warriors dashed out and charged across the open, howling, springing and waving their guns or tomahawks in the air. With their painted faces, smeared and striped with every vivid colour, their streaming scalp-locks, their waving arms, their open mouths, and their writhings and con-tortions, no more fiendish crew ever burst into a sleeper's

nightmare. Some of those in front bore canoes between them, and as they reached the stockade they planted them against it and swarmed up them as if they had been scaling ladders. Others fired through the embrasures and loop-holes, the muzzles of their muskets touching those of the defenders, while others again sprang unaided on to the tops of the palisades and jumped fearlessly down upon the inner side. The Canadians, however, made such a resistance as might be expected from men who knew that no mercy awaited them. They fired whilst they had time to load, and then clubbing their muskets they smashed furiously at every red head which showed above the rails. The din within the stockade was infernal, the shouts and cries of the French, the whooping of the savages, and the terrified screaming of the frightened women blending into one dreadful uproar, above which could be heard the high shrill voice of the old seigneur imploring his *censitaires* to stand fast. With his rapier in his hand, his hat lost, his wig awry, and his dignity all thrown to the winds, the old nobleman showed them that day how a soldier of Rocroy could carry himself, and with Du Lhut, Amos, De Catinat and Ephraim Savage was ever in the forefront of the defence. So desperately did they fight, the sword and musket butt outreaching the tomahawk, that though at one time fifty Iroquois were over the palisades they had slain or driven back nearly all of them when a fresh wave burst suddenly over the south face which had been stripped of its defenders. Du Lhut saw in an instant that the enclosure was lost and that only one thing could save the house.

"Hold them for an instant," he screamed, and rushing at the brass gun he struck his flint and steel and fired it straight into the thick of the savages. Then as they re-coiled for an instant he stuck a nail into the touch-hole and drove it home with a blow from the butt of his gun. Darting across the yard he spiked the gun at the other corner, and was back at the door as the remnants of the garrison were hurled towards it by the rush of the assail-

ants. The Canadians darted in, and swung the ponderous mass of wood into position, breaking the leg of the foremost warrior who had striven to follow them. Then for an instant they had time for breathing and for council.

## 37. *The Coming of the Friar*

BUT their case was a very evil one. Had the guns been lost so that they might be turned upon the door, all further resistance would have been vain, but Du Lhut's presence of mind had saved them from that danger. The two guns upon the river face and the canoes were safe, for they were commanded by the windows of the house. But their numbers were terribly reduced and those who were left were weary and wounded and spent. Nineteen had gained the house, but one had been shot through the body and lay groaning in the hall, while a second had his shoulder cleft by a tomahawk and could no longer raise his musket. Du Lhut, De la Noue and De Catinat were uninjured, but Ephraim Savage had a bullet hole in his forearm, and Amos was bleeding from a cut upon the face. Of the others hardly one was without injury, and yet they had no time to think of their hurts, for the danger still pressed and they were lost unless they acted. A few shots from the barricaded windows sufficed to clear the enclosure, for it was all exposed to their aim, but on the other hand they had the shelter of the stockade now, and from the further side of it they kept up a fierce fire upon the windows. Half a dozen of the *censitaires* returned the fusillade, while the leaders consulted as to what had best be done.

"We have twenty-five women and fourteen children," said the seigneur. "I am sure that you will agree with me, gentlemen, that our first duty is towards them. Some of you, like myself, have lost sons or brothers this day. Let us at least save our wives and sisters."

"No Iroquois canoes have passed up the river," said

one of the Canadians. "If the women start in the darkness they can get away to the fort."

"By Saint Anne of Beaupré," exclaimed Du Lhut, "I think it would be well if you could get your men out of this also, for I cannot see how it is to be held until morning."

A murmur of assent broke from the other Canadians, but the old nobleman shook his bewigged head with decision.

"Tut! Tut! what nonsense is this!" he cried. "Are we to abandon the manor-house of Sainte Marie to the first gang of savages who choose to make an attack upon it? No, no, gentlemen, there are still nearly a score of us, and when the garrison learn that we are so pressed, which will be by to-morrow morning at the latest, they will certainly send us relief."

Du Lhut shook his head moodily.

"If you stand by the fort I will not desert you," said he, "and yet it is a pity to sacrifice brave men for nothing."

"The canoes will hardly hold the women and children as it is," cried Theuriet. "There are but two large and four small. There is not space for a single man."

"Then that decides it," said De Catinat. "But who are to row the women?"

"It is but a few leagues with the current in their favour, and there are none of our women who do not know how to handle a paddle."

The Iroquois were very quiet now, and an occasional dropping shot from the trees or the stockade was the only sign of their presence. Their losses had been heavy, and they were either engaged in collecting their dead, or in holding a council as to their next move. The twilight was gathering in, and the sun had already sunk beneath the tree-tops. Leaving a watchman at each window the leaders went round to the back of the house where the canoes were lying upon the bank. There were no signs of the enemy upon the river to the north of them.

"We are in luck," said Amos. "The clouds are gathering and there will be little light."

"It is luck indeed, since the moon is only three days past the full," answered Du Lhut. "I wonder that the Iroquois have not cut us off upon the water, but it is likely that their canoes have gone south to bring up another war-party. They may be back soon, and we had best not lose a moment."

"In an hour it might be dark enough to start."

"I think that there is rain in those clouds, and that will make it darker still."

The women and children were assembled and their places in each boat were assigned to them. The wives of the *censitaires*, rough hardy women whose lives had been spent under the shadow of a constant danger, were for the most part quiet and collected, though a few of the younger ones whimpered a little. A woman is always braver when she has a child to draw her thoughts from herself, and each married woman had one now allotted to her as her own special charge until they should reach the fort. To Onega, the Indian wife of the seigneur, who was as wary and as experienced as a war sachem of her people, the command of the women was entrusted.

"It is not very far, Adèle," said De Catinat, as his wife clung to his arm. "You remember how we heard the Angelus bells as we journeyed through the woods. That was Fort St. Louis, and it is but a league or two."

"But I do not wish to leave you, Amory. We have been together in all our troubles. Oh, Amory, why should we be divided now?"

"My dear love, you will tell them at the fort how things are with us, and they will bring us help."

"Let the others do that, and I will stay. I will not be useless, Amory. Onega has taught me to load a gun. I will not be afraid, indeed I will not, if you will only let me stay."

"You must not ask it, Adèle. It is impossible, child. I could not let you stay."

"But I feel so sure that it would be best."

The coarser reason of man has not yet learned to value those subtle instincts which guide a woman. De Catinat argued and exhorted until he had silenced if he had not convinced her.

"It is for my sake, dear. You do not know what a load it will be from my heart when I know that you are safe. And you need not be afraid for me. We can easily hold the place until morning. Then the people from the fort will come, for I hear that they have plenty of canoes, and we shall all meet again."

Adèle was silent, but her hands tightened upon his arm. Her husband was still endeavouring to reassure her when a groan burst from the watcher at the window which overlooked the stream.

"There is a canoe on the river to the north of us," he cried.

The besieged looked at each other in dismay. The Iroquois had then cut off their retreat after all.

"How many warriors are in it?" asked the seigneur.

"I cannot see. The light is not very good, and it is in the shadow of the bank."

"Which way is it coming?"

"It is coming this way. Ah, it shoots out into the open now, and I can see it. May the good Lord be praised! A dozen candles shall burn in Quebec Cathedral if I live till next summer!"

"What is it, then?" cried De la Noue impatiently.

"It is not an Iroquois canoe. There is but one man in it. He is a Canadian."

"A Canadian!" cried Du Lhut, springing up to the window. "Who but a madman would venture into such a hornet's nest alone! Ah, yes, I can see him now. He keeps well out from the bank to avoid their fire. Now he is in mid-stream and he turns towards us. By my faith, it is not the first time that the good father has handled a paddle."

"It is a Jesuit!" said one, craning his neck. "They are ever where there is most danger."

"No, I can see his capote," cried another. "It is a Franciscan friar!"

An instant later there was the sound of a canoe grounding upon the pebbles, the door was unbarred, and a man strode in, attired in the long brown gown of the Franciscans. He cast a rapid glance around, and then, stepping up to De Catinat, laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"So, you have not escaped me!" said he. "We have caught the evil seed before it has had time to root."

"What do you mean, father?" asked the seigneur. "You have made some mistake. This is my good friend Amory de Catinat, of a noble French family."

"This is Amory de Catinat, the heretic and Huguenot," cried the monk. "I have followed him up the St. Lawrence, and I have followed him up the Richelieu, and I would have followed him to the world's end if I could but bring him back with me."

"Tut, father, your zeal carries you too far," said the seigneur. "Whither would you take my friend, then?"

"He shall go back to France with his wife. There is no place in Canada for heretics."

Du Lhut burst out laughing. "By Sainte Anne, father," said he, "if you could take us all back to France at present we should be very much your debtors."

"And you will remember," said De la Noue sternly, "that you are under my roof and that you are speaking of my guest."

But the friar was not to be abashed by the frown of the old nobleman.

"Look at this," said he, whipping a paper out of his bosom. "It is signed by the governor, and calls upon you under pain of the king's displeasure to return this man to Quebec. Ah, monsieur, when you left me upon the island that morning you little thought that I would return to Quebec for this, and then hunt you down so many hundreds of miles of river. But I have you now,

and I shall never leave you until I see you on board the ship which will carry you and your wife back to France."

For all the bitter vindictiveness which gleamed in the monk's eyes, De Catinat could not but admire the energy and tenacity of the man.

"It seems to me, father, that you would have shone more as a soldier than as a follower of Christ," said he; "but since you have followed us here, and since there is no getting away, we may settle this question at some later time."

But the two Americans were less inclined to take so peaceful a view. Ephraim Savage's beard bristled with anger, and he whispered something into Amos Green's ear."

"The captain and I could easily get rid of him," said the young woodsman, drawing De Catinat aside. "If he *will* cross our path he must pay for it."

"No, no, not for the world, Amos! Let him alone. He does what he thinks to be his duty, though his faith is stronger than his charity, I think. But here comes the rain, and surely it is dark enough now for the boats."

A great brown cloud had overspread the heavens, and the night had fallen so rapidly that they could hardly see the gleam of the river in front of them. The savages in the woods and behind the captured stockade were quiet, save for an occasional shot, but the yells and whoops from the cottages of the *censitaires* showed that they were being plundered by their captors. Suddenly a dull red glow began to show above one of the roofs.

"They have set it on fire," cried Du Lhut. "The canoes must go at once, for the river will soon be as light as day. In! In! There is not an instant to lose!"

There was no time for leave-taking. One impassioned kiss and Adèle was torn away and thrust into the smallest canoe, which she shared with Onega, two children and an unmarried girl. The others rushed into their places, and in a few moments they had pushed off and had vanished into the drift and the darkness. The great cloud had

broken and the rain pattered heavily upon the roof, and splashed upon their faces as they strained their eyes after the vanishing boats.

"Thank God for this storm!" murmured Du Lhut. "It will prevent the cottages from blazing up too quickly."

But he had forgotten that though the roofs might be wet the interior was as dry as tinder. He had hardly spoken before a great yellow tongue of flame licked out of one of the windows, and again and again, until suddenly half of the roof fell in, and the cottage was blazing like a pitch-bucket. The flames hissed and sputtered in the pouring rain, but, fed from below, they grew still higher and fiercer, flashing redly upon the great trees, and turning their trunks to burnished brass. Their light made the enclosure and the manor-house as clear as day, and exposed the whole long stretch of the river. A fearful yell from the woods announced that the savages had seen the canoes, which were plainly visible from the windows not more than a quarter of a mile away.

"They are rushing through the woods. They are making for the water's edge," cried De Catinat.

"They have some canoes down there," said Du Lhut.

"But they must pass us!" cried the Seigneur of Sainte Marie. "Get down to the cannon and see if you cannot stop them."

They had hardly reached the guns when the two large canoes filled with warriors shot out from among the reeds below the fort, and steering out into mid-stream began to paddle furiously after the fugitives.

"Jean, you are our best shot," cried De la Noue. "Lay for her as she passes the great pine tree. Lambert, do you take the other gun. The lives of all whom you love may hang upon the shot!"

The two wrinkled old artillerymen glanced along their guns and waited for the canoes to come abreast of them. The fire still blazed higher and higher, and the broad river lay like a sheet of dull metal with two dark lines, which marked the canoes, sweeping swiftly down the centre.

One was fifty yards in front of the other, but in each the Indians were bending to their paddles and pulling frantically, while their comrades from the wooded shores whooped them on to fresh exertions. The fugitives had already disappeared round the bend of the river.

As the first canoe came abreast of the lower of the two guns, the Canadian made the sign of the cross over the touch-hole and fired. A cheer and then a groan went up from the eager watchers. The discharge had struck the surface close to the mark, and dashed such a shower of water over it that for an instant it looked as if it had been sunk. The next moment, however, the splash subsided and the canoe shot away uninjured save that one of the rowers had dropped his paddle while his head fell forward upon the back of the man in front of him. The second gunner sighted the same canoe as it came abreast of him but at the very instant when he stretched out his match to fire a bullet came humming from the stockade and he fell forward dead without a groan.

"This is work that I know something of, lad," said old Ephraim, springing suddenly forward. "But when I fire a gun I like to train it myself. Give me a help with the handspike and get her straight for the island. So! A little lower for an even keel! Now we have them!" He clapped down his match and fired.

It was a beautiful shot. The whole charge took the canoe about six feet behind the bow, and doubled her up like an eggshell. Before the smoke had cleared she had foundered, and the second canoe had paused to pick up some of the wounded men. The others, as much at home in the water as in the woods, were already striking out for the shore.

"Quick! quick!" cried the seigneur. "Load the gun! We may get the second one yet!"

But it was not to be. Long before they could get it ready the Iroquois had picked up their wounded warriors, and were pulling madly up-stream once more. As they shot away the fire died suddenly down in the burning

cottages and the rain and the darkness closed in upon them.

"My God!" cried De Catinat furiously, "they will be taken. Let us abandon this place, take a boat and follow them. Come! Come! Not an instant is to be lost!"

"Monsieur, you go too far in your very natural anxiety," said the seigneur coldly. "I am not inclined to leave my post so easily!"

"Ah, what is it? Only wood and stone which can be built again. But to think of the women in the hands of these devils. Oh, I am going mad! Come! Come! For Christ's sake come!" His face was deadly pale, and he raved with his clenched hands in the air.

"I do not think that they will be caught," said Du Lhut, laying his hand soothingly upon his shoulder. "Do not fear. They had a long start and the women here can paddle as well as the men. Again, the Iroquois canoe was over-loaded at the start, and has the wounded men aboard as well now. Besides, these oak canoes of the Mohawks are not as swift as the Algonquin birch barks which we use. In any case it is impossible to follow, for we have no boat."

"There is one lying there."

"Ah, it will but hold a single man. It is that in which the friar came."

"Then I am going in that! My place is with Adèle!" He flung open the door, rushed out, and was about to push off the frail skiff, when someone sprang past him, and with a blow from a hatchet stove in the side of the boat.

"It is my boat," said the friar, throwing down the axe and folding his arms. "I can do what I like with it."

"You fiend! You have ruined us!"

"I have found you and you shall not escape me again."

The hot blood flushed to the soldier's head, and picking up the axe, he took a quick step forward. The light from the open door shone upon the grave, harsh face of the

friar, but not a muscle twitched nor a feature changed as he saw the axe whirl up in the hands of a furious man. He only signed himself with a cross, and muttered a Latin prayer under his breath. It was that composure which saved his life. De Catinat hurled down the axe again with a bitter curse, and was turning away from the shattered boat when in an instant, without a warning, the great door of the manor-house crashed inwards, and a flood of whooping savages burst into the house.

## 38. *The Dining Hall of Sainte Marie*

WHAT had occurred is easily explained. The watchers in the windows at the front found that it was more than flesh and blood could endure to remain waiting at their posts while the fates of their wives and children were being decided at the back. All was quiet at the stockade and the Indians appeared to be as absorbed as the Canadians in what was passing upon the river. One by one, therefore, the men on guard had crept away and had assembled at the back to cheer the seaman's shot and to groan as the remaining canoe sped like a bloodhound down the river in the wake of the fugitives. But the savages had one at their head who was as full of wiles and resource as Du Lhut himself. The Flemish Bastard had watched the house from behind the stockade as a dog watches a rat hole, and he had instantly discovered that the defenders had left their post. With a score of other warriors he raised a great log from the edge of the forest, and crossing the open space unchallenged, he and his men rushed it against the door with such violence as to crack the bar across and tear the wood from the hinges. The first intimation which the survivors had of the attack was the crash of the door, and the screams of two of the negligent watchmen who had been seized and scalped in the hall. The whole basement floor was in the hands of the Indians, and De

Catinat and his enemy the friar were cut off from the foot of the stairs.

Fortunately, however, the manor-houses of Canada were built with the one idea of defence against Indians, and even now there were hopes for the defenders. A wooden ladder which could be drawn up in case of need hung down from the upper windows to the ground upon the river side. De Catinat rushed round to this, followed by the friar. He felt about for the ladder in the darkness. It was gone.

Then indeed his heart sank in despair. Where could he fly to ? The boat was destroyed. The stockades lay between him and the forest, and they were in the hands of the Iroquois. Their yells were ringing in his ears. They had not seen him yet, but in a few minutes they must come upon him. Suddenly he heard a voice from somewhere in the darkness above him.

" Give me your gun, lad," it said. " I see the loom of some of the heathen down by the wall."

" It is I. It is I, Amos," cried De Catinat. " Down with the ladder or I am a dead man."

" Have a care. It may be a ruse," said the voice of Du Lhut.

" No, no, I'll answer for it," cried Amos, and an instant later down came the ladder. De Catinat and the friar rushed up it, and they hardly had their feet upon the rungs when a swarm of warriors burst out from the door and poured along the river bank. Two muskets flashed from above, something plopped like a salmon in the water, and next instant the two were among their comrades and the ladder had been drawn up once more.

But it was a very small band who now held the last point to which they could retreat. Only nine of them remained, the seigneur, Du Lhut, the two Americans, the friar, De Catinat, Theuriet the major-domo, and two of the *censitaires*. Wounded, parched and powder-blackened, they were still filled with the mad courage of desperate men who knew that death could not come in no

more terrible form than through surrender. The stone staircase ran straight up from the kitchen to the main hall, and the door, which had been barricaded across the lower part by two mattresses, commanded the whole flight. Hoarse whisperings and the click of the cocking of guns from below told that the Iroquois were mustering for a rush.

"Put the lantern by the door," said Du Lhut, "so that it may throw the light upon the stair. There is only room for three to fire, but you can all load and pass the guns. Monsieur Green, will you kneel with me, and you, Jean Duval? If one of us is hit let another take his place at once. Now be ready, for they are coming!"

As he spoke there was a shrill whistle from below, and in an instant the stair was filled with rushing red figures and waving weapons. Bang! Bang! Bang! went the three guns, and then again and again Bang! Bang! Bang! The smoke was so thick in the low-roofed room that they could hardly see to pass the muskets to the eager hands which grasped for them. But no Iroquois had reached the barricade, and there was no patter of their feet now upon the stair. Nothing but an angry snarling and an occasional groan from below. The marksmen were uninjured, but they ceased to fire and waited for the smoke to clear.

And when it cleared they saw how deadly their aim had been at those close quarters. Only nine shots had been fired, and seven Indians were littered up and down on the straight stone stair. Five of them lay motionless, but two tried to crawl slowly back to their friends. Du Lhut and the *censitaire* raised their muskets, and the two crippled men lay still.

"By Sainte Anne!" said the old pioneer, as he rammed home another bullet. "If they have our scalps we have sold them at a great price. A hundred squaws will be howling in their villages when they hear of this day's work."

"Aye, they will not forget their welcome at Sainte

Marie," said the old nobleman. "I must again express my deep regret, my dear De Catinat, that you and your wife should have been put to such inconvenience when you have been good enough to visit me. I trust that she and the others are safe at the fort by this time."

"May God grant that they are! Oh, I shall never have an easy moment until I see her once more."

"If they are safe we may expect help in the morning, if we can hold out so long. Chambly, the commandant, is not a man to leave a comrade at a pinch."

The cards were still laid out at one end of the table, with the tricks over-lapping each other as they had left them on the previous morning. But there was something else there of more interest to them, for the breakfast had not been cleared away, and they had been fighting all day with hardly bite or sup. Even when face to face with death Nature still cries out for her dues, and the hungry men turned savagely upon the loaf, the ham and the cold wild duck. A little cluster of wine bottles stood upon the buffet, and these had their necks knocked off, and were emptied down parched throats. Three men still took their turn, however, to hold the barricade, for they were not to be caught napping again. The yells and screeches of the savages came up to them as though all the wolves of the forest were cooped up in the basement, but the stair was deserted save for the seven motionless figures.

"They will not try to rush us again," said Du Lhut with confidence. "We have taught them too severe a lesson."

"They will set fire to the house."

"It will puzzle them to do that," said the major-domo. "It is solid stone, walls and stair, save only for a few beams of wood, very different from those other cottages."

"Hush!" cried Amos Green, and raised his hand. The yells had died away and they heard the heavy thud of a mallet beating upon wood.

"What can it be!"

"Some fresh devilry, no doubt."

"I regret to say, messieurs," observed the seigneur,

with no abatement of his courtly manner, " that it is my belief that they have learned a lesson from our young friend here, and that they are knocking out the heads of the powder-barrels in the store-room."

But Du Lhut shook his head at the suggestion. " It is not in a redskin to waste powder," said he. " It is a deal too precious for them to do that. Ah, listen to that ! "

The yellings and screechings had begun again, but there was a wilder, madder ring in their shrillness, and they were mingled with snatches of song and bursts of laughter.

" Ha ! It is the brandy casks which they have opened," cried Du Lhut. " They were bad before, but they will be fiends out of hell now."

As he spoke there came another burst of whoops and high above them a voice calling for mercy. With horror in their eyes the survivors glanced from one to the other. A heavy smell of burning flesh rose from below, and still that dreadful voice shrieking and pleading. Then slowly it quavered away and was silent for ever.

" Who was it ? " whispered De Catinat, his blood running cold in his veins.

" It was Jean Corbeil, I think."

" May God rest his soul ! His troubles are over. Would that we were as peaceful as he ! Ah, shoot him ! Shoot ! "

A man had suddenly sprung out at the foot of the stair and had swung his arm as though throwing something. It was the Flemish Bastard. Amos Green's musket flashed, but the savage had sprung back again as rapidly as he appeared. Something splashed down amongst them and rolled across the floor in the lamp-light.

" Down ! Down ! It is a bomb ! " cried De Catinat.

But it lay at Du Lhut's feet, and he had seen it clearly. He took a cloth from the table and dropped it over it.

" It is not a bomb," said he quietly, " and it *was* Jean Corbeil who died."

For four hours sounds of riot, of dancing and of revelling

rose up from the store-house, and the smell of the open brandy casks filled the whole air. More than once the savages quarrelled and fought among themselves, and it seemed as if they had forgotten their enemies above, but the besieged soon found that if they attempted to presume upon this they were as closely watched as ever. The major-domo, Theuriet, passing between a loop-hole and a light, was killed instantly by a bullet from the stockade, and both Amos and the old seigneur had narrow escapes until they blocked all the windows save that which overlooked the river. There was no danger from this one, and, as day was already breaking once more, one or other of the party was for ever straining their eyes down the stream in search of the expected succour.

Slowly the light crept up the eastern sky, a little line of pearl, then a band of pink, broadening, stretching, spreading, until it shot its warm colour across the heavens, tinging the edges of the drifting clouds. Over the woodlands lay a thin grey vapour, the tops of the high oaks jutting out like dim islands from the sea of haze. Gradually as the light increased the mist shredded off into little ragged wisps which thinned and drifted away, until at last, as the sun pushed its glowing edge over the eastern forests, it gleamed upon the reds and oranges and purples of the fading leaves, and upon the broad blue river which curled away to the northward. De Catinat, as he stood at the window looking out, was breathing in the healthy resinous scent of the trees, mingled with the damp heavy odour of the wet earth, when suddenly his eyes fell upon a dark spot upon the river to the north of them.

"There is a canoe coming down!" he cried.

In an instant they had all rushed to the opening, but Du Lhut sprang after them, and pulled them angrily towards the door.

"Do you wish to die before your time!" he cried.

"Aye, aye!" said Captain Ephraim, who understood the gesture if not the words. "We must leave a watch

on deck. Amos, lad, lie here with me and be ready if they show."

The two Americans and the old pioneer held the barricade, while the eyes of all the others were turned upon the approaching boat. A groan broke suddenly from the only surviving *censitaire*.

"It is an Iroquois canoe!" he cried.

"Impossible!"

"Alas, your excellency, it is so, and it is the same one which passed us last night."

"Ah, then the women have escaped them."

"I trust so. But alas, seigneur, I fear that there are more in the canoe now than when they passed us."

The little group of survivors waited in breathless anxiety while the canoe sped swiftly up the river, with a line of foam on either side of her, and a long forked swirl in the waters behind. They could see that she appeared to be very crowded, but they remembered that the wounded of the other boat were aboard her. On she shot and on, until as she came abreast of the fort she swung round, and the rowers raised their paddles and burst into a shrill yell of derision. The stern of the canoe was turned towards them now, and they saw that two women were seated in it. Even at that distance there was no mistaking the sweet pale face, or the dark queenly one beside it. The one was Onega and the other was Adèle.

## 39. *The Two Swimmers*

CHARLES DE LA NOUE, Seigneur de Sainte Marie, was a hard and self-contained man, but a groan and a bitter curse burst from him when he saw his Indian wife in the hands of her kinsmen, from whom she could hope for little mercy. Yet even now his old-fashioned courtesy to his guest had made him turn to De Catinat with some words of sympathy, when there was a clatter of wood, something darkened the light

of the window, and the young soldier was gone. Without a word he had lowered the ladder and was clambering down it with frantic haste. Then as his feet touched the ground he signalled to his comrades to draw it up again and dashing into the river he swam towards the canoe. Without arms and without a plan he had but the one thought that his place was by the side of his wife in this, the hour of her danger. Fate should bring him what it brought her, and he swore to himself as he clove a way with his strong arms, that whether it were life or death they should still share it together.

But there was another whose view of duty led him from safety into the face of danger. All night the Franciscan had watched De Catinat as a miser watches his treasure, filled with the thought that this heretic was the one little seed which might spread and spread until it choked the chosen vineyard of the Church. Now when he saw him rush so suddenly down the ladder, every fear was banished from his mind save the overpowering one that he was about to lose his precious charge. He, too, clambered down at the very heels of his prisoner, and rushed into the stream not ten paces behind him.

And so the watchers at the window saw the strangest of sights. There, in mid-stream, lay the canoe, with a ring of dark warriors clustering in the stern, and the two women crouching in the midst of them. Swimming madly towards them was De Catinat, rising to the shoulders with the strength of every stroke, and behind him again was the tonsured head of the friar, with his brown capote and long trailing gown floating upon the surface of the water behind him. But in his zeal he had thought too little of his own powers. He was a good swimmer but he was weighted and hampered by his unwieldy clothes. Slower and slower grew his stroke, lower and lower his head, until at last with a great shriek of *In manus tuas, Domine!* he threw up his hands, and vanished in the swirl of the river. A minute later the watchers, hoarse with screaming to him to return, saw De Catinat pulled aboard the Iroquois

canoe, which was instantly turned, and continued its course up the river.

"My God!" cried Amos hoarsely. "They have taken him. He is lost!"

"I have seen some strange things in these forty years, but never the like of that!" said Du Lhut.

The seigneur took a little pinch of snuff from his gold box, and flicked the wandering grains from his shirt-front with his dainty lace handkerchief.

"Monsieur de Catinat has acted like a gentleman of France," said he. "If I could swim now as I did thirty years ago, I should be by his side."

Du Lhut glanced round him and shook his head. "We are only six now," said he. "I fear they are up to some devilry because they are so very still."

"They are leaving the house!" cried the *censitaire*, who was peeping through one of the side windows. "What can it mean? Holy Virgin, is it possible that we are saved? See how they throng through the trees. They are making for the canoe. Now they are waving their arms and pointing."

"There is the grey hat of that mongrel devil amongst them," said the captain. "I would try a shot upon him were it not a waste of powder and lead."

"I have hit the mark at as long a range," said Amos, pushing his long brown gun through a chink in the barricade which they had thrown across the lower half of the window. "I would give my next year's trade to bring him down."

"It is forty paces farther than my musket would carry," remarked Du Lhut, "but I have seen the English shoot a great way with those long guns."

Amos took a steady aim, resting his gun upon the window sill, and fired. A shout of delight burst from the little knot of survivors. The Flemish Bastard had fallen. But he was on his feet again in an instant and shook his hand defiantly at the window.

"Curse it!" cried Amos bitterly, in English. "I

have hit him with a spent ball. As well strike him with a pebble."

"Nay, curse not, Amos, lad, but try him again with another pinch of powder if your gun will stand it."

The woodsman thrust in a full charge, and chose a well-rounded bullet from his bag, but when he looked again both the Bastard and his warriors had disappeared. On the river the single Iroquois canoe which held the captives was speeding south as swiftly as twenty paddles could drive it, but save this one dark streak upon the blue stream, not a sign was to be seen of their enemies. They had vanished as if they had been an evil dream. There was the bullet-spotted stockade, the litter of dead bodies inside it, the burned and roofless cottages, but the silent woods lay gleaming in the morning sunshine as quiet and peaceful as if no hell-burst of fiends had ever broken out from them.

"By my faith, I believe that they have gone!" cried the seigneur.

"Take care that it is not a ruse," said Du Lhut. "Why should they fly before six men when they have conquered sixty?"

But the *censitaire* had looked out of the other window, and in an instant he was down upon his knees with his hands in the air, and his powder-blackened face turned upwards, pattering out prayers and thanksgivings. His five comrades rushed across the room and burst into a shriek of joy. The upper reach of the river was covered with a flotilla of canoes from which the sun struck quick flashes as it shone upon the musket barrels and trappings of the crews. Already they could see the white coats of the regulars, the brown tunics of the *coureurs-de-bois*, and the gaudy colours of the Hurons and Algonquins. On they swept, dotting the whole breadth of the river, and growing larger every instant, while far away on the southern bend, the Iroquois canoe was a mere moving dot which had shot away to the farther side and lost itself presently under the shadow of the trees. Another

minute and the survivors were out upon the bank, waving their caps in the air while the prows of the first of their rescuers were already grating upon the pebbles. In the stern of the very foremost canoe sat a wizened little man with a large brown wig, and a gilt-headed rapier laid across his knees. He sprang out as the keel touched bottom, splashing through the shallow water with his high leather boots, and rushing up to the seigneur, he flung himself into his arms.

"My dear Charles," he cried, "you have held your house like a hero. What, only six of you! Tut, tut, this has been a bloody business!"

"I knew that you would not desert a comrade, Chambly. We have saved the house but our losses have been terrible. My son is dead. My wife is in that Iroquois canoe in front of you."

The commandant of Fort St. Louis pressed his friend's hand in silent sympathy.

"The others arrived all safe," he said at last. "Only that one was taken, on account of the breaking of a paddle. Three were drowned and two captured. There was a French lady in it, I understand, as well as madame."

"Yes, and they have taken her husband as well."

"Ah, poor souls! Well, if you are strong enough to join us, you and your friends, we shall follow after them without the loss of an instant. Ten of my men will remain to guard the house, and you can have their canoe. Jump in then, and forward, for life and death may hang upon our speed!"

## 40. *The End*

THE Iroquois had not treated De Catinat harshly when they dragged him from the water into their canoe. So incomprehensible was it to them why any man should voluntarily leave a place of safety in order to put himself in their power that they could only set it

down to madness, a malady which inspires awe and respect among the Indians. They did not even tie his wrists, for why should he attempt to escape when he had come of his own free will? Two warriors passed their hands over him, to be sure that he was unarmed, and he was then thrust down between the two women while the canoe darted in towards the bank to tell the others that the St. Louis garrison was coming up the stream. Then it steered out again, and made its way swiftly up the centre of the river. Adèle was deadly pale and her hand, as her husband laid his upon it, was as cold as marble.

"My darling," he whispered, "tell me that all is well with you—that you are unhurt!"

"Oh, Amory, why did you come? Why did you come, Amory? Oh, I think I could have borne anything, but if they hurt you I could not bear that."

"How could I stay behind when I knew that you were in their hands? I should have gone mad!"

"Ah, it was my one consolation to think that you were safe."

"No, no, we have gone through so much together that we cannot part now. What is death, Adèle? Why should we be afraid of it?"

"I am not afraid of it."

"And I am not afraid of it. Things will come about as God wills it, and what He wills must in the end be the best. If we live, then we have this memory in common. If we die, then we go hand-in-hand into another life. Courage, my own, all will be well with us."

"Tell me, monsieur," said Onega, "is my lord still living?"

"Yes, he is alive and well."

"It is good. He is a great chief, and I have never been sorry, not even now, that I have wedded with one who was not of my own people. But ah, my son! Who shall give my son back to me? He was like the young sapling, so straight and so strong! Who could run with him, or leap with him, or swim with him? Ere that sun shines

again we shall all be dead, and my heart is glad, for I shall see my boy once more."

The Iroquois paddles had bent to their work until a good ten miles lay between them and Sainte Marie. Then they ran the canoe into a little creek upon their own side of the river, and sprang out of her, dragging the prisoners after them. The canoe was carried on the shoulders of eight men some distance into the wood, where they concealed it between two fallen trees, heaping a litter of branches over it to screen it from view. Then, after a short council, they started through the forest walking in single file, with their three prisoners in the middle. There were fifteen warriors in all, eight in front and seven behind, all armed with muskets and as swift-footed as deer, so that escape was out of the question. They could but follow on, and wait in patience for whatever might befall them.

All day they pursued their dreary march, picking their way through vast morasses, skirting the borders of blue woodland lakes where the grey stork flapped heavily up from the reeds at their approach, or plunging into dark belts of woodland where it is always twilight, and where the falling of the wild chestnuts and the chatter of the squirrels a hundred feet above their heads were the only sounds which broke the silence. Onega had the endurance of the Indians themselves, but Adèle, in spite of her former journeys, was footsore and weary before evening. It was a relief to De Catinat, therefore, when the red glow of a great fire beat suddenly through the tree-trunks, and they came upon an Indian camp in which was assembled the greater part of the war-party which had been driven from Sainte Marie. Here, too, were a number of the squaws who had come from the Mohawk and Cayuga villages in order to be nearer to the warriors. Wigwams had been erected all round in a circle, and before each of them were the fires with kettles slung upon a tripod of sticks in which the evening meal was being cooked. In the centre of all was a very fierce fire which had been made of brushwood placed in a circle, so as to leave a clear

space of twelve feet in the middle. A pole stood up in the centre of this clearing, and something all mottled with red and black was tied up against it. De Catinat stepped swiftly in front of Adèle that she might not see the dreadful thing, but he was too late. She shuddered, and drew a quick breath between her pale lips, but no sound escaped her.

"They have begun already, then," said Onega composedly. "Well, it will be our turn next, and we shall show them that we know how to die."

"They have not ill-used us yet," said De Catinat. "Perhaps they will keep us for ransom or exchange."

The Indian woman shook her head. "Do not deceive yourself by any such hope," said she. "When they are as gentle as they have been with you it is ever a sign that you are reserved for the torture. Your wife will be married to one of their chiefs, but you and I must die, for you are a warrior, and I am too old for a squaw."

Married to an Iroquois! Those dreadful words shot a pang through both their hearts which no thought of death could have done. De Catinat's head dropped forward upon his chest and he staggered and would have fallen had Adèle not caught him by the arm.

"Do not fear, dear Amory," she whispered. "Other things may happen, but not that, for I swear to you that I shall not survive you. No, it may be sin or it may not, but if death will not come to me, I will go to it."

De Catinat looked down at the gentle face which had set now into the hard lines of an immutable resolve. He knew that it would be as she had said, and that, come what might, that last outrage would not befall them. Could he ever have believed that the time would come when it would send a thrill of joy through his heart to know that his wife would die?

As they entered the Iroquois village the squaws and warriors had rushed towards them, and they passed through a double line of hideous faces which jeered and jibed and howled at them as they passed. Their escort led them

through this rabble and conducted them to a hut which stood apart. It was empty, save for some willow fishing nets hanging at the side, and a heap of pumpkins stored in the corner.

"The chiefs will come and will decide upon what is to be done with us," said Onega. "Here they are coming now, and you will soon see that I am right, for I know the ways of my own people."

An instant later an old war-chief, accompanied by two younger braves and by the bearded half-Dutch Iroquois who had led the attack upon the manor-house, strolled over and stood in the doorway, looking in at the prisoners and shooting little guttural sentences at each other. The totems of the Hawk, the Wolf, the Bear and the Snake showed that they each represented one of the great families of the Nation. The Bastard was smoking a stone pipe, and yet it was he who talked the most, arguing apparently with one of the younger savages who seemed to come round at last to his opinion. Finally the old chief said a few short stern words, and the matter appeared to be settled.

"And you, you beldame," said the Bastard in French to the Iroquois woman, "you will have a lesson this night which will teach you to side against your own people."

"You half-bred mongrel," replied the fearless old woman, "you should take that hat from your head when you speak to one in whose veins runs the best blood of the Onondagas. You a warrior? you who, with a thousand at your back, could not make your way into a little house with a few poor husbandmen within it! It is no wonder that your father's people have cast you out! Go back and work at the beads, or play at the game of plum stones, for some day in the woods you might meet with a man, and so bring disgrace upon the nation which has taken you in!"

The evil face of the Bastard grew livid as he listened to the scornful words which were hissed at him by the captive. He strode across to her, and taking her hand he

thrust her forefinger into the burning bowl of his pipe. She made no effort to remove it, but sat with a perfectly set face for a minute or more, looking out through the open door at the evening sunlight, and the little groups of chattering Indians. He had watched her keenly in the hope of hearing a cry, or seeing some spasm of agony upon her face, but at last, with a curse, he dashed down her hand and strode from the hut. She thrust her charred finger into her bosom and laughed.

"He is a good-for-nought!" she cried. "He does not even know how to torture. Now, I could have got a cry out of him. I am sure of it. But you—monsieur, you are very white!"

"It was the sight of such a hellish deed. Ah, if we were but set face to face, I with my sword, he with what weapon he chose, by God, he should pay for it with his heart's blood."

The Indian woman seemed surprised. "It is strange to me," she said, "that you should think of what befalls me when you are yourselves under the same shadow. But our fate will be as I said."

"Ah!"

"You and I are to die at the stake. She is to be given to the dog who has left us."

"Adèle! Adèle! What shall I do!" He tore his hair in his helplessness and distraction.

"No, no, fear not, Amory, for my heart will not fail me. What is the pang of death if it binds us together?"

"The younger chief pleaded for you, saying that the *Mitche Manitou* had stricken you with madness, as could be seen by your swimming to their canoe, and that a blight would fall upon the nation if you were led to the stake. But this Bastard said that love came often like madness among the pale faces, and that it was that alone which had driven you. Then it was agreed that you should die and that she should go to his wigwam, since he had led the war-party. As for me, their hearts were

bitter against me, and I also am to die by the pine splinters."

De Catinat breathed a prayer that he might meet his fate like a soldier and a gentleman.

"When is it to be?" he asked.

"Now! At once! They have gone to make all ready. But you have time yet, for I am to go first."

"Amory, Amory, could we not die together now?" cried Adèle, throwing her arms round her husband. "If it be sin, it is surely a sin which will be forgiven us. Let us go, dear. Let us leave these dreadful people and this cruel world and turn where we shall find peace."

The Indian woman's eyes flashed with satisfaction.

"You have spoken well, White Lily," said she. "Why should you wait until it is their pleasure to pluck you. See, already the glare of their fire beats upon the tree-trunks, and you can hear the howlings of those who thirst for your blood. If you die by your own hands, they will be robbed of their spectacle, and their chief will have lost his bride. So you will be the victors in the end, and they the vanquished. You have said rightly, White Lily. There lies the only path for you!"

"But how to take it?"

Onega glanced keenly at the two warriors who stood as sentinels at the door of the hut. They had turned away, absorbed in the horrible preparations which were going on. Then she rummaged deeply within the folds of her loose gown and pulled out a small pistol with two brass barrels and double triggers in the form of winged dragons. It was only a toy to look at, all carved and scrolled and graven with the choicest work of the Paris gunsmith. For its beauty the seigneur had bought it at his last visit to Quebec, and yet it might be useful, too, and it was loaded in both barrels.

"I meant to use it on myself," said she, as she slipped it into the hand of De Catinat. "But now I am minded to show them that I can die as an Onondaga should die, and that I am worthy to have the blood of their chiefs in

my veins. Take it, for I swear that I will not use it myself, unless it be to fire both bullets into that Bastard's heart."

A flush of joy shot over De Catinat as his fingers closed round the pistol. Here was indeed a key to unlock the gates of peace. Adèle laid her cheek against his shoulder and laughed with pleasure.

"You will forgive me, dear," he whispered.

"Forgive you! I bless you, and love you with my whole heart and soul. Clasp me close, darling, and say one prayer before you do it."

They had sunk on their knees together when three warriors entered the hut and said a few abrupt words to their country-woman. She rose with a smile.

"They are waiting for me," said she. "You shall see, White Lily, and you also, monsieur, how well I know what is due to my position. Farewell, and remember Onega!"

She smiled again, and walked from the hut amidst the warriors with the quick firm step of a queen who sweeps to a throne.

"Now, Amory!" whispered Adèle, closing her eyes, and nestling still closer to him.

He raised the pistol, and then, with a quick sudden intaking of the breath, he dropped it and knelt with glaring eyes looking up at a tree which faced the open door of the hut.

It was a beech tree, exceedingly old and gnarled, with its bark hanging down in strips and its whole trunk spotted with moss and mould. Some ten feet above the ground the main trunk divided into two, and in the fork thus formed a hand had suddenly appeared, a large reddish hand, which shook frantically from side to side in passionate dissuasion. The next instant, as the two captives still stared in amazement, the hand disappeared behind the trunk again and a face appeared in its place, which still shook from side to side as resolutely as its forerunner. It was impossible to mistake that mahogany, wrinkled skin, the huge bristling eyebrows, or the little

glistening eyes. It was Captain Ephraim Savage of Boston !

And even as they stared and wondered a sudden shrill whistle burst out from the depths of the forest, and in a moment every bush and thicket and patch of brushwood were spouting fire and smoke, while the snarl of the musketry ran round the whole glade, and the storm of bullets whizzed and pelted among the yelling savages. The Iroquois' sentinels had been drawn in by their blood-thirsty craving to see the prisoners die, and now the Canadians were upon them, and they were hemmed in by a ring of fire. First one way and then another they rushed, to be met always by the same blast of death, until finding at last some gap in the attack they streamed through, like sheep through a broken fence, and rushed madly away through the forest with the bullets of their pursuers still singing about their ears, until the whistle sounded again to recall the woodsmen from the chase.

But there was one savage who had found work to do before he fled. The Flemish Bastard had preferred his vengeance to his safety ! Rushing at Onega he buried his tomahawk in her brain, and then, yelling his war-cry, he waved the blood-stained weapon above his head, and flew into the hut where the prisoners still knelt. De Catinat saw him coming, and a mad joy glistened in his eyes. He rose to meet him, and as he rushed in he fired both barrels of his pistol into the Bastard's face. An instant later a swarm of Canadians had rushed over the writhing bodies, the captives felt warm friendly hands which grasped their own, and looking upon the smiling well-known faces of Amos Green, Savage and Du Lhut, they knew that peace had come to them at last.

And so the refugees came to the end of the toils of their journey, for that winter was spent by them in peace at Fort St. Louis, and in the spring, the Iroquois having carried the war to the Upper St. Lawrence, the travellers were able to descend into the English Provinces, and so to make their way down the Hudson to New York, where a

warm welcome awaited them from the family of Amos Green. The friendship between the two men was now so cemented together by common memories and common danger that they soon became partners in fur-trading, and the name of the Frenchman came at last to be as familiar in the mountains of Maine and on the slopes of the Alleghanies as it had once been in the *salons* and corridors of Versailles. In time De Catinat built a house on Staten Island, where many of his fellow-refugees had settled, and much of what he won from his fur-trading was spent in the endeavour to help his struggling Huguenot brothers. Amos Green had married a Dutch maiden of Schenectady, and as Adèle and she became inseparable friends, the marriage served to draw closer the ties of love which held the two families together.

As to Captain Ephraim Savage, he returned safely to his beloved Boston, where he fulfilled his ambition by building himself a fair brick house upon the rising ground in the northern part of the city, whence he could look down both upon the shipping in the river and the bay. There he lived, much respected by his townsfolk, who made him selectman and alderman, and gave him the command of a goodly ship when Sir William Phips made his attack upon Quebec, and found that the old Lion Frontenac was not to be driven from his lair. So, honoured by all, the old seaman lived to an age which carried him deep into the next century, when he could already see with his dim eyes something of the growing greatness of his country.

The manor-house of Sainte Marie was soon restored to its former prosperity, but its seigneur was from the day that he lost his wife and son a changed man. He grew leaner, fiercer, less human, for ever heading parties which made their way into the Iroquois woods and which outrivalled the savages themselves in the terrible nature of their deeds. A day came at last when he sallied out upon one of these expeditions, from which neither he nor any of his men ever returned. Many a terrible secret is hid

by those silent woods, and the fate of Charles de la Noue, Seigneur de Sainte Marie, is among them.

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### Note on the Huguenots and their Dispersion.

Towards the latter quarter of the seventeenth century there was hardly an important industry in France which was not controlled by the Huguenots, so that, numerous as they were, their importance was out of all proportion to their numbers. The cloth trade of the north and the south-east, the manufacture of serges and light stuffs in Languedoc, the linen trade of Normandy and Brittany, the silk and velvet industry of Tours and Lyons, the glass of Normandy, the paper of Auvergne and Angoumois, the jewellery of the Isle of France, the tan yards of Touraine, the iron and tin work of the Sedanais—all these were largely owned and managed by Huguenots. The numerous Saint days of the Catholic Calendar handicapped their rivals, and it was computed that the Protestant worked 310 days in the year to his fellow-countryman's 260.

A very large number of the Huguenot refugees were brought back, and the jails and galleys of France were crowded with them. One hundred thousand settled in Friesland and Holland, 25,000 in Switzerland, 75,000 in Germany and 50,000 in England. Some made their way even to the distant Cape of Good Hope, where they remained in the Paarl district.

In war, as in industry, the exiles were a source of strength to the countries which received them. Frenchmen drilled the Russian armies of Peter the Great, a Huguenot count became commander-in-chief in Denmark, and Schomberg led the army of Brandenburg, and afterwards that of England.

In England three Huguenot regiments were formed for the service of William. The exiles established themselves as silk workers in Spitalfields, cotton spinners at Bideford, tapestry weavers at Exeter, wool carders at Taunton, kersey makers at Norwich, weavers at Canterbury, hat makers at Wandsworth, sailcloth makers at Ipswich, workers in calico in Bromley, glass in Sussex, paper at Laverstock, cambric at Edinburgh.

Early Protestant refugees had taken refuge in America twenty years before the revocation, where they formed a colony at Staten Island. A body came to Boston in 1684, and were given 11,000 acres at Oxford, by order of the General Court at Massachusetts. In New York and Long Island colonies sprang up, and later in Virginia (the Monacan Settlement), in Maryland, and in South Carolina (French Santee and Orange Quarter).

### Note on the Future of Louis, Madame de Maintenon, and Madame de Montespan.

It has been left to our own century to clear the fair fame of Madame de Maintenon of all reproach, and to show her as what she was, a pure woman and a devoted wife. She has received little justice

from the memoir writers of the seventeenth century, most of whom, the Duc de St. Simon, for example, and the Princess Elizabeth of Bavaria, had their own private reasons for disliking her. An admirable epitome of her character and influence will be found in Dr. Dollinger's *Historical Studies*. She made Louis an excellent wife, waited upon him assiduously for thirty years of married life, influenced him constantly towards good—save only in the one instance of the Huguenots, and finally died very shortly after her husband.

Madame de Montespan lived in great magnificence after the triumph of her rival, and spent freely the vast sums which the king's generosity had furnished her with. Eventually, having exhausted all that this world could offer, she took to hair-shirts and nail-studded girdles, in the hope of securing a good position in the next. Her horror of death was excessive. In thunder-storms she sat with a little child in her lap in the hope that its innocence might shield her from the lightning. She slept always with her room ablaze with tapers, and with several women watching by the side of her couch. When at last the inevitable arrived she left her body for the family tomb, her heart to the convent of La Flèche, and her entrails to the priory of Menoux near Bourbon. These latter were thrust into a box and given to a peasant to convey to the priory. Curiosity induced him to look into the box upon the way, and, seeing the contents, he supposed himself to be the victim of a practical joke, and emptied them out into a ditch. A swineherd was passing at the moment with his pigs, and so it happened that, in the words of Mrs. Julia Pardoe, " in a few minutes the most filthy animals in creation had devoured portions of the remains of one of the haughtiest women who ever trod the earth."

Louis, after a reign of more than fifty years, which comprised the most brilliant epoch of French history, died at last in 1715 amidst the saddest surroundings.

One by one those whom he loved had preceded him to the grave, his brother, his son, the two sons of his son, their wives, and finally his favourite great-grandson, until he, the old dying monarch, with his rouge and his stays, was left with only a little infant in arms, the Duc D'Anjou, three generations away from him, to perpetuate his line. On 20th August, 1715, he was attacked by senile gangrene, which gradually spread up the leg until on the 30th it became fatal. His dying words were worthy of his better self. " Gentlemen, I desire your pardon for the bad example which I have set you. I have greatly to thank you for the manner in which you have served me, as well as for the attachment and fidelity which I have always experienced at your hands. I request from you the same zeal and fidelity for my grandson. Farewell, gentlemen. I feel that this parting has affected not only myself but you also. Forgive me! I trust that you will sometimes think of me when I am gone."

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