CEDRIC, THE FORESTER

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CEDRIC THE FORESTER

BY BERNARD MARSHALL

NOW HE RAISED HIMSELF ON HIS ARM AND CLAIMED THE VICTORY

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DP Transcriber's notes can be found at the end of the book.

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CEDRIC THE FORESTER

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ILLUSTRATIONS

We made a procession through the field, all the men and maidens shouting and dancing and making a most merry and heartening din

He gave no inch of ground save to leap from side to side in avoiding my downward strokes

In a twinkling armed and mounted men were all about us

Old Marvin had his cross-bow ready drawn, and he shot young Montalvan through the face at the very first onset

Hard we rode, indeed, and with little mercy on our mounts

The water at the ford was filled with mounted men and bullock carts, laden with spoil and making their difficult way through the swift-flowing current

The leader had his great sword thrust aside by Cedric's bow, then was seized about the waist and hurled to the rocks below

Both were red of face with hurry, and their horses were well lathered and breathing hard

Then with loud menaces I drove him to the wall where I made him stand with hands above his head

Sir Cedric rose to his feet and for a moment looked from one to the other of our company

With a mighty shout, we rode down upon the bridge, trusting all to the darkness and the fury of our attack

CHAPTER I—THE SIEGE OF

CASTLE MOUNTJOY

That was a blithe spring morning when the messenger from the King brought to my father the order to join the army at Lincoln for the great expedition into Scotland. Six armored knights with their squires and a hundred men-at-arms made up the Mountjoy quota; and these my father, liege lord of the domain and loyal subject of the crown, lost no time in bringing together.

Messengers, on horseback and afoot hurried out with his commands; and at the castle we were all in a pretty flurry of making ready.

The armorers were hammering and riveting in the courtyard, making a most merry din; the big ox-carts lumbered in over the drawbridge, bearing meat and grain for my father's company while on its way to the assembly ground and for us who were to remain at Mountjoy; and our men in their leathern jackets and hoods and with their cross-bows slung on their backs were coming in by ones and twos and in groups of half a score.

Now my lady mother drew near to Father's side as he watched the labor of the armorers, and I, having no will to lose any word of his, came forward also.

"My lord," she said, "I would speak with thee where the noise of these hammers will not deafen our ears."

My father laughed as one laughs at the sorriest jest when he is gay.

"Gadzooks! my lady," he said with a curtsy which my mother says he learned in Italy, and which, try as I may, I cannot copy—"a daughter of the Montmorencys should find in the din of armorers' hammers a music far sweeter than that of the lute or viol."

"'Tis well enough," said my mother, hurriedly, "and I should sorrow to live where it never was heard. But I have a grave matter upon which to consult thee. Hast thou given thought, my lord, to the castle's defense during thine absence and that of the best part of our men?"

My father's brow became furrowed. I opened my mouth to speak, but Mother frowned at me so I held my peace. Methinks she sometimes thinks of me as naught more than a child, forgetting that it was my fifteenth birthday that we marked at Candlemas.

"Some little I have thought of that," began my father, "and, indeed, Kate, I would not have thee think I would leave thee unsecured. Marvin, the old cross-bowman who attended me through all my campaigns, and whose eye for the homing place of his arrow, is, in spite of his years, like that of Robin Hood himself, shall be thy right-hand servitor, and with him six good serving men, who, like

him, are of the older day and unfit for the long marches, but who can handle the cross-bow or, at need, the spear as well as in their best days. These shall be at thy command; and will be ample for these quiet times."

"Nay, my lord," she answered, quickly, "these days are none so quiet, with the Old Wolf of Carleton sharpening his fangs for us and ours."

"The Old Wolf hath his summons to the King's banner as I have mine. Our smaller quarrels must be laid aside while the war is on; and if Fortune desert me not, I shall return far higher in the favor of the King than e'er before. It is this very business, well and faithfully done, that shall put an end to Carleton's insolence. The Wolf shall snap his jaws in vain. The fat goose of Mountjoy for which he hungers shall show itself an eagle with beak and talons."

"I hope it may be as thou sayest, my lord. Still, leave with us Old Alan, the armorer. He too is past the days of hard campaigns; and thou wilt have the young smith, Dickon, for thy work in the camp. Alan shall make for us such a store of cross-bow bolts as will make Old Marvin and his men seem a score in case of need."

"As thou wilt, Kate. I had need of Old Alan's head far more than his hands; but 'tis true enough he's not the man who followed my father to the wars."

Then he turned to me and smiled as on that greeting day of his return from the Holy Wars.

"But, Kate," he cried, "here is the Champion of Mountjoy now. We had forgot the chief of our defenders. Mayhap Sir Dickon here, if any seek to do thee harm, will find better marks for his bolts than rooks and hares."

I knew that he made a jest of me; for he, too, hardly knows that I lack but half a foot of being as tall as himself and that when I am not put about by hurry or the like, my voice is as low a bass. But I answered in goodly earnest:

"That I will, Father. An if any varlet throw but an unmannerly word at my lady mother, I'll stop his mouth with a good steel bolt. Let but any one—Gray Wolf or other—threaten Mountjoy while thou'rt away, and come within bow-shot of our walls, and he shall rue it well."

"Ha! The young eagle tries his wings," laughed my father. "Spoken like a true Mountjoy, Dickon. Thou'lt do. Give thee but a few more years and thou'lt serve the King like all thy line."

"And like a true Montmorency, my lord," put in my mother. "Forget not that."

"'Pon my soul, 'tis true," he laughed, "Dickon hath as good blood on the distaff side as any his father can boast.—But to the matter of the castle's defense in need. Will-o'-the-Wallfield shall stay behind also to see that stores of grain and beef are ample. He's ever a good hand with the farmers and as sound as an oak staff." And with a kiss for my mother and a pinch o' the ear for me, he hurried

out again to the armorers.

His spirits in good sooth were high that morning, as well might they be. It was full two years since his return from the Holy Land. I had seen him in London, riding in his shining mail with those who had helped redeem the Blessed Sepulcher, and he the bravest, finest figure of them all. Since that time he had stayed here at the castle with naught to do save to judge the suits of the countryfolk and now and again chase down and hang some forest-lurking robber. His comrades in arms and those that knew his temper and his deeds were at the Court, a hundred miles away; and many a dull day must have seemed a week in passing. Here in the West we have no tourneys and of travelers from the farther world not many. Only lately some little stir of life did we have. The Gray Wolf of Carleton from his castle at Teramore, three leagues away, had sent to us an insolent demand for tribute, claiming forsooth that the Lords of Mountjoy were but a younger line of the House of Carleton and that we held our fiefs on sufferance and at the will of them, our superiors.

Always shall I remember the language of my father's answer. The clerkly knave who brought Lord Carleton's message shrunk and shriveled before it like a leaf too near the fire. Just so will I meet all such threats and insolence when I have but a few more years.

"Suzerain of Mountjoy, forsooth! Let the Gray Wolf look well to Teramore, lest we of Mountjoy smoke him from his lair. Mountjoy banners will dip before those of Carleton when England pays tribute to the Saracen, and Beelzebub, thy master's friend, sits on the throne."

The knave slunk back to Teramore; and for some weeks the Gray Wolf's pack had yapped and yowled. Two of Lord Carleton's bailiffs had their heads well broken by Mountjoy tenants of whom they demanded rental; and an armed party was sent out to avenge them. These men-at-arms were even more roughly used by some of our Mountjoy cross-bowmen who spied the Carleton banner from afar as it entered the village.

Real fighting would surely have come of it, and we of Mountjoy outnumbered three to one, had not the King sent messengers to Teramore and Mountjoy also, commanding all of us to cease from any violence in the quarrel till his men could report to him the rights and wrongs of it.

Now came the King's call to his vassals, great and small, to serve in the Scottish war; and my father was gay with the thought of service under his sovereign's banner,—service that might place the name and fame of Mountjoy high in his master's favor, and show what manner of man and subject it was whom the Gray Wolf would rob of his lands.

A week from that morning my mother had in hand a letter brought by a courier from the King's army and bearing my father's greetings. They were well

on their way to the north, and believed the Scots would soon have reason to repent them of their folly. Father had been given a post in the advance guard, and was in high feather over rejoining some of his comrades of earlier years.

On the same day, and from another source, we had news that the Gray Wolf was delayed at Teramore by an illness,—the same that had plagued him at times since his campaigns in the Holy Land, but that he had sent word to the King that he would overtake the banners ere they reached the Scottish border.

At seven of the next morning, I stood with Old Marvin by the drawbridge wheel. He had seen to its lowering, and a wain-load of wheat from the grange at the Wallfield was coming slowly into the courtyard. Suddenly I espied a body of horsemen approaching at a trot half a mile away, at a bend on the wooded road from Mannerley. With pointing finger, I guided the eyes of Marvin; and for half a minute we both stood watching the riders without a word. They were soon lost behind the trees, but our old archer, with his hand on the wheel, now shifted his looks to the road where it came out of the forest, a scant bowshot below us.

Now we could hear the hoofbeats and once and again the ring of steel. This could be no friendly call from our neighboring knights and squires so early in the day. Besides, the loyal men of the whole region were with the King's banner. Had the horsemen come by the Teramore road, our thoughts would have flown at once to the Old Wolf and his designs, and the drawbridge had gone up in a twinkling; but these came from Mannerley; and I knew well that the good lady of Mannerley had days since sent her small quota of knights and men-at-arms to Lincoln. We had not long to wonder, for now the column came from the wood at a swinging trot, and with a tall, gray-bearded knight at its head came forward swiftly toward the open gate.

Marvin stayed his hand no longer. I seized the crank with him; and we swiftly turned it. We drew the bridge to a slant, half way to the upright and barely in time to halt those riders on the yonder side of the moat.

"I know thee, my Lord Carleton," shouted Marvin, "what would'st thou at Mountjoy? Dost think we keep no watch and ward?"

The Old Wolf (for verily he was the leader of the horsemen) shouted back to us in tones that made my ear drums ache:

"Lower the bridge, varlet. Know'st thou not I am liege lord of Mountjoy, and will hang thee higher than Haman if thou stay'st me by so much as an instant. Lower the bridge, if thou would'st save thy carcass from the crows!"

Before Marvin could say aught in reply he was thrust aside, and my mother, the Lady of Mountjoy, stood by the sally port. In a moment I stood close behind her with cross-bow drawn and bolt in groove.

"My Lord Carleton," she said, and her voice was wonderfully sweet after the rasping tones that had been filling our ears, "what dost thou here with three score

mounted men when the King hath summoned all loyal vassals to his banner?"

So evil a face as he made at this greeting I hope never to see again.

"Ah! 'tis thou, then, Kate of Montmorency. I have somewhat pressing business of my own to forward ere I send final answer to the King. Now deliver to me the keys of this my castle of Mountjoy. Or mayhap thou wilt send yonder leather-coated varlet to act as thy champion 'gainst one of my kitchen knaves. Now lower thy bridge, and all shall be well. I will send thee and the boy there with a convoy of trusty knights to the Convent of St. Anne. If thou hast the folly to attempt to stay me, I will take the place by storm; thy varlets shall hang, every one; and thine own fate thou canst guess. Come now! which, shall it be? I am not accustomed to stay long for answers."

"Traitor and Hound of Bedlam!" cried my mother in such a voice as I knew not she possessed, "thine own head with the gray locks thou dishonorest shall hang from my battlements ere thou gainest aught by this attack on what thou thinkest to be a defenseless woman. While my lord fights for his country under the banner of the King, thou sendest back lying messengers, and arm thy crew for robbing him of his lands. Now back, with all thy bloody-handed band, or my cross-bowmen shall see if they cannot find with their bolts the joints of your harness. I give no more time to parley. Back with you!"

Already my cross-bow was leveled at the gray beard of the leader on the other side of the moat. I would make good my boast made to my father but a week since. I was trembling and my hair stood up like that of a dog that meets his bitter enemy. Muttering a little prayer for the bolt, and closing my eyes with a sudden, foolish dread, I pulled the trigger. But my mother, just then seeing my design, struck up the weapon with one swift blow, so that the bolt sped harmlessly over the heads of the horsemen.

"Hold thy arrows, boy," she commanded, "we cannot shoot men down at parley, be they never so villainous. And we shall have fighting enough ere long."

Lord Carleton made a move of defiance; but he wheeled his steed and led his men down the road by which they came. In the shadow of the woods they halted; and the Gray Wolf called about him three or four knights to whom he gave hurried orders. Very soon his troop broke into three parties. One rode to the right and another to the left, while the third, under the old lord's command, remained opposite the main gate and drawbridge. Then our watchers on the battlements saw the other parties posted at points of vantage around the castle and a young squire riding at full gallop along the road to Teramore. The siege of Castle Mountjoy had begun.

We passed some weary hours while the Carleton knights gave no sign of meaning to attack. The approaches to the drawbridge are steep and rocky, and the moat is commanded by the cross-bowmen from the slits in the towers and

from the battlements above. I well knew that Carleton was an old and skillful soldier, even though a cruel and bloodthirsty one; and it was easy to be seen that he had no mind to lose any of his armored knights in vain attempts to reach us. Now and again a cross-bow bolt sped from our battlements toward the besiegers; and some of these rang on their helmets or breastplates; but the hounds had good Toledo armor, and no bolt found its way to joint or visor. I found none to stay me now; and stood by a firing slit, sending arrow after arrow at our enemies.

Twice old Marvin had dinted with well-aimed bolts the hauberk on which rested the long gray beard of the leader of the pack. A younger knight, whom I took to be Ronald of Egleston, seemed to beg him to take to the shelter of the trees; but the Old Wolf just shook his head with impatience, and rode on from one to another of the sentry posts.

At noon we could see in the edge of the wood, beneath the oak branches not yet clothed with leaves, leathern wallets opened and bread and meat passed around, this being followed by horns of ale and skins of wine from the load of a pack-mule tethered near by.

Then my mother, aided by old Dame Franklin, her nurse as a child and ever her faithful servitor, and by me as the Heir of Mountjoy and the representative of my father here, carried to the sentinels on the ramparts and at the arrow slits bounteous refreshments of bread and cheese and ale, encouraging them the while by friendly, confident words and by her dauntless demeanor in readiness for the attack which we all well knew was to come.

"Marvin," she said, as we came near my old friend and worthy teacher of the arts of war, "shall we give them as good or better than they can send?"

"Aye, that we will, Lady," quoth Marvin with an obeisance, losing the while no glance of what might be happening in the edge of the wood opposite, "if the wind will but ease a thought, and the Gray Wolf take not to some shelter, I will land an arrow yet at the roots of that beard which flaunts there in the breeze like a banner for those robber hounds."

"God speed thy bolt, good Marvin. An thou dost that, 'twill be as loyal a service as e'er them did'st the House of Mountjoy. His band would not linger long to annoy us, I think. And that cottage and half dozen acres by the mill shall be thine in fee simple."

"Lady Mountjoy," he said, with another bow, "I have served my Lord of Mountjoy and his father before him for fifty years. Your bounty is ever welcome, but, with it or without, I serve while I live. But hold! there's the Gray Wolf again, looking our way with hungry eyes,—"

He took long and careful aim, while I who had often seen him bring down a running hare at a greater distance, watched him with halted breath. But Fortune smiled not on him. A gust of wind came just as he drew trigger, and turned his

bolt enough in the hundred and fifty yards of its flight to make it pass harmlessly to one side of our enemy. Old Marvin made a bitter groan at this bad hap, and stood looking at the knight with grinding teeth.

"Better luck and a quieter air next time, good Marvin," quoth mother, "thou'lt wing him yet, be sure." And she passed to another embrasure to greet old Alan, the armorer, who was busy with carrying fresh supplies of bolts to the archers.

At two o' the clock a cry came down from our lookouts that reënforcements were coming for our enemies. My mother and I hurried to the battlements and from there descried a motley array of a hundred or more men-at-arms, archers and peasants with axes and spades, tramping along the road from Teramore.

For a moment we were frightened at what we saw. Here was proof indeed that the Old Wolf meant no hurried foray but an attack in such force as might be expected to gain the castle and the lands of Mountjoy.

Most of its proper defenders were far away, marching with other loyal men under the banner of the King; and now it was clear that Carleton had let no man go forward from all his lands, reserving all for this treacherous blow. Armored knights could not swim the moat or climb up its steep sides; but the Carleton force was now twenty times greater than ours, and the Gray Wolf was well skilled in all the arts of attack.

We had not long to wait in suspense. The men-at-arms and the peasants turned into the wood before coming within range of our archers. Soon after we heard the sound of many axes. Before a half hour had passed there came from the forest a body which seemed like a part of the wood itself. A hundred men ran out, clad in leathern jackets or the peasants' homespun, and carrying no weapons save axes or poniards stuck in their belts, each bearing before him a great, withe-bound armful of branches. Following these came a score with planks and beams from a little lodge in the wood which they had torn down; then eight huge fellows, running with a tree, trimmed of its branches and carried butt foremost as a battering ram. This was the thing that made me quake for the safety of the castle, for it was clear to all of us that if those robber beasts could fill the moat with their fascines and lumber, they could swarm across, force down the drawbridge and with that accursed log break down the inner gate. Once inside the courtyard, they would hold all in the castle at their mercy.

Surrounding the churls who acted as ram-bearers, and running as best they might in their heavy armor, was a group of knights and squires, led by the savage old graybeard of Carleton. Last of all came a dozen cross-bowmen with bows drawn and bolts in groove.

A half dozen of our bolts hummed through the air at their on-coming line. I was at one of the arrow slits, glad indeed of a fair chance at the Carleton curs, and

using as best I might the good steel bow which my father had brought back from the Crusade. Some of our first volley of bolts found their marks, but most flew over their heads or buried themselves in the bundles of branches which served them well as shields. With might and main we loaded and fired again, this time with more effect. One of my bolts felled the leader of the ram-bearers and threw his fellows into confusion. But now the line was at the moat, the fascines were hurled into it, the planks and beams followed helter skelter, and a few of the boldest of their men-at-arms dashed out on the footing thus made.

Now indeed our bolts began doing their work. The fascines gone, the leathern jackets were but the sorriest protection, and at twenty to forty paces hardly a bolt failed to bring down its man. We were firing as fast as we could lay the bolts in groove. All their burdens were in the ditch, but it was not filled enough to allow a crossing. Some of those who had ventured on the planks and branches became foot-caught, slipped through to the water below and perished miserably like thieving rats caught and drowned in a trap of meal strewn on the water of a tub.

The Carleton cross-bowmen could do little against our stone walls pierced with narrow firing slits. Some of their arrows came through, but none of us were injured. Two huge stones, hurled by Alan, the armorer, from the battlements above, came down on the heads of the luckless churls in the moat and helped to scatter the scanty footing. Thrice more had old Marvin dinted with his bolts the armor of the Gray Wolf, who was running up and down behind his men, shouting threats and orders; but still the arrows failed in drawing blood. Two other knights were not so fortunate, for bolts struck them full in the faces, and they were borne from the field by their comrades.

In time, mid curses and threats, old Carleton shouted an order for retreat. It was none too soon, for already half the homespun varlets and men-at-arms, seeing no hope of reaching us, and expecting any moment the fate which was falling on their comrades, were on their way to the shelter of the woods. The Carleton crew recrossed the open ground more quickly than it had come. Twenty or more of their number remained behind, in the ditch or on its bank, and the battering ram lay where its bearers had dropped it when their comrades broke and ran.

Hardly had the last of them disappeared under the oaks when Marvin and Alan appeared in the moat, armed with long-handled pikes. Quickly hauling together some of the planks and beams to make a raft, they began pulling and pushing apart the rest of the matter which had been meant to form a crossing. There had not been enough of the brush and lumber for the Carleton purpose but could they place as much more in the same spot, it might make them a footway. We who guarded them from above and stood ready to give warning of any

TWO HUGE STONES, HURLED BY ALAN THE ARMORER, CAME DOWN ON THE HEADS OF THE LUCKLESS CHURLS IN THE MOAT

new attack were able to tell them over and again that none of our enemies were showing their heads. So holpen, the old soldiers made a thorough piece of work, and in half an hour had hauled out all the planks and beams and so scattered the brush bundles that they would be of little use to the attackers should they find stomachs for another assault.

That night was a weary one for all of us. The camp fires of the Carleton robbers made a kind of circle about our place and gave us warning of how close they made the siege. My mother gave orders that half her men should lie down to sleep, though with their arms beside them, while she and Marvin often made the rounds to be sure of the watchfulness of the others. She would have had me go to my bed like a very child; but I begged it as a boon to share the watch, to which prayer she most unwillingly gave ear. That night I could not have slept in the downiest of couches, e'en with the softest music of well-played lutes. There was men's work afoot; and ours were all too few. At midnight the sleepers were awakened and the watch changed; but always we three remained on guard.

The night was quiet, even so; and so was the whole of the day that followed. Beyond bowshot on the open ground, we could see the groups of our enemies

and watch the sentries pacing their beats. Nearer at hand on the wooded side, we could hear from time to time the calls of men and the strokes of axes.

In the afternoon my mother found a few hours for sleep, leaving Marvin, who seemed to have no need for rest, in charge. Our old soldier and worthy lieutenant had told her that the siege might last for weeks, and that it would be folly for her to wear out her strength in its very beginning. To this good advice I made bold to add my urging. Dame Franklin had followed her mistress everywhere, bringing her food and drink when of herself she would have forgotten, and trying always to place herself between Lady Mountjoy and her enemies.

The first night had been starlit, but that which now came on was cloudy and so dark that one could scarce discern an enemy at a dozen paces, and not then unless his figure were seen against the sky. None of our men were allowed to sleep, for it was felt that the Carletons might come at us again at any moment and with much better chances for success than before. No one in the castle forgot that our enemies outnumbered us by almost a score to one or had any doubts as to what would come to us if by force or by treachery, the Gray Wolf and his pack made their way into our courtyard.

Soon after midnight we heard a loud tramp and roar of footsteps in the direction of the wood. Arrows we sent hap-hazard toward the attack, but in the darkness these did little more than tell our enemies that the Mountjoy men were at their posts. In a moment the other side of the moat was thronged with half-seen figures. Cries of command rang out and the waters of the ditch splashed high with the strokes of fascines, logs and sacks of earth. Now again our archers found victims, but in the murk and mid the wild cries and running to and fro these were but few. Most of our bolts struck harmlessly into the ground or the water or rang against the stones of the moat wall.

The frontmost of the churls who bore the brush and sacks, when they had cast their loads into the ditch, turned and ran back to the edge of the wood whence they presently returned with fresh supplies. Had it not been for the good labors of old Marvin and Alan in moving the matter cast down in the first attack a way would soon have been laid to the foot of the drawbridge. As it was, our ditch was fast filling. There seemed to be thousands of the burden bearers, running like Imps of Darkness with planks and great bundles; and in the pitchy dark of that black night the fire of our garrison had no effect.

I was firing as fast as might be from one of the arrow-slits; but, like the others, could not tell whether any of my bolts were finding victims. Each moment the numbers of our enemies increased. The pile of planks and brush now reached nearly to the inner wall of the moat. My mother ran back and forth behind the archers, carrying new supplies of missiles, and shouting heartening words. Old Marvin was hurling bolts as fast as he could load, and roundly cursing the hounds

of Carleton and the blackness of the night that sheltered them. A moment more and I could hear axes ringing against iron. The bloody crew were hacking at the fastenings of the chains of the drawbridge.

Suddenly a thought crossed my mind like a shooting star; and I sprang away from my firing port.

"Mother," I cried, "we must have light to shoot by or we're undone. Quick! the torches!"

Throwing down my cross-bow, I ran into the great hall and caught up a torch from the mantel. Thrusting it deeply into the fireplace embers, I quickly kindled it; then sped up the stairs toward the battlements.

Not for nothing is my lady mother a Montmorency of the old fighting line. In a trice she had understood my plan and was following me with a lighted torch. Close behind her came old Dame Franklin, bearing another. The three of us ran with all our might up the crooked stair and the ladders, and came out on the battlements, under the black sky.

As if the castle were all aflame, the moat and the farther bank were lighted by the glare. In an instant the cross-bowmen found their targets among the fascine bearers and the men-at-arms who were already swarming across. At once we heard their cries of rage and pain, and could see corpses rolling down the bank into the muddy waters. Alan heaved great stones from his supply on the battlements on to the heads of the men-at-arms in the ditch who but now had been raising a shout of victory. Old Marvin took most careful aim at a gray beard which caught the flare of light, and sent forth a mighty yell of joy as the knight spun around on his heel and fell to the ground.

Oh, the crowding and shouting and trampling under foot in the ranks of our enemies! The threats and the fear and the curses! Our arrows kept pouring from the firing slits. A younger knight caught his chief by the shoulders while another seized his legs, and they bore him quickly away. There was no need for any order to retreat. The whole body was in headlong flight in the winking of an eye, pursued by the whizzing bolts and the jeering yells of our fellows in the towers. On the battlements above stood my lady mother, old Dame Franklin and I, holding aloft our flaming torches.

Suddenly the old nurse screamed that I was hurt. And indeed, I now felt a most sharp pain through my shoulder where, it seems, had struck a bolt discharged by some Carleton archer. My doublet was covered with blood; and I felt a most unmanly giddiness. It was over in a flash; but my mother, pale as a ghost under the torchlight, had seized me by one arm while Dame Franklin grasped the other, fearing forsooth lest I fall from the battlements to the moat below. Between them, I made my way down to the hall where they led me to a couch, they all the while mumbling and weeping and forgetting our glorious victory which

had all my thoughts.

Soon old Marvin had drawn the arrow and dressed the hurt with the simples he had at hand. 'Twas my first wound, and, truth to tell, as Marvin plucked the bolt away my stomach was none too well at ease, and the room and all its folk swung slowly round and round. Yet when I heard him declare to my lady mother that the young master was now a man in his own right and a worthy son of the Mountjoys, I closed my eyes to the dizzying hall with its dancing armor suits and its nodding pictures of my long dead forbears, and soon slumbered, well content.

For two hours and more I slept as one drugged. When my eyes opened, the hall had ceased its swinging, and my mother sat by my couch and did hold my hand in both of hers as she was wont to do long, long ago when I was but a child. Dame Franklin, in a chair near by did slumber deeply and with most comical groans and snores. Just then returned old Marvin, fresh from new labors in the moat. He and Alan had again cleared away all the contrivings of our enemies; and he was in high feather at our victory.

"Lady Mountjoy," he said, making due obeisance, "we have beaten the wolf-pack full soundly. The Old Wolf himself is sore stricken, if not dead; and the others will gladly crawl to their holes. Sir Dickon will have a merry tale and true to tell my lord when he comes from the Scottish war."

"Say'st thou so, good Marvin?" quoth my mother in reply. "Dost think we have smitten them so they will give over all their evil design?"

"My word upon it, Lady. We have beaten off all their strokes, killed a score and more of their men, and gi'en to the Old Wolf himself some measure of his just deserts. The morning will show their camp fires cold and the woods and fields of Mountjoy deserted by the whole wolf-pack. Ere three days have passed thou shalt walk abroad with thy women and without fear of any Carleton, lord or churl."

These goodly words were to me better than physic; and the smile which my lady mother gave to me was a fair guerdon for any service. Soon I slept again and dreamed of riding my white mare on the banks of Tarleton Water on a day most fair to see. But I wakened to a gray and frosty dawn and to things far other than my dreams. My mother had just returned from the ramparts. The besiegers were still at their posts, and their camp fires burned brightly. She had made out messengers speeding along the road to Teramore, but of a breaking of the siege could see no signs around the camps of our enemies.

When she brought this news to me, I spurned the quilted robes and the silken coverlet which she had laid over me, sat up on the couch and asked for boots and cross-bow. She was deeply frightened at this, fearing my giddiness had returned and that I knew not what I said. But Marvin, coming into the hall just then, did say that my wound was too slight a thing to keep a fighting man

in his bed; and thus aided I had my way, and soon was on the ramparts again.

CHAPTER II—THE TAPPING ON THE DUNGEON WALL

As before, the siege went on, the sole variance being the absence of the gray-bearded horseman from the groups of knights and squires who made the circuit of the sentry-posts. Days and weeks went by, and they made no further assaults, but so closely were the siege lines drawn that, without wings no creature could enter or leave the castle. It was evident that the Carleton men hoped to starve us into submission. We smiled at this when we thought of the loads of grain and salted meats which had been brought into the storerooms in the first week of my father's absence, and which would be enough to feed all our little garrison for a year. A well of most sweet water in the courtyard had never been known to run dry; so we had little cause for fear of either hunger or thirst.

What with Marvin's simples, my wound was fast healing, and I longed for another fray where I could use my bow at close quarters. Scarce a day passed without one of my bolts striking the steel harness of some Carleton knight; but none found their way to armor joints; and the peasants and leather-coated men-at-arms kept well beyond a hurtful range.

One dismal morning, when a month had passed, my heart sank, as did those of all the Mountjoys, as we made out the tall figure in black armor and the long gray beard of the Lord of Carleton, again making his rounds at the head of a group of knights and squires. Plain to see, he had recovered from his wound and was as bent as ever on Mountjoy's fall. The old Gray Wolf was hungry not only for the house and lands of Mountjoy but also for the vengeance which to him would be sweeter than all the lands of England. Now might we expect new assaults, planned with their two failures in mind, and bringing to bear new plans and schemes and all their beastly hate and greed. Some of our old serving men shivered as they spoke of the devilish deeds of the Gray Wolf, and of the fate in store for them if the next assault should win its way.

That night, at something after ten, the weather being raw and dismal with a cold spring rain and the spirits of all the Mountjoy folk somewhat adroop, one

of the archers had been sent to the cellars to draw a pitcher of ale. In a moment he came up the stairs on the run, and burst into the hall with the empty pitcher held in shaking hands and with teeth chattering with fright.

"Oh, my lady!" he said, catching for his breath, "the Evil One hath us now, and all our doings are for naught."

"What say'st thou, Gavin?" called his mistress, "who tells thee tales of the Evil One?"

"'Tis—'Tis the truth," answered poor Gavin, "but now, in the cellars, he goes—*tap tap tap* in the ground at one's feet. So has he come to take many a poor mortal. We be called for, and all our sins on our heads, with no holy man at hand to say him nay with book and bell."

"Go to. Thou'rt a coward when in the dark by thy lone," said my lady, scornfully, "though thou fight'st well and truly with comrades at thy elbow. Marvin, if our watchers are to have their sup of ale on this raw night, thou must even draw it thyself."

But our brave old archer, hero of a hundred battles, turned pale and answered slowly:

"Nay, my lady, it is not well for mortal men, with mayhap many a word and deed unconfessed and unpenanced, to meddle with the Powers of Darkness. For my sins I know them of old, and I dare not face them. Show me a mortal man, and I'll stand before him with whatever weapons, but not the spirits that thump on the footstones by night or twist the neck of a sleeping man with a hand not seen."

My mother turned pale, and I could see the fringe of her sleeve barely aquiver in the candlelight. She opened her mouth to speak in reproof of Marvin; but found no words, and sat gazing toward him with wide and glistening eyes. Truth to tell, it was a fearsome thing, and for myself I had but the smallest wish to face the dungeon passages on that black night. 'Twas not so long since I would not have faced them by my lone on the most quiet and peaceful of nights with no armed enemies within a day's journey; and a great round lump came up into my throat as I thought of it. Yet, even as we sat eying one another in fear, a thought came to my mind of the duty of a Mountjoy. 'Twas but natural that our serving men should fear the evil sprites let loose by darkness and troublous times; and e'en my mother, a fair and gracious lady, and withal none too strong of body, was not made to face such things. But I was the Heir of Mountjoy; and my father had knelt before a King of France and been made Knight of a holy order for his deeds on the Plains of Jerusalem. I started up and cried:

"Tush! good Marvin. Methought thee far too bold for frightening with old wives' tales. Come! I'll go before thee bearing a candle to fright away thy imaginings."

"Spoken like a true Montmorency," said my mother with a strange little laugh, "truly, Dickon, thou'lt shame us all."

Then she rose and reached to the shelf behind her for a candlestick.

"Oh, now, my lady!" cried old Dame Franklin. "Go not to the dungeons on such a night. The men can better want their sup of ale. 'Tis an ill night for all uneasy sprites. Bide here by the fire, for soon we go to the battlements again."

But my lady already stood with her hand on the great latch of the door at the head of the stairway which led to the donjon keep. I took my cross-bow.

"If any of the Imps of Darkness challenge us," I said, "I'll see whether or no they can stand before a good steel bolt."

But even in the midst of my confident words, I had a thought anent the spectral tappings which chilled the blood in my veins. Ghostly visitants I was ready then to challenge; but I had heard my father tell how the Crusaders took one Saracen stronghold by means of a mine or tunnel, dug with weeks of toil under the walls and into the passages of the ancient keep. Why should not the Old Wolf of Carleton have planned a like attack? During the weeks when his men had seemed so quiet and had given the Mountjoys scarcely a chance for a long bowshot, might they not have been driving such a tunnel under their very feet? Suppose that tapping that Gavin thought the work of the Evil One were the sound of the tools of the servants of one scarcely less evil and with even more cause to wish us ill!

"Come then," said my mother, her face white but firm. Opening the great oak door, she led the way toward the dungeons.

Cross-bow in hand, I followed; and just behind me came Dame Franklin. As she moved toward the door, Old Marvin picked up his cross-bow, made sure of the poniard in his belt and followed also, mumbling the while, as best he might, the words of a Latin prayer.

We came to pause amid the stillness of the vault which was like unto that of the Mountjoy tomb at Kirkwald Abbey to which one day, with my hand tightly clasping my father's, I had paid a well remembered visit. The candle wavered and guttered in a faint draught, and the light gleamed on the wide eyes of the old dame and the trembling hands of the archer. I was standing full still with my eyes on my mother's face. For long we stood while I could hear no sound save the beating strokes beneath my doublet. Then, suddenly, from the floor beneath or the solid wall beside us,—

Tap, tap—tap—tap tap.

No one spoke. The candle shook in my lady's hand till it threatened to fall and leave us in utter darkness. Dame Franklin and the old soldier were frozen in their places. Then again:

Tap tap—tap—tap tap.

"Oh, Mother," I whispered, "the passage! The secret passage! Our enemies have found it."

There was another fearsome silence. Then again—Tap tap—tap—tap tap.

Then the echoes of the great vault were roused by a loud, clear call from my lady mother:

"Oh, my lord! My Lord Mountjoy, is it thou?"

There came a muffled voice in reply, and again we heard the tapping.

DAME FRANKLIN AND THE OLD SOLDIER WERE FROZEN IN THEIR PLACES

At once she leaped toward the wall with a glad cry:

"Oh, my lord, my lord, have patience but a moment. I will undo the door."

She brushed aside some old and mildewed hangings, all heavy with dust and grime, and brought to view a small iron door. Snatching from her girdle the largest key, she fitted it into the lock. Still, try as she would, she could not turn it till old Marvin came to her help. Then indeed the rusty lock gave way, the door swung slowly open, and my father, the Lord of Mountjoy, followed by half a score of knights and men-at-arms, stepped forth into the candlelight.

When Lady Mountjoy at last was free from my father's embrace, she stood with her hands on his shoulders and asked a dozen questions, demanding that he answer all at once.

"Whence comest thou, my lord? Are the Scots beaten? Had'st thou news of the treachery of the Old Wolf of Carleton? How many men hast thou? Oh! I

had forgot this secret passage and the door to which thou gavest me the key on our wedding day. My foolish men, and almost myself, believed thy signal was a ghostly tapping. But Dickon remembered the passage; and when I had thrice heard the signal I knew it for the knock that thou makest at my door,—the signal that means thee and none else in the world."

Meanwhile old Marvin had made fast the secret door, and we all were moving toward the stairway, my father's arm encased in link armor thrown around the waist of the castle's mistress.

"Welladay, my dearest Kate! Not quite so fast and I will tell thee. The Scots are beaten; and we of Mountjoy had an honorable share in it. The campaign goes on, but a loyal youth from Mountjoy village found me after the battle and told of the doings of the traitor, Carleton. Straightway I took the boy before the King. And he being pleased with some work I had done that day, did bid me take ten of my best men, make my choice of ten horses from his train, and ride post haste to the relief of my house and my lady. We reached the Tarn Rock, half a league from here, at nightfall, and reconnoitered Carleton's camp. He being in greater force than we could cope with at once, I bethought me of this old passage from the wood two furlongs off. And so I have been tap, tap tapping for an hour, hoping at last to get the news of my coming to thee. And art thou well, my Kate? And have the rascals done aught to harm thee or Dickon here?"

"Not a whit, my lord. Save for an arrow stroke our Dickon hath come by in open fight, and which is already nearly healed. They have made some mighty threats, and would have carried them through with right good will could they have reached us; but, thanks to Dickon, to old Marvin here and the others, they got much worse than they gave. Many a Carleton knave will ne'er cut another throat, be it of man or pig; and the Old Wolf himself was very near to his just reward in the shape of a good steel bolt from Marvin's bow."

On the ramparts next morning swung my father's banner of purple and gold. Watching our enemies' camp, I could plainly see that the display of this flag, which they knew should signify naught else than the presence of the head of our house, early brought most of them, and finally the Gray Wolf himself, to gaze at the flagstaff. They were telling one another, as I could well imagine, that this was but a ruse on the part of the castle's mistress, intended to deceive them into the belief that Lord Mountjoy had come through their lines in the night. What was their surprise therefore, when Lord Mountjoy appeared on the battlements in full armor and wearing the purple plume he had brought from Italy, and yet more when they saw him attended and followed as he was. Armored knights, in numbers they could not tell, came into sight and passed from view on the battlements and at the casements. We could fairly see the rumor flying through the Carleton camp that Lord Mountjoy had returned with all his men and by

stealth or by magic had passed their sentinels during the night.

The Gray Wolf stared long and viciously at our battlements, and called on those with younger eyes to make sure of what he saw. Then with oaths and curses that made his men quail before him, he gave orders to break camp and return to Teramore.

By midday the last signs of the siege were gone, the ashes of the circling camp fires were cold, and the great drawbridge was down once more. A messenger was sent to the Tarn Rock to bring in the horses and their guards. In the sunny spring afternoon, when we went forth to reconnoiter the deserted camps of our enemies, I rode at my father's side, wearing for the first time the gold-hilted sword which had been brought from Damascus.

Two months later, the King returning to London, confirmed my father in possession of his estates, and sent messengers to old Lord Carleton demanding his instant attendance at court. Again the Old Wolf was ill, too much so to obey the command of his sovereign; but this time he was not to rise from his bed as soon as the messengers had turned their backs.

The wound in his throat made by Marvin's bolt had never fully healed, and now this, coupled with his old distemper, had laid him low. Even while the heralds waited, the priest in the great upper chamber was saying the prayers for the dying. At sunset on that day, I could see from the Tarn Rock the blue and white banner of Carleton flying at half mast over the battlements of Teramore.

CHAPTER III—CEDRIC THE FORESTER

It was on a sunny noontide, in fair October, some six months after we had driven the hounds of Carleton from our castle of Mountjoy, that I was riding in the forest, three leagues and more from home, on the way to see my cousins of Leicester at their manor by the edge of Pelham Wood, and mayhap to share with them one of those goodly pasties of venison which their table never lacks.

My bonny white mare, Clothilde, did amble along the woodland path with dainty and springing steps, as though 'twere joy enough to be abroad and lightly burdened on such a day; and it seemed to me I felt my youth and growing bones

and sinews as ne'er before. As I passed the Tarleton Water which was rippling most sweetly under the sun glints, I was minded of a fair dream that had come to me on that night we halted the second assault of the Carletons, and after old Marvin had bathed and dressed the wound I had from a cross-bow bolt. Here was the sparkling water, just as I had seen it then, and the glimmering of the light on the oak leaves of red and brown and gold; and here was I astride the goodly mare that I had raised and broken from a colt, and on an errand far enough removed from the grim business of that dark and dangerous time.

By my side was the gold-hilted sword from Damascus which had been mine since the return of my father, Lord Mountjoy, from the Scottish war; and I bore no other arms nor thought of any need for them. My sixteenth birthday would not now be long in coming; and already my mark on the lintel post was within a handsbreadth of my father's own. My voice had grown more settled of late; and, in the lonely reaches of the forest, I was practicing for my own delight a sweet ballad which I had often heard him sing, and which he had from the minstrels of Provence who had journeyed with the armies to the Holy Land.

Suddenly, from the corner of my eye, I marked the movement of a bush in a little glade two hundred yards to the right of my path. The swing it made was none such as are caused by the wind; and indeed at the time all the air about was still and warm with the quietness of the summer of St. Martin's. Rather was the movement I had scarcely seen the twitch of the leafy top of a sapling when its stem is roughly seized or when some heavy thing hath fallen against it. To me it told, plainly and well, that either was a deer grazing in that thicket or that some man, mayhap with good reason for not wishing to be seen, was hiding there.

In a moment I had turned Clothilde's head from the path and was riding through the light underbrush with my eyes fixed on the ferny glade. Soon I broke through the bushes that screened it and saw a youth in the Lincoln green of a forester, stripping the hide from a fine antlered buck. There had been, in the troublous times of the past year and more, while most of the knights and gentlemen of the countryside were with the King's banner in Scotland, far too much of lawless slaying of deer by poaching villains and forest hiding thieves. Twice had I, in the thick of the woods, come on the half-flayed and mangled carcasses which had been left to waste or to feed the wolves after tenderloins and haunches had been cut away. Now my choler quickly rose within me, and I called out, full rough and loud:

"How now! Thou deer-stealing varlet! I have thee red-handed. By my faith, thou shalt smart well for this."

The poacher sprang up and faced me; and I saw that he was a youth of not more than my own time, though perhaps a thought broader of the shoulders and hips. He seemed not like a forest lurker either, for he had a good and open

English face with the wide blue eyes that low-hearted knaves but seldom have. Now, however, he answered my threatening looks with a stare as bold as that of Robin Hood, and flung back at me in snarling tones:

"I steal no deer. I am the son of Elbert the forester of Pelham. My lord of Pelham allows us four good deer in each twelve-month; and this is but the third we have taken."

"Thou liest, scurvy knave," I shouted, drawing my sword and making it whistle through the air about my head, "leave that carcass and walk before me to Pelham Manor; and we shall see what Lord Pelham says to this pretty tale of thine."

For answer the forester leaned forward and seized his cross-bow which was leaning, ready drawn and with bolt in groove, against the bole of a sapling near at hand. Leveling the piece at my throat, he growled, full surlily:

"Now, Sir Dickon of Mountjoy, turn thy horse and betake thee from here as fast as may be. I have spoken truth, as you may learn full easily if you ride to Pelham; but never will I, who go about my lawful business, consent to walk as your prisoner like a stealer of sheep. Get thee gone now, for truly my finger itches at the trigger."

His blue eyes blazed at me with a menace not to be gainsaid. Here was no crouching knave who might receive a buffet for his insolence, but one full capable of making good his word. I was looking straight down the cross-bow groove at the steel bolt which another threat from me would send flying into my face. The knave was well beyond the reach of my sword, and could kill me as easily as he had the great buck that lay at his feet. I wheeled the mare and rode away out of the thicket, throwing over my shoulder the while a string of threats of the punishment his acts should bring down on his head when I had but spoken with his master of Pelham. To all these the young forester answered never a word, but stood with leveled weapon till I had passed from sight and hearing.

In the midst of my wrath at being thus balked I could not but admit that he bore himself well and truly. And I thought of a saying of my father's that the greatness of England in battle was not the work of her armored horsemen or even of her stout men-at-arms, but of these same yeomen of the field and forest, who on many a hard-fought field had stood in leathern coats or homespun smocks like the oaks of their native woods and rained their arrows on the faces of the enemy spearmen till the lines wavered and broke and made way for the charge of the mail-clad knights.

I soon regained the pathway, and was riding slowly while I meditated the things I should say to Pelham of the insolence of his forester,—if indeed the churl were the son of Elbert as he claimed. And so were my thoughts disturbed that I saw no more the beauty of the day in the greenwood nor heard the trills and

twitterings of the birds overhead. Thus engaged, and with my eyes fixed on the track in front, it was with surprise that I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs and looked up to see approaching me, and but a hundred yards away, a tall young man, dressed in the style more affected at the court than in our rough Western land. It needed but a second glance for me to name him as Lionel, the twenty-years old son of the old Lord of Carleton, and the bitterest enemy of our house.

Early in the summer the Old Wolf of Carleton, as he was known to the countryside, had died of a wound given him two months before by our old Marvin with his good cross-bow when the Carletons were carrying forward their traitorous assault on the Castle of Mountjoy, the while my father with the best part of his men were with the King's banner in Scotland.

For five years Lionel had been absent from Teramore, and one of a group of high-born youths who, at the great London house of the Duke of Cumberland, were being trained as squires-at-arms whilst they awaited the day for receiving the order of knighthood. At the news of his father's death he hurried to Teramore to join his mother and take charge of the great estate.

Often had we heard since then of the dire threats that he breathed against the House of Mountjoy and all its people; but the King himself had declared our quarrel just and affirmed our rights to the lands of Mountjoy; and we gave little heed to the mouthings of one who had yet his spurs to win and his name to make 'mongst fighting men. But now the thought came over me of a sudden that I was but half a league from Teramore Castle, mounted on a gentle palfrey and with no weapon save the good sword at my side. If the threats of Lionel of Carleton were aught but empty air, he would scarce let slip such an opportunity.

These thoughts were but too well founded. Carleton was gazing fiercely at me as he came forward; and as his horse came opposite, pulled him up with a wrench on the bridle rein so violent that the mettlesome steed all but cast himself on his haunches.

"Ha! Well met, young Dickon of Mountjoy!" he snarled. "By my troth, my good fairy must have guided my bridle to-day to give me this chance to say my say to this young whelp of a race of dogs! Now shalt thou learn what it is to have the Carleton for an enemy."

Carleton was taller and longer-limbed than I. He wore a stout broadsword and, stuck in his belt on the other side, a poniard of most wicked design. He had the better of me in respect to four years and more of practice of arms; and I knew full well that, were their quarrels right or wrong, the Carletons were no weaklings. But already I smarted with the affront given me by the poaching varlet; and now this insult to the honorable name of Mountjoy was not to be borne. I threw his words back in his teeth.

"Thou Wolf-pup from a race of thieves unhung!" I shouted. "Get thee down

from yon tall war-horse, and draw that sword if thou darest. Thou'lt make good thy mighty words or verily thou shalt eat them here and now."

So saying I swung to the ground and drew my weapon. Carleton lost no time in doing likewise, and came at me with a fury which I had scarce expected. I met his thrust with the parry which my father had well taught me years agone; and had my enemy not sprung aside with the quickness of a cat, my sword in return had pierced his neck.

"Ha!" growled Carleton between his gritting teeth, "so the Mountjoy whelp hath already a trick or two of fence. 'Twill make the game the more worth the playing. Hast stomach for cold steel? Look now!"

He danced about me, thrusting and slashing wickedly with his heavy sword, and displayed not ill the training he had had in the halls of Cumberland. But since the day I could raise a foil, it had been my dearest plaything; and whenever my father had been at home, he had made my teaching his special care. Since his return from Scotland there had been scarce a day when we had not spent a brace of hours with the foils or with broadswords and bucklers. Some men are born for sword-play, as others, like Old Marvin, for the cross-bow; but Lionel of Carleton was not of these. A minute had not passed, as we circled and danced about one another, with our weapons striking fire in the shadow of the wood, before I knew that Carleton, with all his added years and training, was no more than a match for me, if indeed as much. He panted and cursed as each trick of thrust was met by its proper parry, and slipped most dangerously on the oak leaves underfoot as I stepped aside from his bull-like rushes. Presently my sword nicked him fairly on the arm, drawing a spurt of blood and a stream of oaths. He lunged wildly forward. I parried his thrust and drove my sword straight at his breast bone.

THE FORCE OF MY BLOW DROVE HIM BACKWARD, BUT MY WEAPON PIERCED HIM NOT

The force of my blow drove him backward, but my weapon pierced him not. Then at once I realized that which made my blood turn cold. He was wearing beneath his doublet a shirt of linked mail; and I, without defense of any sort, was fighting an armored enemy.

"Ho!" I cried, "so thou gard'st thy coward heart with mail, lest peradventure one might fight with thee on even terms."

The wicked look he gave me in reply reminded me, even in that moment of peril, of that on the face of the Gray Wolf of Carleton when he answered my mother's challenge as to his errand at the gates of Mountjoy. But he spent no breath in reply, and fought on with fury, bent on pressing his unknightly vantage to the utmost. Twice I narrowly escaped his blade; then once mine grazed his neck, for that was now my mark; and again blood spurted from the gash.

At this he lost all caution and rushed upon me as a bear upon his foe, getting within my guard by some ill chance, and seizing me about the neck and arms. Both our swords were dropped in the struggle; and we wrestled and fought, not like knights and gentlemen, but like drunken lackeys who have fallen out over their games of dice. Now, indeed, did Carleton's weight and strength befriend him. I strove for my life to topple him beneath me, but all to no purpose. In an instant I was whirled through the air, and came down with a crash on my back, with Carleton's knee firmly planted on my breast bone.

At once he drew his poniard and pressed the point against my throat.

"Now yield thee, Whelp of Mountjoy," he panted, "quick, ere thou diest."

"Thou hast won," I answered, "but, fighting thus, 'twere more to thy honor to have been overcome."

"None of thy insolence," he snarled, "yield thee now as my prisoner and vassal, and say that thou'lt ever yield obedience to the Carleton as thy liege lord."

At this my gorge rose and the world turned black about me. "Never," I groaned, "better far to die than suffer such disgrace."

"Die then," he shouted, hideously, and drew back his poniard for the thrust.

I closed my eyes, yet blood-red figures swam across my vision. In an instant the steel would pierce my throat. Then of a sudden the grip of my enemy relaxed, and his body rolled heavily from me.

I started up, and saw the Carleton lying face up on the oak leaves, his forehead pierced by a cross-bolt. Running toward me through the undergrowth was a figure in Lincoln green which my staring eyes soon told me was the young forester who had defied me in the glen but half an hour gone. His cross-bow was in his hand, and he panted for breath as he approached and called:

"Art thou hurt, Master? Has he stabbed thee?"

"Not a whit," I answered dazedly, examining my limbs and body the while, "I have to thank thee then for my life. Thou camest in the nick of time."

"The Saints be thanked," he answered joyfully. "The Carleton there has what he well deserves. I heard the sword-play from the glen yonder, and soon knew the voice of that black caitiff. I was coming softly through the woods, wishing but to see close at hand a gallant passage at arms, when he overthrew thee and would have foully murdered thee, his prisoner. 'Twas well my bolt already lay in groove."

"Son of Elbert," I answered, offering him my right hand, "thou'rt a ready man and a true, and willing I am to call thee friend. But what other name hast thou?"

He took my hand in a mighty grip and smiled most winsomely. "Cedric," he replied, "a goodly Saxon name, borne by my grandfather before me."

"Well then, Cedric, we must bethink us what shall be done in this juncture. Yonder horse of the Carleton's is ours by lawful spoil. Mount therefore, and let us betake ourselves from here as soon as may be." I took up my sword and my cap from the oak leaves.

He turned toward the horse, and in so doing his glance carried far down the pathway which there for a quarter mile was straight beneath the oak-trees. Then he turned back to me with a cry of alarm.

"Mount and quickly. There be a half dozen of the Carleton men-at-arms. An they catch us here by the body of their master, they will have our blood. Come! For our lives!"

With one bound he vaulted to the saddle of the war horse. Scarcely knowing what I did, I found myself on the mare's back and spurring away up the forest path. Cedric had no spurs, but he quickly urged his mount to a gallop by blows of his heels; and we raced away at full speed. The Carletonians raised a shout as they caught sight of us, and spurred their horses in pursuit. Over our shoulders we saw them pause for a moment by the body of Lionel; then resume the chase with a fury that boded ill for us. I knew full well the fate in store should they overtake us; and pressed the little mare for all the speed she had. Cedric, on the tall war horse, quickly drew ahead, then, seeing me losing ground, drew rein till I overtook him. Our pursuers were well mounted, and were spurring and lashing their horses without mercy. The thunder of hoofs along the forest road was like that at a tourney or a great race-course.

If I had had but a better mount, we could soon have drawn away from them, for the tall steed which Cedric bestrode was the best of the Carleton stables, and our horses were more lightly burdened than those of our pursuers. As it was, we had gone scarce half a mile when 'twas plainly to be seen that my little mare was no match for the long-limbed steeds of the Carletons. Yard by yard we lost ground; and now we could hear the clashing of stirrups and scabbards as our enemies panted close upon our trail.

WE HAD GONE SCARCE HALF A MILE WHEN 'TWAS PLAINLY TO BE SEEN THAT MY LITTLE MARE WAS NO MATCH FOR THE LONG-LIMBED STEEDS OF THE CARLETONS

We were going up a slope where the path ran between groups of boulders and great rocks. Suddenly Cedric drew rein and turned aside behind a sheltering ledge. Clothilde was panting hard, and I gladly followed him, though knowing naught of what he intended.

Throwing himself from the saddle, the forester quickly braced his cross-bow and placed a bolt in groove. Resting the weapon on the corner of the rock, he took quick aim, and let drive at the leading horseman. Instantly the rider fell headlong to the ground, and his companions drew rein in confusion. With a wondrous deftness, my companion loaded again and let fly. This time one of the horses, struck in the breast by the bolt, reared up and threw his rider.

Like a flash Cedric leaped again on his horse's back, and signaling me to follow rode straight away into the forest. The branches were so low and the undergrowth so thick that it would seem that no rider could make his way; but we were riding for our lives, and knew that the limbs would hold back our enemies even more than ourselves. For five minutes we tore wildly through the woods,

half the time with our faces hidden in our horses' manes to save our eyes from being plucked out by the branches. We could hear shouts and curses behind us; but these momently grew fainter, and then could be heard no more.

Soon we came to the bank of a shallow brook. Into this, without stop or parley, plunged Cedric, but instead of riding straight across as I had thought, he turned his horse's head up-stream and urged him at a trot along its bed. For a quarter of a mile we rode thus, then coming to a ford and a half-blind pathway, turned aside in the direction away from Teramore, and again laying our heads on the necks of our mounts, sped through the woods at a ringing gallop. When we had covered a mile in this way, the path merged into a wider one; and I recognized a little vale to which my father and I had once come a-hunting, and which was scarce five miles from Mountjoy.

Here for a moment we paused, and Cedric threw himself down and placed his ear to the ground. Then he rose with a glad smile and shook his head.

"Dost hear nothing of hoof-beats?" I questioned.

"Not a stroke," he answered. "I had bethought me of a cave hard by here where we might be hidden if the hounds were close upon us. There, with the cross-bow, we could have stood off a hundred if need be, but we must have turned the horses loose, with the chance of their being taken."

"Nay," said I, "we've shaken them off full well. In half an hour or less we can be crossing the drawbridge at Mountjoy. That noble steed thou ridest is too fine a prize to be left to the Carleton wolves."

Just then something whirred viciously through the air between us, and a steel cross-bow bolt half buried itself in a tree-trunk close at hand.

Wheeling about toward the place whence came the arrow, I saw the steel cap and the ugly face of a Carleton man-at-arms over the top of a rock a hundred yards away which concealed and sheltered the rest of him. Cedric, with a twist of the bridle rein and some vicious blows with his heels, urged his horse behind the tree which had received the bolt; and I mayhap would have shown more wisdom had I done likewise. But I saw but the single enemy before me; and for the instant his arrow groove was empty. Cedric had already taken toll of two of our enemies, while I, the heir of our house whose quarrel he had espoused, had done naught but fly before their pursuit. With a yell, "A Mountjoy, A Mountjoy," which is the battle cry of our people, I set spurs to my horse, and, sword in hand, charged straight toward the rock.

The Carleton man was striving sore to draw his bow and place another bolt; and had he been but half so deft with that goodly weapon as Cedric had twice shown himself that day, he might have stopped me in full career with an arrow in the breast or face. But he fumbled sadly with the string, and ere he could reach another bolt from his pouch I was almost upon him. In this strait he

dropped the bow and, standing erect, whisked a broadsword from his belt. The scoundrel was tall and long of arm; and now I saw that he wore a quilted and steel-braced jacket which none but the heaviest blow might pierce. I had already repented me of my folly in rushing, for the second time that day, into combat so unequal, and was bethinking me what trick of fence might serve my turn with this brawny and ill-visaged swordsman, when once again the skilled and ready hand of my friend of the Lincoln green saved me from dire peril. Even as our blades clashed, and I felt in his sword-play the firm, sure wrist of my enemy, a bolt whizzed past me and pierced his neck, just where the quilted jacket lay open at the throat. Without a cry, he fell forward on his face.

I looked wildly about, in effort to espy more of the men-at-arms, if so be they were awaiting us in ambush. But I could see no one; and no more arrows came from hidden foes. The woods were as quiet and serene, and the westering sun sent its beams as sweetly into the bonny glade as though men had never killed one another for gain or vengeance. Cedric, on the Carleton war-horse, came forward at a canter, with his bow made ready for another shot if need were.

"Are there more of the hounds?" he called, "if so be, we must take shelter."

"I see none," I answered, "though yonder, midst the little birches, is the horse which this one rode. Mayhap his comrades have ridden by other roads to cut us off."

"'Tis truth," said Cedric, "yon Jackboots, that lieth now so still, did come about by Wareham Road at breakneck pace while we made but slow riding through the tangle. 'Twas well he had not the skill of a yeoman with the cross-bow, else one or both of us would ne'er again have seen Mountjoy. But come! Can thy little mare hold full stride through the glen and over yonder hill? An if she can, we may soon be where no Carletons will dare pursue."

For answer I set spurs to the mare's sides and led the way down the path to the brook at the bottom of the valley. In a cloud of spray we forded the stream, then drove on without mercy up the long slope of Rowan Hill. Soon we were in sight of the towers of Mountjoy, and while the sun had yet an hour's height, went safely o'er the drawbridge.

CHAPTER IV—THE CHAMPION OF MOUNTJOY

As Cedric of Pelham Wood rode with me into the courtyard, we met my father, the Lord of Mountjoy, coming from the stables. His favorite steed, a fine black stallion, Cæsar by name, did suffer from a sprain he had come by at the tournament at Winchester; and my father was much in fear would never again be fit to bear him in the lists or to the wars. We came forward but slowly; and Lord Mountjoy had ample time to note the mud-stained and foam-flecked sides of our mounts, the rents in my garments and the bloody scratches which the forest boughs had made on our faces. Truly, I fear I made but a sorry picture; and 'tis little wonder that a frown was on my father's brow and a roughness in his voice as he called to me:

"How now, Sir Dickon! Hast thou ridden thy little mare through the Devil's Brake and foundered her once for all? And who is this fellow in rags and shreds of Lincoln green that rides at thy side like a comrade? Methinks 'twere better if he kept his place, an ell or two behind."

Cedric's face grew red with wrath at these words; but I hastened to answer before he could make utterance.

"Hold, Father. This is Cedric, a forester of Pelham Wood, and our good and true friend. Twice or thrice this day hath he with his good cross-bow (of which he hath a skill like that of Old Marvin himself) saved me from death at the hands of the Carletons."

"By my faith! Say'st thou so, my boy?" exclaimed Father, with a wondrous change of countenance. Then, turning to Cedric,

"Any who fights the Carleton wolves is a friend to all true Mountjoys. Come my lad, thy hand! And thy pardon if I did speak a thought rough, not knowing thy deserts. Wert thou sore beset? And did thy bolts make good men and quiet of some of those restless knaves?"

"Some of them, my lord, will ne'er again rob an honest farmer of his stores or burn a woodman's cottage," said Cedric with a smile.

"By'r Lady! Thou'rt a man, and shall be a Mountjoy, if guerdon can keep thee," cried my father. "But hold! Give thy mounts to the grooms, and come to the hall. 'Tis ill talking with an empty stomach and a dry throttle. And I'll warrant you're famished, both. There's a hot pasty and somewhat else to be found, I'll be bound. You shall tell me of this day's work by the board and the fire."

In the hall we were greeted by my lady mother, who had heard somewhat of that which passed in the courtyard. Cedric doffed his cap when I presented him to her ladyship, and bowed with a grace I looked not for. And she did ask most eagerly if aught of harm had come to either of us. Being assured that we were yet whole of skin save for the woodland boughs, she brought with her own hands a bench before the fire, and bade Cedric sit as she might have bidden any knight or courtier who visited the hall of Mountjoy. Then she hurried out and

bade the maids bring meat and drink of the best for our refreshment.

My father and mother sat down by either side of us as we ate; and when our hunger had been something dulled, and the maid had been despatched for a jar of the Mountjoy honey which my mother so closely guards against the coming of noble guests, I began the tale of the fortunes of the day.

"Thou knowest, Father, that young Lionel of Carleton hath often sworn to have the lives of you and me for the check the Carletons had in their foray on Mountjoy in the spring and for the bolt which came from Marvin's bow which laid low his father, the Old Wolf of Carleton."

"Full well I know it," growled my father, "an if he were aught but a beardless youth, I would long ago have challenged him to the combat. When he hath won his spurs, if he be still of the same mind, I'll meet him with whatever weapons he chooses, and trust to put an end to his mouthings."

"That thou'lt never do, Father," I cried, "for Cedric here hath come before thee. This day, but half a league from Teramore, young Lionel did meet me as I went my way alone through the forest; and did curse and revile me and all my house, saying that we of Mountjoy were a race of dogs. This being more than e'en a Mountjoy could bear, I did challenge him to mortal fight, and we did meet with swords, on foot there in the path. I quickly found that he wore, beneath his garment, a coat of linked mail which shielded him from all my thrusts. All his strokes I made shift to parry, and at last, when he found he could not reach me with his sword, he rushed within my guard, seized me with a wrestling hold and flung me on my back. Then, kneeling on my chest, he placed a poniard at my throat and sought to make me swear allegiance to the Carleton, acknowledging him as lord and suzerain. This I would never do; and truly I thought my last hour had come, for he had drawn back his dagger for the thrust, when this brave youth, coming through the woods with cross-bow drawn, did see the Carleton's murderous aim, and let fly a bolt which struck him through the forehead."

While I spoke my mother had grown pale as death and my father red, with blazing eyes and angry clinching hands. When I paused my mother cried:

"Oh, Dickon! And had'st thou no wound at all?"

"Not a nick," I answered, "though 'twas close enough, in faith. But we had more to do in no time at all, for no sooner had the Carleton breathed his last than there came a-riding towards us six stout men-at-arms of the Carleton livery. We took horse and rode for our lives, Cedric here on the Carleton's great war-horse. But my little Clothilde being no match for their long-limbed steeds, we should have been overhauled and slain had not Cedric twice turned on them with his cross-bow, each time landing a bolt that sent one of the robber hounds to earth. With that, and with hard riding through the woods where no paths were, we at last got safe away."

"Ah!" cried my father, joyfully, rising and offering his hand again to Cedric, "'twas sweetly done, i'faith. Three of the Carleton hounds in one brief day! Whose son art thou, my friend? And where did'st thou learn such deadly handling of thy weapon?"

"Elbert's son am I," answered Cedric, steadily, "he is forester to my lord of Pelham; and last year did carry away the prize for archery at the Shrewsbury tourney. Since I could carry bow, I have shot as he did teach me."

"What years hast thou?"

"Sixteen, come Candlemas."

"The very age of Dickon here," cried my mother. "Cedric, lad, does thy mother live?"

"Nay, my lady," quoth he, sadly, "two years agone we buried her."

WHILE I SPOKE MY MOTHER HAD GROWN PALE AS DEATH

"Then thou shalt come to live at Mountjoy," she went on with bonny, flushing cheeks and bright and eager eyes. "Hast thou learned thy letters? Canst thou read prayer book or ballad?"

"Nay, my lady," he said again, with a blush. "We of the forest know little of letters."

"Then I will teach thee. Thou'rt a mannered lad and well spoken for one who knows not court or town. Thou shalt be a clerk an thou wishest."

"No clerk shall he be," I cried. "Saving thy pardon, good Mother, he shall be my squire-at-arms. A man that fights as he shall be no shaven-pate. He shall teach me his craft with the bow, and of him I will make a bonny swordsman. What say'st thou, Father? Have I not the right of it?"

My father did smile somewhat to see me so hot and eager in my plans. And truly, I bethought me then that this lad whom I was choosing for my comrade-in-arms was one whom but three hours gone I had never seen, and that now I knew naught of him save that he fought well and truly and with a wondrous skill of his weapon. Yet, looking at his clear, blue eyes and his way of holding up his head as a freeman of England, I repented me not of my words.

Cedric was gazing at Lord Mountjoy, and quietly awaiting his word, while my lady mother glanced quickly from one to another of us. When my father began to speak it was slowly and soberly enough.

"Not quite so fast, Sir Dickon. There's many a thought to be taken yet anent thy knightly training. But now it comes to me that Cedric here e'en must remain at Mountjoy for some months at least, if he would guard his life and limb. After this day's work, should any of the Carleton men come upon him at a vantage, his shrift would be short and no prayers said."

So was it settled that Cedric should remain with us of Mountjoy. The next day a messenger was despatched to Elbert, the forester, with the news of his son's brave deeds and his present safety. I lost no time in beginning his training for sword-play; and he showed himself the best of learners. Within a week, moreover, he had shown to me some tricks of the cross-bow of which I had never heard, and fairly 'mazed our men with the marks he struck at a hundred paces distance. Already we planned a match 'twixt Cedric and Old Marvin which should be a fête-day for all the friends of Mountjoy.

Then came a messenger from Shrewsbury, where for the time the King made his seat, bearing a scroll addressed to my father and sealed with the sign royal. Father read it slowly to himself as he stood with his back to the fire in the hall and the King's messenger was quaffing a cup of wine in the courtyard. My mother and I waited eagerly to hear its contents. Cedric sat in a farther corner, saying over to himself the names of the great letters which my mother had made for him on a sheet of parchment.

'Twas plain to see that the message was not to my father's liking, for he scowled fearsomely as he conned the words. Suddenly he began reading it in a loud and wrathful voice; and Cedric dropped his parchment to listen.

"To Robert, Lord of Mountjoy and Knight of the Holy Sepulcher,

from Henry, King of England, Duke of Normandy and Lord of Anjou, Acquitaine, and Gascony, *Greeting*.

"Know thou that there hath appeared before our Court at Shrewsbury, Elizabeth, Lady of Carleton and Teramore, and relict of Geoffrey, Lord of Carleton, deceased, who hath, on oath, made complaint against thee, thy minor son, Richard and a certain yeoman of Pelham Forest, Cedric, son of Elbert, and now harbored by thee at Mountjoy, as follows:

"That, on Saturday, of October the twenty-second day, thy son Richard did ride in the forests of Teramore without lawful right and leave from the holders thereof; that Lionel of Carleton, son of Geoffrey and Elizabeth of Carleton aforesaid, did meet with him and order him to leave those lands and return not; that thy son Richard did then and there attack Lionel of Carleton; and while they did fight, the yeoman, Cedric, being a servitor and confederate of Richard of Mountjoy did most foully slay Lionel of Carleton by a mortal weapon, to wit, a cross-bow bolt discharged from a point of hiding; that the servitors of Carleton did pursue and endeavor to arrest Richard of Mountjoy and the yeoman, Cedric, the which they did resist with force and arms, and that the aforesaid Cedric did again from hiding strike down and kill two of the Carleton retainers, so that he and thy son, Richard, did make their way to the Castle of Mountjoy where thou hast since harbored and protected them.

"Now therefore, know that it is my will that thou repair to our Court at Shrewsbury, bringing with thee thy son Richard and the yeoman, Cedric, and with not more than ten of thy retainers or men-at-arms, that fair trial of this cause may be had before our presence, on Thursday, of November the second day, at ten of the clock.

"And be thou here solemnly charged and commanded to desist from all violence and quarrel against the family of Elizabeth of Carleton or any of her servants and retainers, and to cause all thy family, thy servants and retainers to likewise refrain.

"Given under our hand and seal, this thirty-first day of October.

"Henry (Rex)."

When the reading was finished we were silent for a space, my father pacing back and forth with roughened brow, and Mother gazing anxiously upon him. At last he turned and said:

"We must to Shrewsbury. 'Tis the King's command; and the Mountjoys

have ever been loyal vassals, as none know better than the King himself. What say'st thou, Richard? Canst thou tell in open court the tale of that day's work even as we heard it here?"

"That I can, Father," I replied, "'tis the truth, and I care not who hears it."

"And thou, Cedric," he said, turning to face the forester who had now advanced to my side, "darest thou to face thy enemies and ours thus? Remember, 'twill go hard with thee if we fail to bring the King to see the truth o't. He might order thy hanging easily as the whipping of a thief. Shall not I rather mount thee on the good horse thou didst win from the Carleton, with thy cross-bow on thy back and a bag of gold pieces beneath thy coat, and send thee to my cousin of Yorkshire, there to bide till this ill wind hath overblown?"

"My lord," answered Cedric, proudly, "that were to save myself at thy cost. The King hath commanded thee to bring me before his court; and if thou fail, he will visit his wrath upon thee. I will not fly. Rather will I ride the good steed thou speakest of to Shrewsbury in thy good company."

"Well said and bravely," said my father, with a note in his speaking which I had heard but once, and that when an old comrade-in-arms, whom he had thought dead in the Holy Land, came in illness and want to our castle door. Now he gazed for a moment full keenly at the face of Cedric, then turned and hurried to the courtyard to give orders for the morrow's journey.

The King's Court was held in the great hall at Shrewsbury, with such a brave array of lords and knights and men-at-arms, not to speak of clerks and counsellors with their mighty gowns and wigs, as was but seldom seen in our Western country. As I gazed at the King in his robes of state, seated on the dais in the midst, and noted his cold, gray eye and the hard lines about his mouth, my heart did somewhat misgive me, for all my repeating over and over to myself that none could gainsay the justice of our quarrel.

A word overheard as we entered the hall had set me thinking deeply; and though I feared not for myself, I began to wish that Cedric who now sat so uprightly by my side had thought fit to take the hint my father gave when first the summons reached us. 'Twas said that the King, in his youth, more than thirty years agone, had known Elizabeth of Winchester, before she was the bride of the Lord of Carleton, that she had then been one of the fairest and proudest maidens in the kingdom, and Prince Henry had felt for her more than a passing fancy. However this had been, and whatever its bearing on the day's fortunes, it was now too late to do aught but await the event. The herald was announcing the cause against Richard of Mountjoy and Cedric, son of Elbert.

Two of the Carleton men-at-arms were sworn as witnesses, and told the tale of the killing of Lionel much as it had been set forth in the complaint of Elizabeth, their mistress. They declared that when they first came in sight of

us, the Carleton and I were fighting with swords and hand to hand, and that I, seeming to have the worse of the fray, did shrilly call to some one hidden in the tangle behind, whereat a cross-bow bolt came from this ambush and slew their master. From that time on, their tales of the day's doings kept near the line of truth; and they did assert full stoutly their honesty in all this business when the King questioned them, making, 'twas plain to see, no little impress on his mind. Indeed, 'twas possible they believed the tale themselves, it being to them most likely from the things that they had seen.

Then was I called upon for my account; and I did set forth all the doings of that day from the time the Carleton met me in the path, forgetting not the foul insults with which Lionel began our quarrel nor the hidden coat of mail with which he thought to shield him. Cedric, with head held high and wide blue eyes gazing straight at the King, next told the tale; and his telling was closely like to mine.

When we both had done, the King sat with his eyes on the ground before him; and the hall was very still till Elizabeth of Carleton, tall, white-haired and queenly, in silken robes of black, rose in her place, and, stretching forth her hands, addressed the King:

"Henry of Anjou," she cried, "Elizabeth of Winchester, in her old age and sorrow, calls to you for vengeance for her murdered son."

More she would have spoken, but bitter tears streamed down her face, and her voice was choked with sobs.

The King gazed steadily at the weeping lady, and made as though to speak when my father started from his seat and shouted:

"There was no murder done, my Lord. The Carleton brought his death upon himself."

The King turned upon him a stern and heavy look.

"Mountjoy," he said, "wast thou there in the forest when Carleton was slain?"

"Nay, my lord."

"Then knowest thou aught save what thy son tells thee of this fray with thy enemies?"

"Nay, my lord; but 'tis enough. The Mountjoys fight their enemies and do not lie about them."

With a wave of his hand the King bade my father be seated. Then he sat motionless and thoughtful for long, while none ventured to disturb him. His brow was drawn as with pain and he rested his head on his hand, the while we of Mountjoy, our enemies of Carleton all the members of that brilliant company awaited his verdict.

At last he slowly lifted his head and began to speak:

"I find the prisoners guilty of the charge that lies against them. To Richard, son of Robert, Lord of Mountjoy, I extend my clemency in view of the loyal and valiant service rendered by his father to our house, commanding only that he desist from bearing arms till he receive our permission.

"As for yonder varlet, called Cedric, he shall hang, to-morrow at dawn; and his body shall swing from Shrewsbury gate as an example to like evil-doers."

Some of the clerks and constables strove to raise the shout—"Long live the King"; but all became utterly silent when my father sprang from his bench, and with a face of fury addressed his sovereign:

"Not so, my lord! Not so! By the Holy Sepulcher, it shall not be."

The King sprang to his feet, and his right hand went to his sword hilt.

"Mountjoy," he shouted, "thou forget'st thyself. Beware lest thou bring down on thy head a wrath more terrible than that of any Carleton."

"By Heaven, my lord!" returned the Lord of Mountjoy in tones that matched the King's, "that brave youth shall never hang for having done a deed that should bring him praise instead. I stand on my rights as a freeman of England, and demand the *trial by battle*. There lies my glove."

Tearing from his hand his leathern gauntlet, he dashed it on the floor at the feet of the King.

All the assembled knights and soldiers drew a deep breath, as one man. There was a low murmur of applause, for the Mountjoys have many friends. The King's hand left his sword, and his face relaxed.

"Thou hast the right, Mountjoy," he said. Then, turning to the Carleton benches, went on: "Is there any among you who will take up this challenge?"

At this there started forth from a group of knights who had been standing a little behind the Lady of Carleton, a man of middle age, short of stature and of wide-mouthed, ill-favored face, but broad of shoulder and with arms so long that his hands reached nearly to his knees like those of a great ape I had seen in the train of the Cardinal.

"I, Philip, Knight of Latiere in Gascony, am cousin of Elizabeth, Lady of Carleton," he shouted. "I take up this glove as her protector and champion."

Then, seizing the glove, he tossed it high in air; and while it soared aloft, drew a long and slender blade from its scabbard, and as the glove fell, pierced it with a flashing thrust so that he held it high where all might see it impaled on the point of his sword.

"So let it be," said the King. "This cause shall be tried by wager of battle, here and now. Sir Philip De Latiere, the conditions are at your will, so they be fair and equal."

"Let him take a sword like unto this," said De Latiere, carelessly, "and if he chooses one a handsbreadth longer, I care not. Then let him lay aside all

other weapons, as I do; and I trust, with the favor of Heaven, to be the means of affirming the righteousness of thy judgment."

With this speech, he made a low bow to the King and another to the assembled knights, and, loosening his sword-belt, handed it with his scabbard and his outer cloak to a squire.

Then I found voice for a thought that had been boiling within me.

"'Twere well, my lord," I said to the King, "to have this champion searched for hidden armor. I have grievous knowledge that the Carletons scruple not to gain that vantage."

Some of the friends of Mountjoy raised a shout:

"Ay! Well spoken! Let him be searched."

The King quelled the tumult with a royal gesture.

"Sir Hugh of Leicester," he said to an aged knight of his train, "make search of both these champions, and tell us whether they wear other arms or armor than the terms permit."

In the meantime my father had thrown aside his cloak and belt; and his sword being far heavier than De Latiere's, had received the loan of a lighter weapon from one of the King's attendants. Sir Hugh approached and lightly struck the shoulders and breast and waist of both the combatants, and announced to the King that neither carried other weapons of offense or defense than the swords in their hands.

Thereupon a space some twelve paces across was cleared in the center of the hall, and Sir Philip and Lord Mountjoy stood facing one another, awaiting the word.

On a signal from the King, the herald shouted, and instantly the blades struck fire, and the champions whirled about one another in mortal combat. The Frenchman danced and dodged with a quickness that minded me, even then, of the beast he so resembled. My father had much ado to continue facing him; and soon 'twas plain to see that the Carleton champion was such a master of fence as would find few to equal him in all England. His blade so flashed in thrust and parry that the eye could not follow its motions; and my father, of whom always I had thought as the finest of swordsmen, soon had all he could do, and more, in defending his breast from the assault, and had no instant's leisure to threaten his enemy.

Half a minute had not passed ere the Frenchman's slashing blade drew blood from the Mountjoy's arm, then from his shoulder; and for one black instant methought the blow was mortal. But for minute after minute, my father fought on, with lips tight closed and eyes that ever followed the hand of his enemy. Then I wondered if De Latiere, with all his leaps and runs, would not tire himself at the last, and slowing in his thrusts, give my father's slower spent strength its chance

for victory. But again I saw how fast the Mountjoy bled from the two wounds he already had; and this hope flitted.

Then truly, in bitterness of spirit, did I perceive how false and cruel is our vaunted trial by wager of battle. Here was my father, a good man and true, fighting to defend the life of an innocent youth; and this dancing Frenchman, to whom the sword was as the wand of a juggler, would soon kill him before our eyes. That Cedric, the forester, was guiltless of the treacherous deed with which he stood charged altered not a whit the devilish skill of the champion who fought to see him hang. And if De Latiere overcame my father at the last, and left him dead at the feet of the King, the tale that I had told would be no whit less true for such an outcome. Verily at that moment my eyes were opened, and thoughts came to me that shall remain while yet I live.

Now the end fast approached. Blood streamed from my father's wounds, and he breathed fast and thickly. He scarce moved from his tracks save ever to turn and face his ape-like enemy, whose blade flashed as swiftly as ever, and in whose eyes gleamed a look of deadly purpose.

My eyes could never follow the stroke which brought to a close this desperate, unequal combat. What I saw was that the Frenchman's blade had pierced my father's breast. Then—all the Saints be thanked!—one last fierce blow from the Champion of Mountjoy.

This instant was the first since the duel began when De Latiere's matchless guarding had not fenced his body from my father's thrust. As quick as the light's rebound when it strikes the surface of still water was the Mountjoy's return of the stroke he had received. The next moment both the champions lay on the floor; and King and knights and lords rushed forward to their succor.

De Latiere was thrust clean through the body; and he never moved nor spoke. But my father's wound, though grievous, it now appeared was far from mortal, his enemy's blade not having deeply pierced him. Now he raised himself on his arm and claimed the victory for Mountjoy and the right.

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Ten days thereafter, we bore home the Champion of Mountjoy in a sumptuous litter, which had been the gift of the King himself. Near the gentle palfrey which bore its van, I rode on my faithful little mare, for now we had no fear of lurking enemies. By the open side of the litter, and oft in gay and heartening speech with him who lay on the silken pillows within, rode Cedric of Pelham Wood, on the captured war-horse of Carleton and wearing, full well and bravely, a new-made suit of the Mountjoy purple and gold.

CHAPTER V—THE FESTIVAL OF THE ARCHERS

Young Cedric, the forester, who was now my constant companion, was walking with me on the path that led by the Millfield. There, since the raising of the siege of Castle Mountjoy, Old Marvin, the archer, and his gray-haired dame had had their cottage and half dozen acres of mowing and tillage. 'Twas on a fair December morning, when yet no snow had come. The hoar frost still covered all the western slopes, and the wood-smoke that came down from a clearing in the forest above did sweeten the air more to my liking than all the scents and powders that the traders bring from Araby.

We had had an hour at the foils, wherein I was master, and another with the cross-bow. And at this good sport Cedric did show such skill that once more I spoke my wonder at the magic of it. He had no more than my own sixteen years; and when 'mongst men and soldiers, he but seldom lifted his voice; but his handling of this weapon would honor any man of middle life who had spent more years with the bow in his hands than Cedric could count, all told.

"Cedric," I cried, "methinks Old Marvin himself could not best thee; and for thirty years he of all the Mountjoy archers hath borne the palm."

Cedric smiled, but shook his head.

"Mayhap Old Marvin knoweth a many things anent the placing of his bolt that have not yet come to me. My father, Elbert of Pelham Wood, who taught me what I know, hath often told me that with the long-bow one man and one only in all of England could best him,—and that one no other than Robin Hood of Sherwood Forest; but with the cross-bow, Marvin of Mountjoy could ever lesson him. And did not thou tell me that 'twas Old Marvin who laid low the Gray Wolf of Carleton, at the siege? 'Tis one thing to strike a fair bull's-eye on target, in broad daylight and quiet air, and another far to strike the throat of one's enemy in battle and by torchlight."

"Aye, and 'twas thou, Cedric, who struck down young Lionel of Carleton and two of his robber hounds of men-at-arms, in our fray in the woods but six

weeks gone. Thy bolts did not then fly by guess or by luck, I trow."

Cedric smiled again, but had no words for this; and I went quickly on:

"I tell thee that when thou'rt my squire indeed, and I a knight in truth, and not by courtesy only, I'll have thee ever ride beside me with thy bow upon thy back, though thou shalt wear garments of velvet instead of Lincoln green and a good broadsword shall swing by thy side. Then can we strike down any caitiff from afar, if need be. And many a night when we make bivouac in the forest or on the moorlands we shall sup right royally on the hares or moorfowl which thy skill will provide, and snap our fingers at the inns and all the houses of the towns."

"'Tis a fair thought," sighed Cedric. "An oak-leaf bed in a glade, by a goodly stream, is ever more to my liking than any made in a dwelling, save in the wet or bitter weather. But, for Old Marvin now—Methinks 'twould please me well to shoot against him at archer match. Were I bested by such as he, 'twould be no honor lost."

"By my faith!" I shouted, "such a match we will have. 'Twill be a fair sight indeed to see two archers such as thou and Marvin at the marks. We'll have a festival for all the friends of Mountjoy, noble and simple, and roast an ox for their regalement. Since the Shrewsbury court and the battle trial that freed thee and me from all charges of foul play in the matter of Lionel of Carleton, and now that my father is nearly well of his wounds, the Mountjoys have reason enough to rejoice. We'll have a day to be remembered."

Just then Old Marvin, who did chop for firewood a fallen yew in the field near by, caught sight of us, and, dropping his ax, came forward to greet us.

"A fine morning for the woods, Sir Dickon," he said, doffing his headgear to me and nodding to Cedric. "Could not one get the leeward of a buck on such a day?"

"Aye," I answered, full the while of my new thought, "and if either thou or Cedric here did come within a hundred paces, we should eat on the morrow of a fair pasty of venison. But what say'st thou, Marvin to an archer match with Cedric? Thou knowest he is newly in our service, but that he hath an eye for the homing of his bolt. Of all the Mountjoy men he alone is worthy to shoot against thee."

"Aye," cried Marvin, eagerly. "I have heard much of his skill. 'Tis said that for such a youth he shoots most wondrous well. For twenty years no Mountjoy hath striven with me at tourney; and a fair day at the marks would like me well. Will there be a prize, think'st thou?"

"Aye, that there will be," I returned full gaily, for now methought the day promised such sport as we had not had for years; and I was fair lifted up with the picture of it that filled my mind. "I'll make my father give to him who wins the

day the best milch cow in all the Mountjoy barns. How likest thou that, Marvin? Could'st thou use such a beast on thy little farm?"

"Marry! Well could I," answered Marvin, his eyes shining as brightly as a youth's. "My dame did tell me yesterday 'tis what we most do lack."

"And I," put in Cedric, "should any wondrous luck or chance bring the prize to me, could give her to my father. He hath a little meadow by his cottage in Pelham Wood where a cow could find sweet pasture, and, in the cot, three little ones who'd thrive on the milk. Marvin, be sure I'll take the prize from thee if ever I can."

"An thou winnest it, thou'lt shoot well, Cedric lad," answered Old Marvin with a grin. "'Tis now full many years since I found any man to best me."

But now I caught sight of my father, Lord Mountjoy, astride the palfrey he rode in those days of recovering from the hurts he had at Shrewsbury, and riding toward the clearing on the hill where the woodmen piled the logs for our fireplace burning. I waved and beckoned to him till he paused and turned his horse's head toward us. In a moment we three stood about him and told of our plans for the archery match. Most of the words were mine, but Cedric and Old Marvin himself were not a whit less eager. Soon I had drawn from Lord Mountjoy the promise that we should have our will, and that the archer festival should be held in the Mountjoy lands in three days' time.

But, hot and eager as I was, I noted even then a backwardness in my father's answers that puzzled me. 'Twas not like him to care for the gift of a cow or a colt to any of his faithful retainers; and I knew he loved a fair match at the targets as well as any. After we had said "good day" to Marvin, and as Cedric and I walked down the road toward the wood on either side of his horse, Father gave utterance to his worrying thought.

"Dickon, 'tis but natural at thy years to be eager and headlong in thy thinking; but has the thought not come to thee at all that this match that thou dost plan so joyously may end in sorrow to thy old instructor in arms?"

"How so?" I questioned,—but even in the saying, I saw a glimmer of his meaning.

"For thirty years and more Old Marvin hath been leading archer of Mountjoy. He nears three score and ten; and may the saints bespeak him many years of peace after all the toils and perils he hath undergone for our house. Mayhap his eye is as clear and his hand as true as ever; but I have seen somewhat of the shooting of Cedric here; and it may be that he'll best Old Marvin at the thing which is his dearest pride. Should that happen, canst thou warrant Marvin will not carry home a bitter heart from thy festival?"

"Oh, Father! Surely thou dost jest. Marvin is no child to grieve at being beaten in fair play, should that chance befall him. I warrant we'll see never a

sign of it."

"'Tis true enough," said my father slowly, "we'll never see a sign of it; but the bitterness may be there ne'ertheless. But I bethink me now,—get John o' the Wallfield or some other Mountjoy archer to make a third. Then Marvin can be but second at worst, and 'twill make a fairer show for all these friends we are to bid come to our fête. John is ever a hopeful youth, and will shoot as though his life depended on it."

Saying thus, he set spurs to his horse, and, with a nod and smile at Cedric, rode away up the forest path.

That afternoon messengers went out from the castle, to bid to the festival the tenantry and all the friends of Mountjoy for ten miles 'round; and an ox was slain for the roasting.

Three days later, on another perfect morn without cloud or breath of wind, there assembled in Yew Hedge Meadow, a furlong from the Mountjoy gate, a concourse which might have graced a tournament. The Pelhams were there and the Leicesters and even a half dozen of the Montmorencys, my mother's kin from Coventry. The yeomanry of the Mountjoy lands had come, e'en to the last man and maid and child, and nigh two hundred of the neighbor folk from Pelham Manor, Leicester and Mannerley. The gentry were gathered on some rows of benches, covered with gay-colored robes, which had been placed on a little hillock at the left; and the commoners stood or walked about on the good brown sward, having many a gay crack and jest between them, and enjoying, methought, a better view of the archery than their betters on the higher ground.

Many of the Mountjoy men had brought their cross-bows; and were now taking random shots at the white-centered target, a hundred paces down the meadow. Others had long-bows and the cloth-yard shafts that the forester loves. When Cedric's father, Elbert of Pelham Wood, came on the ground with his long-bow in his hand a cry went up for a match with that noble weapon to come before the prize shooting of the cross-bow men.

My father came and full warmly greeted the Pelham forester, and gave his word for the long-bow trials. Two of our Mountjoy lads shot each five shafts at the three-inch bull's-eye; and of these Rob of the Rowan Grange was in high delight at thrice fairly striking it. Then Elbert, with a merry grin that showed his toothless jaws, did come to the mark and sent five arrows toward the target, suffering none to touch them till the last was sped. When he had finished there was a shout from all the people, with Rob o' the Rowan's voice among the loudest, for every arrow point had pierced the white.

Now came Marvin, bonnet in hand, before Lord Mountjoy; and began to speak with a quickness and a shortness of breath that I had ne'er before noted.

"My lord, methinks 'twould better the match for those that come to see our

archery if we had, besides yonder target, a moving mark. What think'st thou of the rolling ball such as I used a score of years agone, and with which thyself did have much good sport?"

"Marry! Well bethought, good Marvin!" cried Father. "Have the lads bring planks from the courtyard and set up the trough as thou bid'st them. We have bowling balls enough. Truly, 'twill make the match a gayer sight. There are many here that never have seen thy skill so displayed."

THEN ELBERT DID COME TO THE MARK AND, WITH A MERRY GRIN, SENT FIVE ARROWS TOWARD THE TARGET

Marvin turned away full eagerly to give orders for the making of the slanting trough of planks down which the bowling ball should roll; and as I saw the light in his eyes my heart did warm toward our faithful and stout-hearted old follower that he should devise this play to save his archer fame. For plain it was to me that my father had been well pleased at this thought of Marvin's, believing that in this game which was his very own, and practiced by none beyond the lands of Mountjoy, he would display such mastery as would far outweigh any vantage that young Cedric might gain at the bull's-eye shooting.

Many hands made light work of the making ready. Soon a trough of planks went up to one side of the arrow course, and eighty yards from the mark at which the archers stood. One end was raised four yards from the earth on a scaffolding on which a lad might climb to place the bowling balls in groove. When, at the word, he rolled one from him, it dashed down the slope and rolled and bounded o'er the sod for thirty paces, full like a hare started from his covert by the hunters.

To strike this ball in full career with cross-bow bolt was no child's play. To this could I well swear, for never yet had I succeeded in doing so, when, two years agone, Old Marvin had sought to teach me. As I recalled my many bootless trials, I laughed to think of Cedric and the game Old Marvin now had played on him.

Now came the cross-bow men to the mark for the target shooting. Old Marvin began, and in high confidence. But verily, Fortune frowned on him, for the wind that had been but a breath before, sprung up just as he laid finger to trigger; and his first two bolts missed the white by half an inch. Then came three well within the circle; but the old archer's face bore a piteous frown as he made way for Cedric, for he had thought to equal the long-bow shooting of his old gossip of Pelham Wood.

Cedric quickly sent three bolts to the bull's-eye. Then his hand seemed to tremble; and methought he suffered from the eyes of such a crowd of witnesses. His fourth bolt struck just outside the black, and the fifth went two inches wide.

"What ails thee, lad?" questioned his father, full sharply. "Marvin had the wind to fight; but the air was quiet for thee. Methinks the fare of Mountjoy hall too rich for a plain forester. Thou handled thy weapon better on rye bread and pease porridge."

"Mayhap thou'rt right, Father," returned Cedric with a laugh. "Or mayhap I grow soft with sleeping on so fair a couch of wool. To-day I cannot shoot, it seems. Another day may better it."

John o' the Wallfield was now making careful sight at the bull's-eye; and all the assembly watched him close, for it had been whispered that but the day before he had made five bull's-eye strokes with ne'er a break, and at the same distance as now. He had many friends among the younger men and maids; and these now called to him words of cheer and bade him show his mettle. Thus besought, he showed a skill that surprised us all and filled me with a worry I could scarce suppress. Four of his bolts landed fair within the white, and the fifth but barely missed it. At the target he was winner; and, a few years back, he had been the best of all the Mountjoy archers, save only Marvin himself, at striking the rolling ball. It began to seem that John o' the Wallfield who had been brought into the match to make a third in the scoring, might end by leading off the prize.

Next Marvin came to the mark to shoot at the rolling ball. All the yeomanry crowded round for a nearer view; and the knights and ladies left their benches and came forward that they might miss nothing of this strange test of archery. Now indeed did Marvin display something of the craft that had made him for so many years the leading archer of Mountjoy. Four of his bolts struck the swiftly running mark full squarely; and the fifth was wondrous close. When he had finished all the older yeomen and men-at-arms raised the shout of "Marvin! Marvin!" and some did already talk of bearing him aloft as winner of the day. For never in his

life had the old marksman bettered the record he had just made at the rolling ball; and it was not believed an archer lived who could equal it.

'Twas Cedric's turn to shoot next at this strange target. As he came forward he seemed to be more wrought upon than ever; and I bethought me that he bore but ill the fortunes of the day. He drew his bowstring to charge his weapon with a most unseemly twitch; and then exclaimed in wrath at a broken cord.

"Ho!" he called, "I must lay me a new string, it seems. This one was sadly frayed, and now is gone. But let me not delay the match. Let John go on in my turn while I knot and stretch a stouter one."

Nothing loath, John stepped forward to the mark. My father gave the signal, and the ball rolled down the incline to the sward. Before it had bounded a half dozen paces it was pierced by John's bolt; and there rose a great cry from all the younger men. Next came a miss; then another stroke; and the hubbub rose again. For the fourth and fifth shots, John aimed full carefully along the course the ball should go and before the word was given; but all his care availed him not, for both the bolts missed clean.

Now again the meadow echoed with the cries of "Marvin! Marvin!" Some too did call out a cheer for Cedric as he came up with bolt in groove; for the young forester was well bethought at Mountjoy, and to-day he had not shamed the old-time leader as some had thought he might. As soon as the first ball touched the sward he pressed trigger; and in a moment 'twas seen that his bolt had nicked its edge. Then twice he missed it fairly; and twice more his bolts struck home. With but one more stroke he would have equaled Marvin's score. As it was, his points were six, even as those of John o' the Wallfield, while Marvin had thrice struck the bull's-eye and four times the rolling ball.

When Lord Mountjoy announced the prize was Marvin's, the elder Mountjoy men broke out afresh with cheers; and in these all the company, led by my father himself, speedily joined. Two of the stoutest yeomen hoisted Marvin to their shoulders; and with them in the lead, we made a procession through the fields and toward the hall, all the men and maidens shouting and dancing and making a most merry and heartening din.

The tables were spread in the courtyard, and already were laden with bounteous platters of the roasted beef with bread and cakes and ale and goodly Yorkshire pudding. The yeomanry here sat them down while my father did lead his guests of gentle blood to the tables spread in the castle hall. For an hour we feasted sumptuously, and many a tale was told of archery and of the deer hunting of olden days, when, as I learned from the talk of my elders, men were taller and stronger and of keener eye than now, and such craft of the bow as Elbert and Old Marvin had that day displayed was the boast of many archers in any goodly company.

WE MADE A PROCESSION THROUGH THE FIELDS, ALL THE MEN AND MAIDENS SHOUTING AND DANCING AND MAKING A MOST MERRY AND HEARTENING DIN

In all this talk Cedric, the forester, had no part; though he listened full courteously to any who would address him. I had been rejoiced at Marvin's victory; but now I bethought me that Cedric might be feeling bitterness at his own poor showing. That he should strike the rolling ball but thrice in the first five trials seemed not strange; but he had done no better at the bull's-eye target; and his father's words might well have cut more deeply than he chose to show. I found a place beside him, and, speaking softly so that no other might hear, did say:

"'Twas not thy day to-day, Cedric; but mind thee not. There'll be many another match whence thou'lt carry off the prize."

Cedric turned to me and smiled, methought a bit grimly, and I went on:

"'Twas hardly fair to thee to make thee shoot at the rolling ball at a match

and for the first time. 'Tis Marvin's own game; and at it he hath always excelled all others."

"Sir Dickon," said Cedric, speaking as softly as I, "canst thou keep a secret?"

"Of a certainty," I answered. "What now hast thou to reveal?"

"I will show thee something which I would fain have thee know, if thou wilt promise me to tell no soul whatever nor to give any hint of it."

"'Tis well," I answered, "I promise it."

"Listen!" he whispered, "I go now to the Yew Hedge Meadow. After some minutes do thou follow me, and speak not to any one."

Speaking thus, he rose and quickly left the tables. I was full of a desire to learn his meaning; and did wait but the shortest space before following him. I found him, with his cross-bow ready drawn, at the archers' mark in the meadow.

"Do thou climb upon yon scaffolding," said Cedric, "and roll me a ball that I may try my hand once more at this strange game of Marvin's."

I did as he did ask; and his bolt struck it fairly in mid career.

"Well shot!" I cried, "thou'lt yet be Marvin's match at this game too."

"Prithee, another ball," called the forester.

Again I rolled the ball and again 'twas fairly struck. A third and fourth and fifth and sixth went down the trough; and I grew fairly 'mazed, for Cedric met each with a bolt as surely and as easily as if they stood stock still. I leaped down from my perch on the scaffolding and ran to him.

"Cedric!" I cried, "what means this? Thou passest Marvin's self. Did thy hand tremble to-day from the gaze of so many onlookers?"

Cedric laughed again; and now he wore such a gay, light-hearted look as I bethought me had not been on his face for three days past.

"Hush!" he said, "tell it not so loud lest some may hear thee. But was it not the will of my Lord Mountjoy, who risked his life for me at Shrewsbury, that Old Marvin should win this one last archer match? It cost me but a broken bowstring and some little work of the head when John o' the Wallfield seemed like to win the day. He needs must shoot before me that I might know how to guide my bolts. Had he struck the rolling ball with but one more bolt, he would have equaled Marvin's score; and I must have done likewise that we three might shoot again. If with two more, he would have bested Marvin, and I must take the prize from him. But with only two strokes in the five, 'twas easy quite; and now Marvin hath the prize that it were shame to keep from him."

Then indeed I understood; and I wrung Cedric's hand in gladness.

"My father shall know of this," I cried; "and he'll give thee a prize also. Another cow, second only to the one that Marvin chooses, shall go to thy father's cottage."

But Cedric's face, which had been merry, now quickly altered; and he shook

his head.

"Sir Dickon," he said steadily, "dost thou not recall that thou didst promise not to reveal what I did show thee?"

"Why! But of that word thou'lt release me, Cedric. 'Twas but a notion of thine. Truly, Lord Mountjoy should know of this."

But Cedric still shook his head.

"I told thee not in order that I might gain a prize. And for my shooting this day no prize will I take. I somehow could not bear that thou should'st think me so poor an archer as this day's work did show; but now I hold thee to thy knightly word, well and freely given."

I could think of no word more to say nor any way of moving him from his resolve. So we walked slowly back to the hall, and in silence, for Cedric was ever of few words, and I was thinking deeply on his obstinacy.

In the courtyard and in the hall we found the feast was yet in progress. Truly, if our men of England do work and fight as valiantly as they eat and drink, 'tis no wonder that our land grows in power and holds up its head among nations. I left Cedric at his former seat, and walked straight across the hall to my father. Cedric's eyes followed me, for it was plain that he yet feared I might tell Lord Mountjoy how our archery meet had been guided. And I cast back at Cedric, as I went, a sly and crafty look which did nothing [to] reassure him.

Soon I gained the ear of my father; and for half a minute did speak to him full earnestly. To which he straightway made answer in his strong and goodly tones which Cedric and many others might well hear above the hum of voices and the clatter of the serving-men:

"Marry! Well bethought, Dickon. It were indeed a shame to let such archery at our festival go unrewarded. 'Twill pleasure Cedric also; and, truly, he hath borne himself well this day."

Rising, he addressed the company:

"Ho! good friends all! Fair ladies and most worshipful knights and gentlemen: I go to the courtyard to say to our yeomanry assembled there some words that you may also wish to hear."

Then he passed out of the hall, and all the lords and ladies rose to follow him. Cedric and I were last. As we waited for the crowd to pass through the doorway, he whispered, sharply:

"Hast thou then told Lord Mountjoy after all?"

I smiled in answer.

"Contain thyself, good Cedric, and hear what thou shalt hear."

He would have questioned further, but at that moment my father's voice was heard in the courtyard.

"Friends and Well Wishers of the House of Mountjoy: I know full well,

'twill pleasure you to hear that the prize that our good Marvin hath so truly won this day is not the sole prize of our festival. The cross-bow is a noble weapon, but the long-bow of Merry England is no less; and we have seen some archery to-day that must not go without a guerdon. Therefore to Elbert, Forester of Pelham and father of Cedric, now of our house, I give his choice of any cow in the Mountjoy herds, saving only that which Marvin chooses. To John o' the Wallfield also I make gift of a good steel cross-bow of the sort which Marvin tells me he much desires, and with which he may better even the archery he hath bravely shown to-day.

"Now here's a health to Merry England and long life to her honest yeomanry! So long as they guide bolt and shaft as now they'll confusion bring to all of England's enemies."

So it befell that in the dusk of that fair day Elbert, the forester, did lead home to Pelham Wood a goodly, milk-white heifer. A proud man was he of this prize of his archery; but, had he known the full tale of the day's doings, he might have been, without vainglory, prouder still.

CHAPTER VI—WOLF'S HEAD GLEN

I think that that spring morning whereon Cedric and I set out on the forest road to Coventry was the fairest that ever I have seen. The sun shone gloriously in the open glades and on the moorlands, and white clouds sailed aloft like racing galleons. The bird chorus among the little new leaves overhead was as the mingled music of harps and lutes and voices in the choir at Shrewsbury, and flowerets of blue and pink and gold full gallantly bedecked the pathside and the brown forest floor. Withal 'twas not a day for idleness and dreaming, for a chill air breathed in the darker vales, and here and there in the deep woodlands and on northern slopes a graying patch of snow yet lingered.

Old William, a faithful archer of Mountjoy, rode with us as guide and counsellor—this by the insistence of my father, Lord Mountjoy, who had a sorry lack of faith in the judgment and discretion of what he called "two half-broke colts" like Cedric and me.

"I know full well," he had said when I broached the plan of riding the ten leagues to Coventry to pay due respects to our kinsfolk of Montmorency,—"that Cedric hath a wondrous skill and quickness with his cross-bow, and that thou, Dickon, in thy sword-play, art not far behind many a man that calls himself knight and soldier. You will be mounted well; and mayhap, if danger beset, can fight or fly, saving whole skins as on that day the Carletons hunted you in the woods of Teramore. But all is not done by eyes and limbs, be they never so keen and skilled. Your veteran of three-score will step softly and dry-shod around the quagmire in which your hair-brained youth of sixteen plunges head and ears."

"Never fear, Father," I cried, "with William or without, we'll keep whole skins. These are now full quiet days, and we ride for pleasure, not for brawling."

"'Tis true," he answered slowly, "with the hanging of Strongbow, we now have the outlaw bands in wholesome fear; and the Carletons have raised no battle cry since the fall. 'Tis like they have little will for it since they were so sorely smitten at the siege and first the Old Wolf and later young Lionel received their just dues from us and ours. They have no leaders now save the widowed lady and a fifteen-years old lad that bears his father's name of Geoffrey and shall be Lord of Carleton. Mayhap we have before us some few years to build the fortunes of our house without let or hindrance from any of that crew at Teramore. But William shall go with thee to Coventry, ne'ertheless, to see that thou miss not the road and seek no useless brawls. Listen well to what he tells thee, and thou'lt make a safe return."

Now all three of us had our cross-bows slung upon our backs; and I wore at my side the good Damascus blade which was my dearest pride. We carried in leathern pouches a store of bread and meat for the midday meal; and William had made shift to shoot a moorfowl that he spied running midst the gorse by the wayside.

So, an hour past the noonday, we made camp by a fair stream, set a fire alight to roast the bird, and feasted right merrily. As we sat about the embers, filled with the comfort of hunger well sated, I lifted up my voice in a ballad of which I had many times of late made secret practice. It went right merrily and clear; and when I had once sung it through Cedric and old William both urged me on to repeat it. When I sang again Cedric surprised me much, seeing the untaught forester that he was, by joining me with a sweet, high contra-melody that wondrously enhanced the music; and old William too, after a few gruff trials, did bravely swell the chorus.

Thus pleasantly occupied, and with our carol ringing through the vale, we heard no sound of hoofbeats, and I looked up with a start to see, passing along the path, fifty paces from our camp fire, three armed and mounted travelers.

There were two stout men-at-arms, wearing the braced and quilted jackets

that, against arrows or javelins, so well replace breastplates of steel, and armed with great two-handed broadswords and poniards. Between them, and a little to the fore, on a proudly stepping little gelding, rode a youth of somewhat less than our own years, wearing an embroidered tunic of white and rose and a sword which hung in a scabbard rich with gold and gems.

William snatched at the cross-bow which lay on the grass beside him; but the strangers paid little heed to us, the men-at-arms but glancing surlily in our direction. In a moment they had passed from sight, and the forest was quiet again. For a little we talked of who they might be and what their errand was in these parts; but none of us could name any of their party. We were now some eight leagues from Castle Mountjoy and mayhap three from Mannerley Lodge. It seemed not unlikely that the stranger youth might be of some party that visited the good lady of Mannerley, and that he was now riding abroad under the escort of two of her stout retainers.

The passing of the strangers, and the sour looks of the two men had driven the carol from our minds; and we loosed our horses from the saplings to which they had been tied, and soberly remounted to resume our journey. It had been ten of the morning ere we left Mountjoy, and we had come but slowly along the narrow forest paths. Now the sun was well down in the West, and clouds were gathering darkly overhead. William urged us to make haste lest we be caught in the cold rain that he prophesied would be falling ere night. So we took the road again, and, after all our good cheer and merry chorusing, with our spirits strangely adroop.

We rode but slowly, for we had no wish to overtake the travelers. On our woodland roads, 'tis well to beware of strangers, especially when night approaches and one is not yet in sight of friendly castle walls. If they too made for Coventry, 'twas well, and we might follow them into the town without exchanging words; and if their way lay elsewhere, we could willingly spare their company.

A mile or so we rode in quietness. Then, coming to the top of a rise where the path emerged from the woods and half a mile of open moor lay before us, we beheld a sight which caused us to draw rein full suddenly and to gaze again, under sheltering hands, at the place where the road again made into the forest. There were our three strangers in desperate fight with half a dozen men. The outlaws—for such they seemed—were roughly clad in gray homespun and Lincoln green, and armed with bows and quarterstaves. They did swiftly run and dodge from behind one tree-trunk to another, evading the sword strokes of the horsemen and sending shaft after shaft against them. Even as we gazed, an arrow pierced the quilted jacket of one of the men-at-arms, or found a spot uncovered at the throat, and brought him heavily to the ground.

For one quick-throbbing moment I looked at Cedric, to spell, if I might, his thoughts at this juncture. Should we turn back ere the outlaws spied us, and make good our 'scape in the forest? The band might be far larger than it seemed; often a hundred or more of these robbers consorted under the banner of some famous outlaw chief. If we went forward, we might but add to the number of their victims.

Then came the voice of old William, cracked and broken with his fear for our safety, and striving hard to stay us from an emprise which seemed certain death:

"Turn, Masters! Turn ere they sight us. We are too few and too lightly armed to face such numbers. An we go forward, they'll spit us with their shafts like a roast at the fire. Come, Sir Dickon! Come, I pray thee. My Lord Mountjoy leans upon me to bring thee safe through. Back to the greenwood while yet there's time."

I uttered not a word, and firmly held my restive steed; but I saw in Cedric's face no thought of flight nor care for life or limb,—rather the look of a noble hound that spies the frothing, tusker boar at slaughter of his comrades, and beseeches but the word that looses him against the monster's flank.

And now Cedric's horse and mine sprang forward together. To this day I know naught of any settled thought of riding to the attack. Mayhap the limbs that came to me as my heritage from a line of fighting men that never endured to see foul ambush and treachery have their way did move without any guidance and set the spurs against my horse's sides. Cedric rode the great war-horse which he had won from the Carleton; and though my own mount was a fair tall stallion, half of Arab strain, the forester drew ahead on the rough pathway e'en while he drew his cross-bow cord and fitted bolt to groove. In a moment I had charged my weapon also; and then I found old William by my side, his cross-bow in his hands and all his protests forgotten.

Now the hoofs of our mounts thundered most sweetly on the sward, and for all the folly of our venture, I felt such an uplifting of the heart as I had known but once or twice before in all my life. As we neared the fray at the wood's edge, I shouted the battle cry of Mountjoy; and, my two companions joining with a will, we came down upon the varlets like a troop of armored horse.

As we approached 'twas clear that the outlaws had all the better of the fight. One of the men-at-arms lay dead on the ground, and the other though still fighting blindly had twice been pierced by arrows in neck and face. The robbers had a chieftain who carried no bow, but a sword only, and who had been ordering and cheering on his men while striking no blow himself. Now the youth in the white tunic, who had received no hurt as yet, dashed toward him and struck full bravely with his golden-hilted sword, but wildly and in a way unskilled. The

robber met the blow with a twisting parry that struck the hilt from the boy's hand and sent the blade whirling away into the underbrush; then leaping forward he seized the youth's shoulder and pulled him from his horse.

HE GAVE NO INCH OF GROUND SAVE TO LEAP FROM SIDE TO SIDE IN AVOIDING MY DOWNWARD STROKES

Drawing rein at fifty yards, we all three let fly our bolts, Cedric and old William each bringing down his man. My own bolt flew wide of the robber captain because of my fear of striking the youth who was now his prisoner. Then, dropping the bow, I betook me to a weapon more natural to my temper, and, sword in hand, was instantly in combat with the chief. He pushed the boy behind him and gave me blow for blow; and, truth to tell, he handled his blade—the weapon of a knight and gentleman—with a skill far beyond that of any yeoman I had known. Our blades flashed merrily in the sunlight that now streamed through a rent in the western clouds; and I lost all knowledge of the fray around us.

I fought on horseback, and he on foot; but he gave no inch of ground save to leap from side to side in avoiding my downward strokes. All his thrusts I managed to parry; but, somewhat with swordsmanship and more with wondrous quickness of foot, he likewise foiled mine. Twice had I essayed the best of all my

tricks of fence only to fail in reaching my tall and nimble enemy.

I was gathering my wits for another stratagem, the which might take him off his guard, when suddenly, and to my great amaze, he leaped aside from my attack and sprang behind a tree trunk. From there he leaped to another, farther in the forest; and so by running and hiding, quickly disappeared in the greenwood.

I looked about me, dizzied with the quickness of that which had befallen; and beheld a sight for tears and groaning. Both the stranger men-at-arms lay dead on the oak leaves amidst the bodies of five of the outlaws who had been slain by their swords and our cross-bow bolts; and, lying with his shoulders half supported by Cedric's arms, was our faithful old William, his breast pierced by a cloth-yard shaft and his eyes just closing in death.

Cedric sadly laid down the body of our old retainer; and I thought it fitting to make a hasty prayer for his soul's peace. Then, as I rose, the stranger youth came forward haltingly. Methought he had a most winsome face, with honest eyes of blue and with brown and curling hair. I was about to offer some friendly greeting when our ears were affrayed by a loud blast of a hunting horn which came from a furlong's distance in the wood.

Cedric's face changed instantly; and he grasped at my elbow.

"Quick, Sir Dickon!" he cried. "Let us mount and away. Yon notes are the call of the robber chief to all his band. They'll be here anon and slay us every one if we make not haste."

"Come then," I answered, and, seizing the youth's hand in lieu of other greeting, I drew him swiftly toward his horse, and mounting my own, wheeled back into the pathway. Cedric, with one bound, was on his horse's back; but the stranger was slower in his movements, seeming mazed and like one in a dream with the suddenness of these turns of fortune. I caught the bridle rein of his horse which had somewhat strayed; and then indeed he came quickly forward and climbed to the saddle. But a precious moment had been lost; and now, just as we emerged on the moor, there came a deadly flight of arrows from the wood. The archers were yet a hundred paces off; and low-hanging boughs did much deflect their shafts; but my horse was sorely stricken and reared and flung me to the earth. Another arrow struck mortally the stranger boy's bay gelding, and a third pierced my doublet sleeve and drew a spurt of blood.

"Quick!" shouted Cedric. "Mount with me, both of ye. Quick for your lives!"

Reaching down, he fairly lifted the stranger to a place in front of him, while I seized his belt and madly scrambled up behind. Then the forester set spurs to his horse's sides, and that splendid steed, despite his triple burden, was off with a bound.

But now, alas! the outlaws were at the wood's edge. Another flight of

arrows whistled about our ears; and the stranger, with a groan, clapped his right hand to his side and tried manfully to pluck away a shaft which was quivering there. His violent clutch served but to break the wood, and left the barb embedded in the flesh. Cedric threw one arm about him, lest he fall, and shouting to me to cling tightly to his waist, spurred madly on, blind to all but the path before him.

The robbers came streaming from the wood, and seeing that our one remaining horse was now burdened with the weight of three riders, dashed after us on foot with the hope, not ill-founded, of overtaking and slaying us. Some of these men of the greenwood can leap and run very like the deer they chase; and, had not our horse been the best and strongest that ever I bestrode, they might have gained upon us on the open heath enough to have made sure work of their archery.

But momently we drew away from them; and none of their whizzing shafts did further harm. Indeed, had not Cedric been fain to check our speed lest our burdened mount stumble in the rough and treacherous pathway, we might have shortly distanced them. As it was, we came again to the forest which we had left a quarter hour before, and the smoother road beneath the oak trees, with the shouting robber band a furlong behind us.

Then for the first time spake the youth that rode so unsteadily before us. Deathly pale he was, and his voice like that of one on a sick-bed.

"Masters," he murmured, "I fear my hurt is mortal, and you vainly risk your lives for mine. Put me down, I pray you, on the oak leaves, that I may die in peace, and you may 'scape with no more hurt."

"That we will not," I cried, hotly. "We'll bear thee away to safety, spite of all. Look but now! We gain upon them. A quarter hour will see us well beyond their reach."

"I cannot bear it," he answered faintly. "I bleed full sorely, and I needs must rest." With that his color left him utterly; his blue eyes twitched and closed; he fainted, and but for Cedric's arm must surely have fallen.

Cedric turned to me and whispered:

"Save him we must, or we are no true men."

"Surely we must save him," I echoed, "but how shall we compass it? If he have not rest full soon and the dressing of his hurt, he will surely die."

"One chance there still remains," he answered softy, "though in the essay we give o'er our own near sight of safety. What say'st thou? Shall we attempt it?"

"With all my heart," I cried. "Shall we make stand in some rock cranny hereabouts?"

To this the forester made no reply. We were riding down a slope toward a wide but shallow stream which we must ford. The outlaws were hid from view

by the rise behind us, but we could still hear their shouts and knew that they had by no means given o'er the hope of reaching us.

Midway in the current Cedric sharply pulled his horse's head to the right, and leaving the pathway utterly, spurred him at a trot up the sandy and pebbly bed of the stream. A turn soon hid the ford from view, and this not a moment too soon, for now again we heard the outlaws coming down the hill in hot pursuit. Cedric drew rein for an instant, and we heard them splashing through the shallows of the ford, and then their running feet on the path beyond. A bow-shot farther on we drew out from the stream bed and made better going in the open woods of a valley which led upwards toward the rocky hills to the northward.

"Dost know this place?" I asked of Cedric.

"Aye," he answered shortly, "'tis known as Wolf's Head Glen."

Then we came to thicker wood growth; and he had much ado to guide the war-horse safely in the tangle and to keep the boughs from the face of the stricken youth before him. Once more we entered the stream bed, and again emerged where the forest was of older growth and had little underwood to check us. We had come a mile or more from the pathway when of a sudden the forester drew rein and looked with care about him. Then he leaped down, leaving me to hold the wounded boy, and made his way up a rocky slope to a tangle of saplings and thorn bushes. These at one point he drew apart; then he disappeared, crawling on hands and knees into the darkness beyond.

Speedily he returned; and now a glad and hopeful look was on his face. "'Tis well," he said, "we yet will save him. Here is shelter and safe hiding if I mistake not."

He lifted down the boy, and together we bore him up the slope and through the narrow, thorny pathway. Beyond was a rocky cave with space enough for half a dozen men to lie on the beds of leaves the winds had drifted in, though nowhere high enough to let one stand erect. The mouth was safely covered by the growth of sapling trees and briers; and one might pass at twenty paces and ne'er suspect it.

We laid our burden on the leaves. The poor youth's face was so white and still and his hands so cold that truly I thought we were too late and that his spirit had fled. But Cedric stripped away the garments from the lad's breast and laid his ear against it. Then he rose and nodded brightly.

"He lives. We yet will save him. First let us make ready a bandage, then pluck this shaft away and bind the wound."

I quickly stripped me of a linen garment of which Cedric did make a soft dressing and shield for the hurt. Then I held the quivering side while Cedric firmly drew away the arrow. As it came forth the boy gave a piteous groan and his eyes flickered open, but quickly closed again. The bleeding started afresh, but

the forester, with a wondrous deftness, applied the bandage and closely fastened it with strips that went about the body and over the shoulders of the lad. Then we brought water in an iron cup which Cedric carried at his girdle, and bathed the boy's white face. Soon his eyes opened once more, and he asked for drink.

When the lad's thirst was sated and he knew us again, Cedric stole out with cross-bow drawn to make his way a little down the glen and see if any of the robber band had trailed us. Seeing naught of them, he quickly returned and took our good steed and, first giving him to drink at the stream, tethered him in a close thicket half a furlong off where he might browse in quiet and mayhap escape the notice of our enemies.

An hour later we re-dressed our companion's hurt, using a poultice of healing leaves which Cedric had found by the brookside and crushed between stones. Soon the lad fell asleep, and though sometimes beset with grievous pains and babbling dreams, did rest not ill for one who had been so near to death.

Cedric and I watched the night out, sitting with drawn bows at the cave mouth. The stars were bright, but there was no moon and little wind; and our talk was low lest after all some of the outlaws might be near. Half in whispers he told me the story of the glen and its name. It seems that an honest yeoman, John o' the Windle, who had been his father's friend in his youth, had had the mischance to quarrel with a sheriff's man, and, to save his own life, had pierced him with a cloth-yard shaft. Then John Windle had fled to the forest and become a wolf's head, which is the name the commonalty have for outlaws, since the killing of either wolves or outlaws may bring a bounty from the Crown. For years he had lived in this very glen, with his hiding place in the cave known to but a few faithful friends. Often he was pursued to the little valley, but among its woods and streams always shook off the sheriff's trailers and made good his 'scape. Finally the legend grew that he was befriended by unseen powers and changed himself to a wolf whenever he crossed the little stream at the place where so many times his trail had been lost. Cedric's father, Elbert of Pelham Wood, had once brought him to this spot to visit the outlaw after he had become old and was far gone in his last sickness; and a few days later the two foresters had buried the wolf's head near the cave where he had lived.

Just after dawn, Cedric, sitting at watch, pierced with a cross-bow bolt a hare that was hopping through the underwood fifty paces off. Most cautiously we built a little fire within the cave and roasted the meat for our breakfast, we being of sharpest appetites through having eaten naught since the middle of the day before.

Some of the tenderest bits we offered to the stranger, and he did try to eat, but with no avail for he grew dizzy when we raised him from his couch. Cedric's face grew grave at this, and soon he came and placed his hand upon the cheek and

neck of the lad. What he found made him frown most anxiously at me. The face of the wounded youth had now lost all its paleness; 'twas flushed and something swollen and to the touch near burning hot.

"Sir Dickon," called Cedric, suddenly, "we must move him, and quickly, to where a leech can tend him. He hath a fever, and with it his wound will not heal."

"Can we issue from this wood by any other road than that on which we left the robbers?" I questioned. "If so be, mayhap we can reach to Mannerley Lodge."

"There is a steep pathway higher in the glen that doth issue on Wilton Road. If we gain that, 'tis not above two leagues to Mannerley."

"Then let us go. I wager we meet not again with the outlaws. They ever scatter and hide themselves after a fray like that of yesterday. Our steed must carry three as before. 'Twill be but an hour's ride."

Soon Cedric had returned from the thicket with the steed, we had lifted the stranger as gently as might be, and, mounting also, were on our way out of the forest. Now I rode in the saddle and held the boy in his place, and Cedric sat behind me with drawn cross-bow and bolt in groove.

We met none to gainsay us, and soon emerged from the wood. For a quarter hour we made such speed as we might along the road to Mannerley. Then all at once the youth's body grew limp in my arms, and I saw that again his wound bled full sorely and that once more he yielded to a death-like fainting.

I drew rein, and we dismounted, laying the boy on the leaves by the side of a little brook. For anxious moments we knelt beside him, bathing his forehead with the cold water, listening in vain for his heart-beats, and much in fear that his eyes would never reopen.

IN A TWINKLING, ARMED AND MOUNTED MEN WERE ALL ABOUT US

Then of a sudden we heard iron-shod hoofs on the roadway and a man's rough voice in surprise and angry threatening:

"Hold! What have we here? By'r Lady! 'tis the Mountjoys!"

In a twinkling, armed and mounted men were all about us; and with a heart like lead I recognized the Carleton livery. We could neither fight nor fly. Half a dozen stout men-at-arms leaped from their horses and rushed upon us. We had not struck a blow ere they overthrew us and wrenched our weapons from our hands. In a moment more my hands and Cedric's were fast bound with halters like those of scurvy thieves that go to pay their penalty upon the gibbet.

"Ha! Look but here!" cried the leader, whom I now saw to be none other than the man who had so sworn against us at the trial at Shrewsbury, "these are young Sir Richard and the forester that slew Sir Lionel but six months gone. And now we come on them again red-handed. See *this* foul wickedness that they have done! What say you now? Shall we not rope them up to yonder limb in requital?"

"Aye, Aye! Let's hang them and quickly," cried another.

"Men of Carleton," said I from where I lay upon the ground, "we are no murderers. But if slay us ye must, let us at least have the death of men and soldiers. I am the heir of a noble house that yields no jot to any Carleton; and my comrade here is a freeman of England with no smirch on his name. 'Tis not fitting that ye visit on us the punishment of thieves."

"Ho!" jeered the leader, "hear the young hound of Mountjoy, now caught in the sheepfold. 'Tis like if we listen to him that he and this Pelham varlet will yet concoct some plan to 'scape us. Quick, men! the halters! For we have other and sadder work to do."

Then for a moment all the forest and the blue sky seemed to turn to blackness around me. There was a roaring in my ears like to that I heard when as a child I fell one day from the foot board over the waters of the mill race and came not up to breathe till I reached the other side of the whirlpool below. Then from the midst of this reeling nightmare I heard a voice, saying faintly:

"Oh, Hubert! What dost thou here? And what do ye to these friends of mine that they lie on the ground in bonds?"

The stranger youth was sitting up on his leafy couch. His face was still deadly pale, but his eyes gleamed brightly.

"Our Lady be thanked! He lives," muttered the leader of the men-at-arms, to my utter amaze doffing his headpiece before the stricken youth. Then in answer:

"Master Geoffrey, God be thanked, they have not murdered thee! But these are Sir Richard of Mountjoy and the forester, Cedric, the very same that did to death thy brother, Lionel. Now we shall swing them from yonder oak limb. 'Twill heal thee faster to see thy enemies thus justly served."

"Hubert, thou shalt not,—*on thy life*!" cried Geoffrey, his weak voice shrill

with passion, "be they Mountjoys or be they sons of Beelzebub, they are good men and true, and have over and again risked their lives for mine. And I do verily believe that the tale they told at the Shrewsbury trial was the truth, and that my brother brought his death upon himself. Now cut those bonds,—and quickly."

The soldier yet hesitated and muttered somewhat beneath his breath.

"I tell thee, Hubert," broke out Geoffrey afresh, "thou shalt loose them, and give them horses that they may ride safely to Mountjoy. If thou disobey me, verily I'll have thee beaten with rods and cast in the lowest dungeon of Teramore."

Another of the men-at-arms now spoke aside to Hubert.

"He is the Master, Hubert; and we must e'en obey. Forget not that, since the death of Lionel, young Sir Geoffrey is himself the Carleton."

Hubert drew his dagger and came toward me. From the look on his ugly face I much misdoubted whether he meant to carry out the commands of his young master or to stab me to the heart. But he quickly cut the rope that bound my wrists, and then did a like service for Cedric.

We stood erect and made our bows before the young Lord of Carleton.

"Sir Geoffrey," said I, slowly, "thy house and mine have been bitter enemies; but glad am I to call thee friend. Wilt thou clasp hands in token?"

For answer his face lighted up with his most winsome smile, and he extended toward me his right hand in fellowship. To Cedric also he gave a clasp of such heartiness as he could compass, calling him the while brave rescuer and comrade. Then turning again to me, he said:

"Sir Richard of Mountjoy, mount this horse of Hubert's here, which I freely give thee, while Cedric rides the good steed that bore us so bravely through the forest. My men shall make for me a litter of poles, with robes and garments slung between, and bear me to Mannerley. There will I bide till my wound is healed. Say to thy father, the Lord of Mountjoy, that I renounce all the vengeance that my father and my brother swore against him, and that I extend to him also the hand of friendship. 'Twill please me well if, while I still lie at Mannerley, he and thou and Cedric come riding there and visit me. And so good-by with all my heart. May thou win safely home and Heaven's blessing follow thee."

Gladly we mounted and reined our horses' heads toward home. As we left the little glade we turned for one more look at the pale youth, lying half prostrate on his couch of leaves; and our hearts did swell with gladness to know his life was safe and that no longer was he a stranger or an enemy. And once more we caught his winsome smile and the wave of his hand that bade us God speed.

CHAPTER VII—THE OUTLAWS OF BLACKPOOL

'Twas a fortnight after the fray with the outlaws on the borders of Blackpool Forest, where, all unknowing, we had saved the life of young Sir Geoffrey of Carleton, heir of the house that for so long had been our bitterest enemy, that my father and I rode with Cedric, my comrade and squire, and six stout men-at-arms over the hill road to Mannerley. There our new-made friend, Sir Geoffrey, lay recovering from his wound.

Lord Mountjoy wore helmet and cuirass; and his good two-handed broadsword swung by his side, while both Cedric and I wore shirts of linked mail and our followers each a quilted, shaft-proof leathern jacket. Cedric carried the cross-bow which he had often used to such good purpose, and I the sword of Damascus steel which my father had riven from a Saracen noble in the Holy Land. Withal we made a brave array on the woodland roads and one of which the boldest band of outlaws with their bows and bills and coats of Lincoln green might well beware.

But no enemy gainsaid us on the road; and at two o' the clock we rode across the drawbridge of our good friend and neighbor, the Lady of Mannerley. She bade us welcome in the courtly manner to which she was bred, and ushered us to the great hall. Geoffrey was reclining in a great chair before the fire, and rose to greet us with most joyous face. His wound was healing fast, as we had known from the messengers who had passed almost daily to and fro; but the young Lord of Carleton was still pale with the bloodletting, and could leave his chair no longer than the courtesy of a host demanded. As he shook hands with my father, the Lord of Mountjoy, his words of heartfelt welcome and the smile on his winsome face made amends for the weakness of his clasp; and I was filled with joy to see that my father warmed to him at once and for his sake willingly forgot the deeds of the old Gray Wolf, who had been Lord of Carleton.

When Geoffrey was again seated and we had found places on the benches around him, the Lady of Mannerley brought to us some most dainty cakes and

cups of hot mulled wine, serving us with her own hands, as is the custom when guests of quality are welcomed. There ensued an hour of goodly talk, Geoffrey of Carleton plying my father with questions of that of which he loves best to speak,—the wars for the Holy Sepulcher's recovery—and Cedric and I listening or putting in our words as occasion offered. Geoffrey heard from me the tale of our archer festival and of old Marvin's and Cedric's wondrous prowess with the cross-bow. Then by degrees we came to the story of the day whereon Cedric and I and poor old William came upon the outlaw band in Blackpool that sought to kill his two retainers and make him prisoner; and we lived over again in joy the battle at the forest's edge and the bloody and desperate chase that followed.

When that tale had been fully told by us three youths, speaking sometimes in turn and sometimes, at the most perilous passages, crying out all together what had chanced, Geoffrey turned to me to say:

"But, Sir Richard,—in the forest where I first saw thee and Cedric at the fire,—that was a most sweet ballad you did sing. Can you not raise it again? I have a great mind to hear it."

At this, nothing loath, I turned my eyes to the rafters and began the lay. Cedric, joining in with his sweet harmonizing, did give it a grace which else it had sadly lacked; and the hall of Mannerley rang with it even as had the little glade in the wood. Lady Mannerley came again to the door of the hall, and behind her a half dozen of her maids and serving men. Geoffrey and the others loudly cried "Encore"; and the second time my father took up the lay with us, so it went rousingly and to the delight of the whole company. When at last we ceased Geoffrey declared that the song and the gay and heartening talk withal had done for him more good than all the herbs and poultices of the leech, and that with one more day like to this he verily believed he could ride abroad whole and sound.

Our audience departed with the end of the singing; and then Lord Mountjoy spoke most seriously:

"What thou say'st, Sir Geoffrey, puts me in mind that in these rough times there is other work for us who are verily whole and sound than this chaffering and singing at a bonny fireside, most pleasant though it be. I must bestir myself to punish these greedy rascals of the greenwood that set upon to rob and murder all those that go the forest roads not armed to the teeth and in strong company. 'Tis said that this unhung varlet that so sorely beset thee hath now no less than seven score bowmen at his back. To-morrow I ride to enlist the aid of my lord of Pelham with his twenty archers, and as soon thereafter as may be to Dunwoodie of Grimsby. The good lady who is now our hostess will doubtless send some men-at-arms and foresters. We shall make up a company that can take Blackpool Wood from all its sides at once; and it shall go hard but we send a half hundred of the rogues to their reckoning."

During this speech the eyes of the young Lord of Carleton had grown bright as with a fever; and he could hardly wait for my father to come to an end before crying out:

"Oh, good Mountjoy! My friend—if thou art my friend indeed, stay this goodly enterprise but a few short months—or weeks mayhap—and let me join with thee. This outlaw chief, whom now I learn is called the Monkslayer from certain of his bloody deeds, hath offered both injury and insult to the House of Carleton. Two of my faithful men he slew, and me he took prisoner, and would have held for high ransom, if indeed he spared my life, had it not been for Sir Richard and Cedric here and that worthy old archer of Mountjoy who met his death fighting in my behalf. Give me but two short months—I ask no more—to heal me of my wound and make some practice of arms; and I will ride with thee to the hunting of this outlaw and his band with forty men-at-arms and eight score archers from Carleton and Teramore. So shall we make short and sure work of it."

My father gazed at the glowing face of our new-made friend; and plain it was to me that the liking he had at first conceived for the lad suffered nothing from this headlong eagerness to be up and doing with arms in his hands. Turning to Cedric and me, with a broad and happy smile, Lord Mountjoy said:

"Well, lads, 'twas your quarrel and Sir Geoffrey's at the first. What say you? Shall we risk the scattering and 'scaping of these rogues by waiting till the fall for him? For I plainly see that, with all good will, he cannot rightly ride and fight before that time in such a rough campaign as this will be."

"Oh, let us wait, Father!" I cried, "Sir Geoffrey hath the right in saying 'tis especially the Carleton's quarrel; and 'twill be a fine sight for all the country-side to see the banners of Mountjoy and of Carleton waving together in so good a cause after all these years of enmity. Mayhap Sir Geoffrey will return with usury the arrow-shot he had from those scurvy knaves. If so, 'twill not be an ill beginning for his career in arms."

Cedric, who was ever of few words, nodded his head at this speech of mine; and so 'twas settled among us. Through the summer months we would strike no blow at the outlaws save in defense, but at the fall of the leaf, when the woods made not so close a cover, we would fall upon them in their fastnesses with all our forces at once, and so destroy and scatter them that the woodland roads of the whole county would be free of their kind for years to come.

A week later Sir Geoffrey took his way to his great castle at Teramore under a strong escort of Carleton men-at-arms. Ten days thereafter Cedric and I rode thither to pay a promised visit and to talk of the outlaw hunt and our great plans for the days to follow. Sir Geoffrey showed himself a most gracious host; and we passed some goodly hours in the Carleton hall and in the courtyard where

Cedric did try most manfully to impart to Geoffrey and me some measure of his cross-bow skill.

For my own handling of this weapon, I fear that all Cedric's and old Marvin's teachings are bootless, and that never shall I shoot with any certainty; but, to Cedric's huge delight, Sir Geoffrey took to the exercise like one born in a forester's cottage. In half an hour he was striking marks at fifty paces that were small enough for Cedric's own aim at twice that distance, and his instructor was prophesying he would be a bonny archer long before he could well handle a broadsword. This I thought likely enough, for Geoffrey, though his age lacked but half a year of Cedric's and mine, was somewhat lightly built and had not yet the reach and the forearm muscles that make a swordsman. 'Twas plain that among us three I should long remain the master with this best of weapons; and with this thought to console me, I took it not too ill that I should prove such a poor third at the archery.

That night, as Cedric and I sat at board with my father and mother, we were full of talk of the day's doings; and I was already planning festival days and nights when the Carletons and the Mountjoys and all our friends of Pelham and of Mannerley should fore-gather at Mountjoy or at Teramore for feasts and dancing in such ways as had been in days of yore.

Suddenly my mother interrupted all this talk and planning with a sober question:

"And the Lady of Carleton—Geoffrey's mother—did she greet thee full courteously to-day, Dickon?"

At once I felt as one who treads in icy water where he had thought to meet firm ground.

"Nay, mother. We saw her not at all—save for a glimpse at chamber window as we rode toward the drawbridge."

"Ah! then she was not abroad, it seems."

"Nay, she kept her chamber. Mayhap she was not well."

"Did Sir Geoffrey make for her her excuse?"

My face, as I could feel, grew burning red as I made answer:

"Nay, he said no word of her."

Then Lady Mountjoy turned to my father, who had been closely listening:

"It seems, my lord, that we shall not soon ride toward Teramore."

My father sadly shook his head, and gazed at the board before him. He had been glad at heart at the thought of the healed breach between the two houses; and now it seemed that all such thoughts were vain.

"Mayhap Lady Carleton will ride over with Sir Geoffrey when next week he comes to Mountjoy as he promised," I offered.

My father again shook his head.

"Mayhap she will, Dickon. If so be, she shall have the right hand of welcome; but much I misdoubt her coming to Mountjoy. When all is said, 'tis but natural she cannot bring herself to call us friends. It was we of Mountjoy that did to death her husband and her eldest son; and though we know well, and have maintained it by oath and by arms, that 'twas in fair battle, on our part at least, and that they brought their deaths upon themselves, yet perhaps 'tis too much to expect her to credit our words and deeds that give the lie to those of her own house. Nay, I see it now. She will never be a friend of Mountjoy."

He sighed deeply and turned again to his carving. None of us had more words; and it seemed that a cold fog, like those that come from the Western Sea in springtime, had settled on our spirits.

Four days later Sir Geoffrey came to Mountjoy, attended by a well-armed retinue; but his lady mother was not with him; and again he said no word of her. We made the young heir of Carleton full welcome to Mountjoy, and spent the day with meat and drink and the practice of arms. With the cross-bow he did even better than before, and showed himself not too dull a learner at the foils. But the gayety we had had at Teramore was not with us at Mountjoy. 'Twas as if some shriveled witch had envied us our merriment and put a spell upon us to destroy it. Something of this Sir Geoffrey seemed to feel at last; and the sun was yet three hours high when he took horse for his return.

So passed the summer. We did not ride again to Teramore, nor did Sir Geoffrey come to Mountjoy. Once I learned that he visited the Lady of Mannerley; and Cedric and I took the same day to pay our own respects. We had much good talk of the outlaw band and of the great day that was now fast approaching, but of Lady Carleton and the new peace that reigned between Mountjoy and Carleton no word was spoken.

Came a day in fair October that minded me full sharply of that one a year agone whereon I had met Lionel of Carleton in the woods of Teramore. The men of Mountjoy were early astir, and four score strong, counting the men-at-arms, the cross-bow men and the foresters with their long-bows and cloth-yard shafts, were making toward their post on the hither side of Blackpool Wood. On our left, two furlongs off, were Lord Pelham and his archers; to the right the score or so of Mannerly retainers and Squire Dunwoodie with half a hundred yeomen. On the far side of the forest, three leagues away, we knew that young Sir Geoffrey with dour-faced old Hubert led nigh two hundred Carleton men-at-arms and bowmen, and Lionel of Montmorency a hundred more. We were to march in open line, converging toward the center of the wood at grim Blackpool. Any of the robbers found in hiding were to be captured or slain; and whichever leader first encountered the outlaws in force was to give three long notes on his hunting horn. Then half the forces of all the others were immediately to join

him, leaving the remainder to guard all lines of possible escape. Our plans had been well kept secret amongst the leaders; not one of our own men knew them until that very morning. Withal it promised to be a most unlucky day for those cut-throat knaves who had so long cheated the gallows.

Our march was slow, as well might be in all those brakes and rocky glens. Now and again a lurking knave in Lincoln green was found and quickly made prisoner—or, if he made resistance, even more quickly disposed of. Some, however, were too fleet of foot for capture by our more heavily burdened men; and, after sending a shaft or two at the line of skirmishers, made good their escape into the wood before us.

'Twas ten by the sun when we heard, from Dunwoodie, far on our right, the three long blasts of the horn. Instantly my father and I took half our men, and leaving the rest under old Marvin, the archer, ran through the forest toward the fray. Afterward we learned to our cost that some of our leaders took not so careful thought of the places of their forces in the skirmish line, but rushed off at once to the alarm, followed by well nigh their whole companies, leaving in places gaps of a mile or more in what should have been our close-drawn cordon.

Be that as it might, ten minutes had not passed before Dunwoodie with his half hundred archers was reinforced by a gallant array of bowmen and men-at-arms. The outlaws, a hundred or more in number, and led by the Monkslayer himself, had been pressing Dunwoodie hard. The robber chief, carrying a sword and wearing the steel cap and breast-plate of a knight, stood forth from all shelter, commanding and exhorting his followers, apparently with no fear at all of flying shafts and quarrels. The men of Dunwoodie Manor fought from behind trees and rocks; and most of them had quilted, leathern jackets; but they were no match in archery, for the outlaws, many of whom, by virtue of their skill with the long-bow, had lived for years in the forest and never lacked for venison or greatly feared the sheriff and his men. Half a dozen Dunwoodie archers already lay weltering on the leaves, struck through throat or face with cloth-yard shafts; and only one or two of the robber knaves had been likewise served. Our coming, however, changed all in a twinkling. Mountjoy struck the outlaws on one flank just as Lionel of Montmorency came down upon the other. In the time a man would need to run a furlong's length, a score or more of the varlets were slain by shafts and cross-bow quarrels or by the swords of our men-at-arms, fifty more had clasped their hands above their heads in token of surrender, and the Monkslayer and the remainder of his crew had taken flight toward the center of the forest.

My father, who had been chosen leader by the other nobles, now called a halt and sent out a half dozen messengers to right and left to see and report to him the state of our cordon. Some of these returned in half an hour with their news, while others made the entire circuit of the forest, bearing Lord Mountjoy's

commands for the reforming and tightening of the skirmish line and for the delaying of further advance till he should give the word. Since the scattering of the main body of the robbers a number of the fugitives had been creeping back with their hands tightly clasped over their heads and begging for quarter. It was my father's thought that, in a day's time, these desertions from the outlaw band would be so many that the task of surrounding and taking the remainder and the Monkslayer himself would be a light one.

At two o'clock Sir Geoffrey joined us with thirty of his men. The main body he had left under old Hubert on the other side of Blackpool. He was aching for a sight of the outlaws, and deemed our chances of encountering them again better than those along the line he had been guarding. Sir Geoffrey had grown brown and sturdy in the summer just past, and had added near an inch to his stature. Now he handled his cross-bow like a skilled archer, and was soon in eager talk with Cedric over the practice at moving marks.

Our camp was made in a fair and pleasant glen, some two or three miles from Blackpool. We had eaten of the bread and meat in our pouches, and sat at ease about our camp fires, my father having well seen to it that sentinels were posted against any sortie of the enemy. Suddenly one of these, half a furlong away in the wood, called out to us and pointed down a pathway to where it crossed a stream a bowshot below our camp. There were approaching two men in the Lincoln green, and bearing a cloth of white which had been tied to a rough pole standard.

"Ha!" cried Squire Dunwoodie, "here come two of the varlets with a message. We will hear it; and if we like it not, will hang them up to yonder limb."

"Nay!" cried my father, angrily, "we shall do no violence to bearers of a flag of truce, be they honest men or thieves. 'Tis like the Monkslayer begs for mercy; but whate'er his message, the bearers of it shall return to him unscathed."

The envoys now approached and, bowing low before Lord Mountjoy, delivered to him a folded parchment. My father bent his brows upon this for a moment, then exclaiming in wrath, bade me read it to the assembled company. These were the words of the scroll:

> "To Robert, Lord of Mountjoy, Geoffrey, Heir of Carleton and other worshipful lords and gentlemen:
>
> "Know that my men have this day taken prisoner, and now securely hold for ransom Elizabeth, Lady of Carleton with two of her attendants. Some three score of my greenwood rangers are now held captive by you, if indeed you have not already done violence upon them. These friends and followers of mine I now ask that you freely release, without injury or mutilation, and that they go free before the

sunrise of to-morrow. Also that you then withdraw all your armed forces from Blackpool Forest. Then shall the Lady and her attendants likewise depart without harm from me or mine. If so be you refuse my terms, then when the sun is one hour high you shall receive a messenger from me who will bear with him the left hand of the aforesaid Lady of Carleton. If by sunset of to-morrow my men have not been suffered to freely return, another messenger shall bring you the lady's right hand.

"My fastness you shall never take. If you attempt it, at the first alarm the prisoners shall die. Enough is said to make plain my will. Those who have had dealings with me will tell you that my word for good or for ill I always keep.

"William of Tyndale,
Called by some the Monkslayer."

"Oh, the murderous varlets!" cried Sir Geoffrey; and I thought it no shame to him that tears streamed down his face, "they will cut off her hands. 'Twere better far that they slew her outright. Oh! to have that bloody villain for a moment within sure aim I would willingly die the instant after."

"How could she have been taken?" asked Lord Mountjoy.

"I mind me now," replied Geoffrey, wringing his hands in misery, "she ever went on Saturdays to tend my brother's grave at Lanton, two miles from our gates and on the forest's edge. She was used to take an ample guard; but to-day I have taken nearly all our men-of-arms for this expedition. She liked it not that I should come; and now she has ventured forth without escort and to my everlasting sorrow. Oh, that *bloody* villain!"

"Hush, Sir Geoffrey," said my father quickly, his face working in sympathy with the lad's sore distress, "they shall not harm thy lady mother. If need be, and no other way will serve, we will e'en release our prisoners and thus pay her ransom."

A mutter of discontent from some of the other leaders followed this, and Dunwoodie spoke full surlily:

"Seven of my good yeomen have already been slain in this quarrel; divers of our friends have lost men also, and Lord Pelham hath been borne homewards with an arrow wound that came near to being mortal. Shall we have nothing for all this but the freeing of these varlets?"

"What would'st thou do then, Dunwoodie,—leave the Lady of Carleton in the hands of the outlaws?"

Dunwoodie only growled in reply; and soon my father spoke again, this

time to the outlaw messengers:

"Go to your chief," he said, "and say that we consider his offer, but that if the Lady of Carleton or her attendants be harmed one whit, we will hunt him and all his followers to the death e'en if that hunting takes a thousand men and a year's campaigning. Let him look to it."

The messengers bowed again and made their way into the deeps of the forest. My father and the nobles that were there gathered about the camp fire in deep discussion of this sore dilemma.

CHAPTER VIII—"THE FORTRESS OF THE MONKSLAYER"

Cedric plucked at my sleeve and drew me aside.

"Thou and Sir Geoffrey come with me a little," he whispered, "I have somewhat to say on this."

Quickly I sought out Geoffrey, and led him away into the bracken in which Cedric had already disappeared. A bow-shot away from the camp we came up with him.

"Sir Richard," he said, speaking far more quickly than was his wont. "I have a thought of the whereabouts of this fastness that the robber speaks of in his letter."

My heart leaped within me. "Hast thou, Cedric?" I cried. "If any one of all our company should know, it would be thou who art native to these woods and knowest them as the very deer that run them."

"Aye," he replied shortly, "I believe 'tis not two miles hence. What say'st thou? Shall we reconnoiter?"

"With all my heart," I answered.

Geoffrey drew his cross-bow cord and placed a bolt in groove. "Lead on, Cedric," he said in a low voice. "I will follow thee if 'tis to a lion's den."

"Come then," replied Cedric, and moved away through the underwood.

He took a roundabout course to avoid our own sentries and their questions which might be hampering. In five minutes we had passed the line where a little ravine ran between the posts of two of the archers who stood on guard, and were

hurrying through the wood, crouching for shelter behind trees and rocks and crossing the more open spaces in stooping runs lest we encounter the arrows of the outlaws. We saw none of our enemies, however, and in an hour were on a deeply wooded hillside amidst huge rocks and brawling streams, half a league and more from our camp fires.

Now we knew from the added caution of our leader that we approached the spot he suspected as the fortress of the outlaws. He crouched and crawled like a serpent, and fully as silently, turning to us from time to time to lay a finger on his lips. At last he paused at the foot of a huge old oak that yet bore most of its leaves, and motioning us not to follow, quickly drew himself up among the branches.

For half a minute he lay on a great limb six yards above the ground and peered obliquely down the hillside at a point where we could see naught but a little stream that issued from between huge ledges. Then his face lighted up of a sudden, and he looked down to us and beckoned us to join him.

This we managed with no more noise than might well be covered by the rustling of the oak leaves, and soon lay on the limb beside Cedric and, peering out betwixt the branches, beheld that to which his finger pointed.

There was a narrow pathway which led up between the ledges; and, at a bend in this where they were concealed from any in the wood below, stood two tall archers in Lincoln green, with axes in their belts, long bows in hand and arrows ready notched. They neither saw nor heard aught of us, and we might have fired on them with goodly chance of slaying one or both; but Cedric now motioned us down to the ground again and soon joined us beneath the tree.

Without a word he retraced his steps through the forest; and by sundown we stood again amongst the ferns in the place where he had first revealed his thought. Then he spoke again:

"'Tis e'en as I thought. The Monkslayer hath his fastness in a wide cavern at the head of yonder gully. There is no approach save by that winding path you saw where half a dozen men might well stop a thousand. He thinks to guard my Lady Carleton there until her ransom be paid. And whether even then he will let her go unharmed we know not."

Sir Geoffrey ground his teeth in rage.

"Hast thou any plan?" I asked of Cedric.

"Aye," he replied, "though 'tis something ticklish; and if it fail, 'twill be an ill chance indeed."

"Say on, Cedric," said Geoffrey, eagerly.

"This is my thought," said Cedric, "we have till to-morrow's sunrise before any harm shall befall thy lady mother. Now, it would be disastrous to attack the fastness openly; but it may be that with two score of swordsmen, creeping

on them just before the dawn, we can take them by surprise. Your archer is all at disadvantage in fighting at arm's length; and if such a force can reach the cavern's mouth, I warrant we snatch away the prisoners almost before they are aware. The cave is broad but not deep. I remember it full well. There is no room in it for hiding."

"But Cedric!" I cried, "how shall we reach the cave's mouth without alarm? Hast thou forgotten the two sentries in the lower pathway?"

Cedric smiled broadly.

"And hast thou forgotten, Sir Dickon, the oak tree from which we spied them but now? Old Marvin and I together shall care for the sentries."

I drew a deep breath as I caught the full working of his plan. "Cedric," I said, "thou wilt never remain a simple squire. Thou hast a head as well as an arm. The King hath need for such in many places of trust."

"Let us first make this plan succeed," replied Cedric evenly, though I could see that my words had warmed him to the heart. "Now shall we tell Lord Mountjoy?"

"Aye," said I, "let us have him from the camp at once. I warrant you he'll kindle at our news. And he knows which of our swordsmen will carry themselves best in such a venture."

"And I have twenty men of Carleton here that can be trusted," put in Geoffrey.

"Right," said Cedric, "'twill make us amply strong. We must have no blunderers, though, for look you, some of these greenwood men have ears that can hear a twig break at two hundred paces. We must urge Lord Mountjoy to hold all at a safe distance till the signal."

Two hours after the midnight we set out through the forest for the storming of the robber fastness. Cedric, as pathfinder, was in the lead, followed close by Lord Mountjoy, Sir Geoffrey and me. After us, and treading most cautiously, 'mongst the leaves and brush, came old Marvin, the archer, and thirty chosen swordsmen of Mountjoy with a score or more of Geoffrey's men.

There was no moon; and the faint stars gave but little light in the forest deeps. Our way lay, as often as not, over steep and rocky slopes where our faces were torn with thorns and our legs bruised against the unseen rocks.

We had made little more than half of our way to the outlaw stronghold when Lord Mountjoy, in coming down a streamlet bank in the darkness, stepped heavily on a stone that rolled beneath his weight, and went to the ground with his right foot twisted under him. He gave a groan of pain, yet in an instant was up again to resume his march. But then 'twas found this could not be. His ankle had been most sorely wrenched, and would not at all endure his weight. He sank down again on a leafy bank, and called us to him. Amidst half stifled groans and

grumblings at his ill fortune he declared he could not move from thence without assistance. There was no help for it; he must await our return. Therefore he gave o'er to me the leadership of the venture. We left with him two stout men-at-arms, and went quickly on, for now it seemed the sunrise could not be long in coming.

At the fourth hour of the morning we lay by the streamlet bed, two hundred paces from the robbers' sentry post in the rocky passage. Cedric and old Marvin had left us to climb the hillside by another route and gain the branches of the great oak tree. Already there was a grayness in the dark that told of the coming dawn. Half an hour passed, and by little and little the trunks of the trees grew more clearly to be seen and we could well make out each other's faces. Roosting wild fowl roused themselves, and flew away with a clatter of wings. We knew that Cedric and Marvin awaited the daylight to make sure their aim. At last, on the top of a tall tree above me, I spied a beam of sunlight.

Immediately, as it seemed, there came from the oak tree the call of an owl, twice repeated. This was the signal for which we waited; and we sprang up together and ran, as silently as might be, toward the pathway entrance. We gained it unmolested, and with Geoffrey and me in the lead, quickly came upon the bodies of the sentries. Cedric and Marvin, from their post in the tree, had well done their work. The sentinels had perished silently, each with a bolt through his skull.

We rushed forward; and now some of our arms rang against the stones; and there was a cry from above us. This was no time for stealth and creeping. On we went with a rush and with a clatter of heels on the rocks of the path and of steel against steel as we jostled one another in the race.

In a moment we were at the cavern's mouth; and found a score of the robbers on their feet to meet us. Arrows whizzed among us and one or two men fell, mortally hurt. Geoffrey let fly his bolt at a tall villain that stood in his path, and shot him fair between the eyes. Then I saw no more for I was face to face with the outlaw chief, and our swords flashed fire.

He still wore his steel breastplate, which I believe he had not laid aside that night; and this well matched the shirt of woven mail that had stayed two or three arrows which had otherwise laid me low. I felt taller and stronger at that moment than e'er before in my life; and my sword seemed a very plaything in my hands, like that of the Frenchman, De Latiere, who had so nearly done to death my father at the court at Shrewsbury. The outlaw was no novice with the sword, as I who had once before crossed weapons with him, could well testify. But almost at the outset I brought to bear the play that, with my father's help, I had all that summer been perfecting. A swinging feint at the forearm turned itself in mid-air to a flashing thrust straight at his unguarded throat. I pierced him through and through, and he fell and died at my feet.

Looking about me, I saw most of the outlaws dead or dying and the remainder being fast bound as prisoners. Young Sir Geoffrey of Carleton had dropped his cross-bow on the ground and stood with his mother's arms firmly clasped about his neck the while he whispered somewhat in her ear. At her side her two handmaids stood unharmed and loudly weeping for joy.

As I stood looking, well content, at this spectacle, the Lady of Carleton suddenly loosed her son and ran toward me. In an instant I too was clasped in a warm embrace.

"Richard of Mountjoy," she cried, "thou and thine were my son's friends and rescuers, and now mine also. This day's deeds bespeak thee far better than any words. Heaven is my witness, I believe thou art a true man and hast spoken the truth as to thy dealings. All that we can do to serve thee shall be done. From this day forth and forever there shall be peace and love betwixt our house and thine."

CHAPTER IX—CHURL AND OVERLORD

'Twas a year and more after the overthrow of the Monkslayer in Blackpool Forest and the killing or scattering of most of his band that my father, the Lord of Mountjoy, with my lady mother and myself and Cedric the Forester, now my accredited squire, sat one day in the hall of Mountjoy talking of the news that had that day come in. There had been, it seemed, a most desperate and bloody revolt of the churls on the lands of Sir Hugh DeLancey, some ten leagues to the south of us. A hundred or more of the peasantry with some apprentices and hangers-on at the village, armed with axes, clubs and scythes, had taken the manor by surprise in the night, killed Sir Hugh and half a dozen of his men in the hall, driven out the lady, then sacked the place and burnt it to the ground.

We were fair horror-struck at such lawless and brutal doings; and for a time we vied with one another in calling vengeance down on the leaders of that guilty crew and in plans for assisting in their punishment. But in the midst of this an archer came from the courtyard with the word that one of Sir Hugh's men-at-arms, who had been wounded in the onslaught, had managed to get him to horse

and away after the death of his master, and was even now at the gate asking the hospitality of Mountjoy. My father at once gave orders for his welcome; and soon the man, who, after all, had escaped with wounds of no great moment, was sitting at our board with meat and drink before him. When his hunger and thirst were abated, he told us the tale of the churls' revolt in a somewhat different seeming.

Sir Hugh DeLancey, though a loyal follower of the King, a resolute punisher of outlawry, and oft a comrade of my father's at the jousts and in the battle line, had been a hard master to all his men in kitchen and hall and a heavy-handed overlord to the peasantry about him. Many a one had muttered curses after him when his back was turned; but he was ever quick with riding whip, or oaken cudgel at need, so that almost none dared gainsay him. Now it seemed that but the day before he had sent his steward to the cottage of Oswald, a farmer of his demesne, to say that Oswald was to make ready to receive for the night two of the grooms of Lord Westerby who were to accompany their master on a two-days' deer hunt in Sir Hugh's forests. By ill hap it chanced that Dame Margery, Oswald's wife, was ill-a-bed at the time, and appeared to be nigh unto her death; and Oswald sent back the word to his master that on this account he could not receive the two men that were to be quartered on him. The steward, however, held an old grudge against Oswald; and so, returning to his master, spoke but the half of Oswald's answer, saying only that the farmer refused to have the grooms in his cottage.

When Sir Hugh heard this, he flew into a rage, called for his horse and rode to Oswald's door, followed at a little distance by this retainer who now told us the tale. Arrived before the cottage door, he drew his sword, and, taking it by the blade, pounded with might and main with the butt on the panel. Oswald came forth, and, angered by this unseemly noise at the door of what would soon be a house of mourning, spoke roughly to his liege lord, requesting him to withdraw and leave the dying in peace.

Sir Hugh's own choler was so high that 'tis doubtful if he sensed the meaning of Oswald's words, for he answered with a command to throw the door wide, as he would take the cot forthwith to stable his horse within, and it should be seen who was master on the lands of DeLancey. Oswald stood immovable, and as the knight advanced on him laid hold of a firewood stick to dispute his way. At this Sir Hugh struck right madly with the weapon which he still held by the blade. By a most unhappy chance the broadsword hilt came down, full force, upon the farmer's temple, and in an instant he was stretched dead at the feet of his master. Then Sir Hugh took horse again and rode back to the manor.

Poor Dame Margery set up a piteous outcry, and soon there came two or three of the neighbor folk who heard her broken tale of the encounter. Ere night the bitter news was on every tongue within miles of DeLancey Manor; and when

at dark the word went round that Margery had died also, a vengeful band soon formed itself, and those bloody deeds were done of which the earlier news had come to us.

Scarce had the DeLancey man finished his tale and been taken to his lodging where the leech should tend his hurts when a messenger rode up to our court-yard gate and demanded admittance in the name of the Lord High Constable. He brought us the news that the Constable was already in the saddle and with half a hundred lances at his back was riding to DeLancey Manor for the quelling of the mutiny and the punishment of Sir Hugh's murderers. It seemed, however, that the Lord Constable had no archers with him and feared they might be sorely needed in the fighting to come. Therefore he asked of Lord Mountjoy that he send with the messenger half a dozen mounted cross-bow men,—men who could strike a fair target at two hundred paces; and he promised to reward bountifully any such who should do the Crown good service.

At this Lord Mountjoy turned to Cedric, saying:

"Now here's the chance, Cedric, my lad, for thee to earn both gold and honor. Wilt thou pick five more Mountjoy cross-bow men and ride with them 'neath the Constable's banner?"

But with a countenance of a sudden grown something pale, Cedric made reply:

"Good my lord, I pray you lay not your commands upon me to that effect. This expedition likes me not."

"How now!" exclaimed my father, "this is a new temper for thee, Cedric. Thou'rt ever ready to be where shafts and quarrels fly. Surely thou'rt not frighted of peasants' clubs and scythes."

"Nay, my lord. But for this fighting I have indeed no stomach, and 'tis like I should make but a poor soldier in the Constable's train. I pray you, if Mountjoy must furnish archers for this work, let some other lead them."

My father's face grew very red. He leaned far over the table toward Cedric, and seemed about to speak full loud and angrily. Then bethinking himself, he turned again to the Constable's messenger, and said:

"Return thou to the Lord Constable with Mountjoy's compliments; and say that within the half hour six good cross-bow men will set forth from here, and will o'ertake him on the road long before he reaches DeLancey Manor."

The messenger bowed and withdrew. Soon we heard his horse's hoofs on the drawbridge. Then Lord Mountjoy sent for one of the older of the Mountjoy archers from the court-yard below, and gave to him the commission just refused by my obstinate squire. This accomplished he turned again to Cedric, with a heavy frown on his brow, and said:

"Now tell us, if thou wilt, sirrah, why this sudden showing of the white

feather. 'Tis not like thee, I'll be bound, to shrink from any fray, whether with knight or clown, or to shame me as thou hast before the Constable's messenger. What terrifies thee now in the thought of this rabble?"

"I have no fright of them, my lord. Rather I wist not to have any hand in their punishment for a deed which, lawless though it be, still had the sorest provoking."

Lord Mountjoy gazed at the youth in amazement. My mother and I caught our breaths and one or the other of us would have interposed a word to blunt the edge of such wild-flung talk; but my father burst out again, and in a voice that echoed through the house:

"And would'st thou then let the murderers of my friend go free of punishment for that he had struck down a churl that refused him entrance to a house on his own domain?"

"The man did but defend his right," returned the Forester, steadily. "The house was his, against all comers, e'en his liege lord, till he had been duly dispossessed."

Such rebel doctrine had ne'er before been heard in Mountjoy Hall. 'Twas little wonder that my father's face grew purple with wrath as he shouted:

"And where gettest thou such Jack Clown law as that? Is it from the books of chronicles thou hast learned to pore over by the hour, or from the monks at Kirkwald that lend them to thee?"

"Nay, my lord, 'tis from the ancient Saxon law that ne'er hath been abrogated in England, though many a time o'erridden. 'A freeman's house is his sole domain though it be no more than a forester's cot.'"

Lord Mountjoy had risen and now stamped back and forth.

"Ne'er abrogated, forsooth! But it well should be. This is no law or custom for the descendants of the nobles that landed with William the Conqueror. 'Tis of a piece with the insolence of the churls on Grimsby's lands, who would have a magistrate of their own choosing forsooth, to try their causes withal—reaching up to snatch the reins of governing from their lawful masters. What do such clowns know of law or governing? When did ever such make shift to guide or protect a state?"

"Those same chronicles, my lord, of which you spoke but now, tell us of a republic of Rome, where commoners ruled the city, and that that city grew so great in power as to rule half the world and more."

My father gazed grimly at the youth who dared thus to question his wisdom; but for the moment he had naught to say, and Lady Mountjoy seized the chance to exclaim:

"Oh! in those chronicles there is a bonny tale of the saving of the city by the voice of geese. I will fetch them and read it you."

Lord Mountjoy, not thus to be put aside, made an impatient gesture, and was about to take up again the argument when a knock was heard on the door of the hall, and a maid announced that Old Marvin, the archer, craved speech with Lord Mountjoy. Glad enough was I to see him admitted, for this quarrel that had flamed up so suddenly between my father and my friend and squire was a bitter thing to me and to my lady mother. More than once had Cedric saved my life in battle and skirmish; and Lord Mountjoy himself had stood forth as his champion when King Henry condemned Cedric to be hanged for the killing in fair fight of young Lionel of Carleton. Of all the Mountjoy retainers, Cedric had the steadiest hand and the clearest head. I had often prophesied that unless I rose in honors and preferment faster than I could rightly expect, I should not long be able to retain such a youth as a simple squire. But now I seemed like to lose him before ever my spurs had been won and he to part from us in bitterness.

As Cedric was the most valued among the younger retainers of our house, so was old Marvin, the cross-bow man, among the elders who had followed first my grandfather, then my father to the wars. His wondrous skill with his weapon had done yeoman service on many a field, and finally had struck down the old Gray Wolf, Lord Carleton in the midst of the desperate assault he made on the walls of Mountjoy. For two years now Marvin and his good wife had enjoyed the cottage and six acres of the Millfield, where we hoped he might have many years of peace as some measure of requital for a lifetime of toil and danger. 'Twas not likely that Lord Mountjoy, in the angry mood of the moment, would have admitted any other of his followers; but Marvin was a man of honor and privilege in Mountjoy Hall.

As soon as Marvin had entered, my mother rose and, calling Cedric to her, found some duty upon which to employ him, so that he left the hall, and was seen no more till late at night. Meanwhile the old archer had explained to us that a message had just come to him from his brother who was a forester on the lands of Lord Morton, a day's journey to the north. Marvin had not seen his brother for twenty years; and when last they parted it was in some coldness; but now the other, who was a few years older than Marvin, was lying sick in his cottage at Morton, and asked his brother to come to him that they might be reconciled ere he died. He offered, if Marvin would come and stay with him to the end, to settle upon him as his heir any goods or savings he might have. Marvin now craved leave to join a merchants' caravan which was just setting forth in that direction, that he might comply with his brother's last request.

On hearing Marvin through, my father instantly gave his leave, and ordered furthermore that a good horse from the Mountjoy stables be placed at his disposal. Thereupon our faithful old retainer bade us a hasty good-by, for the caravan was already on the road; and we wished him a safe return.

My mother and I did hope and plan that Lord Mountjoy might easily forget the dispute he had with Cedric; and to that end found means to keep Cedric busily employed through the following morning; and at the midday meal did turn the talk toward the great tournament that was soon to be held at Shrewsbury. But some Imp of Mischief had his way at last, for at mid-afternoon my father entered the hall and found Cedric by the fireside, deep in the great book of chronicles. This was enough to bring to mind the heresies that Cedric had found therein; and in a moment all the anger of the day before flamed up again. Soon Lord Mountjoy was shouting in his wrath, declaring that the nation went to the dogs where curs and clowns were not duly subject to their lawful masters, and that if Cedric would mend his fortunes, he must first cast out such folly from his mind. Cedric replied, in lower tones indeed, but by no means meekly, upholding what he called the rights of English freemen to household and to peaceable assembly and to trial, when accused, by juries of their peers. At last my father checked his speaking, and said slowly and in cold anger:

"I tell thee, sirrah, thou'lt mend thy clownish ways of thinking if thou'rt to remain in Mountjoy Hall. We'll have no rebel firebrands—no ale-house ranters with their crazy mouthings,—stirring up our yeomanry through thee. While I hold the fee of Mountjoy, every man-jack in cot or in castle must be a loyal subject of the King and of his liege lord."

At this my squire made a low bow and said:

"I thank you then, my lord, for all your kindness, and will say farewell. I can say naught but the truth for either friend or foe."

"Cedric!" cried my mother, "thou canst not mean it. Think what Mountjoy means to thy fortunes; and think again of the good-will we all bear thee. Say to Lord Mountjoy that those were but thoughtless words, and be our man again."

Cedric shook his head, but trusted not his voice to speak. Thereat my father drew from his pouch a purse of gold and offered him.

"Thou hast given the Mountjoy right loyal service. Take this in token."

But Cedric again shook his head.

"Nay, my lord, such service as I gave was not for gold, and I cannot receive it. With your leave, I will take the steed that was the Carleton's, and since called mine, and ride away from Mountjoy where my words and thoughts are dangerous."

More talk there was and further urgings from my mother and from me; but Cedric's will remained unmoved. Lord Mountjoy paced back and forth before the hearth with hands clasped behind his back and with a deeply furrowed brow. The Forester bowed low again and left the hall; and soon thereafter we heard the tramp of his horse on the drawbridge. Then I took me to the battlements and watched my loyal squire and comrade till his figure grew dim and disappeared

on the road that lay to the south and east, toward London town.

Three mournful days went by. Word came that the peasantry of DeLancey Manor had been herded up by the Constable and his lancers, and that two of the ringleaders had been hanged. Although my father gave the messenger who brought this news a broad piece of gold, it seemed to bring him but little cheer to know that the slayers of his friend had met their punishment. There was but little talk in Mountjoy Hall; the rain fell dismally without; the days were dark and cold; and e'en our good log fire seemed powerless to brighten them.

Then came, hard riding, a messenger from the Lord of Morton. He bore a letter from his lordship to my father; and filled it was with direful news. Old Marvin of Mountjoy had been sorely wounded at Morton in some fray for which Lord Morton blamed no other than his own son, who, it seems, had perished in the fighting. Lord Morton wrote in noble fashion of his grief that our retainer should have come to harm through any of his house, and said that Marvin had the best of care at Morton, and that, so soon as he should be sufficiently recovered, he should be borne to Mountjoy in a litter, and that all of the goods of his brother who had lately died should be honorably bestowed upon him.

The letter was brief withal; and when my father had finished reading it to us we yet remained sore puzzled at this happening. We turned again to the old serving man who had brought the message, and him Lord Mountjoy questioned sharply:

"Know'st thou aught of this affair, my man, save what is set forth in this letter?"

"Aye, my lord," he answered heavily, "much of this sad work I saw. 'Twas an ill time indeed, for my Lord of Morton is far gone in years, and now this misfortune hath robbed him of his only son and heir."

"Tell us of it, I pray thee," said my father, eagerly, "if so be thou canst do so with full loyalty to thy house."

"Nay. My Lord Morton conceals naught. It was Sir Boris, his son, that was to blame, and he denies it not. Lord Morton is an upright man and a just; but for years he hath tried in vain to curb the wildness of young Sir Boris. Drink and dice have been the young lord's ruin as of many a better man before. Only a fortnight since, Lord Morton forbade him, on pain of his worst displeasure, to bring any dice, those tools of the Devil, into Morton Hall. More than that, he drove from the very door two of the young bloods from Shrewsbury who had been the young lord's boon companions in drinking and gaming."

"But how did this touch our Marvin? He was not lodged in Morton Hall, I trow."

"Nay, my lord. Marvin came three days ago to the cottage in Morton Wood where his brother, the forester, lay in his last illness. 'Twas none too soon, i' faith,

for hardly more than a day later, Old Gilbert breathed his last. That was toward sundown; and Marvin, who had been joined by some stranger lad, prepared to spend one more night in the cottage to look after his brother's body, which they planned to bury on the morrow. This I knew, for my Lord Morton had sent me there for word of the forester; and I brought back the news to the Hall.

"A little later I had commands from young Sir Boris to join him in his hunting lodge in the wood, for that he should meet some friends there in the evening, and I should wait on them with food and drink. I well knew that this was but a trick to set at naught the orders of my Lord Morton; and now I have sorrow that I did not instantly acquaint him with it. But Sir Boris was a willful man and very ill to oppose; so I obeyed him, thinking that 'twas better there should be at the lodge one man at least of sober head than that the party should be served by some of our young kitchen knaves who think of naught themselves but drink and lawless living.

"But alas! that night's revel was far worse than ever I had thought. There was young Damian of Lancaster, Sir Henry Walcott and Guy De Montalvan—roistering and dissolute blades all of them—and two or three more whose names I knew not. I had brought a fair venison pasty to the lodge; but for this they nothing cared. 'Twas the love of drink and gaming that brought them there; and the fires were scarce lighted and the table spread ere they had broached a cask of wine and the dice were rattling on the boards. Their gaming soon was fast and furious; and the stakes grew ever higher. Young Boris at first won nearly every cast, till his pouch was bulging with gold pieces; but by ten o' the clock his luck had turned and he lost and lost. All his winnings went, then all the gold he had or could borrow. Next he wagered the suit of armor which had been his father's gift when he was knighted, then the great white horse which bore him in the tourney. In another hour all of these were lost and young Guy de Montalvan was richer far than e'er he had deserved. By now all of them were much the worse for wine; and when Sir Boris wished to continue the play when he had naught more to wager, they disputed him with oaths.

"Then my young master bethought him for a space whilst the others played on regardless. At last he burst out with a shout:

"'I know the whereabouts of gold that is of right the Morton's. Gilbert, the old churl who was our forester, hath died this day. At his cot he had, I doubt not, store of gold pieces which my father and I have given him from time to time. Now I have need of them, and will proceed to take what is mine own. Who follows me?'

"There were shouts and laughter at this and clapping of hands. Sir Boris started up and, sword in hand, ran out the door. Then before I could say or do aught to stay them, the whole rioting crew had seized cloaks and weapons

and were streaming forth into the forest on the way to Gilbert's cottage. I left the lodge and ran with all my might along the path to the castle to arouse Lord Morton. But 'twas half a mile and more, and when I reached there my master was deep in sleep. He roused him up at once, and soon, with half a dozen stout men-at-arms at his back, was running through the wood to put a stop to those mad doings.

"But alackaday! he was too late to do aught but view the scene of ruin and dishonor to his house and to gather up the bodies of the slain and those who lay in wounds and blood. The rest of the tale I had from old Marvin himself as I tended him but yesterday; and piteous it was, not for him only, who will recover of his hurts, but for all of us who love the name and fame of Morton.

"'Twas near midnight when he and the stranger youth who were lying on the floor, covered with their cloaks were roused by blows of sword hilts that rang upon the door and by shouts and drunken yells. The body of old Gilbert lay upon the bed; and doubtless this din and cursing at such a time struck horribly on Marvin's ears.

"'Who art thou, and what wilt thou have?' he shouted.

"'Sir Boris of Morton,' came the answer, 'get up, thou churl and open the door.'

"'Not for thee nor any man in such guise as this. Know'st thou not that Gilbert, the forester, lieth dead here? Go thy ways, I pray thee, and leave this house in peace.'

"But at this there were more yells and calls and louder smiting on the door. Then spake the stranger youth:

"'Go thy ways, whoe'er ye be. We be two armed men, and will suffer none to enter here this night.'"

"Well and bravely spoken!" exclaimed my father, "'twas a well-born youth, I warrant thee."

"Nay," answered the old servant, "he wore the hodden gray. But gentle or simple, he soon was forced to make good his words or swallow them, for my young master and his crew withdrew them for a brief space, then came rushing all together, bearing a huge log which they employed for a battering ram. At the very first thrust, it broke down the cottage door with a horrid crash. Then those that bore it instantly drew swords and poniards and essayed to enter in its wake.

"Old Marvin, it seemed, had his cross-bow ready drawn; and he shot young Montalvan through the face at the first onslaught. The stranger youth fought with broadsword, and well and truly too. He had at first some vantage in the shadow in which he stood; but soon the rioters were all around him. He felled one of them with his very first stroke; but then Sir Boris came opposite him, striking and cursing like a madman. Marvin was overthrown and sorely wounded, and

still the youth fought on, beset by four of his enemies at once. In a moment he had thrust Sir Boris clean through the body, and an instant after, fell, wounded to the death."

OLD MARVIN HAD HIS CROSS-BOW READY DRAWN, AND HE SHOT YOUNG MONTALVAN THROUGH THE FACE AT THE VERY FIRST ONSET

"Oh! By all the Saints!" cried Lord Mountjoy, "in hodden gray, say'st thou? I warrant 'twas a disguise, and that he was of noble strain. He could not have better died had he been a Huntingdon or a Montmorency."

During this recital my mother's face had grown white as wax. Now she asked in halting whispers, midst gasps for breath that came near to being sobs:

"Had'st thou—no word—of his name and degree?"

"Nay, my lady," replied the old servant, "save that Marvin seemed to know him and called him Cedric."

"Cedric!" cried my mother and I at once, while my father turned deadly pale and sat down heavily on a bench near by.

"Cedric!" I shouted again, "'tis Cedric of Mountjoy,—none other."

Then my father found voice. 'Twas a low, weak tone—one scarce to be heard indeed:

"This is a judgment on me for my hardness. Cedric was right indeed. I see it clearly now that 'tis our own old Marvin whose rights were trampled on by those who called him churl and varlet. And what a battle the lad did make! And how he fell—like a prince of the blood beset by ruffians! Oh! Did he live to speak any words of farewell—to leave any message with Marvin or any other?"

"I know not, my lord," replied the old serving man, "when I left Morton Hall this morning, 'twas said that he still breathed, but that he could scarcely last the

day."

My father started up and gave a furious pull to the bell cord. The clangor thus provoked sent the chief of our serving men hurrying in.

"Tell the grooms to saddle Cæsar," shouted Lord Mountjoy, "and call Broderick and say that he and six armed and mounted men are to attend me. I ride at once to Morton."

"And I also," I cried, "Galvin, tell the grooms to make ready the black mare that I rode yesterday."

"And my horse also," shrilled my mother, the instant I was done. "I, too, will ride to Morton."

'Twas fifteen leagues to Morton Hall; and much of the road was rough and wild, with many a stony hill to climb and many a stream to ford. The half of the journey we made by the light of the great round harvest moon that sent its silvered rays near level through the forest. Hard we rode, indeed, and with little mercy on our mounts; and 'twas scarce four hours after we left Mountjoy when, piloted by the old Morton serving man, we dismounted before the door of Gilbert's cottage.

HARD WE RODE, INDEED, AND WITH LITTLE MERCY ON OUR MOUNTS

Praise be to the saints! We were not too late, for Cedric lay within, still breathing, though with closed eyes and with face of deathly paleness. Old Marvin lay on another couch hard by; and a leech and a nursing woman from Morton Hall were with them.

Marvin greeted us gladly, and seemed not surprised at our coming. His voice roused Cedric; and he looked upon us with knowing eyes and weakly ut-

tered words of welcome. Lord Mountjoy knelt on the ground at his side, and clasped his hand.

"Cedric," he whispered, painfully, "canst thou forgive me my words of harshness and my driving thee forth from thy home?"

Then a smile of great content o'erspread my comrade's face; his eyes grew brighter, and a faintly ruddy color came to his cheeks.

"Lord Mountjoy," he said, and his voice was far stronger than before, "I freely forgive you for any trifling slights you have offered. I pray you, make not too much of them."

"Thou wert right, after all," went on Lord Mountjoy, "in holding to the rights thy fathers had of old. I should well have known thou wert too staunch ever to be a breeder of trouble in the house of thy friends. Now would I give the half of my lands to have thee back, well and sound, at Mountjoy Hall."

Then Cedric smiled again, now broadly as of old.

"No such price as that shall you pay, my lord, for somewhat which shall be granted without price whatsoever. I have two deep wounds, forsooth, but little thought of dying. The good leech here knows not of the strength that a plain-living forester can muster when his friends come all these leagues to bid him be of good cheer. I will ride again beneath the Mountjoy banner, my lord, and that before the spring."

At that all three of us that had before knelt dry-eyed before his couch, began weeping copiously for very joy, and Old Marvin, from his bed offered up a prayer of thanksgiving. The leech now came forward, and closely noting the change in Cedric's face, added his assurance to the stricken youth's own testimony. Two hours later we came softly from the cottage where both our faithful men lay soundly sleeping. Into the forest the leech followed us to say that now the worst was past, and that he doubted not their full recovery.

CHAPTER X—THE PASS OF THE EAGLES

On a breezy autumn morning, while we made practice of arms in the courtyard, a herald from De Lacey, the Lord High Constable, rode over Mountjoy drawbridge.

He had an urgent message for my father, and the like for Sir Geoffrey, the young Lord of Carleton, Sir James Dunwoodie of Grimsby and all the other loyal knights and barons of our neighborhood. The Welsh had broken over the border once more; and under Rhys, their barbarous chief who styled himself King of Wales, were burning and ravaging through the Western Marches. Many miles of fair and fruitful land they had overrun; and now they lay before Wallingham, threatening that goodly fortress and all of those who had taken refuge within it with fire and sword.

The army of the Welsh was five thousand strong. They had driven the garrison of Wallingham within walls at once; and had they been as skilled in the use of mangonels and other enginery of siege as they were with the swords and javelins of their ancient custom, they would ere this have breached or scaled the walls and given the place over to massacre and the torch. But stout Sir Philip De Courcey still stood at bay; and now De Lacey was arming for his relief. The Constable had but five hundred horsemen; and of these seven score mail-clad knights, for the young king, Richard the Lion Hearted, so lately crowned, was gathering for the Crusade a vast array of the chivalry of England; and this left our Western Marches but lightly defended. So the Lord Constable was sending messengers far and wide, calling to his standard the knights and barons of the Western counties with all the mounted men that at a day's notice they could muster.

De Lacey had many times before met and scattered the bands of Welsh marauders. Now he meant to deliver such a blow as should break their power forever. He had sworn to drive them not only from the plain of Wallingham, but across the Marches and into their mountain fastnesses and to harry and slay them till not a score of the robbers remained under the skull-bone banner of their chief. To this end, he would accept no foot-soldiers, even as archers. His whole force must be mounted in order that the Welsh, on their tough little mountain horses might not escape as they had done after many another bloody raid.

On the following day there gathered under the Constable's banner at Hereford such an array of chivalry as I had ne'er before seen. Four hundred mail-clad knights were there, and near a thousand men-at-arms in good steel caps and braced and quilted leathern jackets and bearing the stout shields and heavy broadswords of their trade. Then there were twelve hundred and more of archers, mostly armed with cross-bows, but some with long-bows and cloth-yard shafts, some having quilted caps and jackets, but more being lightly clad in the foresters' Lincoln green or peasants' hodden gray. All, as by the Constable's command, were mounted in some sort, though truly some of the sorry old nags and hairy-legged plow-horses that they bestrode might have much to do to overtake one of the wiry and long-shanked Welsh who fled on foot, to say naught of their

ponies that could run all day without tiring on their moorland tracks and winding mountain ways.

Geoffrey, the young Lord of Carleton, with two hundred men, was at the meeting place when we arrived. Soon after came Dunwoodie of Grimsby, Lord Pelham, Lionel of Montmorency and the men of Mannerley, Whitbury and Gresham. By the Commander's order, each man had in his pouch store of bread and dried meat for three days' campaigning. Beyond that time, we must find our eating where we could. 'Twas mid-afternoon ere our force was assembled; but we took the road straightway, and by nightfall were encamped at Hardiston, half way to Wallingham.

For Geoffrey of Carleton, for myself, the Heir of Mountjoy, and my squire and comrade, Cedric of Pelham Wood, this was the first sight and sound of war on such a scale; and we were fairly lifted up by the thought of what the morrow would bring. Cedric and I had each nineteen years at Candlemas, and Sir Geoffrey but six months less. Many bloody frays had we seen in the petty warfare of our countryside with robber baron and with banded forest outlaws; and each of us already knew the pang of hostile steel. Cedric, indeed, was but lately recovered from the wounds he had a year before at Morton where he had been accounted as one dead. But the tramp of an army of mounted men and the sweet music of their clinking armor and weapons we heard for the first time that day. We rode near the middle of the line; and, glancing forward and back at the gallant train, that seemed a whole crusade on the narrow roads, could scarce believe that there existed anywhere an enemy that could stand before its charge. Our mail-clad knights alone, riding under the lead of the stern old Constable, seemed invincible. The Welsh, we knew, fought without defensive armor, save their bull's hide shields; and almost I pitied them for their nakedness when I thought of the terrible Norman spears and swords in the hands of men long trained in their skillful use and hardened by years of warfare. It seemed scarce fair indeed that knights and gentlemen should fight at such advantage. The arrows and javelins and e'en the sword strokes of their enemies would touch them not, while their own well-aimed blows would cleave through flimsy defenses and scatter wounds and death. Thus mused I in my youthful ignorance; but ere two days had passed I was both sadder and wiser. Never again will I pass such hasty judgment on the power of an enemy I have not surely tried.

Though both Sir Geoffrey and I were as yet knights by courtesy only, not having won our spurs, we were armed and equipped for the expedition like the older knights about us. Cedric also, though a yeoman born, wore a coat of woven mail, and had a good broadsword at his side. But slung upon his back the while was his steel cross-bow—his first and favorite weapon and the one with which he had such wondrous skill. He could strike a running hare more surely than I

could one that sat stock still beneath a bush; and he had managed to impart to a dozen and more of the Mountjoy archers some measure of his craft, so that 'twas acknowledged we had the best cross-bow men in the countryside.

Geoffrey of Carleton had gained much in the two years just past in breadth of shoulder and length of arm; and could now dispute with me on almost even terms with the foils or the wooden targes and broadswords of our martial play. I had already the height and reach of my father who had a name for bone and brawn and feats of knightly strength; and Cedric, though a handsbreadth shorter, had the shoulders and thighs of a smith. He could hang by one arm from a bough, and draw himself up to the chin; and I have seen him crumple a gold coin in his hand by way of making good his word when he had declared it over thin and light.

Though Cedric was born and had lived till his sixteenth year in the woodland cottage of his father, the forester of Pelham, his speech was not as that of the churls around us; and at Castle Mountjoy he had learned the ways of gentleness as readily as one of noblest blood. My lady mother was never aweary of lessoning such a pupil in the manners of a knight and gentleman; and now had reason to look with pride on her work. Withal Cedric ne'er forgot the class from which he sprung nor carried himself as a lord over them when given authority.

We made but a short night of it at Hardiston. By three o' the clock we were in saddle again, and pricking forward toward the plain of Wallingham. By sun-up we were within three leagues of the castle, and the Constable had sent forward light-armed scouts to bring us word of the siege. Then spake my father, with the freedom of an old comrade of the Constable's and veteran of many a hard campaign:

"Methinks, my lord, that Rhys and his Welsh rabble will ne'er await our coming on Wallingham Plain where they must needs fight with the castle in their rear and the danger of a sortie of the garrison. Beshrew me if they do not fly again across the Marches when they hear of our coming in force, and await another time to strike at undefended lands."

"By'r Lady! Mountjoy," returned the Constable, "I believe thou'rt right, and Rhys will never risk his thieving crew on a good wide field where sword and lance decide the day. But what would'st thou suggest? Can we do aught but ride for Wallingham as hard as may be?"

"Aye, my lord. There is a fork o' the road a bowshot hence where one track leads to Wallingham and the other to Egbert's Ford o'er a wide stream a league from the castle. 'Tis on the road to the Marches; and if we ride and hold it, we may there intercept the Welsh and cut them off from their retreat. If they leave not Wallingham, we can ride from thence and take them at vantage."

"Well said, Mountjoy, i' faith!" cried De Lacey, "prithee, Sir Richard of

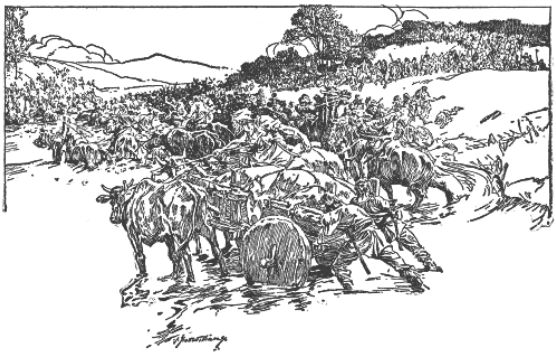
Mountjoy, ride forward and give the word to the vanguard to take the right turning. We'll come between the rogues and their retreat, and fight, mayhap, with the river at our backs. There'll be full many of them, I trust, that will never ride again for robbery and burning."

Mine errand with the vanguard was quickly done. Less than an hour thereafter we rode out of the forest in sight of Egbert's Ford. Then were Lord Mountjoy's words full justified for we saw before us, and but half a mile away, the whole army of the Welsh in full retreat on the road toward the Marches and the tangle of mountains and valleys beyond. Fortune smiled on our banners that morning; for indeed, had we foreknown our enemies' movements and timed our coming to the minute, it could not have better fallen out. As we emerged from the greenwood, half of the Welsh army had already crossed the stream; the water at the ford was filled with mounted men and bullock carts, laden with spoil and making their difficult way through the swift-flowing current; and the remainder of their forces still stood on the hither side, awaiting their turn for the crossing.

It needed not the eye of a great captain to discern our vantage in such a posture. As our knights and men-at-arms came forth on the field they set up a shout of joy full like that of unleashed hounds that see the boar started from his covert. Almost without a word from their chiefs, and without a moment's loss, they formed in line of battle. Then came the Constable's ringing word: "Forward for Saint George!" and the line rolled forward down the hill with a rush and roar like that of the great downfall of rock and earth and full-grown trees that I had once seen in the Western mountains.

My father and I rode at the head of the Mountjoy knights and men-at-arms, and not far from the Constable. Sir Geoffrey full gallantly captained the chivalry of Carleton and Teramore, and Lionel of Montmorency rode just beyond him, leading a hundred lances. Lord Mountjoy had named Cedric to lead the Mountjoy archers, five score strong; and I could see o'er my shoulder that they were the first of the bowmen to form their line and follow in the wake of the men-at-arms. Thus the army of the Constable poured down upon the luckless Welshmen in two thunderous, onrushing waves.

They made shift to meet our attack as best they might, facing us with stubborn courage indeed, but with little skill of the military art, and with a battle front that seemed more like a moiling and howling mob of rioters than an army under its lawful captains. If any noise e'er heard could have effected it, we might have been checked indeed, for, as we galloped down upon them, they set up a chorus of shrieks and yells that seemed like to split one's ears. Swords and maces seemed their principal weapons, with here and there a lance or a battle-ax, and mingled helter-skelter with their heavier arms, the bows and shafts of their archers. Their bows had not the length nor the power of those of our English foresters; and the



THE WATER AT THE FORD WAS FILLED WITH MOUNTED MEN AND BULLOCK CARTS, LADEN WITH SPOIL AND MAKING THEIR DIFFICULT WAY THROUGH THE SWIFT-FLOWING CURRENT

cloud of arrows they sent toward our mail-clad line had no more effect than as if a flock of sparrows had sought to check and thwart us.

Into that howling mob we rushed with leveled lances. Our horses were stayed by the very mass of the bodies of our enemies; and in a moment we were assailed, as it seemed, from all sides, by the survivors, some of them dreadfully wounded, but wielding swords and battle-clubs and javelins with a demon-like fury.

Their skill with these weapons was not to be despised; and, if they had no coats of mail to shield them, neither were their movements impeded by weight of armor. Hundreds of our men-at-arms and scores of knights fell in that struggle on the river brink. Victory was no such easy goal as I had thought.

Meanwhile the half of the Welsh army which was on the other side of the river, commanded by Rhys himself, essayed to re-cross and come to the aid of their comrades. They might well have succeeded, and mayhap found some means of outflanking us, had it not been for the watchfulness of Cedric of Mountjoy. He and our whole array of archers had been close behind us, striving to do their share by way of shooting between our bodies at the mass of Welshmen. But soon the tangle was such that their bolts seemed as like to slay friend as foe, and they had gradually desisted. Then Cedric caught sight of the Welsh entering the water on the farther side, and drawing the Mountjoy archers to the left of the main battle, began sending a stream of quarrels in their direction. The Lord Constable, having just then a moment's respite, saw what was toward, and sent word to

the other leaders of our bowmen to follow the tactics of the Mountjoy men. In a moment the air above the stream was filled with a cloud of bolts and shafts, and the waters became clogged with dead and dying men and horses. Such a rain of death and wounds was not to be endured by unprotected men. Soon the Welsh warriors were turning their horses' heads again toward the bank; and those that regained it, with their fellows who had not yet reëntered the ford, fell back to a safer distance.

Now the battle on the river bank went swiftly to its close. The struggling and yelling Welsh grew ever fewer, and our knights gained room for yet more deadly work with sword and lance. Soon the half of the Welsh forces that had occupied the hither bank had been destroyed or scattered, and our army was crossing the river in pursuit of Rhys and his remaining warriors who were riding for life toward the mountains in the West.

True to his sworn purpose, the Constable lost not a moment in the chase. The Welsh horses were fresher than ours that had already traveled far that day, and they were more lightly burdened, else we might have ridden them down and finished the work so well begun at Egbert's Ford. As it was, our enemies, by abandoning their spoils and lashing their ponies forward without mercy, managed to keep well beyond bowshot for the half a dozen leagues that lay between the Ford and the entrance of a narrow valley that led up into the mountains where they had so often before found safe retreat. Into this defile we rode at three o' the clock, cutting down or making prisoners of a dozen stragglers whose horses had failed them at the beginning of the upward road.

Without pause we spurred on up the stony pathway for a mile and more; then found the valley narrowing to a pass between high walls of rock. Through this the army of the Welsh had gone, leaving a guard of a hundred or more to stay our progress.

Our leader well knew the tactics fit for such a juncture. He halted his main force, and sent forward the archers,—the long-bow men under Simon of Montmorency, and those with cross-bows under Cedric of Mountjoy. Soon the defenders of the pass were whelmed with a cloud of arrows and quarrels. They sheltered themselves as best they might 'mongst rocks and trees; but the arrows came like rain, searching every cranny of the pass. In scarce half an hour the last of the Welsh rear-guard was slain or had fled, and the way was open before us.

The Constable left two hundred men-at-arms and archers, under an old and trusted knight, to guard the pass behind us; and we rode forward into the wide valley. The day was now far spent, and the sun had passed from sight behind the mountains that rose ever higher toward the West. The scattered oaks and firs and the great rocks that strewed the valley on either hand might well have sheltered an ambush; and we rode forward more slowly, with lines of skirmishers well to

the fore and to the right and left.

And now it seemed that Fortune who with the sun had smiled upon us all day long, withdrew her favor also, for we had traversed scarce a league of the rocky track along which Rhys and his army had fled when thick clouds obscured the narrow sky above us; thunder roared and rumbled in the mountain passes, and torrents of rain began to fall. The darkness swiftly enclosed us, and we had perforce to halt lest we should lose our way amongst the woods and rocks. There, drenched and chilled and worn with a day of riding and battle, we made bivouac and ate of the food in our pouches. Mindful of the skill and daring of the Welsh in night attacks, the Lord Constable posted double lines of sentinels; and we seized such sleep as we might, wrapped in our dripping cloaks and lying upon the grass and leaves.

At last, I for one, slumbered heavily; and it seemed but an hour ere our leaders roused us and we saw the black shadows of the mists around us turning gray with morning light. While we ate again of the bread and meat we carried, the Constable despatched two riders with a message to Sir Guy Baldiston at the pass, with commands to send back word to Wallingham of our whereabouts and our intent to pursue the ravagers still farther.

In half an hour we were again in saddle, and De Lacey was giving directions for our better ordering to guard against surprise upon the march, when one descried our messengers returning at full gallop and lying low upon their horses' necks as if in fear of arrows that might come from wayside rocks and trees. They rode indeed not like the soldiers of a victor's army but like men who are hunted and flee for their lives.

In a moment more they had attained our lines, their horses loudly panting with the labor of such galloping over rough and stony paths; and the foremost rider cried out to the Commander:

"Oh, my lord! Sir Guy and all his men are slain, and the Welsh have the pass again. We but narrowly escaped being taken ourselves."

The Constable sat on his great war-horse, gazing and frowning at the messenger for a length of time that an arrow, shot strongly upward, might have needed to come again to earth. Then he said, sternly:

"And how closely didst thou see all this?"

"My lord, we rode within a bowshot. 'Twas something dark and misty; and we knew not what was toward. The pass is filled with Welshmen; and they raise the skull-bone banner. 'Tis an army such as we encountered yesterday."

De Lacey glanced about him at his leaders.

"My lords and gentlemen: you hear what has chanced. Shall we attack again from this side or fare onward?"

"We must ride onward, my lord, and that quickly," answered Lord Moun-

tjoy, “we cannot force that narrow pass ’gainst such an army as our messenger describes. Doubtless they hold also the crags above; and from thence they can roll down rocks that would fell and crush any force that attempted it.”

“We saw many hundreds of them on the crags above,” put in the messenger.

“And what if we ride forward?” demanded the Constable. “Have we a clearer road on that side?”

“Aye, my lord,” returned my father, “once, years agone, I rode through this valley a hawking. There is another gateway, called the Pass of the Eagles, three leagues farther west. It is much broader than the other, and if we hasten, Rhys can scarcely gather a force that can hold it against us. Then beyond is the good wide valley of Owain, adown which, in ten hours hard riding we may gain the Marches once more.”

The Lord Constable gazed at the ground before him for a moment. Then he lifted his head and spake so that all around might hear.

“My lords: this Welsh freebooter hath shown himself a better general than I. He hath enticed us into this valley, and then hath closed the gate behind us, as one entraps a bear or wolf. The storm, it seems, hath given him respite; he fights in his own land, and doubtless the night hath brought many recruits to his banner. Now ride we on to force this other gateway ere he gather an army that can close that also. Forward, for Saint George.”

At the full trot we rode away, and for an hour and more we slackened not our speed. By the sides of the pathway, or crouching under crags on the hillside, we saw at intervals the huts of stones and turf of the Welsh mountain folk; but all stood silent and deserted with never a wisp of smoke from chimney or sight of woman or child.

When the sun was an hour high, the valley narrowed again around us; and we came in sight of the Pass of the Eagles. Then indeed we knew that if any of us returned alive from this adventure, ’twould be by the favor of all the Saints and by the utmost might of our arms. For the army of Rhys stood before us, drawn up in twenty ranks across the defile which was there of a furlong’s width. In the front rank stood the spearmen with the butts of their weapons firmly planted in the ground and the points held at the height of a horse’s breast; in the next the King and his sons, the leaders of tribes and all of those who bore the heaviest arms and iron shields; behind them, rank after rank of swordsmen and javelin throwers, and, rearmost, their archers with bows in hand and arrows ready notched.

The flanks of the Welsh array were protected by high and rocky slopes where scrubby oaks and thorns found scant foothold amidst the crags and where no horse could tread. On both sides of the valley where it narrowed to the pass were broken cliffs that not a mountain goat could scale. Beyond these lay the

heather-covered mountainsides and faraway rocky peaks where already snow had come.

At the word our men wheeled into line of battle, the armored knights in the van, in two open ranks, then the men-at-arms in three more of closer array. The archers were not to charge with us, but, with a dozen knights and a hundred men-at-arms under Lord Mountjoy, were to form a rearguard lest other bodies of the Welsh close in upon us. Both Sir Geoffrey and I had won favor in the Lord Constable's eyes by somewhat we had accomplished in the fighting at the ford; and now I led the forces of Mountjoy at his right and Geoffrey those of Carleton and Teramore on his left hand.

In a moment came the furious shock of battle and all the frightful scenes of the struggle by the river's edge—with the vantage now on the side of our enemies. Many of the steeds of our gallant knights transfixed themselves upon the Welsh lances; and their riders, brought to the ground, fell victims to swords or javelins or were crushed beneath the hoofs of our own oncoming ranks. But the line of spears was utterly broken; and the other knights and men-at-arms drove furiously into the mass before them. Swords and lances did their terrible work, and in the briefest time hundreds of our enemies had fallen. The Constable fought that day with a huge mace, and, swinging it about his head as it were a willow wand, he seemed like the great god Thor of the heathen worship of old.

But now for every two or three of the Welsh one of our knights or men-at-arms perished also. Some of the tribesmen, struck down by the swords of the riders, thrust upwards at our horses with swords and knives as we passed over them, and so cast down many a rider into the mêlée of dashing hoofs and glancing blades; and many times furious warriors, laying hold upon the riders, brought them to the earth and to speedy death. Their archers and javelin throwers aimed at our necks and faces; and though many of their shafts flew wide or even struck down their own, others found their marks indeed and added to our fatal losses.

From one desperate moment to another, for a length of time ever unknown to me, the struggle and the slaying went on unchecked. Our numbers grew ever fewer, and we were gaining scarce a yard of ground. For all the heaps of fallen, the Welsh fought on with undiminished fury; and 'twas evident that they would slay the last of us ere we could force the pass. Lionel of Montmorency had fallen with half his men, as also Dunwoodie and Sir William, his brother and heir. The Lord Constable himself was wounded, and, panting with fatigue and loss of blood, had dropped his mace to fight again with broadsword. Sir Geoffrey of Carleton had once saved him from the hands of a huge Welsh warrior who sought to drag him from his saddle; and now the two fought almost back to back in an ever narrowing circle of enemies.

Suddenly I saw and felt the tribesmen wavering and giving ground before

us, and became aware of a shower of cross-bow bolts that was falling among them and striking them down by hundreds. Looking up to see whence they came, I beheld Cedric of Mountjoy and half a thousand of his cross-bow men among the rocks in the promontory to the right, discharging their bolts as fast as they could lay them in groove and pouring a most deadly hail into the thick ranks of our enemies. 'Twas evident that Cedric had dismounted all his men and found some means to scale the cliffs and strike the Welsh in flank.

THE LEADER HAD HIS GREAT SWORD THRUST ASIDE BY CEDRIC'S BOW, THEN WAS SEIZED ABOUT THE WAIST AND HURLED TO THE ROCKS BELOW

Then I saw that a body of the enemy, hastily called from the rear-most ranks by the huge and red-haired Gruffud, son of Rhys, assaulted this position and sought to pull our archers from their posts of vantage. Climbing upward amongst the crags, they faced at closest range the deadly aim of the cross-bow men. Backward they fell by scores, their bodies crushing down those below them. Not a dozen came to grips with the archers. Of these the leader had his great

sword thrust aside by Cedric's bow, then was seized about the waist, lifted from the earth and thrown to the rocks below where he lay still with broken back.

With the fall of Gruffud, our men set up a mighty shout, and pressed the Welsh ever the harder. The deadly bolts still poured down from Cedric's vantage ground, but shifted ever their direction as we drove the enemy before us. The yells of the Welshmen, which had been those of victory and triumph, now changed to cries of despair. Hundreds turned and fled; and of these many cast down their weapons that they might run the faster. Soon the downward pathway ahead of us was filled with fugitives, and only a few bands of desperate warriors fought on, preferring death to such a defeat after victory had been almost within their grasp.

With the pass open before us, we paused not to pursue the Welsh into the rocky and wooded fastnesses where they had fled. Taking up our sorely wounded in such litters as we could hastily form, and those with less grave hurts behind the other horsemen, we reformed our column and rode away down the broad valley toward the Marches and the goodly fortress of Wenderley that Sir John Clarendon held for the King.

When the moon rose at the ninth hour of the evening of that day the Lord High Constable stood in the courtyard at Wenderley, surrounded by the lords and barons of his expedition and of the castle garrison. His wounds had been bathed and bandaged, but his face was white with the bloodletting and the fatigues of the day so that his friends were urging him to seek his rest. Yet for the time he put away their counsel, declaring that one duty yet remained. Young Geoffrey of Carleton and I with Cedric, my squire, had been summoned before him.

"Kneel down," he commanded, sternly. We obeyed in silence, and he drew his sword from its sheath and thrice struck the young Lord of Carleton lightly on the shoulder.

"Rise, Sir Geoffrey of Carleton," he said, "I dub thee knight. Be thou ever faithful, true and valorous as thou hast been this day."

Then I also received the strokes of the sword and words were pronounced that made me a knight and chevalier in verity.

Lastly, and to my great amaze, I heard the words:

"Rise, Sir Cedric De La Roche. I dub thee Knight of the Crag. The device on thy shield shall be an eagle in token of the spot where thy resource changed defeat to victory. Be thou ever faithful, true and valorous as thou hast been this day, and England hath gained a stout defender and King Richard of the Lion Heart a worthy support to his throne."

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CHAPTER XI—BY KIMBERLEY MOAT

After the Battle of the Pass we had a season of quiet at Mountjoy. King Richard had sailed on the Great Crusade, leaving his brother John as Regent; and the people of England, nobles and commons alike, learned that there was a far worse rule than that of stern old Henry of Anjou, for John Lackland, his younger son, had at once the greed of a tiger and the meanness of a rat. Many of the high places of Church and State were filled with his favorites—miserable creatures for the most part whose only merits were a ready complaisance to the wishes of their master and a measure of craft and subtlety in furtherance of his schemes. Sheriffs and bailiffs of a yet more contemptible strain hurried to do the bidding of these velvet-clad beggars and thieves, and honest and forthright men led a hard life indeed unless they were themselves high in power and of numerous following.

Among these last might be reckoned the Mountjoys and their friends and allies, the Carletons of Teramore. We were too strong and too valuable in the defense of the Western Marches to be meddled with save for the greatest cause; so the land for some leagues about us was in a measure free from the ills which now and again brought other portions of the Kingdom to the verge of rebellion.

Sir Cedric, as now we gladly styled him, was high in the councils of Mountjoy. My father consulted him as often as myself on the gravest questions; and Lady Mountjoy willingly spent uncounted hours in bettering his knowledge of polite and courtly ways and of those divers little matters of knightly bearing to which in our rough Western land we give mayhap too little heed. At the books, to her amaze, he soon had far outstripped her. An uncle of his was one of the monks at Kirkwald Abbey, and a famous Latin scholar. For a year past, Cedric had been making frequent journeys to the Abbey; and once we had old Father Benedict at Mountjoy for a month or more. For hours together they would pore over dusty and ancient tomes that made me ache with weariness but to look upon them. The first we knew, our Cedric was better at the Latin reading than any layman we had seen or heard of. History and chronicles were good meat and drink

to him; and often, with his head between the covers of a book, his dinner would be quite forgot but for my lusty calling.

Withal he was no pale bookworm, but a lusty and rollicking lad who in rough and tumble play could lay me on the broad of my back with scarce a minute's striving. At the sword-play I was ever his better, but his mastery of the cross-bow grew yet more wonderful as the seasons passed. Even the oldsters admitted that he equalled Marvin at Marvin's best. Already he had the name of the best cross-bowman in England; and I found that strangers to our county, who had heard nothing of the deeds of my father and all our noble forbears, had knowledge, nevertheless, of Mountjoy as the house to which Sir Cedric gave allegiance.

But I think the thing that warmed me most toward my former squire and constant comrade was the loyalty he ever had to the class of folk from which he sprung. Lord Mountjoy often gave to him authority over working crews at some necessary task on farm or highway or scouting parties of swordsmen and archers that rode the Marches to guard against the Welsh marauders. It would have been no wonder had such a sudden rise to title and preferment bred in a youth who had been born in a forester's cot a certain arrogance of manner and an overweening confidence in his own worth and deserts. But, by his own desire, the archers and men-at-arms of Mountjoy still addressed him as they had when his station was no higher than theirs; and though he could be quick and firm on occasion, he was never above listening to and profiting by the counsels of the elder men in buckram or in hodden gray. Nor did he forget the cottage in Pelham Wood which housed his old father and his small, tow-headed brethren. Since he had dwelt at Mountjoy Hall, scarce a month had passed without his riding thence and leaving with them some share in any guerdon he had won.

It was after such a journey that Cedric returned to the Hall one autumn evening in such a mood of silence and depression as I had never seen since those sad days when he quarreled with my father over the punishment due the churls of De Lancey Manor. At his supper he spoke no word, and ate and drank but little. My lady mother did anxiously inquire if he were ill, for we knew him well as a valiant trencherman, and he had ridden far in a frosty air. He put away her questionings with his usual courtesy, denying that aught ailed him; but me he could not so easily check, for I followed him to his room, and, finding him sitting with his face in his hands, demanded to know as friend and comrade what had turned his world awry.

"Sir Richard," he replied sadly, "hast ever had friend of thine flung into dungeon cell, there to lie at the pleasure of some low-living scoundrel?"

"Nay," I answered quickly, "this evil I have thus far 'scaped, though I well know 'tis common enough in these days, and many there be that suffer it."

"Of those I am one," replied Cedric. "And now I rack my head to know whether or not there be any possible help for it. Wilfrid, son of the farmer of Birkenhead, was my comrade and playmate since ever I can remember. We hunted and fished and swam together and willingly fought each other's battles when we were but little lads. Once he plunged in and pulled me from the Tarleton Water, when, far gone with cramp, I had twice sunken. His handling of the long-bow is well-nigh equal to my father's, and better than that of any youth I know. I had lately planned to bring him to Mountjoy and to say a word to thy father of his deserts."

"And who is it that now hath seized him?"

"'Tis that wry-mouthed and rat-eyed scoundrel, Bardolph, that lately hath been made King's Bailiff, and hath in charge the rebuilding of Kimberley Castle."

"He that plundered the chapel at Ravenstone?"

"The same. He would steal the pennies from the eyes of the dead, if no avenger were by. But 'tis spite rather than greed that prompts him in this matter of my friend. Some years ago, when we were all lads together, young Bardolph, who is the son of an innkeeper at Rothwell, came riding past Birkenhead with some village comrades of his. In a foolish attempt at wit, he cast some foul insult at Wilfrid who stood by the way, watching them pass. In an instant, Wilfrid had snatched him from the saddle and rolled him well in a puddle of mud that chanced to be at hand, so that Bardolph rode home at last a sorry spectacle indeed. That day he ne'er forgot, it seems, and only now has found an opportunity for vengeance. He hath been given the charge of the work at Kimberley where Prince John plans to enlarge and strengthen the fortress and fill it with a numerous garrison. He hath need of many cattle for the work of hauling the stone and timber; and though we are not now at war, and there can be seen no pressing need for haste, he seizes the horses and oxen from the farmers roundabout and drives the work as though the Scotch and Welsh were o'er the borders both at once. With this excuse he seized the yoke cattle at Birkenhead."

"But Birkenhead is full five leagues from Kimberley."

"Aye, and that it is that shows the act was done with malice and with none of necessity. A hundred farms were nearer to the castle, and some of them might far better spare their oxen. 'Twas in the thick of harvest too. Thou knowest how the rains have held it back till it seems that the snows may cover the uncut grain if the farmers make not haste. But Wilfrid made shift to go on with his hauling in some sort. He put to the yoke a pair of half-broke steers that should not have worked till the spring, and with half loads was bringing his crops to barn and stack. Then what did Bardolph do but come again, with two soldiers at his back, and make demand of Wilfrid for these cattle also."

"The hound! I would I had been there to tell him straight what manner of

cur he is."

"There was no need for that. Wilfrid forthwith flew into such a rage as drove from him all fear of what might betide. First he shouted at the bailiff some most naked truths as to his character and doings, then he rushed upon him, and, warding off a sword blow, pulled him from his horse, even as he had done that other time, and ere the soldiers could interfere had broken Bardolph's nose with one great blow from his fist."

"Oh Saints above! Did he so indeed? There's a yeoman for thee of the sort that win England's battles. I would we *had* him under Mountjoy banner. But what next occurred?"

"The soldiers had leaped from their horses as soon as the bailiff went down, and both together they seized Wilfrid and overthrew and bound him fast. Then, lashing him on the back of a horse, they set out for Kimberley, with he of the broken nose riding close behind, shedding a stream of blood and furious oaths. The neighbor folk say that over and over again he swore that young Birkenhead should never leave Kimberley alive."

"By'r Lady!" I cried, "there's naught to prevent him making good his threats. He is in command at Kimberley now that the Sheriff hath left for the North."

Cedric nodded sadly.

"'Tis so. He dares not put him to death openly, but he may starve him in his cell and report that he died of a sickness. And if the Sheriff returns, I doubt of much betterment for one in Wilfrid's plight. Thou knowest well that throughout England at this moment there are lying in dungeons, with chains on their limbs, full many honest men who are as innocent of any crime as thou or me."

"I know it well indeed. And of these there are many as to whom their very jailers know not the charge against them, for their accusers are long ago dead. 'Tis a hard world we live in, Cedric; but I see not how we may better it."

Cedric sprang up and faced me with high-held head and blazing eyes.

"Sir Richard, if thou'lt help me, we *may* better this hard world for one luckless man. It has come to me how we may take Wilfrid of Birkenhead from the very walls of Kimberley."

"Help thee? My word upon it, I *will* help thee if it can be done at all. Say on."

"My thought is this," answered Cedric quickly, whilst tears of joy sprang to his eyes at my hearty seconding, "one that came from Kimberley even as we talked at my father's to-day hath told us that Wilfrid is confined not in the castle dungeons, since those are in some way concerned in the present changes, but in a strong room in the tower, some forty feet above the moat. The window is not barred, since the apartment was never meant to serve for prison; but the wall is

sheer below it to the cliff that steeply slopes from thence to the moat. 'Twould be sure death to fling one's self down, since the rock at the base is after all too wide to be passed by a leap from the window. But with a stout rope now, and with friends on the farther side with horses not far off—"

"But the sentries on the battlements would surely spy him as he descended."

"Not on a moonless night, and especially if he knew the moment when the sentry had just passed overhead and therefore would not soon return. 'Tis a desperate thing, I own; but believe me, Sir Richard, we shall not fail. Already I see the way to take the rope and our messages to Wilfrid in his cell. There is a group of trees which in the last score of years while the castle has been little used as a stronghold, has been allowed to grow on the hither side of the moat, just opposite the tower. There we will hide and do our part in the venture. To-morrow night will be moonless. What sayest thou?"

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The next day at noon, soon after Bardolph of the Broken Nose had ridden away from Kimberley on some necessary errand, a stout old monk, in the flowing robe of his order, with hood and cowl closely drawn about his face, and bearing a basket on his arm, appeared at the gate of Kimberley. He wished to see the prisoner, Wilfrid, and to bear to him the consolations of religion and also some articles of food which friends of his had prepared. The clerkly youth who seemed in authority in the absence of the bailiff was much in doubt as to the wisdom of permitting any such entry, and, indeed, at first refused. But the good monk fairly overwhelmed him with quotations from the Scripture and the writings of the Holy Fathers relative to his duty to visit those who were sick or in prison, and quoted so many Latin texts that the youth was soon fairly bewildered and overcome. Stipulating only that the basket be left below, since the bailiff had given strict orders that no food was to be taken to the prisoner by any save himself, he led the way up the tower stairs, and unlocking the heavy oaken door, admitted the monk to the room where Birkenhead was confined.

In another quarter of an hour the monk had departed as he came, taking up his basket again at the gateway and leaving with the chatelaine his heartiest blessing. To me, who had been anxiously watching from one of the village houses, a furlong from the walls, it seemed that he walked with much firmer and more vigorous step as he returned o'er the drawbridge than he had when first he crossed it. But if this were so, none in the castle seemed to remark it—at any rate the monk's departure was not interrupted, and he passed out of the village, looking neither to the right nor the left.

Soon after, I followed and overtook him after he had entered a thick copse

of yew and hazel half a mile away. Beneath that leafy screen, Cedric flung off the monkish gown and hood, dropped the basket on the ground, and stood gazing at it gloomily.

"Sir Richard," he said at length, "Wilfrid of Birkenhead hath been for three days close shut in that tower room, and no least morsel of food hath been given him. Bardolph verily means to compass his death by starving."

"The miserable hound!" I answered between set teeth, "'tis a pity Wilfrid did not strike a thought harder and break his worthless skull."

Cedric's face was wried with pain and wrath. He stamped upon the ground in bitter impatience. Then, pulling from the basket the huge meat pie which had formed the greater part of the provision he had sought to carry to the prisoner, he dropped it before him and struck it with most vicious kick before it reached the ground. The crust flew off in a dozen pieces, and revealed the inner part as no juicy slices of flesh of fowl or pig but a close-wound coil of hempen rope, such as no mortal man could feed upon.

"Had I placed this beneath my armpits as was my first thought," growled Cedric, "it would now have been safe hidden in the bundle of straw they have given Wilfrid for a bed. Fortune favored us not, it seems; but mayhap that fickle jade will smile on our further contrivings. I made a new plan even as I climbed the tower stairs; and Wilfrid is well apprised of it. 'Tis not so simple as the first nor seemingly so sure; but it may serve our turn."

"Must we wait till the morrow and risk another entry of the castle?" I questioned. "Mayhap the bailiff will not ride abroad so opportunely."

"Nay, we shall make the essay to-night," he answered slowly. "Time presses, if Wilfrid is not to be so weakened by fasting as to be incapable of any effort in his own behalf. Marcel hath already been told to have the horses here at nine and await our coming till dawn if need be. If we can come by a ball of fine, stout cord like fishing lines, we will have that rope in the tower room by midnight. Then all the rest will be quickly done, and Wilfrid a dozen leagues from Kimberley ere sunrise."

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An hour before midnight Cedric and I lay under the group of saplings, ten yards from the castle moat and opposite the window of the room which held young Wilfrid of Birkenhead. Beside us on the ground, lay the ball of cord, with one projecting end fastened to the coil of rope. Now Cedric took a cross-bow bolt from the sack at his girdle and tied the other end of the cord firmly about it. Then, drawing the bow, he placed the bolt in groove.

The sky was covered with thin clouds that half obscured the stars; and the

moon had not yet risen. The castle wall on the other side of the moat was a gray blur in the murk, but we could clearly see the sentinel as he slowly paced his rounds of the battlements. The steel cap that he wore and the point of his spear caught now and again a gleam of the starlight. Twenty feet below the tower's summit a blacker square in the wall was the window of Wilfrid's cell; and to the right of this could barely be discerned the lattice which had been swung wide as though to admit the fresher air.

Cedric crouched on his knees, gazing at the window till the sentry passed from sight; then softly he uttered the cry of an owl. At once some white object fluttered in the blackness of the cell window. Cedric rose to his feet, took careful aim at the window and let fly the bolt. But alas! the pull of the cord as it unwound from the ball checked the quarrel sadly, and it rang on the stones of the wall no higher than our heads. We crouched at once in the shadows, certain that the sentry had heard its steely stroke; but he came not back to the tower; and soon we breathed again.

Cedric drew in the line and recharged his weapon, whispering to me the while that he should have better known than to have it so tightly coiled, and that another try, with the cord lying loose, would surely place the bolt within the window.

Now the sentry came again on his rounds; and we waited perforce for his passing. When he had gone once more Cedric threw his weapon to his shoulder and sent the bolt on its way. How my ears strained in listening! And, an instant later, how my heart sank when I heard once more the clang of iron 'gainst the tower stones and realized that Cedric had failed a second time to strike his mark at fifty paces.

This time the sentry heard the stroke—or so it seemed—for he came hurrying back to the tower battlements, and peered downward past the open window for minutes together. But all had become as still as death, and there was naught that he could see; so at length he turned away and resumed his pacing.

As Cedric again drew in the quarrel, he whispered to me:

"I have it now. The line drew down my bolt by a yard or more. I must allow for that by a higher aim. The third cast never fails; and for that we yet have time ere yonder sentry is sure there's mischief afoot."

He took a fresh bolt and tied the cord with care about it. Then for the third time he aimed at the tower above us. 'Twas the lucky third indeed, for, close following the whir of the quarrel, came a muffled thud as it struck the oaken door within the cell. This seemed not to reach the ears of the sentry on the other side of the battlements, for though we listened with bated breath, there was no sound of his returning footsteps. The next instant we could see the unspent portion of the line was tightening with a pull from the tower. Then straightway the coil of

rope left its place at our feet, swam through the moat and climbed the tower's side.

Cedric and I clasped hands in joy, for now we could see our project succeeding. In no more time than he needed to descend from the window, swim the moat and reach the horses in the hazel copse, Wilfrid would be safely away from Kimberley.

Once more the sentry made his rounds, and once more passed regardless of what was going forward six yards below him. Wilfrid appeared at the window, and, lowering himself hand over hand, came swiftly down the rope to the cliff below. There misfortune awaited us. As he dangled from the rope with his feet seeking a hold on the sloping cliff, he loosened a bit of rock, the size of a man's head, that lay near the tower base; and this accursed stone slid and rolled noisily down the crag and struck the waters of the moat with a hideous splashing.

At once the sentry, whose ears mayhap had been sharpened by the other noise for which he had found no reason, came running again to the tower. Peering into the darkness below, he spied the prisoner just as he leaped down the rock and plunged into the moat.

The sentinel was a ready man and determined,—such an one as might well have served a better master. Setting up a lusty shout of alarm, he turned at once to a pile of the stones that were kept on the battlements for the repelling of besiegers, and began hurling these into the moat.

The water's surface was in shadow and we could not see the head of the swimmer, nor could we tell whether any of the soldier's wild-flung missiles had found their mark. A minute passed wherein my blood seemed to freeze and my limbs to lock themselves fast like those of one who perishes from a mad dog's bite. The stones still followed one another in vicious plunges into the black waters: and the soldier continued to halloo for the guardsmen at the gate to lower the bridge and search the farther bank.

Then Cedric broke away from me and plunged into the moat. Forgetting all else, I followed him to the water's edge, stood peering vainly into the blackness, and might have dived in also had he not speedily returned. He was swimming lustily with one hand, and with the other bearing up his comrade. I seized them both as they came within reach, and hauled them ashore. Cedric joined with me and we drew Wilfrid up the bank and half way to the group of saplings. There Cedric stopped with a groan of misery, and fell on his knees by the limp body of his friend. The wind had brushed the clouds from the sky; and by the starlight I saw that Wilfrid's head had been crushed by one of the stones from the battlements.

Cedric rose to his feet and shook his fist in frenzy toward the King's stronghold. But already the bridge was down, and the guard was pouring across.

I plucked my comrade by the sleeve.

"Come Cedric, come! Our friend is past all help. Let us away ere they slay us also."

He turned to me with a face of deathly whiteness; and for a moment I thought he would refuse. But I seized his hand, and he let me hurry him to the shelter of the trees. Through these we quickly passed, and then raced down the dim-lit field to a hedgerow a furlong away. Running behind this, we soon distanced our pursuers.

In half an hour we had come by roundabout ways to the hazel copse where Marcel and the horses awaited us. In silence we mounted, and in silence rode through all the hours of darkness, Cedric sitting with head bowed forward, enwrapped in gloomy thought as in a sable garment. The way was rough and weary, and we found no solace in the fragrance of the harvest fields and leaf-strewn woods or in the song of the night wind. As the sun rose behind a veil of gray and chilling mists, we climbed the slopes of Rowan Hill and sighted the towers of Mountjoy.

CHAPTER XII—THE IRON COLLAR

A year had passed since our ill-fated venture beneath the walls of Kimberley, and 'twas such an autumn morning as makes one forget his cares and sorrows and those of a strife-torn world, and believe in the coming of a better day.

Cedric and I had promised ourselves rare sport in the woods of Grimsby. The sky overhead was of brightest blue, and the sunlight filtered sweetly through the boughs of oak and beech that now had dropped the half of their leaves to make a rustling carpet underfoot. In the treetops the birds sang lustily, making the best of the smiling time that comes before the winter's winds and snows. Now and again a woodmouse scampered on fallen log, a hare sprang away from her form, or a moorfowl scuttled to cover in the bracken. To me there were never sweeter sights and sounds and fragrances than those of autumn woodlands; and to Cedric, the son of a Pelham forester, they were as native and joyous as the brown brook waters to the speckled trout or the green hill pastures to the Mountjoy kine.

Since my comrade and former squire had been knighted at Wenderley, after the victory over the Welsh at the Pass of the Eagles, we at Mountjoy had grown well used to think of him as Sir Cedric De La Roche, the name conferred by the Lord High Constable when he made him knight and chevalier. But a newer honor had come to him but four months past; and though 'twas well deserved and a most gracious act of our liege lord, the Lion Hearted Richard, we yet could scarce conceive of its reality.

De Lacey, the High Constable, who with the backing of all the Mountjoys and Carletons, had well served the King in the Western counties in the struggle against his usurping brother, John, after the King's return from the German captivity, had told to him the tale of the Welsh battle and something of Cedric's more recent services. Then he had hinted that the fee of Grimsby had been vacant, save for the royal stewards, ever since Sir James Dunwoodie and his brother had perished in the Battle at the Pass. Forthwith the King summoned secretaries to write at his bidding; and shortly a herald arrived at Castle Mountjoy with letters patent, making our Cedric the Knight of Grimsby and conferring on him in fee the lands and manor house and all the rights Dunwoodie had before.

At the royal assembly at Shrewsbury, Cedric had appeared with his due quota of six mounted men-at-arms and fifty archers; and no knight or baron in the whole array looked a better captain of his forces or held himself in more manly fashion as the King rode down the line to view us. Truly my heart swelled that day with gladness at the recognition that had come to so brave and true a man without awaiting the silvering of his hair and the bowing of his shoulders with years.

Lord Mountjoy was mightily proud of Cedric, as I well knew, and had stinted not to boast of him on occasion as a Mountjoy lad with a head as well as hands. And, however he might wish to check o'er-weening youth and confidence, my father might not gainsay that he, that had long been famous for his swordplay through all our countryside, had much ado to hold his own with foil or quarter-staff against me, now that my strength and reach did equal his, or that Cedric of the broad back and oaken thighs could lift breast-high a weight that neither of us could stir.

Now Sir Cedric De La Roche and I adventured through the Grimsby woods, afoot, clad as huntsmen and carrying only our cross-bows and poniards. For the most part, those that hunt in greenwood choose the long-bow with its cloth-yard shafts; but from a child Cedric had displayed a wondrous skill with the other weapon; it was ever his favorite; and I followed his humor. Already he had struck a fine moorfowl that ran amongst the gorse and I a hare that sat upright beneath a leafy beech, thinking himself well hidden. We talked full loud and gayly as we made our way through bush and brake or along the woodland paths, for truly it

was the sunlight and the comradeship and the smell of the fallen leaves that had brought us to the forest rather than any wish for heavy game sacks. Already we had meat enough for the roasting at our noon-tide campfire; and we little cared for more.

To fare abroad on such a morn, among the gray tree trunks and by the brown woodland streams, was enough for our content. As we walked on, Cedric told tale after tale that he had from old books of ballads and chronicles wherein brave knights rode gayly through just such a land as this and had full many gallant adventures and sweet passages at arms. Almost could I see the fays and elves that he declared were dancing on the forest floor and the old, black-robed magician that held them at his thralls.

Suddenly we heard sound of hoofs, and saw approaching us along a bridle path two armed and mounted horsemen. 'Twas Lord Gilroy, who held the great domain of that name two leagues and more away, and his nephew, a hulking youth of two and twenty or thereabouts, by name Sir Philip Carrington. Both were red of face with hurry, and their horses were well lathered and breathing hard. At first sight of us Lord Gilroy called out loudly:

"Ah, good morrow, gentlemen! Well met, Mountjoy and Grimsby both. Grimsby, we have to crave thy leave to ride through thy lands in search of a murdering villain that hath escaped us at Gilroy."

"A murderer, sayst thou?" answered Cedric, "whom hath he slain?"

BOTH WERE RED OF FACE WITH HURRY, AND THEIR HORSES WERE WELL LATHERED AND BREATHING HARD

"'Tis Simon, my dogmaster. He lies at the point of death, or is dead for aught I know by this time, his skull near crushed with a cudgel. 'Twas my thrall, Egbert, a surly fellow well deserving of the hangman's noose, that thus assaulted him. It seems the dogmaster had found him sore abusing one o' the best of our

hounds, and had rated him soundly, threatening a report to me of his actions. I saw but the end of the matter and that from a distance, and with Philip here have ridden hard after him. The varlet made at once for the woods and has thus far escaped us; but we will run him to earth, if it take the whole of Gilroy.

"A surly fellow indeed!" exclaimed Sir Cedric. "'Tis well that he be apprehended quickly, else he'll join some outlaw band, and bid us all defiance. Thou may'st ride through my lands at will for his capture—or we may chance upon him in the wood. How may we know him?"

Lord Gilroy smiled, but in a hard, grim way he hath that is more menacing than any frown.

"'Tis easy knowing him. He wears an iron collar, like all my thralls, bearing his own name and mine in graven letters. It makes the hunting of them far easier when they have done some violence, or if they attempt to fly from my lands. But give you good day, messieurs! We must fare on. If so be you get sight of him, a cross-bow quarrel would not be amiss if he stop not on order. And if you take and send him to me, I will be much beholden. Our thralls must be kept well in leash, e'en if that leash be on occasion a hangman's knot. Come Philip, ride to the left, I pray thee, while I follow this path through yonder thicket."

Cedric and I walked on, talking of this bloody mischief, and of the chances of the thrall's recapture. Somehow the brightness had gone from the sun glints, and the woodland seemed no longer a forest enchanted where nymphs and elves might dance away from hollowed tree or the gray-haired wizard, Merwin, be seen upon a mossy rock, summoning by magic spells a troop of Arthur's chivalry.

"'Tis true this fellow must be taken," said Cedric, sadly, "for such as he make up the outlaw bands that now and again give trouble sore to honest men. But I know not for the life of me why men that are born and die upon this green earth like any others, and that have as good a wish to live unhampered as you and I, should wear upon their necks collars of iron that mark them forever as slaves and bondmen. I have little wonder that such at times break forth with violence. Nay! I have the more that ever they remain quiet like oxen in a paddock awaiting the plowman's yoke."

Cedric had stopped short in the path and was facing me. Upon his broad and comely face was the same stern look he had worn that day he withstood my father in the matter of the churls at De Lancey Manor.

"Why, God ha' mercy, Cedric!" I protested, "I see no need for all this heat. These thralls have never known other condition; and 'tis like they live the more in comfort for a master's guidance."

Cedric's eyes blazed at this, and he spoke full loudly:

"Look thee now, Sir Richard! Hast ever asked of thrall whether or not he would have his freedom if he might? If ever thou dost, thou'lt find that there's

never a villein or thrall in England but would prefer himself as master to the kindest and best of lords that ever lived."

"How know'st thou that?" I questioned, sharply, being myself somewhat kindled by the heat with which he spoke.

"Hark thee, Sir Richard! Thou hast on Mountjoy lands no thralls, for that thy grandfather made freemen of them all. But when I came to Grimsby there were here a dozen or more that wore the iron collar and might not leave the land. I had not been here a fortnight ere I loosed the collars from their necks, and bade them go or stay as pleased them for that now they were free men. Some were youths like ourselves; some strong men of middle life and others old and white-haired; but every one of them fell down before me and wept for very joy that they and their children after them should be free. Forsooth, I liked it not that men with sons older than me should pay me homage as I were a heathen Caliph on his throne. 'Tis nearly four months since; and not one of them has left the lands of Grimsby and every one would fight for me 'gainst any man on earth. Had'st thou seen their faces on that day I threw their collars to the smith to beat into bush-cutting hooks, thou'd never question more whether men would choose to *be* men rather than cattle."

"Ah well!" I answered, "mayhap it is as thou sayest. Some of the best men under the Mountjoy banner are sons of those my grandfather loosed from bondage. But this is a question too great for our settlement, and this too fair a day for argument. What if we make our fire and dress this meat for dinner? Verily, I am already sharp set with this autumn air."

Just then we spied before us, on a little rise in the woodland, a hunting lodge that had been built by the Dunwoodies for their pleasuring when they and their friends hunted in the forest. Cedric remembered that he had the key to the great lock on the door among those that hung at his girdle; and we advanced to enter and examine the place, I, for one, being glad enough of any happening that should cause us to forget the matters of which we had been talking. Soon we were inside the lodge, and found it clean and comfortable enough, it being furnished forth with a table and benches of logs, split and hewn, and a good broad fireplace with spits whereon to hang the roasting.

"Ah!" cried Cedric in a voice far other than his last speaking, "what say'st thou? Shall we not roast our meat here rather than among the leaves in the wood, where a fire in this dry time may go beyond our holding?"

"Surely," I answered, "'twill be better far to-day. Come, I'll flay and dress the hare while thou makest ready the fire. Thou'rt ever skillful at the kindling."

So we set gayly to work; and in half an hour had our meat before us on the table. Some bread and cheese from our pouches that we toasted o'er the embers made with it a feast fit for any king on a woodland holiday. Our content with

the world returned, and we sang a lusty ballad over the well-picked bones. Then, being something thirsty, Cedric started up to see if the lodge contained a pitcher with which he might fetch clear water from the stream near by. Meanwhile my eye had been caught by an old and somewhat rusted broadsword that hung on pegs over the fireplace. I reached it down at once, and, testing it with a few passes and upward strokes, found it a good blade and true; and wondered much that it should have been left in this place as something without worth. Then I saw on a bench in a darkened corner a small anvil and some armorer's tools, and bethought me that the lodge might have been used at need for repairing arms when the Grimsby men were called to war.

For a moment I had not noted Cedric's movements; but now at a sudden word from him I wheeled about and saw him crouching at the door of an inner room of the lodge and gazing into the darkness beyond as a hound that hath run the fox to earth: I crouched beside him and looked also. The room beyond, it seems, had been used in the Dunwoodies' time for the receiving and dressing of meat and drink and such like offices. There was a small square window, now nearly closed by its plank shutter, but admitting at the side a narrow beam of light. For a time my eyes could make out naught; but after a little I saw, beneath a bench or table in the farthest corner, first two glistening eyes, then, dimly, the form of a man.

Cedric took down his cross-bow and laid a bolt in groove.

"Come forth from there, my man," he shouted, "we have thee fairly caught."

No answer came, and for a moment I doubted if we had seen aright. Then Cedric called out again:

"Come forth, I tell thee. Else I'll fairly send a quarrel through thee."

There came a low groan from the darkness, and words that seemed made with labor:

"Strike then. I care not."

"What say'st thou?" called Cedric, "seest thou not I can strike thee with bolt fairly in face?"

"Strike then. 'Tis better so."

Cedric turned to me with blank amaze upon his face.

"Heard thou ever the like? The man defies us to the death." Then, quickly thrusting his bow into my hands:

"Hold this against mischance. There's more to this than we know. I will fetch this fellow forth."

"Hold Cedric," I cried, "beware lest he stab thee."

But my comrade had already advanced into the darkened room. He sprang beneath the table, like a boar-hound on his prey, and in an instant emerged at deathly grips with a man as broad and heavy as himself who fought with tooth

and nail and heel and with the fierceness of a cornered wolf. E'en in that moment I noted the iron collar on his neck, and knew we had to do with Egbert, the Gilroy thrall.

Round and round they whirled in desperate wrestling, the while I tried in vain to be of help. In a moment they were out of the room where the villein had lain hidden and fighting full madly in the lodge, the thrall striving to throw his captor from him and make his way out the door and into the woods beyond.

Finding this impossible, he made a mighty effort, and lifted Cedric fairly from his feet, and flung him on his side upon the floor. For an instant it seemed he would win away unless I drove a quarrel through him; but Cedric twisted instantly and rolled the other on his back. Then in a flash he had pinned him down and had his knee on his breast.

"Now yield thee," Cedric panted. "Thou seest I can slay thee if I will."

"Slay me then," gasped the other. "'Tis better than Lord Gilroy's branding iron or hanging noose."

"Ah then, thou'rt Egbert that murdered the dogmaster?"

"No murderer am I; but that will serve me not. Lord Gilroy will have me flayed alive with ne'er a chance to tell my tale."

For a moment Cedric gazed into the bloodshot eyes beneath him. Then he questioned, slowly:

"Hark thee, my man. If I let thee up, wilt thou sit quiet and tell to us thy tale of this day's doings?"

"Aye," replied the thrall, "though to me 'tis all one. Thou'rt a knight and landlord, and wilt have no ear for the words of a thrall that wears the iron collar and is hunted by his master like a sheep-killing hound."

"Of that we shall see," replied Cedric, and, springing up, he released his prisoner and pointed to one of the benches that he might sit before us. "Now tell us," he commanded, "why thou did'st beat the dogmaster till he lies near to death."

Egbert, the thrall, took seat as he was bidden, loosed the garment that had tightened about his throat in the struggle and began:

"Simon, the dogmaster, had ever a grudge toward me,—for what I know not. And when I went to him three days ago to say that one huge hound of his pack had come a roaring at me as I worked in the field, and forced me to climb on a hay rick to 'scape his jaws, he only laughed and said that thrall-meat would be cheaper far for such a valued beast than beef or mutton. This morn, at nine o' the clock, I crossed the hay field at the back of the kennels, and out leaped this same hound with frightful growls and roars and widely opened jaws as if he would devour me forthwith. No tree or hay-rick was at hand that I could climb; and I seized me a stone the size of my right fist, and with it felled the beast so that

he lay still enough upon the grass. This was no sooner done than I heard behind me the running feet of Simon, the dogmaster. He had his dog-whip in his hand; and when he came in reach, he struck at me with all his might. The lash curled about my face, and made the weals you still may plainly see. Such despite was more than I could bear. I seized the whip from his hand, and although I knew full well it meant the branding iron or the gallows, I struck him thrice o'er the head with the loaded butt he keeps for the savage and unruly ones among his pack. Simon fell down in a heap. And then I saw Lord Gilroy riding toward me from a hilltop a furlong off, and made for the woods where his horse could not follow. They hunted me all morning, but I would have won away had'st thou not found me."

When the thrall had ceased speaking it was very still in the lodge. Cedric looked at me with a painful question in his eyes. What my own looks answered I know not save from his words that quickly followed.

"Egbert," he cried, "thy act may have been lawless; but we will not judge thee; and thou shalt not be sent back to the lash or the branding iron by act of ours. Neither shalt thou longer wear that badge of slavery about thy neck. Here's that which will sever it."

Striding to the darkened corner he took from among the armorer's tools a stout, long-bladed file; then, springing back to Egbert's side, seized the iron ring with one hand and set to work upon it with lusty strokes. Soon the band was half cut through; then Cedric dropped the file, and, taking the collar in both his sinewy hands, gave a mighty twist, broke it apart utterly and flung it as an accursed thing into the blackness beneath the armorer bench.

Next he took his cross-bow from the table and thrust it into Egbert's hands.

"Take this for thy safer journeying," he cried, "thou'lt need to travel fast and far for some few days. Then thou may'st take service under some true lord as a plowman or a soldier as thou wilt. From this day forth thou art a freeman."

Egbert gazed at Cedric with tears streaming down his face. Then he fell on his knees before him; but my comrade raised him almost roughly.

"Up with thee, Egbert! Thou'rt a freeman now, and should do utter homage to none but God. And there's work to do if thou wilt keep thy freedom. Thou must be far away from Gilroy before another morn."

Egbert, among his sobs of joy, could say no word. I found in my pouch a little purse of gold and gave it him.

"Thou'lt need to buy thy food and lodging as a traveler," I said, "and not be taken as a prowling varlet. Look to it now."

Then he that had been our prisoner found voice at last and began to murmur broken words of thanks and to encumber his new found liberty with oaths of lifelong fealty to ourselves. But Cedric again checked him with uplifted hand.

"Hark!" he whispered, "what was that sound?"

For a moment all three of us stood silent and breathless, listening to the wind in the branches without and the faint snapping of coals on the hearth. Then came the noise again,—a long drawn, baying howl of a hound on a scent.

"Some of our neighbors hunt the deer," I said.

"Nay," answered Cedric quickly, "'tis no deer-hound. 'Tis a far deeper note."

Meanwhile the face of Egbert had turned an ashen gray, and now his limbs shook with very terror.

"'Tis the bloodhounds of Gilroy," he gasped. "My lord ever keeps two or three for just such use as this. They follow on my track."

Then from a window we saw, a furlong off in the open wood, two huge brown hounds that ran with noses close to earth and upon a path that led straight toward the lodge.

Cedric seized his cross-bow again from Egbert's hands.

"Get thee back within," he commanded, "I will soon stop the coursing of these blood beasts."

Egbert leaped through the door again to the inner room; and Cedric, throwing wide the shutter, was taking aim at the foremost of the hounds when I cried out from behind him:

"Hold! Hold! It is too late. There come the horsemen."

From another point in the wood, not far from where the dogs had emerged, there were now riding toward us half a dozen mounted men. Cedric withdrew his weapon; and we gazed upon them in utter dismay. Lord Gilroy and Sir Philip Carrington were in the lead, and after them came three or four stout foresters and last of all, upon an ambling palfrey, none other than Simon, the dogmaster, with his head bound round and round with a great white cloth.

Cedric put away his bow, and, unbarring the door of the lodge, stood on the step without, spurning away the hounds that sought to enter.

"Good morrow, gentlemen!" he called, full jovially.

"Good morrow, gentlemen *both*," answered Lord Gilroy with a most wicked laugh.

"Your hunting does not prosper," said Cedric, paying no heed to the affront conveyed in Gilroy's sneering words.

"How not?"

"Why, it would seem that your hounds have picked up our trail to the lodge here in place of that of their proper quarry, as the best of dogs will do at times."

"Aye," answered Lord Gilroy, still with the evil smile on his face. "The best of dogs and men do err at times. And yet, 'tis passing strange they are so set upon it. See! They course about and about thy little lodge and will not leave it."

Cedric cast a careless glance at the hounds. Then he said:

"Come messieurs, can ye not alight for a moment and rest within? I cannot offer meat and drink for here we have none; but you may sit upon a bench by a fire while your men aid the hounds at finding the track again."

Lord Gilroy threw his bridle rein to one of the foresters, leaped down from his horse, and strode toward the door; and his nephew did likewise. Simon and the others withdrew to a little distance and dismounted by the brook where they called the hounds to them.

When our most unwelcome guests were within the lodge, Cedric made haste to place for them the benches before the fireplace and again lamented that the place afforded nothing of refreshment. I made such talk as I might with both Lord Gilroy and Sir Philip, asking them of the tourney at Winchester where they had lately ridden, the deer on Gilroy lands and other like matters of no import.

Gilroy's keen gray eyes roved ever about the lodge; and after one or two courteous replies to my questions, he asked of Cedric:

"Art sure, Grimsby, that that inner room contains no cask or wine-skin? 'Twould seem else that thy lodge is but meagerly furnished."

"Aye, 'tis so," answered Cedric at once.

Again our guest glanced keenly at Sir Cedric, while I breathed shortly indeed. But he said no more; and now I made diversion by asking Sir Philip if 'twas true that the Carringtons are Welsh descended. I knew full well 'twas not; and was hugely pleased when he denied it hotly and went on at greatest length to prove his family of pure Norman blood by reciting all the quarterings on the Carrington shield and their origins in the days before the Conquest.

At last Lord Gilroy stood erect and said, to my great and joyful relief:

"Welladay! We must fare on, if ever we are to take that runagate. The sunbeams already slope far to westward; and 'twill soon be—"

But there his words were of a sudden checked; and he stood staring at a point on the floor beneath the bench, three yards away. There, where half an hour before all had been deepest shadow, the sloping beam of the afternoon sun now rested, and brought to clear and certain view *the iron collar.*

With an oath he sprang forward and seized it. Holding it up before us, he read in a loud voice the graven words:

"Egbert, Thrall of William, Lord of Gilroy."

Cedric stood facing him; and none of us spoke any word. Then Gilroy flung the collar on the floor and burst forth:

"Ah then! 'Tis even as I thought. One churl will help another in any strait."

At this insult to my comrade, my hand flew to where my good sword should have been; and I ground my teeth to find it not. But Gilroy paid no heed to me.

Instantly he sprang forward toward the inner door.

"We'll see what lies within," he shouted.

But Cedric De La Roche was quicker yet. He leaped before the door, and with a mighty push sent Lord Gilroy half across the room. Then both Gilroy and Carrington drew swords and rushed upon us. By this time I had gathered my wits, and recalling the goodly weapon at my very back, had turned and seized the rusted broadsword from above the fireplace. I was but just in time to receive the attack of both of them at once; for Cedric stooped to reach his cross-bow which rested against the wall, ready drawn and with the bolt he had meant for the hound still in groove. For a moment I withstood the double attack; then Sir Philip only was before me. He fought fiercely enough, forsooth, but in a most lubberly fashion. Half a dozen strokes and I caught his weapon with a twist I had long practiced and sent it clattering across the floor. Then with loud menaces of running him through the body, I drove him before me to the wall where I made him stand with hands above his head. Glancing sidewise, I now beheld the Lord of Gilroy in the same pitiful plight. His weapon also lay on the floor; and Cedric stood before him with cross-bow leveled at his heart.

"Wilt thou slay us then," growled Gilroy, "in unseemly brawl over this runagate?"

"Nay," answered Cedric sweetly, "but ye are our prisoners, duly taken. If we grant your lives and arms, you shall give us knightly word to retire from the lands of Grimsby, and give o'er this bloody hunting you were bent upon."

"That word we give," said Gilroy, shortly.

We instantly lowered our weapons, and, stooping, lifted the swords from the floor and returned them to their owners. Simon, the dogmaster, opened the door and thrust in his bandaged head wherein one eye was purple and swollen with a blow it had received from the whip butt. Behind him stood two of the foresters.

"Return thou, till I call thee," shouted Gilroy furiously.

When they had retired once more to the brookside, our late antagonists turned again to leave the lodge. At the door Lord Gilroy paused and spake again, slowly and as one that fully weighs his words.

"Our word is given to leave the lands of Grimsby and thus to allow this thrall to escape. But no promise have we given as to aught else. Mayhap the King will listen when I send him word at Winchester how his vassal so newly of the fee of Grimsby is bearing himself. Mayhap it will not seem to him quite fitting that one who holds his lands in fee should with deceit and with violence shelter misdoing churls from their lawful masters."

I caught my breath in dismay. Such a threat I knew the crafty Gilroy quite capable of carrying out. For myself I had little concern: the Mountjoys were too

THEN WITH LOUD MENACES I DROVE HIM TO THE WALL WHERE I MADE HIM STAND WITH HANDS ABOVE HIS HEAD

strong in the Western country and too valuable to the King's cause for any such matter to bring down upon us any serious menace. But Cedric was a yeoman born; and many there were to think with spite and envy of his rise to knightly dignity.

Sir Philip now burst forth with a cackling laugh—the first sound that had come from him since I had him at the wall with his hands o'er his head.

"Ha, Grimsby!" he jibed, "thou'rt not so great a victor as it seemed. Mayhap the fee of Grimsby will soon be vacant once more."

Then Cedric spoke again, his words being pronounced with the same slow heedfulness with which the Lord of Gilroy had uttered his threat a moment since.

"'Tis true, my lord, that naught prevents thee from sending or carrying this tale to the King. 'Tis also true—and this mayhap thou hast forgotten—that naught prevents *me*, in the event of thy wishing to carry this quarrel further, from taking to the King the full account (well known to me though thou hast thought it hidden) of thy doings and those of the Carringtons during the weeks that followed the King's return to England, and while his traitorous brother, Prince John, with

the aid of certain gentlemen who might have been more loyally employed, strove to keep him from his throne, and even, so 'tis said, to deprive him of life."

Before the half of this had been spoken the face of Lord Gilroy had grown pale as death, and he seemed to shrink a full handsbreadth in stature. His nephew gazed from one to the other of us with whitened cheeks and foolish, open mouth. As soon as Cedric had finished, Lord Gilroy began in a tone far different from any he had used that day:

"Nay, nay, Grimsby and Mountjoy both! Why *should* we make of this trifling despite o'er a runagate thrall such a matter of bitter menacing? In truth, 'twere well should we all forget this day of petty quarreling and live in neighborly peace henceforth."

"Nothing would better please me," quoth Sir Cedric in reply.

"And thou, Mountjoy?" pursued Lord Gilroy, "what sayest thou?"

"With all my heart," I replied.

Lord Gilroy seemed about to offer his hand in token of our reconciliation; but mayhap something in our faces stayed him. With a hurried bow he turned once more to the door of the lodge. After him went Sir Philip, reminding me in his shrunken confidence of a rain-drenched chanticleer. At the brookside, they climbed sullenly upon their horses' backs, and without a word to their followers, spurred away through the forest.

An hour later, Egbert, the freeman, astride a good horse from the Grimsby stables, with cross-bow in hand and gold in pouch, was riding through the twilight on the road to Shrewsbury.

CHAPTER XIII—ON THE ROAD TO RUNNYMEDE

I was in Stamford in the year of the Great Charter of King John. Half the knights and barons of all England with a goodly following of men-at-arms and yeomanry had been assembled under the banner of our stout Marshal, Fitz Walter, and had seized by force and arms full many royal castles. Now, at the end of a truce which to no avail had been secured by the Archbishop, we were ready to march towards London to bring to terms our most crafty and tyrannic lord and king. For years

he had dealt in plots and scheming to overreach the great and strong among the baronry, and from the weaker seized their lands and goods at will and oft threw their persons into durance to further his gross ends of gain or vengeance. Now some hundreds of the barons of the North, with a dozen or more of us from the West counties and the Welsh Marches, and a sprinkling of churchmen, who no less than ourselves had suffered from the King's o'erreaching, were gathered in Bermondsey Hall to agree, if we might, upon a scroll of the grievances that the King must remedy when our further assaults should have forced him to sue for peace.

Geoffrey, Lord of Carleton and Teramore, leader of a hundred lances and half a thousand bowmen, rose from his seat amid a clamor of disputing voices and saluted the Marshal and the assembled company.

"I propose, my lords and gentlemen," he said in that high, sweet voice of his which yet is far-heard and commanding, "the name of Sir Cedric De La Roche, Knight of Grimsby and bold defender of our Western Marches, for the fifth and final member of this group. He is a brave man and true; and hath, as we often say in the West, a head as well as an arm. He is both soldier and scholar, forsooth, and knoweth more of the Latin tongue than any layman among us. You have named Sir Richard of Mountjoy to serve you in this matter because, three months agone, he took the Castle of Tournoy which the King's men were strongly holding with greater forces than his own and from whence they might have sorely threatened us. But most of you know not that 'twas Cedric De La Roche who gained entrance to the castle in disguise, and full well deceived the garrison, then at midnight overpowered, gagged and bound the sentinel at a little postern gate, threw it open and admitted the Mountjoys. Lacking him and his stratagem we might still be hammering at the walls of Tournoy and our whole campaign be sore delayed."

"For the Latin we have the Abbot of Moberley," said old Lord Esmond from his seat on one of the benches at the right. "What need have we of another clerk?"

"The Reverend Abbot," answered Carleton, "will do the cause good service, I doubt not, in making clear for our Commissioners the substance of old scrolls and charters which they must study, and mayhap in inditing in fair Latin hand the articles which we present to the King. In his hands we may be sure the interests of his order, and particularly of the Abbey of Moberley, will not suffer. But I say 'tis well that we of the baronage have a representative of our own number who can see that this scroll, for which we risk our lives and fortunes, truly and amply provides for remedy of the wrongs we suffer."

"And *I* say," shouted Lord Esmond, springing to his feet the instant Carleton had finished, "that if we are to have a representative of our order in the inditing of this scroll, as my Lord Carleton says, we should have a representative indeed. De La Roche is a true man and a capable soldier, as none will deny; but we have

here many lords and gentlemen of longer service and of purest Norman blood. The Knight of Grimsby, as all may know, is yeoman and Saxon born. Such a man, be he never so learned, must ever think as the folk from whom he sprung and can never rightly guard our rights and privileges."

For an hour we had debated of our wrongs and the measures that should put an end to them, each speaker being fiercely bent upon the thing that should lift the oppression that had borne most heavily upon him and caring little for aught else. But finally 'twas seen that the whole assembly could accomplish naught but argument and loud bickering, and that the writing of the scroll must be done by a few chosen men who should later bring their work before the whole body of leaders for their assent and undertaking. Two of the oldest of the northern leaders, the Baron De Longville and the Lord of Esmond, had been first named, then the learned and courtier-like Abbot of Moberley who was beneath the insurgent banner because of the King's high-handed procedure in the matter of Moberley Abbey, where, during the absence on pilgrimage of the rightful holder, he had declared the abbacy vacant and conferred it with all its lands upon one of his shameless favorites from Normandy. A moment before, my own name had been added to the list in recognition of the services of the Western lords that had well broken the power of the King in all their countryside.

Following Lord Esmond's bitter speech, came shouts of approval from some of the other northerners; and it seemed like that my old friend and comrade would be deprived of the honor which Geoffrey of Carleton had sought to have conferred upon him. But the venerable De Lacey, long the Lord High Constable of England, and still a power in the land, though bent and snowy-haired with age, rose slowly to his feet and addressed the Marshal and the company:

"My lords: 'tis well for those to talk who know whereof they speak. Years agone I knighted Cedric De La Roche for knightliest service at the Battle of the Pass where verily he changed defeat to victory. Since that time he hath many a time and oft served under me and others, always to the welfare of the Kingdom and the enhancement of his name. Lord Esmond says that Cedric De La Roche comes not of noble family. I ask of you, my lords, who made *our* families noble but some hard-smiting ancestors we had that served not better, I warrant you, than this man of whom we speak. And I have seen his lands of Grimsby and the stout and loyal men who do willingly follow him, and know full well he can think and plan as well as strike. Finally, my lords, 'tis not the tale of his father's or his grandfather's deeds but of his very own that should guide the choosing of a man for a time of need."

At this, still louder shouts burst forth, especially from the younger men; and some did loudly call Sir Cedric's name, insisting that he serve. When partial silence came once more, the Marshal brought all question to an end by announc-

ing all the names of the group and ending with that of Cedric De La Roche. Then, it being near the supper hour, the company broke up amid cheering and noisy overthrow of benches and the clamor of many voices in eager talk of the day's events.

The meeting next day of the group that should do the writing of the scroll was scarcely better than that of the whole assembly. Esmond and De Longville disputed long and loud over exemption from the tax levied for the French war; and some suggestions that we others made for the Kingdom's better ordering went all unheeded in the din. The Abbot, smiling and crafty as always, patiently awaited the time, so sure to come, when noise and clamor should exhaust itself, and his own smooth-spoken counsel should prevail. He had with him a copy of the old charter of the First Henry; and Cedric a draft of some of the laws of Edward the Confessor which he believed should be included. At last, when 'twas seen that we made no headway, my own voice was for a moment listened to; and 'twas agreed that our two scholars, the Abbot and Cedric De La Roche, should work together, making from the ancient laws and grants, with such additions as were found needful, the articles we should put before the King.

With all my comradely thought for Cedric, I could but smile as I thought of the task that now confronted him. I knew well that he had certain cherished plans with regard to these articles whereby he hoped to gain for the commons some of the privileges and immunities which he regarded as the natural rights of freeborn men. Often and often he had declaimed to me of these things, and with such eloquence and conviction as well nigh made me a convert to his party—if that could be called a party which had no leaders and no program and scarce a voice save his own. The commons knew no other way of protest against the wrongs they suffered than such violent and fruitless revolts as that of the churls of De Lancey Manor, with mayhap the killing of a tyrannous noble and the later hunting down and hanging of the leaders of the mob. Cedric had for years maintained that their natural rights should be assured to them by charter and not left to the caprice of some careless or greedy overlord.

But the Abbot of Moberley was allied by blood and by early training to powerful Norman families; and 'twas likely that he had but little sympathy with any such ideas. Handsome, learned and eloquent, he was accustomed to win his way among rough and heavy-handed lords and barons and the little better schooled officials of the royal courts by the skill and grace of his address, and yet more, if all rumors were true, by a readiness to shift his allegiance to any cause in accordance with circumstance and his own prevailing interest. In truth, he had been bred for the law as much as for the Church; and his great services to his order, which had been amply rewarded with power and place, were those performed in court or council rather than in church or monastery.

At this very time, Lord Geoffrey of Carleton, Cedric and I had reason to suspect the Abbot of secret communications with the Archbishop, who was still nominally of the King's party, and who would perhaps have much to do with the final shaping of our articles if ever we should force the King to consent to their sealing. 'Twas evident that the rights of churchmen would not be overlooked in the final treaty; and, although this too had our approval, we were the more determined that those of other estates should also be well guarded.

On the morrow, nevertheless, it seemed certain that this co-working of two such diverse men would be effective, and that we would soon be prepared to take before the assemblage of leaders the completed scroll. The Abbot and Cedric De La Roche came late to our meeting, and still debating hotly on the way; but they brought a list of articles they had most cunningly devised for the remedy of the ills of which we most loudly complained. The Abbot read them to us clearly and with most just accent, like the learned speaker that he is; and I think the two old northern lords were mightily impressed with the power and worth of words so skillfully marshalled. When he had finished we might have then and there adopted the articles and ended our labors. But at the end of his reading, the Abbot said:

"My lords, I wish to testify that from Sir Cedric De La Roche I have received most welcome assistance in the drawing of this scroll, both in the reading of the ancient laws and charters and in the devising of new provisions toward the wise and just ordering of the Kingdom. Nevertheless, upon some minor points we have not yet agreed; and upon these he wishes to address you."

Sir Cedric rose to his feet, and for a moment looked from one to the other of our company. His fine and open countenance and clear blue eyes and the martial squareness of his broad shoulders would have won him high regard in any great assembly. It seemed to me at that moment that the youth whom I had first known as a forester of Pelham and whom I had seen rise to knightly dignities, well deserved, was at the summit of his career when those whose decisions were weighty in the affairs of our time awaited his words on a matter of such moment. Baron De Longville was looking at Cedric with no unfriendly eye; but the Lord of Esmond, who had wished to adopt the articles at once, frowned with impatience at the end of the Abbot's speech, and now gazed moodily at the floor.

"My lords," began Cedric clearly, "we have as the twentieth of these articles—'Let no Sheriff or Bailiff of the King take horses or carts of any free man for doing carriage except with his own consent.' Upon the next page we have the provision—'Let not the body of a baron, knight or other noble person be taken, or imprisoned or disseized, or outlawed or banished, or in any way destroyed, nor let the King go or send upon him by force, except by the judgment of his peers or by the law of the land.' These things are just and right, but to my

thinking they go not far enough. Why should we not deserve the good wishes for the triumph of our cause and the strong right arms not only of the baronage but of all the freemen of England? Why should not these provisions be altered to guard their rights also?"

SIR CEDRIC ROSE TO HIS FEET AND FOR A MOMENT LOOKED FROM ONE TO THE OTHER OF OUR COMPANY

Lord Esmond raised his head and gazed sharply at Cedric's face.

"And how would'st *thou* amend them," he growled.

"I would say, in the first instance, 'Let no Sheriff or Bailiff of the King *nor any other person* take horses or carts of any free man for doing carriage except with his own consent.' And in the second, would have the words *a free man* in place of *baron, knight or other noble person*, so that it would read: 'Let not the body of a free man be taken or imprisoned or disseized, or outlawed'—and the rest."

"Mayhap these churls have made thee their spokesman," sneered Esmond.

"Nay," replied Cedric, "I speak for no party, whether high or low, but for the common good of England."

Lord Esmond turned with sour and vinegary look first to De Longville, then to the Abbot.

"What did I say in the Assembly? This man hath no conception of the rights of our order. All his concern is for churls and clowns."

Cedric grew very red, and his hand went to his sword hilt. I sprang up to address our chief, De Longville, and placed myself between the Knight of Grimsby and the fiery old lord from the North.

"My lords," I cried, "we gain nothing by arguments that speedily pass into brawls. Come, let us vote upon these provisions. 'Tis the rightful way. To-

morrow, or the next day at the furthest, we must take our report to the Assembly; and we should come to agreement."

"'Tis so," replied De Longville, "we waste our time in bickering. Come Esmond, what say'st thou as to these amendments?"

"I say *nay*," shouted Esmond. "Let the articles even stand as they were."

"And thou, Most Reverend Abbot?"

"I say *nay*," replied the churchman quietly.

"And thou, Mountjoy?"

"Aye," I answered loudly. "These changes seem to me to take naught from us and to be well conceived to gain us many friends."

"De La Roche?"

"Aye."

De Longville gazed first at the floor beneath his feet then at the ceiling overhead and bent his brows in a painful frown. At length he said:

"It seems I have the casting vote. I see little use in these changes, save to pamper churls and thralls that too often already raise their heads with complaints and demands. Some of them verily believe they might govern the land as well as their betters. 'Tis a dangerous tendency that must be checked. I say *nay* also."

Lord Esmond turned toward Cedric with a smile of triumph; and my heart became as lead to think of his defeat. But the Knight of Grimsby was instantly on his feet again with a new proposal, which to my amaze he uttered with a broad and pleasant smile on his face, such as he might have worn had his amendings been received with utmost acclaim.

"Has the thought come to you, my lords, that in this scroll, thus far, we have made no provision for the enforcement of our demands? We deal with a strong and crafty monarch. Even if he place his seal upon our demands, what surety have we that he will adhere to them after our levies have been dispersed? He will then be stronger than any one or two or three of us. How shall we ensure his adherence to the treaty?"

The rest of us gazed at one another in silence. This was a new thought, it seemed, to our whole assembly; and none could deny the seriousness of the question. At last De Longville spoke again:

"And hast thou, Grimsby, given thought to this so that thou canst now produce a remedy?"

"Not on the instant, my lord; but in the main my thought is this: In this instrument itself must be provision for its enforcement. The King must agree that a body of ten or a score or more of us shall be named by ourselves; and that these shall be responsible to see that the charter be not impaired or overridden. In another night I can form the language to carry this provision into our articles."

Then the Abbot spoke, suggesting that Sir Cedric be instructed to do this;

and finally, on motion of mine, the articles were back referred to Cedric and the Abbot with instruction to bring to our meeting, at two o' the clock on the following day, a fair and perfect copy that we might adopt and place before the assembled leaders.

'Twas then high noon. As we left the Council Hall, Sir Cedric took me by the arm and insisted that I come to his inn for the midday meal. There was in his inviting a special urgency and a look in his eyes from which I who knew him so well of old instantly gained the knowledge that this was no ordinary matter of courtesy but something of vastly greater moment. So I easily suffered myself to be led toward his quarters; and soon we were seated at a board that was graced with a goodly roast and all other due refreshment.

When we had something satisfied our hunger, and the old serving man who waited on us had departed, Cedric bent toward me across the board to say:

"What sayest thou, Sir Richard, to a ride of a dozen leagues or so and a little adventure whereby, if Fortune favors, we may do our cause full loyal service?"

"With all my heart!" I cried, "whither shall we ride, and on what errand?"

'Twas two months and more since we had seen activity; and this dull life of the camp and the town was little to my liking. Sir Hubert Gillespie had lately struck a blow for the King by the surprise and capture of two strong castles in the Midlands that we had thought safely in our hands, while we with our brave array at Stamford consumed the days and our dwindling substance in idleness.

"'Tis one that's something dangerous, forsooth," replied my friend, "and I doubt much whether our elderly and prudent leaders would approve it."

"Say no more, for Mountjoy is with thee to the hilt. What followers shall I bring, and with what arms?"

"A dozen lusty swordsmen—men still young and light on the feet and with heads to understand a stratagem. Dickon and John o' the Wallfield and Elbert the Smith are the right sort. See that every man wears beneath his outer garment a coat of linked mail and carries a sword no longer than his arm. Within the hour I will meet thee at the beech wood thou knowest to the south of the town; and will bring a like number of the men of Grimsby. We shall ride hard and far; so look to it, I pray thee, that thy men be well mounted. We may have cause for speed on the homeward road."

An hour later, with four and twenty proper men, Cedric and I rode out of the beech wood, and took the high road toward the south, where, but five or six leagues away, the castles and most of the towns were still in the hands of the King's mercenaries. I knew full well that the quest on which we were embarked was one that meant our cause's advancement, and would have willingly trusted Cedric for the rest; but now we drew ahead of our horsemen, and he explained full clearly his design. 'Twas such a plan as only Cedric would have formed, and

its outcome in truth, exceeding dubious; but we were comrades of old in many a venture that would have been refused by prudent men; and now he had no labor in convincing me that this was worth the trial.

After an hour's riding, we came to a thick wood, and turned aside in this into a little glade where we halted to rest our mounts and to bring about a most surprising change in our appareling. At a word from Cedric, each of the Grimsby men proceeded to withdraw from his saddle bags some garments which, being unfolded, appeared as the long gray cloaks and hoods of palmers. Each, it seemed, had brought a costume for himself and for one of the Mountjoy men; and now, in less time than the telling takes, we had all laid aside among the bracken any headwear or other dress that might not properly consort with these, and stood forth as a body of pilgrims in the dress that marked those who had accomplished the toilsome journey to the Holy Land. Soon we were on the road again, and, save for now and again the rattle of a sword hilt or a robust, laughing word, might not have been distinguished from a cavalcade of devout returning pilgrims such as were not uncommon on our roads.

Without mishap we pursued our way into a region where all the points of vantage were held by our enemies; and where armed parties, far too strong for our gainsaying, patrolled the roads or watched them from the hilltops. In the late afternoon we came within sight of the Castle of Moberley which was held for the King by Sir John Champney with a hundred lances and six score cross-bowmen.

On the left, and but half a mile from the castle, lay the Abbey where William De Bellair, favorite of the King, renegade cleric and forsworn Crusader, held usurping sway over the monks and lay brethren and the fields and vineyards that had been the rightful domain of our associate at Stamford whom we still greeted as the Abbot of Moberley.

At a like distance from Moberley Castle was a fork in the road just beyond a timbered bridge o'er a stream. There the left-hand track led to the Abbey and that on the right went straight to the castle gates. At the full trot we took the former turning, and soon were calling for admittance at the Abbey doors.

This, to a devoted band of pilgrims, was not long denied. The gates were thrown ajar, and, leaving two trusty fellows to care for the horses in the outer courtyard, we passed into the refection hall of the monastery to pay our respects to this venerable seat of piety and learning. Our worthy palmers scattered themselves about the great room with its low timbered ceiling and mighty fireplace, and engaged in talk with the monks or in reverent examining of the painted series on the walls, the work of an earnest though not too highly skilled lay brother, and setting forth the story of Joseph and his brethren.

After a little, Sir Cedric, acting as our leader, sent word to the Abbot whom we had not yet seen, that here was a group of a score and more of palmers who

now paid their first visit to the far-renowned Abbey of Moberley and who wished to have speech with the reverend master of the house ere they departed. This message, with its accompanying compliments, accomplished its intent; and soon William De Bellair, in all the robes of his office, entered the hall from an inner door and seated himself in his great chair on the dais.

If ever the character and history of a man were written on his face, 'twas so with the false Abbot of Moberley. My gorge rose within me at the sight of his red and bloated countenance that told so plainly of a life the very opposite of that led by a true monk and churchman. His mean and shifty little gray eyes were all but covered with folds and wrinkles of fat, yet quite sufficiently revealed a nature compounded of fox and pig. De Bellair was one of a group of dissolute Frenchmen who had won the favor of the King and the hatred of true Englishmen by supporting our lawless and grasping sovereign in all his schemes for the seizure of power and wealth. It was against them nearly as much as the King that our banner of revolt had been raised; and in our Articles of Stamford we had already named a half dozen of the worst of them who must be deprived of all offices and banished from the Kingdom. 'Twas no blame to the Church that such miscreants profaned some of her holy offices. In defiance of her rights of ancient usage, they had been thrust by their royal master into the places they disgraced, oftentimes in reward for services which would not bear recording.

"Reverend Father," said Cedric, bowing low, "we congratulate ourselves upon our visit to this ancient and honorable abbey; and we have here some gifts and tokens to bestow upon thee as the head of this worthy brotherhood."

De Bellair bowed deeply in acknowledgment of this greeting. When he raised his head again, what was his amaze and horror to find that he that had addressed him so respectfully had sprung upon the dais, pulled from his shoulders the palmer's cloak, and now rushed upon him as a hound upon his quarry. In an instant the long gray robe was flung o'er the Abbot's head and arms, and despite his struggles and cries a rope was speedily bound about his middle, pinioning his hands to his sides. Then he was lifted bodily and hurried toward the courtyard door. Some of the monks set up a hideous outcry, and one or two sought to intercept those who carried the bound and struggling Abbot; but where they thought to deal with unarmed pilgrims, they found themselves confronted with two and twenty stout fellows each of whom had drawn from beneath his flowing cloak a short-bladed sword and flourished it in most menacing way. They fell back before us, overawed, and understanding nothing of what had passed. Only one of the monastery people did preserve his wits at this amazing juncture, and this an acolyte youth of sixteen years. Slipping out of the hall and through the rear of the Abbey, he ran, as we afterwards learned to our cost, with might and main to take the news of this mad foray to the castle's governor.

In the outer yard we spent some time in adjusting more firmly our captive's bonds and in cutting slits through the cloak that bound his head so as to allow him to breathe but nowise to see and scarcely to make himself heard with calls for help. Then hoisting him with difficulty (for he was a gross, fat man) upon a stout charger whereon one of our own men rode behind him, we turned away from the Abbey and rode at such speed as we might on the road by which we came.

Our progress was slow at the first, for our prisoner sat most unevenly in his bonds; and we had no mind to let him fall by the way. And we had no more than fairly set out on the road when he began to shout and halloo in such wise that Dickon o' the Wallfield, who rode behind him, was fain to bring him to understanding of his hopeless plight by a sharp prick from his poniard's point. Thereafter he was silent; and we made better way; but withal most precious time had been lost. The night had already fallen, and with another quarter hour we might have won safely away. But as we approached the fork of the road we heard a thunder of hoofs coming from the castle. The riders were nearer the joining than we, and ere we could gain the bridge we heard their horses upon it and knew that Sir John Champney's men were drawing up in battle array to meet us. As we surmised even then, Sir John had divided the force that he so hastily summoned to punish the supposed outlaws who seized the Abbot for a ransom, and had sent one party straight to the Abbey and led the other to this point to intercept us.

In the light from the great moon now rising, we could see that their numbers were more than twice our own. They were variously armed, as was to be expected with men who had been so abruptly summoned forth; but there were lances and steel caps enow and some had coats of mail. We sorely wished for the good broadswords we left behind at Stamford or the cross-bows with which a dozen of our party were so skilled. But now was not time for hesitation or for choosing of courses. Well we knew that in a trice the other party, riding from the Abbey gates, would be on our track and we would be taken in front and rear. With a mighty shout we rode down upon the bridge, trusting all to the darkness and the fury of our attack.

In a moment we were in the midst of a bloody mêlée on the bridge. Our men thrust back their hampering robes, and hewed and slashed with deadly effect; but those opposing us were no weaklings nor novices in war. Sir John Champney slew two of our men with downright broadsword strokes and another was pierced through throat by a lance. I rode in a closer press of fighting than I had seen since the Battle of the Pass; and once or twice was near beaten from my horse, though some of those that rained their blows on me fared worse indeed. Then Cedric came face to face with Sir John Champney, received a broadsword stroke on his uplifted, mail-clad arm, and countered with a blow that sent his enemy to earth.

Instantly the cry arose that Sir John was slain. Most of his followers were French and Flemish mercenaries; and now they melted away before us, fleeing to the fields on either side of the bridge or leaping to the shallow waters below. We paused long enough to learn that our men who had fallen were past all help; then rode forward at a gallop up the moon-lighted way, with our prisoner still safely bound and in our midst.

By the eleventh hour we entered again the wood where we had transformed ourselves to palmers; and 'twas the work of but a moment to change us back to knights and men-at-arms. By midnight we were safely in the town and had our prisoner properly bestowed. Then Cedric and I parted for the night,—I to go to my bed, and he, as the morrow showed, to labor by candle-light all through the hours of darkness.

At nine the next morning I was by appointment at Cedric's lodging, and found that he had just despatched a messenger to the true Abbot of Moberley with an urgent request that he come at once since most important news awaited him from the Abbey itself. This message speedily accomplished its object, and the Abbot, standing not on ceremony, came hurrying to the lodgings.

WITH A MIGHTY SHOUT, WE RODE DOWN UPON THE BRIDGE, TRUSTING ALL TO THE DARKNESS AND THE FURY OF OUR ATTACK

We greeted him most courteously, and, when our guest was duly and comfortably seated, Cedric stated that riders had come in from Moberley the night before with the news of a most surprising happening. A band of a score or more of pilgrims returning from the Holy Land had entered the Abbey, and, doubtless being wroth at William De Bellair because he had forsworn himself by abandon-

ing his vow to go an Crusade for the recovery of the Holy Sepulcher, had seized and bound him, and, overawing the monastery with weapons, had carried him away by force.

The Abbot listened to this tale of violence with sparkling eyes and with no hint of censure for those who had so roughly laid hands upon a cleric dignitary. When it was finished, indeed, he could scarce restrain his glee. Rising and smiting the table roundly with his hand, he cried:

"Ha! Well served! Well served indeed, for a creature that calls himself monk and abbot, forsooth, when profit is that way to be gained but who forgets all monkish obligations when a layman's way of living better serves him! The palmers are right indeed, and I devoutly hope they may keep him for aye as far from Moberley Abbey as his conduct hath ever been from that of a true churchman."

Cedric then resumed, in slow and measured voice:

"It so happens, Reverend Abbot, that I have several friends among these palmers, and to some extent they rely on me for advice in this matter."

"Ah! Is it so indeed?" questioned the Abbot, eagerly. "Then I trust that thou, as a true friend of the Church and her rightful servitors, hast given advice to hold this fellow they have taken—at least till the King be brought to terms and our brotherhoods be free again to fill their offices without dictation."

Cedric slowly shook his head.

"Nay, my advice has not yet been given. 'Twill require some further meditation to be sure that 'tis wisely bestowed. But, Reverend Abbot, if thou wilt but climb the stair that I shall show thee here and apply thine eye to a hole in the wall at the right, near the top, I warrant thee a sight well worth thy pains."

So saying, Cedric rose and throwing open a small door at the rear of the room, indicated a dim and curving staircase that rose beyond it. The Abbot, after a searching glance at his host as though he feared some stratagem, quickly mounted, looking eagerly the while for the eye-hole in the wall. Both of us remained below; and Cedric, turning to a cabinet withdrew from it and placed upon the table a huge scroll of many sheets of freshly-written parchment.

A moment later, the churchman returned with brightly glowing face and twinkling eyes, and when the stairway door was closed again, exclaimed:

"Sir Cedric De La Roche, thou'rt a true friend to the Church, and thy services shall be well remembered. 'Tis William De Bellair, beyond all doubt, who sits in yonder inner room, and 'tis two archers of Grimsby who guard him. Full well do I know who led that band of palmers; and I say again thy fortunes shall not suffer for it."

Cedric bowed and smiled.

"Ah well! 'Tis neither here nor there who led the palmers or whether they

acted wholly of their own impulse. The thing of greatest moment now is this scroll of the articles which I have here in fair copy. Read it, I pray thee, and see whether thou wilt give thy voice for its adoption. Thou wilt see that I have introduced the provision for five and twenty barons who shall enforce the charter and also have written in some other matters that seem to us of moment."

The Abbot took the scroll and quickly conned the pages whereon he and Cedric had on the first day of their labors come to full agreement. Then he came to the twentieth article, and ceasing reading, looked up at Cedric sharply.

"Thou hast here the wording for which thou did'st argue yesterday."

"Aye, 'tis so," answered Cedric, grimly, "read on."

The Abbot complied, but quickly came to another stop.

"Let not the body of *a free man* be taken or imprisoned—" he read, "that again is the very language that was yesterday rejected."

Cedric nodded in assent. "Read on," he said.

For some pages the Abbot went on in silence. Then he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and paused to read again—this time aloud—an article that appeared near the end of the scroll.

"All the aforesaid customs and liberties which the King hath conceded, to be held in the Kingdom as far as concerns his relations to his men, all in the realm, as well ecclesiastics as laity, *shall on their part observe toward their men*."

The Abbot leaped to his feet, his face red with wrath.

"What means this, De La Roche? Would thou have all these things for which we risk our lives and lands extended to every churl and varlet in the Kingdom?"

"Aye," answered Cedric steadily. "And if thou'lt look abroad through our camp, thou'lt see some thousands of those same churls and yeomen that do risk their lives in this cause as much as thou or me."

The Abbot shook his head with impatience.

"'Tis beyond reason, De La Roche. I cannot give my word for it."

Cedric for a moment gazed out of window. Then he said to me:

"This keeping in durance of an ecclesiastic who was appointed to his place by the King and moreover stands high in his favor, is a difficult and dangerous business. 'Twill be better if we take him to the town's edge and turn him loose to find his way back whence he came."

The Abbot gazed at Cedric with parted lips and bated breath while one might have told two score. Then of a sudden he flung the parchment on the table and laughed full loud and long.

"Thou hast won, De La Roche. I yield me. Thou hast won and fairly. Thou'rt a most persuading speaker, I'll be bound. I will go before our group this day, and make them adopt these articles whether they will or no. Then to-

morrow I will speak for them before the whole assembly. Thou shalt see what I can do when I am well put to it. Depend upon it, the articles of that very scroll that lies before us will be the ones our party will present to the King. And thou, on thy part, shall have due watch and ward kept of thy prisoner, and see to it that he by no means gains his liberty until the King hath sealed our charter and pledged himself to interfere no more in our clerical elections."

The Abbot was as good as his word. That afternoon he delivered such an address in eulogy of the articles as they appeared in this latest scroll as I had never heard before on any subject whatsoever. He marshalled all the arguments Cedric had used together with many more he had not thought on. His speech was filled with grace and eloquence and was of an enthusiasm that carried all away. He showed beyond all doubt the power that would accrue to our party through this inclusion of the rights of the commonalty in our charter. When he was done De Longville as strongly favored these provisions in the articles as on the day before he had opposed them. Lord Esmond grimly held his peace, though oft shaking his gray head in denial, and soon the scroll had been adopted by our vote of four to one. The following day our ardent champion made a yet more eloquent speech before the full assembly; and the articles were approved by acclamation.

All know the remainder of the tale of Magna Charta,—how the King, three days later, at Brackley where the articles were read to him, refused them with an oath, furiously declaring that the barons might as well have asked of him his kingdom,—how we resumed the war forthwith and the taking of his castles,—how the gates of London were opened to us and the King was at length brought to terms at Runnymede. There again 'twas Cedric De La Roche and the Abbot of Moberley who conferred with the Archbishop and the other commissioners of the King and satisfied themselves and us that the completed scroll that received the royal seal was to the same effect as our articles of Stamford and Brackley.

And now King John is dead, and little lamented, and a wiser sovereign rules the land. Already men begin to see how great a thing was done at Runnymede. 'Tis said that the Great Charter will be for centuries to come the basis of our English law, since it affirms with equal voice the rights of all our three estates,—the nobility, the clergy and the commons. It seems to me that later generations will find in its provisions the authority and the suggestion for many a reform that we dare not yet attempt, and that freer and happier men may date the beginning of better things to our bitter struggle with King John. If so be, may they think not overmuch of us that were noble born and fought for lordly privilege, but may they never forget that in our day there were true men of lowly birth who risked their all for the rights of their fellows. Of these was none more worthy of honor than he whom I am ever proud to call my friend and comrade,—Cedric, the Forester of Pelham.

THE END Transcriber's Notes for Cedric, the Forester:

Differences from modern spelling and modern construction have not been changed.

Variations in hyphenation and inconsistencies in spelling were retained.

Punctuation inconsistencies and typographical errors were silently corrected.

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