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The Lances of Lynwood,



The Oxford Story Readers

Fourth Series



The Lances of
Lynwood

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has been Abridged*

CHAPTER I

SELDOM had the interior of this island presented a more peaceful and prosperous aspect than in the reign of Edward III., when the more turbulent spirits among his subjects had found occupation in his foreign wars, and his wise government had established at home a degree of plenty, tranquillity, and security, such as had probably never before been experienced in England.

In the village of Lynwood, among the cottages and farmhouses occupying a fertile valley in Somersetshire, arose the ancient Keep, built of grey stone, and strongly fortified ; though the moat was clear of weeds, and full of water, the drawbridge was so well covered with hard-trodden earth, overgrown at the edges with grass, that, in spite of the massive chains connecting it with the gateway, it seemed permanently fixed on the ground. The spikes of the portcullis frowned above in threatening array, but a wreath of ivy was twining up the groove by which it had once descended, and the archway, which by day stood hospitably open, was at night only guarded by two large oaken doors, yielding to a slight push. Beneath the southern wall of the castle court were various flower-beds, the pride and delight of the old seneschal, Ralph Penrose,

in his own estimation the most important personage of Lynwood Keep.

One fine evening old Ralph stood before the door, his bald forehead and thin iron-grey locks unbonneted, and his dark ruddy-brown face raised with an air of deference towards the lady who stood on the steps of the porch. She was small and fragile in figure; her face, though very lovely, was pale and thin, and her smile had in it something pensive and almost melancholy, as she watched a noble-looking child of seven or eight years old, who, mounted on an old warhorse, was led round the court by a youth, his elder by some ten or eleven years.

“See, mother!” cried the child, “I am holding the reins myself. Uncle Eustace lays not a finger on them!”

“As I was saying, madam,” continued Ralph, disregarding the interruption, “you are too gentle with your tenants, my lady, and they grow insolent in Sir Reginald’s long absence.”

“All goes ill in his absence,” said the lady. “And when he returns it will be but a bright dream to last for a moment. He cannot long be spared from the Prince’s side.”

“Hark! hark!” cried Eustace. “Dost not hear, Ralph? A horn!”

“The Lynwood note! My husband’s note! O thanks, thanks to the Saints!” cried the lady, clasping her hands, whilst Eustace, vaulting into the saddle behind his little nephew, rode across the drawbridge as fast as old Blanc Etoile could be prevailed on to move. Gaining the summit of a rising ground both

at once shouted, "Our own pennon! It is himself!" as they beheld the dark blue crosslet on an argent field floating above a troop of horsemen, whose armour glanced in the setting sun.

"There are the Lances of Lynwood, Arthur," said Eustace, leaping to the ground. "Keep your seat, and meet your father like a brave knight's son."

He then settled the reins in the child's hand, and walked beside him to meet the newcomers. They were about twenty in number. In front rode two of higher rank. The first was a man of noble mien and lofty stature, his handsome though sunburnt countenance displayed beneath his small blue velvet cap, his helmet being carried behind him by a man-at-arms, and his attire consisting of a close-fitting dress of chamois leather, a white mantle embroidered with the blue cross thrown over one shoulder, and his sword hanging by his side. His companion was of still greater height, and very slight; his large keen eyes, hair, and moustache, black as jet; and his complexion dark brown, with a well-formed aquiline nose.

The instant the first-mentioned horseman perceived Eustace and Arthur, he sprang to the ground, and hurried to meet them with rapid affectionate greetings and inquiries. In another moment Dame Eleanor appeared on the drawbridge, and, weeping with joy, was clasped in her husband's arms. Sir Reginald addressed his tall companion: "Friend Gaston, I bid you welcome! Dame Eleanor, and you, brother Eustace, I present to you my trusty esquire, Master Gaston d'Aubricour."

Eustace came within a few steps of the stranger, and stood waiting to offer him any courtesy in his power.

It was the squire who was the first to speak. "So this is Sir Reginald's old Keep! A fine old fortalice—would stand at least a fortnight's siege."

"You have seen many sieges and passages of arms?" asked Eustace, looking up in his face.

"Since our castle of Albricorte was sacked and burnt, I have seen little else—three stricken fields—two towns stormed—castles more than I can remember."

"Alas!" said Eustace, "I have seen nothing but the muster of arms at Taunton!"

D'Aubricour laughed. "Look not downcast on it," said he; "you have time before you, and one year at Bordeaux is worth four elsewhere. But I forget, you are the young clerk; and yet that scarcely accords with that bright eye of yours, and the weapon at your side."

"They spoke once of making me a clerk," said Eustace; "but I hope to show my brother that I am fit for his own way of life. Sir Squire, do but tell me, do you think I look unfit to sustain the honour of my name?"

"Mere strength is little," said the squire, "else were that comely giant, John Ingram, the best warrior in the army. Nor does height reckon for much; Du Guesclin himself is of the shortest. Nor do you look like the boy over whose weakly timid nature I have heard Sir Reginald lament."

Eustace had, in fact, hardly reached the middle height, and was very slender; his limbs were, however,

well proportioned, his step firm, and every movement full of activity and grace. His face, shaded with bright chestnut hair, was of a delicate complexion, the features finely moulded, and the usual cast of expression slightly thoughtful; but there was frequently, and especially at this moment, a bright kindling light in the dark blue eyes, which changed the whole countenance from the grave and refined look of the young scholar to the bold ardent glance of the warrior.

“A cavalier, every inch of you!” cried d’Aubricour, striking Eustace on the shoulder as he concluded his inspection. “I’ll have the training of you, and see if I do not make you as true a chevalier as the most burly giant of them all.”

CHAPTER II

THE house of Lynwood had long been famed for loyalty, which had often cost them dear, since their neighbours, the Lords of Clarenham, never failed to take advantage of the ascendancy of the popular party, and make encroachments on their privileges and possessions.

The turmoils of the reign of Edward II. had not failed to leave their traces on the fortunes of the Lynwoods. Sir Henry, father of the present knight, was a staunch adherent of the unfortunate monarch, and even

joined the hapless Edmund, Earl of Kent, in the rising in which that prince was entrapped after the murder of his brother. On this occasion it was only Sir Henry's hasty flight that preserved his life, and his lands were granted to the Baron Simon de Clarenham by the young Edward III., but the whole county of Somerset rose to expel the intruders from Lynwood Keep, and reinstate its true master. Nor did Simon de Clarenham make much resistance.

Sir Henry Lynwood's eldest son, Reginald, was early sent to the Royal Camp, where he soon distinguished himself and gained the favour and friendship of the gallant Prince of Wales. The feud with the Clarenhams seemed to be completely extinguished, when Reginald succeeded in obtaining the hand of a lady of that family, the daughter of a brave knight slain in the wars in Brittany.

Since this time, both the Baron de Clarenham and his son, Sir Fulk, had been on good terms with the Knight of Lynwood, and the connection had been drawn still closer by the baron's second marriage with the Lady Muriel de la Poer, a near relative of Sir Reginald's mother. Many a time had Dame Eleanor Lynwood ridden to Clarenham Castle, under the escort of her young brother-in-law, to whom such a change from the lonely old Keep afforded no small delight.

Eustace, Sir Henry's younger son, was a puny, ailing child, preferring the seat at his mother's feet, the fairy tale of the old nurse, the song of the minstrel, or the book of the priest, to horse and hound, or even to the sight of the martial sports of the tilt-yard.

The last five years had, however, wrought a great change in him ; he began to outgrow the delicacy of his constitution, and with it, to shake off his timidity of disposition. A diligent perusal of the romances of chivalry filled him with emulation, and he had applied himself ardently to all knightly exercises, looking with great eagerness to the time when he might appear in the Prince's court.

Very different was the state of the old Keep of Lynwood from the quiet, almost deserted condition, in which it had been left so long, now that the knight had again taken his wonted place amongst the gentry of the county. Entertainments were exchanged with his neighbours, hunting and hawking matches, and all the sports of the tilt-yard followed each other in quick succession, and the summer passed merrily away. Merrily, that is to say, with Sir Reginald, whose stirring life in camp and court had left him but few and short intervals for enjoying his home and the society of his wife ; with Eleanor, who, relieved from long anxiety, began to recover the spirits and health which had nearly failed her ; and with Eustace, to whom the arrival of his brother and his followers brought a continued course of novelty and delight.

Two months had not passed since Sir Reginald's return before an invitation was sent to the trusty and well-beloved Sir Reginald¹ Lynwood to join the forces which the Duke of Lancaster was assembling at Southampton, the Prince of Wales having promised to assist King Pedro of Castile in recovering the kingdom from which he had been driven by his brother Enrique.

Sir Reginald could not do otherwise than prepare with alacrity to obey the call of his beloved Prince, though he marvelled that Edward should draw his sword in the cause of such a monster of cruelty, and he was more reluctant than ever before to leave his home. He even promised his sorrowful Eleanor that this should be the last time he would leave her.

Eleanor smiled, but the next moment sighed and drooped her head, while a tear fell on the blue silk with which she was embroidering the crosslet on his pennon.

The trampling of horses was now heard, and there rode into the court an elderly man, whose dress and bearing showed him to be of consideration, accompanied by a youth of eighteen or nineteen, and attended by two servants. Sir Reginald and his brother immediately stepped forward to receive them.

“Sir Philip Ashton,” said the former. “This is friendly in you to come and bid us farewell.”

“I grieve that it should be farewell, Sir Reginald,” said the old knight, dismounting, whilst Eustace held his stirrup; “our county can ill spare such men as you. Thanks, my young friend, Eustace. See, Leonard, what good training will do for an esquire; Eustace has already caught that air and courteous demeanour that cannot be learnt here among us poor knights of Somerset.”

This was to his son, who, with a short abrupt reply to the good-natured greeting of Sir Reginald, had scrambled down from his saddle, and stood by Eustace's side, staring round him, and chiefly fixing his large grey eyes upon Gaston, whose tall active figure and

lively dark countenance seemed to afford him an inexhaustible subject of study.

Sir Philip went to pay his respects to the Lady of Lynwood, and then, as the hour of noon had arrived, all partook of the meal, which was served in the hall, the squires waiting on the knights and the lady before themselves sitting down to table.

It was the influence of dinner that first unchained the silent tongue of Leonard Ashton, when he found himself seated next to his old acquaintance, Eustace Lynwood.

“So your brother has let you bear sword after all. How like you the trade? Better than poring over crabbed parchments, I trow. But guess you why we are here to-day? My father says that I must take service with some honourable knight, and see somewhat of the world. He spoke long of the Lord de Clarenham, because his favour would be well in the county; but at last he has fixed on your brother, because he may do somewhat for me with the Prince.”

“Then you are going with us to Bordeaux?” exclaimed Eustace eagerly.

“Ay, truly.”

“Nay, but that is a right joyful hearing!” said Eustace. “Old friends should be brethren in arms.”

“But, Eustace,” said young Ashton, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, “I like not that outlandish squire, so tall and black.”

In the meantime, Sir Philip Ashton was entering upon the business of his visit, which was to request Sir Reginald to admit his son into his train as an

esquire The Knight of Lynwood, though not very desirous of this addition to his followers, could not well refuse him; but he mentioned his own purpose of quitting the Prince's court as soon as the present expedition should be concluded.

"I shall hope it may be otherwise, for my boy's sake," said Sir Philip. "But be that as it may, his fame will be secured by his going forth for the first time with such a leader as yourself. The example and friendship of your brother will also be of the utmost service. Your chief squire too—so perfect in all chivalrous training, and a foreigner—who better could be found to train a poor Somersetshire clown. One word more, Sir Reginald, I pray you. You are all powerful with Prince Edward. My poor boy's advancement is in your hand. One word in his favour to the Prince—a hint of the following I could send his pennon——"

"Sir Philip," said Reginald, "you overrate my influence, and underrate the Prince's judgment, if you imagine aught save personal merit would weigh with him. Your son shall have every opportunity of deserving his notice, but whether it be favourable or not must depend on himself. If you desire more, you must not seek it of me."

Sir Philip protested that this was all he wished, and after reiterating his thanks, took his leave, promising that Leonard should be at Lynwood Keep on the next Monday, the day fixed for Sir Reginald's departure.

CHAPTER III

THE morning of departure arrived. The men-at-arms were drawn up in the court like so many statues of steel; Leonard Ashton sat on horseback, his eyes fixed on the door; Gaston d'Aubricour, wrapped in his gay mantle, stood caressing his Arab steed, Brigliador; Ralph Penrose held his master's horse, and a black powerful charger was prepared for Eustace, but still the brothers tarried.

"My Eleanor, this should not be!" said Reginald, as his wife clung to him weeping. "Keep a good heart. 'Tis not for long. Take heed of your dealings with your Cousin Fulk. She knows not what I say. Father Cyril, keep guard over her and my boy, in case I should meet with any mishap."

"I will, assuredly, my son," said the chaplain; "but it is little that a poor priest like me can do."

"Watch over her, good father; she is weak and tender. Look up, sweetheart, give me one cheerful wish to speed me on my journey. No? She has swooned. Eleanor! my wife——"

"Begone, begone, my son," said Father Cyril; "it will be the better for her."

"It may be," said Reginald; "yet to leave her thus. Arthur, be duteous to her; talk to her of our return; farewell, my boy, and blessings on you. Eustace, mount."

Sir Reginald, sighing heavily, swung himself into the saddle; Eustace waited a moment longer.

“Eustace!” hastily called Reginald, and with a hurried farewell to all around, the young squire sprang on horseback, and the troop rode across the drawbridge. They halted on the mound beyond; Sir Reginald shook his pennon, till the long white swallow tails streamed on the wind, then placed it in the hands of Eustace, and saying, “On, Lances of Lynwood! In the name of God, St. George, and King Edward, do your duty.”

A few days brought the troop to Southampton, where John of Gaunt was collecting his armament, and with it they embarked, crossed to St. Malo, and thence proceeded to Bordeaux, but there found that the Prince of Wales had already set forth.

Advancing immediately, at the end of three days they came in sight of the encamped forces. Glorious was the scene before them, the green plain covered in every direction with white tents, surmounted with the banners or pennons of their masters, the broad red Cross of St. George waving proudly in the midst, and beside it the royal Lions and Castles of the two Spanish monarchies.

The sound of horses' feet approached rapidly from another quarter, and a small party came in sight, the foremost of whom checked his bridle, as, at Reginald's signal, his Lances halted and drew respectfully aside. He was a man about thirty-six years of age, and looking even younger, from the remarkable fairness and delicacy of his complexion. The perfect regularity of his noble features, together with the commanding, yet gentle expression of his clear light blue eyes, would, even without the white ostrich

feather in his black velvet cap, have enabled Eustace to recognise in him the flower of chivalry, Edward, Prince of Wales.

“Welcome, my trusty Reginald!” exclaimed he. “I knew that the Lances of Lynwood would not be absent where knightly work is to be done. Methinks I see there a fair face like enough to yours to belong to another loyal Lynwood.”

“I could wish it were a little browner and more manly, my lord,” said Reginald. “It is my brother Eustace, who has been suffered to tarry at home as my lady’s page, till he looks as white as my lady herself.”

“We will soon find a cure for that in the sun of Castile,” said Edward.

“This, my lord, is the son of Sir Philip Ashton, a loyal knight of our county.”

“He is welcome,” said the Prince. “We have work for all. Let me see you this evening at supper in my tent.”

“Well, Eustace, what sayest thou?” said Gaston, as the Prince rode on.

“A prince to dream of, a prince for whom to give a thousand lives!” said Eustace.

“And that was the Prince of Wales!” said Leonard. “Why, he spoke just like any other man.”

The two tents of the Lances of Lynwood having been erected, and all arrangements made, the knights and squires set out for the Prince’s pavilion, the white curtains of which were conspicuous in the centre of the camp.

At the upper end was placed a long table for the

Prince and his guests, and here Sir Reginald took his seat, with many a hearty welcome from his friends and companions in arms, while Gaston led his comrades to the lower end, where squires and pages were waiting for the provisions brought in by the servants, which they were to carry to their knights.

The Black Prince himself occupied the centre, his brother John at his left hand, and at his right a person whom both this post of honour and the blazonry of his surcoat marked out as the dethroned King of Castile, "Pedro the Cruel."

"Eustace! What, Eustace, in a trance?" said d'Aubricour. "Waken, and carry this trencher of beef to your brother."

The discontented glance with which Leonard's eyes followed his fellow-squires, did not pass unobserved by a person with whom d'Aubricour had exchanged a few words, a squarely made, dark-visaged man, with a thick black beard, and a huge scar which had obliterated one eye.

"You gaze after that trencher as if you wished your turn was come," said he, in a patois of English and French.

"Why, ay," said Leonard; "but I trow I have as much right to serve at the Prince's table as dainty Master Eustace. My father had never put me under Sir Reginald's charge had he deemed I should be kept here among the serving-men. Gaston d'Aubricour is as sharp as the knight himself, and gibes me without ceasing; but yet I could bear it all, were it not for seeing Eustace, the clerk, preferred to me, as if I were not heir to more acres than he can ever count crowns."

“What may then be your name, fair youth, and your inheritance?” demanded the one-eyed squire.

“My name is Leonard Ashton; my father——” but Leonard’s speech was cut short by a squire who stumbled over his outstretched foot. Both parties burst into angry exclamations, Leonard’s new acquaintance taking his part. Men looked up, and serious consequences might have ensued had not Gaston hastened to the spot.

“Shame on you, young malapert,” said he to his hopeful pupil. “Cannot I leave you one moment unwatched, but you must be brawling in the Prince’s own presence? Hear, bear this bread to Sir Reginald instantly, and leave me to make your peace. Master Clifford,” added he, as Leonard shuffled away, “’tis an uncouth lad whom Sir Reginald Lynwood has undertaken to mould into form, so I must e’en beg you to take my apology.”

“Most readily, Master d’Aubricour,” replied Clifford; “there would not have been the least offence had the youth only possessed a civil tongue.”

“A plague upon it!” said Gaston. “To train two boys is more than I bargained for, and over and above to hinder this wiseacre Ashton from ruining himself, or being ruined by Le Borgne Basque! I would let the oaf take his course, for a wilful, wrong-headed fool, but that it would scarce be doing good service to Sir Reginald.”

On the way to the tent he began to take Leonard to task. “A proper commencement! Did you take the Prince’s pavilion for one of your own island hostels?”

“What business had he to tread on my foot?” growled Leonard.

“What business had your foot there?”

“I was speaking a few words to another gentleman.”

“The fewer words you speak to Le Borgne Basque, the better, unless you wish that the crowns with which your father stored your pouch should jingle in his pockets. It is well for you the knight marked you not.”

“You held long enough parley with him yourself,” said the refractory pupil.

“Look you, Master Leonard Ashton, I have no purse to lose, and above all, my name and fame are made, and yours——”

“What would you say of mine?” said Leonard, with sulky indignation. “The heir of Ashton is not to be evened to a wandering landless foreigner.”

“It is not in sight of those mountain peaks,” said Gaston contemptuously, “that I am to be called a foreigner; and as to being landless, if I chose to take my stand on the old tower of Albricorte, and call myself lord of the whole hillside, I should like to see who would gainsay me. In this camp I would have you to know that the question is, not who has the broadest lands, but who has the strongest arm.”

“Who is this man? What is his name?” asked Eustace.

“Le Borgne Basque, I know no other,” said Gaston. “He is a Free Companion, brave enough, but more ready at the sack than the assault, and loving best to plunder, waste, and plunder again, or else to fleece such sheep as our friend here.”

“How could such a man gain entrance to the Prince’s pavilion?”

“Stout hearts and strong arms find entrance in most places,” said Gaston.

The next morning the army began their march to the Pyrenees. They halted for some days at the foot of the hills, whilst negotiations were passing between the Black Prince and Charles the Bad, King of Navarre, who might easily have prevented their entrance into the Peninsula by refusing a passage through his mountain fastnesses.

When the permission was granted, they advanced with considerable danger and difficulty. The rugged paths were covered with snow and ice, which made them doubly perilous for the horses, and but for Gaston’s familiarity with his native hills, Sir Reginald declared that he could never have brought his little troop across them in safety.

CHAPTER IV

THE moon was at her height, and shone full into the half-opened tent of Sir Reginald Lynwood. At the further end, quite in darkness, the knight, bare-headed, and rosary in hand, knelt before the dark-robed figure of a confessor, while at a short distance lay, on a couch of deerskins, the sleeping Leonard Ashton. Before the looped-up curtain that

formed the door was Gaston d'Aubricour, on one knee, close to a huge torch of pinewood fixed in the earth, examining by its flaring smoky light into the state of his master's armour, proving every joint with a small hammer. Near him, Eustace, with the help of John Ingram, the stalwart yeoman, was fastening his charge, the pennon, to a mighty lance of the toughest ash-wood, and often looking forth on the white tents on which the moonbeams shed their pale, tranquil light. There was much to impress a mind like his in the scene before him: the unearthly moonlight, the few glimmering stars, the sky—whose southern clearness and brightness were, to his unaccustomed eye, doubly wonderful—the constant though subdued sounds in the camp, the murmur of the river, and, far away in the dark expanse of night, the sparkling of a multitude of lights, which marked the encampment of the enemy. His eye glanced brightly, his step was free and bold, as he felt that this was the day that must silence every irritating doubt of his possessing a warrior-spirit.

The first red streak of dawn was beginning to glow in the eastern sky, when the note of a bugle rung out from the Prince's tent, and was responded to by hundreds of other horns. That instant the quiet, slumbering camp awoke, the space in front of every tent was filled with busy men, arming themselves, or saddling their horses. Gaston and Eustace, already fully equipped, assisted Sir Reginald to arm; Leonard was roused, and began to fasten on his armour; the men-at-arms came forth from their tent, and the horses were saddled and bridled. "And now," called

Sir Reginald, "bring our last loaf, John Ingram. Keep none back. By this day's eve we shall have abundance, or else no further need."

The hard dry barley-bread was shared in scanty, but equal measure, and scarcely had it been devoured, before a second bugle blast, pealing through the camp, caused each mail-clad warrior to close his visor, and spring into his saddle. A third, and all rode forth into the open plain, where, according to previous orders, they arrayed themselves in two divisions, the first commanded by the Duke of Lancaster and Sir John Chandos, the second by Prince Edward and Don Pedro.

After a pause, employed in marshalling the different bands, the host advanced at an even pace, the rising sun glancing on their armour, and revealing the multitude of waving crests, and streamers fluttering from the points of the lances, like the wings of gorgeous insects. Presently a wall of glittering armour was seen advancing to meet them, with the same brilliant display. It might have seemed some mighty tournament that was there arrayed, as the two armies stood confronting each other, rather than a stern battle for the possession of a kingdom.

During the battle which followed, with the loss of only one man-at-arms, the Lances of Lynwood had taken several prisoners. It was high noon, and the field was well-nigh cleared of the enemy, when Sir Reginald drew his rein at the top of a steep bank clothed with brushwood, sloping towards the stream of the Zadorra, threw up his visor, wiped his heated brow, and, patting his horse's neck, turned to his

brother, saying, "You have seen sharp work in this your first battle-day, Eustace."

"It is a glorious day!" said Eustace. "See how they hurry to the water." And he pointed over the low shrubs to a level space on the bank of the river, where several fugitives, on foot and horseback, were crowding together and pressing hastily forward.

"Ha!" cried Sir Reginald, "the golden circlet! Henry of Trastamare himself!" and at the same instant he sprang to the ground. "You," said he, "speed round the bushes, meet me at the ford they are making for." This was directed to Gaston, and ere the last words were spoken, both Sir Reginald and Eustace were already beginning to hurry down the bank. Gaston rose to his full height in his stirrups, and, looking over the wood, exclaimed, "The Eagle crest! I must be there. On, Ashton—Ingram, this way—speed, speed, speed!" and with these words threw himself from his horse, and dashed after the two brothers, as they went crashing, in their heavy armour, downwards through the boughs. In less than a minute they were on the level ground, and Sir Reginald rushed forward to intercept Don Enrique, who was almost close to the river. "Yield, yield, Sir King!" he shouted; but at the same moment another knight on foot threw himself between, raising a huge battle-axe, and crying, "Away, away, sir; leave me to deal with him!" Enrique turned, entered the river, and safely swam his horse to the other side, whilst his champion was engaged in a desperate conflict.

The Knight of Lynwood caught the first blow on

his shield, and returned it, but without the slightest effect on his antagonist, who, though short in stature, seemed to possess gigantic strength. A few moments more, and Reginald had fallen at full length on the grass, while his enemy was pressing on, to secure him as a prisoner, or to seize the pennon which Eustace held. The two squires stood with lifted swords before their fallen master, but it cost only another of those irresistible strokes to stretch Gaston beside Sir Reginald, and Eustace was left alone to maintain the struggle. A few moments more, and the Lances would come up—but how impossible to hold out! The first blow cleft his shield in two, and though it did not pierce his armour, the shock brought him to his knee, and without the support of the staff of the pennon he would have been on the ground. Still, however, he kept up his defence, using sometimes his sword, and sometimes the staff, to parry the strokes of his assailant; but the strife was too unequal, and, faint with violent exertion, he felt that all would be over with him in another second, when his sinking energies were revived by the cry of “St. George,” close at hand. His enemy relaxing his attack, he sprang to his feet, and that instant found himself enclosed, almost swept away, by a crowd of combatants of inferior degree, all of whose weapons were turned upon his opponent. A sword was lifted over the enemy’s head from behind, and would the next moment have descended, but that Eustace sprang up, dashed it aside, cried “Shame!” and, grasping the arm of the threatened knight, exclaimed, “Yield, yield! it is your only hope!”

“Yield? and to thee?” said the knight; “yet

it is well meant. Thou art of gentle birth? I yield me then, rescue or no rescue, the rather that I see thou art a gallant youth. Hark you, fellows, I am a prisoner, so get off with you. Your name, bold youth?"

"Eustace Lynwood, brother to this knight," said Eustace, raising his visor, and panting for breath.



"You need but a few years to nerve your arm. But rest a while, you are almost spent," said the prisoner.

"My brother! my brother!" was all Eustace's answer, as he threw himself on the grass beside Gaston, who, though bleeding fast, had raised his master's head, and freed him from his helmet; but his eyes

were still closed, and the wound ghastly. "Reginald! Oh, brother, look up!" cried Eustace. "Oh, Gaston, does he live?"

"I have crossed swords with him before," said the prisoner. "I grieve for the mishap." Then, as the soldiers crowded round, he waved them off with a gesture of command, which they instinctively obeyed. "Back, clowns, give him air. And here—one of you—bring some water from the river. There, he shows signs of life."

As he spoke, the clattering of horses' feet was heard—all made way, and there rode along the bank of the river a band of Spaniards, headed by Pedro himself, his sword, from hilt to point, streaming with blood, and his countenance ferocious as that of a tiger. "Where is he?" was his cry; "where is the traitor Enrique? Where has he hidden himself?"

The prisoner, who had been assisting to lift the wounded man out of the path of the trampling horses, turned round and replied, with marked emphasis, "King Henry of Castile is safe on the other side of the Zadorra, to recover his throne another day."

"Du Guesclin himself! Ah, dog!" cried Pedro, his eyes glaring with malignity, and raising his weapon to hew down Bertrand du Guesclin, for no other was the prisoner, who stood with folded arms, his dark eyes fixed in calm scorn on the King's face, and his sword and axe lying at his feet.

Eustace was instantly at his side, calling out, "My Lord King, he is my prisoner!"

"Thine!" said Pedro, with an incredulous look. "Leave him to my vengeance, and thou shalt have

gold—half my treasury—all thy utmost wishes can reach——”

“ I give him up to none but my lord the Prince of Wales,” returned the young squire undauntedly.

“ Fool and caitiff, out of my path, or learn what it is to oppose the wrath of kings ! ” cried Pedro.

Eustace grasped his sword. “ Sir King, you must win your way to him through my body.”

At this moment one of the attendants whispered, “ *El Principe, Senor Rey,* ” and, in a few seconds more, the Black Prince, with a few followers, rode towards the spot.

Hastily dismounting, Pedro threw himself on his knees to thank him for the victory ; but Edward, leaping from his horse, raised him, saying, “ It is not to me, but to the Giver of victories, that you should return thanks ; ” and Eustace almost shuddered to see him embrace the bloodthirsty monster, who, still intent on his prey, began the next moment, “ Here, Señor Prince, is the chief enemy—here is the disturber of kingdoms—Du Guesclin himself—and there stands a traitorous boy of your country, who resolutely refuses to yield him to my just vengeance.”

As Pedro spoke, the Prince exchanged with Sir Bertrand the courteous salutation of honourable enemies, and then said, in a quiet, grave tone, “ It is not our English custom to take vengeance on prisoners of war.”

“ My lord,” said Eustace, stepping forward, as the Prince looked towards him, “ I deliver the prisoner into your princely hands.”

“ You have our best thanks, Sir Squire,” said the

Prince. "You are the young Lynwood, if I remember right. Where is your brother?"

"Alas, my lord, here he lies, sorely hurt," said Eustace, only anxious to be rid of prisoner and Prince, and to return to Reginald, who by this time had, by the care of Gaston, been recalled to consciousness.

"Is it so? I grieve to hear it!" said Edward, with a face of deep concern, advancing to the wounded knight, bending over him, and taking his hand. "How fares it with you, my brave Reginald?"

"Poorly enough, my lord," said the knight faintly. "I would I could have taken King Henry——"

"Lament not for that," said the Prince, "but receive my thanks for the prize of scarcely less worth, which I owe to your arms."

"What mean you, my lord? Not Sir Bertrand du Guesclin; I got nothing from him but my death-blow."

"How is this, then?" said Edward. "It was from your young brother that I received him."

"Speak, Eustace!" said Sir Reginald eagerly, and half raising himself. "Sir Bertrand your prisoner? Fairly and honourably? Is it possible?"

"Fairly and honourably, to that I testify," said Du Guesclin. "He knelt before you, and defended your pennon longer than I ever thought to see one of his years resist that curtal-axe of mine. The *routier* villains burst on us, and were closing upon me, when he turned back the weapon that was over my head, and summoned me to yield, which I did the more willingly that so gallant a youth should have such honour as may be acquired by my capture."

"He has it, noble Bertrand," said Edward. "Kneel down, young squire. Thy name is Eustace? In the name of God, St. Michael, and St. George, I dub thee knight. Be faithful, brave, and fortunate, as on this day. Arise, Sir Eustace Lynwood."

"Thanks, thanks, my gracious Prince," said Reginald, a light glancing in his fading eyes. "I should die content to see my brother's spurs so well earned."

"Die! Say not so, my faithful Reginald. Speed, Denis, and send hither our own leech! I trust you will live to see your son win his spurs as gallantly!"

"No, my good lord, I am past the power of leech or surgeon; I feel that this is my death-wound. I am glad it was in your cause. All I desire is your protection for my wife—my boy—my brother——"

"Your brother has earned it already," said Edward. "Your child shall be as my own. But, oh! can nought be done? Hasten the surgeon hither! Cheer thee, Reginald!—look up! Oh, would that Du Guesclin were free, the battle unfought, so that thou wert but safe, mine own dear brother-in-arms!"

"Where is the Prince?" called a voice from behind. "My lord, my lord, if you come not speedily, there will be foul slaughter made among the prisoners by your Spanish butcher—King, I would say."

"I come, I come, Chandos," answered Edward. "Fare thee well, my brave Reginald; and you, my new-made knight, send tidings to my tent how it is with him."

He pressed Reginald's hand, and, sighing deeply, mounted his horse and rode off with Sir John Chandos,

leaving the wounded knight to the care of his own followers.

The stream of blood was flowing fast, life was ebbing away, and Sir Reginald's breath was failing, as Eustace, relieving Gaston from his weight, laid his head on his breast, and laved his brow with water from the river. "You have done gallantly, my brave brother; I did wrong to doubt your spirit. Thanks be to God that I can die in peace, sure that Arthur has in you a true and loving guardian. You are young, Eustace, but my trust in you is firm. You will train him in all Christian and godly ways——"

"It shall be the most sacred charge of my life," said Eustace, scarcely able to speak.

"I know it," said Reginald; and making an effort to raise his voice, he continued, "bear witness, all of you, that I leave my son in the wardship of the King, and of my brother, Sir Eustace Lynwood. And," added he earnestly, "beware of Fulk Clarenham. Commend me to my sweet Eleanor; tell her she is the last, as the first, in my thoughts." Then, after a pause, "Is Gaston here?"

"Yes, Sir Reginald," said Gaston, leaning over him, and pressing the hand which he feebly raised.

"Gaston, farewell, and thanks to you for your true and loving service. Eustace will find where-with to recompense you in some sort, in my chest at Bordeaux, and my brave Lances likewise. And, Gaston, go not back to the courses and comrades whence I took you. Leonard, strive to be a true and brave man, though I may not fulfil your father's trust. Eustace—my eyes grow dim—is this you

supporting my head—are these your tears? Weep not for me, brother. Save for my poor Eleanor, I would not have it otherwise. Mercy is sure! Hold up the blessed rood—the sign of grace—you are half a clerk, repeat me some holy psalm or prayer.”

Eustace raised the cross hilt of his sword, and with a broken voice, commenced the *Miserere*. Sir Reginald at first followed it with his lips, but soon they ceased to move, his head sank back, his hand fell powerless, and with one long gasping breath his faithful and noble spirit departed. For several moments Eustace silently continued to hold the lifeless form in his arms, then raising the face, he imprinted an earnest kiss on the pale lips, laid the head reverently on the ground, hung over it for a short space, and at last, with an effort, passed his hand over his face, and turned away.

His first look was towards d'Aubricour, who sat resting his head on his hand, his elbow supported on his knee, while with the other hand he dashed away his tears. His countenance was deathly pale, and drops of blood were fast falling from the deep gash in his side. “Oh, Gaston,” exclaimed Eustace, with a feeling of self-reproach at having forgotten him, “I fear you are badly wounded!”

“You would think little of it had you seen more stricken fields, young knight,” said Gaston, attempting to smile; “I am only spent with loss of blood. Bring me a draught of water, and I can ride back to the tent. But look to your prisoner, Sir Eustace.”

Eustace turned to see what had become of his illustrious captive, and saw him at a little distance.

speaking to a knight on horseback. "Sir Eustace," said Bertrand, stepping towards him, "here is Sir William Beauchamp, sent by the Prince to inquire for your gallant brother, and to summon me to his tent. I leave you the more willingly that I think you have no mind for guests this evening. Farewell. I hope to be better acquainted."

Eustace had little heart to answer, but he took up Du Guesclin's sword, as if to return it to him. "Keep it, Sir Knight," said Bertrand; "you know how to wield it. I am in some sort your godfather in chivalry, and I owe you a gift. Let me have yours, that my side may not be without its wonted companion. Farewell."

"And, Sir Eustace Lynwood," said Sir William Beauchamp, riding up, "you will advance to Navaretta, where we take up our quarters in the French camp. I grieve for the loss which has befallen us this day; but I trust our chivalry has gained an equally worthy member."

Eustace bowed and, whilst Messire Bertrand mounted a horse that had been brought for his use, turned back to his own melancholy duties. The body of Sir Reginald was raised from the ground, and placed on the levelled lances of four of his men, and Eustace then assisted Gaston to rise. He tottered, leant heavily against the young knight, and was obliged to submit to be lifted to the saddle; but neither pain, grief, nor faintness could check his flow of talk.

CHAPTER V

A BATTLE in the days of chivalry was far less destructive than those of modern times. The loss in both armies at Navaretta did not amount to six hundred ; and on Pedro's side but four knights had fallen, of whom Sir Reginald Lynwood was the only Englishman.

On returning to his tent, Eustace found Gaston sitting on his couch.

"But what do I see?" said Gaston. "You, a belted knight, in your plain esquire's helmet, and the blood-stained surcoat! Ay, and not even the gilded spurs!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Would that I had seen you depart! But it was Leonard's fault. Why, man, knew you not your duty?"

"I am no squire of Eustace Lynwood," said Ashton.

"Every squire is bound to serve the knight in whose company he finds himself," said d'Aubricour. "You must present yourself to the Prince to-morrow, Sir Eustace."

"One of his squires bade me to his presence," said the young knight; "but I must now write these heavy tidings to my poor sister, and I am going to Father Waleran's tent to seek parchment and ink. So farewell, Gaston, keep quiet, and weary not yourself with my equipment."

With these words he left the tent, and Gaston, shaking his head, and throwing himself back on his

deerskins, exclaimed, "Tender and true, brave and loving! I know not what to make of Eustace Lynwood. But," he continued, rising again, "Guy, bring me here the gilded spurs you will find yonder. The best were, I know, buried with Sir Reginald, and methought there was something amiss with one rowel of the other. So it is. Speed to the armourer, and bid him come promptly."

"I marvel at you, d'Aubricour," said Leonard, "that you should thus weary yourself, with your fresh wound, and all for nought."

"Call you our brave young banreret nought? Shame on thee! All England should be proud of him, much more his friend and companion."

"I wish Eustace Lynwood well with all my heart," said Leonard; "but I see not why he is to be honoured above all others. He does not own a palm's breadth of land, and for gold, all he will ever possess is on those broken spurs of his brother's."

"Listen to me, Leonard," said Gaston. "Rich or poor, Sir Eustace is the only fit leader of the Lances till the little boy is of age, but this he could not be without knightly rank."

"No, indeed," said Leonard. "Strange that the touch of the Prince's sword should make so great a difference between him and me."

"If it *was* the touch of the Prince's sword that did so," said Gaston.

"I tell you flatly," proceeded Ashton, "I might follow Sir Reginald, since he was a man of substance, honoured in our country, and my father meant to oblige and do him grace by placing me with him.

But as to serving Eustace, the clerk, no older than myself, half a head shorter, and a mere landless upstart, that my father's son shall never do ! ”

Early the next morning Gaston had the satisfaction of beholding his young banneret arrayed in knightly guise, the golden spurs on his heels, Du Guesclin's sword by his side, and his white mantle flung over his shoulder. Leonard was summoned to accompany him, but he growled out something so like an absolute refusal and utter disclaimer of all duty to Sir Eustace, that Gaston began to reproach him vehemently.

“ Never mind, Gaston,” said Eustace ; “ you never mend matters with him in that way. I shall do very well alone.”

“ So you shall never go,” said Gaston, rising ; “ I will go myself, I have been longing to see you received by the Prince. Where is my sword ? ”

“ Nay, Gaston,” said Eustace, “ that must not be. Leonard, since it is the only way to quiet him, I order you to mount.”

Leonard hung his head and obeyed. They rode towards the village of Najara, where Eustace found the Prince entering the church, to hear morning mass. Giving his horse to John Ingram, he followed among the other knights who thronged the little building.

The service at an end, he received more than one kind greeting from his brother's friends, and one of them, Sir Richard Ferrars, a fine old man, whose iron-grey locks contrasted with his ruddy complexion, led him forward to present him to the Prince of Wales.

“ Welcome ! our new-made knight,” said Edward.

Bertrand du Guesclin, who stood among the throng of nobles around the Prince, was the first to come forward and shake Eustace by the hand.

“Truly,” said old Sir John Chandos sternly, “a likely lad enough had he been under his brother’s training, but they will spoil him, and I will have no hand in it.”

Eustace had been accustomed to hold the warrior in such veneration, that he felt considerably hurt and mortified at the want of welcome which contrasted with the kindness of the rest; and he could hardly recover his self-possession sufficiently to inquire the pleasure of the Prince with regard to his brother’s troop.

“Take the command yourself,” said Edward. “You surely have some esquire or man-at-arms who can supply your own want of experience.”

“My brother’s squire, Gaston d’Aubricour, is well learned in chivalry, my lord,” said Eustace; “and I will do my best, with his aid, to fulfil my trust.”

“It is well,” said Edward. “The Lances of Lynwood are too well trained easily to forget their duty, and I fear not but that you will do well. How old is your brother’s young heir?”

“Eight years, my lord.”

“We will soon have him at Bordeaux,” said Edward, “that he may grow up with my boys in the same friendship as their fathers. And now,” added he, “in an hour’s time the bugles shall summon you to depart for Burgos.”

The Prince walked away towards his tent and

Eustace looked round for his horse, which he saw at no great distance with Ingram, but Leonard Ashton was nowhere in sight. Eustace mounted, and rode towards his own tent, desiring the yeoman to seek Ashton out, and inform him of the order for departure, while he himself proceeded slowly, musing, with feelings of considerable disappointment and vexation on the reception he had met from Sir John Chandos, the man in the whole camp whose good opinion he would have most valued. "This is folly," thought he. "On whom does it depend, but myself, to win his praise? I will make him confess at last, that, young as I am, I can show that I deserve my spurs. What, ho! Ingram, where is Master Ashton?"

"Where you will little like to hear of him, Sir Knight," said the yeoman, galloping up. "At the wine-shop, yonder, in the village, with that ill-favoured one-eyed squire that you wot of. I called him as you desired, and all that I got for an answer was, that he would come at his own time, and not at your bidding."

"Said he so, the ungracious, headstrong fellow?" said Eustace. "To ride back myself might be the means of getting the whole troop late in starting, and disorderly—yet, to leave him!" Eustace looked at John Ingram. "Ride you on, John," said he; "tell Master d'Aubricour of the order to depart—let all be in readiness by the time I return."

Then turning his horse quickly, Eustace rode back to the village. All was haste and confusion there—horses were being led forth and saddled—bugles sounding—everything in the bustle incident to im-

mediate departure. He could only make his way through the press slowly, which ill suited with his impatience. In front of the inn there was a still closer press, and loud vehement voices were heard, while the various men-at-arms crowded in so closely to see the fray, as to be almost regardless of the horse, which Eustace was pressing forward upon them. He looked for Leonard, but in vain. At that moment a cry was heard—"The Provost Marshal!" The crowd suddenly, he knew not how, seemed to melt away from around him, and he found himself left, on horseback, in the midst of the little village green, amongst scattered groups of disreputable-looking yeomen, archers and grooms, who were making what speed they could to depart, as from the other side the provost, the archers of the guard, and Sir John Chandos entered upon the scene.

"Ha! What is all this? Whom have we here?" exclaimed the old baron. "Sir Eustace Lynwood! a fair commencement for your dainty young knighthood!"

"On my word, my Lord Chandos," said Eustace, colouring deeply, "I am no loiterer here; I came but to seek my squire, Leonard Ashton, and found myself entangled in the crowd."

"Ay, ay, I understand," said Chandos, without listening to him. "I see how it will be. Off to your troop instantly, Master Knight. I suppose they are all seeking squires in the wine-shops!"

"You do me wrong, my lord," said Eustace; "but you shall be obeyed."

The bugles had already sounded before he reached his own quarters, where he found that, thanks to

Gaston, all was right. The tent had been taken down and packed on the baggage-mules, the men were mounted, and drawn up in full array, with his banner floating above their heads; and Gaston himself was only waiting his appearance to mount a stout mule, which Martin, the 'horse-boy, was leading up and down.

"This is well. Thanks, good Gaston," said Eustace, with a sigh of relief, as he took off his heavy helmet, which had become much heated during his hasty ride in the hot sun.

"No news of the truant?" asked Gaston. "Who but you would have thought of going after him?"

The signal for the march was given, and all set forth. Early in the year as it was, the sun already possessed great force. The thirst occasioned by the heat was excessive, and at every venta, in the villages through which they passed, the men called loudly for liquor; but the hot, fiery Spanish wine was only fit to increase the evil by inflaming their blood.

Without being positively in disorder, the troop did not display the well-arranged aspect which had always hitherto distinguished the Lances of Lynwood; and poor Eustace, wearied and worn out, his right-hand man failing him, and dispirited by Chandos' reproach, had serious thoughts of going to the Prince and resigning the command for which he was unfit.

At last he beheld the Cathedral of Burgos rising in the midst of the Moorish fortifications of the town, and, halting his men under the shade of a few trees, he rode on, and as soon as the open space for his tents had

been assigned, he returned to see them raised. Gaston, who had of late become more silent, was lifted from his mule, and assisted into the tent, where he was laid on his couch; and, soon after, Eustace was relieved from his anxiety on Leonard Ashton's account, by his appearance. He came stumbling in without one word of apology, only declaring himself as weary as a dog, and, throwing himself down on a deerskin on his own side of the tent, was fast asleep in another minute.

CHAPTER VI

LEONARD ASHTON was awakened the next morning by the light of the rising sun streaming in where the curtain of the tent had been raised to admit the fresh, dewy morning air. The sunbeams fell on the hair and face of Eustace as he leant over Gaston, who lay stretched on his couch, and faintly spoke, "I tell you it is more. Such fever as this would not be caused by this trifling cut. There is sickness abroad in the camp, and why should it not be my turn as well as another man's. Take care of yourself, Sir Eustace."

No sooner did Leonard understand the sense of these words, than he sprang up, rushed out of the tent, and never rested till he thought himself at a safe distance, when he shouted to Eustace to come to him.

“Has he got this fever on him?” exclaimed he, as Eustace approached.

“He is very ill at ease,” replied Eustace; “but to my mind it is caused by yesterday’s fatigue and heat, added to the wine which he would drink.”

“It is the fever, I say,” replied Ashton; “I am sure it is. Come away, Eustace, or we shall all be infected.”

“I cannot leave him,” said Eustace.

“What? You do not mean to peril yourself by going near him?” said Ashton.

“I think not that there is peril in so doing,” answered Eustace; “and even if there were, I could not leave him in sickness, after all his kindness to me and patience with my inexperience.”

“He is no brother nor cousin to us,” said Leonard. “I see not why we should endanger our lives for a stranger. I will not, for my part; and, as your old friend and comrade, I would entreat you not.”

These were kinder words than Eustace had heard from Ashton since the beginning of his jealousy, and he answered, as he thought they were meant, in a friendly tone, “Thanks, Leonard, but I cannot look on Gaston d’Aubricour as a stranger; and had I fewer causes for attachment to him, I could not leave my post.”

“Only you do not expect me to do the same,” said Leonard; “my father sent me here to gain honour and wealth, not to be poisoned with the breath of a man in a fever.”

“Assuredly not,” said Eustace. “I will arrange matters so that you shall no longer sleep in our tent.

But let me ask of you, Leonard, what was the meaning of your conduct of yesterday ? ”

“ You may ask yourself,” said Leonard sullenly ; “ it is plain enough, methinks.”

“ Have a care, Leonard. Remember that my brother’s authority is given to me.”

“ Much good may it do you,” said Leonard ; “ but that is nothing to me I am no vassal of yours, to come at your call. I am not going to stay in this infected part of the camp with men who keep a fever among them. Give me but my sword and mantle from the tent, and I will trouble you no more.”

“ Wait, Leonard. I will take all measures for your safety ; but remember that I am answerable to the Prince for my brother’s followers.”

“ Answer for your own serfs,” retorted Leonard. “ My father might be willing to grace Sir Reginald by letting me follow him, but by his death I am my own man, and not to move at your beck and call, because the Prince laid his sword on your shoulder. Knaves Jasper,” he called to one of the men-at-arms, “ bring my sword and cloak from the tent ; I enter it no more.”

“ I know not how far you may be bound to me,” said Eustace, “ and must inquire from some elder knight, but I fear that your breaking from me may be attended with evil effects to your name and fame.”

Leonard had put on his dogged expression, and would not listen. He had already set his mind on joining Le Borgne Basque, and leaving the service which his own envious temper rendered galling ; and the panic excited in his mind by Gaston’s illness determined him to depart without loss of time.

The report that the fever was in the tent of Sir Eustace made most persons willing to avoid him, and he met with little interruption in his cares. Of Leonard, all that he heard was from a man-at-arms, who made his appearance in his tent to demand Master Ashton's arms, horse, and other property, he having entered the service of Sir William Felton ; and Eustace was too much engaged with his own cares to make further inquiry after him.

CHAPTER VII

AS Eustace was returning to his tent one evening, his attention was caught by repeated groans, which proceeded from a wretched little hovel almost level with the earth. "Hark!" said he to Ingram, a tall, stout man-at-arms from the Lynwood estate. "Didst thou not hear a groaning?"

"Some of the Castilians, sir. To think that the brutes should be content to live in holes not fit for swine!"

"But methought it was an English tongue. Listen, John!"

And in truth English ejaculations mingled with the moans: "To St. Joseph of Glastonbury, a shrine of silver! Blessed Lady of Taunton, a silver candlestick! Oh, St. Dunstan!"

Eustace doubted no longer; and stooping down

and entering the hut, he beheld, as well as the darkness would allow him, Leonard Ashton himself, stretched on some mouldy rushes, and so much altered, that he could scarcely have been recognised as the sturdy, ruddy youth who had quitted the Lances of Lynwood but five weeks before.

“Eustace! Eustace!” he exclaimed, as the face of his late companion appeared. “Can it be you?”

“It is I, myself, Leonard,” replied Eustace; “and I hope to aid you.”

“Let me feel your hand, that I may be sure you are flesh and blood,” cried Ashton, raising himself and grasping Eustace’s hand between his own, which burnt like fire; then, lowering his voice to a whisper of horror, “she is a witch!”

“Who?” asked Eustace, making the sign of the cross.

Leonard pointed to a kind of partition which crossed the hut, beyond which Eustace could perceive an old hag-like woman, bending over a cauldron which was placed on the fire. Having made this effort, he sank back, hiding his face with his cloak, and trembling in every limb. A thrill of dismay passed over the knight, and the giant, John Ingram, stood shaking like an aspen, pale as death, and crossing himself perpetually. “Oh, take me from this place, Eustace,” repeated Leonard, “or I am a dead man!”

“But how came you here, Leonard?”

“I fell sick some three days since, and—and, fearing infection, Sir William Felton bade me be carried from his lodgings; the robbers, his men-at-arms, stripped me of all I possessed, and brought

me to this dog-hole, to the care of this old hag. Oh, Eustace, I have heard her mutter her prayers backwards ; and last night!—oh, last night ! at the dead hour, there came in procession—seven black cats, each holding a torch with a blue flame, and danced around me, till one laid his paw upon my breast and grew and grew, with its flaming eyes fixed on me, till it was as big as an ox, and the weight was intolerable, the while her spells were over me, and I could not open my lips to say so much as a prayer. At last the cold dew broke out on my brow, and I should have been dead in another instant, when I contrived to make the sign of the cross, whereat they all whirled wildly round, and I fell—oh, I fell miles and miles downwards, till at last I found myself, at morning's light, with the hateful old witch casting water in my face. Oh, Eustace, take me away !”

Such were the times, that Eustace Lynwood, with all his cool sense and mental cultivation, believed implicitly poor Leonard's delirious fancy, black cats and all ; and the glances he cast at the poor old Spaniard were scarcely less full of terror and abhorrence, as he promised Leonard, whom he now regarded only in the light of his old comrade, that he should, without loss of time, be conveyed to his own tent.

“ But go not—leave me not,” implored Leonard, clinging fast to him, almost like a child to its nurse, with a hand which was now cold as marble.

“ No ; I will remain,” said Eustace ; “ and you, Ingram, hasten to bring four of the men with the litter. Hasten, I tell you.”

Ingram, with his eyes dilated with horror, appeared

but too anxious to quit this den, yet lingered. "I leave you not here, Sir Knight."

"Thanks, thanks, John," replied the youth; "but remain I must, and will."

The old woman, a kind-hearted creature in the main, though certainly forbidding-looking in her poverty and ugliness, was rejoiced to see her patient visited



by a friend. She came towards them, addressing Eustace with what he took for a spell, though, had he understood Spanish, he would have found it a fine flowing compliment. Leonard shrank closer to him, and pressed his hand.

Upon the arrival of all the Lances of Lynwood, headed by Gaston himself, upon his mule, in the

utmost anxiety for his knight, Leonard was carried out. After a short time his fever began to abate, and he ceased to be haunted.

In the meantime, the Prince of Wales, weary of the treacherous delays and flagrant crimes of his ally, resolved to quit this fatal land of Castile.

There was a general cry of joy throughout the camp when orders were given that the tents should be struck and the army begin its march to France in the early coolness of the next morning. There they were again dispersed, as the war was at an end; and the young Sir Eustace Lynwood received high recommendation from the Prince, and even from Chandos himself, for being able to show his brother's band as complete in numbers and discipline as on the day when it was given into his charge.

The peace with France, however, prevented the Prince from being desirous of keeping up the Lances of Lynwood, and he therefore offered to take their young leader into his own troop of knights, who were maintained at his own table; and so distinguished was this body, that no higher favour could have been offered. Edward likewise paid to Sir Eustace a considerable sum as the purchase of his illustrious captive, and this, together with the ransoms of the two other prisoners, enabled him to reward his faithful men-at-arms. Leonard Ashtoi., having no pleasant reminiscences of his first campaign, and having been stripped of all his property by his chosen associates, was desirous of returning to his father; and Eustace, after restoring his equipments to something befitting an esquire of property, and liberally supplying him with

the expenses of his journey, bade him an affectionate farewell, and saw him depart, not without satisfaction at no longer feeling himself accountable for his conduct.

The Gascon squire still remained attached to Eustace's service, while the trusty Englishman, John Ingram, performed the more menial offices. Time sped away at the court of Bordeaux; the gallant Du Guesclin was restored to liberty, after twice paying away his ransom for the deliverance of his less renowned brethren in captivity, and Enrique of Trastamare, returning to Castile, was once more crowned by the inhabitants. His brother Pedro, attempting to assassinate him, fell by his hand, and all the consequences of the English expedition were undone—all, save the wasting disease that preyed on England's heir, and the desolation at the orphaned hearth of Lynwood Keep.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO years had passed since the fight of Navaretta, when Sir Eustace Lynwood received from England a letter from Father Cyril, praying him to return home as soon as possible, since his sister-in-law, Dame Eleanor, was very sick, and desired to see him upon matters on which more could not be disclosed by letter.

Easily obtaining permission to leave Bordeaux, he

with Gaston and Ingram travelled safely through France, and at length found himself once more in Somersetshire. It was late, and fast growing dark, when they rode through Bruton ; but, eager to arrive, they pushed on, though twilight had fast faded into night, and heavy clouds, laden with brief but violent showers, were drifting across the face of the moon.

At length they were descending the long low hill, leading to the wooded vale of Lynwood, and the bright lights of the Keep began to gleam like stars to the eager eyes of the young knight, who gazed upon them long and affectionately, as he felt himself once more at home. "I wonder," said he, "to see the light strongest towards the east end of the Castle! I knew not that the altar lights in the chapel could be seen so far!"

He wound his bugle and rode towards the gate, but the drawbridge was raised. "This is some strange chance!" said he. "Ralph must indeed be deaf!"

"Try them again, Sir Eustace," said Gaston.

"Hark!—methought I heard the opening of the hall door!" said Eustace.

"My teeth are chattering with cold," said Gaston, "and the horses will be ruined with standing still in the driving rain. Cannot we betake ourselves to the village hostel?"

"I must be certified that there is nothing amiss," said Sir Eustace, springing from his saddle; "I can cross the moat on one of the supports of the bridge."

"Have with you then, Sir Knight," said Gaston,

also leaping to the ground, while Eustace cautiously advanced along the narrow frame of wood on which the drawbridge had rested, slippery with the wet, and rendered still more perilous by the darkness. Gaston followed, balancing himself with some difficulty, and at last they safely reached the other side. Eustace tried the heavy gates, but found them fastened on the inside with a ponderous wooden bar. "Most strange!" muttered he; "yet, come on, Gaston, I can find an entrance, unless old Ralph be more on the alert than I expect."

Creeping along between the walls and the moat, till they had reached the opposite side of the Keep, Eustace stopped at a low doorway; a slight click was heard, as of a latch yielding to his hand, the door opened, and he led the way up a stone staircase, in the thickness of the wall, warning his follower now and then of a broken step. After a long, steep ascent, Gaston heard another door open, and though still in total darkness, perceived that they had gained a wider space. "The passage from the hall to the chapel!" whispered the knight, and feeling by the wall, they crept along, until a buzz of voices reached their ears, and light gleamed beneath a heavy dark curtain which closed the passage. Pausing for an instant, they heard a voice tremulous with fear and eagerness: "It was himself—tall plume, bright armour, the very crosslet on his breast could be seen in the moonlight! Oh, it was Sir Reginald himself, and the wild young French squire that fell with him in Spain!"

There was a suppressed exclamation of horror,

and a sound of crowding together, and at that moment, Eustace, drawing aside the curtain, advanced into the light, and was greeted by a frightful shriek, which made him at first repent of having alarmed his sister, but the next glance showed him that her place was empty, and a thrill of dismay made him stand speechless and motionless, as he perceived that the curtain he grasped was black, and the hall completely hung with the same colour.

The servants remained huddled in terror round the hearth, and the pause was first broken by a fair-faced boy, who, breaking from the trembling circle, came forward, and in a quivering tone said, "Sir, are you my father's spirit?"

Gaston's laugh came strangely on the scene, but Eustace, bending down, and holding out his hand, said, "I am your Uncle Eustace, Arthur. Where is your mother?"

Arthur, with a wild cry of joy, sprung to his neck, and hid his face on his shoulder; and at the same moment old Ralph, with uplifted hands, cried, "Blessing on the Saints that my young lord is safe, and that mine eyes have seen you once again."

"But where, oh, where is my sister?" again demanded Eustace, as his eye met that of Father Cyril, who, summoned by the screams of the servants, had just entered the hall.

"My son," replied the good father solemnly, "your sister is where the wicked may trouble her no more. It is three days since she departed from this world of sorrow. She is in peace. Mourn not that her sorrows are at an end, her tears wiped away,

but prepare to fulfil her last wishes, those prayers, in answer to which, as I fully believe, the Saints have sent you at the very moment of greatest need."

"What is the need you speak of? What danger do you fear?" said Eustace.

"This is no scene for dwelling on the evil deeds of wicked men otherwise than to pray for them," said the priest; "but return with me to the hall, and you shall hear."

Eustace returned to the hall, where he found Gaston and Ingram, just come in from attending to the horses, and Ralph hurrying the servants in setting out an ample meal for the travellers.

"My good old friend," said Eustace, holding out his hand as he entered, "I have not greeted you aright. Never was there face which I was more rejoiced to see."

"It was the blame of our own reception of you, Sir Eustace," said old Penrose. "I could tear my hair to think that you should have met with no better welcome than barred gates and owlet shrieks; but did you but know how wildly your bugle-blast rose upon our ear, while we sat over the fire well-nigh distraught with sorrow, you would not marvel that we deemed that the spirit of our good knight might be borne upon the moaning wind."

"Yet," said Arthur, "I knew the note, and would have gone to the turret window, but that Mistress Cicely held me fast; and when they sent Jocelyn to look, the cowardly knave brought back the tale which you broke short."

“But why all these precautions?” said Eustace
“Why the drawbridge raised? That could scarce be
against a ghost.”

“Alas, Sir Eustace, there are bodily foes abroad!”
said Ralph. “By your leave, Master d’Aubricour,”
as Gaston was about to assist his knight in unfasten-
ing his armour, “none shall lay a hand near Sir
Eustace but myself on this first night of his return.”
The golden spurs and the sword of Du Guesclin re-
joiced the old man’s heart, and, touching them almost
reverentially, he placed the large arm-chair at the
head of the table, and began eagerly to invite him to
eat.

Eustace was too sorrowful and too anxious to be
inclined for food, and long before his followers had
finished their meal, he turned from the table, and asked
for an account of what had befallen in his absence.
In answer to the query, “Who is the enemy you fear?”
there was but one answer, given in different tones,
“The Lord de Clarenham!”

“Ha!” cried Eustace, “it was justly then that
your father, Arthur, bade me beware of him when he
committed you to my charge on the battlefield of
Navaretta.”

“Did he so?” exclaimed Father Cyril. “Did he
commit the boy to your guardianship? Formally
and before witnesses?”

“I can testify to it, good father,” said Gaston.
“Ay, and you, Ingram, must have been within
hearing—to say nothing of Du Guesclin.”

“And Leonard Ashton,” said Ingram.

“It is well,” said Father Cyril. “He will be here

to-morrow to be confronted with Clarenham. It is the personal wardship that is of chief importance, and dwelt most on my lady's mind."

"Clarenham lays claim then to the guardianship?" asked Eustace.

"Yes," said Father Cyril. "No sooner did the news of Sir Reginald's death reach England than Fulk sent a summons for the dues paid by vassals to their lord on a new succession, and on Eleanor's indignant refusal, followed it up by a further claim to the wardship of the person of Arthur himself as the next of kin who was of full age." Again was his demand refused, and shortly after Lady Lynwood's alarms were brought to a height by an attempt on his part to waylay her son and carry him off by force, whilst riding in the neighbourhood of the castle. The plot had failed, by the fidelity of the villagers of Lynwood, but the shock to the lady had increased the progress of the decay of her health, already undermined by grief. On her brother-in-law, Sir Eustace, her chief hope was fixed; on him she depended for bringing Arthur's case before the King, and, above all, for protecting him from the attacks of the enemy of his family, rendered so much more dangerous by his relationship. She obtained a promise from Father Cyril that he would conduct the boy to the Abbey of Glastonbury, and there obtain from the abbot protection for him until his uncle should return.

This was accordingly Father Cyril's intention. It was unavoidable that Fulk, the near kinsman of the deceased, should be present at the funeral, but Father

Cyril had intended to keep Arthur within the sanctuary of the chapel until he could depart under the care of twelve monks of Glastonbury, who were coming in the stead of their abbot—he being, unfortunately, indisposed. Sir Philip Ashton had, likewise been invited, in the hope that his presence might prove a check upon Clarenham.

CHAPTER IX

WITH the first dawn of morning, the chapel bell began to toll, and was replied to by the deeper sound of the bell of the parish church. Soon the court began to be filled with the neighbouring villagers, with beggars, palmers, mendicant friars, pressing to the buttery-hatch, where they received the dole of bread, meat, and ale, from the hands of the pantler, under the direction of the almoner of Glastonbury, who requested their prayers for the soul of the noble Sir Reginald Lynwood, and Dame Eleanor of Clarenham, his wife.

Next came in long file, mounted on their sleek mules, the twelve monks of Glastonbury. On the way Sir Eustace held some conference with the chief, Brother Michael, who had come prepared to assist in conveying Arthur, if possible, to Glastonbury, but was very glad to find that the knight was able to take upon himself the charge of his nephew, without em-

broiling the Abbey with so formidable an enemy as Lord de Clarenham.

The next arrival was Sir Philip Ashton and his son, who could hardly believe their eyes when Eustace met them. While Sir Philip was lavishing compliments on Eustace, the latter rejoiced when the sound of horses made it necessary to go and meet Lord de Clarenham at the door. Arthur looked up in Sir Fulk's face, with a look in which curiosity and defiance were expressed ; while Fulk, on his side, was ready to grind his teeth with vexation at the unexpected sight of the only man who could interfere with his projects.

The whole company moved in solemn procession towards the chapel, where the mass and requiem were chanted, and the corpse of the Lady Eleanor, enclosed in a stone coffin, was lowered to its resting-place, in the vault of her husband's ancestors.

It was past noon when the banquet was spread in the hall ; a higher table on the dais for the principal guests, and two long ones below for the retainers and yeomanry, the latter of whom were armed with dagger, short sword, or quarter-staff.

There was no one who did not feel as if on the eve of a storm ; but all was grave and decorous ; and at length Brother Michael and the monks of Glastonbury, rejoicing that they, at least, had escaped a turmoil, took their leave, mounted their mules, and rode off.

" It waxes late," said Lord de Clarenham, rising ; " bring out the horses, Miles ; and you, my young kinsman, Arthur, you are to be my guest from

henceforth. Come, therefore, prepare for the journey."

"What claim have you to his wardship, Sir Fulk?" asked Eustace coldly.

"As his feudal superior, and his nearest relation of full age," replied Clarenham.

"There are many here who can prove that it is twenty-one years past since I was born on the feast of St. Eustace," replied the young knight. "The house of Lynwood owns no master beneath the King of England, and the wardship of my nephew was committed to me by both his parents. Here is a witness of the truth of my words. Holy father, the parchment!"

Father Cyril spread a thick roll, with heavy seals, purporting to be the last will and testament of Dame Eleanor Lynwood, bequeathing the wardship and marriage of her son to her beloved brother, Sir Eustace Lynwood, Knight Banneret, and, in his absence, to the Lord Abbot of Glastonbury, and Cyril Langton, clerk.

"It is nought," said Clarenham, pushing it from him; "the Lady of Lynwood had no right to make a will in this matter, since she unlawfully detained her son from me, his sole guardian."

"The force of the will may be decided by the King's justices," said Eustace; "but my rights are not founded on it alone. My brother, Sir Reginald, with his last words, committed his son to my charge."

"What proof do you bring, Sir Eustace?" said Fulk. "I question not your word, but something more is needed in points of law, and you can scarcely

expect the world to believe that Sir Reginald would commit his only child to the guardianship of one so young, and the next heir."

"I am here to prove it, my lord," said Gaston eagerly. "'To your care I commit him, Eustace,' said Sir Reginald, as he lay with his head on his brother's breast; and methought he also added, 'Beware of Clarenham.' Was it not so, friend Leonard?"

Leonard's reply was not readily forthcoming. His father was whispering in his ear, whilst he knit his brow, shuffled with his feet, and shrugged his shoulder disrespectfully in his father's face.

"Speak, Master Ashton," said Clarenham, in a cold, incredulous tone, and bending on father and son glances which were well understood. "To your testimony, respectable and uninterested, credit must be added. So, Master Leonard Ashton, let me hear your testimony, as to the dying words of Sir Reginald Lynwood. I am content to abide by them."

"Come, Leonard," said his father, who had been whispering with him all this time, "speak up; you may be grieved to disappoint a once friendly companion, but you could not help the defect of your ears."

"Sir Philip, I pray you not to prompt your son," said Eustace. "Stand forth, Leonard, on your honour. Did you or did you not hear the words of my brother, as he lay on the bank of the Zadorra?"

Leonard half rose, as if to come towards him, but his father held him fast; he looked down, and muttered, "Ay, truly. I heard Sir Reginald say somewhat."

"Tell it out, then."

"He thanked the Prince for knighting you—he

prayed him to have charge of his wife and child—he bade Gaston not return to evil courses,” said Leonard, bringing out his sentences at intervals.

“And afterwards,” said Eustace sternly—“when the Prince was gone? On your honour, Leonard.”

Leonard almost writhed himself beneath the eyes that Eustace kept steadily fixed on him. “Somewhat—somewhat he might have said of knightly training for his son—but—but what do I know?” he added, as his father pressed hard on his foot; “it was all in your ear, for as he lay on your breast, his voice grew so faint, that I could hear little through my helmet.”

“Nay, Master Ashton,” said John Ingram, pressing forward, “if I remember right, you had thrown off your helmet, saying it was as hot as a copper cauldron; and besides, our good knight, when he said those words touching Master Arthur, raised himself up somewhat, and spoke out louder, as if that we might all hear and bear witness.”

“No witness beyond your own train, Sir Eustace?” said Clarenham.

“None,” said Eustace, “excepting one whose word even you will scarcely dare to dispute, Sir Bertrand du Guesclin.”

“I dispute no man’s word, Sir Eustace,” said Fulk; “I only say that until the claim which you allege be proved in the King’s court, I am the lawful guardian of the lands and person of the heir of Lynwood. The Lord Chancellor Wykeham may weigh the credit to be attached to the witness of this highly respectable esquire, or this long-eared man-at-arms, or may send

beyond seas for the testimony of Du Guesclin : in the meantime, I assume my office. Come here, boy."

"I will not come to you, Lord Fulk," said Arthur ; "or when I do, it shall be sword in hand to ask an account for the tears you have made my sweet mother shed."

"Bred up in the same folly!" said Fulk. "Once more, Sir Eustace, will you yield him to me, or must I use force?"

"I have vowed before his mother's corpse to shield him from you," returned Eustace.

"Think," continued Sir Philip, "of the disadvantages to your cause of provoking a fray at such a time. Hold your hand, and yield the boy, at least till the cause come before the Chancellor."

"Never," said Eustace. "His parents have trusted him to me, and I will fulfil my promise. The scandal of the fray be on him who occasions it."

"I will not be bearded by a boy," returned Clarenham. "Hark you, Sir Eustace. You have been raised to a height which has turned your head, your eyes have been dazzled by the gilding of your spurs, and you have fancied yourself a man ; but in your own country, and your own family, airs are not to be borne. We rate you at what you are worth, and are not to be imposed on by idle tales which the boastful young men of the Prince's court frame of each other. Give up these pretensions, depart in peace to your fellows at Bordeaux, and we will forget your insolent interference."

"Never, while I live," replied Eustace. "Vassals of Lynwood, guard your young lord."

“Hurrah for the Lances of Lynwood!” shouted John Ingram, and the cry was taken up by many a gruff honest voice, till the hall rang again, and the opposing shout of “A Clarenham, a Clarenham!” was raised by the retainers of the baron. Eustace, at the same moment, raised his nephew in his arms, and lifted him up into the embrasure of one of the high windows.

After several minutes’ confused fighting, the tumult cleared away, as it were, leaving the principals on each side opposite to each other; and as the fortune of the day rested on their conflict, all became gradually fixed in attention, resting upon their weapons, in readiness at any moment to renew their own portion of the combat.

Fulk, tall and robust, had far more the appearance of strength than his slenderly made antagonist, but three years in the school of chivalry had not been wasted by Eustace, and the sword of Du Guesclin was in a hand well accustomed to its use. Old Ralph was uttering under his breath: “Ha! Well struck! A rare foil—a perfect hit—have a care.—Ah! there comes my old blow—that is right—there—one of your new French back-strokes—but it told.—Oh! have a care—the Saints guard—ay—there—follow it up! Hurrah for Lynwood!” as Fulk tottered, slipped, sank on one knee, and, receiving a severe blow on the head with the back of the sword, measured his length on the ground.

“Hurrah for Lynwood!” re-echoed through the hall, but Eustace cut short the clamour at once, by saying, “Peace, my friends, and thanks! Sir Fulk



de Clarenham," he added, as his fallen foe moved, and began to raise himself, "you have received a lesson, by which I hope you will profit. Leave the house, whose mourning you have insulted, and thank your relationship that I forbear to bring this outrage to the notice of the King."

While Eustace spoke, Fulk had, by the assistance of two of his retainers, recovered his feet; but though unwounded, he was so dizzied with the blow as to be passive in their hands, and to allow himself to be led into the court, and placed on his horse. Before riding out of the gates, he turned round, and clenching his fist, glanced malignantly at Eustace, and muttered, "You shall aby it."

Eustace turned back into the hall, and at the door was met by little Arthur, who caught hold of his hand, exclaiming, "So you have won me, and shall keep me for ever, Uncle Eustace."

When the hall was clear of guests, a council was held between the knight, the priest, and the two esquires. Its result was, that Arthur's person should be secured, by his uncle carrying him at once to the Prince's protection at Bordeaux; but it was only with difficulty that Eustace was prevailed on to fly, as he said, from his accusers.

Eustace then received from the hands of the priest a bag of gold coins, his portion as a younger son part of which he gave to be distributed in alms, part he still confided to Father Cyril's keeping, and the rest he was to take away for present needs—and they parted for the last night of his brief stay at Lynwood Keep.

CHAPTER X

IN the early morning Sir Eustace and his few followers were in their saddles, little Arthur riding between his uncle and Gaston. The chief part of the day was spent on the journey, and at evening found themselves at the door of a large hostel, its open porch covered by a vine.

The host and his attendants ran out at first to meet them, but, on seeing them, appeared disappointed. And as the knight, dismounting, ordered supper and bed, the host replied that he could indeed engage to find food, and to accommodate their steeds, but that the whole of the inn had been secured on behalf of two ladies and their train, who were each moment expected.

“Be it so,” said Eustace; “a truss of hay beside our horses, or a settle by the fire, is all we need. Here is a taste already of a warrior’s life for you, Arthur.”

The boy was delighted, certain that to sleep beside his pony was far more delightful, as well as more manly, than to rest in his bed, like a lady at home.

As this was arranged, a sound of horses’ feet approached, and a band of men-at-arms rode up to the door. Arthur started and squeezed his uncle’s hand as he recognised the Clarenham colours and badge, uttering an exclamation of dismay. “Never fear, Arthur,” said Eustace, “they come from the

way opposite to ours. It is not pursuit. See, it is an escort—there are ladies among them.”

“Four!” said Arthur. “Uncle, that tall dame in black must be the Lady Muriel. And surely the white veil tied with rose-colour belongs to kind Cousin Agnes.”

“True! These are no Clarenhams to guard against,” said Eustace to his squire, who looked ready for action. “Lady Muriel, the stepmother of the baron and his sister, is my godmother, and by birth a Lynwood.”

Then, stepping forward, he assisted the elder lady to dismount; she returned his courtesy by a slight inclination, as to a stranger, but her companion, who had lightly sprung to the ground, no sooner perceived him than she exclaimed, “Eustace!” Then, laying her hand on Lady Muriel’s arm, “Mother, it is Sir Eustace Lynwood.”

“Ha! my gallant godson!” said the baroness, greeting him cordially. “Well met, brave youth! No wonder in that knightly figure I did not know my kinswoman’s little page. How does my gentle niece, Eleanor?”

“Alack! then you have not heard the tidings?” said Eustace.

“We heard long since she was sick with grief,” said Lady Muriel, much alarmed. “What mean you? Is she worse? You weep—surely she still lives!”

“Ah, honoured dame, we come even now from laying her in her grave. Here is her orphan boy.”

Agnes could not restrain a cry of grief and horror, and Eustace was greatly affected by her grief.

Many tears were shed, and caresses lavished upon the orphan. The ladies asked his destination, and on hearing that he was to be taken to the Prince's court at Bordeaux, Agnes said, "We, too, are bound to the Prince's court. I am to journey thither with Fulk. Were it not better for Arthur to travel with us? Most carefully would we guard him. It would spare him many a hardship; and his company would be a solace, almost a protection to me. My pretty playfellow, will you be my travelling companion?"

"I would go with you, Cousin Agnes, for you are kind and gentle, and I love you well; but a brave knight's son must learn to rough it; and besides, I would not go with Sir Fulk, your brother, for he is a false and cruel knight, who persecuted my blessed mother to the very death."

"Can this be? Oh, speak, Eustace!" said Agnes. "What means the boy? Hath Fulk shown himself other than a loving kinsman?"

"Ah, lady," said Eustace, "I grieve twice in the day to sadden your heart; yet since so much has been said, it were best to relate the whole truth," and he proceeded to tell what had passed respecting the wardship of young Arthur.

Agnes' eyes filled with burning tears of indignation. "Oh, dear lady mother," cried she, "take me back to our convent! How can I meet my brother! How conceal my anger and my shame!"

There was a silence, first broken by Eustace. "One thing there is, that I would fain ask of your goodness," said he; "many a false tale, many a foul slander, will be spoken of me, and many may give

heed to them ; but they shall not render my heart heavy while I can still believe that you give no ear to them."

" Sir Eustace," said the Lady of Clarenham, " I have known you from childhood, and it would go hard with me to believe aught dishonourable of the pupil of Sir Reginald and of Eleanor."

" Yes, Sir Eustace," added Agnes, " it would break my heart to distrust you ; for then I must needs believe that faith, truth, and honour had left the world."

" And now," said Lady Muriel, " Agnes, we must take leave of our kind kinsman, since, doubtless, he will desire to renew his journey early to-morrow."

Eustace bent his knee to kiss the hands which were extended to him by the two ladies, then left the room, feeling, among all the clouds which darkened his path, one clear bright ray to warm and gladden his heart. Agnes trusted his truth, Agnes would be at Bordeaux,—he might see her, and she would hear of his deeds.

Without further adventure the Lances of Lynwood safely arrived at Rennes, the capital of Brittany, where Jean de Montford held his court. Here they met the tidings that Charles v. had summoned the Prince of Wales to appear at his court, to answer an appeal made against him by the vassals of the Duchy of Aquitaine. Edward's answer was, that he would appear indeed, but that it should be in full armour, with ten thousand knights and squires at his back ; and the war had already been renewed.

The intelligence added to Eustace's desire to be at

Bordeaux, but he could not venture through the enemy's country without exposing himself to death or captivity.

No less than two months was he obliged to wait ; but at length he learnt that a band of Free Companions had arrived at Rennes, on their way to offer their service to the Prince of Wales ; accordingly he set forth, and after some interval found himself once more in the domains of the house of Plantagenet.

It was late in the evening when he rode through the gates of Bordeaux, and sought the abode of the good old Gascon merchant, where he had always lodged. He asked for Sir John Chandos, and was told that high words had passed between him and the Prince respecting a hearth-tax, and he had returned to his government. It was the Earl of Pembroke who was now all-powerful. The Baron de Clarenham had arrived at Bordeaux. He had come with as splendid a train as ever was beheld, and was in high favour at court.

This was no pleasing intelligence, but Eustace determined to go the next day to present his nephew to the Prince immediately after the noontide meal.

Accordingly, leading Arthur by the hand, and attended by Gaston, he made his appearance in the hall just as the banquet was concluded. Many well-known faces were there, but, as he advanced up the space between the two long tables, he was amazed at meeting scarce one friendly glance of recognition, and Leonard Ashton, to his surprise, he saw seated among the knights.

Thus he passed on until he had nearly reached the

dais where dined the Prince and the personages of the most exalted rank.

Eustace stepped forward, and bending one knee, said, "My lord, I come to report myself as returned to your service, and at the same time to crave for my nephew the protection you were graciously pleased to promise him."

"It is well, Sir Eustace Lynwood," said Edward coldly, and with a movement of his head, as if to dismiss him from his presence; "and you, boy, come hither," he added, as Arthur, seeing his uncle rise and retreat a few steps, was following his example. "I loved your father well," he said, laying his hand on the boy's bright wavy hair, "and you shall find in me a steady friend as long as you prove yourself not unworthy of the name you bear. Thine arm, Clarenham. Let us to the Princess, and present her new page. Follow me, boy."

With a wistful look at his uncle, standing alone on the step of the dais, Arthur reluctantly followed the Prince as, leaning on Clarenham's arm, he left the hall, and, crossing a gallery, entered a large apartment. At one end was a canopy embroidered with the arms and badges of the heir of England, and beneath it were two chairs of state, one of which was occupied by Joan Plantagenet, Princess of Wales, once the Fair Maid of Kent, and though now long past her youth, still showing traces of beauty befitting the lady for whom her royal cousin had displayed such love and constancy.

As her husband entered, she rose, and looking anxiously at him, while she came forward to meet

him, inquired whether he felt fatigued. "No, my fair dame," replied the Prince. "I came but to present to you your new page; the young cousin, respecting whose safety my Lord de Clarenham hath been so much in anxiety."

"Then it is his uncle who hath brought him?" asked Joan.

"Yes," replied Edward, "he himself brought him to the hall, and even had the presumption to claim the protection for him that I pledged to his father, when I deemed far otherwise of this young Eustace."

"What account does he give of the length of time that he has spent on the road?" asked the Princess.

"Ay, there is the strangest part of the tale," said Fulk Clarenham, with a sneer, "since he left the poor simple men at Lynwood believing that he was coming at full speed to seek my lord the Prince's protection for the child, a convenient excuse for eluding the inquiries of justice into his brawls at the funeral, as well as for the rents which he carried off with him; but somewhat inconsistent when it is not for five months that he makes his appearance at Bordeaux, and then in the society of a band of *routiers*."

"It shall be inquired into," said the Prince.

"Nay, nay, my lord," said Fulk; "may I pray you of your royal goodness to press the matter no further. He is still young, and it were a pity to cast dishonour on a name which has hitherto been honourable. Since my young cousin is safe, I would desire no more, save to guard him from his future machinations. For his brother's sake, my lord, I would plead with you."

“Little did I think such things of him,” said the Prince, “when I laid knighthood on his shoulder in the battlefield of Navaretta; yet I remember even then old Chandos chid me for over-hastiness. Poor old Chandos, he has a rough tongue, but a true heart!”

The indignation may be imagined with which Arthur listened to this conversation, as he stood on the spot to which Edward had signed to him to advance, when he presented him to the Princess. He longed ardently to break in with an angry refutation of the slanders cast on his uncle, but he was too well trained in the rules of chivalry, to say nothing of the awful respect with which he regarded the Prince, to attempt to utter a word, and he could only edge himself as far away as was possible from Clarenham, and cast at him glances of angry reproach.

CHAPTER XI

IF Arthur Lynwood felt desolate when he left his uncle's side, it was not otherwise with Sir Eustace as he lost sight of the child, who had so long been his charge, and who repaid his anxiety with such confiding affection. The coveted fame, favour, and distinction seemed likewise to have deserted him. The Prince's coldness hung heavily on him, and as he cast his eyes along the ranks of familiar faces, not one

friendly look cheered him. His greetings were returned with coldness, and a grave, haughty courtesy was the sole welcome. Chafed and mortified, he made a sign to Gaston, and they were soon in the street once more.

“Coward clown!” burst forth Gaston at once. “Would that I could send all his grinning teeth down the false throat of him!”

“Whose? What mean you?”

“Whose but that sulky recreant, Ashton? He has done well to obtain knighthood, or I would beat him within an inch of his life with my halbert, and if he dared challenge me, slay him as I would a carrion crow! He a knight! Thanks to his acres and to Lord Pembroke!”

“Patience, patience, Gaston—I have not yet heard of what he accuses me.”

“No; he has learnt policy—he saith it not openly! He would deny it, as did his esquire when I taxed him with it! Would that you could not tell a letter! Sir Eustace, of your favour let me burn every one of your vile books.”

“My innocent friends! Nay, nay, Gaston—they are too knightly to merit such measure. Then it is the old accusation of witchcraft, I suppose. So I was in league with the Castilian witch and her cats, was I?”

“Ay; and her broom-stick or her cats wafted you to Lynwood, where you suddenly stood in the midst of the mourners, borne into the hall on a howling blast! How I got there, I am sorry to say, the craven declared not, lest I should give him the lie at once!”

“But surely such a tale is too absurd and vulgar to deceive our noble Prince.”

“Oh, there is another version for his ears. This is only for the lower sort, who might not have thought the worse of you for kidnapping your nephew, vowing his mother should remain unburied till he was in your hands, and carrying off all his rents.”

“That is Clarenham’s slander.”

“Yes.”

“And credited by the Prince? Oh, little did I think the hand which laid knighthood on my shoulder should repent the boon that it gave!” exclaimed Eustace, with a burst of sorrow rather than anger.

One day Agnes de Clarenham, always retiring and pensive, was sitting apart in the embrasure of a window, whence, through an opening in the trees of the garden, she could catch a distant glimpse of the blue waters of the river where it joined the sea, which separated her from her native land, and from her who had ever been as a mother to her. She was so lost in thought, that she scarce heard a step approaching, till the unwelcome sound of “Fair greeting to you, Lady Agnes,” caused her to look up and behold the still more unwelcome form of Sir Leonard Ashton. To escape from him was the first idea, for his clownish manners, always unpleasant to her, had become doubly so, since he had presumed upon her brother’s favour to offer to her addresses from which she saw no escape; and with a brief reply of “Thanks for your courtesy, Sir Knight,” she was about to rise and mingle with

the rest of the party, when he proceeded bluntly, "Lady Agnes, will you do me a favour?"

"I know of no favour in my power," said she.

"Nay," he said, "it is easily done, and it is as much to your brother as to myself. It is a letter which, methinks, Fulk would not have read out of the family, of which I may call myself one," and he gave a sort of smirk at Agnes;—"but he writes so crabbedly, that I, for one, cannot read two lines,—and I would not willingly give it to a clerk, who might be less secret. So methought, as 'twas the baron's affair, I would even bring it here, and profit by your convent breeding, Lady Agnes."

Agnes took the letter, and began to read:—

"For the hand of the Right Noble and Worshipful Knight, Sir Leonard Ashton, at the court of my lord the Prince of Wales, these:—

"FAIR SIR, and brother-in-arms,—I hereby do you to wit, that the affair whereof we spoke goes well. Both my Lord of Pembroke and Sir John Chandos readily undertook to move the Prince to grant the banneret you wot of the government of the castle, and as he hath never forgotten the love he once bore to his brother, he will the more easily be persuaded. Of the garrison we are sure, and all that is now needful is, that the one-eyed squire, whereof you spoke to me, should receive warning before he arrives at the castle.

"Tell him to choose his time, and manage matters so that there may be no putting to ransom. He will understand my meaning.—Greeting you well, therefore, "FULK, Baron of Clarenham."

“What means this?” exclaimed Agnes, as a tissue of treachery opened before her eyes.

“Ay, that you may say,” said Leonard, his slow brain only fixed upon Fulk’s involved sentences, and utterly unconscious of the horror, expressed in her tone. “How is a man to understand what he would have me to do? Send to Le Borgne Basque at Château Norbelle? Is that it? Read it me once again, lady. What am I to tell Le Borgne Basque? No putting to ransom, doth he say? He might be secure enough for that matter—Eustace Lynwood is little like to ransom himself.”

“But what mean you?” said Agnes, eagerly hoping that she had done her brother injustice in her first horrible thought. “Sir Eustace Lynwood, if you spake of him, is no prisoner, but is here at Bordeaux.”

“He shall not long be so,” said Leonard. “Heard you not this very noon that the Prince bestows on him the government of Château Norbelle on the marches of Gascony? Well, that is the matter treated of in this letter. It is Le Borgne Basque who is seneschal, and ’twas he who was to admit Clisson’s men.”

“Admit Clisson’s men!”

“Ay—’tis one of those castles built by the old paladin, Renaud de Montauban, that Eustace used to talk about. I ween he did not know of this trick that will be played on himself—and all of them have, they say, certain secret passages leading through the vaults into the castle. Le Borgne Basque knows them all, for he has served much in those parts, and Fulk placed him as seneschal for ‘he very purpose.”

“ For the purpose of admitting Clisson’s men ? Do I understand you right, Sir Knight, or do my ears play me false ? ”

“ Yes, I speak right. Do you not see, Lady Agnes, it is the only way to free your house of this stumbling-block—this beggarly upstart Eustace—who, as long



as he lives, will never acknowledge Fulk’s rights, and would bring up his nephew to the same pride.”

“ And is it possible, Sir Leonard, that brother of mine, and belted knight, should devise so foul a scheme of treachery ! Oh, unsay it again ! Let me believe it was my own folly that conjured up so monstrous a thought ! ”

“ Ay, that is the way with women,” said Leonard ; “ they never look at the sense of the matter. Why,

this Eustace, what terms should be kept with him, who has dealings with the Evil One, and——”

“ I will neither hear a noble knight maligned, nor suffer him to be betrayed,” interrupted Agnes. “ I thank you, however, for having given me such warning as to enable me to traverse them.”

“ What will you do ? ” asked Leonard, with a look of impotent anger.

“ Appeal instantly to the Prince. Tell him the use that is made of his castles, and the falsehoods told him of his most true-hearted knight ! ” And Agnes, with glancing eyes, was already rising for the purpose, forgetting, in her eager indignation, all that must follow, when Leonard, muttering, “ What madness possessed me to tell her ! ” stood full before her, saying, gloomily, “ Do so, lady, if you choose to ruin your brother ! ” The timid girl stood appalled as the horrible consequences of such an accusation arose before her.

That same day Eustace was summoned to the Prince’s presence.

“ Sir Eustace Lynwood,” said Edward gravely, “ I hear you have served the King well beneath the banner of Sir John Chandos. Your friends have wrought with me to give you occasion to prove yourself worthy of your spurs, and I have determined to confer on you the government of my Château of Norbelle on the frontier of Gascony, trusting to find you a true and faithful governor and castellane.”

“ I trust, my lord, that you have never had occasion to deem less honourably of me,” said Eustace ; and his clear open eye and brow courted rather than

shunned the keen look of scrutiny that the Prince fixed upon him. His heart leapt at the hope that the time for inquiry was come; but the Prince in another moment sank his eyes again, with more, however, of the weary impatience of illness than of actual displeasure, and merely replied—

“Kneel down, then, Sir Knight, and take the oaths of fidelity.”

Eustace obeyed, hardly able to suppress a sigh at the disappointment of his hopes.

“You will receive the necessary orders and supplies from Sir John Chandos, and from the treasurer,” said Edward, in a tone that intimated the conclusion of the conference; and Eustace quitted his presence, scarce knowing whether to be rejoiced or dissatisfied.

The former Gaston certainly was. “I have often been heartily weary of garrison duty,” said he; “but never can I be more weary of aught than of being looked upon askance by half the men I meet. And we may sometimes hear the lark sing too, as well as the mouse squeak, Sir Eustace. I know every pass of my native county, and the herds of Languedoc shall pay toll to us.”

Sir John Chandos, as Constable of Aquitaine, gave him the requisite orders and information. The fortifications, he said, were in good condition, and the garrison already numerous; but a sum of money was allotted to him in order to increase their numbers as much as he should deem advisable, since it was not improbable that he might have to sustain a siege, as Oliver de Clisson was threatening that part of the

frontier. Four days were allowed for his preparations, after which he was to depart for his government.

Eustace was well pleased with all that he heard, and returned to his lodging, where, in the evening twilight, he was deeply engaged in consultation with Gaston, on the number of followers to be raised, when a light step was heard hastily approaching, and Arthur, darting into the room, flung himself on his neck, exclaiming, "Uncle, uncle, go not to this castle!"

"Arthur, what brings you here? What means this? No foolish frolic, no escape from punishment, I trust?" said Eustace, holding him at some little distance, and fixing his eyes on him intently.

"No, uncle, no! On the word of a true knight's son," said the boy, stammering in his eagerness, "believe me, trust me, dear uncle—and go not to this fearful castle. It is a trap—a snare laid to be your death, by the foulest treachery!"

"Silence, Arthur!" said the knight sternly. "Know you not what treason you speak? Some trick has been played on your simplicity, and yet you—child as you are—should as soon think shame of your own father as of the Prince, the very soul of honour."

"Oh, it is not the Prince—he knows nought of it; it is those double traitors, the Baron of Clareham and Sir Leonard Ashton, who have worked upon him, and deceived him."

"Oh, ho!" said Gaston. "The story now begins to wear some semblance of probability."

"Well, then," said Arthur, "you must know that this Château Norbelle is one of those built by that

famous paladin, the chief of freebooters, Sir Renaud de Montauban, of whom you have told me so many tales. Now all of these have secret passages in the vaults communicating with the outer country."

"The boy is right," said Gaston. "I have seen one of them in the Castle of Montauban itself."

"Then it seems," proceeded Arthur, "that this castle hath hitherto been in the keeping of a certain one-eyed seneschal, a great friend and comrade of Sir Leonard Ashton——"

"Le Borgne Basque!" exclaimed both knight and squire, looking at each other in amaze.

"True, true," said Arthur. "Now you believe me. Well, the enemy being in the neighbourhood, it was thought right to increase the garrison, and place it under the command of a knight, and these cowardly traitors have wrought with my Lord of Pembroke and Sir John Chandos to induce the Prince to give you this post—it being their intention that this wicked seneschal and his equally wicked garrison should admit Sir Oliver de Clisson, the butcher of Bretagne himself, through the secret passage. And, uncle," said the boy, pressing Eustace's hand, while tears of indignation sprang to his eyes, "the letter expressly said there was to be no putting to ransom. Oh, Uncle Eustace, go not to this castle!"

"And how came you by this knowledge?" asked the knight.

"That may I never tell," said Arthur.

"By no means which might not beseem the son of a brave man?" said Eustace.

"Mistrust me not so foully," said the boy. "I

know it from a sure hand, and there is no dishonour, save on the part of those villain traitors. Oh, promise me, fair uncle, not to put yourself in their hands ! ”

“ Arthur, I have taken the oaths to the Prince as castellane. I cannot go back from my duty, nor give up its defence for any cause whatsoever.”

“ Alas, alas ! ”

“ There would be only one way of avoiding it,” said Eustace, “ and you must yourself say, Arthur, whether that is open to me. To go to the Prince, and tell him openly what use is made of his castles, and impeach the villains of their treachery.”

“ That cannot be,” said Arthur, shaking his head sadly ; “ it is contrary to the pledge I gave for you and for myself. But go not, go not, uncle.”

“ Think you not that Gaston, and honest Ingram, and I may not be a match for a dozen cowardly traitors ? Besides which, see here the gold allotted me to raise more men, with which I will obtain some honest hearts for my defence—and it will go hard with me if I cannot find Sir Renaud’s secret door.”

“ Then, if you will go, uncle, take me with you—I could, at least watch the door ; and I know how to hit a mark with a cross-bow.”

“ Take you, Master Arthur ? What ! steal away the Prince’s page that I have been at such pains to bring hither, and carry him to a nest of traitors ! Why, it would be the very way to justify Clarenham’s own falsehoods.”

“ And of the blackest are they ! ” said Arthur
“ Think, uncle, of my standing by to hear him breath-

ing poison to the Prince, and then preventing him from searching to find out the truth, by pretending a regard for my father's name, and your character. Oh that our noble Prince should be deluded by such a recreant, and think scorn of such a knight as you ! ”

“ I trust yet to prove to him that it is a delusion,” said Eustace, “ and though clouded for a time, I will yet clear it ; so, Arthur, be not downcast for me. But tell me, how came you hither ? ”

“ She—that is, the person that warned me—let me down from the window upon the head of the great gargoyle, and from thence I scrambled down by the vines on the wall, ran through the court without being seen by the squires and grooms, and found my way to the bridge, where happily I met John Ingram, who brought me hither.”

“ She ? ” repeated Gaston, with a sly look in his black eyes.

“ I have said too much,” said Arthur, colouring deeply ; “ I pray you to forget.”

“ Arthur, you must return to the palace immediately,” said Sir Eustace.

“ Oh, uncle,” said the boy, “ may I not stay with you this one night ? See how late and dark it is—the castle gates will be closed by this time.”

“ Then,” said the knight, “ since it is, as you say, too late to rouse the palace, I will take you back in my hand to-morrow morn, see the master of the damoiseaux, and pray him to excuse you for coming to see me ere my departure.”

“ Yes, that will be all well,” said Arthur ; “ I could, to be sure, find the corner where Lord Harry has

loosened the stones, and get in by the pages' window ere old Master Michael is awake in the morn ; but I think such things are more like those of a fox than of a brave boy, and though I should be well punished, I will walk in at the door, and hold up my head boldly."

" Shall you be punished then ? " said Gaston. " Is your old master of the damoiseaux very severe ? "

" He has not been so hitherto with me," said Arthur. " He scolds me for little, save what you too are displeased with, Master d'Aubricour, because I cannot bring my mouth to speak your language in your own fashion. It is Lord Harry that chiefly falls under his displeasure. But punished now I shall assuredly be, unless Uncle Eustace can work wonders."

" I will see what may be done, Arthur," said Eustace. " And now, have you supped ? "

The evening passed off very happily to the little page, who, quite reassured by his uncle's consolations, only thought of the delight of being with one who seemed to supply to him the place at once of an elder brother and of a father.

Early the next morning Eustace walked with him to the palace. Just before he reached it, he made this inquiry, " Arthur, do you often see the Lady Agnes de Clarenham ? "

" Oh yes, I am with her almost every afternoon. She hears me read, she helps me with my French words, and teaches me courtly manners. I am her own page and servant—but here we are. This is the door that leads to the room of Master Michael de Sancy, the master of the damoiseaux."

CHAPTER XII

THE next few days were spent in taking precautions against the danger intimated by the mysterious message. Gaston gathered together a few of the ancient Lances of Lynwood, and these, with some men-at-arms, formed a body with whom Eustace trusted to be able to keep the disaffected in check. Through vineyards and over gently swelling hills their course led them, till, on the evening of the second day's journey, on the summit of a rock overhanging a small rapid stream, appeared the tall and massive towers of a castle, surmounted by the broad red cross of St. George, and which their guide pronounced to be the Château Norbelle.

"A noble eyrie!" said Eustace, looking up and measuring it with his eye.

"Shame that such a knightly building should serve for such a nest of traitors!" said Gaston.

"Let us summon the said traitors," said Eustace, blowing a blast on his bugle. The gates were thrown wide open, the drawbridge lowered, and beneath the portcullis stood the seneschal, his bunch of keys at his girdle. A patch covered the lost eye, his moustache was shaved, his hair appeared many shades lighter, as well as his beard. The knight debated with himself whether to let him perceive that he was recognised, and deciding to watch his conduct, he asked by what name to address him.

"Thibault Sanchez," replied Le Borgne Basque,

giving his real name, "so please you, noble sir, a poor squire from the mountains, who hath seen some few battles and combats in his day, but never one equal to the fight of Najara, where your deeds of prowess——"

"My deeds of prowess, Sir Seneschal, had better rest in silence until our horses have been disposed of, and I have made the rounds of the castle before the light fails us."

"So late, Sir Knight, and after a long and weary journey? Surely you will drink a cup of wine, and take a night's rest first, relying on me, who, though I be a plain man, trust I understand somewhat of the duties of mine office."

"I sleep not until I have learnt what is committed to my charge," replied the knight. "Lead the way, Master Sanchez."

They crossed the narrow court, and passed beneath a second portcullised door. A large wood fire was burning on the hearth, and there was a long table in the room, where were placed some drinking horns, and a flask or two of wine.

"A drop of wine, noble knight," said the seneschal. "Take a cup to recruit you after your journey."

The probability that the wine might be drugged had been contemplated by Eustace, who had not only resolved to abstain himself, but had exacted the same promise from d'Aubricour, sorely against his will.

"We will spare your flasks till a time of need," said Eustace. "And now to the walls," he added, after he had filled a cup with water from the pitcher and refreshed himself with it. Gaston followed his

example, not without a wistful look at the wine, and Sanchez was obliged to lead the way up a long flight of spiral steps to two other vaulted apartments, one over the other—the lower destined for the sleeping chamber of the knight and his squire, the higher for such of the men-at-arms as could not find accommodation in the hall or in the offices below. Above this they came out on the lead-covered roof, surrounded with a high crenellated stone parapet, where two or three warders were stationed. Still higher rose one small octagonal watch-tower, on the summit of which was planted a spear bearing St. George's pennon, and by its side Sir Eustace now placed his own.

“I have not yet seen the vaults,” Eustace said.

“The vaults, Sir Knight? What would you see there, save a few rusted chains, and some whitened bones? Not a man in the castle will enter those vaults after sunset, Sir Knight.”

“I will take the risk alone,” said Eustace. “Hand me a torch there!”

Gaston took another, and Thibault Sanchez, seeing them so resolute, chose to be of the party. The torches shed their red glare over the stone arches on which the castle rested, and there was a chill damp air and earthy smell, which made both knight and squire shudder and start. No sooner had they entered than Thibault, trembling, exclaimed, in a tone of horror, “There! there! O blessed Lady, protect us!”

“Where?” asked Eustace.

“’Tis gone—yet methought I saw it again. There! look yonder, Sir Knight—something white fluttering behind that column!”

Gaston crossed himself, and turned pale; but Eustace had settled his nerves. "A truce with these vain follies, Master Seneschal," said he sternly. "Those who know Le Borgne Basque cannot believe his fears to be other than assumed."

No ghost could have startled the seneschal of the Château Norbelle as much as this. He fell back, and subsided into complete silence, as he meditated whether it were best to confess the plot, and throw himself upon Sir Eustace's mercy. It so chanced that Sir Eustace's spur rung against something of metal, and he called for Gaston to hold his torch lower. The light fell not only upon an iron ring, but upon a guard which evidently covered a keyhole.

Sanchez gave up his bunch of keys, protesting that there was nothing there which could unlock the mysterious door; but the knight had another method. "Look you, Master Sanchez," said he, "it may be, as you say, that this door hath not been unclosed for hundreds of years, notwithstanding I see traces in the dust as if it had been raised of late. I shall, however, sleep more securely if convinced that it is an impossibility to lift it. Go, therefore, Gaston, and call half a dozen of the men, to bring each of them the heaviest stone they can find from that heap I saw prepared for a mangonel in the courtyard."

"Oh, excellent!" exclaimed Gaston; "and yet Sir Eustace——"

There he stopped, but it was evident that he was reluctant to leave his master alone with this villain. Eustace replied by drawing his good sword and giving him a fearless smile as he planted his foot upon

the trap-door, and, fixing his gaze upon Le Borgne Basque, made him feel that this was no moment for treachery.

Gaston sped fast out of the dungeon, and in brief space made his appearance at the head of the men-at-arms, some bearing torches, others labouring under the weight of the huge stones, and, with unwilling hands, they built up such a pile upon the secret door, that it could not be lifted from beneath without gigantic strength, and a noise which would re-echo through the castle. This done, Sir Eustace watched them all out of the vault himself, closed the door, locked it, and announced to the seneschal his intention of relieving him for the future from the care of the keys.

As to Le Borgne Basque, he betook himself to the buttery; and there, in an undertone of great terror, began to mutter to his friend and ally, Tristan de la Flèche, "It is all over with us! He is a wizard! What, save enchantment, could have enabled him to recognise me under this disguise, or how could he have gone straight to yonder door?"

"Think you not that he had some warning?" asked Tristan.

"Impossible, save from Clarenham, or from Ashton himself; and, dolt as he is, I trow he has sense enough to keep his own counsel. When all is still, I will go round and waken our comrades, while you creep forth by the hole beneath the bartizan, and warn Clisson that the secret passage is nought, but that when he sees a light in old Montfort's turret——"

Tristan suddenly trod on his foot, as a sign of silence,

as a step descended the stairs, and Sir Eustace stood before them.

“ You appear to be agreeably employed, gentlemen,” said he, glancing at the stoup of wine which was before them ; “ but my orders are as precise as Norman William’s. No lights in this castle, save my own, after eight o’clock. To your beds, gentlemen, and a good night to you ! ” He was still fully armed, so that it was unsafe to attack him. At the turn of midnight, Le Borgne Basque crept forth, but he had not descended far before a red gleam of torchlight was seen on the dark stairs, and the black head and dark eyes of Gaston appeared, glancing with mischievous amusement, as he said, in his gay voice, “ You are on the alert, my old comrade. But Sir Eustace entrusts the care of changing the guard to none but me ; so I will not trouble you to disturb yourself another night.” And the baffled miscreant retreated.

CHAPTER XIII

THERE was a village at some distance from the Château Norbelle, the inhabitants of which were required to furnish it with provisions. The castellane, by paying just prices, and preventing his men from treating the peasants in the cruel and exacting manner to which they were accustomed,

had gained their goodwill. Prompt intelligence of the proceedings of the French army was always brought to him, and he was thus informed that a large treasure was on its way from Bayonne to Carcassonne, being the subsidy promised by Enrique, King of Castile, to his allies, Bertrand du Guesclin and Oliver de Clisson.

It became the duty of the English to intercept these supplies, and Eustace knew that he should incur censure should he allow the occasion to pass. But how divide his garrison? Which of the men-at-arms could be relied on? After consultation with d'Aubricour, it was determined that he himself should remain with John Ingram and a sufficient number of English to keep the traitors in check, while Gaston went forth in command of the party, who were certain to fight with a good will where spoil was the object. They would be absent at least two nights, since the pass of the Pyrenees, where they intended to lie in ambush, was at a considerable distance, nor was the time of the arrival of the convoy absolutely certain.

The expedition proved completely successful, and on the morning of the third day the rising sun beheld Gaston d'Aubricour riding triumphantly at the head of his little band, in the midst of which was a long line of heavily laden baggage-mules. The towers of Château Norbelle appeared in his view, when suddenly, with a cry of amazement, he perceived that the pennon of St. George and the banner of Lynwood were both absent from the keep. He could scarcely believe his eyes, but forcing his horse onward with

furious impetuosity to obtain a nearer view, he discovered that it was indeed true.

“The miscreants!” he shouted. “Oh, my knight! my knight!” and turning to the men who followed him, he exclaimed, “There is yet hope! Will you see our trust betrayed, our noble knight foully murdered or delivered to his enemies, or will ye strike a bold stroke in his defence? He who is not dead to honour, follow me!”

There was a postern, of which Eustace had given Gaston the key, on his departure, and thither the faithful squire hastened, without looking back to see whether he was followed by many or few—in fact, rather ready to die with Sir Eustace than hoping to rescue him. The ten Englishmen and some eight Frenchmen, infected by the desperation of his manner, followed him closely as he rushed up the slope, dashed through the moat, and in another moment, opening the door, burst into the court. There stood a party of the garrison, upon whom he rushed with a shout of “Death, death to the traitors!” Gaston’s arm did the work of three, as he hewed down the villains, who, surprised, made feeble resistance.

“Ah! Master d’Aubricour, ’twas not me, ’twas the traitor, Sanchez—’twas Tristan,” was the answer. “Oh, mercy, for our blessed Lady’s sake!”

“No mercy, dogs, till ye have shown me Sir Eustace in life and limb.”

“Alas, alas, Master d’Aubricour!” This cry arose from some of the English; and Gaston, springing towards the bartizan, beheld the senseless form of his beloved knight lying stretched in a pool of his



own blood ! Pouring out lamentations in the passionate terms of the South, he lifted his master from the ground, and, as he did so, he fancied he felt a slight movement of the chest, and a faint moan fell upon his ear.

He saw only, heard only, thought only, of Sir Eustace ! He lifted the knight in his arms, and, hurrying up the stone steps, placed him on his couch.

“Bring water ! bring wine !” he shouted as he crossed the hall. A horse-boy followed with a pitcher of water, and Gaston, unfastening the collar of his doublet, raised his head, held his face towards the air, and deluged it with water, entreating him to look up and speak.

A few long, painful gasps, and the eyes were half unclosed, while a scarce audible voice said, “Gaston, is it thou ? I deemed it was over !” and then the eyes closed again. Gaston’s heart was lightened at having heard that voice once more, and answering, “Ay, truly, Sir Knight ; all is well so you will but look up,” he succeeded in pouring a little water into his mouth.

He was interrupted by several of the men-at-arms, who came trooping up to the door, looking anxiously at the wounded knight, while the foremost said, “Master Gaston, here is gear which must be looked to. Thibault Sanchez and half a dozen more have drawn together in Montfort’s tower, and swear they will not come forth till we have promised their lives.”

“Give them no such pledge !—Hang without

mercy!" cried another voice from behind. "Did not I myself hear the traitorous villains send off Tristan de la Flèche to bear the news to Carcassonne? We shall have the butcher of Bretagne at our throats before another hour is over."

"Cowardly traitor!" cried Gaston. "Wherefore didst thou not make in to the rescue of the knight?"

"Why, Master d'Aubricour, the deed was done ere I was well aware; and when it was done, and could not be undone, and we were but four men to a dozen, what could a poor groom do?"

Eustace again opened his eyes, and made an effort to raise his head, as he said, almost instinctively, "Secure the gates! Warders, to your posts! Not a moment to be lost! Give me some wine!" and he spoke in a stronger voice. "How many men of you are true to King Edward and to the Prince? All who will not fight to the death in their cause have free leave to quit this castle; but, first, a message must be sent to Bordeaux."

"True, Sir Eustace, but on whom can we rely?" asked Gaston.

"Alas! I fear my faithful Ingram must be slain," said the knight, "else this could never have been. Know you aught of him?" he added, looking anxiously at the men.

The answer was a call from one of the men: "Here, John, don't stand there grunting like a hog; the knight is asking for you, don't you hear?"

"Stand up, John, and let us know if you are in your senses," said Gaston angrily. "Let us know whether you have been knave, traitor, or fool; for

one or other you must have been, to be standing here sound and safe."

"You have been deceived by their arts," said Eustace. "That can I well believe; but that you should be a traitor, never, my trusty John!"

"Blessings on you for the word, Sir Eustace!" cried the yeoman, while tears fell down his rough cheeks. "Oh, all the wine in the world may be burnt to the very dregs ere I again let a drop cross my lips! But it was drugged, Sir Eustace, it was drugged."

"I believe it," said Eustace; "but we must not wait to hear your tale, John. You must take horse and ride with all speed to Bordeaux. One of you go and prepare a horse——"

"Take Brigliador!" said Gaston; "he is the swiftest."

"Then," proceeded Eustace, "bear the news that we have been betrayed—that Clisson will be on us immediately—that we will do all that man can do to hold out till succour can come, which I pray the Prince to send us."

"Take care to whom he addresses himself," said Gaston. "To some our strait will be welcome news."

"True," said Eustace. "Do thy best to see Sir John Chandos, or, if he be not at the court, prefer thy suit to the Prince himself—to any save the Earl of Pembroke. Or if thou couldst see little Arthur, it might be best of all. Dost understand my orders, John?"

"Ay, sir," said Ingram, shaking his great head, while the tears still flowed down his cheeks; "but to see you in this case!"

“Speed, speed, Ingram! Tell the Prince, if this castle be taken, it opens the way to Bordeaux itself. Tell him how many brave men it contains, and say to him that I pray him not to deem that Eustace Lynwood hath disgraced his knighthood. Tell Arthur, too, to bear me sometimes in mind, and never forget the line he comes of. Fare thee well, good John!

“One thing more: should you see Leonard Ashton, let him know that I bear him no ill-will, and pray him not to leave the fair fame of his old comrade foully stained. Farewell: here is my hand—do not take it as scorn that it is my left—my right I cannot move——”

The yeoman still stood in a sort of trance, gazing at him, as if unable to tear himself away.

“See him off, Gaston,” said the knight; “then have the walls properly manned—all is in your hands.”

“Now, up with the good old banner!” said Gaston; “and let us give Messire Oliver such a reception as he will be little prepared for.” He then gave some hasty directions, appointed old Silverlocks, a skilled and tried warrior, to take the place of seneschal for the time, and to superintend the arrangements; and, sending two men to guard the entrance of Montfort’s tower, where Sanchez and his accomplices had shut themselves up, he returned to the castellane’s chamber.

Gaston hastened to the side of his beloved knight, almost dreading, from his silence and stillness, to find him expiring. But he was only faint and exhausted, and when Gaston raised him, and began to examine his wounds, he looked up, saying, “Thanks, thanks,

kind Gaston ! but waste not your time here. The castle ! the castle ! ”

“ What care I for the castle compared to your life ! ” said Gaston.

“ For my honour and your own,” said Eustace, fixing his eyes on his squire’s face. “ Gaston, I fear you,” he added, stretching out his hand and grasping that of d’Aubricour. “ If you survive, you will forget the duty you owe the King, for the purpose of avenging me upon Clarenham. If ever you have loved me, Gaston, give me your solemn promise that this shall not be.”

“ It was the purpose for which I should have lived,” said Gaston.

“ You resign it ? ” said Eustace, still retaining his hold of his hand. “ You touch not one of my wounds till you have given me your oath.”

“ I swear it, then,” said Gaston, “ since you will ever have your own way, and I do it the rather that Messire Oliver de Clisson will probably save me the pain of keeping the pledge.”

“ You have taken all measures for defence ? ”

“ Yes. The men-at-arms, such as are left, may be trusted, and have all taken an oath to stand by us, which I do not think they will readily break. The rest either made off with the baggage-mules, or were slain when we broke in to your rescue, or are shut up with Le Borgne Basque in Montfort’s tower. I have sent the men to their posts, put them under Silverlocks’ orders, and told him to come to me for directions.”

Eustace at last resigned himself into the squire’s

hands. A broken arm, a ghastly looking cut on the head, and a deep thrust with a poniard in the breast, seemed the most serious of the injuries he had received ; but there were numerous lesser gashes and stabs which had occasioned a great effusion of blood, and he had been considerably bruised by his fall.

Gaston could attempt nothing but applying some ointment, sold by a Jew at Bordeaux as an infallible cure for all wounds and bruises ; and, having done all he could for the comfort of his patient, quitted him to attend to the defence of the castle.

His first visit was to Montfort's tower.

" Well, Master Thibault Sanchez, or, if you like it better, Le Borgne Basque," cried he, " thank you for saving us some trouble. You have found yourself a convenient prison there, and I hope you are at your ease."

" We shall see how you are at your ease, Master Gaston le Maure," retorted Sanchez from the depths of the tower, " when another Borgne shall make his appearance, and string you up as a traitor to King Charles, your liege lord."

" Le Borgne Basque talking of traitors and such gear !" returned Gaston ; " but he will tell a different tale when the succours come from the Prince."

" Ha ! ha !" laughed Thibault ; " a little bird whispered in mine ear that you may look long for succour from Bordeaux."

This was, in a great measure, Gaston's own conviction ; but he only replied the more vehemently that it could not fail, since neither knights nor castles were so lightly parted with, and that he trusted soon

to have the satisfaction of seeing the inhabitants of the tower receive the reward of their treachery.

Now the warder on the watch-tower blew a blast, and every eye was turned towards the eastern part of the country, where, in the direction of Carcassonne, was to be seen a thick cloud of dust, from which, in due time, were visible the flashes of armour and the points of weapons. Gaston, having given his orders, hurried down to bear the tidings to Sir Eustace, and to array himself in his own brightest helmet and gayest surcoat.

Ascending again to the battlements, he could see the enemy approaching, and could distinguish the banner of Clisson.

At last they came to the foot of the slope where they arranged themselves in order, and, after a moment's interval, a man-at-arms rode forward towards the postern door, looked earnestly at it, and called, "Sanchez!"

"Shoot him dead!" said Gaston to an English crossbow-man who stood beside him; "it is the villain Tristan."

The arblast twanged, and Tristan fell.

The French, dismayed by the reception of their guide, held back; but presently a pursuivant came forward from their ranks, and, after his trumpet had been sounded, summoned, in the name of the good knight, Messire Oliver de Clisson, the garrison of Château Norbelle to surrender it into his hands, as thereto commissioned by his grace, Charles, King of France.

The garrison replied by another trumpet, and Gaston,

standing forth upon the battlements, over the gateway, demanded to speak with Sir Oliver de Clisson, and to have safe-conduct to and from the open space at the foot of the slope. This being granted, the drawbridge was lowered, and the portcullis raised, and Gaston d'Aubricour came forth in complete armour, and was conducted to the leader of the troop.



“So, Sir Squire!” exclaimed Clisson in his harsh voice, “what excuse do you come to make for slaying my messenger ere he had time to deliver his charge?”

“I own him as no messenger,” returned Gaston. “He was a renegade traitor from our own castle, seeking his accomplice in villainy!”

“Well, speak on,” said Oliver to whom the death

of a man-at-arms was a matter of slight importance. "Art thou come to deliver up the castle to its rightful lord?"

"No, Messire Oliver," replied Gaston. "I come to bring the reply of the castellan, Sir Eustace Lynwood, that he will hold out the castle to the last extremity against all and each of your attacks."

"Well and good, Sir Squire," said Clisson, rather pleased at the bold reply. "We understand each other. Fare thee well."

And Gaston walked back to the castle, muttering to himself, "So, grim Oliver, do thy worst!—Ha!" as he entered the castle— "down porticullis—up drawbridge! Archers, bend your bows! Martin, stones for the mangonel!"

Nor was the assault long delayed. Clisson's men only waited to secure their horses and prepare their ladders, and the attack was made on every side.

It was well and manfully resisted. Bravely did the little garrison struggle with the numbers that poured against them on every side, and the day wore away in the desperate conflict.

Sir Eustace heard the loud cries of "Montjoie St. Denis! Clisson!" on the one side, and the "St. George for Merry England! A Lynwood!" with which his own party replied; he heard the thundering of heavy stones, the rush of the combatants, cries of victory or defeat. Sometimes his whole being seemed in the fight; he clenched his teeth, he shouted his war-cry, tried to raise himself and lift his powerless arm; then returned again to the consciousness of his condition, clasped either the

rosary or the crucifix, and turned his soul to fervent prayer.

So passed the day—and twilight was fast deepening into night, when the cries, a short time since more furious than ever, and nearer and more exulting on the part of the French, at length subsided, and finally died away; the trampling steps of the men-at-arms could be heard in the hall below, and Gaston himself came up with hasty step, undid his helmet, and, wiping his brow, threw himself on the ground with his back against the chest, saying, “Well, we have done our devoir, at any rate! Poor Brigliador! I am glad he has a kind master in Ingram!”

“Have they won the court?” asked Eustace. “I thought I heard their shouts within it.”

“Ay! Even so. How could we guard such an extent of wall with barely five-and-twenty men? Old Silverlocks and Jaques de l’Eure are slain, Martin badly wounded, and we all forced back into the inner court, after doing all it was in man to do.”

“I heard your voice, bold and cheerful as ever, above the tumult,” said Eustace. “But the inner court is fit for a long defence.”

“Yes,” said Gaston, slowly rising, and bending over the knight; “but is there nought I can do for you, Sir Eustace?”

“Nought, save to replenish my cup of water. It is well for me that the enemy have not cut us off from the castle well.”

By this time a slight stir was heard within the castle and Gaston, rising from his knees, went to the loophole, which commanded a view of the court

where the French had taken up their quarters for the night in some of the outbuildings—and the lion rampant of Clisson was waving in triumph on the gateway tower.

“All silent there,” said he; “but I must go to rouse our knaves in time to meet the first onset.” And, as he clasped on his armour, he continued, “All that is in the power of man will we do! Rest assured, Sir Eustace, they reach you not save through my body; and let your prayers be with me. One embrace, Sir Eustace, and we meet no more——”

“In this world.” Eustace concluded the sentence, as Gaston hung over him, and his tears dropped on his face. “Farewell, most faithful and most true-hearted! Go, I command thee! Think not on me—think on thy duty—and good angels will be around us both. Farewell, farewell.”

Gaston crossed the room with slow and lingering step, closing his visor as he did so, and, after a short interval, Eustace could hear his gay, bold tones calling, “Up! up! my merry men, all!”

CHAPTER XIV

THE open space beyond the walls of Bordeaux presented a bright and lively scene. It was here that the pages of the Black Prince were wont to exercise those sports and pastimes for which the court of the palace scarce afforded sufficient space.

Of all the merry groups scattered through that wide green space, the most interesting was one formed by three boys, Lord Harry, Prince Edward, and Arthur, who stood beneath a tree, a little from the rest. The two eldest might be from ten to eleven years old, the third two or three years younger, and his delicate features, fair, pale complexion, and slender limbs, made him appear too weak and childish for such active sports as the rest were engaged in, but that the lordly glance of his clear blue eye, his firm tread, and the noble carriage of his shapely head, had in them something of command, which attracted notice.

“What are you staring at so fixedly, Arthur?” said Edward. “At the poor jaded horse that yonder man-at-arms is urging on so painfully?”

“’Tis Brigliador, and John Ingram himself,” cried Arthur. “Oh, my uncle, my uncle!” And in one moment he had bounded across the ditch, which fenced in their exercising ground, and had rushed to meet Ingram. “Oh, John,” tell me of Uncle Eustace! Is he alive?”

“He is alive, Master Arthur—that is, he was when I came away, but as sore wounded as ever I saw knight. And the butcher of Brittany is upon them by this time, and here I am sent to ask succours—and I know no more to whom to address myself than the cock at the top of Lynwood steeple!”

“But what has chanced, John?—make haste and tell me.”

And John, in his own awkward and confused style, narrated how he had been entrapped by Sanchez, and the consequences of his excess.

Arthur had covered his face with his hands, and gave way to tears of indignation and grief, as he felt his helplessness. But one hand was kindly withdrawn, and a gentle voice said, "Weep not, Arthur, but come with me, and my father will send relief to the castle, and save your uncle."

"Oh yes, thanks, thanks! None but the Prince can save him. Oh, let me see him myself, and that instantly!"

"Then, let us come," said Edward, still holding Arthur's hand.

Arthur set off at such a pace, as to press the little Prince into a breathless trot by his side; but he, too, was all eagerness, and scorned to complain. They proceeded without interruption to the court of the palace. Edward, leading the way, hastened to his mother's apartments. He threw open the door, looked in, and, saying to Arthur, "He must be in the council-chamber," ran down a long gallery to an ante-chamber, where were several persons waiting for an audience, and two warders, with halberts erect, standing on guard outside a closed door.

"The Prince is in council, my lord."

Edward drew up his head, and, waving them aside with a gesture that became the heir of England, said, "I take it upon myself." He then opened the door, and, still holding Arthur fast by the hand, led him into the chamber where the Prince of Wales sat in consultation with his nobles and clerks.

There was a pause of amazement as the two boys advanced to the high carved chair on which the Prince

was seated—and Edward exclaimed, “Father, save Arthur’s uncle!”

“What means this, Edward?” demanded the Prince of Wales, somewhat sternly. “Go to your mother, boy—we cannot hear you now, and——”

“I cannot go, father,” replied the child, “till you have promised to save Arthur’s uncle! He is wounded!—the traitors have wounded him!—and the French will take the castle, and he will be slain!”

“Come here, Edward,” said the Prince, remarking the flushed check and tearful eye of his son, “and tell me what this means.”

Edward obeyed, but without loosing his hold of his young friend’s hand. “The man-at-arms is come, all heat and dust, on the poor, drooping, jaded steed—and he said the knight would be slain, and the castle taken, unless you would send him relief. It is Arthur’s uncle that he loves so well.”

“Arthur’s uncle?” repeated the Prince—and, turning his eyes on the suppliant figure, he said, “Arthur Lynwood! Speak, boy.”

“Oh, my lord,” said Arthur, “I would only pray you to send succour to my uncle at Château Norbelle, and save him from being murdered by Oliver de Clisson.”

It was a voice which boded little good to Arthur’s suit that now spoke. “If it be Sir Eustace Lynwood, at Château Norbelle, of whom the young Prince speaks, he can scarce be in any strait, since the garrison is more than sufficient.”

The little page started to his feet, and, regarding the speaker with flashing eyes, exclaimed, “Hearken

not to him, my Lord Prince! He is the cause of all the treachery!—he is the ruin and destruction of my uncle;—he has deceived you with his falsehoods!—and now he would be his death!”

“How now, my young cousin!” said Clarenham, in a most irritating tone of indifference—“you forget in what presence you are.”

“I do not,” replied Arthur, fiercely. “Before the Prince, Fulk Clarenham, I declare you a false traitor!—and, if you dare deny it, there lies my glove!”

Fulk only replied by a scornful laugh, and, addressing the Prince, said, “May I pray of your Grace not to be over-severe with my young malapert relation.”

“You do not know all, my lord,” said Arthur, turning eagerly. “Lord de Clarenham has deceived you, and led you to imagine that my uncle wished ill to me, and wanted to gain my lands; whereas it is he himself who wants to have me in his hands to bend me to his will. It is he who has placed traitors in Château Norbelle to slay my uncle; they have already wounded him almost to death, and they have sent for Sir Oliver de Clisson, the butcher. Gaston will hold out as long as he can, but if you will not send succours, my lord, he will—will be slain; and kind Gaston too;” and Arthur, unable to control himself any longer, covered his face with his hands and gave way to a silent suppressed agony of sobs and tears.

“Cheer thee, my boy,” said the Prince kindly; “we will see to thine uncle.” Then, looking at his

nobles, he continued, "Since there does in truth appear to be a knight and castle in jeopardy, one of you had, perhaps, better go with a small band and clear up this mystery. If it be as the boy saith, Lynwood hath had foul wrong."

"I care not if I be the one to go, my lord," said Chandos; "my men are ever kept in readiness, and a night's gallop will do the lazy knaves all the good in the world."

Arthur, brushing off the tears, of which he was much ashamed, looked at the old knight in transport.

"Thanks, Chandos," said the Prince; "I would commit the matter to none so willingly as to you."

"My lord," said Arthur, "would you but grant me one boon—to go with Sir John to Château Norbelle?"

Arthur's eagerness extorted a consent, and he rode off amid Sir John Chandos' troop, boldly enough at first, but by and by so sleepily, that, as night advanced, Sir John ordered him to be placed in front of a trooper. It was broad day when he was awakened by a halt, and the first thing he heard was, "There is St. George's pennon still safe!"

He sat upright, gazed eagerly forwards, and beheld a tall dark tower rising by the bank of a stream at some distance. "Château Norbelle?" he asked.

"Oh, ho, my little page," said Chandos. "Ay, Château Norbelle it is—and we are in time it seems! Now—close in—lances in rest—bows bent. Forward banner!"

The whole squadron rode down the slope of the hill,

and up the ascent on which the castle stood. Loud cries and shrieks from within began to strike their ears—the clash of arms—all the tumult of attack and defence raging fearfully high and wild.

“Ho, ho, friend Oliver!—we have you in a trap!” said old Chandos in high glee; as he drew up close without the walls. “Neville, guard the gates!”

He signed to about half his band to remain without, and cut off the retreat of the enemy. Arthur, unnoticed and forgotten, rode alongside of Sir John Chandos as he crossed the drawbridge. The castle gate was open, and showed a wild, confused mass of struggling men and flashing arms. It was the last, most furious onset, when Clisson, enraged by the long resistance of so weak a garrison, was concentrating his strength in one effort.

In rushed Chandos, shouting his war-cry! In dashed his stout warriors, and loud and fierce pealed forth “St. George! St. George!” drowning the now feebler note of “Montjoie, St. Denis!” and fearful were the shrieks of horror and of pain that rose mingled with it. Hemmed in, attacked in front and rear, their retreat cut off, the French looked in vain for escape; some went down beneath the tremendous charge of the English, some cried for mercy, and surrendered as prisoners. Oliver de Clisson himself, seeing that all was lost, swinging round his head his heavy battle-axe, opened for himself a way, and, with a few followers, broke through the men whom Chandos had left outside, and, cutting down a groom who was holding it, captured one of his led horses, on which he



rode off at his leisure, confident in his own gigantic strength.

Arthur stood and looked round, hesitating whether to ask for his uncle ; but, perceiving the spiral stairs, quickly ascended. Far and far up he wound, till he came to a low-browed arch ; he paused, and saw a large vaulted room, through the loophole window of which shone a yellow stream of golden sunshine. There was a low bed in one corner, and on it lay a motionless form. On tiptoe, and with a throbbing heart, the boy approached ; he saw the face—it was ghastly pale. He stood transfixed—could it be ?—yes, it must still be, his own Uncle Eustace !

CHAPTER XV

IT was still very early, and the narrow line of sky seen from the turret window was gilded by the bright pale-green light of morning when Sir Eustace awoke. All around was perfectly still, and he could have believed himself waking merely from a dream of tumult and disturbance, but for his feelings of pain and weakness. At some little distance lay, on a softly dressed sheepskin, the oriental figure of the Jewish mediciner, and, at the foot of his own bed, the unexpected form of little Arthur reclined, half sitting, half lying, with his head resting on his crossed arms, and his long curls floating over them. All was a riddle

to his misty remembrance, clouded by weakness; and, in vague uncertain recollections and conjectures, the time rolled away, till the sounds of awakening and calls of the warders within the castle betokened that it was occupied by no small number of persons. Still Arthur slept on, and Eustace abstained from the slightest movement that could disturb him, till a step stole quietly to the door, and Gaston's head was seen cautiously and anxiously looking in. Eustace, raising his hand, beckoned him, and made a sign of silence.

"How is it with you, Sir Eustace? It must needs be better. I see a light in your eye once more."

"I am another man since yesterday, Gaston; but be careful—see there."

"Little fear of breaking such sleep as that," said Gaston. "'Tis a noble-hearted little fellow, and if matters go better with us henceforth, it will be his work."

"What is become of Clisson?"

"He was riding off headlong when Master Henry Neville last beheld him, gaining thereby a sound rating from old Chandos."

"Sir John Chandos here?"

"Even so. All thanks to that brave young damoiseau who—"

Here Gaston's ardour had the effect of awakening the doctor, who immediately began to grumble at his patient's admitting visitors without permission. By the time he had examined Eustace's wounds and pronounced him to be progressing favourably, the whole castle was up and awake, and Arthur, against his will, was sent down to attend on Sir John Chandos

at breakfast, when scarce satisfied that his uncle could speak to him.

In process of time he came up to announce a visit from Chandos himself, and close on his steps followed the stalwart old warrior. Pausing at the door, he looked around him, struck with the aspect of the dungeon-like apartment, still more rugged in the morning light than in the evening gloom—the bare rough walls, an arrow sticking between the stones immediately above the knight's head, the want of furniture, the knight's own mantle and that of Gaston both called into requisition to protect him from the damp, chill night air, their bright hues and rich embroidery contrasting with the squalid appearance of all around, as, indeed, did the noble though pale features of the wounded man himself, and the graceful attire and shining hair of the fair young boy who stood over him. But Sir John beheld all with no dissatisfaction.

“Well, my brave young sir,” said he, advancing, “how is it with you this morning? You look cheerily; I trust we shall soon have you on horseback again.”

“Thanks to the blessed Saints and to you, Sir John,” replied Eustace. “I fear you fared ill last night for,”—and he looked round with a smile—“you see, I occupy the state bedchamber.”

“The better, Sir Eustace,” said Chandos. “It does my heart good to see such a chamber as this.”

“Has the Prince commanded an inquiry into my conduct?” exclaimed Eustace. “It is what I have ever most warmly desired.”

“ Yes, and know you whom you have to thank ? ” said Sir John. “ That youngster who stands at your feet—’twas he that, with little Prince Edward, burst into the council, and let not another word be said till he had told your need, given Fulk Clarenham the lie direct, and challenged him to prove his words. The confession of yonder mutinous traitors will clear you from all that your accusers have said, by proving their villainy and baseness ! ”

“ How ? Sanchez and his fellows ? Have they surrendered ? ”

“ Yes ; they told a marvellous tale—that Clarenham had placed them here to deliver you up to the enemy, whom they were to admit by a secret passage—and that they would have done it long since, save that you and your squire not only discovered the passage, but showed such vigilance, and so frustrated all their plans.”

“ Ye,” replied Eustace. “ The recognition of Le Borgne Basque in the seneschal set us on our guard.”

“ And now,” said Chandos, “ I must be on my way back. But what is to be done with the boy ? ”

“ Oh, I remain here,” cried Arthur eagerly. “ The Prince consented. Oh, I pray of you to let me stay here.”

“ In this dismal old castle, Arthur ? ” said Eustace ; “ apart from all your playmates ? It will not be like home, remember ; for scarce ever will you be able to go beyond the walls—and with me lying here, and Gas^ton always occupied, you will find it weary work.”

“ Not with you, Uncle Eustace ! I shall sit by

you, and tend you, and read to you. It is so long since I have been with you! Oh, send me not away. I care for no playmate—for nothing in the wide world, as for you!”

“Well, let him e’en stay,” said Sir John.

The two knights had next to arrange some matters respecting the garrison, Sir John leaving a sufficient number of men to secure the castle in case of a second attack.

The old commander took his leave, with many kind wishes for Sir Eustace’s speedy recovery, and promises that he should ere long hear from Bordeaux. In ten minutes more Arthur, standing at the window, announced that the troop was riding off, with Clisson’s pennon borne among them in triumph, and Sanchez and his accomplices, with their hands tied, and their feet fastened together beneath the bodies of their horses.

CHAPTER XVI

FOUR or five weeks had passed away since Sir John Chandos had quitted the Château Norbelle.

The knight had nearly recovered his full strength, but still wore his broken arm in a scarf, when, one evening, as he was sitting on the battlements, delighting the ears of Arthur and of Gaston with an interminable romance of chivalry, three or four horsemen,

bearing the colours and badges of the Black Prince, were descried riding towards the castle. Knight, squire, and page instantly descended to the courtyard, which, in short space, was entered by the messengers, the principal of whom, an elderly man-at-arms, respectfully saluted the knight, and delivered to him a parchment scroll, tied with silk of scarlet and blue, supporting the heavy seal of the Prince of Wales and Duke of Aquitaine, and addressed to the hands of the honourable Knight Banneret Sir Eustace Lynwood, castellane of the Château Norbelle. This document bore the signature of Edward himself, and contained his mandate to Eustace to come immediately to his court at Bordeaux, leaving the command of the Château Norbelle to the bearer.

The next morning Eustace, with Gaston, Arthur, and Ingram, all full of expectation, and delighted at the change from the gloomy, solitary old castle, were all posting on their way back to Bordeaux, and about ten in the morning of the following day rode into the town.

There was evidently some grand spectacle at hand, for they found warders placed, to keep back the dense throng of people.

“Ha,” cried Gaston, “what means this? Is there a tilt towards?”

“Can it be a challenge on the part of Fulk?” said Eustace. “Yet that can hardly be. And see, there is no barrier in the midst, only a huge block. What can be intended?”

“Come with me, Arthur, since I must present

myself," said Eustace, dismounting, as one of the Prince's squires held his horse.

"Who is yonder dark-browed dwarfish knight at the Prince's right hand?" cried Arthur.

Eustace could scarcely believe his eyes as he looked where the boy pointed.

The royal party were now seated in full array on their raised platform; the Prince upon his chair of state, and at his side sat his wife. The two boys, Prince Edward and his cousin, Henry of Lancaster, were stationed as pages on each side of the Princess, but as their playfellow, Arthur, advanced with his uncle, they both sprang down the steps of the gallery to meet him, and each took a hand. Edward, however, first bethinking himself of the respect, which, prince as he was, he owed to a belted knight, made his reverence to Sir Eustace, who, at a sign from the Prince of Wales, mounted the steps and bent his knee to the ground before him.

"Nay, Sir Eustace," said the Prince, bending forward, "it is rather I who should kneel to you for pardon. I have used you ill, Eustace, and, I fear me, transgressed the pledge which I gave to your brother on the plain of Navaretta."

"Oh, say not so, my gracious liege," said Eustace; "it was but that your noble ear was deceived by the slanders of my foes!"

"True, Sir Eustace—yet, once, Edward of England would not have heard a slanderous tale against one of his well-proved knights without sifting it well. But I am not as once I was—sickness hath unnerved

me. And now, Sir Eustace, that I am about to repair my injustice towards you, let me feel, as a man whose account for this world must ere long be closed, that I have your forgiveness."

The Prince took the hand of the young knight, who struggled hard with his emotion. "And here is another friend," he added—"a firmer friend, though foe, than you have found some others."

"Well met, my chivalrous godson," said the Constable du Guesclin, holding out his hand.

"I marvel——" Eustace hardly found words, between wonder and condolence.

"What means all this preparation?" asked Arthur—"these lists! Oh, surely, there is not to be a tourney, which I have longed to see!"

"No," said Edward, "that cannot be, my mother says, while my father is still so weakly and ill. But there are the trumpets; you will soon see what will befall."

And, with a loud blast of trumpets, the gorgeously arrayed heralds rode into the court, followed by a guard of halberdiers, in the midst of whom rode a knight in bright armour, his visor closed, but his shield and crest marking the Baron of Clarenham.

When the trumpets had ceased, and the procession reached the centre of the lists, they halted, and drew up in order—the principal herald, Aquitaine, immediately in front of the Prince. After another short, clear trumpet-blast, Aquitaine unrolled a parchment, and, in a loud voice, proclaimed the confession of Fulk, Baron of Clarenham, of his unknighly conduct in attempting to betray the person of the good

knight, Eustace Lynwood, Knight Banneret, with that of his esquire, Gaston d'Aubricour, and of certain other trusty and well-beloved subjects of his liege lord, King Edward of England, together with the fortalice, called Château Norbelle, into the hands of the enemy—having for that purpose tampered with and seduced Thibault Sanchez, senechal of the castle, Tristan de la Flèche, and certain others, who, having confessed their crime, have received their deserts, by being hung on a gallows, he himself being degraded from the honours and privileges of knighthood, of which he had proved himself unworthy—and his lands forfeited to the King, to be disposed of at his pleasure.

Clarenham was then compelled to dismount from his horse, and to place, first one foot, and then the other, upon the block, where a broad, red-faced cook, raising his cleaver, cut off the golden spurs. Sir John Chandos, as Constable of Aquitaine, then came forward, and, taking the shield from the arm of Clarenham, gave it, reversed, into the hands of one of the heralds, who carried it away. The belt, another token of knighthood, was next unbuckled, and Chandos, taking the sword, broke it in three pieces across his knee, saying, "Lie there, dishonoured steel!" and throwing it down by the spurs. Lastly, the helmet was removed, and thrown to the ground, leaving visible the dark countenance, where the paleness of shame and the flush of rage alternated.

"And now, away with the traitor, away with the recreant knight!" cried in a loud voice Sir John Chandos, while the shout was taken up by a deaf-

ening multitude of voices—in the midst of which the degraded knight made his way to the gate, and, as he passed out, a redoubled storm of shouts and yells arose from without.

“Where is Agnes?” said Arthur.

“In the convent of the Benedictine nuns,” said Edward. “But in your ear, Arthur, what say you to our plan that she shall be heiress of her brother’s lands, on condition of her wedding—guess whom?”

“Not mine uncle! Oh, Lord Edward, is it really so? How rejoiced old Ralph would be!”

The unhappy Fulk, in leaving the court, entered upon a scene where danger, as well as disgrace, was to be apprehended. The rabble of the town all joined in one cry of—“Away with the recreant Englishman! down with him!—down with him!” Every hand was armed with a stone, and brief would have been Fulk’s space for repentance, had not the cry in its savage tones struck upon the ear of Eustace as he stood in the lists, receiving the congratulations of Sir John Chandos and of other knights.

“They will murder him,” exclaimed Eustace; and breaking from his new friends, he made his way to the gate, and hurried into the town, just as Fulk had fallen to the ground, struck by a heavy stone hurled by the hand of no other than John Ingram. He rushed forward amid the hail of stones, and, as he lifted Clarenham’s head, called out, “How is this! Brave men of Bordeaux, would you become murderers! Is this like honourable men, to triumph over the fallen!”

They held back in amazement for a second; then,

as Eustace knelt by him and tried to recall his consciousness, murmurs arose, "Why interferes he with our affairs? He is English. Away, Master Knight, be not so busy about the traitor, if you would not partake his fate."

Eustace looked up as the stones were uplifted, and more than one Free Companion had drawn his sword.



"Hold!" he exclaimed, in a clear, full-toned voice. "Hold! I am Eustace Lynwood, the castellan of Château Norbelle!"

There was an instant silence. Every one pressed forward to see him, whose recent adventures had made him an object of much interest and curiosity. Whispers passed of "Noble knight! If he revenge not himself, what right have we?"

By this time Eustace, having observed Ingram among the crowd, summoned him to his side, and at the same time courteously craving the aid of one of the bystanders, succeeded in conveying Clarenham to the door of a monastery chapel, the porch of which opened upon the street.

“Holy fathers,” said Eustace, “I crave the protection of the Church for an unhappy, and, I trust, a penitent man, praying you will tend him well to the aid and relief alike of body and soul, until you hear from me again.”

With these words he quitted the chapel before his late enemy had sufficiently recovered his faculties to recognise his preserver.

Leonard Ashton had, it appeared, saved himself by making full confession, and had been sent home, in deep disgrace, though spared public dishonour.

It was some few days after these events that the presence of the Lady Agnes de Clarenham was requested in the parlour of her nunnery by a person who, as the portress informed her, was the bearer of a message from the Princess of Wales. She descended accordingly, but her surprise was great on beholding the young knight with whom she had last parted at the hostelry.

She started, and would have retreated, but that he prevented, by saying, “Lady Agnes, I pray you to hear me—for you have much to forgive.”

“Forgive? Nay, Sir Eustace, it is you who have so much to forgive my unhappy house! But tell me, Sir Eustace—for vague rumours only reach us in this lonely cell—was it true that the populace pursued

my fallen brother with clamours, and might even have slain him, but for his rescue by a gallant knight, who braved their utmost fury ? ”

“ It was even so, lady,” said Eustace, with some embarrassment.

“ Oh, who was that noblest of knights who has that strongest claim on the gratitude of the broken-hearted sister ? ”

“ Nay, lady, it was but the common duty, the mere mercy of a Christian man, who could not see a fellow-creature die such a death, without attempting to save him.”

“ Oh, Sir Eustace, it is not like your former self to deny the greatness of a noble deed ! Tell me the name of that most noble of men ! ”

He half smiled, then looking down, and colouring deeply, “ Do you remember, Lady Agnes, the knight whom you bound by a promise, that in case of the triumph of his cause——”

“ Eustace, Eustace ! Oh, I should have known that nothing was too great and high for you. Oh, how shall I ever render you my thanks ! After such cruel treachery as that from which you have, and, I fear me, are still suffering ! Alas, alas, that I should be forced to use such harsh words of my own brother ! ”

“ I trust you may still be comforted, lady,” said Eustace. “ From what the good fathers tell me, there is hope that Fulk may yet be an altered man ; and when the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which he has vowed, is concluded, may return in a wholly different temper.”

“ Return ; but whither should he return ? ” said

Agnes, in a broken, despondent tone; "landless, homeless, desolate, outcast—what shelter is open to him? For if the portress's tale spoke truth, his lands and manors are forfeited to the King."

"They are so, in truth; but there is one way, Agnes, in which they may still be restored to their true owner."

"How so? What mean you, Sir Eustace?"

"Agnes, I would not have broken upon your sorrow by speaking thus abruptly, but that the King's desire was urgent. To you, in all justice, does he will that the castles and manors of Clarenham should descend, but on one condition."

Agnes raised her eyes, and looked anxiously at him as he paused in considerable embarrassment.

"On condition that you, Lady Agnes, should permit the King to dispose of your fair hand in marriage."

Agnes gave a slight cry. "Oh, that may never be, and—but how advantageth that poor Fulk?"

"Because, Lady Agnes—because it is to me that they would grant that hand which I have so long loved passionately and hopelessly. Agnes, it was not willingly, but at the command of the Prince that I came hither with a suit which must seem to you most strangely timed; but see you not, that jointly we can do what we never could do separately, we could kneel before King Edward, and entreat for the pardon and restoration of Fulk, which, to such prayers, he would surely grant?"

Agnes spoke in a broken voice, as she said, "Eustace, you are the most generous of knights." Eustace stood, watching her; but before either had summoned

courage to break the silence, the portress came hurrying in, "Good lack! good lack!—here is the Princess of Wales herself at the gate, and all her train. Where is the mother abbess?" While the good woman was bustling on in her career, Eustace had time to say, "Yea, Agnes, the Princess is come, in case you hear my suit favourably, to conduct you back to Bordeaux. Think of a true and devoted heart—think of Fulk ere you decide!"

Agnes quickly gained her cell, and sank down on her bed to make the most of the minutes that might be her own.

"Well, my gentle Agnes," said the Princess, upon her return, "what say you? Come you back to the court?"

Agnes offered no opposition, but allowed her dress to be arranged, took leave of the abbess and her nuns, and shortly found herself mounted on her palfrey in the Princess's train, with Sir Eustace Lynwood at her side.

For the next seven years the Clarenham vassals rejoiced in the gentle, noble, and firm rule of their new lord and lady. The castle was placed under the charge of Gaston d'Aubricour, beneath whose care the fortifications assumed a more modern character, and the garrison learnt the newest fashions of handling their weapons.

At the end of that time Sir Eustace and his lady travelled to the court, where, alas, of all the royal party who had rejoiced at their marriage, they found only the young King Richard II. and his mother, the Princess Joan, now sadly aged by time and sorrow.

No one at the council could refuse when it was made known that King Richard would be pleased to reinstate in his titles, lands, and manors, Fulk, late Baron of Clarenham, in consideration of his good services to Christendom, rendered on the coast of Africa under the banner of the Knights of St. John, whose Grand Master attested his courage and faithfulness.

Soon Clarenham Castle opened its gates to receive its humbled, repentant, and much-changed lord, who was welcomed by all the gentle blood in the county—at the head of whom rode Sir Eustace with his squire, and his nephew Arthur, now a gallant young man, only waiting the summons, promised him by the Princess, to receive knighthood at the same time as his royal master, Richard II.

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