

Illustrated by The Kinneys

CHAPTER XX—Continued.

With tender hands the Squire lowered his comrades' heads, but even as he did so there came a choking rush of blood, and the soul had passed. So died a gallant cavalier of France, and Nigel as he knelt in the ditch beside him prayed that his own end might be as noble and as debonaire.

How the Second Messenger Went to Confess.

Under cover of night the wounded men were lifted from the ditch and carried back, whilst pickets of archers were advanced to the very gate so that none should rebuild it. Nigel, sick at heart over his own failure, the death of his prisoner and his fears for Ayward, crept back into the camp, but his cup was not yet full, for Knolles was waiting for him with a tongue which cut like a whip-lash. "Who was he, a raw squire, that he should lead an attack without orders? See what his chivalry has brought about. Twenty men have been destroyed by it and nothing gained. Their blood was on his head. Chandoes should hear of his conduct. He should be sent back to England when the castle had fallen."

Such were the bitter words of Knolles, the more bitter because Nigel felt in his heart that he had indeed done wrong, and that Chandoes would have said the same thing, perchance in kinder words. He listened in silent respect, as his duty was, and then having saluted his leader he withdrew apart, threw himself down among the bushes, and wept the hottest tears of his life, sobbing bitterly with his face between his hands, and striving as hard, and yet everything had gone wrong with him. He was bruised, burned and aching from head to foot. Yet so high is the spirit above the body that all was nothing compared to the sorrow and shame which racked his soul.

But a little thing changed the current of his thoughts and brought some peace to his mind. He had slipped off his mail gauntlets, and as he did so his fingers lighted upon the holy badge, which Mary had fastened there when they stood together upon St. Catherine's Hill. He remembered the motto curiously written in filigree of gold. It ran: "Fais ce que dois, quitte ton pourrai, c'est commande au chevalier."

The words rang in his weary brain. He had done what seemed right, come what might. It had gone awry, it is true; but all things human must fail. If he had carried the castle, he felt that Knolles would have forgiven and forgotten all else. If he had not carried it, it was no fault of his. No man could have done more. If Mary could see how would she have approved. Dropping into sleep, he saw her dark face, shining with pride and with pity, stooping over him as he lay. She stretched out her hand in his dream and touched him on the shoulder. He sprang up and rubbed his eyes, for fact had woven itself into dream in the strange way that it does, and some one was indeed leaning over him in the gloom and shaking him from his slumbers. But the gentle voice and soft touch of the Lady Mary had changed suddenly to the harsh accents and rough grip of Black Simon, the fierce Norfolk man-at-arms.

"Surely you are the Squire Loring," he said, peering close to his face in the darkness.

"I am he. What then?"

"I have searched through the camp for you, but when I saw the great horse tethered near these bushes, I thought you would be found here. I would have a word with you."

"Speak on."

"This man Ayward the bowman was my friend, and it is the nature of God that He has given me to love my friends even as I hate my foes. He is also thy servant, and it has seemed to me that you love him also."

"I have good cause so to do."

"Then you and I, Squire Loring, have more reason to strive on his behalf than any of these others, who think more of taking the castle than of saving those who are captive within. Do you not see that such a man as this robber lord would, when all else had failed, turn most surely on the throats of his prisoners at the last instant before the castle fell, knowing well that come what might he would have short shrift himself? Is that not certain?"

"By Saint Paul! I had not thought of it."

"It was with you, hammering at the inner gate," said Simon, "and yet when I thought that it was giving way I said in my heart: 'Good-by, Squire! I shall never see you again.' This Baron has gall in his soul, even as I have myself, and do you think that I would give my prisoners alive, if I were constrained so to do? No, no; had we won our way this day it would have been the death-stroke for them all."

"It may be that you are right, Simon," said Nigel, "but I thought of it. He should assuage our grief. But we cannot save them by taking the castle, then surely they are lost indeed."

"It may be so, or it may not," Simon answered slowly. "It is in my mind that if the castle were taken very suddenly and in such a fashion that they could not foresee it, then perchance we might get the prisoners before they could do them scathe."

Nigel bent forward eagerly, his hand on the soldier's arm.

"You have some plan in your mind, Simon. Tell me what it is."

"I had wished to tell Sir Robert, but he is preparing the assault for tomorrow and will not be turned from his purpose. I have indeed a plan, but whether it be good or not I cannot say until I have tried it. But first I will tell you what put it into my thoughts."

Know then that this morning when I was in yonder ditch I marked one of their men upon the wall. He was a big man with white face, red hair and a touch of Saint Anthony's fire upon the cheek."

"But what has this to do with Ayward?"

"I will show you. This evening after some of my fellows round yonder small fort upon the knoll to see if we could spy a weak spot in it. Some of them came to the wall to curse us, and among them whom should I see but a big man with a white face and a touch of Saint Anthony's fire upon the cheek? What make you of that, Squire Nigel?"

"That this man has crossed from the castle to the fort."

"In good sooth, it must indeed be so. There are not two such speckled men in the world. But if he

crossed from the castle to the fort, it was not above the ground, for our own people were between."

"By Saint Paul! I see your meaning," cried Nigel. "It is in your mind that there is a passage under the earth from one to the other."

"I am well sure of it."

"Then if we should take the small fort we may pass down this tunnel, and so carry the great castle also."

"Such a thing might happen," said Simon, "and yet it is dangerous also, for surely those in the castle would hear our assault upon the fort and so be warned to bar the passage against us, and to slay the prisoners before we could come."

"What then is your rede?"

"Could we find where the tunnel lay, Squire Nigel, I know not what is to prevent us from digging down upon it for Ayward, crept back into the camp, but his cup was not yet full, for Knolles was waiting for him with a tongue which cut like a whip-lash."

"Who was he, a raw squire, that he should lead an attack without orders? See what his chivalry has brought about. Twenty men have been destroyed by it and nothing gained. Their blood was on his head. Chandoes should hear of his conduct. He should be sent back to England when the castle had fallen."

Such were the bitter words of Knolles, the more bitter because Nigel felt in his heart that he had indeed done wrong, and that Chandoes would have said the same thing, perchance in kinder words. He listened in silent respect, as his duty was, and then having saluted his leader he withdrew apart, threw himself down among the bushes, and wept the hottest tears of his life, sobbing bitterly with his face between his hands, and striving as hard, and yet everything had gone wrong with him. He was bruised, burned and aching from head to foot. Yet so high is the spirit above the body that all was nothing compared to the sorrow and shame which racked his soul.

But a little thing changed the current of his thoughts and brought some peace to his mind. He had slipped off his mail gauntlets, and as he did so his fingers lighted upon the holy badge, which Mary had fastened there when they stood together upon St. Catherine's Hill. He remembered the motto curiously written in filigree of gold. It ran: "Fais ce que dois, quitte ton pourrai, c'est commande au chevalier."

The words rang in his weary brain. He had done what seemed right, come what might. It had gone awry, it is true; but all things human must fail. If he had carried the castle, he felt that Knolles would have forgiven and forgotten all else. If he had not carried it, it was no fault of his. No man could have done more. If Mary could see how would she have approved. Dropping into sleep, he saw her dark face, shining with pride and with pity, stooping over him as he lay. She stretched out her hand in his dream and touched him on the shoulder. He sprang up and rubbed his eyes, for fact had woven itself into dream in the strange way that it does, and some one was indeed leaning over him in the gloom and shaking him from his slumbers. But the gentle voice and soft touch of the Lady Mary had changed suddenly to the harsh accents and rough grip of Black Simon, the fierce Norfolk man-at-arms.

"Surely you are the Squire Loring," he said, peering close to his face in the darkness.

"I am he. What then?"

"I have searched through the camp for you, but when I saw the great horse tethered near these bushes, I thought you would be found here. I would have a word with you."

"Speak on."

"This man Ayward the bowman was my friend, and it is the nature of God that He has given me to love my friends even as I hate my foes. He is also thy servant, and it has seemed to me that you love him also."

"I have good cause so to do."

"Then you and I, Squire Loring, have more reason to strive on his behalf than any of these others, who think more of taking the castle than of saving those who are captive within. Do you not see that such a man as this robber lord would, when all else had failed, turn most surely on the throats of his prisoners at the last instant before the castle fell, knowing well that come what might he would have short shrift himself? Is that not certain?"

"By Saint Paul! I had not thought of it."

"It was with you, hammering at the inner gate," said Simon, "and yet when I thought that it was giving way I said in my heart: 'Good-by, Squire! I shall never see you again.' This Baron has gall in his soul, even as I have myself, and do you think that I would give my prisoners alive, if I were constrained so to do? No, no; had we won our way this day it would have been the death-stroke for them all."

"It may be that you are right, Simon," said Nigel, "but I thought of it. He should assuage our grief. But we cannot save them by taking the castle, then surely they are lost indeed."

"It may be so, or it may not," Simon answered slowly. "It is in my mind that if the castle were taken very suddenly and in such a fashion that they could not foresee it, then perchance we might get the prisoners before they could do them scathe."

Nigel bent forward eagerly, his hand on the soldier's arm.

"You have some plan in your mind, Simon. Tell me what it is."

"I had wished to tell Sir Robert, but he is preparing the assault for tomorrow and will not be turned from his purpose. I have indeed a plan, but whether it be good or not I cannot say until I have tried it. But first I will tell you what put it into my thoughts."

Know then that this morning when I was in yonder ditch I marked one of their men upon the wall. He was a big man with white face, red hair and a touch of Saint Anthony's fire upon the cheek."

"But what has this to do with Ayward?"

"I will show you. This evening after some of my fellows round yonder small fort upon the knoll to see if we could spy a weak spot in it. Some of them came to the wall to curse us, and among them whom should I see but a big man with a white face and a touch of Saint Anthony's fire upon the cheek? What make you of that, Squire Nigel?"

"That this man has crossed from the castle to the fort."

"In good sooth, it must indeed be so. There are not two such speckled men in the world. But if he

crossed from the castle to the fort, it was not above the ground, for our own people were between."

"By Saint Paul! I see your meaning," cried Nigel. "It is in your mind that there is a passage under the earth from one to the other."

"I am well sure of it."

"Then if we should take the small fort we may pass down this tunnel, and so carry the great castle also."

"Such a thing might happen," said Simon, "and yet it is dangerous also, for surely those in the castle would hear our assault upon the fort and so be warned to bar the passage against us, and to slay the prisoners before we could come."

"What then is your rede?"

"Could we find where the tunnel lay, Squire Nigel, I know not what is to prevent us from digging down upon it for Ayward, crept back into the camp, but his cup was not yet full, for Knolles was waiting for him with a tongue which cut like a whip-lash."

"Who was he, a raw squire, that he should lead an attack without orders? See what his chivalry has brought about. Twenty men have been destroyed by it and nothing gained. Their blood was on his head. Chandoes should hear of his conduct. He should be sent back to England when the castle had fallen."

Such were the bitter words of Knolles, the more bitter because Nigel felt in his heart that he had indeed done wrong, and that Chandoes would have said the same thing, perchance in kinder words. He listened in silent respect, as his duty was, and then having saluted his leader he withdrew apart, threw himself down among the bushes, and wept the hottest tears of his life, sobbing bitterly with his face between his hands, and striving as hard, and yet everything had gone wrong with him. He was bruised, burned and aching from head to foot. Yet so high is the spirit above the body that all was nothing compared to the sorrow and shame which racked his soul.

But a little thing changed the current of his thoughts and brought some peace to his mind. He had slipped off his mail gauntlets, and as he did so his fingers lighted upon the holy badge, which Mary had fastened there when they stood together upon St. Catherine's Hill. He remembered the motto curiously written in filigree of gold. It ran: "Fais ce que dois, quitte ton pourrai, c'est commande au chevalier."

The words rang in his weary brain. He had done what seemed right, come what might. It had gone awry, it is true; but all things human must fail. If he had carried the castle, he felt that Knolles would have forgiven and forgotten all else. If he had not carried it, it was no fault of his. No man could have done more. If Mary could see how would she have approved. Dropping into sleep, he saw her dark face, shining with pride and with pity, stooping over him as he lay. She stretched out her hand in his dream and touched him on the shoulder. He sprang up and rubbed his eyes, for fact had woven itself into dream in the strange way that it does, and some one was indeed leaning over him in the gloom and shaking him from his slumbers. But the gentle voice and soft touch of the Lady Mary had changed suddenly to the harsh accents and rough grip of Black Simon, the fierce Norfolk man-at-arms.

"Surely you are the Squire Loring," he said, peering close to his face in the darkness.

"I am he. What then?"

"I have searched through the camp for you, but when I saw the great horse tethered near these bushes, I thought you would be found here. I would have a word with you."

"Speak on."

"This man Ayward the bowman was my friend, and it is the nature of God that He has given me to love my friends even as I hate my foes. He is also thy servant, and it has seemed to me that you love him also."

"I have good cause so to do."

"Then you and I, Squire Loring, have more reason to strive on his behalf than any of these others, who think more of taking the castle than of saving those who are captive within. Do you not see that such a man as this robber lord would, when all else had failed, turn most surely on the throats of his prisoners at the last instant before the castle fell, knowing well that come what might he would have short shrift himself? Is that not certain?"

"By Saint Paul! I had not thought of it."

"It was with you, hammering at the inner gate," said Simon, "and yet when I thought that it was giving way I said in my heart: 'Good-by, Squire! I shall never see you again.' This Baron has gall in his soul, even as I have myself, and do you think that I would give my prisoners alive, if I were constrained so to do? No, no; had we won our way this day it would have been the death-stroke for them all."

"It may be that you are right, Simon," said Nigel, "but I thought of it. He should assuage our grief. But we cannot save them by taking the castle, then surely they are lost indeed."

"It may be so, or it may not," Simon answered slowly. "It is in my mind that if the castle were taken very suddenly and in such a fashion that they could not foresee it, then perchance we might get the prisoners before they could do them scathe."

Nigel bent forward eagerly, his hand on the soldier's arm.

"You have some plan in your mind, Simon. Tell me what it is."

"I had wished to tell Sir Robert, but he is preparing the assault for tomorrow and will not be turned from his purpose. I have indeed a plan, but whether it be good or not I cannot say until I have tried it. But first I will tell you what put it into my thoughts."

Know then that this morning when I was in yonder ditch I marked one of their men upon the wall. He was a big man with white face, red hair and a touch of Saint Anthony's fire upon the cheek."

"But what has this to do with Ayward?"

"I will show you. This evening after some of my fellows round yonder small fort upon the knoll to see if we could spy a weak spot in it. Some of them came to the wall to curse us, and among them whom should I see but a big man with a white face and a touch of Saint Anthony's fire upon the cheek? What make you of that, Squire Nigel?"

"That this man has crossed from the castle to the fort."

"In good sooth, it must indeed be so. There are not two such speckled men in the world. But if he

crossed from the castle to the fort, it was not above the ground, for our own people were between."

"By Saint Paul! I see your meaning," cried Nigel. "It is in your mind that there is a passage under the earth from one to the other."

"I am well sure of it."

"Then if we should take the small fort we may pass down this tunnel, and so carry the great castle also."

"Such a thing might happen," said Simon, "and yet it is dangerous also, for surely those in the castle would hear our assault upon the fort and so be warned to bar the passage against us, and to slay the prisoners before we could come."

"What then is your rede?"

"Could we find where the tunnel lay, Squire Nigel, I know not what is to prevent us from digging down upon it for Ayward, crept back into the camp, but his cup was not yet full, for Knolles was waiting for him with a tongue which cut like a whip-lash."

"Who was he, a raw squire, that he should lead an attack without orders? See what his chivalry has brought about. Twenty men have been destroyed by it and nothing gained. Their blood was on his head. Chandoes should hear of his conduct. He should be sent back to England when the castle had fallen."

Such were the bitter words of Knolles, the more bitter because Nigel felt in his heart that he had indeed done wrong, and that Chandoes would have said the same thing, perchance in kinder words. He listened in silent respect, as his duty was, and then having saluted his leader he withdrew apart, threw himself down among the bushes, and wept the hottest tears of his life, sobbing bitterly with his face between his hands, and striving as hard, and yet everything had gone wrong with him. He was bruised, burned and aching from head to foot. Yet so high is the spirit above the body that all was nothing compared to the sorrow and shame which racked his soul.

But a little thing changed the current of his thoughts and brought some peace to his mind. He had slipped off his mail gauntlets, and as he did so his fingers lighted upon the holy badge, which Mary had fastened there when they stood together upon St. Catherine's Hill. He remembered the motto curiously written in filigree of gold. It ran: "Fais ce que dois, quitte ton pourrai, c'est commande au chevalier."

The words rang in his weary brain. He had done what seemed right, come what might. It had gone awry, it is true; but all things human must fail. If he had carried the castle, he felt that Knolles would have forgiven and forgotten all else. If he had not carried it, it was no fault of his. No man could have done more. If Mary could see how would she have approved. Dropping into sleep, he saw her dark face, shining with pride and with pity, stooping over him as he lay. She stretched out her hand in his dream and touched him on the shoulder. He sprang up and rubbed his eyes, for fact had woven itself into dream in the strange way that it does, and some one was indeed leaning over him in the gloom and shaking him from his slumbers. But the gentle voice and soft touch of the Lady Mary had changed suddenly to the harsh accents and rough grip of Black Simon, the fierce Norfolk man-at-arms.

"Surely you are the Squire Loring," he said, peering close to his face in the darkness.

"I am he. What then?"

"I have searched through the camp for you, but when I saw the great horse tethered near these bushes, I thought you would be found here. I would have a word with you."

"Speak on."

"This man Ayward the bowman was my friend, and it is the nature of God that He has given me to love my friends even as I hate my foes. He is also thy servant, and it has seemed to me that you love him also."

"I have good cause so to do."

"Then you and I, Squire Loring, have more reason to strive on his behalf than any of these others, who think more of taking the castle than of saving those who are captive within. Do you not see that such a man as this robber lord would, when all else had failed, turn most surely on the throats of his prisoners at the last instant before the castle fell, knowing well that come what might he would have short shrift himself? Is that not certain?"

"By Saint Paul! I had not thought of it."

"It was with you, hammering at the inner gate," said Simon, "and yet when I thought that it was giving way I said in my heart: 'Good-by, Squire! I shall never see you again.' This Baron has gall in his soul, even as I have myself, and do you think that I would give my prisoners alive, if I were constrained so to do? No, no; had we won our way this day it would have been the death-stroke for them all."

"It may be that you are right, Simon," said Nigel, "but I thought of it. He should assuage our grief. But we cannot save them by taking the castle, then surely they are lost indeed."

"It may be so, or it may not," Simon answered slowly. "It is in my mind that if the castle were taken very suddenly and in such a fashion that they could not foresee it, then perchance we might get the prisoners before they could do them scathe."

Nigel bent forward eagerly, his hand on the soldier's arm.

"You have some plan in your mind, Simon. Tell me what it is."

"I had wished to tell Sir Robert, but he is preparing the assault for tomorrow and will not be turned from his purpose. I have indeed a plan, but whether it be good or not I cannot say until I have tried it. But first I will tell you what put it into my thoughts."

Know then that this morning when I was in yonder ditch I marked one of their men upon the wall. He was a big man with white face, red hair and a touch of Saint Anthony's fire upon the cheek."

"But what has this to do with Ayward?"

"I will show you. This evening after some of my fellows round yonder small fort upon the knoll to see if we could spy a weak spot in it. Some of them came to the wall to curse us, and among them whom should I see but a big man with a white face and a touch of Saint Anthony's fire upon the cheek? What make you of that, Squire Nigel?"

"That this man has crossed from the castle to the fort."

"In good sooth, it must indeed be so. There are not two such speckled men in the world. But if he

crossed from the castle to the fort, it was not above the ground, for our own people were between."

"By Saint Paul! I see your meaning," cried Nigel. "It is in your mind that there is a passage under the earth from one to the other."

"I am well sure of it."

"Then if we should take the small fort we may pass down this tunnel, and so carry the great castle also."

"Such a thing might happen," said Simon, "and yet it is dangerous also, for surely those in the castle would hear our assault upon the fort and so be warned to bar the passage against us, and to slay the prisoners before we could come."

"What then is your rede?"

"Could we find where the tunnel lay, Squire Nigel, I know not what is to prevent us from digging down upon it for Ayward, crept back into the camp, but his cup was not yet full, for Knolles was waiting for him with a tongue which cut like a whip-lash."

"Who was he, a raw squire, that he should lead an attack without orders? See what his chivalry has brought about. Twenty men have been destroyed by it and nothing gained. Their blood was on his head. Chandoes should hear of his conduct. He should be sent back to England when the castle had fallen."

Such were the bitter words of Knolles, the more bitter because Nigel felt in his heart that he had indeed done wrong, and that Chandoes would have said the same thing, perchance in kinder words. He listened in silent respect, as his duty was, and then having saluted his leader he withdrew apart, threw himself down among the bushes, and wept the hottest tears of his life, sobbing bitterly with his face between his hands, and striving as hard, and yet everything had gone wrong with him. He was bruised, burned and aching from head to foot. Yet so high is the spirit above the body that all was nothing compared to the sorrow and shame which racked his soul.

But a little thing changed the current of his thoughts and brought some peace to his mind. He had slipped off his mail gauntlets, and as he did so his fingers lighted upon the holy badge, which Mary had fastened there when they stood together upon St. Catherine's Hill. He remembered the motto curiously written in filigree of gold. It ran: "Fais ce que dois, quitte ton pourrai, c'est commande au chevalier."

The words rang in his weary brain. He had done what seemed right, come what might. It had gone awry, it is true; but all things human must fail. If he had carried the castle, he felt that Knolles would have forgiven and forgotten all else. If he had not carried it, it was no fault of his. No man could have done more. If Mary could see how would she have approved. Dropping into sleep, he saw her dark face, shining with pride and with pity, stooping over him as he lay. She stretched out her hand in his dream and touched him on the shoulder. He sprang up and rubbed his eyes, for fact had woven itself into dream in the strange way that it does, and some one was indeed leaning over him in the gloom and shaking him from his slumbers. But the gentle voice and soft touch of the Lady Mary had changed suddenly to the harsh accents and rough grip of Black Simon, the fierce Norfolk man-at-arms.

"Surely you are the Squire Loring," he said, peering close to his face in the darkness.

"I am he. What then?"

"I have searched through the camp for you, but when I saw the great horse tethered near these bushes, I thought you would be found here. I would have a word with you."

"Speak on."

"This man Ayward the bowman was my friend, and it is the nature of God that He has given me to love my friends even as I hate my foes. He is also thy servant, and it has seemed to me that you love him also."

"I have good cause so to do."

"Then you and I, Squire Loring, have more reason to strive on his behalf than any of these others, who think more of taking the castle than of saving those who are captive within. Do you not see that such a man as this robber lord would, when all else had failed, turn most surely on the throats of his prisoners at the last instant before the castle fell, knowing well that come what might he would have short shrift himself? Is that not certain?"

"By Saint Paul! I had not thought of it."

"It was with you, hammering at the inner gate," said Simon, "and yet when I thought that it was giving way I said in my heart: 'Good-by, Squire! I shall never see you again.' This Baron has gall in his soul, even as I have myself, and do you think that I would give my prisoners alive, if I were constrained so to do? No, no; had we won our way this day it would have been the death-stroke for them all."

"It may be that you are right, Simon," said Nigel, "but I thought of it. He should assuage our grief. But we cannot save them by taking the castle, then surely they are lost indeed."

"It may be so, or it may not," Simon answered slowly. "It is in my mind that if the castle were taken very suddenly and in such a fashion that they could not foresee it, then perchance we might get the prisoners before they could do them scathe."

Nigel bent forward eagerly, his hand on the soldier's arm.

"You have some plan in your mind, Simon. Tell me what it is."

"I had wished to tell Sir Robert, but he is preparing the assault for tomorrow and will not be turned from his purpose. I have indeed a plan, but whether it be good or not I cannot say until I have tried it. But first I will tell you what put it into my thoughts."

Know then that this morning when I was in yonder ditch I marked one of their men upon the wall. He was a big man with white face, red hair and a touch of Saint Anthony's fire upon the cheek."

"But what has this to do with Ayward?"

"I will show you. This evening after some of my fellows round yonder small fort upon the knoll to see if we could spy a weak spot in it. Some of them came to the wall to curse us, and among them whom should I see but a big man with a