

and snatching the steward's sword from its scabbard advanced to the end of the bridge at the very moment that the first horseman rode up.

"Halt! Who cometh?" cried Arnold in the ancient form.

The captain of the King's guard stared, but made answer, "Charles, by the grace of God of this realm of England King. Who are you, that challenge the King?"

"I am Arnold, Earl of Vane, by the King's gift and my fathers' sword," answered the young man.

The captain glanced at the naked blade, and again took up the old formulas, though in evident surprise. "And where is your fathers' sword?" he demanded.

"At the King's right hand, now and always," answered Arnold, holding the sword by the end of the blade as custom ordained.

The captain hesitated at this unexpected encounter. But Charles, whose coach had halted at the entrance of the bridge, had caught the challenge. He raised his head, and his dark, indolent eyes perceived the naked sword.

"Whom have we here?" he asked, and motioned to the riders about him to move aside. "Let this gentleman approach."

Arnold stepped forward between the opening ranks of soldiers and courtiers, and sinking on one knee, offered the hilt of his sword to the King. "Sire," said he, "I give your Majesty welcome to my castle of Vane, which your Majesty's fathers gave to mine. I am Arnold Firle, my cousin Edmund's heir."

"And where, fair sir, is your traitorous cousin Edmund?" asked the King.

"Sire, he is drowned."

"Why, that is good news," said Charles, coolly, "though it defrauds the headsman. Pray how came your cousin to so convenient an end?"