Illustrated by The Kinneys

SIR NIGEL

By A. CONAN DOYLE

CHAPTER XIX—Continued.

The young Frenchman had risen to his feet. "Do not take my sword," he said. "I am yours, rescue or no rescue. I think now that I could mount my horse, though indeed my head still rings like a cracked bell."

Nigel had lost all traces of his comrades; but he remembered Sir Robert's words that he should ride upon the sun with the certainty that sooner or later he would strike upon the road. As they jogged slowly along over undulating hills, the Frenchman shook off his hurt and the two chatted merrily together.

"I had but just come from France," said he, "and I had hoped to win honor in this country, for I have ever heard that the English are very hardy men and excellent people to fight with. My mules and my baggage are at Evran; but I rode forth to see what I could see, and I chanced upon your army moving down the road, so I coasted it in the hopes of some profit or adventure. Then you came after me and I would have given all the gold goblets upon my father's table if I had my harness so that I could have turned upon you. I have promised the Countess Beatrice that I will send her an Englishman or two to kiss her hands."

"One might perchance have a worse fate," said Nigel. "Is this fair dame your betrothed?"

"She is my love," answered the Frenchman. "We are but waiting for the Count to be slain in the wars, and then we mean to marry. And this lady of thine, Nigel? I would that I could see her."

"Perchance you shall, fair sir," said Nigel, "for all that I have seen of you fills me with desire to go further with you. It is in my mind that we might turn this thing to profit and to honor, for when Sir Robert has spoken with you, I am free to do with you as I will."

"And what will you do, Nigel?"

"We shall surely try some small deed upon each other, so that either I shall see the Lady Beatrice, or you the Lady Mary. Nay, thank me not, for like yourself, I have come to this country in search of honor, and I know not where I may better find it than at the end of your sword-point. My good lord and master, Sir John Chandos, has told me many times that never yet did he meet French knight nor squire that he did not find great pleasure and profit from their company, and now I very clearly see that he has spoken the truth."

For an hour these two friends rode together, the Frenchman pouring forth the praises of his lady, whose glove he produced from one pocket, her garter from his vest, and her shoe from his saddle-bag. She was blond, and when he heard that Mary was dark, he would fain stop then and there to fight the question of color. He talked too of his great chateau at Lauta, by the head waters of the pleasant Garonne; of the hundred horses in the stables, the seventy hounds in the kennels, the fifty hawks in the mews. His English friend should come there when the wars were over, and what golden days would be theirs! Nigel, too, with his English coldness thawing before this young sunbeam of the South, found himself talking of the heather slopes of Surrey, of the forest of Woolmer, even of the sacred chambers of Cosford.

But as they rode onward towards the sinking sun, their thoughts far away in their distant homes, their horses striding together, there came that, which brought their minds back in an instant to the perilous hillsides of Brittany.

It was the long blast of a trumpet blown from somewhere on the farther side of a ridge toward which they were riding. A second long-drawn note from a distance answered it.

"It is your camp," said the Frenchman.

"Nay," said Nigel; "we have pipes with us and a naker or two, but I have heard no trumpet-call from our ranks. It behooves us to take heed, for we know not what may be before us. Ride this way, I pray you, that we may look over and yet be ourselves unseen."

Some scattered bowlders crowned the height, and from behind them the two young Squires could see the long rocky valley beyond. Upon a knoll was a small square building with a battlement round it. Some distance from it towered a great dark castle, as massive as the rocks on which it stood, with one strong keep at the corner, and four long lines of machicolated walls. Above, a banner flew proudly in the wind, with some device which glowed red in the setting sun. Nigel shaded his eyes and stared with wrinkled brow.

"It is not the arms of England, nor yet the lilies of France, nor is it the ermine of Brittany," said he. "He who holds this castle fights for his own hand, since his own device flies above it. Surely it is a head gules on an argent field."

"The bloody head on a silver tray!" cried the Frenchman. "Was I not warned against him? This is not a man, friend Nigel. It is a monster who wars upon English, French and all Christendom. Have you not heard of the Butcher of La Brohiniere?"

"Nay, I have not heard of him."

"His name is accursed in France. Have I not been told also that he put to death this very year Giles de St. Fol, a friend of the English King?"

"Yes, in very truth it comes back to my mind now that I heard something of this matter in Calais before we started."

"Then there he dwells, and God guard you if ever you pass under yonder portal, for no prisoner has ever come forth alive! Since these wars began he hath been a king to himself, and the plunder of eleven years lies in yonder cellars. How can justice come to him, when no man knows who owns the land? But when we have packed you all back to your island, by the Blessed Mother of God, we have a heavy debt to pay to the man who dwells in yonder pile!"

But even as they watched, the trumpet-call burst forth once more. It came not from the castle but from the farther end of the valley. It was answered by a second call from the walls. Then in a long, straggling line there came a wild troop of marauders streaming homeward from some foray. In the van, at the head of a body of spearmen, rode a tall and burly man, clad in brazen armor, so that he shone like a golden image in the slanting rays of the sun. His helmet had been loosened from his gorget and was held before him on his horse's neck. A great tangled beard flowed over his breastplate, and his hair hung down as far behind. A squire at his elbow bore high the banner of the bleeding head. Behind the spearmen were a line of heavily laden mules, and on either side of them a drove of poor country folk, who were being herded into the castle. Lastly came a second strong troop of mounted spearmen, who conducted a score of more of prisoners who marched together in a solid body.

Nigel stared at them and then, springing on his horse, he urged it along the shelter of the ridge so as to reach unseen a spot which was close to the castle gate. He had scarce taken up his new position when the cavalcade reached the drawbridge, and amid yells of welcome from those upon the wall, filed in a thin line across it. Nigel stared hard once more at the prisoners in the rear, and so absorbed was he by the sight that he had passed the rocks and was standing sheer upon the summit.

"By Saint Paul!" he cried, "it must indeed be so. I see their russet jackets. They are English archers!"

As he spoke, the hindmost one, a strong built, broad-shouldered man, looked round and saw the gleaming figure above him upon the hill, with open helmet, and the five roses glowing upon his breast. With a sweep of his hands he had thrust his guardians aside and for a moment was clear of the throng.

"Squire Loring! Squire Loring!" he cried. "It is I, Aylward the archer! It is I, Samkin Aylward!" The next minute a dozen hands had seized him, his cries were muffled with a gag, and he was hurled, the last of the band, through the black and threatening archway of the gate. Then with a clang the two iron wings came together, the portcullis swung upward, and captives and captors, robbers and booty, were all swallowed up within the grim and silent fortress.

The Blackest Spot in Christendom.

XX.

How the English Attempted the Castle of La Brohiniere.

For some minutes Nigel remained motionless upon the crest of the hill, his heart lead within him, and his eyes fixed upon the huge gray walls which contained his unhappy henchman. He was roused by a sympathetic hand upon his shoulder and the voice of his young prisoner in his ear.

"Peste,!" said he. "They have some of your birds in their cage, have they not? What then, my friend? Keep your heart high! Is it not the chance of war, to-day to them, to-morrow to thee, and death at last for us all? And yet I had rather they were in any hands than those of Oliver the Butcher."

"By Saint Paul, we cannot suffer it!" cried Nigel distractedly. "This man has come with me from my own home. He has stood between me and death before now. It goes to my very heart that he should call upon me in vain. I pray you, Raoul, to use your wits, for mine are all curdled in my head. Tell me what I should do and how I may bring him help."

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders. "As easy to get a lamb unscathed out of a wolves lair, as a prisoner safe from La Brohiniere. Nay, Nigel, whither do you go? Have you indeed taken leave of your wits?"

The Squire had spurred his horse down the hillside and never halted until he was within a bowshot of the gate. The French prisoner followed hard behind him, with a buzz of reproaches and expostulations.

"You are mad, Nigel!" he cried. "What do you hope to do then? Would you carry the castle with your own hands? Halt, man, halt, in the name of the Virgin!"

But Nigel had no plan in his head and only obeyed the fevered impulse to do something to ease his thoughts. He paced his horse up and down, waving his spear, and shouting insults and challenges to the garrison. Over the high wall a hundred jeering faces looked down upon him. So rash and wild was his action that it seemed to those within to mean some trap, so the drawbridge was still held high and none ventured forth to seize him. A few long-range arrows pattered on the rocks, and then with a deep booming sound a huge stone, hurled from a mangonel, sang over the head of the two Squires and crushed into splinters amongst the bowlders behind them. The Frenchman seized Nigel's bridle and forced him farther from the gateway.

"By the dear Virgin!" he cried, "I care not to have these pebbles about by ears, yet I cannot go back alone, so it is very clear, my crazy comrade, that you must come back also. Now we are beyond their reach! But see, my friend Nigel, who are those who crown the height?"

The sun had sunk behind the western ridge, but the glowing sky was fringed at its lower edge by a score of ruddy twinkling points. A body of horsemen showed hard and black upon the bare hill. Then they dipped down the slope into the valley, whilst a band of footmen followed behind.

"They are my people," cried Nigel joyously. "Come, my friend, hasten, that we may take counsel what we shall do."

Sir Robert Knolles rode a bowshot in front of his men, and his brow was as black as night. Beside him, with crestfallen face, his horse bleeding, his armor dinted and soiled, was the hot-headed knight, Sir James Astley. A fierce discussion raged between them.

"I have done my devoir as best I might," said Astley. "Alone I had ten of them at my sword-point. I know not how I have lived to tell it."

"What is your devoir to me? Where are my thirty bowmen?" cried Knolles in bitter wrath. "Ten lie dead upon the ground and twenty are worse than dead in yonder castle. And all because you must needs show all men how bold you are, and ride into a bushment such as a child could see. Alas for my own folly that ever I should have trusted such a one as you with the handling of men!"

"By God, Sir Robert, you shall answer to me for those words!" cried Astley with a choking voice. "Never has a man dared to speak to me as you have done this day."

"As long as I hold the King's order I shall be master, and by the Lord I will hang you, James, on a near tree if I have further cause of offense! How now, Nigel? I see by yonder white horse that you at least have not failed me. I will speak with you anon. Percy, bring up your men, and let us gather round this castle, for, as I hope for my soul's salvation, I will not leave it until I have my archers, or the head of him who holds them."

That night the English lay thick round the fortress of La Brohiniere so that none might come forth from it. But if none could come forth it was hard to see how any could win their way in, for it was full of men, the walls were high and strong, and a deep dry ditch girt it round. But the hatred and fear which its master had raised over the whole country-side could now be plainly seen, for during the night the brushwood men and the villagers came in from all parts with offers of such help as they could give for the intaking of the castle. Knolles set them cutting bushes and tying them into fagots. When morning came he rode out before the wall and he held counsel with his knights and squires as to how he should enter in.

"By noon," said he, "we shall have so many fagots that we may make our way over the ditch. Then we will beat in the gates and so win a footing."

The young Frenchman had come with Nigel to the conference, and amid the silence which followed the leader's proposal, he asked if he might be heard. He was clad in the brazen armor which Nigel had taken from the Red Ferret.

"It may be that it is not for me to join in your counsel," said he, "seeing that I am a prisoner and a Frenchman. But this man is the enemy of all, and we of France owe him a debt even as you do, since many a good Frenchman has died in his cellars. For this reason I crave to be heard."

"We will hear you," said Knolles.

"I have come from Evran yesterday," said he. "Sir Henry Spinnefort, Sir Peter La Roye and many other brave knights and squires lie there, with a good company of men, all of whom would very gladly join with you to destroy this butcher and his castle, for it is well known amongst us that his deeds are neither good nor fair. There are also bombards which we could drag over the hills, and so beat down this iron gate. If you so order it I will ride to Evran and bring my companions back with me."

"Indeed, Robert," said Percy, "it is in mind that this Frenchman speaks very wisely and well."

"And when we have taken the castle—what then?" asked Knolles.

"Then you could go upon your way, fair sir, and we upon ours. Or if it please you better you could draw together on yonder hill and we on this one, so that the valley lies between us. Then if a cavalier wished to advance himself or to shed a vow and exalt his lady, an opening might be found for him. Surely it would be shame if so many brave men drew together and no small deed were to come of it."

Nigel clasped his captive's hand to show his admiration and esteem, but Knolles shook his head.

"Things are not ordered thus, save in the tales of the minstrels," said he. "I have no wish that your people at Evran should know our numbers or our plans. I am not in this land for knight errantry, but I am here to make head against the King's enemies. Has no one aught to say?"

Percy pointed to the small outlying fortalice upon the knoll, on which also flew the flag of the bloody head. "This smaller castle, Robert, is of no great strength and cannot hold more than fifty men. It is built, as I conceive it, that no one should seize the high ground and shoot down into the other. Why should we not turn all our strength upon it, since it is the weaker of the twain?"

But again the young leader shook his head. "If I should take it," said he, "I am still no nearer to my desire, nor will it avail me in getting back my bowmen. It may cost a score of men, and what profit shall I have from it? Had I bombards, I might place them on yonder hill, but having none it is of little use to me."

"It may be," said Nigel, "that they have scant food or water, and so must come forth to fight us."

"I have made inquiry of the peasants," Knolles answered, "and they are of one mind that there is a well within the castle, and good store of food. Nay, gentlemen, there is no way before us save to take it by arms, and no spot where we can attempt it save through the great gate. Soon we will have so many fagots that we can cast them down into the ditch, and so win our way across. I have ordered them to cut a pine-tree on the hill and shear the branches so that we may beat down the gate with it. But what is now amiss, and why do they run forward to the castle?"

A buzz had risen from the soldiers in the camp, and they all crowded in one direction, rushing toward the castle wall. The knights and squires rode after them, and when in view of the main gate, the cause of the disturbance lay before them. On the tower above the portal three men were standing in the garb of English archers, ropes round their necks and their hands bound behind them. Their comrades surged below them with cries of recognition and of pity.

"It is Ambrose!" cried one. "Surely it is Ambrose of Ingleton."

"Yes, in truth, I see his yellow hair. And the other, him with the beard, it is Lockwood of Skipton. Alas for his wife who keeps the booth by the bridge-head of Ribble! I wot not who the third may be."

"It is little Johnny Alspaye, the youngest man in the company,' cried old Wat, with tears running down his cheeks. "'Twas I who brought him from his home. Alas! Alas! Foul fare the day that ever I coaxed him from his mother's side that he might perish in a far land."

There was a sudden flourish of a trumpet and the drawbridge fell. Across it strode a portly man with a faded herald's coat. He halted warily upon the farther side and his voice boomed like a drum. "I would speak with your leader," he cried.

Knolles rode forward.

"Have I your knightly word that I may advance unscathed with all courteous entreaty as befits a herald?"

Knolles nodded his head.

The man came slowly and pompously forward. "I am the messenger and liege servant," said he, "of the high baron, Oliver de St. Yvon, Lord of La Brohiniere. He bids me to say that if you continue your journey and molest him no further he will engage upon his part to make no further attack upon you. As to the men whom he holds, he will enroll them in his own honorable service, for he has need of long-bowmen, and has heard much of their skill. But if you constrain him or cause him further displeasure by remaining before his castle he hereby gives you warning that he will hang these three men over his gateway and every morning another three until all have been slain. This he has sworn upon the rood of Calvery, and as he has said so he will do upon jeopardy of his soul."

Robert Knolles looked grimly at the messenger. "You may thank the saints that you have had my promise," said he, "else would I have stripped that lying tabard from thy back and the skin beneath it from thy bones, that thy master might have a fitting answer to his message. Tell him that I hold him and all that are within his castle as hostage for the lives of my men, and that should he dare to do them scathe, he and every man that is with him shall hang upon his battlements. Go, and go quickly, lest my patience fail."

There was that in Knolles' cold grey eyes and in his manner of speaking those last words which sent the portly envoy back at a quicker gait than he had come. As he vanished into the gloomy arch of the gateway the drawbridge swung up with creak and rattle behind him.

A few minutes later a rough-bearded fellow stepped out over the portal where the condemned archers stood, and seizing the first by the shoulders he thrust him over the wall. A cry burst from the man's lips and a deep groan from those of his comrade below as he fell with a jerk which sent him half-way up to the parapet again, and then after dancing like a child's top swung slowly backward and forward with limp limbs and twisted neck.

The hangman turned and bowed in mock reverence to the spectators beneath him. He had not yet learned in a land of puny archers how sure and how strong is the English bow. Half a dozen men, old Wat amongst them, had run forward toward the wall. They were too late to save their comrades, but at least their deaths were speedily avenged. The man was in the act of pushing off the second prisoner when an arrow crashed through his head, and he fell stone dead upon the parapet. But even in falling he had given the fatal thrust and a second russet figure swung beside the first against the dark background of the castle wall.

There only remained the young lad, Johnny Alspaye, who stood shaking with fear, an abyss below him, and the voices of those who would hurl him over it behind. There was a long pause before anyone would come forth to dare those deadly arrows. Then a fellow, crouching double, ran forward from the shelter, keeping the young archer's body as a shield between him and danger.

"Aside, John! Aside!" cried his comrades from below.

The youth sprang as far as the rope would allow him, and slipped it half over his face in the effort. Three arrows flashed past his sides and two of them buried themselves in the body of the man behind. A howl of delight burst from the spectators as he dropped first upon his knees and then upon his face. A life for a life was no bad bargain.

But it was only a short respite which the skill of his comrades had given to the young archer. Over the parapet there appeared a ball of brass, then a pair of great brazen shoulders, and lastly the full figure of an armored man. He walked to the edge and they heard his hoarse guffaw of laughter as the arrows clanged and clattered against his impenetrable mail. He slapped his breast-plate, as he jeered at them. Well he knew that at the distance no dart ever sped by mortal hands could cleave through his plates of metal. So he stood, the great burly Butcher of La Brohiniere, with head uptossed, laughing insolently at his foes. Then with slow and ponderous tread he walked toward his boy victim, seized him by the ear, and dragged him across so that the rope might be straight. Seeing that the noose had slipped across the face, he tried to push it down, but the mail glove hampering him he pulled it off, and grasped the rope above the lad's head with his naked hand.

Quick as a flash old Wat's arrow had sped, and the Butcher sprang back with a howl of pain, his hand skewered by a cloth-yard shaft. As he shook it furiously at his enemies a second grazed his knuckles. With a brutal kick of his metal-shod feet he hurled young Alspaye over the edge, looked down for a few moments at his death agonies, and then walked slowly from the parapet, nursing his dripping hand, the arrows still ringing loudly upon his back-piece as he went.

The archers below, enraged at the death of their comrades, leaped and howled like a pack of ravening wolves.

"By Saint Dunstan," said Percy, looking round at their flushed faces, "if ever we are to carry it now is the moment, for these men will not be stopped if hate can take them forward."

"You are right, Thomas!" cried Knolles. "Gather together twenty men-at-arms each with his shield to cover him. Astley, do you place the bowmen so that no head may show at window or parapet. Nigel, I pray you to order the countryfolk forward with their fardels of fagots. Let the others bring up the lopped pine-tree which lies yonder behind the horse lines. Ten men-at-arms can bear it on their right, and ten on the left, having shields over their heads. The gate once down, let every man rush in. And God help the better cause!"

Swiftly and yet quietly the dispositions were made, for these were old soldiers whose daily trade was war. In little groups the archers formed in front of each slit or crevice in the walls, whilst others scanned the battlements with wary eyes, and sped an arrow at every face which gleamed for an instant above them. The garrison shot forth a shower of crossbow bolts and an occasional stone from their engine, but so deadly was the hail which rained upon them that they had no time to dwell upon their aim, and their discharges were wild and harmless. Under cover of the shafts of the bowmen a line of peasants ran unscathed to the edge of the ditch, each hurling in the bundle which he bore in his arms, and then hurrying back for another one. In twenty minutes a broad pathway of fagots lay level with the ground upon one side and the gate upon the other. With the loss of two peasants slain by bolts and one archer crushed by a stone, the ditch had been filled up. All was ready for the battering-ram.

With a shout, twenty picked men rushed forward with the pine-tree under their arms, the heavy end turned toward the gate. The arbalesters on the tower leaned over and shot into the midst of them, but could not stop their advance. Two dropped, but the other raising their shields ran onward still shouting, crossed the bridge of fagots, and came with a thundering crash against the door. It splintered from base to arch, but kept its place.

Swinging their mighty weapon, the storming party thudded and crashed upon the gate, every blow loosening and widening the cracks which rent it from end to end. The three knights, with Nigel, the Frenchman Raoul and the other squires, stood beside the ram, cheering on the men, and chanting to the rhythm of the swing with a loud "Ha!" at every blow. A great stone loosened from the parapet roared through the air and struck Sir James Astley and another of the attackers, but Nigel and the Frenchman had taken their places in an instant, and the ram thudded and smashed with greater energy than ever. Another blow and another! the lower part was staving inward, but the great central bar still held firm. Surely another minute would beat it from its sockets.

But suddenly from above there came a great deluge of liquid. A hogshead of it had been tilted from the crenellement until soldiers, bridge, and ram were equally drenched in yellow slime. Knolles rubbed his gauntlet in it, held it to his visor, and smelled it.

"Back, back!" he cried. "Before it is too late!"

There was a small barred window above their heads at the side of the gate. A ruddy glare shone through it, and then a blazing torch was tossed down upon them. In a moment the oil had caught and the whole place was a sheet of flame. The fir-tree that they carried, the fagots beneath them, their very weapons, were all in a blaze.

To right and left the men sprang down into the dry ditch, rolling with screams upon the ground in their endeavor to extinguish the flames. The knights and squires protected by their armor strove hard, stamping and slapping, to help those who had but leather jacks to shield their bodies. From above a ceaseless shower of darts and of stones were poured down upon them, while on the other hand the archers, seeing the greatness of the danger, ran up to the edge of the ditch, the shot fast and true at every face which showed above the wall.

Scorched, wearied and bedraggled, the remains of the storming party clambered out of the ditch as best they could, clutching at the friendly hands held down to them, and so limped their way back amid the taunts and howls of their enemies. A long pile of smoldering cinders was all that remained of their bridge, and on it lay Astley and six other red-hot men glowing in their armor.

Knolles clinched his hands as he looked back at the ruin that was wrought, and then surveyed the group of men who stood or lay around him nursing their burned limbs and scowling up at the exultant figures who waved on the castle wall. Badly scorched himself, the young leader had no thought for his own injuries in the rage and grief which racked his soul. "We will build another bridge," he cried. "Set the peasants binding faggots once more."

But a thought had flashed through Nigel's mind. "See, fair sir," said he. "The nails of yonder door are red-hot and the wood as white as ashes. Surely we can break our way through it."

"By the Virgin, you speak truly!" cried the French Squire. "If we can cross the ditch the gate will not stop us. Come, Nigel, for our fair ladies' sakes, I will race you who will reach it first, England or France."

Alas for all the wise words of the good Chandos! Alas for all the lessons in order and discipline learned from the wary Knolles. In an instant, forgetful of all things but this noble challenge, Nigel was running at the top of his speed for the burning gate. Close at his heels was the Frenchman, blowing and gasping, as he rushed along in his brazen armor. Behind came a stream of howling archers and men-at-arms, like a flood which has broken its dam. Down they slipped into the ditch, rushed across it, and clambered on each other's backs up the opposite side. Nigel, Raoul and two archers gained a foothold in front of the burning gate at the same moment. With blows and kicks they burst it to pieces, and dashed with a yell of triumph through the dark archway beyond. For a moment they thought with mad rapture that the castle was carried. A dark tunnel lay before them, down which they rushed. But alas! at the farther end it was blocked by a second gateway as strong as that which had been burned. In vain they beat upon it with their swords and axes. On each side the tunnel was pierced with slits, and the crossbow bolts discharged at only a few yards' distance crashed through armor as if it were cloth and laid man after man upon the stones. They raged and leaped before the great iron-clamped barrier, but the wall itself was as easy to tear down.

It was bitter to draw back; but it was badness to remain. Nigel looked round and saw that half his men were down. At the same moment Raoul sank with a gasp at his feet, a bolt driven to its socked through the links of the camail which guarded his neck. Some of the archers, seeing that certain death awaited them, were already running back to escape from the fatal passage.

"By Saint Paul!" cried Nigel hotly. "Would you leave our wounded where this butcher may lay his hands upon them. Let the archers shoot inward and hold them back from the slits. Now let each man raise one of our comrades, lest we leave our honor in the gate of this castle."

With a mighty effort he had raised Raoul upon his shoulders and staggered with him to the edge of the ditch. Several men were waiting below where the steep bank shielded them from the arrows, and to them Nigel handed down his wounded friend, and each archer in turn did the same. Again and again Nigel went back until no one lay in the tunnel save seven who had died there. Thirteen wounded were laid in the shelter of the ditch, and there they must remain until night came to cover them. Meanwhile the bowmen on the farther side protected them from attack, and also prevented the enemy from all attempts to build up the outer gate. The gaping smoke-blackened arch was all that they could show for a loss of thirty men, but that at least Knolles was determined to keep.

Burned and bruised, but unconscious of either pain or fatigue for the turmoil of his spirit within him, Nigel knelt by the Frenchman and loosened his helmet. The girlish face of the young Squire was white as chalk, and the haze of death was gathering over his violet eyes, but a faint smile played round his lips as he looked up at his English comrade.

"I shall never see Beatrice again," he whispered. "I pray you, Nigel, that when there is a truce you will journey as far as my father's chateau and tell him how his son died. Young Gaston will rejoice, for to hif come the land and the coat, the war-cry and the profit. See them, Nigel, and tell them that I was as forward as the others."

"Indeed, Raoul, no man could have carried himself with more honor or won more worship than you have done this day. I will do your behest when the time comes."

"Surely you are happy, Nigel," the dying Squire murmured, "for this day has given you one more deed which you may lay at the feet of your lady-love."

"It might have been so had we carried the gate," Nigel answered sadly; "but by Saint Paul! I cannot count it a deed where I have come back with my purpose unfulfilled. But this is no time, Raoul, to talk of my small affairs. If we take the castle and I bear a good part in it, then perchance all this may indeed avail."

The Frenchman sat up with that strange energy which comes often as the harbinger of death. "You will win you, Lady Mary, Nigel, and your great deeds will be not three but a score, so that in all Christendom there shall be no man of blood and coat-armor who has not heard your name and your fame. This I tell you—I, Raoul de la Roche Pierre de Bras, dying upon the field of honor. And now kiss me, sweet friend, and lay me back, for the mists close round me and I am gone."

(To be continued.)

Dame Fashion's Dictum

An effective "jumper" to wear with a princess skirt or high pleated girdle is made of lace flouncing gathered loosely at the lower edge by a black velvet ribbon. The square yoke is formed of lace insertion and the flouncing which forms the sleeves is fastened to it at the side. The seam running from the corner under the arm joins the sleeve to the body of the waist. The hat is made of a large circle of dark blue straw over a blue frame. This does not extend more than an inch from the crown under the brim, and a gilt wire near the edge keeps the brim in shape. A band of gold yellow velvet encircles the crown and the bows are of blue ribbons.

THE WEATH

Meteorologic
Victoria, B. C., at 8 p.
SYNOPSIS.

The barometer is rising ove Pacific slope and fair weather general throughout the provinc erate winds along the coast. is cooler between the ranges berta to Manitoba it is slow milder.

TEMPERATURE.

Victoria
Vancouver
New Westminster
Kamloops
Barkerville
Port Simpson
Atlin
Calgary
Winnipeg
Portland
San Francisco

FORECASTS.

For 24 hours from 5 a. m. Thursday:
Victoria and Vicinity: Light winds, generally fair, s higher temperature.
Lower Mainland: Light or mo generally fair, stationar temperature.

Highest
Lowest
Mean
Rain
Sunshine ... 7 ho

March.

Highest temperature
Lowest temperature
Mean temperature
Total precipitation for the inch; average amount, 2.6
Bright sunshine, 173 hours mean daily proportion, 0. sunshine being).

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VICTORIA TIDE T

(April, 1907.)
(Issued by the Tidal Surv the Department of Marine Ottawa.)

Date.	Time	Ht	Time	Ht	Tim
	h. m.	ft.	h. m.	ft.	h. m
1	4 13	8.4	11 06	3.1	18
2	4 40	8.5	12 04	2.6	19
3	5 07	8.5	12 05	2.2	21
4	0 31	7.1	5 35	8.5	14
5	1 38	7.6	6 04	8.4	15
6	0 53	7.9	3 10	7.8	6
7	1 33	8.1	4 50	7.6	7
8	1 56	8.0	6 10	7.1	9
9	2 06	7.9	7 07	6.4	11
10	2 02	7.9	5 47	6.1	12
11	2 05	7.9	8 23	4.8	14
12	2 16	8.0	8 58	4.0	15
13	2 36	8.2	9 34	3.4	16
14	3 00	8.3	10 12	3.0	17
15	3 22	8.3	10 53	2.7	19
16	3 40	8.2	11 38	2.5	...
17	3 47	8.1	12 26	2.3	...
18	.....		3 48	7.8	13
19	.....		3 20	7.4	14
20	1 17	8.0	.....		15
21	1 53	7.9	.....		16
22	1 53	7.8	.....		16
23	1 20	7.6	.....		17
24	1 00	7.6	7 15	5.9	11
25	1 08	7.7	7 38	5.2	12
26	1 24	8.0	8 04	4.2	14
27	1 44	8.2	8 35	3.3	15
28	2 08	8.5	9 13	2.5	16
29	2 34	8.7	9 56	1.8	17
30	3 02	8.9	10 44	1.3	18

The time used is Pacific the 120th meridian west. from 0 to 24 hours, from mi night. The figures for heig tinguish high water from lo

The height is measured of the lower low water at This level corresponds with which the soundings on chart of Victoria harbor ar closely as can now be asce

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COLONIAL CON IS OPENED LONDON

Premiers of Nearly A erning Colonies a Session

ADDRESS BY BRITIS

Only Official Reports to Public—Chair Is Occ Earl of Elgi

London, April 15.—The ference between the prem Britain's self-governing the British colonial s opened today at the under the presidency of Elgin, secretary of state nies. Reporters are no the conference, so the pu to be contented with a sored official summary proceedings until a blue conference is issued, mo final adjournment.

The premiers present Louis Botha, shrd cm Jameson of Cape Colony premier of Transvaal; Australian Premier, Sir mier of New Zealand, Moore, premier of Natal frid Laurier, premier of mier Sir Robert Bond land, will arrive in the week. The premiers w led by their advisers.

A number of British ters attended the mo Premier Campbell-Bann the proceedings with a in which he outlined t discussion, such as trad colonies and Great Brit the colonies. The pre expressed the hope that tions would have useful of the colonial premiers reply after which the c cussed the procedure Meetings will be held week, and they are exp month.

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VESSELS IN TR

Green Bay, Wis., Apri ported here that the st Stephens, with its cons upon the clay banks te of Sturgeon bay. Th said to have gone ashore noon during a fierce sto saving crew has gone ance.

—o—

MANY KILLED A

Lodz, Russia, April 1 last four weeks over have been killed or wo labor fights. The go failed to protect those w to work, and the latte matters into their own violently expelling the