

By A. CONAN DOYLE

I Such would have been the fate of
-I the stranger, as of so many cavaliers
I before him, had Nigel not chanced to
n be close upon his heels. In an instant
n Pommers had burst through the
of group who struck at the prostrate

man, and in another two of the robbers had fallen before Nigel's sword. A spear rang on his breastplate, but one blow shore off its head, and a second that of him who held it. In vain they thrust at the steel-girt man. His sword played round them like lightning, and the fierce horse ramped and swooped above them with pawing iron-shod hoofs and eyes of fire. With cries and shrieks they flew off to right and left amidst the bushes, springing

over boulders and darting under branches where no horseman could follow them. The foul crew had gone as swiftly and suddenly as it had come, and save for four ragged figures littered amongst the trampled bushes, no sign remaining of their passing.

Nigel tethered Pommers to a thorn-bush and then turned his attention to the injured man. The white horse had regained his feet and stood whinnying gently as he looked down on his pros-

trate master. A heavy blow, half broken by his sword, had beaten him down and left a great raw bruise upon his forehead. But a stream gurgled through the gorge, and a capful of water dashed over his face brought the senses back to the injured man, if he was a mere stripling, with the delicate features of a woman, and a pair of great violet-blue eyes which looked up presently with a puzzled start into Nigels' face.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Ah, yes! I call you to mind. You are the

young Englishman who chased me on the great yellow horse. By our Lady of Rocamadour, whose vernicle is round my neck! I could not have believed that any horse could have kept at the heels of Charlemagne so long. But I will wager you a hundred crowns, Englishman, that I lead you over a five-mile course."

"Nay," said Nigel, "we will wait till you can back a horse ere we talk of racing it. I am Nigel of Tilford, of the family of Loring, a squire by rank and the son of a knight. How are you

"I also am a squire by rank and the son of a knight. I am Raoul de la Roche Pierre de Bras, whose father writes himself Lord of Grosbols, a free vavasar of the noble Count of Toulouse, with the right of fossa and of furca, the high justice, the middle and the low." He sat up and rubbed his eyes. "Englishman, you have saved my life as I would have saved yours, had I seen such yelping dogs as upon a man of blood and of coat-armour. But now I am yours, and what is your sweet will."

"When you are fit to ride, you will come back with me to my people."

"Alas! I feared that you would say so. Had I taken you, Nigel—that is your name, is it not?—had I taken you, I would not have acted thus."

"How then, would you have ordered things?" asked Nigel, much taken with the frank and debonaire manner of his captive.

"I would not have taken advantage of such a mischance as has befallen me which has put me in your power. I would give you a sword and beat you

"Indeed, your words are both good and fair," said Nigel. "By Saint Paul! I cannot call to mind that I have ever met a man who bore himself better. But since I am in my armor and you without, I see not how we can debate the matter."

"Surely, gentle Nigel, you could doff your armor."

"Then have I only my underclothes?"

"Nay, there shall be no unfairness there, for I also will very gladly strip to my underclothes."

Nigel looked wistfully at the Frenchman; but he shook his head. "Alas! it may not be," said he. "The last words that Sir Robert said to me were that I was to bring you to his side, for he would have speech with you. Would that I could do what you ask, for I also have a fair lady to whom I would fain send you. What use are you to me, Raoul, since I have the taking of you?"

gained no faith in the saving of you.
How is it with you now?"

(To be continued.)

on's Dictum



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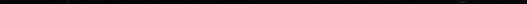
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