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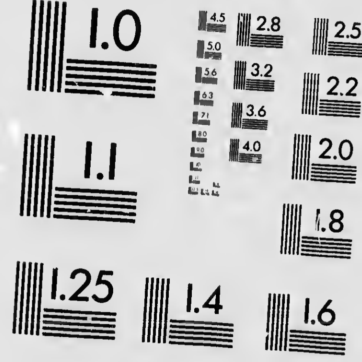

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The Chevalier of the Splendid Crest

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The Chevalier of the Splendid Crest

by

The Right Hon.
Sir Herbert Maxwell
BART., M.P., F.R.S.

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DEDICATION.

MY DEAR CHRISSIE,

I have noticed that you share my interest in trying to realise what were the conditions of living in this country before its people had become so busy, so well-off, and, perhaps, so fond of ease as we are now. Therefore will you allow me to offer you the dedication of an attempt to retrace the outlines and heighten the details of existence seven hundred years ago, when for the first time a generation had grown up in England under the rule of a thoroughly English king, and when the Scottish people had been launched upon the long and costly struggle by which they won and maintained their independence?

In so far as the narrative consists of a translation

of Sir Maurice de Bulkeley's narrative, I have been not a little puzzled how to render the spirit of Norman French. He and most of his compeers under the Plantagenets no doubt could express themselves in the speech of the commonalty, but at that date English was still very far from being the flexible medium which was to win encomium from the German philologer Grimm as "possessing a veritable power of expression, such as perhaps never stood at the command of any other language of man." Geoffrey Chaucer had not yet arisen to do for his speech what Dante did for the Tuscan dialect, conferring upon it high rank among the literary languages of Europe. To translate the idioms of courtly Norman French into the familiar phrases of modern English would be to sacrifice too much of its character. I have chosen, therefore, a middle course, and, while preserving to the best of my ability the pictures of character and scenery drawn by Sir Maurice, have endeavoured to render his phrases into such English as was spoken when, at last, towards the close of the fifteenth century it became the speech not only of the commonalty, but of the Court and those who follow Court fashion. Even so, some further

modification seemed expedient, such as the adoption of the plural instead of the singular in the second personal pronoun, and the suppression of the old termination of the verb in the third person singular.

I shall feel well rewarded for my pains if, overlooking the defects of so much of the narrative as I am responsible for, you are able to derive any interest or amusement in the perusal.

Your loving

FATHER.

MONREITH,
20th April 1900.

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The Chevalier of the Splendid Crest.

I.

Of the hunting of the great boar of Waltham Chace.

THE first strokes of dawn were stirring the eastward gloom behind the hamlet of Alresford. Lights already shone from the casements and moved about the court-yards of the king's hunting-lodge at Itchenstoke, where voices sounded in the darkness among the scattered outbuildings; the deep baying of a hound came from the kennels and shrill neighing from the long stable. Of a sudden all lesser noise was drowned by the clear notes of a half-dozen bugles, winding in unison a long recheat or huntsman's call. To those well versed in venerie—as it is meet and proper that every gentleman of the Court should be—it conveyed intelligence that neither the red stag, nor the fallow buck, nor any other of the beasts of sweet flight was to be hunted that day; for is not every fair quarry entitled to its proper recheat?

and on this morning the notes pealed the summons to pursuit of the fiercest of all our five beasts of venerie—the wild boar. Fiercer even than the wolf, of which wicked brood not one now remains in the county of Southampton, inasmuch as my lord the king has caused them all to be slain outright, by reason of the mischief they wrought upon the young deer; whereby he has drawn to himself the love of our husbandmen and shepherds, who now may pasture their flocks securely on the downs—yea, even throughout the night, which were a thing past belief to men of an older time.

Yes; the wild boar is most highly esteemed of all beasts of the forest for the exercise of high woodcraft—a right sanglier, to wit, for I speak not of a pig of the sounder, nor yet of a hog, nor even of a hog's steer, seeing that our nobles hold such in no great fame for the chase, but suffer the young boar to grow for three years or four, when it is like he will go *singulier* or solitary, which is the meaning of our word "sanglier." Then indeed he becomes a quarry to be hunted with hounds of a nobler courage than is needful for any other; the horse also must be trained to greater steadiness and the hunter's nerves more firmly strung. Moreover you must hunt the sanglier with greater store of hounds, else you will not discourage him one whit; for he values not the hunter who shall essay to rear him with a weak pack. Furthermore, you must note that the right season for the hunting of the boar beginneth about the Nativity of our Lord, and continueth until the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin.

Well, it was midway between these two feasts, on the festival, namely, of Saint Matthias,[1] that my lord

[1] 24th February.—Ed.

the king had appointed to hunt a great boar that harboured a bare league from his lodge at Itchenstoke. When the bugles ceased the courtyard was all astir. The stable doors were thrown wide; one by one, horses to the number of between thirty and forty were led forth,—some for the forest officers, to wit, the forester and the verderers, the regarder and the rangers—others for the prickers or mounted huntsmen—others, again, for the knights who it was the king's pleasure should accompany him to the chase.

The door of the hall stood open, whence a broad glare from the blazing logs on the hearth shot forth into the gloom without and fell on a splendid brown steed, which, still sheeted as a protection from the chill morning air, stood pawing the earth and blowing long streams of vapour from his red nostrils. This was the king's favourite Andalusian hunter, el Bravo, of a stock which he had brought to England with him when he returned from the Crusade thirty years before—far too great a favourite to be kept standing in the cold.

Hardly had the knights begun to gather at the door, when there stood among them a tall, lean—very lean—figure, slightly stooping and leaning on the shaft of a broad-bladed boar-spear.

It was the king.

Ah! how we worshipped him—the Great Plantagenet. How the moisture gathers in my sightless orbs as I call to mind those beloved features and the kindly brown eyes, which we had all seen at times blazing into sudden wrath, as quickly to pass away. My heart is heavy as I recall that far-off day, and as I ponder upon all the misery and shame that has come upon our land since—the England that Edward made for us.

"A fair morning to you, gentlemen," said the king, as he stepped into the open air and cast a careful glance upon the lightening sky. "Stand not uncovered, I pray you; cover yourselves, gentlemen, for the morning air is raw, as my old bones do surely testify. Well, Hildred!" his Grace continued, as the forester stood before him and did his reverence, "the day promises well for the sport. What news of the game?"

"Sire," replied the forester, "a right sanglier hath couched in a thicket on the skirts of Hampnage Forest. I marked his tracts and lesses last night, where he had been routing in the fern field, and I judge him to be very great. I heard him freaming last night, also, at sundown. I doubt not we shall rear him at that spot this morning, and with this wind we may hunt him at force by Cheriton to Waltham Forest, for that is where he rightly belongs. But we must approach his couch from the north, for there be two large sounders in Hampnage; if he cross the trail of them the hounds may divide."

The king listened attentively.

"Good!" he exclaimed, shaking his heavy spear aloft. "By the blessed Saint Hubert! these are tidings of a sort it does a greybeard good to hear. Take a horn of ale, Hildred—here, varlet! ale to the forester. And now to horse, gentlemen! Hildred, unkennel!"

The hounds were leamed already in the yard—twenty couples of great, powerful raches, dusky and tan-coloured for the most part. They streamed forth and clustered round Hildred, who had mounted an animal of greater bulk than el Bravo, but with breeding enough to enable him to breast the Hampshire hills. Hildred put the horn to his lips and blew the "strokes to the field"—*ton, ton, tavern, ton; tavern, ton, ton, tavern.*

"Now, *now*, NOW! Merriman," he cried, gently chiding an old hound which, at the sound of the well-known notes, threw his muzzle in the air and bayed in ecstasy of anticipation. Then they moved off in the dusk, the prickers riding on each side of the pack, lest, in that unfenced downland, they should break away on crossing the scent of some night-wandering animal.

It was half daylight when the long cavalcade defiled through Tichbourne shallows, scaring the wild ducks from their repast among the cresses, and sending a brace of herons from the ford with heavy wing-strokes and harsh screams. The dark eminence of the royal forest of Hampnage rose before us, beyond which lay the combe, dense with blackthorn and brambles, where the great boar was known to harbour.

. . . .

Now, it may be cause of wonder to some how I—Brother Baldwin of the Franciscan Order of Minorite Friars—came to be riding in such gallant company on such a worldly errand as a boar-hunt. I will explain it as briefly as I can.

You shall apprehend, then, that I have not always been what I was at that time, still less what I am now. I won my spurs fairly, God knoweth, on the stricken field long since and far away—on the scorching plains of Acre. It was my lord the king himself—Prince Edward of England as he then was—that gave me my accolade. It was in the year 1291—aye me! wellnigh thirty years ago, that the Soldan's host descended—but that is no matter of this tale. Some day, peradventure, after I have told what has to be said in this book, I may dictate to Brother Matthias, who clerks for me (for I am blind now, my friends, quite blind, and have plenty of leisure to spend

in recalling old times)—I may dictate, I say, to Brother Matthias the story of my own life, and some of those things which I remember only too clearly. Meanwhile it is only needful to mention that there came upon me some five years later, after we had all returned from the Holy Land, such deep horror for certain deeds in which I had borne a part—nay, the chief part—that I could find no peace for my soul, and I resolved to forswear the world and spend the rest of my days in a cloister. My royal master was ill pleased at this. Hotly he chided me, asking if I thought the throne had so many keen blades and stout hearts round it, that it was a time to desert my post (I was constable of the king's castle of Winchester then). But I was firm—mad, if you like—with unrest, and I kept to my resolve. The king has often been angered with me, both before and since that day; but his anger has ever passed like a summer cloud, leaving his countenance brighter than before. But it did not pass away so quickly this time. He dismissed me with words which cut me to the heart; for campaigning, my friends, makes men forget the gulf between king and subject—noble and villein. We loved each other, the king and I (be it spoken with great reverence), like foster-brothers, and it must have been that my leaving him caused him to doubt my great love.

"Go, then, Sir Maurice de Bulkeley," he said harshly, "go, sir, if you think that the safety of your soul is in jeopardy through serving a prince such as I. I am learning the lesson to be careful in future upon whose arm I lean."

I was miserable; day and night I wandered distraught, yet with no wavering purpose. May none to whom these words come know the gnawing of remorse—"the worm

that dieth not!" Peace I could only hope to find in the bosom of Holy Church, and I offered myself for the noviciate of the strictest order of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Some hint of the king's displeasure had leaked out, I suppose, or else the provincial master hesitated to receive on his own responsibility the vows of a knight so famous (for I *was* famous then—they reckoned me the fifth knight in Christendom). So I was summoned before the minister-general, Raymond Gaufredi, in Paris—one who knew right well how to read the secrets of a man's heart. He found that what I took for repentance—the grinding load that never left my brain—was no more than fruitless remorse. He touched the fibres that still tingled with the memory of what had been so sweet. He made me own (for I was not one to lie to any man) that if what had been done could be done again, I could not but do it.

"My son," he said, gravely shaking his head, "the cloister is no place for thee. Who art thou to preach the word to sinners, a sinner thyself—shriven indeed, but unrepentant? Nevertheless, thy trouble is sore and must needs be healed. Money will not cover the stain, nor penance wipe it out. Keep thy lands, yet will we admit thee to the noviciate. For the higher orders thou hast, at present, no vocation; but if thou standest the searching of a novice, thou may'st prove worthy of the rule of a lay brother. Who can say what service in that grade may work on thy spirit? Meanwhile be content; go in peace."

Well, I entered on my probation; after some months I was admitted to tertiary order of penitents in the Minorite Friars. I took upon me the vow of the third rule, binding me for ever to abstain from bearing arms,

save for defence of Church and country, from eating meat on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, from wearing any ornament or any clothing except what was grey and dark and poor. But besides this, and the necessity for setting apart certain hours in each day for devotional exercise, there was nothing to exclude me from the ordinary business and pursuits of a layman.

I returned to England—to my own castle in the county of Stafford, and devoted my time to prayer and good works, and to acquiring clerkly lore. One day I received my lord the king's summons to attend his Court at York. I obeyed with heavy heart, believing that I had forfeited my old friend's favour for evermore. But never was there spirit so generous as Edward Plantagenet's—never breathed there a knight who could dismiss so clearly all shadow of grudge.

"How now, Sir Grey Coat!" quoth he, "so they found you were not of the right fibre for a monk, did they? God's wounds! Maurice, but I love thee still, man. I find I cannot get on without thee, old comrade. I am waxing old now, Maurice; too old to make new friends. You may not fight now, they tell me, but you can write, and you shall serve me as clerk to my Privy Council. Go to! there will be plenty of time to tell thy beads between whiles."

From that moment, down to the morning of that hunting of which I have begun to tell—some fourteen years I reckon—I served my lord the king as diligently with the pen as theretofore I had done with sword and lance. From the hour in which my lord committed to me his privy seal in keeping, I was closely in his confidence, nor do I believe that he withheld from me anything that was in his thoughts. But I am childless. My lands

should have passed at my death to a distant and wealthy kinsman; therefore when another king, Edward of Carnarvon, filled my old master's throne, and the old order changed in a fashion which I sorely misliked, I yielded half of my estates to my legitimate heir, and half to Mother Church, and was at last received into the cloister where I am seated even now. I am no longer Sir Maurice de Bulkeley of Patshull in the county of Stafford, but plain Brother Baldwin of the Order of Minorite Friars.

. . . .

We rode forward through the grey land. The increasing light revealed little in the attire of the cavaliers to betoken some of the proudest nobles in England. Nothing but his great stature distinguished my lord the king from the gentlemen in his train—nothing in the dress of these barons and knights whereby a man might tell them from the prickers and other attendants. Most of them wore close-fitting jackets of Lincoln green, trimmed with fur of fox or marten; albeit some, and among them myself, preferred leathern jerkins, as being a better protection against thorns. No hats or caps were worn; only fur-lined hoods, which might be thrown back on the shoulders in the heat of the chase. King Edward ever discouraged display of finery by the gentlemen of his Court, being happiest himself when arrayed like a well-to-do citizen. He laughed at niceties of dress, except it were a question of military equipment, and then he would discuss keenly by the hour the merits of the latest fashion in helmets or the proper length of a hauberk. The wind blew bitterly off Southampton Water on this morning, yet the king wore no cloak, not even a courtepy, and none of his suite cared to meet the rough

raillery he certainly would have bestowed upon any one who went a-hunting with heavy clothing.

I have dwelt with some precision on these matters, though perhaps of little moment, because my eyesight failed not before I had witnessed the great change that was wrought in apparel when Edward of Carnarvon came to the throne, and I wish to show you England as it appeared when I knew it and loved it best.

As we skirted the forest the king began to speak earnestly with a young knight who rode beside him—one with a countenance of extraordinary pallor, which you might note the more readily because of his jetty moustache and pointed beard. Mounted on a Welsh garron (no mean animal to carry one through a long day in a hilly country) I rode as was my wont and my lord the king's will, somewhat behind his Grace, yet not so far as that, when we passed over soft turf, I could not easily hear what passed between him and the knight.

"Ah! this is freedom indeed," exclaimed the king, straightening himself in the saddle, and drawing in the chilly air with a sigh of content. "I care not, de Valence, though I should never again see drawn sword or lance in rest. In the few years that are left to me, let me see my people growing happy and rich and contented, and I ask for nothing to stir my blood more fiercely than a day now and then with hawk or hound. As for you, de Valence, you long for the glory of battle, and may get impatient with your old master who whines for peace."

"Now God forbid, sire," replied the knight, "that I should wish to see war again in our own land, which you have pacified so happily. But so long as the Holy Sepulchre is in the Soldan's keeping, there will always be work for Christian knights to do elsewhere."

"Ay," said the king, "Palestine is a fair college for soldiers. But know you this, that in my old age I see clearly that it is not well for a people when their rulers adventure far afield. Let Pope and preacher say what they will, if the Paynim hold Jerusalem wrongfully, it is to God they must answer, not to man. I tell thee, de Valence, I am better content that the cross of Saint George flies over all our castles in Scotland, than if it were planted on the very citadel of Jerusalem itself."

"Oh, sire!" expostulated de Valence, "your Grace's rule could never be in real jeopardy in the northern realm. All is at peace there now."

"Our Grace's rule!" returned the king, more sadly than was his wont. "Our Grace's rule! And think you, de Valence, that my anxiety has been only for my own kingship, which I shall have to give up to another so soon? Have I known and loved you from a boy, and failed to persuade you that my labour has been to give to the whole of this island of ours such a king as Alfred was to but a part of it—a king who should set little store by majesty or homage, save as the pledges of unity and strength? These poor, wildfire Scots, how they hate me, yet from what have I not saved them? Have I not been the means, under God, of delivering them from being rent asunder between the Brus and the Comyn and the rest of them? Have I not welded them and our English into one sea-girt nation, of which the power and the riches shall one day be the greatest the world has seen? And you talk to me of 'our Grace'! But enough! see, Hildred has brought us near our game, and is about to sound the call to discouple."

It was broad daylight now. Hildred had halted on a bare space of down, overlooking the dusky expanse of

Hampnage forest. On the side of this space furthest from the forest there was a deep combe, fringed along the edge with junipers and withered ferns, and filled with a dense thicket of thorns, both white and black, and scrubby oak. It was here that the huntsman had marked the couch of the great boar of Waltham. Now, had we been hunting the hart, we should not have drawn so near the covert where it was thought our quarry lay, and we should have been careful to approach it against the wind; for the hart windeth sharp and far, and quickly discovereth treachery against himself. But a right sanglier is not so lightly dislodged; he will abide in his den, and most commonly standeth his bay, till he be charged home with great store of hounds and shouting of men, with horns blowing a double recheat; all which has been set forth in plain speech by William Twety, chief huntsman to our present king, Edward of Carnarvon, in his ingenious treatise on venerie, wherefore there is no cause that I dwell at greater space thereon at this time.

Now, while Hildred was disposing his men along the covert, and the knights were taking their places to follow in the burst (for we hunt not the boar on foot, as the Saxon English were wont to do, deeming that all knightly sports should be exercised in the saddle), I pushed up beside my lord the king; for I was ever ill at ease when he went a-hunting the boar, seeing how boldly he would expose himself to the onset of that most savage beast.

"Beseech your Grace," I said, "to have a care of your person this day. Will you not be content to keep the hounds in view, and leave to younger men that which they covet—to go in with the spear?"

"Maurice, Maurice!" answered my master, "was that the kind of counsel you were wont to offer when we lay

in our camp at Acre. By the rood! gossip, thou'rt parlously changed since you took to mumbling aves at odd hours."

"But, sire——"

"Hark to Ribaut!" cried the king, as a hound's challenge sounded in the combe. "Va outre, Ribaut!" he sang out with a true huntsman's cheer; "hau mon valet! hau lo-lo-lo! veleci, veleci, allez mon petit!"

From the far side of the covert came Hildred's cheer.

"Hala-ila-la! tayau, tayau! hau l'amy après! veleci y dit vrai!"

Then the pack opened in chorus.

"Velelau, velelau, veleci! tayau, tayau!"

"Sangdieu! was there ever sweeter music heard?" exclaimed the king, as, turning el Bravo's head, he trotted lightly down the slope to the upper end of the combe, so that when the chase began he should be even with the hounds. All this time there sounded a great clamour in the dell, the baying of hounds, the shouting of men, and the braying of horns, to cause the boar to break his bay. It came at last. The notes of the hounds suddenly ceased, save for the impatient yelping of the young hounds, for they were running their game in view along the bottom, towards where we stood. Then was there great bustle among the prickers and others who had dismounted to enter the thicket, each man seeking his horse and climbing into the saddle, eager for a start.

There came a crashing in the thorns near where we sat, my lord the king and I, with Sir Aymer de Valence at his other rein. Then the outmost bushes parted, and within ten paces of our horses' feet a mighty sanglier appeared in the open and dashed away across the short turf. Close behind him came the leading hounds; it had

seemed impossible to one who had not experience of the speed of a boar that so heavy a beast could gain on these high-bred raches. Yet did he so, and anon we were all thundering after the flying pack.

"Ha! y fuit la, mes chiens; y fuit la! ha, ha! tayau, tayau!"

Ah! but it was a gracious, a soul-stirring sight as the chase swept out upon the windy upland of Ganderdown. We bore along by Cheriton and Kilmeston upon our left, and Beaworth upon our other hand; then, bending to the west and sinking the steep side of Upham Whitehill, we picked our course through the wet meadows lying around Bishop's Waltham.

II.

Of the great peril into which King Edward came; of the gallant feat of a squire of Lincoln county, and of the heavy tidings from the North.

Two long leagues and more had we galloped before this good boar gave signs of sinking. He had run the hounds out of view in the first burst, compelling them to put their noses to the ground, whereby the pace was somewhat slackened. Yet it remained great—so great that none but the fleetest and stoutest could live with the pack. I have said that my Welsh garron had speed and bottom; both were well tested on this day. Far across the plain stretched the line of hunters, some dismounted, ruefully gazing on sobbing steeds, ridden to a stand; others labouring on, though with faint hopes of fleshing a spear. De Valence had fallen out; a sharp flint had sprung up and wellnigh severed the near fetlock of his good horse—a cruel sight. I reined up and offered him my Welshman, which was still fresh and pulling on my arms. But de Valence's first thought was for his master.

"Ride on, Sir Maurice!" he cried, "heed not for me: ride like Sathanas himself, and look to the king. See he come not in jeopardy."

So I rode on. There was nobody near the king but myself and one other, a young squire of Lincoln county, of gentle blood but, as men said, greatly straitened in means, who had lately come to us in the suite of Sir Robert de Clifford, then on a visit to the Court. Hildred, the master huntsman, had led the chase for the first league, but now he was entangled in the plashy meadows about Waltham, and soon there was none other in sight. The hounds never wavered on the line, but carried a fine head, for the king thought no pains too great to obtain a level pack. We thence rode on in silence till we began to sink the hill towards Swanmore. Then, at length, the boar showed symptoms of failing strength. We viewed him heading straight for Waltham Chace, which lay like a grey hedge about a league before us. Another mile, and the hounds ran from scent to view, and we saw the end was near. My friends, it came not a moment too soon for me. I know not how my lord the king felt—he showed no token of distress despite his threescore and eight years; and his Andalusian, though flecked with foam and soiled with mire, still carried his crest erect, and brought his hocks well under him at every stride. But my arms were trembling, my temples throbbed like Saracen drums, my throat was like the Syrian desert. My good garron, too, was labouring heavily; every stride threatened to be his last. Had the boar before us carried hoofs of fine gold and tusks of pearl, I must have drawn rein in sheer mercy to my suffering steed. But I could not leave my lord the king to go alone. I knew too well what would happen when our quarry turned to bay. The king loved his hounds too well to leave them at the mercy of that furious beast.

The noble sanglier swam the river above Waltham

mill; on the south bank was a large osier-bed; I saw his tusks gleam as he halted for a moment on the skirts of it, turning to view his pursuers. The leading hounds were within half-bowshot of him; as their deep notes of vengeance struck his ear, he tossed his mighty head, wheeled sharp round and plunged into the thicket. Then we knew the supreme moment was at hand; the sanglier was about to stand his bay. It is the moment of danger, greatly coveted by gentlemen of mettle, forasmuch as it is the right of the foremost rider to press forward and deliver his thrust from the saddle. But the ground did not admit of the approach of a horse; had the huntsmen and prickers been at hand, they and the knights present would have dismounted and entered the thicket on foot, so that they might surround the bay, and meet the animal with their spears. For at such times the boar will run vehemently at anything he seeth before him.

I was nearest the king when the boar entered the osiers, yet somewhat far behind him; my nag, as I have said, being at the end of his powers. The squire of Lincoln county, Walter le Marmion, had ridden up the far side of the water at the mill; a wide and deep channel with miry sides lay between him and us. My eye was on the king; I doubted not that he would halt and allow the hounds to set their bay, till some of the straggling horsemen arrived. What was my dismay to behold him galloping towards the osiers, whence came the clamour of the bay! He pulled up at the end of the hard ground, dismounted, and I saw that he was for entering the thicket.

"Hold, sire," I cried, in an agony of fear—"hold! the prickers will be here anon. For God's sake, hold!"

But if he heard, which I greatly doubt, for my voice

was faint, he heeded not. I was helpless; it was like an evil dream; I saw the awful danger, and could not move from my place to avert it. I, too, dismounted, and followed the king on foot; but though I was younger than he, my limbs were not so supple, and my breath was scant. By Heaven's grace, there was better help at hand. Marmion, who had found his error in riding along the north bank, saw the king leave his horse, and knew the peril; for all that he was young, he was a skilful forester. He hesitated not a moment, but sprang to the ground, spear in hand, plunged into the icy water, and swam to the hither bank. Then he ran swiftly across the meadow and disappeared in the osiers, while I hobbled up as best I could.

I came on the ground in time to witness the end. The hounds were baying furiously, three or four of them lay torn and bleeding, dead or dying, frightfully gashed on flanks and loins. The rest formed a dense ring round the boar, which wheeled in turn as the raches pressed on him. On the far side of the ring from me stood the king; Marmion was some paces on his right, flourishing a kerchief to tempt the boar to charge him. But the brute, as if conscious of where his dearest vengeance was, valued him not; and violently tossing aside the hounds before him, rushed with fury on the king, who aptly composed his body and ordered his spear to receive him. My master's eye was as true, his nerve as firm, as of yore, but, alas! envious age had robbed his muscle of some of its strength. The blade struck fair on the vital spot between the eyes; howbeit, so great was the force of the rushing beast that the steel glanced and entered the thick flesh of the neck. By the mercy of the saints, the pain caused the boar to swerve. I myself now saw the white tushes,

like sabres of the infidel Moors, within a hair's-breadth of the king's thigh. He, still gripping the ashen shaft, was thrown to the ground by the violence of the charge. The boar turned to wound him. Now the tushes of a boar cannot rip downwards, but upwards only, so the king clapped close to the boggy soil, and escaped unhurt at the first onset. But had help not been at hand, it is like he must have died in the end, unless Saint George had wrought a miracle for his safety, by reason that the nature of a right sanglier is cruel and unforgiving. There followed no miracle, but truly a deed of fine woodcraft. Walter le Marmion, seeing the king's peril, met the boar as he turned, and, with true aim, plunged his spear-blade featly behind the beast's shoulder, and held on. It was the death-wound, and fearful it was to witness the struggles of the creature—mute, for the boar of the forest suffers without cries—but striving to wound and kill to the last.

Slowly, and sorely bemired, King Edward rose to his feet. He was pale, for the fall had shaken him rudely, and bareheaded, his hood being thrown back on his shoulders. It touched me sadly, even at that moment of stress, to mark how time had thinned and blanched the hair I remembered so thick and dark. He stood in silence for a few moments gazing at the dead quarry, in which the two spears were still fixed—the first in the shaggy neck, the second in the heart.

"My poor hounds!" quoth he sadly, casting his eyes round the mangled pack. "A friend in need," he added, looking first at me and then, kindly, on the young squire.

His voice was faint, and he gasped for breath, as he leaned his shoulder against a pollard stump. But, recovering himself, he waved me aside as I offered him support, and resumed in a stronger tone—

"Fear not for me, Maurice; my old carcase has come by no damage. But after threescore a man rallies not from a rude fall as quickly as of yore. A friend in need, I say; Maurice, know you the young man? Is he a gentleman of name and arms?"

Le Marmion was standing astride of the carcase, warding off the great hounds which bayed fiercely in a circle, eager to rend it. There was nothing in his dress to mark his rank, even if it had not been drenched and darkened with his plunge in the river. He might have been a common pricker or one of the humbler attendants of the hunt; yet there was something noble in his bearing beyond the general run of men. His countenance was flushed with the chase; fair curls clustered thickly on his bare head; his clinging jacket of Lincoln green displayed a tall and well-knit frame.

"He is Walter le Marmion of Shakingdon, sire," I replied, still gasping for breath, "an esquire of Lincoln county, lately come to Itchenstoke in the train of Sir Robert de Clifford."

"Sangdieu! a proper gallant," exclaimed the king. "Is he of the house of Scrivelsby, think you?"

"The same, sire, and descended of Fontenaye. He is nephew of Sir Philip le Marmion of Scrivelsby, your Grace's hereditary champion."

"Ha! Sir Philip—who proclaimed my challenge on Coronation day?" exclaimed the king. "No better blood in England, pardie! Right glad am I it is so, for now I know what guerdon he will prize most for his service this day. Tell him to wind a mort, then, and let it be a treble one. I have no breath left to spare, but we must call our company together, if there be any within hearing."

Le Marmion, at my bidding, put his horn to his lips

and winded a right mort—*tone, ton tavern, ton tavern, ton tavern, tone* — repeating it thrice, whereby it was made known as far as the clear notes were carried on the breeze that a sanglier of royal quality was laid low. Then we rested until peradventure some prickers or purlieu-men should arrive to clean the boar. The hounds were quiet now, resting, lapping water, or licking each other's wounds. Ever and again le Marmion winded his horn, adding to the mort the call to the company; but it was long before any answer came. At last, when I was ill at ease lest my lord the king should be struck by a chill, for he was very wet, we heard an answering horn.

It was that of Hildred, the master huntsman, who, having worked his way through the meadows of Waltham, followed on our tracks, swearing horribly, I make no doubt, for such was his wont when matters went crossly. With him rode Sir Thomas de Clare, the king's Steward of Waltham Chace, much abashed and out of countenance, seeing that no man loveth to be cast out in pursuit of game, be it hart or boar. Then there gathered to us others by degrees, and the king, who had not spoken a word to le Marmion, which I thought strange, seeing that, under God and the saints, he owed his preservation to the esquire—the king, I say, called a silence, and spoke as follows to the company:

"Messieurs, it is enjoined upon every knight that he use not his dignity solely to his own advantage, but that he shall take note of the actions of those who have not earned their spurs, so that the order may be duly recruited by the addition of those who are worthy of the accolade. This day a signal service has been rendered to ourselves, and through us, to the realm which God hath set under

our rule. It is our purpose to reward this service in the very place where it was performed, and thereby to acquit ourselves of a debt of gratitude, which, nevertheless, we shall ever bear in remembrance."

Now, the circumstances of the king's deliverance from peril had been bruited among the company as they reassembled, and all applauded the gallant words.

"Walter le Marmion," continued the king, drawing his short hunting sword as he stood beside the carcase of the boar—and then men perceived what was to be the nature of the guerdon.

The esquire stood before the king—the boar between them. First the young man blushed like a damoysel, and then turned very pale: but he stood erect and motionless, as became a well-trained soldier.

"Kneel down, and let that be thy hassock, young sir," quoth the king, pointing to the boar and smiling, for the wet ground under the long, reedy grass was deeply trampled with mire and gore. Le Marmion bent his knee on the rough, dark flank of the beast, and the king, touching him lightly thrice on the shoulder with the naked blade, said:

"Gautier le Marmion, au nom de Dieu, Saint Michel et Saint George je te fais chevalier. Soyez preux, hardi et loyal!"

Then, raising the young man to his feet—

"Avancez, chevalier, au nom de Dieu!" and, embracing him, added—"from our heart we thank you, gallant Sir Walter, for your ready help this day."

"Oyez, oyez!" we all shouted in acclamation; and truly the tears stood in my old eyes, in part from gratitude for the safety of my master, and in part from warmth

of feeling to the young gentleman who had so bravely secured it.

Then, leaving Hildred and his men to clean the boar and give the offal to the hounds which had so well earned their accustomed reward, the king remounted el Bravo and summoned Sir Thomas de Clare, Sir Walter le Marmion and myself to ride home with him. Itchenstoke lay fully three leagues to the north, but the day was yet young, and we rode leisurely, conversing on the incidents of the chase. The king had recovered marvellously from his shaking, and rallied le Marmion on his wet garments. When we were still a league or more distant from our journey's end, we descried a knight and his valet pricking at speed towards us along the downs.

"Here is one that beareth tidings," quoth the king, "and I mislike his gait, for the bearer of good tidings is ever more prone to tarry than to speed. Please God it be not some fresh unwisdom of my son and his friends!"

"Methinks I recognise the sorrel palfrey of Sir Robert de Clifford, sire," I observed, "who has ridden forth to see how the chase has fared."

Now de Clifford, who was the king's lieutenant on the Scottish Marches, had purposed to hunt with us that day, but, inasmuch as messengers from the north had arrived just as we were on the point of starting, he had craved the king's grace to be excused, in order to peruse his despatches.

"How now, Sir Robert?" cried the king, as de Clifford (for it proved to be he) reined up beside the path. "Man! but I am vexed for thee. Thou hast missed the gallantest chase that I have seen these ten seasons past. Were the despatches, then, of more moment than the hanging of some rascally Scot or the

complaint of a pillaged prior? See now! thou art pillaged thyself," waving a hand towards le Marmion, "for I have despoiled you of your best squire."

"The newest, sire," replied de Clifford, "for he came to me but three weeks since bearing letters of commendation from the good Earl of Lincoln. If he be the best, why—the best I have is always at your Grace's disposal. I am grieved, sire," he continued with a grave countenance, "to be the bearer of evil tidings——"

"Said I not so, Maurice?" interposed the king, shrugging his shoulders and making a quaint grimace.

"They are of a nature," resumed de Clifford, "that will not brook delay in your Grace's consideration."

"I am wet, weary, and hungry, good Sir Robert," answered the king. "I leave it to your discretion whether I am to hear these tidings fasting or full."

"Alas, my liege!" quoth de Clifford, "I have no choice but to take your commands at once, for within an hour I must be on my way to the Scottish border. There is open rebellion broken out among the Scots. The Earl of Carrick has slain John Comyn with his own hand, and has called on all men to support him as rightful King of Scotland."

"Ha-a-a-h!" hissed the king, in an accent so strange that it startled me; and said no more, riding on in silence for a space. Then he inquired sharply—

"From whom have you this news?"

"From Sir John de St John, your Grace's sheriff of Dumfries," was the reply; "there is no room to doubt it."

The king said no other word, but quickened his pace, and we performed what remained of the journey at a hand-gallop, and in silence.

Now this silence of the king was to me, who knew his moods so well, a sure sign that he was deeply moved. When matters of lighter offence crossed or disappointed him, my master's wrath would flare out in terrible fashion; his speech would grow thick, and biting, violent words would crowd to his lips. But such fury cooled quickly, and then—none so anxious as he to atone for any injury he might have done to any man in his anger. Twice or thrice only had I known him to brook affront mutely, and each time his vengeance had been sure and terrible.

Summons were issued for a Council to assemble early in the afternoon. The king allowed himself no more time than to change his hunting clothes and take a hasty repast. He ate alone and in silence; summoning de Clifford to his closet immediately after, he remained shut up with him until the hour appointed for the Council. Then de Clifford rode off on the London road, and the few privy councillors within summons assembled in the great hall, Sir Aymer de Valence being the chief, as being in rank above all the barons, saving only Henry of Lancaster.

The king entered the council-chamber leaning heavily on my arm. These tidings from the north, coming suddenly upon him when he was weary with the chase, seemed to have added ten years to his age; he walked with difficulty, but his speech was grave and clear.

"Messieurs," he said, "we are summoned to action when most we hoped for repose. Sir Robert de Brus, the Earl of Carrick, upon whom, as ye witnessed in our recent Council at Westminster, we reposed our confidence and entrusted with high authority in our realm of Scotland, hath most traitorously and violently broken

his faith, declared open rebellion against our rule, and foully slain John Comyn of Badenoch, whom we lately received to our peace. We do not greatly fear that the Scottish people will rise with him; nevertheless we must prepare for war."

The king paused, breathing heavily, then rose to his feet. There lay before him, as always when the Council was assembled, the Gospels in a cover of heavy pigskin, richly stamped and clasped with silver curiously wrought. Laying his left hand on the tome, and raising his right aloft, my master resumed.

"We vow before God and the swans to take no rest—to follow no enterprise—until this foul murder under trust is avenged; and, when that is accomplished, we swear to bear arms no more against Christian men."

Again the king's voice ceased as he sat down. When he spoke again, it had regained its usual tone when business was on hand.

"Our vengeance must be swift and heavy, lest the fire spread. Therefore do we appoint our loved cousin, Sir Aymer de Valence, to be commander of all our forces and supreme commissioner in Scotland, and we lay upon him our commands to proceed with all speed to that country, to take the traitor Robert de Brus, whom we declare hereby forfeited in all his lands and honours, and to bring him before us wherever we may be. We direct him, further, to take and summarily hang all others his accomplices in this most bloody deed, and to put down by force of arms all gatherings of our Scottish subjects, other than those under our faithful officers. Have we your approval, messieurs, in these measures?"

All present signified their assent.

"For ourselves," continued the king, "we propose to

ride to Westminster with all speed, and thence, after taking counsel with our son, the prince, and with our Parliament, to follow in person to Scotland, should this rebellion most unhappily continue."

Further measures were then agreed on. Despatches were prepared for Sir Henry de Percy, the king's sheriff in Carrick and Ayr, and these it was resolved to commit to the keeping of the young knight Sir Walter le Marmion, for the king had a quick eye for a good horseman and a ready hand. It was his Grace's pleasure, also, that I should travel with de Valence and le Marmion—"for," said he, "I shall burn for tidings—tidings—tidings. Thou canst write, Maurice, and write well. Keep me well informed, and take heed to thy safety."

So it came to pass that about five hours after noon I rode out in the train of Sir Aymer de Valence, with Sir Walter le Marmion. Three knights we were, yet were there but two esquires, those of de Valence, by reason that Marmion had not had time to attach one for his own service, and I, as befitted my vocation, bore no arms saving only a misericorde or dagger, wherefore I had no need for a squire. Yet we had with us six men-at-arms, with valets, grooms, and other attendants—in all some forty horsemen with sixteen led horses. There lay before us between one hundred and thirty and one hundred and forty leagues of march; Sir Aymer, let him speed as he might, could not reckon upon accomplishing more than eight long leagues each day; therefore with such a train as we had it would be seventeen or eighteen days before we could enter Scotland, even should all fare well with us. We travelled far into the first night and lay at Farnham, entering London the next day two hours after noon.

Of le Marmion I shall have much to tell hereafter, far more than might be deemed likely, seeing that I was nearly forty years his elder—a gulf which separates two men so widely that it hardly brooks friendship between them. Yet this young chevalier had come so suddenly to fame by his quick and sage courage, he had performed such signal service to the whole nation by saving the king's life, that I bestowed more notice upon him than otherwise I should have been disposed to do. He had come to Court, as I have said, in the suite of Sir Robert de Clifford, but of the single man-at-arms, four light horsemen and six bowmen (which made the proper complement of his lands of Shakingdor), not one was forthcoming at the last muster, so sorely had the fortunes of his house dwindled before he became its head. In truth, I learned afterwards that there had been some ungenerous merriment among the better-furnished gentry, because of the young man's old-fashioned equipment, and specially by reason of the quaint figure and speech of his solitary attendant—a Fenman from Lincolnshire, whose age can have been nothing under the half hundred. As I looked more closely at them—master and man—there was something that made my old heart warm to them, something that spoke to me of an ancient race which had not fared too fatly among the greedy Gascons, swarming of late more and more thickly in our land. There was that of modesty in le Marmion which goes so well with the flush of youth, yet which is almost the first grace to vanish from comely faces like his when they go forth into the hard world.

The Court gallants might jape and sneer, as such feather-heads do use, at the young knight's homely and antique equipment, and at the rustic bearing and harsh

speech of Michael the Fenman, yet not a man of them all could look without delight upon the horses of the strangers. Of these there were but three—Marmion's destrier of Spanish blood, and two quick-stepping, well-ribbed hackneys, models of strength and activity, of which the Fenman rode one and led the other as a sumpter-horse. Upon the knight's charger it were difficult to bestow too high praise. From his firm thick crest to his solid, flinty hoofs and well-set pasterns there was not a point upon which the most jealous critic (and what critics be there so jealous as those of horseflesh?) could have laid the finger of blame. Sloping shoulders gave assurance of ease to the rider; a broad brisket, wide nostril, and deep ribs warranted endurance and wind; while long powerful thighs and sweetly modelled hocks bespoke high power of speed. Altogether Lightheart, for so his master had named him, was such a steed as the eye loves to dwell upon, and of the horse's quality none could be in doubt who saw him led forth on that evening, as fresh and full of fire as if the hunting of the great boar in the morning, which had strained the powers of many a costly animal, had been no more than easy exercise for him.

III.

Of Mistress Challice de Roos, and of her opinions about matrimony.

"TILL I am married! have I not told you every time you have mentioned that tiresome matter—and the saints alone know how often you have done so—that I have made up my mind *never* to marry?"

"Oh yes, madame; you have—lately at least—spoken very decidedly about your decision to remain single. But a maiden's future—always saving your gracious favour—does not rest in her own hands. It lies with our Lady and the saints to fashion it at the appointed time. Besides—still craving your patience—it is the manner of maids to forswear matrimony. Many a buxom mother I could point to that I have heard in times past declare that she would as lief hold her hand in the fire as wed with a man. Yet when the right man came, the vows—where were they? For I was not born last year, madame, nor, for that matter, within the last forty years."

The first speaker gave an impatient push with a very neatly slippered foot to the stool on which it rested.

"I think, Gillian," she said, with just so much dignity

as is at command of a damoysel at the moment when her tirewoman has thrown heavy masses of hair over her features, "I think it were more becoming if you paid greater attention to what I tell you, instead of babbling continually about the doings of your gossips. In some respects I am a little different from the persons you describe as 'buxom mothers,' and perhaps more determined to carry into effect what I say. I repeat—I have made up my mind *never* to marry. Let that suffice."

Gillian, as the knowledge of her conversational powers which I have since acquired compels me to believe, cannot have been without material for rejoinder, yet was not capable at the moment of articulate speech, by reason of sundry hairpins which she held in her lips. But whereas it is contrary to the nature of things that silence should prevail when two women are together, Gillian's mistress, rising to her feet as soon as the hairdressing was complete, resumed the theme which she had just proscribed.

"Of course," quoth she in a tone of childish banter, "you are a foolish old woman, and it does not really concern me to the value of two hairpins what you say, and even less what you think. But I find it vexing that you persist in treating me as if I were still a child with no mind of my own. I would have you to know that I *have* a mind, and what is the use of a mind if it may not be changed?"

Gillian, being now busy about the lacing of a sky-blue bodice, had other pins in her lips, and postponed her reply; therefore her young mistress went on—

"I have changed mine lately, as I have told you. It is quite true that when I was very young I used to talk to you about my marriage, as if it were something as certain

to come to one as a first communion. One gets that habit, you see, from hearing older women talk, and from reading romances like 'Sir Bevis de Hampden,' where love comes and marriage follows as regularly as seedtime and harvest. But at my present age" (it could not have been more than a score of summers) "I perceive clearly enough that I am not in the same position as other women. In the first place, I have never felt the slightest inclination to be in love; I fancy I am so constituted that I am not capable of the feelings which other people describe. But the chief obstacle—that which makes it impossible that I should ever marry—is that I am so wickedly rich. When a man looks softly at me, I cannot but perceive that he is reckoning up my gold, and calculating how his power would be increased by wedding the Lady of Kendal Honor. I tell you, Gillian, that I will not listen to any man until I am sure that it is myself, and not my money-bags, that attracts him."

"Madame has but to look in front of her at this moment," replied Gillian, straightening herself from her task and pointing to a polished steel mirror before her mistress, "to see what brings to her feet the gallantest knights in the Court of King Edward—the saints defend him!"

In truth the mirror gave back but a dark reflection of the fair face and brilliant figure before it. The lady threw an impatient glance at it, as she stamped her foot and made reply—

"Gillian! how can you be so stupid? Can you not understand that it is as odious to be courted for one's skin and teeth and hair as for one's wealth? Any doll will do for that, and better too, for dolls will last for ever with ordinary care. No; it is *myself* that must be loved,

if love it is to be; not my pink cheeks and yellow bezants. And it is because no man ever looks beyond one or other —ever cares to know anything of the being that possesses them—that I am determined no man shall be master of either."

"Ah, madame," rejoined the elder woman, shaking her head with that indulgent sagacity that comes with years to all good women, "be not ungrateful to the good God for His gift of beauty, nor to Saint Herbert of Derwentwater for the wealth he has guided into your hands. The hour may come—nay, if I know aught of madame's nature, it must come—when you will be thankful to both for giving you so much to bestow."

. . . .

I have been at pains so far to repeat this dialogue exactly as it was reported to me by Gillian the tirewoman at a later day, because this is a convenient way to bring before those who may read these lines the portraiture of a damoysel about whom much will have to be told in the course of this narrative. I have found it expedient in the service of my lord the king to converse often and freely with persons even of humble degree, gaining thereby an insight into circumstances and character which I could never have acquired had I associated only with those of my own rank. The conversation I have repeated took place in the castle of Kendal, where Sir Aymer de Valence, Sir Walter le Marmion, and I lay on the thirteenth night after leaving Itchenstoke, the rest of our company finding lodging in the town.

Kendal is a fair town, the great wool market of the north, lying right on the king's highway, on the southern skirts of that mountainous region which divides England from Scotland. The castle of Kendal, standing upon an

eminence above the town, had come by inheritance to young Mistress Challice de Roos, together with many leagues of hill and dale, mountain and moorland, which spread far around it on every side. The good knight her father, Sir Thomas de Roos, had fallen in my lord of Lancaster's expedition to Gascony in the year 1295, while she was still a child. Her mother, Katherine de Strickland, of the ancient house of Sisergh, survived Sir Thomas but long enough to behold in Challice the promise of beauty beyond the common—even among the de Roos, whose beauty hath passed into a proverb—leaving her daughter the sole heiress of the honour of Kendal. In such wise Mistress Challice became absolute mistress of a great seigneury, with power of life and death over her vassals, right of frank chase and free warren upon her lands, and of fishing in the sea which bounded them on the west as far as an archer, riding into it at ebb-tide, could shoot an arrow. The estates were so wide, so rich and so well-peopled, that their owner never found difficulty in meeting the feudal obligation to send to the king's host, whenever need should arise, twenty-two men-at-arms, with attendants and grooms, one hundred and fifty "hobelars" or light horsemen, and three hundred bowmen under a captain. The dalesmen of Kendal and Fawcett Forest were reckoned among the readiest, the best equipped, and the stoutest of those which mustered from time to time before the king's lieutenant. The only fee payable for this great domain, besides the military service, was one soar hawk rendered annually at Winchester on the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin.

Challice de Roos, therefore, as lady of the honour of Kendal—the Lily of Kendal, as her dalesmen loved to call her—received into her small hands all the power and

dignity which had passed from the mailed grasp of the dead Sir Thomas; for such is our feudal law of inheritance.

All the power and dignity, it is true, but not quite all the freedom. By the same code it is prescribed, as is well known to all men, that, in the event of a maiden succeeding to the possession of lands, she becomes a royal ward, and that the king has absolute disposal of her hand in marriage. Now this, it will be allowed, was a very important limitation on the liberty of a damoysel who, as she informed her tirewoman, had a mind of her own. There is no lack of instances wherein the predecessors of our king have exercised this right ruthlessly with a sole view to the consolidation of military strength or the reward of successful commanders. Not only could I record, were that expedient, instances wherein a monarch has disposed of his ward to a dull, an aged, a debauched or a wicked baron, but, what is even worse, such marriages have often been sold to ambitious or avaricious subjects, perhaps to discharge some private debt. When a marriage is sold in this way, it is treated purely as a matter of merchandise, which is surely a thing most contrary to the nature of a sacrament, and ought to be forbidden by Holy Church.

Thitherto Mistress Challice had been little concerned about her own destiny. My lord the king had appointed Sir Blaise de Strickland, her own mother's brother, as her guardian and steward of her household, and under care of this gentle old knight she had lived, far from the Court, a little queen among her own people. Suitors, of a truth, had not been few, as was but natural, by reason that so much wealth seldom goes with such dazzling beauty; yet among them all not one could make vaunt of higher favour than a courtly reception and a bright smile.

As for Gillian, the Lily's chief waiting-woman, surely never was there more perfect understanding between mistress and maid, albeit they were of different, and once hostile, races. Challice de Roos was of our pure Norman blood, while Gillian was but the daughter of a mere Saxon dalesman. They even spoke to each other in different languages ; seeing that Challice talked in the sweet French tongue, as our gentles do mostly use, which Gillian, although she understood it, could not frame her lips to sound, but uttered the harsh and grating speech of her fathers.

Howbeit the difference between these women in station and age, in appearance and language, only brought out more strongly the fulness of their affection for each other. Gillian had been the Lady Challice's first and only nurse, which enabled her to speak before her mistress with that tone of mingled tyranny and worship—the prerogative of an old servant.

Outside the castle, the people on the lands of Kendal were still Saxon in blood and speech; but time had softened the bitterness of conquest, and the dalesmen mustered as readily under the scarlet and yellow pennon of the de Roos, and paid their rent with as reasonable a degree of reluctance, as if the Lily had been one of their own race.

. . . .

Now Mistress Challice had spoken her mind about marriage with so much decision that a man might deem there was no more to be said thereanent. Yet is this matter one wherein women find endless store for parley, wherefore the Lily resumed her discourse whileas Gillian added the last touches to her attire.

"You see, Gillian," quoth she, "of all the men who

have paid me the compliment of sighing and looking foolish in my presence, there is not one whom I could think without a shudder of marrying. Many a one makes a fair show on horseback, with a *coif de mailles* about his ears and chin, a steel plate over his face, a scutcheon on his arm, and an esquire carrying his pennon; but strip him of his shell—take him out of his shell—put him in bliaus and hosen, and lo, you! what an empty pate he carries. There is Sir Giles de Argentine, for instance, reputed the third knight in all Christendom. I felt that I had shown him some rudeness, by reason that people had put it abroad that we were betrothed. Therefore, being of a mind to make him some small amend, I went up to him at the king's revels at Westminster, and bade him lead me to the dance. He is well-favoured, as you know, and his pourpoint of scarlet velvet passemented with gold became him *à merveille*; but his countenance darkened; he shifted uneasily from one leg to the other; 'I do not dance,' was all he could find to say. 'What then is your business?' I asked, laughing outright. 'War,' quoth he, scowling like any Saracen. 'What! at a revel?' I cried. 'Oh, sir! this is a time of peace; assuredly both you and your harness should have been oiled and hung in the wardrobe till you were wanted once more, lest you should turn even more rusty than you are!'"

"Ah, madame!" said Gillian, "you should think shame to flout so noble a chevalier. Was it not he that saved our King Edward's life at Falkirk, when no arm less puissant could have scattered the vermin Scots? By Saint Herbert! I have seen Sir Giles but once, and never did I behold a more proper knight—always saving your own father of blessed memory."

"That is all true as you say, Gillian; perchance I was

too quick upon him; yet he vexed me with his solemn face and uncouth speech."

"After all, madame," observed Gillian, "there is a saying in your own language that *noblesse oblige.* Such as I may wed where we will; but for you it might be better to show favour to such a knight as Sir Giles—one to whom the king could refuse no favour—than to wed in the end with any husband whom the king may choose for the Lily of Kendal."

"The king! God bless him, then, for a gentle knight," exclaimed Challice, who, her toilette completed, stood at her full height in the feeble light of the rush candles. "Do you see *that*, you foolish Gillian?" she continued, holding up her little finger, "and do you not know that I can turn King Edward round that as easily as a skein of silk? You should have seen how his kindly old face shone upon me when he took my hand, and, raising me from my obeisance, said gaily—'Where shall I find a lord for my fair ward of Kendal?' My knees knocked together, I promise you, but I found the boldness to answer, 'Will you not let your ward find one in her own time, sire?' 'Well said!' he cried, 'well said! By our lady! but you shall, sweet Challice, and do not fear that a battered old soldier like your king will interfere to spoil fair sport.' Then he drew me aside so that others might not hear, and he spoke kindly about my father, and how faithful a knight he had been. Next, stroking my hand tenderly, he added, 'Fear not, sweet lass, that I shall ever force a husband on thee. Think you that I have forgotten the love of my Eleanor? The remembrance of it ever softens my heart to all gentle dames. No; you shall choose your own mate, my pretty bird, subject always to my approval of him as one worthy of the daughter of my old

gossip, Thomas de Roos.' So you see I have the word of a Plantagenet, Gillian, and what can be surer than that?"

With these words she swept a mocking curtsey and left the room, descended the winding stairs to receive in the great hall some guests of distinction who had ridden up to claim the hospitality of a night.

"A bonny sight it was for my old eyes," said Gillian, as she described to me afterwards what had passed between her and her mistress, "to see her finely busked in silver and white and blue. I was half laughing and half weeping, for I have seen sorrows come to highborn dames in their marriage, of a kind that yeomen and franklins have not to fear."

IV.

Of the great snow that fell after Candlemas.

I HAVE said that we rode into Kendal on the evening of the thirteenth day after leaving the king's hunting-lodge at Itchenstoke. Lancaster, which lieth seven leagues short of Kendal, is reckoned ten days from London for a king's messenger, and we had ridden from a point eighty miles south of London; de Valence, with all his train, travelled as swiftly as any light-armed post. He devoured the way; if a sumpter-horse broke down he spared no money to buy a fresh one. I speak with some carnal pride—the saints forgive me—of this journey, seeing that it is not every man of threescore and five years who could ride in harness for eleven winter days on end at the rate of eight leagues a-day.

It had not been without sore misgiving that I parted with my lord the king. The evil tidings from Scotland, following so quickly upon the shock he sustained in hunting, had naughtily affected his health, and brought on symptoms of that fell disease which he had contracted many years before in Palestine. He retired early to rest, and, before leaving, I attended him in his bedchamber. I pressed an earnest request that he would permit me to

remain behind and ride with him to London, whither it was his purpose to go on the following day, but he would not consent.

"No, Maurice," said he, when I urged him to depute another clerk to go with Sir Aymer, "no. There may be others who clerk it as featly as you, though not many, but there is none upon whom I can rely to send me such full and true accounts of matters in the north. Thou art a knight and a soldier, man, despite thy clerkly habit, and have not forgotten how to reckon forces in the field; whereas these monkish writers can count nothing surely but their beads and the rents of their abbots. This is a matter, I tell thee, of no common moment. I cannot travel swiftly myself; be thou my eyes and ears, while de Valence is my arms."

His speech, always somewhat thick and halting, was more so than its wont; he seemed to speak with difficulty and great weakness; but his will was strong that I should go, and I dared not tarry.

The weather grew wintry as we travelled north. The season had been mild thus far, but as February drew to a close the cold increased, and when we passed through my own county of Stafford snow was falling thickly. After Preston (for we took the western route as the easiest in winter) the roads were heavily drifted and our progress was very slow. We lay at Lancaster on the twelfth night, intending to pass next day as far as the priory of Shap, and to touch the Scottish march on the sixteenth day; howbeit the saints willed it otherwise, as will be shown.

When we rode out of Lancaster a furious north wind blew in our faces, blinding us with small snow, piling the drifts yet deeper. Men said we were ill advised to attempt the hill passes in such wicked weather, and told

us dreadful tales of travellers who had perished on the moorland of Shap; but ours was no common errand, and de Valence valued his own safety no whit, so that the king's service might be performed. Yet can neither men nor horses accomplish the impossible. We had been seven hours on the road, and had ridden no more than six leagues, when we reached a small hillside hamlet called Oxenholme. Far below us in the valley on our left hand I could discern dimly through the drift the roofs of Kendal town, with here and there a light sparkling in the growing dusk. Beyond this point the track leads past Grayrig, into the heart of desolate mountains. I knew this waste, having ridden through it six years before, when my lord the king laid siege to Caerlaverock Castle; but it was summertide then, and the moorland was bravely green. Now it was sheeted with deep snow, only here and there the black crags and watercourses showed the landmarks, and when Sir Aymer, after half an hour to bait, ordered the advance, I felt that we were riding to our death. I cared not greatly, for I have noted that in time of snow men's thoughts are numb, as it were; furthermore, I was so weary with travel that it had been no hardship to lie down by the wayside and seek the sleep that knows no waking. I could not, aged as I was, have followed so far, but for the dispensation which permitted me to eat meat, Lent though it were, on every day in the week what time I was on the active service of my lord the king.

Well, we pressed on for a mile or so from Oxenholme, till we came to a field of snow which wholly hid the track. Sir Aymer plunged foremost to mid-girth in the drift; in vain he spurred forward again and again. Not man nor horse could pass that way and live. The gale howled

above; the drift had drowned the dusk; night was upon us, and the bitter cold struck through the thickest woollen shirt; the steel of our harness seemed to burn the hand that touched it.

Sir Aymer swore deeply. I crossed myself and prayed that his words might not be accounted sin, but, so watchful is Sathanas for our undoing, that I felt that a good round soldier's oath or two would have been a comfort even to mine own soul.

"Trumpeter, sound the retreat!" cried our commander. "Gentlemen all, I call you to witness that the king's service cannot go farther this day. We will to Kendal, and claim a night's shelter from Mistress Challice de Roos."

And so back to Oxenholme, whence we descended the valley wherein the town of Kendal stands on the fair river Kent. An hour later and all of us, men and horses, were comfortably housed, the squires and men-at-arms in the hostelries, the hobelars and servants billeted in the town, while we knights were cordially welcomed to the guest-chamber in Kendal Castle. It is a strong house, built on a bold height two bowshots on the east of the town, garrisoned in times of peace with five men-at-arms, ten cross-bowmen, ten archers, and fifteen horsemen of the dales.

Even at this day there rises within my blind eyes a bright picture of the scene, as we—de Valence, le Marmion, and myself—sat round the great fire in the castle hall while the servants prepared supper. Thirteen days of incessant travel in wintry weather had disposed even the youngest and blithest of us to enjoy the warmth and shelter, with the prospect of a good meal-tide and a long night of repose. It is true that we were not without

grave thoughts concerning this unforeseen delay in the king's mission, and what might be the consequences; yet had we done what men might do; the rest lay with Him who giveth snow like wool, and scattereth hoar-frost like ashes. The hollow roaring of the wind sounded down the wide vent, reminding us of what might—nay, what assuredly would—have been our fate had we struggled a little farther into the wilderness.

Sir Blaise de Strickland moved about on the flagged hearth, old, small, nervous in manner, but courteously anxious to make us at our ease. He was able to add little to what we had heard already about affairs in Scotland, for the storm had stopped all communication by closing the roads.

"Had you any tidings," inquired de Valence, "of the movements of the Earl of Carrick—nay, earl no longer—of that forsworn traitor Robert de Brus?"

"None, so please you," replied Sir Blaise, "save that he had eluded the watch set by Sir John de St John, and men do say that he has gone far to the north. Great is the pity of it! Sure I ever reckoned him one of the gallantest of our young nobles—one whom my lord the king held in high honour."

"Ay, by my faith! 'tis a pity of it," said de Valence; "and there will be more pity before this wrong is righted. De Brus, de Brus! I loved him well, albeit I distrusted him at one time. Yet I believed that he had left the faults and follies of his youth behind."

"It is a strange thing," I observed, "how some men lay their conscience about a broken oath, by holding all vows void, save one which each man must hold sacred. It is a doctrine for which there is no warrant in Holy Writ, nor yet in the practice of the Church, yet I have

heard good knights aver that, unless they have sworn by their proper oath, they must be held blameless of perjury. Now my lord of Carrick—— "

"Call no man lord whom the king hath dishonoured!" cried de Valence roughly.

I paused a space, for I love not harsh speech among friends, especially from one so much younger than myself than de Valence, who was not more than six-and-twenty. Yet I bethought me I was under governance of this knight for the nonce, and that it would not beseem me to take offence.

"De Brus," I resumed, "swore his fealty on the Holy Evangels, on the Cross of St Neot, and on the Black Rood of Scotland. I heard him do so in the New Temple of London no longer ago than the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Rood,[1] and verily he was a belted earl then. Had the Council known what several form of oath de Brus held his own, then—my credit on it!—he would not be fleeing from the king's wrath now."

"Had we but known," said Sir Blaise, glancing uneasily at de Valence, who, with his chin in his bosom, glared in silence at the fire—"had we but known what was in his black heart when he passed a night with us but five weeks since, it had been easy to forestall his evil purpose."

At this moment the curtain at the stairs was drawn aside, and she whom men called the Lily of Kendal entered the hall, her hand resting on the shoulder of a pretty page. We all rose to our feet, and she greeted us with perfect grace.

"You are welcome, gentlemen," she said, "to our poor castle of Kendal. Sir Aymer, I greatly grieve to

[1] 14th September.—ED.

understand that this storm has hindered your journey on the king's most pressing service. I beg that you will make this house your own until the roads be open again."

De Valence bowed and expressed his gratitude; then, at the command of Mistress Challice, he presented us to her. Dead though I believed myself to all pertaining to this world, save the service of my king and country, yet enough of the old spirit lingered to make me long to exchange places with le Marmion. On me, indeed, the lady's glance rested kindly enough for a moment, though it is not likely that her eyes could find much pleasure in beholding my grey beard and sunken cheeks. But I noted that, when she turned to receive le Marmion's salutation, the smile faded from her lip, and her countenance assumed a grave, almost a cold expression.

"Sir Walter le Marmion, madame," explained Sir Aymer, "a gentleman of Lincoln county and the latest addition to our roll of knights, although the king's business has been hitherto of too pressing a kind to suffer him to keep his night of vigil, save in the saddle."

How well I knew—now when such knowledge was of no avail to me—and how little Marmion suspected, what that change in the damoysel's demeanour meant. It was the involuntary *garde-à-vous!* warning a maiden's instinct of the approach of the very danger which it unconsciously courts—the chill of the morning, which melts so swiftly away when life is still young.

The young knight, on his part, responded according to use and wont. Not a word passed his lips, but he flushed deep over face and brow as his eyes looked boldly into those of the beautiful creature before him.

She was, indeed, passing fair as she stood in the light

of the fire and wall-sconces, clad in a kirtle of light-blue sendal, high in the neck and tight in the sleeves, trimmed with silver lace, and over it a delicate surquayne of white cambray, like a floating cloud on a summer sky. Her hair was not hidden by any of those fantastic devices which costumiers have invented to mar the glory of our women, such as coifs, wimples, and horned head-dresses; it was dressed high and simply, with a fillet of sky-blue silk and a string of fine pearls intertwined among the dark tresses. I wished that a cunning limner of Italy might have portrayed her as she stood—a bright figure against the dark arras, with the pretty page dressed in his mistress's liveries of scarlet and gold, with ribbons of apricot and rose, her chosen colours. Yet a man less careful than myself to keep record of small matters might scarce have noted these details, having eyes only for the lovely countenance of the damoysel. That was, in truth, the most beauteous I ever beheld—save one; ah me! save one. There was a wonderful glory in the soft dark eyes and arch of pencilled brows, in the sweet lips parting so readily into smiles; but the rarest grace of all was the marvellous delicacy of complexion, such as the moist, cool air of our northern land sometimes bestows on those of southern blood. It is this that makes the English beauty endure so long; in no other land where I have come do women part with youth so slowly as in ours, fading as the heather fades, still beautiful, even when death is drawing near.

There entered the hall behind Mistress Challice a person whom we had not yet seen, whom I must mention, however, as he bore no small part in certain events which will fall to be recorded in their order. He was a priest—an elderly man—who had lived as chaplain in the house-

hold of the deceased Sir Thomas, and had continued to do so during the childhood of his daughter. Father Ailwyn was not of such a figure as would satisfy the ideas of some persons as being most convenient for the sacred office. His was no ascetic form or meek demeanour, for he was hearty and loud-voiced, debonair, and one of the most powerfully framed men I ever beheld, so that the mild and nervous Sir Blaise seemed to shrink to insignificance beside him. Indeed, had the knight exchanged his scarlet jupon lined with sendal for the priest's black robe, the parts might have seemed to be more fitly assigned. Yet, as I lived to know, Father Ailwyn was not one of those priests of whom the satirist Alanus hath drawn the portrait with crayon only too faithful—*potius dediti gulæ quam glossæ; potius colligunt libras quam legunt libros; libentius intuentur Martham quam Marcum; malunt legere in Salmone quam in Solomone.*[1]

With the frame of a man-at-arms and not despising vivers and good liquor, Father Ailwyn was learned withal, and bore a warm heart under his ample cassock, as many a poor soul could testify in the wild Westmorland dales.

One other person made up the party of eight for whom covers had been laid at the upper table—a lady somewhat advanced in years, named Mistress Alison, who, having been Mistress Challice's governess in childhood, remained with her as lady companion after she had grown up.

Pretty it was to behold the Lily dispensing such ceremony as befitted the household of a great landowner.

[1] "More inclined to gluttony than to interpreting the Word; inclined to collect lucre rather than to read books; ogling Martha more willingly than they contemplate Mark; preferring to study Salmone rather than Solomon."—Ed.

She spoke and moved with the unconscious simplicity of a girl; which was well-pleasing to me, who have noted that those who live far from Court are often prone to consider their own possessions the most important thing in God's universe, and watch eagerly for symptoms of awe or admiration in those who visit their houses.

"We are famous," they will tell a guest, "for our ale, or our beef, or our conserves," or what not, and they press him to partake, not so greatly out of concern for his comfort (though they may be careful for that also) as to wring from him a confession that the fare is the finest that ever was set before him. Even so have I seen a small sloop, when laid alongside the jetty of some sea-coast hamlet, command the close attention of gaping rustics, who examine its hull, its spars, and cordage, and pronounce it to be a marvel of human ingenuity; yet let the same vessel cast her anchor in Southampton Water or the Pool of London, and you shall hardly notice her among the great ships and galliots of all nations. Of such disproportioned vainglory Mistress Challice betrayed no trace.

The company being assembled, there was no small stir among the servants, whose liveries of yellow and scarlet made gay the lower end of the hall. The butler stood at the buttery hatch, whence each man took a dish in his turn and carried it to the board—great store of viands—a noble salmon from the Kent, good Westmorland mutton from the hill, a salted round of beef with puddings, a dish of capons, wild ducks from Morcambe Bay, French plums stewed with pot-barley, and many another toothsome dish, even to certain fresh pot-herbs, which I marvelled to behold, as betokening a right cunning gardener, seeing what great cold had prevailed of late.

Father Ailwyn left me in no doubt as to whom credit was due for this addition to the feast.

"Our English lords," he said, "do greatly err in their neglect of sallets and cooked herbs, wherein the gentlemen of France take so great delight. Beef and mutton be mighty fine fare," and his eyes twinkled merrily as he scanned the fast filling board, "but to purge a man's blood of evil humours and to keep his eye clear, he should eat of herbs once in every day. I will take you to the herb garth on the morrow, Sir Maurice, an' it please you, and show you our devices for keeping the frost at bay, so that the table shall be supplied daily with fresh green things. For the Mistress Challice hath committed the care of the garden to me."

"Then," said I, "you do not hold with those who make it contrary to Christian doctrine to eat of things save in their appointed seasons."

"Not I, i' faith!" quoth Father Ailwyn; "I would have strawberries at Noel and pippins at midsummer if I could. And the blessed Ninian was of my mind too, mark you, a saint whom we hold in special honour in the north. Have you never read how he chid the monks of Whithorn because their table was bare of green things at midwinter, and how the brother whom he sent into the herb garth to bring what he could find, went thither much doubting that the holy man was distraught with constant praying and fasting, yet beheld the borders teeming with the finest leeks? Ah! no, the ten commandments and the rule of the Church are enough for me, without works of supererogation."

A trumpet flourished in the courtyard, proclaiming all to be ready; the two ladies and their company seated themselves at the high table on the dais, as is meet, while

the household and retainers, to the number of about one hundred and forty, ranged themselves along the lower tables. Father Ailwyn besought a blessing, nor tarried long upon it, for he seemed as sharply set as we were, who had ridden so many hours in the storm.

To le Marmion, as the youngest knight in the company, was accorded the privilege of carving before the lady of the feast. I noticed that, as he stood in front of her, busying himself at the trencher, Mistress Challice took occasion to look on him more attentively than before. He, looking up suddenly, met her gaze fixed on him, and was strangely moved thereat; for he drove the knife so stiffly into the roast as to force off a naughty jagged slice, and sent a jet of gravy over the fair table-cover. Whereat Mistress Challice fell a-laughing.

"Softly, sir knight!" she cried; "this is no Scots rebel before you, but honest English mutton."

Le Marmion, colouring, laughed also; and thus simply was the ice broken between Challice de Roos and the Knight of Shakingdon.

After all had well eaten and drunk, perfumed water was handed round with napkins to wash our hands withal, and the tables were removed. Now Kendal Castle being so close to the highway, there were few evenings when strolling minstrels or players did not resort thither, for such are ever welcome in those mansions that lie far from great cities. Thus when the hall was cleared, there came before us two Spaniards with giterns, and a black-eyed wench with them, who did dance in marvellous fashion,—first on her feet, most graciously, and anon upon her hands with her feet aloft, though at times she brought them down to touch the comb in her black hair. Yea, but more wondrous things she did than that. Taking

two short straight swords, such as we call the anlace or basilarde, and setting them erect, she placed her palms on the points and danced upon them as boys commonly do use stilts.

But Mistress Challice took small pleasure in such outlandish feats. She said she preferred to see a woman as God had made her, rather than with her heels where her head ought to be. Wherefore, after the gleemen had sung a couple of ballads, she bade the seneschal give them money and let them depart. Then she said to us:

"I know not if it be your pleasure, gentlemen, to retire at once to rest. If so, my seneschal shall light you to the guest-chamber. But the hour is early; it has been our custom to deceive these long winter evenings by listening to Father Ailwyn while he reads aloud some romaunt of chivalry, of which he has great store. There are chess and the tables also, if you prefer such pastimes."

We all expressed a wish to listen to the reading. Gleemen and dancing-girls are well enough, and it is a poor house that does not receive many such for the entertainment of guests; but it is a rarer pleasure, and one that I marvel much our great lords do not more commonly encourage, to sit thus round the hearth and hearken to a tale from one who knows the art of well delivering it. In this craft Father Ailwyn mightily excelled. His voice was clear and sweetly modulated, and swiftly sped the hours while he held us enthralled with the story of Sir Eglamour of Artois.

V.

Of the love of Sir Walter le Marmion, and how the Lily of Kendal appointed him her knight.

DESPITE Sir Aymer's burning desire to get forward on the king's service, the evil weather and the snow in the passes kept us prisoners for a whole week at Kendal. I was not blind in those days, my friends, and it needed no better eyes than God had given me to discern what had arisen between Walter le Marmion and Mistress Challice. The knight, at least, had fallen in love at first sight; as for her, were it love, or merely the influence that draws two young beings together, I knew not, but I could see that she took pleasure in his presence, and encouraged him to sit in her bower while she stitched at embroidery with Mistress Alison.

Now I had conceived a warm affection for Walter le Marmion as we journeyed through England. Sir Aymer de Valence, though as brave a chevalier as ever bestrode a destrier, was but indifferent company in travel. By nature reserved and taciturn, he seemed unable to shake himself free from anxiety about affairs in Scotland, and he could talk about nothing else, and even about that only now and again. So, for lack of other company, I

had ridden chiefly with Sir Walter, loving above most things to listen to the bold hopes and frank confidence of the young and strong. The regard I felt for him seemed to be returned, for he spoke to me with the utmost frankness, and asked my counsel about many matters. Perceiving, therefore, the growing sympathy between Sir Walter and the young châtelaine, I drew much pleasure therefrom, reflecting how often from such intercourse the fairest passions take their rise. What! was it unbecoming to my vows to have regard to such worldly things? I trow not, indeed. That I had wrecked my own earthly hopes by a deed I have had to expiate by dying to the world, was no cause that I should not rejoice to witness the happiness of others. I could not but reflect what a comely pair of lovers these might be; ay, and how fittingly the wealth of the Lady of Kendal would support the slender revenues of the Knight of Shakingdon. Then they were both inclined to gentle pursuits. Mistress Challice never wearied of books and ballads, and when these failed (for the store of them in Kendal Castle was soon exhausted) she would talk of them by the hour; wherein le Marmion was a notable solace to her, by reason that, although he had no clerkship, his memory was well stored with deeds of chivalry and honest loves of man and maid. Each day, therefore, at noon Mistress Challice would bid Sir Walter to her bower, and there they would sit while she told from memory some chapter from the chronicles or he rehearsed a lay of Provence, Mistress Alison saying never a word and paying little heed, it may be, to what was said, her mind being greatly given to household affairs. I doubt that Mistress Challice's broidering did not make great progress during this week; at all events I remarked that, on the last morning

of our sojourn, the needle was sticking in the self-same golden flower-de-luce wherein I had seen it on the first day after we arrived.

The frost endured for five days; hardly might one stir half a mile from the castle by reason of the snow. But on the sixth day the wind shifted. Le Marmion and I were pacing the paved bailey within the barmekyn; I had been saying something that lay on my mind concerning the light conversation of Father Ailwyn, for I have ever held that it is unseemly in a priest to busy himself with vain tales of chivalry and worldly loves. It savoureth overmuch of the behaviour of certain friars, which of late have filled our land, wandering from house to house, as ready to tell a wanton tale or to sell trinkets and spices, as to preach the gospel and assoilzie the penitent. But le Marmion was not of a like mind.

"I cannot hold," he said, "that he who wears a frock should cease to be a man. Father Ailwyn is none the worse priest because at proper seasons he holds the company with a harmless tale. For my part, I would put more trust in a confessor of that kind than in one who is ever mumbling prayers and looking sourly upon mirth."

"And yet," I argued, "it is hard for a man to serve two masters. If he fill his mind with idle stories, how can he meditate rightly on divine mysteries?"

"Then must you begin at the top of the tree, Sir Maurice," retorted le Marmion. "You would have no churchmen in the state or in the field. Is the Bishop of Durham a worse pastor because he is a good commander?"

"I think the affairs of a great diocese are enough for the governance of any man," I replied; "but I confess that my lord the king could scarcely dispense with such a soldier as Anthony Beck. Yet I tell you, Sir Walter,

that I have observed among the people a growing disrespect for the authority of the Church, which comes, I am well persuaded, from the abuses which are growing up within the Church."

"Ah, well, it may be as you say," quoth my companion; "but as a plain Englishman I feel more concern for the affairs of this nation than for those of the Church, which is well able to care for itself. There are some signs of a change in the sky," he went on, scanning the flagstaff on the keep, where the gale blew the pennon stiffly out, displaying the red bougets of de Roos on their yellow field. "The wind seems backing to the west, and those clouds are softening. Let us view the prospect from the battlements."

We ascended a tower, through which we passed upon the stone walk whereon the sentinels paced round the whole enclosure, and whence a wide view could be had of the surrounding country. It still lay under a pall of white. On our right, as we looked southward, the ground fell rapidly to the river: the houses in the town clustered like beehives along its banks, and beyond them the dark ridge of Scout Scar closed the view to the west. Farther to the south the land spread out in a fair plain, and away to the north, beyond the keep, lay the road to Scotland through the fastnesses of Fawcett Forest.

"How long, think you, Sir Maurice, will it be before we can march again?" asked Marmion.

"By my faith, I cannot guess," quoth I; "the frost holds strong, but the season is late. We are near the sea here—yonder is the glimmer of it, beyond Arnside Knot—and the change may come in a few hours. I noted a good omen this morning—a string of wild geese flying high and heading due north."

"But even if the change were to come," resumed Marmion after a pause, "it might be some days before the roads are open."

"Not many, if I reckon rightly the spirit of Sir Aymer. He, at least, chafes sorely at this hindrance to his duty."

I spoke somewhat drily, thinking that le Marmion found Kendal Castle too much to his liking to grieve for the chance that was keeping us there. A peal of rough laughter came from a knot of fellows on the far side of the courtyard, followed by a kind of scuffle, and we moved round the ramparts to see what was ado. They did not notice us as we stood above them, busy on their sport which seemed like to become rougher than was meet. A number of idlers, grooms and a hobelar or two, had gathered round Michael the Fenman, Marmion's sole attendant, and were taking their fun out of the old man, who was busy cleaning his harness.

"Thou'rt a man o' many parts, Master Fenman," a long-limbed young dalesman was saying, "surely. A man, said I? why thou'rt a whole knight's retinue—squire and man-at-arms, groom and varlet, all packed into one jerkin."

"The master who should lose thee and a sixpence would be the poorer by it by just six pennies," retorted Michael, not ill-humouredly.

The dalesman grinned, having no rejoinder ready, for I have noted that these north country folk are harder in the head than they are quick with the tongue. But a stripling groom was ready with his taunt.

"That is a loss which thy master will scarcely come by, Michael. Not many testers to fall out of his purse, I reckon."

"Then God send thee more wit," answered the Fenman, "and me more silver, for He knoweth we both stand in need of it."

"Nay," interposed a purlieu-man from the forest, "let us not fall to sharp words, lads. The Fenman's knight is a proper gallant, and if there be fighting to be done, I'se warrant he'll bear his part in it. As for gold, there be many maids and widows in the land with pelf for two."

"He'll scarce look so high as the Lily o' Kendal, Master Rafe," quoth the dalesman.

"Looking and winning are two different tasks," interposed one sententiously who had not yet spoken — a serving-man who, after the manner of his kind, esteemed himself of finer clay than the common troopers and bowmen, yet was fain to mingle with them, if it were but to display his more abundant knowledge of the world. "Sir Walter may look at my mistress so long as he hath a mind or as she hath patience; but as for winning— why, man, thou knowest she is the king's ward, and it is the king who must declare whom she shall wed. From what I have seen of his highness, I should expect his choice to fall on some noble with a fairer following than *that*," pointing to old Michael with a sneer.

Michael was polishing a pair of leathern reins; his patience, at no time very long, was wearing out apace, for he brooked ill to hear his master, the first gentleman in Christendom, as he esteemed him, and his master's affairs made the common gossip of the stable-court. He looked sidelong at the last speaker.

"You'll be a man among the geese," he said, "when the gander's away. Go to! you'll be one of those, I reckon, that eat till they sweat and work till they freeze. An honest day's work is the medicine for such as thee,

then wouldst thou have less leisure to mell in the business of thy betters."

"Hark ye, Master Fenman," retorted the varlet, "'tis well for thee that thou'rt stricken in years, else would I cause thee to be stricken with rods for thy wanton tongue."

Michael's wrath was fairly on the boil now. He swung the reins suddenly around and caught the varlet a stinging cut upon his thin yellow hosen, which made him leap and cry aloud. I feared the old man might come to hurt among them, for this sort seldom argue long without coming to cudgel play, and the step from cudgels to steel is a short one; but Walter drew me back.

"Trust old Michael," said he, "to take care of his ill-favoured carcase. We have heard enough—too much, by my faith—let us withdraw, good Sir Maurice."

For a time we paced the ramparts together in silence, and well I knew on what my gentleman's thoughts were running. That I read them not amiss was clear when he first spoke.

"Did yon varlet speak sooth, think you, about Mistress Challice and her marriage?"

"Doubtless," quoth I. "My lord the king's mind is full of weightier matters at present; but his pleasure will be made known of a surety when he is at greater leisure."

"The king's pleasure!" he exclaimed.

"The king's pleasure, of course," I replied. "The Lady of Kendal cannot wed without it."

"Do you mean that the king will command her to marry whomsoever he may name for her husband?" and le Marmion stopped in his walk, as if some new idea had entered his mind.

"Undoubtedly, that is his right. Mistress Challice has

great possessions which it were not right should pass to any but a tried and loyal subject, and one of a rank not inferior to her own. *Si qua voles apte nubere, nube pari,*" I continued heedlessly, forgetting that had Sir Walter understood the Latin tongue he might have drawn discouragement from this saw. He only bit his lip, and we walked forward.

"Come, Sir Walter," I said, laying my hand on his shoulder, for I loved the young knight, "let us not beat about the bush. Let us be frank with each other. I perceive that you have fallen in love."

"I suppose I have," said he, laughing uneasily, "and what you tell me shows the folly of it. For it is not likely that King Edward will view the lord of the ruined manor of Shakingdon, who at the utmost can put but three sorry spearmen in the field, as a meet suitor for the Lady of Kendal, who has five hundred of the stoutest fighting men in England under her pennon. When a man is once down—down with him!"

"Esperance! man," I cried, "esperance! A man has no more goods than he gets good of; nothing can be lost that has not been won. Was it not no later than yester eve that we listened to Father Ailwyn as he read aloud the tale of Jehan of Dammartin and Blonde, the heiress of the Earl of Oxford? Have you forgotten how Blonde was ordained to be the spouse of the Earl of Gloucester, and how, in the end, Jehan won her in the teeth of both earls?"

"Ay, but Blonde loved Jehan," answered le Marmion somewhat ruefully, "and thought no shame to tell him so."

"Not at the first," I argued, forgetting that I was dead to the world with all its loves and hates, its welfare and

its woe, saving only as they concerned Holy Church and my lord the king. "These high-spirited dames are not so lightly won. Blonde of Oxford took no note of Jehan of Dammartin, save as a playmate, till he proved himself *preux chevalier.* Then she gave him her heart, and all the power of the great earls availed not to take it away."

"But the king," persisted le Marmion, "the king! Who can withstand the will of the king?"

"He hath pronounced no will," said I, "nor is he one to act the tyrant in such matters, having ever a tender heart for beauty. Nay," I continued, recollecting what Gillian had told me in her gossip, "the king hath passed his word to Mistress Challice that he will never press her to wed against her will."

"How know you that?" asked Sir Walter, turning sharply and facing me.

"Heed you nothing how I know it," I returned softly, for in sooth I was little vain of listening to the tattle of serving-maids, and, as I have said, only practised the same in so far as it furthered the service of my lord the king. "If the tale were not true, I would not tell it you, Sir Walter. You have won the king's favour already; if you would win his word also—courage! man, and you shall run as fair a chance as any belted earl."

"Shakingdon and Kendal!" murmured the knight ruefully, wagging his head; "'tis no equal match."

"The greater glory to win it," I replied. "But tell me, Sir Walter, does the lady herself favour your suit?"

"My suit!" quoth he; "I have preferred no suit, God wot!"

"At least she shows you no disfavour?" I asked.

"Nay, Sir Maurice; but how can I discern whether it be better favour than any gracious lady would show

to a storm-stayed guest? At times there is a gentle jeering in her manner, which makes me doubt she is making mirth of me. It was but yesterday that she rallied me because of the outworn fashion of my jupon, which she said was fully four inches too short according to the prevailing mode. At other times, and in company, she will be cold and readier to converse with others than with me. In short, Sir Maurice," exclaimed Marmion, stopping again and wheeling round upon me, "I am of all men most unhappy. I have known no peace since first I set eyes upon Challice de Roos; my very courage seems to die when I think that in two days we may be gone, and I shall see her no more. But why do I weary you with my complaint?"

"Why not?" said I; "once I too was young and in love. If you will have my advice, here it is. Make your suit to Mistress Challice before you leave these walls. If she hearkens—well—leave the rest to the king's grace—do not fear. If she hearkens not, no harm is done; you know the worst. No maiden ever yet liked a man worse because he wooed her."

How well I knew every symptom of the malady! From generation to generation the game is the same, yet we learn no better skill in it than our sires—no keener insight into its secrets—till we have risen from our seats and made way for fresh players. Then, when the wisdom bought with dear experience can serve ourselves no longer, we stand behind and look over the hands; many a false card we see played, but there never was a player yet who would heed a warning.

I saw Sir Walter no more alone until the second day after our conversation. The thaw had set in fairly, and it was expected that the passes would be open on the

morrow. I felt some deal anxious how the young knight might fare with the lady, but I knew enough about such matters to feel assured that elder folks had best hold aloof from them until difficulties should be defined.

Howbeit, I bethought me again of the waiting-woman, Mistress Gillian. No easy matter it was to devise opportunity for conversation with her; yet her age and hard features were my shield against such suspicion as might have been engendered by my approaching a comelier handmaiden. The guest-chamber, where we travellers lay, opened close upon the top of the winding stairs, in the same gallery as Mistress Challice's bower. I accosted Gillian as she passed from attending on her mistress with some trifling request for the repair of a torn shirt. Now, for touching the gratitude and loosening the tongue-strings of an elderly waiting-woman, commend me to a goblet of well-spiced hypocras sweetened with honey, such as I desired the butler to prepare for me, and bade Gillian attend me at noon in the guest-chamber with needle and thread. Behold her then at the appointed hour seated upon the casement, with the good hypocras at her elbow.

I was not disappointed; she needed little pressing to talk about her beloved young mistress and about the several suitors that had paid their addresses. Not one of them, it appeared, had received the slightest food for hope; each had been received courteously, as beseemed a *grande dame* in her own castle; each had been given to understand that, so far as his own merits would carry him, the prize was beyond his reach; and, this far at least, no pressure had been put upon the lady by her royal guardian.

Then, as the comforting hypocras loosened the old

dame's tongue, I began to speak of Sir Walter le Marmion, and of the great service he had rendered to my lord the king in my presence. She listened willingly enough to that, for all people, especially in the parts near unto the Scottish border, loved then to hear speech about their good king; and when I had finished Mistress Gillian began to praise Sir Walter, and was so frank as to say that he was the only knight of them all that had touched the damoysel's fancy. This was even better than I had looked for, making me confident that the advice I had given le Marmion was not amiss, and I determined to follow it up, for I see no virtue in friendship unless a man be ready to aid a friend in all honourable enterprise.

On the feast, then, of Saint Benedict it rained all the fore-day, but le Marmion, instead of going as usual to Mistress Challice's bower, remained in the hall during the afternoon, where I sat before the fire. He was restless, and strode from one side of the hall to the other. Once or twice he came and sat beside me, as if he wished to talk, but the place was full of people coming and going, bad for private conversation. At last he cried to me from the casement—

"Let us go abroad for a space, Sir Maurice; the clouds are breaking; the rain has ceased; it will do us good to take the air."

We passed into the bailey-ward. The cold had abated, and already there seemed a scent of spring afloat, which boded fairly for our speedy departure.

"Well," he began, "I have taken your advice. I have put my fortune to the touch"

"With Mistress Challice?" I asked.

"With the same," he replied.

"With what speed, my friend?" I asked again.

"Speed is not the word," quoth he. "We are just as we were. I told her I loved her; she said she knew that already. I asked her whether she loved me, and—blunt fool that I am!—whether she would wed with me.—'Love is a great word,' she answered, laughing, 'but wed is a greater.' Nothing was further from me than laughter; I pressed her earnestly for an answer.—'Plenty of time for that,' quoth she, still mocking.—'Not for me,' said I, 'for at daybreak on the morrow we march, and I must have my answer first.—'Must?' said she, becoming grave of a sudden; 'nay, but that is a bigger word than either love or wed, and one that I have not heard so often.' I burned, for who had dared to speak to her of love and wedding? I craved her mercy; I told her—what you know well, Sir Maurice—that there was no happiness for me unless she gave me her love; that if she withheld it I would seek to die among the Scots. 'Let me see,' quoth she; 'I have known you exactly seven days, sir knight. Such acquaintance is hardly warrant for a bond for life. Suppose we try first how we get on as friends.' There was no shamefastness in her manner, nor yet the boldness of some of our great Court dames; only a bewildering, half-malicious kind of raillery, that I knew not how to meet, so terribly was I in earnest. I said a man might have many friends, but only one love. 'Then,' quoth she, 'many men are mightily slandered, seeing that their loves are reckoned like their wars—the more of them the greater glory.' But I pressed her so earnestly that at last she rose and said, 'Look you, Sir Walter, he who would gain what you seek must do so either by time—to prove his faithfulness,—or by deeds—to prove his valour. Choose which you will: either come back to me in three

years from this date and ask for my answer then, or go forth against the king's enemies and do some exploit which will show you worthy of your spurs—nay, some exploit beyond the common feats of chivalry.'"

"And what was your choice, Sir Walter?" I asked.

"Can you doubt it?" he exclaimed. "Three years—why, it is eternity! Rather than that——"

"You chose to do some famous exploit. You did well, young sir, and the time is propitious, for it is like there will be work for loyal men in Scotland anon."

"And what chance do I stand with Mistress Challice when I have done her bidding?"

"Marry! but it would take a wiser head than mine to read that riddle," I replied. "This much there is in your favour—though many have sought the maiden, none has prevailed even so far as you have. No matter how I know this—thus far her heart has not been touched. Well, then, in sending you forth on this mission, either she is acting the coquette—cold and calculating——"

Walter interrupted me with a vehement gesture of dissent.

"Well," I continued, "if she be not that, then she feels enough interest in you to put your mettle to the touch; and credit me, Sir Walter, as surely as a maiden's interest is aroused in a man, so surely it is something lacking in him if he fails to warm it into something better."

One thing was clear to me—namely, that Mistress Challice did not suspect Sir Walter of those designs upon her fortune which she had detected, or thought she detected, in her other lovers. I felt content to leave matters to take their course, holding myself ready to further them in Sir Walter's favour should occasion arise, either with my lord the king or in any other way that offered itself.

For I had taken the affairs of these young people to heart in a degree that I had hardly believed possible, seeing how long it was since I had busied myself with love passages. Walter and Challice had indeed each found a way into my affections in wondrous short time. As long as I was with my lord the king, I had ever enough to keep my thoughts busy and prevent them dwelling much on a far-off past and a lonely present. But in these days of waiting at Kendal my heart was hungry for some living interest, and I found myself drawn towards these young folks in a degree whereat I marvelled.

The Angelus now sounded clear from the chapel belfry; le Marmion and I bent the knee for a few moments in silent prayer, and then turned our steps over the draw-bridge to prepare for evening meal-tide. At the entrance to the donjon stood the Lily of Kendal with her page, having come forth to breathe the fresh evening air.

"Now would I wager a dozen links of this against your misericorde, Sir Maurice," she cried gaily, holding out with one hand a curiously wrought golden chain that hung about her neck, and pointing with the other to the dagger hanging by my hip, "that I know what you men of blood have been discoursing about so privily. I have watched you from my bower this hour past, as you paced to and fro."

"Madame," quoth I, wrinkling my hard features in a smile, without which a man might hardly look on that lovely countenance, "our theme was a noble one, and one in which it might be you would deign to take some concern. Yet will I accept your wager and give you three guesses."

"Three!" she cried, "and I can declare it in one."

It tickled me to behold the expression of anxious quest

on le Marmion's countenance. "Nay, but I will give you three, madame," said I, "and win my wager withal."

"Allons!" she exclaimed, "you were discussing the merits of the new fashion of vambraces and demi-brasarts. You, Sir Maurice, maintained that nothing could be so good as well-tempered mail of the kind worn by your grandsire, which I see you prefer; while you, Sir Walter, were strongly in favour of the modern plates which the armourers of Milan have devised, and which Sir Aymer de Valence wears."

I shook my head.

"Well, then, you were talking about the order of your march to-morrow, and reckoning the chances of getting over the hills to Carlisle."

I shook my head again.

"Come," she cried, "I cannot be wrong this time. You were forecasting your plan of campaign in Scotland, and how long it would take to restore the king's peace in that land."

I shook my head a third time.

"Pardie!" said she, "if none of these things occupied your thoughts, then I pity King Edward for not having more devoted knights. Howbeit, I see I have lost my wager and must pay."

She made as though she would twist off some links of the chain, then paused and, saying it were pity to mar such fine workmanship, took it from her neck with a pretty grace of impatience. Next, with a dimpling blush, but with steadfast demeanour, she passed it round the neck—not of me, who had staked my good blade of Spanish steel with its hilt of green shark skin—but of le Marmion, who had hazarded nothing, and so passed within the hall.

"Call you that justice?" I cried, mocking, but well pleased by what I had seen. "Surely this is a new way to pay old debts."

Walter fingered the glittering links, and made as though he would take off the chain.

"It is none of mine, Sir Maurice," he said; "you have fairly won it."

"Nay, but I will none of it, sir knight," quoth I. "Know you not that the vows of my order forbid me to wear ornament or fine raiment. See! I go free, while you are bound captive by these golden fetters." Then, as we passed within the hall, I added—"Your heart is fainter than I think, le Marmion, if you refuse so fair a challenge."

Challice had given an open pledge, not of love, perhaps, but of accepting Sir Walter as her chosen knight. It was a pledge of that nature which could not pass unnoticed in a company which had sojourned so many days together, and where there were so many watchful eyes upon the mistress of the castle. Sir Walter's jupon was of dark Lincoln green, and, as he stood as usual at the trencher carving, the heavy gold links glittered clearly in the light. The chain was one which Mistress Challice had worn every night since our arrival; its absence from her neck was not likely to escape attention. And, sure enough, I soon saw a whispering round Gillian at one of the lower tables, with keen glances directed to where we sat along the dais. Next, I felt Father Ailwyn's foot on mine; with raised eyebrows he made a gesture with his hand as if touching a neck chain; Mistress Alison looked demure and somewhat severe; even Sir Aymer, who had brightened amazingly at the prospect of our speedy departure, detected something in the wind, and presently arrived at an inkling

of the matter. What is there in this world that moves the imagination so pleasantly as a love affair?

Meanwhile, the centre of all this stir, Mistress Challice herself, sat queen-like and unmoved, a trifle paler, it may be, than her wont, but giving no outward sign of what was in her mind. Many a highborn maiden, methought, will take a knight's service for the glory and excitement of the thing, though her heart be in nowise touched; yet had this damoysel never done the like before, though there had been many who desired no higher reward than to wear her colours in the lists. Even while I mused, I saw her eyes rest on Sir Walter as he carved the meat before her—eyes wherein there lay the light that shines only from one source. Howsoever, it was but for a moment; presently she turned to speak to de Valence about his journey on the morrow.

Perhaps the only one of the hundred and more persons assembled in that hall who was quite unconscious of what was going forward was old Sir Blaise de Strickland. Honest gentleman, he had passed a laborious day, receiving the reports of scouts as to the state of the roads, preparing victuals for our journey, besides the customary business to be transacted with his niece's tenants and the garrison of the castle. Such affairs the knight was wont to discharge in a certain chamber within the inner bailey, and whereas his memory had begun to fail by reason of age, he had recourse to sundry simple devices to quicken it withal. Of these the commonest and, as he assured me, the most successful, was to lay some object on the floor of the chamber near the door, so that it should catch his eye as he passed abroad. Thus it came about that, after a morning spent in business, the chamberlain's office would seem as though it had been shaken by an

earthquake, every small article lying on the floor, instead of on the table or hanging on the wall.

That very morning, when I visited Sir Blaise to discharge certain moneys which he had disbursed on behalf of our people in the town, I found him standing like one distraught, his white hair all ruffled, and his points—some unloosed, some knotted awry. His eyes were fixed on a spur which lay on the floor, beside a number of other objects. He started as I accosted him, passed his hand over his brow and chin, and said plaintively—"Beshrew me! if I can tell what yon spur is. *Voyons un peu*—that hawk's hood is seed-corn for franklin Hans; I shall not forget *that*. The parchment roll is to remind me that three new hauberks are wanted in the hobelar troop. The gauntlet is for proceedings against the salmon-poachers at Lower Levens; but the spur—the spur—nay, but it hath escaped me for the nonce. But see—I will lay this crossbow quarell beside the rest, so shall I not omit to reflect on what the spur signifies. Now, Sir Maurice, it shall be my pleasure to attend to your business. Be seated, I pray. My memory serves me scurvily sometimes, but I find this plan of aiding it with tangible objects vastly useful."

VI.

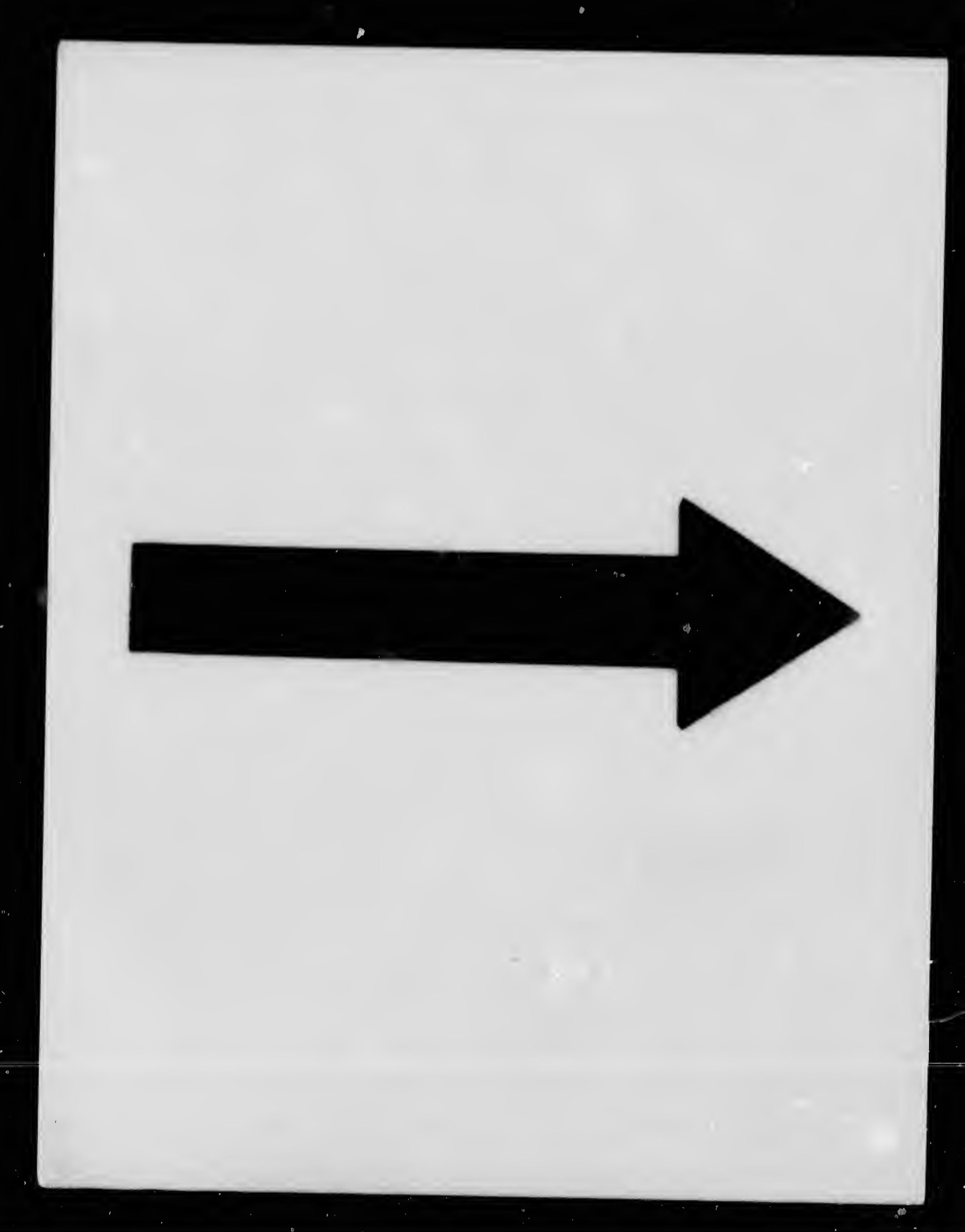
Of the gift which Mistress Challice sent to Sir Walter le Marmion, and of other matters which befell at this season.

MERRILY blared the trumpets of Sir Aymer de Valence in the gusty dawn, calling our men from the town to muster in the bailey-ward. We were to march at sunrise, and the whole household was astir to bid us godspeed, while the townsfolk crowded into the open space beyond the outer barbican; for the fame of de Valence was known to the utmost Christendie. Sir Blaise hobbled hither and thither bareheaded, his white locks fluttering in the breeze, giving useless orders which everybody received with respect, but which it entered into nobody's thoughts to fulfil. Mistress Challice, wrapped in a furred mantle, but with no covering on her shapely head save what God had planted there, stood beside the door to bid her guests farewell. Each of us in order—de Valence first, I next, and then le Marmion—dropped on the knee and kissed her hand. To each of us she made a little speech, as beseemed a châtelaine sending travellers from her roof. When it came to le Marmion's turn, methought she was going to let him depart in silence. He had risen to his feet and

turned away, when she recalled him, and, speaking low and fast, said—

"Sir Walter, the king's service hath been so urgent since you won your spurs, that you have not had time to appoint a squire, such as it beseemeth every good knight to have. Will you accept one of my naming? I have caused Father Ailwyn to write to my young kinsman, Geoffrey de Neville, desiring him to wait on you, wherever you may be in Scotland, and to place himself at your commands. You will find him faithful and of quick understanding."

It had been my purpose to avoid witnessing the parting of these two, but for the life of me I could not resist turning to see how Sir Walter received this fresh mark of his lady's favour. Never can I forget that beautiful sight—the very picture, as it seemed to me, of chivalrous romance. Ah! we may read as often as we list about such scenes, yet rarely see them in such perfection. The damoysel stood in the grey morning light—tall, pale, with coils of dark hair ruffled in the wind—sending forth her knight-errant on his quest. And Walter, meet chevalier for such a maiden, what noble purpose shone on his handsome countenance! It was the first time he had appeared before Challice in full armour; scarcely could she have wished for a worthier champion. His hauberk of mail, which it was Fenman Michael's pride to burnish, although of a fashion somewhat passed from favour, showed forth the symmetry of his arms and shoulders to better advantage than do the Milanese plates which our nobles have lately affected. On his head he wore a light *chapelle-de-fer*, whence the *coif-de-maille* was thrown back like a capuchin's hood upon his shoulders, leaving his neck and short curling hair open to view. At the throat, under



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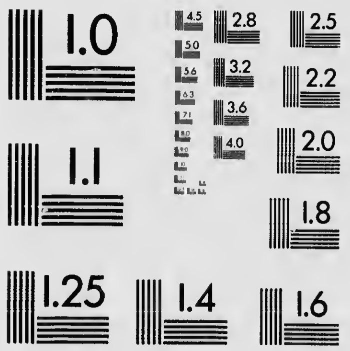

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a jupon of his own liveries, vairey blue and white, might be seen a few golden links of the Lily's gift of yester eve. Yet it seemed as though some sprite had smitten this knight with dumbness. He gazed steadily in the damoysel's eyes for half the space of a paternoster; then, dropping again on his knee, kissed her hand, rose lightly and passed out to his horse. It was then I first noted a fresh token of the Lily's favour to her knight. Round his steel cap was bound a silken fillet—straw-coloured and rose—the liveries of Mistress Challice.

"To horse!" cried de Valence, and there was clatter of harness as we swung into our saddles: then the trumpets brayed sharply; the castle gates swung open; we three knights passed through the archway amid the cheers of the little garrison within and the populace without. "A droite—tournez!" cried the captain of hobelars to his men, "En avant—marchez!" and our escort defiled after us as we rode out upon the northern road. We travelled fast—as fast as the state of the ground would allow; but some of the passes were still deep with snow, which stayed our progress and caused Sir Aymer to mutter many an impatient curse. A lonely region it was; for full five leagues we met never a traveller, save only a couple of stout yeomen with a string of pack-horses, carrying wool to Kendal mart.

I have said that in the earlier part of this journey I had found le Marmion a more spritely comrade than de Valence. Mightily were matters altered now. The young knight rode wrapt in his own thoughts, answering courteously enough, it is true, when I spoke to him, but with none of that playful fancy and open confidence which first drew me towards him.

"Ah! mon garçon," quoth I to myself, "I too have

passed that way, and found my own thoughts the best of company. *L'amour fait passer le temps*," and I added with half a sigh—"*le temps, fera-t-il passer l'amour?*"

De Valence, on the other hand, showed himself a different man from the grim warrior with whom I had hurried through the midlands. Released at length from his intolerable durance at Kendal, his spirits rose higher with every league that brought him nearer the scene of action; and he showed, whereat I marvelled, that he had been in nowise blind to what had been passing between Sir Walter and Lady Challice. Sir Aymer was so earnest in the king's service as to appear at times unconscious of the lighter affairs of his fellows; yet was he but young in years, and kindly disposed, as every good chevalier ought to be, to honourable love between man and maid. I questioned him, therefore, concerning the view he thought my lord the king would take of the Knight of Shakingdon as suitor for the Lady of Kendal Honor.

"You know the king as well or better than I or any other," answered Sir Aymer, "and how nothing delights him more than a true love match. There will be no difficulty in that quarter, I imagine: what le Marmion has to make secure is the lady's will, and the saints defend me from making a guess how that will turn!"

I mentioned the incidents of the gold chain and the silken colours (for we old men will gossip about such things, long after our own day for them is past), and I marvelled to find that neither of them had escaped Sir Aymer's notice.

"Nay, but," quoth he, "there is little in such things beyond the common amorous trifles that pass between young men and maidens. What! we are Christians in this land and may not, like the Paynim Turk, marry

every lass we cast sheep's eyes upon. Le Marmion will do his devoir all the better because he is in love, or fancies himself so. As for the damoysel—time will show whether hers is more than a passing fancy."

About this I had my own opinion, but kept it to myself.

De Valence was greatly desirous of reaching Carlisle that night, but so evil were the ways and so sore the labour upon man and beast of getting through the drifts, that before we reached Penrith, seven good leagues short of the border city, half our horses were at a standstill. Very unwillingly, therefore, our leader stayed there for the night, we being kindly entreated by Sir Hugh de Lowther, the king's constable of the fine castle overlooking the town. From him we learnt news from the north, of evil moment, indeed, yet not so evil as might have fallen out. The forsworn Earl of Carrick — nay, earl no longer, for le Marmion carried in his satchel the king's letters patent bestowing that earldom on Sir Henry de Percy, sheriff of Ayr county—Robert de Brus, I say, had raised his standard in open rebellion and had fled somewhere to the north of Scotland, where there be mountains and woods vaster than those near the English border. None knew of his exact whereabouts, nor had the commonalty risen in his cause. Sir John de St John held de Brus's lands in Annandale for the king; de Percy might be trusted to keep Carrick quiet; still, there were known to be two earls with the rebel, Lennox and Athol, both powerful chiefs with many vassals; and, worst of all, two Scottish prelates — the Bishops of St Andrews and Glasgow — had betrayed their allegiance and given the adventurer the blessing of Holy Church. When de Valence heard this, he was mightily concerned, inasmuch as these two

prelates—the primate of Scotland and the bishop of the second see in Scotland—exercised more powerful sway than many earls, for men stand in greater awe of spiritual than of temporal power, and these possessed both in large measure. Moreover, they were rulers of high ability and fiery activity.

I sat late into the night, writing all this to my lord the king; yet I urged him not to fret at the delay, as too well I wot he would. There was still time, I said; the kingdom was in no jeopardy; true English garrisons held all the king's castles in Scotland, and the great ado was to capture de Brus, and disperse his following before it gathered strength.

At Carlisle our company broke up. De Valence, with the greater part of our troop, set out for Berwick, while le Marmion and I, with ten spears, held north across the Esk, and so by way of Dumfries unto the town of Ayr. It was hard to think that war was at hand, so peaceful seemed the country and so busy the people on their farms. Oxen were drawing slow furrows in the fields, fishers hauling their nets in the rivers, shepherds driving their flocks to the hills; the only sign of unrest was the frequency of mounted patrols—ten to twenty spears in a lump—scouring the highways and upland tracks.

"I doubt," quoth I to Sir Walter, "you may have to go further afield than Scotland ere you find wherewithal to fulfil your lady's command."

. . . .

Now there is no cause, neither is it my purpose, to set forth the events of this wicked rebellion, saving only as they touched upon the fortunes of those whose story I have taken upon me to tell. He who listeth to learn how the arch-rebel was crowned King of Scots by that mis-

guided prelate, Bishop Wishart of Glasgow, and all the coil that came out of that black treason, may find the same plainly set forth in the chronicle of Brother Hildebrand of the Franciscan house in Carlisle, who did most patiently and truthfully record all that happened of note in these times. Brother Hildebrand is well known by me as a most sedulous scholar, worthy of all credence, even in those matters wherein the passions of men do most surely move them to make discordant report of the same matter.[1] My lord the king wrote to me very often while we tarried in Ayr, craving for tidings, and chiefly of the taking of King Hobbe—for so he called Robert de Brus—and of the Scottish prelates. Hard was the grip which disease had obtained upon the king—so hard that he might not stir from his bedchamber in Westminster; yet he assured me that he was resolved to march upon Scotland so soon as he should gather strength. He had sent forth orders for the mustering of a mighty host at Carlisle on the feast of the Visitation;[2] meantime, great preparations were afoot for the knighting of Prince Edward of Carnarvon and three hundred young men of gentle families.

"We hope," wrote the king, "by the blessing of the saints, to keep the vigil of St John in Carlisle; but let us hear before that—aye, long before—of some notable exploit wrought upon the Scots, and let his highness King Hobbe be brought before us, that we may give him a lesson in the manner of rightly wearing a crown."

Alack! St John's day passed, and still my master re-

[1] Sir Maurice de Bulkeley, or Brother Baldwin—to use his ecclesiastical appellation—probably refers here to the Latin work known to us as the Chronicle of Lanercost, which is known to have been compiled in the monastery of Carlisle.—Ed.

[2] 2nd July.

mained bedridden in the south, though the Prince crossed the border on the feast of St Swithun,[1] and fared northward at the head of a great array of horse and foot. Howbeit I was able to send my lord the king tidings such as it would do him good to receive—how, on the feast of St Peter and St Paul,[2] de Brus dared to await the attack of Sir Aymer de Valence in the woods near St John's town (called Perth in the speech of the barbarous people in those parts), and how the rangale[3] with him, to the number, men say, of five thousand, were driven with great slaughter to the mountains where no man might follow them. De Brus himself came near being taken, for he was unhorsed by that good knight, Sir Philip de Mowbray, and had with surety been made prisoner or slain had not he been rescued by his kinsman Sir Christopher de Seaton (whom, as being a knight of fair renown, I mourn should have fallen into such evil company). Nay, but I had better tidings than these for my master, for the recreant prelates had been seized and sent under strong guard to the king's new castle on the Tyne.

Verily, this speedy conclusion (for so it seemed to all of us) to the accursed rebellion against our sovereign lord's authority, did act like a charm on King Edward's body. The inward trouble abated fast; he wrote to me that before the feast of St Bartholomew[4] he would be able to laugh at leechcraft; and in truth he was so far recovered as to be able to journey slowly, borne in a horse-litter. He came to the priory of Lanercost in Cumberland about the feast of St Michael and All Angels,[5] where he rested for the winter among the good brethren.

And now there was nothing of such moment, whether

[1] 15th July. [2] 29th June. [3] Rabble.
[4] 24th August. [5] 29th September.

happening or like to happen, that I should write about to my lord the king, de Brus being in hiding among the great hills, if indeed he were still alive, which no man might of a certainty affirm. His wife, whom none now dared to call Queen of Scots, with his sisters and daughters, had been taken by our Prince Edward, and had been doomed, unhappy ladies, to expiate de Brus's crime by imprisonment in cages[1] at various castles in the realm; while Nigel de Brus had been brought to Berwick, there to suffer as a traitor on the gallows-tree. My mission, therefore, was at an end, and I obtained the king's leave to rejoin his Court.

This happy settlement (for so we then deemed it) was little to the liking of one man, at least, among us. Sir Walter le Marmion had received at Ayr the summons to join the prince's army at Carlisle with the modest complement proper to his manor of Shakingdon—namely, three spearmen and nine Lincoln archers. Yet as I have shown, of this following not one was forthcoming save old Michael the Fenman, so sorely had the resources of this ancient estate diminished. Now men in the enjoyment of wealth are prone to disdain those from whom Fortune hath with-

[1] Much undeserved obloquy has been cast upon the memory of Edward I. because of his supposed harshness to these ladies. But the "kages" were not such barbarous contrivances as is commonly supposed. They were constructed *inside* turrets in the castles of Roxburgh and Berwick and the Tower of London; they were made of wooden lattice strengthened with iron and furnished like a comfortable chamber (*et q la kage soit ensi fait q la Contesse de Buchan y eit essement de chambre cortoise*). For attendance upon the Queen of Scots in her imprisonment, King Edward directed that there should be engaged two waiting-women, "advanced in years and not gay," two valets and a foot page, "sober and not riotous, to make her bed, and for other things necessary for the comfort of her chamber."—See Palgrave's 'Documents and Records illustrating the History of Scotland,' p. 358.—Ed.

drawn her favour; and there were assembled in the prince's host many of the wealthiest and haughtiest knights of England. Grudging, therefore, that Sir Walter should be exposed to such slights and taunts as, by reason of his poverty, he would be sure to suffer were he to march with the prince into Scotland, I made interest with my lord the king, and obtained his commission in favour of the young knight being appointed constable of Cumnock, a fortalice belonging to the rebel James of Douglas, who, it was deemed, had fallen in the affray at St John's town. Sir Walter was set there to watch de Brus's lands of Carrick; and there he spent the winter season, the longest, as he afterwards told me, the loneliest, and the dreariest of his life.

Now Cumnock Tower stands upon a wet, windy upland, where few travellers pass; yet came there after Noeltide one who, coming, fanned furiously the flame of Sir Walter's impatience. Through all the summer and autumn months no word had passed between him and the Lily of Kendal, and greatly the knight had fretted lest he should have passed clean out of her thoughts. How the damoysel fared and how she felt were alike matter of faith with him, and foolish food is faith for a hungry man (I speak not of the faith of a Christian man but of a lover, which, to our shame be it spoken, commonly burns with a far more consuming flame). But this traveller who, as I have said, came to Cumnock about the feast of the Circumcision of the Blessed Saviour,[1] brought to Sir Walter something more substantial than faith. He was, in truth, none other than young Geoffrey de Neville, kinsman of Mistress Challice de Roos, whom she had appointed to be esquire to her knight-errant.

[1] 1st January.

Solid proof this that she had him still in memory, but there was more to boot. Geoffrey was the bearer of a gift from the damoysel to the knight—a basnet, to wit, or steel headpiece, shaped after the newest fashion, richly gilt and brightly burnished, and with a camail of glittering links to protect cheeks and neck. It bore, moreover, an ornament whereof no man had seen the like before, albeit our gallants have since that time assumed such devices to bear in battle and the lists. From the top of the headpiece rose the similitude of a falcon with outspread wings, wrought in silver and covered with yellow gold. Truly it was a cunning masterpiece of the craft of heaulmier and silversmith; and this the Lily of Kendal had caused to be fashioned in London town of set purpose to bestow upon her lover.

Aye, but there was more to boot. In such marvellous measure had the damoysel profited by Father Ailwyn's schooling that she could write in most clerkly wise, which is truly seldom to be witnessed among our ladies of high degree. Geoffrey, therefore, with the helmet, delivered a letter from under Mistress Challice's own hand. This, of a verity, Sir Walter, having no more of scholarship than other noble knights, was not able to decipher; yet the purport thereof, being made known to him by the gentle squire, did greatly stir and encourage him. Thus ran the letter:—

"A stone is a sorry gift to send unto one who craveth bread. Sir Walter le Marmion hath asked me for my heart and I sent him a helmet. Yet if he still desireth the first, let him prove himself worthy thereof by taking the second unto the most perilous place in the king's dominions and there make the falcon famous. May God and Saint Herbert of Derwentwater

have the knight in their good keeping and strengthen his arm.

"Given at our castle of Kendal on
this the eve of Saint Thomas[1]
in the xxxiv year of Edward
of England."

My friends—those of you who are still young—nay, some of you who, like myself, are withered and dry—can you not understand how greatly such a letter as this stirred the heart of Marmion? Fain was he to ride forth at once in quest of perilous enterprise; yet was he constable of Cumnock, and might not quit his post, even on so knightly an endeavour. Well he knew that the fame he sought must be found in the king's service, and that if he betrayed his devoir, his newly-worn spurs would be hacked from his heels, and his name struck dishonoured from the roll of knighthood. He led Geoffrey de Neville up to the battlements, seeking to be alone for a space with one so fresh from his mistress's dear presence, and questioned him closely about how she fared, whereupon she busied herself, what guests had been in the castle, and many other trifles such as mount into moment as soon as a man hath given away his heart.

"Look around, de Neville," quoth le Marmion, as they stood on the windy summit and gazed upon the brown hills. "Is that the kind of land where a man may gather fame? Is yon a dragon, think you, crouching in that birchen shaw, whence I may rescue a distressed damoysel, or is it but the bank where men cut peats? Is that a foeman with a hundred spears at his back coming over yonder dreary moor, against whom I may ride single-

[1] 21st December.

handed? or are they but rushes shaken with the wind? I tell thee, Geoffrey, that day after day, these five darksome months, I have spied every brake and combe, scour'd every mountain-track, yet never have I seen aught more terrible than a parcel of shepherds passing to Lanark fair, or a king's messenger hurrying to Ayr with despatches. Fame—quotha! a fine place this to learn patience; but to win fame—by the rood! Mistress Challice might as well bid me walk dryshod across the Straits of Calais."

"Sir knight," replied the squire, whom his fair cousin had fashioned for his duties and had taught the grace of ready speech, "I have learnt that fame is not wont to come seeking a chevalier, but must herself be sought and seized."

"O excellent youth!" cried Sir Walter bitterly. "It gladdens me to find that my esquire has been trained in the maxims of true chivalry. Perchance your philosophy may reveal to me how knight-errantry is to be performed by one who is tied by the king's commission in this God-forsaken land, like a baited bull to a stake."

Geoffrey's handsome countenance fell.

"Forgive me, Neville," continued Marmion. "I must not weary you with my complaint. That were a scurvy reward to one who has brought me the best news I have heard for months. See! tell me once more how this letter runs; let me get the words of it by rote, and then you shall go to refresh and repose after your travel."

. . . .

It might have been about six weeks or two months after this, I think about the feast of Saint Matthias, that my lord the king, greatly restored through the ease of his life at Lanercost, came to Carlisle in his horse-litter, I riding beside him. Wellnigh a year had gone by since de Brus

had rebelled against his liege lord, and still the traitor was at large. Some men said he was hiding in the isles of the west, wherefore the king's galleys under Bysset of the Glens did most diligently search those stormy seas through that winter, yet to no good purpose. Others, again, spread the rumour that the false King of Scots had passed over to Norway, and would return no more to trouble the realm. Of his chief friends, the Earl of Menteith, Sir Patrick de Graham, and a few other rash knights who had been drawn into his desperate venture, had been received to the king's peace—so great was my master's mercy upon penitent wrongdoers. But others had sinned beyond redemption. Those who were proved to have borne arms against de Valence, or to have been accomplices in the most foul murder of John Comyn, suffered the traitor's doom. Three knights and twelve others of gentle birth were hanged on a gibbet at Newcastle in one day; but the one whose fate I most deeply deplored—nay, I mourn for him to this hour—was gentle, gallant Sir Christopher de Seton. I besought my lord the king to spare his life,—to strain the virtue of mercy in favour of one who had done good service in the past. Never did Edward show himself more stern. Raising himself with difficulty in his bed, to which his malady returning had confined him, his eyes flashed and seemed to draw nearer together, as he said—

"Mercy! said you, Maurice? Aye, as I hope for mercy so shall I ever show it—even to a dog, were he to seek my grace. But to a perjured rebel, one of my own knights, taken in arms against myself—never! *Pactum serva!* he who cannot keep covenant shall never live as liegeman of mine."

The prince had returned to Carlisle by this time, where

by the king's orders a numerous army was retained. Seeing that the rebellion was thus at an end, I became somewhat urgent with my master that he should return to the south, where the milder air and broader sunshine might restore his vigour. But he spoke against it so vehemently that from that day I dared not renew my prayer.

"By Christ!" he cried, "have matters come to this pass with you, Maurice, that you think there is no Englishman who holds his oath sacred? Know you not — nay, did you not hear with those dull ears of yours — how I swore in the presence of my Council at Itchenstoke, before God, who made me, and by the Swans, that I would rest not till I had avenged the blood of the Comyn? The Lord do so unto me and more also if I—I who have been hanging knights for breaking their covenant—set the example of breaking mine own!"

"God forbid, sire!" said I; "but no man can say that your vow is unfulfilled, seeing that many have suffered death for that crime already."

"Go to, for an old dotard that thou art, Maurice. Much learning, methinks, hath driven thee mad. What! am I not King of Scots, and shall I turn back from the border of my own realm, without making progress through it in the eyes of all men? What reverence, think you, can a people pay to a king whom they never see—a god in a distant cloud? The kingdom of Scotland is as the kingdom of heaven in this respect, at least, that if the lord thereof delay his coming too long, there will be trouble among his servants. So speak no more to me of return, till I have fulfilled my purpose; and be not too sure that we have heard the last of King Hobbe!"

Thus we lay still in the old red city on the banks of Eden, watching the first faint flush of spring spread across

the meadows, while prayer was made daily in the churches that the king might recover strength.

One day there came to me a letter from le Marmion, imploring me to lay his case before the king. He had wished for long, he told me, to write me a letter, but, except Geoffrey de Neville, there was not one of all his company who knew pencraft better than himself; but at last there had come to his tower a mendicant friar bound for Carlisle, who willingly lent his service as scribe. Le Marmion had applied already to de Valence, asking to be relieved from his charge so that he might do some exploit upon the king's enemies, whether in Scotland or elsewhere; but for answer he got only a command to attend to his duty as constable of Upper Nithsdale. Then he went on to inform me about that of which I had not heard tell before, namely, of the gift and letter received from Mistress Challice. He urged me to crave the king's grace to enable him to prove worthy of his devoir to the damoysel.

Now it had been more than once on the point of my tongue to speak to my master concerning the affairs of Walter and Challice (I felt towards them in some sort as though they had been my own children, and in my thoughts their titles of courtesy fell into disuse), and well I knew what solace the king would draw in his sick-bed from a tale of gentle love; yet I refrained, calling to mind the saying of my own franklins in Staffordshire—

> "Who mells in what another does,
> Had best go home and shoe his goose."

But well I knew the practice of the mendicant brethren of mine order—how they were used to be more eager to spread light tidings than to preach the Gospel; wherefore

I felt assured that by means of the writer and bearer of Walter's letter, every tapster and armourer's apprentice in Carlisle would know the purport of it before nightfall; and that, on the morrow, the glee-maidens would be chanting in the streets a ballad of the loves of the Knight of Shakingdon and the Lily of Kendal.

And this, not only by reason of the busy delight taken by our commonalty in the doings of noble families, but all the more surely by reason that the Lady of the Honor of Kendal was such a great personage in the border region—her dalesmen, easily to be known by their yellow doublets turned up with scarlet, being well known in the army then assembled at Carlisle with the king.

So I hung back no more, but opened the matter unto my lord the king without more ado. His attention was awakened at once.

"Ha!" he cried, "poachers in our royal forest. Rebels on this side the border as well as the other—sangdieu! but the fire spreads."

"Sire," quoth I, "here is no infringement of your prerogative. The lady has laid her commands on a chevalier, than whom your Grace, I am well assured, has no more dutiful and loyal subject. He but proposes to obtain the royal licence to make his suite."

"A likely enough gallant," answered the king, "nor shall I be quick to forget the aid he brought me at my greatest need. Ah, Maurice, old friend! I fear me that was the last sanglier I shall ever face. But the young man sets some store on his services, to ask one of our richest wards as his guerdon—aye, and one of the fairest, as I remember well."

"There is no harm done yet, sire," I replied; "no more, at least, than must always chance, so long as

young knights are allowed to carry eyes in their heads and damoysels roses in their cheeks. Besides, even if these two were to prove of one purpose, your Grace might well have a worse lord of Kendal than Walter le Marmion. Bethink you, sire, the levy of Kendal is nothing less than ten score of bowmen, a score and a half of quarellers,[1] and three hundred of the best light horsemen in the realm. Your Grace will doubtless ponder well before adding such a force to the following of some powerful baron."

"Well, well, Maurice," the king said, "there is time enough, as you say. Meanwhile, let us have this fire-eater of the Fens to our Court—this Amadis of thine—this raiser-up of fallen monarchs—this vanquisher of rich maiden's fancies. And look you, gossip, how were it if we were to desire the attendance of the Lily of Kendal also? 'Tis but a ride of two score and ten miles for her—write her a summons. Pardie! tell the fire-eater that he *may* come and the damoysel that she *must;* but harkye! not a word to either of them about the other."

I was well pleased that this diversion should have fallen at this time, so might my lord the king withdraw his mind from certain troubles which, in measure as the Scottish coil resolved itself, had arisen to cause him and all of us grievous disquiet. It is known to all men that Prince Edward of Wales—Edward of Carnarvon as he was cleped of the commonalty—had brought the royal house into grievous contempt by reason not only of his debaucheries (for one does not judge the hot blood of youth too harshly), but of the lewd and insolent comrades which he chose for his pleasures. This prince himself, of noble aspect

[1] Crossbowmen.

at this time, and in stature hardly inferior to the king himself, was of a pliant and kindly disposition; whence arose all the evil into which this land has now fallen, and whence, as it seems to me, it shall hardly be delivered, unless by the continual intercession of Saint George and our Lady. For it has ever been to the most masterful and most diverting adventurer in his following that this prince hath most readily inclined; and, at the time of which I write, this part was filled by a young gentleman of Gascony named Pierre de Gaveston. Him a brilliant wit and handsome person had brought early into high favour with the prince, and verily if Sathanas were permitted, as some men hold he hath been, to appear on earth in likeness of man, then this were surely he. The sum of evil which this Pierre wrought while among us may not be reckoned. His arrogance incensed the nobles against him—his avarice and tyranny the commonalty; and not against him alone, but when men saw that he was the chosen and only counsellor of the prince, maintaining around him a host of common rufflers, tapsters, pimps, and bullies, to the exclusion of all honest persons, then they included the prince in their censure—aye, and even were so rash as to blame our sovereign lord for suffering the like.

My lord the king was indulgent to his son—very loth to interfere with his freedom or his friends—but the limits of his patience had been touched at last. The prince, during his campaign in Scotland, had suffered this Pierre to administer affairs in that country in such a manner as brought the very name of Englishman into hatred and the authority of our sovereign lord into contempt. The king's proclamation of pardon to the commonalty of Scotland had been set aside; many innocent

persons (or those guilty of rebellion only in the second and third degrees) had been hanged by the orders of the said Pierre; the farmer's crops had been wasted in wantonness, their cattle and goods seized without payment to support the soldiery—a thing which our sovereign lord did ever most straightly forbid—nay, but the wives and daughters of orderly burgesses in the towns had been most shamefully entreated; whereof the effect was soon afterwards to become manifest—namely, that many faithful lieges did incline to seek redress at the hands of Robert de Brus. The king, therefore, the true source of these disorders having been notified to him, did summon the prince before him about the feast of the Purification of our Lady, most earnestly rebuked him for the like abuse of his authority, and thereafter, in the presence of the Council, pronounced decree of perpetual banishment upon Sieur Pierre de Gaveston.

Rejoicing then, as I have said, that le Marmion's letter came at a time when my master, having disposed of this grievous matter, could take pleasure in affairs of brighter aspect, I wrote to that chevalier and to Mistress Challice, bidding them to attend the Court which my lord the king was to hold upon the first day of the new year.[1]

The king's health continued to amend, the dry winds of March seeming to abate the swellings; and, albeit unable as yet to mount on horseback, he took the air daily in his travelling litter, el Bravo being led before him, for he dearly loved to refresh his eyes by looking upon that horse.

[1] Sir Maurice's modern readers will bear in mind that, in his day, the new year began on March 15.—Ed.

VII.

Of the meeting at Carlisle between Sir Walter le Marmion and the Lily of Kendal in presence of my lord the King.

I HAD not erred in my expectation of the Franciscan's discretion; the story of the golden helmet had been commonly bruited through the town, where, at that season, there was little enough to occupy men's thoughts and women's tongues. The jongleurs—a race with little reverence for their betters—had got hold of it as I foresaw they would, and were singing through all the streets the ballad of the Lily of Kendal and the Chevalier of the Splendid Crest. It was well, methought, that the matter had not come first to the ears of my lord the king in that guise, else might things have taken a less propitious course, for the most gracious monarchs are wont to be justly jealous of their prerogative.

On the feast of Saint Benedict, then, the last day of the old year,[1] in returning from mass in the Minorite church, I heard a mighty tumult and cheering near the Botcher Gate. Repairing thither to see what might be ado, I beheld Mistress Challice, followed by a score of horsemen in the Kendal liveries, riding up the causey, and a crowd

[1] 14th March.

of townsfolk—men and girls as well as soldiers from all quarters—shouting viva! and waving caps and kerchiefs. At her right rein rode Sir Blaise de Strickland, her chamberlain, easily to be known by the white escallops broidered on his black surcoat; but by his features not his own mother, I'se warrant, could have made him out by reason of the quaint fashion of his chapelle-de-fer, which bore a nose-piece after a kind not in use since the days of King Richard of blessed memory. The Lily, in a close-fitting riding-robe of scarlet cloth, was pale, and seemed to wonder what the turmoil might signify. I saw her turn first to Sir Blaise, as if to ask him to explain; then, checking herself with a smile, she spoke to the page riding at her other rein. He, casting quick eyes around, saw me standing in the crowd, and, knowing my features, pushed his palfrey towards me and said—

"Madame would know the cause of this unwonted tumult."

"Tell her," I replied, "that the Lily of Kendal is dear to the people of Carlisle, and they have heard bruit of the golden helmet."

A deep flush rose to her beautiful brow when the lad reported the tidings: then she turned pale as before, yet smiled at me, and so rode forward, erect and calm.

Now I knew that le Marmion should ride into the city that afternoon from the north; and that if, as was sure to be, he wore the golden basnet and were to pass up the street in that flashing headgear, the bruit would run straightway that the Chevalier of the Splendid Crest had come to town, and, do as I might, it would come to the Lily's hearing. Now, inasmuch as I plainly understood my lord the king's will to be that neither should the Lily

hear that her knight was in Carlisle nor that her arrival should be made known to him, I was at pains to encounter him ere yet he reached the city gate, so that I might conduct him quietly to the lodging I had bespoken for him in Saint Cuthbert's ward, hard by my own. Towards evening, therefore, plainly garbed in brown camelin, I spurred out at the Richergate, across the wooden bridge that spans the Eden, and so through the hamlet of Stanwix along the northern road. I had not ridden a league before I saw five mounted travellers approaching, whom I soon discerned to be Sir Walter and his squire Geoffrey, followed by two spearmen and Michael the Fenman, leading a sumpter-horse. Walter, as I had foreseen, wore the helmet he was to make famous; so after greeting him warmly, I drew him aside, and, if I strained somewhat shrewdly the limits of truth in what I told him, I trust that zeal in the service of my lord the king may be accounted my warrant.

"It is the king's pleasure," quoth I, "that you do not wear this basnet until his will is made known in the matter of his ward, Mistress Challice."

Walter flashed out angrily.

"Sangdieu! there is no man may challenge my right to what favour a lady chooses to bestow, unless he hath a mind to meet me *à outrance* in the lists."

"Softly, Sir Walter," I made answer; "here is no question of challenge or chaudmellay. If you disobey the king, hath he it not in his power to sever you from Mistress Challice for evermore? Be advised by me, my friend; I am not without hope that the king will look with favour on your suit, if you cross him not by disobedience. See, de Neville will carry the basnet, while you ride covered in a furred cap."

"Would you have me seem ashamed of my lady's gift?" quoth he, still chafing.

"Tush! man," said I, "she never bade you sleep in it, I ween. The day is far spent; be advised by a friend, and lay the pretty headgear aside till the morrow."

Very loth was Sir Walter to doff his precious basnet, yet in the end he allowed Geoffrey to unloose the fastenings thereof, and to replace it with a light cap which Michael drew from the valise.

"Keep your hand over that falcon crest while we ride through the streets," I whispered to Geoffrey, adding, as I laid a finger on his arm—"for the sake of your fair cousin of Kendal."

The young man was quick to understand, knowing that I held authority at the Court, and we rode on, Geoffrey going before his master, as befits an esquire.

"I suppose," said Walter gloomily, "that the king views my pretensions with ill favour, as he takes objection to the basnet."

"Nay," replied I, "but he has spoken to me no word of approval or disfavour in the matter. It was his wish merely that you should not display it in public on this occasion."

"The king surely has affairs of greater moment in hand than that he should busy himself about the apparel of a private gentleman."

"Come, Walter," quoth I; "lay aside this churlish mood. I have ever befriended your interest, and am not going to desert it now. All that I can tell you is to be of good hope and be guided for the nonce by me."

"I am a graceless fellow, Sir Maurice," exclaimed the young knight, brightening, and turning his blue eyes frankly upon mine. "I owe you already far more than

I can ever repay. Prithee, bear with me if I have learnt ungracious ways in my hermitage, for, in sooth, I am right glad to be in your company once more—basnet or no basnet."

So we rode back to the town discoursing freely. The watch was set before we stood before the Richergate, but I had the password, and shouted "Beau regard" to the sentinel's "Qui vive?" whereat the drawbridge rumbled down, the gate swung open, and we passed up the darkling streets, no man knowing, save the king and ourselves, that Sir Walter le Marmion had come to Carlisle.

. . . .

Whencesoever it may be that our present king, Edward of Carnarvon, hath derived his love for stage-plays and mummings, wherein he spends so much of his time and substance, it was not inherited from his sire, whom men called Edward Longshanks. My old master ever brooked such entertainment with little patience, holding that right recreation might only be found by a ruler with hawk or hound. Nevertheless he did most heartily relish the framing and carrying out of little strategics, and chiefly those arising out of honourable love affairs; wherefore was my lord the king at no common pains in preparing his audience with le Marmion, whence he proposed to derive some matter for mirth.

On the morrow after the arrival in Carlisle of Sir Walter le Marmion from the north and of Mistress Challice from the south—being the first day of the year of grace 1307—a Council was appinted to meet an hour before noon; but my lord the king directed me to summon the travellers to his presence at an earlier hour. The king was lodged in the great castle, wherein also the Council was wont to assemble, in a large chamber, a

throne being set for the king upon a dais at one end thereof. Opening off this chamber through an archway was a smaller one in a turret, wherein I and my clerks transacted our business. This little room gave upon a separate staircase, at the bottom whereof was a postern door, opening upon a private avenue leading into Fisher Street. There was a falling arras over the archway between the great and the little chamber, usually raised so that the two apartments seemed as one; but when it was lowered, no person in either of these rooms could perceive that it was connected with the other. My lord the king directed me to have the hangings drawn down, and then to cause the Lady of Kendal to be ushered through the postern into the turret-chamber, so that she might be within hearing when Sir Walter entered the presence from the main entrance. He bade me also instruct the knight to don his golden basnet.

All this was done, and, at the appointed hour the king entered the Council-chamber, seating himself, not upon the throne, but in a padded elbow-chair beside the hearth. Then he desired all to withdraw, except the Prince of Wales and myself, that he might confer with his constable of Upper Nithsdale. I heard the latch of the turret-door raised, whereby I knew that Mistress Challice was at her post, and presently the chamberlain in a loud voice announced—"Sir Walter le Marmion de Shakingdon." The knight came before the king uncovered, Geoffrey de Neville bearing the golden basnet behind him.

"Good Sir Walter," said the king, as the young man bent the knee before him, "we greet you well. What tidings bring you from our realm of Scotland?"

"None, sire, beyond what your Grace already knows, that all is quiet in that land."

"Too quiet for young blood such as yours," answered the king, "if the clerk to our Council here informs us aright. Is it true that you have wearied of our service?"

"By no means, sire!" exclaimed le Marmion with warmth; "I crave nothing for myself save liberty to seek out your Grace's enemies and do vengeance on them. But the time hangs heavy that brings no sign of action."

"Yet it is no heavier for you than for others of our faithful knights. But harkye! We have heard bruit of some vow you have taken on you, or some devoir laid on you by a fair lady. We would fain hear the truth of this from your own lips."

"It is soon told, your Grace," replied the knight, the colour mounting in his cheeks. "This basnet here has been committed to my unworthy care by a lady, whom I will maintain against all comers to be noblest and fairest. She has bidden me to repair to the most perilous part of your Grace's dominions and there to make her gift famous, and all my complaint is that Cumnock is no place where deeds of high valour may be done."

"And this noble dame—we would fain hear her name from your lips," said the king, affecting indifference.

Walter hesitated—looked at me—I made a sign of assent—whereupon he said boldly—

"Mistress Challice de Roos of Kendal Honor, so please your Grace."

"So!" cried the king; "by Saint Neot's cross! but this touches us somewhat shrewdly. Know you not, sir knight, that the Lady of Kendal Honor is our royal ward, and that it is our prerogative and purpose to dispose of her in marriage to such a bridegroom as we may deem fit to be lord of the manor of Kendal?"

Le Marmion winced.

"Under favour, sire," quoth he, "there is no question at this time of marriage, seeing that the lady would hear no word from me on that head. But I conceive that your Grace's prerogative is in nowise infringed by such service as any gentleman may render to the lady who honours him with her commands."

"No question of marriage, quotha!" laughed the king, who, I could see, was thoroughly enjoying the comedy. "Mean you that if our will were that you should wed with Mistress Challice, you would think twice before fulfilling it?"

"Sire, again under favour," answered Walter, "I would set no store by such a boon—nay, I would value it not one whit—unless the lady's will were the same as that of your Grace."

While these two spoke, the Prince of Wales stood under the window, mightily unconcerned with what was passing, busily smoothing the feathers of a falcon on his wrist.

"Sir Maurice," said the king, turning to me, and pointing to the tapestry between the chambers, "let us see the other side of the shield."

Seizing the cord I drew aside the hanging, and there stood the Lily of Kendal—fair, exceeding fair, and straight as a young fir-tree. The prince ceased to caress his hawk; le Marmion started forward, I know not with what purpose save the natural force of like to like, but I checked him by pulling his sleeve. Challice waited for no command, but moved with a firm step before the king.

"We cannot rise," said he, "to embrace our ward—not for want of goodwill, but from feebleness of frame. But she will suffer us to kiss her hand."

"Nay, sire," quoth the Lily, "let me do my reverence;"

and kneeling before the king she raised his hand to her lips. I never may forget the regard of deep tenderness she cast upon him from her bright, kind eyes. I have noted this in good women, that they never pay so much heed to a man as when he is ill at ease. Challice ever loved the king, but now that he was broken in health and his great limbs might bear him no more, she seemed to me to claim property in him, as a mother might do in a sick child. Methought if some seely limner had stood by, he might have portrayed the Lily as Notre Dame de la Misericorde.

"You have heard," said the king, "what this knight hath unfolded to us. Have you aught to say against his report?"

"Nothing, sire; he has rendered faithful account, as beseems an honourable chevalier, of what matters have passed between us."

"Do you incline, then," asked the king, "to favour him as a suitor for your hand?"

Challice's eyes flashed in wicked wise, and her colour rose.

"I can tell your Grace," quoth she, "no more than I have already told Sir Walter le Marmion. I bade him come for his answer when he had proved himself worthy of my—of my regard."

As she spoke she turned her steady eyes upon Walter, and I saw again in them for a moment that dewy softening which showed me that, in her heart of hearts, she loved him indeed. But it passed like the shadow of a flying bird on the lake, and her expression grew cold again as the king spoke.

"Yet it is time, Mistress Challice, that we were finding a worthy lord for the Honor of Kendal. We would fain

see our ward meetly mated, and we must not suffer the matter to rest through our default."

"But, sire," Challice said, as calmly as though the king had been parleying about a new palfrey for her, "I have your Grace's royal word for it that I am to choose for myself. More than a year past you gave me that promise at Westminster revels."

"So we did, sweet lady, nor have we forgotten the same; but time passeth, and we ourselves may pass at any hour, and then the choice will rest with another."

His eyes turned to the young prince, standing at the window, who seemed to be noting with close attention what was said.

"We wish," the king went on, "to see your choice made and this great matter settled. Come, be gracious, Mistress Challice! this is here a knight to whom we owe some special mark of favour, inasmuch as he rescued us at a moment of mortal peril. He loves you—thus we are informed—and by Saint George! you might seek farther and light on a less likely chevalier."

"Sire," replied Challice—and I could see how the pride of this high-born maiden did battle with her bashfulness—"I will be frank with your Grace. It is known to all men that I—I love Sir Walter already, else would I have cared no whit for his fame beyond another's. I am not so cold at heart as to send a man into peril for the mere pampering of my pride. Yet is a girl's love but a sorry thing; to the man whom I shall wed I would fain give more than such love—I would give him worship also. When Sir Walter has won *that* from me by some famous deed of arms—well, he will not find me coy!"

A strange speech—surely the strangest, and yet the noblest, I ever heard from maiden's lips. It were as

though all the fantasy and romance of that windy parleying between Oriana and Amadis de Gaul had been distilled in one amazing sentence.

"Under favour, sire," continued the Lily, "I would ask that you should put it to Sir Walter himself, whether he wills that I wed with him now at *your Grace's command*" (she laid much stress on these words), "or hereafter, of my own free will."

The king turned smiling on Sir Walter.

"You have heard, sir knight; what will you? The choice shall rest with you."

Walter gave not answer till he had pondered a space. Then he spoke—

"Let the Lady Challice's free will be done, sire; and God send me speedy occasion to fulfil her devoir on your Grace's enemies!"

Did my old eyes deceive me, or was it in truth a shade of displeasure that passed over Challice's countenance? The Prince of Wales shrugged his shoulders, muttering something about "a bird in hand," and turned again to stroking his hawk.

"So be it then," quoth the king, "if such be both your pleasure; it is not we who will prevent the knight coming by a broken sconce; though where that may soonest be come by at this unwarlike season it may be hard to declare. Now let us examine the newest fashion in basnets."

De Neville, advancing, placed the helmet in the king's hands, who inspected every part of it most eagerly and closely, as he was wont to do with military harness of every kind.

"A pretty headpiece," he said. "I like well that mode of bringing the chapelle-de-fer above the mail.

Then this hanging mouthpiece is a mighty improvement on our old fixed gorgets. See, Maurice, how featly it hangs when not in use; and then it is hooked up—so—before going into action, protecting the teeth and lips. A crossbow quarell is an ugly mouthful, as good Sir Thomas Gray found it at the siege of Stirling. Now a mouthpiece like that would have saved him. That is a pretty conceit—the golden falcon. Edward," he continued, addressing the prince, who had begun to yawn, "I like that device well; what say you to having the dragon of Wales moulded on your basnet?"

Now the prince cared not a hayseed for military equipment of any kind; all his fancy lay in carpentry and wright's handiwork; had it been a horologue, now, that was under question, or even a new churn, none had been readier than he to spend a whole morning viewing and handling it. Or again, had it been a costly robe or silken hose, his love of finery would have been a-fire at once; but for helmets and suchlike—they reminded him over-shrewdly of the labours he had undergone in the Scottish campaign.

"Aye, aye," quoth he in an indifferent tone, stifling his yawn, "'tis an elegant bauble, sire; though I cannot affect to so much skill as your Grace in these matters. Yet methinks it would have seemlier appearance were this old rag removed."

So saying he made as if to tear off a faded, almost colourless, piece of what had once been silken ribbon, twisted round the feet of the golden falcon.

"Messire," cried le Marmion, starting forward, "have a care, messire! No man touches *that* save at his peril."

The prince looked up angrily, for ill he brooked to be addressed in tones of command by one of the king's lieges.

"Pardon, messire," said le Marmion, "but that fillet is the gift, as it was once the colours, of this lady. You would not wish that I should suffer it to be handled irreverently."

"The knight is right, my son," said the king. "If princes would have respect, they must abide by the laws of chivalry."

"If the lady would have her colours honoured," retorted the prince sullenly, "it behoves her to see that they are such as a plain man may discern."

Walter bit his thumb. Such words, if spoken by one of lower than royal rank, could only have been maintained by combat *à outrance;* but Challice sweetly set matters in fair course again by saying to the prince—

"Your rebuke is just, messire; see, I will make the token clear to all men."

Turning to her page, Algernon de Strickland, she loosed a bow of bright ribbons—rose and straw coloured—from his shoulder, twisted them nimbly into a fillet, and bound them round the basnet in place of the old.

My lord the king was well pleased with this pretty play; as for the prince, the cloud passed quickly from his brow, for his nature was to be of sweet temper and easy to be appeased when his anger was roused. The hour for the Council now rang from Saint Mary's belfry; Sir Walter and Mistress Challice withdrew by opposite doors, and I returned to my duties as clerk. The business in hand was of import no more than ordinary,—the assignment of forfeited lands in Scotland—the dismissal to their homes of some of the levies from the southern counties, no further use for them in the north being now apparent—and an audience of the Bishop of Chester, the king's treasurer in Scotland. Yet we had not proceeded

far with it when a messenger was announced, newly arrived from the county of Ayr, with pressing despatches for the king, whereby, as it turned out, the aspect of our Council was strangely altered.

The sheriff of Ayr, Sir Henry de Percy, now by the king's warrant Earl of Carrick, had his headquarters during the winter at Turnberry Castle, the birthplace, and, till he forfeited it, the chief messuage of the rebel de Brus. The whole earldom of Carrick, in common with the rest of Scotland, had remained in the king's peace; the country folk were well-disposed to the king's officers, seeing that these paid well and without delay for all supplies; everything boded security, whereby, doubtless the vigilance of the garrison was some deal laid aside.

Howbeit there had come a rude awakening. Robert de Brus had more friends in the country than Percy reckoned on, and was, moreover, nearer at hand than our people dreamt of. Landing stealthily under cloud of night with a band of catheran Erse and other broken men from all parts, he broke into the village of Turnberry, where most of the English lay in billets. These were cruelly surprised, being cut down man by man as they rushed into the streets; Percy, the while, hearing the tumult, dared not open the castle gates, not knowing the number of his foes. The rebels, having swept up arms, victuals, and other movables, crying "Brus! Brus for Scotland!" uttering horrible blasphemies against our sovereign lord, and rejoicing wickedly by reason of their successful camisade, made off into the mountainous parts of Galloway, whither no horsemen might follow them.

When the king heard these tidings his eyes burned under his shaggy brows.

"Ha!" cried he, "said we not there would be no security in the realm till King Hobbe was safe under lock and key? See if all the idle and discontented rangale will not draw to him after this exploit. Howbeit, he has entered the trap this time; he cannot feed his following among those hills; if de Valence hath not forgotten his craft, de Brus passes not thence alive. Aye, but we must be on the spot ourselves: 'tis the master's eye maketh the horse fat. Blessed be our Lady and our good leeches, we shall be able to set forth before the Annunciation." [1]

Alace! as the event proved, my master recovered not strength so fast as he and all of us hoped for, albeit for a time the stir of fresh musters — the ordering of the host — the coming and departing of messengers with despatches—seemed to put fresh life into him. When the weather favoured, he was even able to mount a palfrey and ride gently by the space of an hour or thereby; yet ever the cruel disorder returned upon him, and the weary change from sick-bed to horse-litter, from horse-litter to saddle, had all to be gone over afresh, until even the old king's lion spirit began to languish under hope so oft deferred.

As soon as the Council was dissolved and I was released from attendance, I hastened to find le Marmion. I sought him in vain at his own lodging in St Cuthbert's ward; neither was he at my house in the Botchergate, whence returning to the castle by the pathway which runs inside the eastern city wall, the ancient habits of a soldier led me to take a prospect from the ramparts. I beheld a great throng of citizens and soldiery gathering on the Swifts—a broad, fair meadow lying north of the

[1] 25th March.

town near unto the river. I noted the flash of steel and the waving of pennons and pencils betokening some martial assembly.

"'Tis the Lady of Kendal," said an officer of crossbowmen, of whom I asked what was ado, "who reviews her levy at three of the clock. Many of our townsfolk have drawn together for the sight, these dalesmen being pretty lads, and well liked in the town."

Mounting to horse straightway, I pressed out at speed through the Richergate, feeling no longer in doubt where my young knight should be found.

"Room, room! for Sir Maurice de Bulkeley!" cried a sergeant of archers, pushing the bystanders roughly aside to allow me to pass through to the space where Mistress Challice sat on horseback with her suite, Sir Blaise beside her, carrying aloft her pennon on a lance.

"Gently, my friend!" I cried to the fellow, for I love not insistance on the privilege of knighthood always to pass to the foremost room in every assembly. However, the crowd fell back quickly enough, knowing how many chevaliers there be that reck little what toes may be crushed or shoulders bruised among the common sort, so that place be quickly yielded before gentlemen of degree. Having, therefore, clear space before me, I spurred on, and there, to be sure, was the Knight of Shakingdon among the company, with the golden falcon glittering bravely and the red and yellow ribbons fluttering in the breeze. Yet was this no moment to gain speech of him, for the men of Kendal were advancing to march past and salute their young mistress.

A brave display they made, these stout dalesmen, whom regular exercise in harness had made into as fine troops as any soldier might wish to see. Six trumpeters

rode before on white horses, brilliant in scarlet and gold, with caps of black Genoa velvet of the best: then came two-and-twenty men-at-arms in single rank abreast, in mail *cap-à-pied*, wearing red and yellow striped jupons over their hauberks, each followed by a valet and groom, also mounted—three score and six in all. Following these came seven troops of light horse — forty men in each troop—in the same flaming liveries. Next them marched four pipers sounding shrilly, behind whom rode the captain of bowmen at the head of four companies of forty each, all clad in green, but with roses of red and yellow ribbon in their steel caps.

After these had passed, I pushed my horse alongside of Marmion. He, turning, cast his eyes to heaven in mock despair.

"A pretty display," he muttered in mine ear, "for the Knight of Shakingdon, even were he able to bring to the field his full array of three sorry spearmen and half-a-dozen Lincoln archers!"

"Tush, man!" I whispered, "what room for discontent after what Mistress Challice has publicly avowed this day. She loves you, Walter; can you doubt it now? But you must not tarry in Carlisle," I said, as we rode back to the town.

"Why not?" he asked, his eyes fixed on a hat decked with grey heron plumes dancing away in front of us.

"Because," said I, "your duty calls you hence immediately, and that is why I sought you here."

"What," he asked, "you would not have me go back to yon dreary old pigeon-cote of Cumnock? Surely the king will find me some more stirring work after what he said this day."

"Much has happened since the morning, Walter," I

answered. "The king has many other affairs in his mind now, than that he should busy himself about the fortunes of a knight bachelor. But woe betide the chevalier whom he finds absent from his post in the hour of action. Besides, look you, man! de Brus is free in the Galloway hills: Cumnock commands the chief passes into Nithsdale: what say you if Cumnock be not the very place where you may win glory for the splendid crest?"

To such purpose I spoke that before nightfall Walter was far on his road to the Scottish border.

Now it is my belief that, when my lord the king asked Walter whether he would take the Lily's hand by royal decree or wait the lady's pleasure, had the knight been less scrupulous and less fearful of offending Challice—had he accepted the boon gladly—never had there been a more willing bride than she, and all the coil that was to follow hereafter might have been avoided. Howbeit the Lily was too proud to withdraw her commands—the knight wanting too much in hardihood to avail himself of this advantage, and thus each had to travel the course which so seldom runneth smooth.

VIII.

Of Sir Walter le Marmion's first quest, and of the wickedness of the Scots against their Sovereign Lord.

MATTER pertaining to mine office as Clerk of the Council did greatly occupy my mind and hands during many days after Sir Walter departed. I was very closely kept with the king, who was fretful and chiding beyond his wont, greatly desiring to hear that de Valence had wrought some exploit upon the rebels, and sorely vexed that he could not strike the blow himself. Mistress Challice still lingered in Carlisle, dismounting each day at my lodging, and turning her talk, as oft as we were alone, upon the fortunes of the absent chevalier. A week passed thus, till the time came when she fixed to return to Kendal.

"Sir Maurice," she said to me on the morning before she set forth, "I greatly fear I have done a vain and wicked thing in sending Sir Walter upon this perilous quest. Methinks mine head has been turned by listening to Father Ailwyn's romances. I thought it a fine thing that Sir Walter should prove that he loved me, as Roland proved his love for Anne by his good sword Durendal. I wished to feel for Sir Walter—perchance you do not know

that when you were all at Kendal he asked me to marry him."

"Well I know it, dear lady," said I, "and with all my heart I wish it may yet be, for of all the knights in my master's Court I deem him worthiest of such a prize."

"Anan," she continued, "I wished before—before I went further, to feel for Sir Walter all that Anne must have felt for Roland,—to feel as a woman can only feel for a man who has done something far beyond her own powers. But now—but now—God wot I wish I had let it all alone, for I see little good to come out of it, and much dolour that may befall."

Tears filled her eyes, and, too proud to let me see them fall, she rose and walked to the casement. 'Tis the onlooker sees most of every game, and here was a game whereat I had played—ah me! how many years ago. All its ruses and feints I knew—nay, not all, for no man may ever learn them all—but many of the chases and passes I knew. From our first meeting, the Lily had never thought it worth while to baffle a harmless greybeard such as I; and now—her thoughts lay open to me like one of Father Ailwyn's painted psalters. Walter had taken her fancy at Kendal; to her fancy she had yielded play, until now she had lost her heart. Mine went out to her as she stood gazing through her tears into the street, all her pride abased—her bosom heaving with the first real pang that had ever pierced it.

"Challice," quoth I, for I saw she wanted a father's help, and trouble maketh titles of ceremony cold and comfortless, "Challice, keep good courage. You have done well to send Walter on his quest; for look you! he is proud as well as you. He felt that a poor knight was over-bold in offering his love to the Lady of Kendal, and

it might well be that, had you given yourself with all your riches unconditionally, sharp and unkind jests might have been passed on him by some of Prince Edward's hungry Gascons. Had these reached Walter's ears—had he suspected that you could think him a fortune-hunter—I believe that you would never have seen him again. But now he has gone forth a proud and happy man, to do your devoir, and to return—yes, assuredly he will return—to claim his meed."

She turned her swimming eyes full on mine, and with a quick movement put her hands on my shoulders, hiding her blushes on my breast. I was old, of course, and young fellows will have it that to be old is to have neither blood nor nerves; I had the vows of Saint Francis upon me; but what vows may chain pulses or stifle thoughts? The weight of that warm, pliant figure in my arms, the scent of her hair, her whisper—"Dear Sir Maurice, you will aid us, will you not?"—well, they brought to memory sundry passages of thirty years before, and I felt that of a surety Walter le Marmion was greatly to be envied.

I comforted and soothed the damoysel in such wise that she soon dried her eyes and smiled in a manner shamefast for having shown so great weakness.

"You must not be afraid of me in future, Sir Maurice," quoth she; "I shall torment you with plans and perhaps with fears; but when I weep, it shall be in private. Only, you know, I get tired of being alone, and you are really the only man to whom I feel that I can go for advice and comfort."

"Not even Sir Blaise?" I asked maliciously.

It was good to hear her laugh ring out again: it reminded me of the first time I had heard it, when Walter blundered in carving before her in the banquet-

ting-hall of Kendal. "Sir Blaise!" she cried, still laughing; and at that moment the door opened and Sir Blaise himself appeared with his usual abstracted expression.

"Coming, my dear niece," he said, "coming. All is ready now for your commands to start. And yet—and yet—there is one thing I cannot call to mind. I had everything laid in order: an inkhorn to remind me to send for your goods at the silk-mercer's, my misericorde telling me to see to that tiercel's hood, my gold ring lying beside it to bring to mind the dried fruit for the kitchener—all these have been attended to; but this gold besant—that surely was to remind me of something important."

"Never mind it now, uncle," said Challice; "let my people prepare for the road and my trumpets sound at noon. Mistress Alison and I will be ready at our lodgings."

While she was yet speaking there arose a great noise of shouting in the street, and looking forth from the casement we beheld a body of troops marching in from the Richergate, filling the causey from side to side, and forcing the townspeople to make room for them by standing in the entries; yet were all the folk clamouring for joy and cheering lustily. In front of the column marched six musicians, as I trow they claimed to be reckoned, albeit in good sooth the din which they belched from their uncouth instruments—leathern bags covered with gaily striped cloth, whence protruded a number of wooden pipes dressed with ribbons—this din, I say, had little of melody in it for southern ears. Yet is it the martial music which these strange warriors do most greatly affect, whereby they be stirred to great excitement and to deeds of extraordinary hardihood. What we beheld was a

squadron of the fierce Scots of Galloway, hereditary foes of the Brus, and therefore, for the nonce, King Edward's men. Their aged chieftain, Sir Dougall Macdouall, rode at their head behind the pipers, easily to be known by all men, not only by reason of the white lion rampant on an azure field, which his esquire bore before him, but by his great stature, his dark eye, and grave, noble countenance. Immediately behind him rode six men-at-arms in full harness. Next came a troop of light horsemen on small, active nags, guarding a clump of prisoners. One of these prisoners lay in a litter—grievously wounded. I recognised his pale features—Christ! it was Alexander de Brus, brother of the rebel king of Scots, one whom I had known erstwhile at the Court as a gallant young squire.

There were nearly a dozen other prisoners, most of them wounded; one, whose clothing all down one side was black with dried blood that had flowed from a hideous wound in his neck—this was Thomas de Brus. Ah! it was a terrible sight to see in such guise men who had sat at the king's table—sons of one of our proudest knightly houses. I scanned the faces of the other wretches, thinking, yet almost dreading, to behold the arch-rebel Robert; but he was not there. Had he fallen on some field? My heart was heavy at the thought, for though I well knew how wickedly he had done to my lord the king, I had never yielded all hope that even now he might find his way back to grace, and leave the land at peace.

We hurried down to the street to hear the tidings. Robert de Brus, we were told, was still at large, no man knew where, but these his brothers had landed in Loch Ryan with a large company of Irish kernes, hoping to make their way into the hills. Howbeit, the faithful

Macdouall had been on the watch; scarcely had they landed from their galleys when he swept down on them in the grey morning and cut them in pieces. Not a man was kept alive save the handful of captives brought to Carlisle.

It was my office to report to my lord the king of the delivery of the prisoners, and to take his pleasure about their trial. I must haste over the recital, for I can ill brook to reflect on the shame and sorrow of this black day. Shame! yes, there was shame in it, for these knights were refused what every free man claims as his right—an open trial.

"They shall die like the forsworn dogs they are," cried the king; "direct the provost-marshal that it is our will they shall be hanged before sundown."

Greatly venturing, I pled with my master for delay, that a court might assemble for the trial of these gentlemen. As for their lives, I had no hope, knowing these to be justly forfeited; yet I misliked the setting aside of the forms of justice, lest the king's fair renown might be smirched.

"Mercy! trial!" shouted Edward Plantagenet, the veins on his temples standing out like knotted cords; "such trial shall they have as the shepherd gives the wolf. Why, man! what boots a trial for men who, with their fealty fresh upon them, have been taken in arms against our rule. To the gallows with them! Enough: I have spoken."

There was nothing for it save to obey, and with heavy heart I wrote forth the sentence; yet was it not my old master who spoke here; it was but the wreck of him, wasted with long sickness, and outworn with just anger against traitors. That these merited death none could

gainsay, else would no realm be secure; but that Edward, who had laboured so long to establish the liberties of Englishmen, should have lived to outrage them so violently — verily it was a grievous thing to come to pass.

It was well that Challice left the town before the tragedy befell. I had brief word with her in the street as she passed out with her suite.

"Spare neither money nor horseflesh, good Sir Maurice," she said earnestly, "but as soon as tidings come, send express to me at Kendal."

I gave my promise, and with that she rode off; yet it was long before I ceased to see that sweet, pleading countenance. Long was it, also, before tidings came of her knight-errant, and when at last they did come, they were of a sort that I took little pleasure in sending forward. In sooth, affairs were falling crossly with the king's cause in Scotland about this season.

Scarcely had the Lily left us ere a mounted post came in from Sir Henry de Percy, bearing grave news indeed. Since the king's illness it had been committed to me, as clerk of his Council, to examine all despatches before they came to his eye. This was my lord the king's own command; reluctantly given, indeed, as he told me, but necessary, owing to the nature of his illness, which at times rendered him unable to give attention to matters of the utmost moment. He was pleased to say that I was the only man he could trust, not to be faithful merely, but to withhold nothing that he ought to know, even in the extremity of weakness.

The king, after the execution of Thomas and Alexander de Brus, had remained gloomy and thoughtful, speaking far less than was his wont, and I was fearful of the effect

upon him of these Ayrshire tidings, lest they should bring about one of those gusts of anger to which he was so prone, and, in his enfeebled state, so ill able to bear. Howbeit they were of a nature which would not brook delay, and with unaccustomed trepidation I sought the presence.

He was not yet risen, though it was past eight o'clock, but he had broken his fast, as I noticed by the remains of a barley-cake and a cup of wine-and-water half finished beside his pillow. He lay with closed eyes, and my heart sank for dread that a fresh attack of his malady was at hand.

"You sleep, my lord?" I said in a low voice.

"No, Maurice," said he, rousing himself with something of his old vigour. "I lay late this morning, having many things on my mind. Any tidings from the north?"

"There are, my lord," I replied, "and such as compelled me to break your repose. These letters are from de Percy, and demand your consideration."

"Ah," he said, all attention and fire in a moment, "thank God for *any* news rather than none!"

I then read him the despatches.

They told the bloody story of that which men speak of now as the Douglas Larder. Briefly, it had fallen on this wise. James of Douglas, lord of Douglas in the shire of Lanark, had companied closely with de Brus from the moment he raised the standard of revolt; had passed with him into hiding during the winter, and had been foremost in the raid upon Turnberry, as was known by his people crying "A Douglas!" in the melée, which was heard above the shouts of "Brus! Brus!" This Douglas, a man of noted personal prowess, as well as a chevalier of pleasant mien and rare clerkly skill,

being with the rebels among the mountains of Galloway, did greatly desire to view his lands and castle of Douglas, which were held by the king's officers. Disguising himself, therefore, as a peasant (which was a light enough matter, seeing how hardship and exposure had rendered gentle and simple of one similitude in the rebel camp), he fared with two comrades only to Hazelside, hard by Saint Bride's chapel of Douglas, where lived one Thomas Dickson, an ancient retainer of his family. This Dickson did most traitorously receive his master to hiding, and, working diligently in the hire of Sathanas, gathered those of his neighbours who, whether from love of the Douglas or hatred of our sovereign lord, would join a plot to seize the castle. On the morning of Palm Sunday they gathered together, Douglas himself carrying a flail, the rest with loose peasant's frocks; yet each man wearing, unseen, a coat of mail and a whinzeour — for so they call the short sword or hanger in their speech.

whinger

The English garrison marched down to hear mass at the chapel, leaving but the porter and the cook in charge of the castle. Douglas and his men pressed into the chapel after the soldiers; prayers had not long begun ere a terrible cry was raised. "A Douglas! a Douglas!" and these cruel bandits sprang upon the soldiers, smiting and slaying, so that scarcely three or four escaped alive; all the rest were captured or slain. Worse was to follow. Rushing up to the castle, the band obtained possession without resistance, devoured the dinner which the kitchener had stayed within to prepare, slew their prisoners, staved in the wine-casks, and burnt the castle to the ground, bearing away arms and money to their stronghold in the hills.

My voice shook as I read the letters; I dared not look upon the king till I had finished, dreading what effect his anger might take upon his weak bodily state. Great was my surprise at the change wrought upon him. Instead of an inflamed countenance and knitted brows, I beheld his eyes sparkling as though he heard the hounds first challenge in covert, and he broke into loud laughter.

"By Christ!" he cried, "but this is glorious!"

A cold horror came upon me. My master's mind had given way, and he was mad.

"Nay, but see you not, Maurice, how glorious it is?" he went on. "James of Douglas hath slain our soldiers in cold blood; henceforward he and all who are with him are *hors de la loi;* not merely rebels, to be taken and tried for their lives, but outlaws and assassins, to be hunted down and slain wherever they may be found. King Hobbe is in the toils. He can never escape from these hills alive; de Valence will not nod; he has troops in every pass; he has but to wait till the old wolf is starved out, or close upon him in his harbour. Sangdieu! I have lain long enough here. We will march on the morrow; meanwhile there is a long morning's work for you, sir clerk, in writing our commands to the forces in Scotland."

Now we had four thousand bowmen and quarellers, and five thousand horse mustered in Carlisle, and these set forth on the morrow, yet without the gladsome presence of the king, who was laid low once again with dysentry. How matters took the evil turn in Scotland — how right went to wrong and the insolence of the rebels carried all before them—is well known now to all men, and I care not to retrace the sorrowful

narrative, save in so far as it bears on the fortunes of my dear children (for so they had become to me), Walter and Challice. From Walter I heard from time to time, first by the hand of his squire, Geoffrey de Neville, and later in his own writing, for he whiled away the tedium of his watch at Cumnock by learning to clerk for himself. In each letter he failed not to urge me to get him relieved from inaction and sent to some place where knightly exploit might be done.

At last I was able to lay his suit before the king. De Valence had written to say that certain news had reached him of the Brus's hiding-place; that if he had men enough he could so surround him that escape save by death was impossible, and he asked for reinforcements. The king himself, though constantly abed, directed measures to comply with this request, attending to every detail, and scrupulously exact in signing commissions for the command of every levy. Among the troops put under orders for instant service in the north were twenty men-at-arms and one hundred and fifty light horse from Kendal — Challice's own dalesmen. Now it so befell that the captain of these, one Roger de Crackenthorpe, was lying ill of smallpox, and the command passed by right to Sir Blaise de Strickland. Yet it had been sheer madness to send this old man, gallant and willing though he was, on such an expedition, so I besought the king to recall le Marmion from Cumnock, commission him as captain of the Kendal troop, and make Sir Blaise constable of Cumnock in his place. It mattered little who held that lonely tower, for good Sir John de Botetourte now lay in Nithsdale guarding every passage. This pleased my master mightily.

"By Saint George!" he cried, "but 'twill be a pretty

passage in chivalry to give this game cockerel command of his sweetheart's men. I'll wager he will not disgrace her colours."

And so it was settled. Marmion wanting no second bidding, came to Carlisle, kissed the king's hand, and took over the command of as pretty a squadron as pennon ever fluttered over. His orders were to report himself to Sir Robert de Clifford, who was assembling a force at the fords of Cree.

Now the Brus was known to be in hiding in a thick forest lying between the lakes of Dee and Trool, his harbour having been betrayed to de Valence by deserters from the rebel band, who feared starvation in these horrid wastes: it was reckoned there could not be more than three hundred broken men still companying with the traitor, and by the feast of SS. Philip and James [1] all was ready for his capture. De Valence was to advance on the second day of May through the moors about Dalmellington, while Percy swept down the seaboard of Ayrshire on the west; and between them marched John of Lorn, with eight hundred hardy Highlanders; de Botetourte was to allow nothing to pass alive through Nithsdale, while de Clifford ascended the valley of the Cree into the wolf's very den—the Glen of Trool.

[1] 1st May.

IX.

Of the setting forth of my Lord the King from Carlisle, and of his doleful death at Burgh-on-Sands.

SPRING lags late in these northern dales, where the woodland is chiefly of ash and oak—trees which seem to vie which of them shall keep their boughs bare longest. Prudent trees, in sooth, not to be lured into leafage by a few bask days, such as would make the beeches of Burnham suddenly adim with greenery; too often have they experienced the sharp-toothed frost that comes with the young May moon; they have learnt how readily the wind wheels back to the bitter east.

But towards the middle of May,[1] the air really softened and the scent of coming summer went abroad. Then it was I began to entertain good hope of my lord the king's recovery. In the cold days about Pask-tide, each noon the ague came upon him, as in the old times of Palestine: his skin grew dry and his eyes bright; then the fever would begin to mount, and he would toss and moan till sundown, when the sweats came on him, and he lay still and prostrate. Many such times have I caught my

[1] Sir Maurice, of course, uses the dates of the old style calendar, twelve days in arrear of our present reckoning.—ED.

breath and stolen a finger upon his pulse, fearing it might be still for evermore. Then would he open his eyes and whisper feebly—

"Better again, dear old Maurice; let me rest."

Rest! that was an evil symptom in one like Edward Plantagenet. How often in the old days would I have been glad to obey the command to rest, yet it never came. Sleep was the one thing that my lord the king grudged, as much to himself as to those who served him. Money, food, drink—as much as any man list let him have; but sleep—bah! it was a dip into death, a cessation of life—no good thing was ever wrought in slumber. With the softening air the fever abated daily. One morning I left him sleeping, and returned shortly before noon, the hour when his trouble usually began to wax. I found him sitting up in bed.

"I am hale again, Maurice," he said, "or shall be so in a day or two. To-morrow, at this hour, I shall be abroad. Meanwhile I am hungry—hey, man! what say you to a roast capon, with a rasher of good Cumberland bacon?"

No more rest for any of us now. In a few days the king was himself again: his messengers rode north with despatches for Scotland—east, west, and south to summon fresh levies; for at last the day was at hand when the king himself would undertake that in which his best knights had strangely failed—the reduction of this Scottish rebellion. I marvelled to see him rally so fast, for truly this last bout had been the worst and longest I had seen; but I found no room in my thoughts except for gratitude to God and Saint George; all misgiving was quenched by my lord's fiery energy and spirit. The bishop celebrated mass one day in the cathedral, in

thanksgiving for the king's restoration to health. The litter in which my master had travelled so wearily from the south was carried up the aisle and deposited in Saint George's chapel. All was bright and gay; the sun shone on the ruddy towers and walls; the birds sang, the people shouted, and all was ordered for our departure for the north on the morrow.

With the morrow came one riding post from Scotland, and fain would I have kept back his despatches till a fitter time for the king to hear them, for I knew not of what purport they might be. The vanguard was on the road; the royal banner was unfurled — three golden leopards passant on a sanguine field; the king's foot was almost in the stirrup, for he would have no assistance in mounting this day, vowing that he was wellnigh as good a man as ever, when his eye fell on the travel-stained horsemen entering the castle court.

"News from the north!" he cried; "why, here is a fair omen. Yon man has ridden fast. I'll wager my best goshawk against a sorry kite that de Valence has redeemed his credit. Quick, Maurice! quick, man! we must not tarry: let us hear the fellow's tidings."

I opened the packet handed to me by the squire; something in the young man's face I liked not, and my worst fears were fulfilled by the first lines I read. They told me of de Clifford's defeat, of the destruction of his force in the Glen of Trool, and how Sir John de Wigtoun and Sir Walter le Marmion were among the slain.

My first thoughts flew to Kendal Castle,—to Challice waiting in her bower for tidings of her errant knight,—of the sorrow that must fall on that fair head—sorrow not unmingled with remorse, and well I knew the enduring

bitterness of *that.* Yet I dismissed these thoughts forthwith, for was not my first duty to my lord the king?

Ah, my beloved master! He said little, yet I marked how the glad light died out of his eyes, and his face grew grey and sunken. He spoke not at all: albeit, as we paced down towards the Richergate, he bowed graciously to the cheering townsfolk. Then, as we rode slowly along the northern road, I called to mind that other ride of yester year from Bishop's Waltham to Itchenstoke, when my lord heard of the first great act of treason by the Brus, and my mind misgave me that he was far less able now than then to bear such harassing tidings.

We had ridden a league or little more when the king complained of thirst. I mingled a little wine and water, which he relished.

"Sire," I said, "you have seen your columns fairly on the march. Bethink you, were it not wiser to spare your strength. If you now return to Carlisle, we can prepare a horse-litter and bring you up with them on the morrow, before they are far into Scottish ground."

"Nay, Maurice," replied he, "it is kindly thought, but it will not do to turn back. I am a little weaker than I thought for, but the Scottish air will work wonders to restore me."

So we rode forward again, while the bodyguard cast many an anxious glance at the king's drooping frame. More wine, and yet more wine. My inmost dread was soon confirmed, for the spasms came on my lord once more, and though he battled bravely against them, it was plain that they were gaining the mastery.

At last, when we were nearing a fisher's hamlet on the sands, the king had fallen from the saddle had not his

son, the prince, riding beside him, cast a strong arm round him.

"I can no more, Maurice." he murmured; "I must e'en lie here to-night, within sight of Scotland, too!" and he waved his hand feebly to where, beyond the gleaming firth, lay the low grey land. "It is hard—hard, but I can no more to-day."

We took him to a lodging, the best in the village, yet humble enough withal. Prince Edward, be his faults what they may, was a dutiful son when evil counsellors were not at hand; he sat beside the pallet of his sire all that summer evening and night, moistening the sufferer's lips and renewing the cold cloths upon his burning temples. There, also, sat good Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, of all my lord's councillors the wisest and the best—the one too, as I think, whom my lord the king most loved and trusted. He and the prince and I sat together through the brief hours of darkness, yet, God wot! the vigil seemed long enow. At sunrise the fever abated, yet instead of waxing weaker, as commonly happens to sick men at such times, my lord the king most strangely gathered strength. Most earnestly he addressed the prince, exhorting him to amend his former life, to give himself wholly to the good governance of the realm, and, over all, not to rest till the rebellion of the Scots should be put down. With terrible vehemence did he urge this duty upon him.

"I shall rise no more, Edward, till the judgment-day, yet I charge you lay not my body to rest until you are master of Scotland. I adjure you by the living God that, so soon as my spirit shall have passed from my body, you do strip away my flesh—see! there is not so much of it as will make the task a heavy one"—and he stretched his

long, wasted arm upon the bed-clothes—"and cause my bones to be borne along with the army till you are victorious. Good Henry de Lacy, hearken while my son makes his vow, and Maurice do you be the second witness, and hand your prince the Holy Evangel."

Prince Edward took from me the book and held it aloft, while with streaming eyes and in a voice broken by sobs, as I myself both heard and saw, he solemnly vowed to perform the will of his sire.

"Swear yet once more, Edward," said the king, yet with failing strength. "Swear that you will govern my people justly, and put aside evil counsellors. Most of all, Edward, swear that Piers of Gaveston shall return no more to the Council-chamber, nor yet to your company, for well I know how wickedly he bends your will."

Again the prince repeated the oath.

Then the king turned his hollow eyes upon

"My lord of Lincoln," he resumed, "and you Maurice, old friend, I can trust you both. Help my boy to keep his pledge. He will stand in need of all the help you can give him, for he is of gentler mould than I. *Pactum serva!*"[1]

Then he lay still for a space, as if composing himself to sleep. Only once we heard his voice again, some half-hour later, when he said low but clear—

"Doux Sire Jesu, ayez merci de moi!"

The sun was high in a clear sky, the larks were lilting blithely over the links, and the western wind blew softly across the firth, when the King of England—the noblest and greatest king that England hath ever known—passed to the keeping of the saints.

. . . .

As the trained destrier gauges the mind of the rider by

[1] Keep covenant!

the hand upon the reins, so the English people, and most quickly the barons and fighting men assembled for the subjugation of Scotland, discerned the change in governance when Edward of Carnarvon became king. His father's corse was scarcely cold ere I became assured that the old order had passed away indeed. It fell to me as clerk of the Council to take the young king's commands for the captains-general, and for carrying out the instructions given by my lord on his dying bed. And what think ye, my friends, was his pleasure? To press forward the invasion of Scotland with all speed and spirit? To prepare his sire's remains for transport with the host? Far otherwise. It was toward sundown before I gained access to the king, for he slept long after his unwonted vigil, and spent the after-day with his chosen friends.

"Ha! de Bulkeley," he cried, as I entered the presence, his voice coming thick, as of one who had drunk deeply; "I reckon we must lie another night in this poor lodging; on the morrow we return betimes to Carlisle."

"But, sire," quoth I, "the army looks to you now as its head. The campaign can scarce proceed without your highness's presence."

"Aye, but I must take council with my friends," he answered, pleasantly enough, for even in his cups Edward of Carnarvon was ever debonnair. "Fact is, we must consider well—hic—the plan of this campaign. What matter—hic—a few days or weeks; we have the whole summer—hic—before us. The longer that damned rascal —hic—de Brus is left among his miserable mountains, the more likely—hic—he is to starve. From Carlisle we shall direct—hic—the conduct of fitting obsequies of our royal sire, whose remains—hic—it is our pleasure shall be laid in the abbey church of Westminster."

"But your vow, sire! It was my lord's pleasure, and he straitly charged us, that his bones were to be laid in no tomb till your Grace had subdued Scotland."

"I know, I know," answered the king, twirling the stem of a wine-cup, and suffering not his eyes to rest on mine. "I know all that, of course; but the world marches, my good friend—hic—the world marches. What! we are not barbarians; much that was held honourable by our ancestors—hic—is—what was I saying?—is contrary to the spirit of a gentler age. Ugh!" he shuddered, "my father's mind was failing at—hic—the approach of death, else had he never made such unreasonable demands. It shall not be."

And thus fell this grievous change on the realm of England. All the world knoweth what followed thereafter—how the corse of the first Edward was carried to London, the second Edward riding with it as far as Stafford, where he fell in and tarried with Sir Pierre de Gaveston. This evil spirit, at whose door I make bold to lay all the shame and sorrow that befell us in after time, had ventured back from banishment during the late king's illness, and resumed full sway over the pliant, pleasure-loving prince, who received him back with open arms. Among the very first letters patent which I, as clerk of the Council, had to submit for the new king's seal were those creating this Gaveston Earl of Cornwall. I marvelled not at Edward's love for Gaveston, he being an accomplished courtier, gallant in the field, and of noble bearing, yet respected he neither woman's honour or man's purse, being of a nature most lewd and covetous. Henceforward this greedy Gascon ruled England, so far as England can be said to have been ruled, when each man began to grasp for his own store and the realm

was rent by faction. I continued in my office at the Council, having, in truth, little heart for it, yet mindful of my sworn devoir to my late lord to be helpful to his son. Of little help I might be, seeing that my advice was never sought, only was I employed to register the decrees put into the king's mouth, and to conduct the correspondence.

Now I had passed my word to Mistress Challice that, be the tidings of le Marmion what they might, I would send them on to her express at Kendal, which promise lay heavily on my soul. Nevertheless I fulfilled it, telling her that Sir Walter had been seen smitten to the earth in the contest with the Scots, and that he was reckoned among the slain. I bade her submit bravely to the will of God, yet well I knew how she must suffer, and how vain must all consolation be for a while.

Then I rode in the king's train to Stafford, returning with him to Carlisle on the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene,[1] and lo! when I rode to my lodging in Saint Cuthbert's ward, I found word from Mistress Challice that she was in her house in the street of Saint Nicholas. It was not long after noon, therefore having dined and washed, I hastened to wait upon her.

Now as I fared along the causey, musing heavily what kind of comfort I could bring to that bruised spirit, one pulled me by the sleeve, and, turning, I beheld none other than Michael the Fenman.

"I was bound even now to your honour's lodging," said he, "but by chance the cripple caught the hare, and I make you my humble service, Sir Maurice."

"Make it short then, good Michael," quoth I, "seeing that I am pressed."

[1] 22nd July.

"If you would have a hen's egg, you must bear the cackling," said the old man, who never could open his mouth but some stale saw would slip out; "I have that to tell you maybe fain would know."

"See here, Michael," said I, "here is a silver half-penny for thee; go thou to the tavern, and come to my lodging an hour hence, when I will gladly hearken to thee. Meanwhile, I must to the Lady of Kendal, who is sorrowing sorely for thy master's death."

"Death, quotha! Look you, Sir Maurice, my master's coffin still grows in the greenwood."

"Speak, knave!" I cried, "and drop your parables for the nonce. Say you that Sir Walter le Marmion still lives?"

"Aye, doth he," answered the honest fellow, "and therefore the greater his need for a friend's help. Aye he liveth—at least he did live fourteen days since, when I last looked on him."

"And where is he?"

"Oh, among the scurvy Scots, but safe enough, I reckon, seeing the store they set by hard coin. They sent me here to seek his ransom; but Shanks is a sorry hackney; I was seven days on the road, and for seven days more I have been seeking audience of some one in authority. Methinks Cumberland justice is like kissing in Kent, and goeth by favour. I could get none to further my master's cause."

"Come with me, Michael," said I, scarcely containing myself for joy, "I will bring thee to one who, I'se warrant, will reward thee handsomely, and we will soon have your master back among us."

I was ushered, Michael with me, into the dining-hall of Challice's house, nor were we there for the telling of

half a score of beads ere Mistress Gillian came down to bid me to her mistress's bower. The Lily was dressed all in sad grey; I noted how sorrow had wasted the roses in her cheeks and drawn great shadows under her sweet eyes, and as I knelt to kiss her hand my heart leapt as I thought what joy was in store for this poor soul. Yet knowing how sudden happiness may disarray the hinges of a mind as surely as the pressure of grief, I blurted not out my tidings like a headstrong boy, but planned to bring the sun softly into her darkened heaven.

"You are welcome, Sir Maurice," said Challice, and then, as if my lineaments brought too clearly before her the image of him she had lost, she covered her poor face with her hands and turned away.

"You have suffered sorely, Challice," said I, "yet you have been brave and bowed to the Lord's will. I am here to bring you comfort."

"I look to you for comfort," she said, looking upon me again, and I noted that no tears had fallen from her eyes. "There is but one road for me to travel now, and I look for your guidance in it; for you too have renounced the world, have you not? I drew little help from Father Ailwyn"—a faint smile flitted across her features—"but you will show me how to proceed in obtaining admission to the Order of the Sisters of Saint Clare, and you will effect the surrender of my lands and goods to the king."

"Dear lady," said I, "you may command my best service in all things; but first listen to the tidings I bear, for they are good to hear."

"There is no more good for me to hear in this world"—she saw the light on my countenance, and gasped, then

seizing my hand with both hers, she cried—"He lives! Sir Maurice, he lives!"

I nodded my head, smiling, and then the well-springs were unloosed, and the first tears shed by Challice since she had received my message of dolour flowed warm and free. I stole quietly from the chamber, telling Gillian, who stood without, that I should await her mistress's summons in the hall.

I had not long to wait, and, taking Michael with me, I let him tell in his own way; howsoever, seeing that it was long and interspersed with many outlandish sayings, I prefer to tell here in mine own.

X.

Of the brave company that followed Sir Robert de Clifford to the taking of de Brus in the Glen of Trool, how it fared with them, and especially with Sir Walter le Marmion.

MERRILY rang out our English trumpets among the oaks of Cree in the first light of a May morning as de Clifford marshalled his own Cumberland yeomen and led them from their camp on the strath of Kirroughtrie. Never a comelier knight than he in all King Edward's Court, of whom the jongleurs do still use to sing—

"Robert le seignour de Cliffort
A ki raisons donne confort
De ses ennemis emcombrer
Toutes le foiz ki remembrer
Ki puet de son noble lignage.
. . . . . .
Si je estoie une pucellette
Je li donroie quer e cors,
Tant est de li bons li recors."[1]

[1] "Robert the Lord of Clifford who has reason for confidence in overcoming his enemies, as often as he calls to mind the fame of his noble lineage. . . . Were I a young maiden I would give him my heart and body, so excellent is his record."—ED.

Men were proud to rally under his famous gonfalon, whereof the field was chequered gold and azure charged with a scarlet fess.

Next in the column rode the Kendal dalesmen, Marmion at their head, preceded by young Geoffrey de Neville bearing the golden basnet, and followed by old Michael the Fenman. The pennon of de Roos, three red bougets on a golden field, fluttered over their heads; but Sir Walter wore a surcoat of his own bearings.

The rear was brought up by Sir John de Wigtoun with three hundred spearmen of Galloway, grim, bearded fellows, not so bravely attired as the English horsemen, yet hardy fighters on their lean, active nags, and thirsting for the first thrust at him whom they looked on as the oppressor of their own prince, Baliol. Sir John's banner and surcoat were alike black, bearing three golden stars, whereby he might be readily distinguished in the closest mellay.

Wellnigh nine hundred horsemen there were, of excellent quality as Marmion noted with approval, regretting only that they were not in the field against a foe who should more shrewdly test their mettle. Yet was it evil ground for cavalry; the woodland track was so strait that the horsemen were compelled to move in single file, whereby from the advanced files to the rearmost it was nigh unto two parts of a league. Howbeit, there was little risk of a flank attack so far from the mountains, and de Clifford reckoned on extending his front upon the open upland beyond the woods.

It was a false reckoning. It is true that after advancing ten miles the column cleared the dense forest, and entered upon a rough moorland, wooded only on the rocky heights, which stood like islets out of the plain;

but that plain itself was sheer morass, impassable by horses. In vain de Clifford cursed his guide, threatening to hang him as a traitor. Marmion told me afterwards he believed the fellow was faithful enough. Speaking no tongue but his own barbarous Erse, he could but point to a blue chasm in the mountain-wall some two leagues before us, and explain through the interpreter how that was the Glen of Trool. Clearly to be seen it was that no man could ride thither, at least in such a season, and I marvel much that a knight experienced in so many wars as was de Clifford had not examined the ground with scouts beforehand; for such we had learned in Palestine to be of greater moment to success than even valour in combat or speed in manœuvre. Howbeit, it is ever the snare of our English captains that they disdain spying and scouting as unknightly employ, longing ever for the clash of arms and crush of chaudmellay.

Clifford, then, had perforce to order his squadrons to dismount and picket their horses on the green holms of Borgan, where the rivers Cree and Minnick meet. Spears were piled in rows, inasmuch as our English soldiers, unlike the Scots, are not trained to use the spear afoot, and find it but an encumbrance. There were but forty quarellers [1] in de Clifford's troop; the rest fell in armed with sword and dagger only. But Sir John de Wigtoun's men had been trained, as all Scotsmen were, to handle their spears afoot as pikemen. Sir John had learnt that art from the Flemings, who five years before had overthrown Count Robert d'Artois in the Battle of the Spurs at Courtray, and shown how foot-soldiery, armed with pikes alone, were more than a match for the proudest chivalry

[1] Crossbowmen, so named from the "quarells" or bolts fired from their weapons.—Ed.

of France. These men of Galloway, then, claimed the vaward, to which de Clifford gave assent, and changed the order of march in such fashion that the Kendal troop became rearmost. Rest assured that Marmion chafed thereat not a little, yet had to obey his chief.

From Borgan the array advanced on foot, making slow progress, for the way was exceeding rough, and it was high noon when they halted for mealtithe at the entrance to the pass of Trool. Not a sound came from the glen to betoken the presence of living man, not a wreath of smoke—nothing but the scream of a pair of buzzards, wheeling slowly above the dark pines on the hill flanks, the whistle of the curlew, and the distant bleating of a sheep. The soldiers were weary and wet with struggling through the bogs; before them rose the mountains, cleft with one mighty rent, wherein slumbered a winding mere between mighty precipices. No wise commander would choose to hazard his men farther in such a trap, unless confident in the weakness of the enemy. De Clifford, fearing an ambush, sent for the guide once more and questioned him right sharply as to the numbers with de Brus, and his exact position.

"Fifteen score, or twenty at the most," affirmed the fellow, a ragged, low-browed rascal, round whose neck for better security a noosed rope had been passed, fastened to the girdles of two stout spearmen: "half of them with the Brus, and half, belike, with Sir James of Douglas."

"And how be they armed?" inquired de Clifford.

"No two of them alike," answered the guide, "and that's the truth. There be some with bows, and some with pikes, some with sperthes,[1] and some with whinzeours and dirks."

[1] Fighting axes.

"Has there been sickness among them?" asked de Clifford.

"Nothing worse than comes of empty wames," quoth the Scot, "and the devil knows that has been rife enough, belly-timber being hard to come by in the hill country."

De Clifford cast his eye over the stout fellows, beef- and corn-fed, lying in their ranks upon the heather; no symptoms of short commons among them, thought he.

"Can ye lead us to where King Hobbe lieth?" he went on. "Mark ye, fellow! on the first sign of treason, you swing from the nearest branch."

"I can take you as far as the loch-foot," answered the spy, "where dwells a cailleach,[1] who knows the very spot. The Brus slew her son with his own hand, wherefore she hath vowed to deliver him over to the English."

At a sign from Sir Robert the troops started to their feet; not a trumpet sounded to give warning to the foe; the march was taken up in silence. At the entrance to the glen the guide halted, pointing to a thicket of hazels, where, he said, lived the woman who was to show the way to the harbour of de Brus. Among these bushes was a kind of hovel, built of rough stones and turf and thatched with heather, so wondrously resembling the shaggy moor around that a man might scarce have spied it were it not for the trampling of the herbage near the entrance.

The spy whistled thrice after the manner of a curlew, and anon there stood in the opening of this den a grey-haired hag, screening her eyes from the sun with her skinny hand. The spy, still between his two guards, approaching her began to speak in Erse; whereat the hag grew excited, the barbarous words came fast from her lips, and thrice she shook her fist towards the defile

[1] An old woman.

between the mountains. But when, at de Clifford's command, a rope was passed round her neck, she fell into a frenzy, waving her arms and scolding shrill in her unknown tongue. Hardly might the other rascal pacify her, explaining that she was not going to be hanged—the rope being no more than such precaution as soldiers do mostly use to observe with doubtful characters.

Once more the column advanced. The ground became more steep; the space between the mere and the hillside narrowed so sharply that the men lost all order and struggled forward at random through a thick wood. This for the space of some two miles, after which the trees grew more scattered, and a prospect might be had to the utmost end of the glen. The hag beckoned that all should lie down, and pointed to a lofty hill-face which lay right athwart the pass, upon which, she made de Clifford understand, was the harbour of the Brus.

De Clifford summoned Marmion and de Wigtour into council. Should they attempt to surround this crag, which seemed scarce possible from the steepness of the ground? or would it not be better to scale it from the west where they lay, trusting that if the rebels took to flight they would fall into the hands either of de Percy, who was advancing from the north, or of Sir John de Botetourte, who held the passes into Nithsdale? All three knights were of one mind. Their men had been in saddle and afoot a matter of eight hours already; to scatter them on a circuit of many miles through these accursed mountains might be to lose them altogether. It was resolved to take Craigmin[1] (for so they called

[1] On the face of Craigmin the shepherds still show the King's Seat, whence Robert Bruce viewed de Clifford's party entering Glentrool. —ED.

the precipice where de Brus was reputed to lie) in front. The beldame, having discharged her part, was set at liberty with a handful of silver pieces.

It was no small encouragement to the knights that the approach of their column had not roused alarm in the glen: all was silent and no man moved on the hills; their only fear was lest the rebels should have decamped, and that the glory of taking King Hobbe should fall to the lot of some other party.

The conference over, each knight rejoined his company. Michael the Fenman stole to his master through the brush.

"See that, squire?" quoth he, addressing him in the style he had used from boyhood, and pointing to a table-land half-way up the mountain, round which the track lay which they were to follow.

"I see nothing but a few lapwings tumbling about," replied Marmion; "what of that?"

"Mickle of that!" answered Michael; "I would have thought you would have been in the fens long enough to know that those birds don't cry for nothing."

"Well?" queried the master.

"I wish it may be well," retorted the servant. "Good heed is safe speed. There are men up yonder, or the birds would not be so noisy about their eggs."

"Men are what we are looking for," replied Marmion lightly, and the English moved on by the lake-side. The way ever grew worse. They came to a place—men call it the Steps of Trool—where the mountain plunges fair into the dark waters below, and one by one the soldiers had to clamber along a narrow ledge for the space of two full bowshots. De Wigtoun with his vanguard got safely across and stood on better ground. Clifford's

borderers were creeping along the rock-face, while Marmion waited his turn to bring up the rear, when a bugle rang out far up the face of Craigmin. Instantly a yell pealed along the crags above the Englishmen; great rocks came hurtling down the precipice, crushing the scattered soldiers or hurling them into the depths below, and soon the air was hissing thick with arrows. They had been led into a frightful ambush. The worst befell de Clifford's men; truly it was piteous to behold these stout yeomen thus penned for slaughter; but all alike in the column were helpless against their foes high aloft. Marmion's rereward could not advance, nor yet Wigtoun's vaward retreat, Clifford's company blocking the only passage. Hell was let loose on these brave men, who could not strike a blow in their own defence.

Marmion and his squire Geoffrey thrust as far forward as they might for the press, mad to succour their comrades, but the way was closed against them by living and dead men. While they were thus struggling with the throng, a boulder plunged fair on Geoffrey's head, scattering his brains over Marmion's gay surcoat. That horrid sight was the last that met the knight's eyes ere sudden darkness fell upon them.

. . . .

After the senses have been knocked out of a man, the first of them to return is, ordinarily, the most trivial—namely, smelling. Hence when Marmion came again to consciousness the first thing he perceived was the sharp odour of pine branches. Opening his eyes, he beheld nothing but a green glimmer, and calling "Geoffrey!" marvelled that his voice came so faint. "Michael!" but none answered, and he lay still, feebly wondering. Anon sleep or something more profound

came upon him again, and when he woke again he heard one who stirred beside him. It was Michael the Fenman.

"Where am I, Michael?" asked the knight.

"Neither in heaven nor hell," replied his attendant, "though I reckoned you were bound straight for one or the other. Yet are there more devils at hand than a man might wish. Your valiancy is in the Scottish camp."

"Pardie! how came I thither?"

"The same way that the king goeth to his own funeral—that is, feet foremost."

"Was I hurt?"

"Even so, my master. I will not tell a lie for scant o' news. You came by what would ha' been fill o' hurt for most stomachs; howbeit the young tree bends where the old oak breaks."

Walter lay still for a space, striving to recall what had passed, but the mirror was blank of all that befell after entering the glen. He tried to rise, but a sharp pang shot through his breast and threw him back on his heather couch. His eyes, becoming used to the gloom, told him that he lay in a small hut or booth, roofed with green pine branches and floored with growing heath, of which a stack had been piled to make his bed. Michael had left the hut, but returned anon with a warm drink strained from seethed oatmeal, mingled with milk and sweetened with honey, whereof Marmion drank slowly till he drained the horn. Michael was well pleased.

"Meat and matins hinder no man's journey," said he, there being few occasions which he could not match from his store of set saws; "and that is the first meat that hath passed thy gullet these three days."

"Three days!" cried Marmion, in a voice, feeble indeed, yet greatly strengthened by the nourishment. "I broke my fast heartily before we left Kirroughtrie camp this morning."

"This morning, quotha! that was three mornings ago. Mickle water goeth by the sleeping miller,"—and not another word would Michael say at that time, nor was it until Walter had slept again, long and sound, that he could recount the events of the combat at the Steps of Trool. Then he told him how a boulder, hurled from the height, had struck him fair on the chest and, knocking him senseless, had broken two or three ribs, which Michael's leechcraft was even now in exercise to heal.

"Where are my comrades, Michael?"

"A bloody day for England," sighed the Fenman, shaking his head. "It was a foolhardy venture to push into these wastes without prickers in advance. The fool saith—Who would have thought it? yet none would listen to old Michael when he pointed the warning of the lapwings."

"But where is Geoffrey de Neville?"

"Death devours lambs as well as sheep," answered Michael. "The brave lad fell, as half our men must have fallen, in his tracks, without so much as a blow struck in defence. The Scots were far above us on the crags; they just rolled the rocks upon us as we stood. Of the vanguard, scarcely a man escaped; but Sir Robert brought away about half his company, and your Kendal blades, being in the rearward, made good retreat. What mortal man could fight against mountains and rocks?"

"And we are prisoners with the Scots?" asked Marmion.

"Aye," replied the other; "it's come to little, but it's

come to that. When the mellay began I kept beside your valiancy, for, thinks I to myself, the lord may be laired and need the hind's help. Master Geoffrey, poor gentleman, was slain first — it's past joking when the head's off, thinks I; then I cried to you to watch yourself, but there was not time for you to heed me: a mickle rock struck you clean on the corslet. I pulled you under a bank where there was some shelter from the falling stuff, and it was there the Scots devils found us when they came to strip the slain. They would ha' cut my throat, sure enough, and were bent on it, had not one of better bearing noted the charges on your surcoat. Seeing these, he calls out in the heathen tongue to the savages, and then he turns to me and quoth he, 'Who's that you have there?' 'Sir Walter le Marmion of Shakingdon,' quoth I, seeing that truth may be told in few words, but a lie needs a long preamble. 'Good!' quoth he, with a grimace as though he smelt a savoury nuncheon; 'then yield you my prisoners.' 'Hell won't be full till you're in it,' thinks I to myself, 'but better long little than soon nothing,' and obeyed with as fine a grace as I could muster. By the rood! but it was a canny chance, for had this gentleman been later on the scene by the saying of a paternoster, you and I would have fed the scald crows, my master; and that's as sure as there's a louse in Pomfret. They kept me alive not by reason of any value there is in my old hide, but that I might keep the life in you, and so Sir Robert Boyd, for that is the knight who stopped the slaying, might hold your valiancy to a good ransom."

Walter le Marmion lay long in his shelter, for he had been sorely bruised and broken by the great stone; yet by Michael's careful tending and dressing of his wounds, and yet more, perchance, by virtue of his youth

and clean blood, he stood after many days upon his feet and warmed himself in the summer sun. Sir Robert Boyd had set over him a secure watch, and came nearly every day to see how his prisoner fared, for knights ever set great store upon their equals taken in battle, forasmuch as they look to making sure gain by their ransom. One morning there came with Boyd another knight, for such Marmion deemed his rank to be, albeit he knew him not, and his attire was simple, without cognisance or knightly device. He stood somewhat over the middle height, with broad shoulders and flat back and limbs of exceeding strength. Fresh of colour, his hair and beard had grown long and of a golden colour, barbers, I ween, being scarce in that wilderness; his eyes, of a dark-grey hue, were bright and searching and of a noble aspect, even as of one accustomed to bear rule. This knight, then, made courteous inquiry about Sir Walter's recovery, and began to question him concerning the king's forces, their disposition, strength, and other matters, of which things the prisoner spake never a word, disdaining to make false report and little inclined to reveal the truth.

"Art thou not feared, sir knight," asked the rebel chief, "to withhold what thou knowest, seeing that it needs but a word from Robert King of Scots and thou shalt look on land and sky no more?"

"I hold not life so dear," quoth Sir Walter, "that I would pay for it with mine honour. As for him you call King of Scots, I count him recreant and forsworn. The rightful King of Scots is Edward Plantagenet."

Boyd started forward, as though he would deal Marmion a buffet, but the other stayed him.

"Softly, good Sir Robert," quoth he, "softly with your prisoner. In good sooth, he hath said no more than I

should say, did I stand in his place. I am pleased that my cousin Edward has such a good servant—the more so that we have gotten him." Then he continued to le Marmion—"Forgive me, fair sir, I did but test the report which has been borne to us of the high character of Sir Walter le Marmion, which I perceive was no false one. You have fallen among your master's foes, yet not altogether among thieves. Your purse and person are as safe with us as in Carlisle Castle; nevertheless to regain your freedom we must require of your friends a ransom of five thousand golden nobles,[1] wherefore we beseech you to communicate with them speedily."

"Sir knight," replied Marmion, "I know not who you may be" (the stranger smiled), "but it is like you are one bearing rule among the king's rebels, and I warn you that no messenger from that faction would be received except as an outlaw in any of the king's castles."

"We thank you for the warning," quoth the stranger knight; "pardie! the bloody work in Carlisle and Newcastle have made us well aware of the terms we have to expect. Howbeit, you have a servant here. Let him bear tidings of your present plight to Carlisle."

"I am but a poor gentleman, sir knight," returned Walter; "my lands of Shakingdon are pledged as heavily as they will bear already. Nevertheless, if you will obtain a pass for my varlet, I have friends in Carlisle whom I would fain inform that I am still alive."

"So be it, then," said the other, and turned to go; then, halting on the threshold, added—"you shall have your freedom to move abroad within limits of our outposts, if you give your knightly parole not to escape. We

[1] About £1666 in modern currency, but representing a far higher value in the fourteenth century.—ED.

will set our cousin Edward an example how to deal with prisoners of every degree."

Walter hesitated. To find his way out of the wilderness without a guide and in his present weakness seemed a slender hope.

"Take my parole, then," he said, not with the fairest grace, for he was sore at heart, not knowing where his ransom might be raised. "Take it, until I call it back. I take Sir Robert Boyd to witness that I will not pass beyond the outposts until I give due warning that my parole is resumed. Yet have I title to know to whom I have committed that parole."

The stranger knight smiled again, saying—

"All men call me Robert de Brus, but the people of this land know me as the King of Scots."

Sir Walter was startled; a scoffing reply rose to his lips, yet prudence counselled him to hold his peace and he obeyed it. Moreover there was that in the appearance and address of the rebel chief which took Marmion's favour despite himself,—a mingled dignity and kindliness —a courtliness—the manner of the great world—strangely at variance with his homely attire and untended locks. The English knight felt that he stood before one who, although rebel and murderer, was yet a man indeed and a leader of men.

"We have heard tell of your quest, Sir Knight of the Splendid Crest," continued de Brus, pointing to Marmion's helmet which lay on his folded jupon in a corner of the hut, and which it had been Michael's pride even in captivity to keep bright and clean. "Rest assured that we shall do nothing to interfere with your devoir to the Lady of Kendal, in whose house we lay in our last passage through England. Permit us to wish you a

speedy release, that you may the sooner accomplish her behest."

That night Michael was put under the guidance of two of Boyd's men, who led him many leagues through a naughty wilderness and at daybreak set him free, directing him by sundry landmarks how he should hold his way into Nithsdale and thence to the English border.

XI.

Of the manner in which Sir Walter le Marmion's ransom was paid, and of the Earl of Cornwall's suit for the hand of Mistress Challice.

NEVER did damoysel hearken so intently to trouvère's virelai, ballad, or *chanson de geste*, as did the Lady Challice to Michael the Fenman's long story. She never took her eyes off his countenance, and I marked her colour flush and fade and flush again, as she followed the speaker into that valley of the shadow of death. When the tale was told she turned to me with a light I had never thought to see again in those dear eyes.

"He was dead to us, Sir Maurice," quoth she faintly, with the dew of joy rising under her lids, "and lo! he liveth. What offering can I make to Our Lady for this most blessed deliverance?" Then rising from her seat she went on in stronger accents. "Now let us lose no time about the ransom. Gentle Sir Maurice, you will doubtless prepare for its speedy despatch under proper escort. It must be sent to-morrow — why not indeed to-night? My dear knight must not lie an hour longer among those bloody men than it needs for succour to reach him."

My mind misgave me; I knew not where this great sum was to be had.

"Dear lady," said I, "rest assured that no time will be lost in transacting this business, albeit we may not proceed so swiftly as we all desire. The king is absent; his treasurer is with him, and unless these were at hand and willing to advance the money on the security of Walter's kinsman, Sir Philip of Scrivelsby, it were hard to say whence it could be come by."

The Lily of Kendal flushed deeply.

"Sir Maurice," she said, "let not that perplex you. I have wealth — God knoweth, far more than I want. What should be simpler than that the town treasurer should advance this money upon my warrant? The credit of the Honor of Kendal will stretch to that, methinks, in this town of Carlisle. Look you, Sir Maurice, sit down quickly and clerk me out the necessary instrument. Quick, quick!"

I did her bidding so far as to draw forth a piece of fair skin from my scrip, for in truth I was little behind her in eagerness to have Sir Walter back on English soil, yet I deemed it right to go forward circumspectly in so weighty a matter. Pausing, therefore, after unscrewing the inkhorn, I said to her—

"It is well that you should know how far you are reaching forth your hand, lest you should not be able to draw it back at pleasure. Sir Walter le Marmion is rich in many things, but parlously poor in gold; and I know not aught that will cut him more cruelly than to find himself under a debt which is far beyond his power to repay."

"Go to, Sir Maurice!" cried Challice, with all her old gaiety back again; "surely your wit is not so slow

as to conceive that Sir Walter shall ever know whence his ransom comes. I charge you on your knightly honour, and you too"—turning to Michael the Fenman —"on the true faith you bear to your master, that no word of this matter shall come to his hearing. Nay, I will have you both swear"—and with a quick turn of her hand she had my misericorde from its sheath; then holding the cross of the hilt before us, she caused us both to swear by the holy symbol that we would never betray her part in the business, unless it were with her consent given.

And thus was Walter's ransom found. On the eve of Saint Peter ad Vincula[1] a troop of forty of the Lady Challice's light horsemen under Captain Leonard de Musgrave passed out of the Richergate, Michael the Fenman riding in their midst, leading a pack-horse laden with five thousand golden nobles. Mistress Challice continued in her house in Carlisle, counting the hours till Walter should return. Before that came about, however, the king came back to the town and with him the newly belted Earl of Cornwall. A council was summoned to meet on Saint Bartholomew's day,[2] whereat I rejoiced, for I had great store of despatches from our commanders in Scotland waiting the king's attention, some of them, God knoweth, of evil purport enough. Yet could I not persuade his Grace to give ear to them. When I read a letter from de Valence, telling how de Brus had taken the field, and that people from all parts had gathered to him in such sort that, intrenching himself upon strong ground at Loudoun Hill, he had repulsed the onset of three thousand horse under de Valence himself, slain many of our men and put the

[1] 1st August. [2] 24th August.

rest to flight—when I read these black tidings to him, I say, he showed little concern.

Now between Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall, and Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, there had never been other than ill-will and envy on the Gascon's part, distrust and dislike on the other's. Gaveston, quick and subtle as the serpent, was ever at the ear of Edward of Carnarvon, whispering evil about de Valence, whom the first Edward loved chief among the younger knights. Therefore when I finished Sir Aymer's letter—

"Pardie," quoth Cornwall, "they make a fine mountain out of this Scots molehill. What would Joseph the Jew have?" (for so this graceless earl had named Sir Aymer, by reason of his sallow countenance). "He hath in his command twenty thousand men; is not that enough to scatter the ragged rabble of King Hobbe? 'Tis my belief that twenty thousand more would not satisfy him."

"Nay," said I, scarce able to swallow my wrath against this Gascon devil, "but, under my lord the king's favour, what is wanted is that his Grace himself should take the field without delay. The Scottish commonalty are taking arms because, knowing that the late king is dead, they see none in his place, and they incline to make friends with the unrighteous mammon. Nor is it the commonalty alone; some of the barons also begin to waver. I have here a letter which I was about to lay before your Highness, telling how Simon and Alexander Fraser, powerful knights in the parts about Aberdeen, have gone over to the rebels with all their following."

"We will hear of that on the morrow, good Sir Maurice," quoth the king, who, as I have said, was ever gentle of speech and courteous withal.

"Under favour, sire," I persisted, "but there have been murmurs even among our English nobles and commonalty, forasmuch as the twentieth penny has been granted and levied for the furtherance of the Scottish war, yet the work goes neither forward nor toward."

"De Valence is our viceroy in the north, and we trust him too well to doubt that he will render right account of these rebels in the end. Meantime, there be other matters of nearer moment to us in which we shall welcome your aid. We have been advised that our father of blessed memory set too little store of late years upon consolidating his power by the wise disposition of his wards in marriage. Now there is at this time, we are advised, in this very town, one of the wealthiest of these wards, as yet unbetrothed—the Lady of the Honor of Kendal. You know the damoysel, for we remember how you brought her to audience with the late king in this very chamber."

My heart grew cold at this hearing.

"Sire," I answered, "I know the lady right well, but she is already promised in marriage by the sanction of your Highness's sire."

"We have other views for her," said the king. "We heard, indeed, that something had passed between her and one Sir Lack-land in our presence, but such as [illegible] not be suffered to interfere in our disposal of wealth and military power."

"But, sire——" I began.

"Prithee, no more at present, Sir Maurice," said the king. "Let a summons be sent to the Lady of Kendal to attend our Court at this hour on the morrow."

I could do no more than my duty. How long that

duty should remain such as I could discharge every day as it passed left me in the greater doubt. Advancing years would have furnished reason enough for demitting my office at any moment, and this I would have done at the first, but for the obligation laid upon me by my dying master. I would have done it now straightway, but that I saw a chance of being of some slight service to my dear young friends. Therefore I sent forward the king's summons to Mistress Challice, not daring to bear them myself, lest I should be tempted to betray to her what was coming. Fain would I have warned her thereof, but my vow as a privy councillor sealed my lips. I beheld her not, then, till she was ushered into the presence on the morrow; when, knowing the sore trial to which she was about to be exposed, I scarce dared lift my eyes upon her beloved countenance.

The king, wearing a gown of lettuce green, passmented with gold and garnets, received the Lily's obeisance with his courtly grace, and bade her be seated upon his left hand. Upon his right hand sat the Earl of Cornwall, yet more gorgeously apparelled than the king, in long jupon *gorge-de-pigeon*, embroidered with pearls and set off with orange-tenney silk. He, having risen with the rest of us, saving the king, when the lady entered, did reseat himself so near the king that his Grace did from time to time recline against the earl, passing his arm round the said earl's neck and even putting his hand in his bosom, as though he had been his paramour; which manner I have seen the Italians use to their close friends, yet hath it always been held unseemly among Englishmen. Besides this earl and myself, there were present but five other privy councillors—to wit, the good Earl of Lincoln, whom Cornwall, in his wanton insolence, had

named *boele-crevée;*[1] Gilbert de Clare, young Earl of Gloucester, whom he thought it no shame to address to his face as *filz-à-puteyne;* Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, the king's cousin, whom he spoke of as *vielers*[2] behind his back; John Hulton, Bishop of Carlisle; and John of Stratford, the king's treasurer. Making becoming reverence to these, Mistress Challice took her seat beside the king, who spoke as here follows to her :—

"You are welcome to our Court, madame, both by reason of the grace brought thereto by the presence of such a gracious lady, but by reason of the high esteem we bear to the Honor of Kendal. Furthermore, standing as we do towards you in the place of guardian, it is concerning your own affairs that we have sought occasion to confer with you."

"My poor affairs are surely beneath your Highness's regard," replied Challice. "My estates are administered by my good uncle Sir Blaise de Strickland, who is even now at Kendal conducting my household. Some three hundred of my levies are with Sir Robert de Clifford in Galloway, the rest are gathering in the hay on their lands."

"It is of something nearer your welfare than lands and levies that we would speak, fair lady," said the king. "You are young, yet not so young but that we marvel greatly that the good king, our father, did not choose one of his most favoured barons upon whom to bestow your hand in wedlock."

No thunder ever clapped so suddenly as this speech upon the Lily's ears: she had received no warning, yet quailed she not as she made reply.

"The king your father did not forget the humblest of

[1] Burst-belly. [2] Fiddler.

his lieges. I had his royal promise before witnesses that I should make my own choice of a husband, and, sire, that choice is already made."

"The king our father was in his dotage, madame, when he gave such a promise. What! *noblesse oblige*, madame; our realm would soon go to wreck if ladies of great estate were suffered to wed with as little ceremony as kitchen wenches. No, madame, we propose for you an alliance worthy of your ancient lineage and great possessions. We have selected our trusty cousin Sir Pierre de Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall, to be your loving spouse, and it is our pleasure that you do accept him before our Council here assembled, and dispose all things for your speedy espousals." [1]

Challice had turned pale as ivory, yet her voice was steady and clear as she answered the king.

"Sire, my troth is plighted to Sir Walter le Marmion of Shakingdon, upon certain conditions which I am well assured he will fulfil. In all things within my power your Grace's command is my pleasure, but in this matter I am bound by my word, whence I may not—I will not depart."

"But a maiden's troth," interposed Gaveston, "unless

[1] It will be noted that this incident, as told by Sir Maurice de Bulkeley, clashes with the accepted date of the Earl of Cornwall's betrothal to Margaret de Clare, sister of the Earl of Gloucester and niece of Edward II. The Exchequer accounts record this as having taken place on 1st November 1307, just after the old king's funeral, which would not consist with Cornwall pressing his suit for Challice de Roos in August of that year and thereafter. On the other hand, de Bulkeley's statement accords with that of the chronicler Walsingham, who, following John de Trokelowe, states that Cornwall's marriage with Margaret de Clare did not take place until after his return from Ireland in 1309.—ED.

it receive the blessing of Holy Church, cannot be reckoned valid. Speak I not sooth, my lord bishop?"

"The truth, my lord of Cornwall," replied John Hulton. "The Church hath appointed certain forms for ratifying the betrothal of man and woman——"

("Not forgetting the fees for the same," I plainly heard Cornwall whisper behind his hand to the king.)

——"and the vows of those persons who neglect such ordinances are written as it were in sand."

"Written in sand or graven in steel, I care not," said Challice bravely, "from my plighted troth I pass not."

"The law of this land," quoth the king, "has given us certain duties and rights, and the power to execute and enforce the same. Nevertheless we should be loth to constrain a damoysel whom we hold in such high esteem; surely our ward will admit that we have been discreet in our choice. A belted earl, a gallant knight—pardie! your ladyship must not reckon on escaping the envy of other dames."

Gaveston rose and, passing round to where the Lily of Kendal sat, went lightly on his knee.

"Dismiss me not unheard, Mistress Challice," said he. "Here is one who craves no higher honour than to wear your colours in the lists or against the king's enemies. I pledge my word that I will ever be your true knight against all comers, that I will place your favour before all other ends, and serve you so till death us do part."

She suffered him to take her hand and raise it to his lips. For a brief space I sat amazed, thinking that she would surely shake off his touch as it had been that of some unclean reptile. But that had been the gesture of any ordinary maiden; and Challice de Roos was different from any that ever I beheld. She suffered the earl to

kiss her hand, as coldly as though she had been a queen accepting the homage of a subject. Then quietly withdrawing it, rose to her feet and spoke without passion, yet with a decision which none present could misinterpret.

"Never, sir earl. Your Grace and my lords, I summon you all to witness—I swear by the Mother of God, by Saint Herbert of Derwentwater, and by my father's bones, that never will I wed with any man save Sir Walter le Marmion of Shakingdon. Sire," turning to the king, "have I your Grace's leave to withdraw?"

"To your own house, madame," replied the king, still looking not unkindly on the damoysel; "but, on your peril, not beyond the town-gates until further word from us." Then, when Challice had left the chamber, "Cousin Pierre," he said to Cornwall, "methinks you had best leave this Lily in the border where she grows. There was a shrewish gleam in those pretty eyes which bodes little peace in a man's household."

"Nay, cousin Ned"—for so this ribald had the impiety to address the Lord's anointed—"you have but put the bit in her mouth; what wonder that she frets at the first restraint. She is a lass of mettle, and will bend bravely to the hand after a few such passages. A pretty piece like that is worth some patience to win."

And the earl delicately smoothed his beard with a scented kerchief, while that I wished all the plagues of Egypt might fall upon him for his insolence.

"Sangdieu!" growled my lord of Lincoln, more outspoken than one in my office could be, "no man shall speak thus lightly of our English dames before my face. You will do me the favour, sir Gascon, to pick your terms with greater care when the Lady of Kendal's name comes up."

"The Countess of Cornwall, as she will soon be, stands in no need of my lord of Lincoln to read me lessons in manners," said Pierre, with a nonchalant wave of his jewelled hand, and without giving so much as a glance towards the other.

Lincoln flushed an angry red, and Lancaster, who hated the Gascon more bitterly than any of us, whispered in his ear. I feared there would be an outbreak even in the presence, but the king smoothed matters over for the nonce, saying in his gentle way—

"Nay, cousin Lincoln, but the Earl of Cornwall meant no offence. We must allow that the damoysel gave scant hearing to his suit. But who is this Knight of Shakingdon who hath wonned so far in her fancy?"

"One who is not likely to win much further, sire," answered Cornwall—"a veritable Gautier Sans-avoir, held to ransom by the Scots at this present for five thousand gold nobles, and the devil himself could not raise as many deniers off Shakingdon manor."

I held my peace, well knowing that my dear young knight would be with us anon to answer for himself; yet I quailed as I counted the odds against which he would have to contend. Presently my thoughts were occupied with other matters, inasmuch as the Council turned to consideration of the Scottish war. The Earls of Lancaster and Lincoln spoke up boldly, declaring that the barons of England were not going to suffer the kingdom to be rent in twain, and insisting on due consideration being given to the position of our forces in the north. They met with support from a quarter whence it might have been least expected. Cornwall had faults enow, God knoweth, but he was a good commander; no man ever called in question his courage in the field. Whether it

were that his knightly spirit was roused to repair the disasters which had overtaken de Valence, or whether he was too shrewd to feel all the disregard he professed for the opinion of his peers, it is certain that it was his influence which determined the king, after all these months of inaction, to put himself at the head of his army and lead them into Scotland. It was his influence, also, that made the king recall de Valence, if not in disgrace, at all events in discredit; in place of whom the king's cousin, John de Bretagne, Earl of Richmond, was appointed viceroy in Scotland.

From that moment it was a changed world in Carlisle. The listlessness, the uncertainty, which had lain so long and so heavily on captain and private lance alike, were at an end. The streets rang to the tramp of horse and the clash of arms as the levies were mustered to their full strength; blithely the dalesmen left their harvest, scarce begun, to be finished by women and boys, for had not the word gone forth that King Edward was going to redeem his pledge to his dying sire and restore victory to the leopards of England?

As for Challice, I bade her be of good cheer. I deemed it no breach of confidence to tell her what was daily more apparent—to wit, that the influence of Gaveston was on the wane, and that the other barons, Hereford, Warwick, Lincoln, and Lancaster, were resolved that the affairs of the kingdom should no longer be guided by him. I told her that Sir Walter would soon be with us once more; that the fortune of war would bring opportunity that he should perform his devoir, and that—and that—well, my own heart was so heavy when I sought to persuade myself that Cornwall would resign his suit, that I could not afford her much solace on that score.

"Wait," said I, with all the assurance I could muster, "watch, and pray. When devotion like Walter's is yours, God and His saints will never suffer that wicked Gascon to effect his will."

"Wait!" murmured Challice with a fleeting smile. "Watch!" she continued aloud, "while the cloud shadows flit across the cornfields and the sea-gulls toss in the wind. Pray! Have I not prayed till I was sick, and all that has come out of it is that Walter is wounded and a prisoner, and the king has decreed me to another husband? Oh you men, you men! how glibly you bid us poor women watch and wait and pray, and how little you know the burden you lay upon us—the boon that is yours is the privilege *to do!*"

. . . .

Amid the bustle of preparation for the Scottish expedition, I took occasion to approach my lord the king when Cornwall was not with him, and obtained his consent that Challice should return to Kendal, and abide his pleasure among her own people. Thither, therefore, she went before we marched northward, but with the army rode a hundred of her horsemen in red and yellow, the rest being still absent on service in Galloway.

It was a grand sight as we set forth on a bright autumn morning, and my old heart was stirred with pride in the power of England, such as I had never thought to feel again, so little spirit had there been in our affairs since Edward of Carnarvon came to their head. But, as I have said, nothing was lacking to the Earl of Cornwall in skill and knowledge for the marshalling of a host, and in this he acted as lieutenant under the king. The levies numbered fully thirty thousand, of which one half were cavalry; but besides these there was the usual horde

of sutlers, provisioners, camp-followers both men and women, so that in all there cannot have been less than fifty thousand souls assembled on the Swifts that morning around the leopards of the royal standard. The army was in four divisions; the first under the good Earl of Lincoln, of whom the trouvères sang—

> "Ki provesté enbrasce é acole
> E en son cuer le a soveraine." [1]

His banner flew bravely out, bearing the purple lion on a field of yellow silk. Next in the column marched the division of the Constable, the young Earl of Hereford, easily to be known by the lioncels of de Bohun, separated by the broad silver bend cotised with gold, all on an azure field. Lances and pennons clustered thick where the scarlet silk, charged with a gold fess and six cross crosslets, blew out over the head of the Earl of Warwick, commanding the third division. Scarlet also flamed in the banner of the fourth leader, known by the ermine cross, famous on many a field, to be none other than Anthony Bek, the bold and wary Bishop of Durham. Besides these chief standards, how many bright bannerets and pennons flash out before my blind eyes as I sit here in fond reverie: the gold and scarlet bars of FitzAlan, the chevronels of de Clare in the same tinctures, the billets and danzette of d'Eyncourt, gold upon blue, the bezants of de la Touch upon a crimson field, the cups and crosslets of Argentine—these and many more. My ears are filled with the flare of trumpets and the rattle of the royal kettle-drums, memorial of the Eastern battlefields whence my old master had brought the fashion which he loved.

[1] "Who holds fast to valour and worships it,
Making it the sovereign of his heart."

I behold them all marshalled and marshalling in the green meadows, such a goodly company of chevaliers as perchance may never more be mustered in England, so sorely has the realm been riven by unreason of its rulers. Dear Jesu! forgive me if I dwell on the glory of that morning—if the memory thereof withdraws my thoughts for a space from the contemplation of Thy cross and passion.

On the second night after our departure we encamped about Dumfries, a moderate town of the Scots upon the march of Galloway, and here it was that I once more embraced my dear knight of Shakingdon. His ransom had reached the Scottish camp without misadventure; de Brus had summoned him before him without delay, restored to him his sword and shield, and, in parting with him, spoken some notable words, as here followeth.

"Go thou free, Sir Walter," said he, "and may God speed thee in thine honourable quest. Happy may'st thou be in thy lady's love, as happy as thou art—thou know'st not how happy—in thy single allegiance to our cousin of England. We grudge thee not to him; in good sooth we have more to fear in the father's bones than in the living son. Neither do we wish him any ill. Bid him from us that he look to his own realm and rule his heritage wisely. In so doing he shall find none of his neighbours more willing to aid than the King of Scots. But tell him also that we had rather be a Scottish carle than an English earl. Say to him that he kicks against the pricks in trying to bend our subjects to his yoke. Let the misery and bloodshed lie at the door of himself and his counsellors, that must follow if he persist in this unjust war."

I burned as I hearkened to these insolent sayings.

"Take your message to the king, Sir Walter," quoth I. "The right spirit is within him now, and a rebel's taunts like these will serve to confirm it."

"Rebel or not," replied le Marmion, "there is something in that man that tells me he can rule men. They enrol daily under his captains; I marked how earnest they were in their drilling, and how de Brus went ever among them, speaking to the meanest of them in their own harsh tongue, and living upon the same fare as the humblest pikeman — sodden meat and oaten pudding; this has gained him such a sway with them as I have not known any of our knights to equal in their following. Trust me, these rough and ragged Scots will take something more than child's play to quell them. Every man of them will have his throat cut rather than yield his rights."

"How now, Sir Walter!" quoth I, "how mean you his *rights?* Sure you can have as little doubt upon which side lies the right as upon which will lie the victory. I like ill to hear you speak thus about the caitiff de Brus and his rabble."

"Nay, Sir Maurice," said the young knight warmly, "never misunderstand me thus. I have little skill in statecraft and care less about rights, knowing only where my own duty lies—under the leopards of England. There I stand, and there shall I fall, if fall it be; only be well assured of this, that it is no mere rabble we have before us, but some thousands of damnably likely foot-soldiers in a naughty land for cavalry. As for de Brus—caitiff an you will, but let no man err in reckoning him either craven or unskilled."

Of Mistress Challice I told Sir Walter much that I need not weary the reader withal; only of the coil con-

cerning Cornwall I kept my own counsel for the nonce, thinking ill to dash the young chevalier's joy at being free once more.

Now le Marmion's dismounted squadron of Kendal horse having, as I explained before, formed the rearguard of de Clifford's column in the attack upon the Glen of Trool, had suffered little loss except that of their commander, and had remained as part of de Clifford's force in Galloway, yet without a captain, for Roger de Crackenthorpe had died of his grievous malady. It so fell out by good chance that these Kendal men were bivouacked on the merse of Nith not a league from Dumfries when Sir Walter joined the king's army at that town, and were already under orders to march in the van on the morrow, in the division of the Bishop of Durham. As soon, therefore, as the knight had made his report he rode quietly out in the evening, and resumed his command of Mistress Challice's levies. My lord of Cornwall's head was too full of weightier matters that he should take any heed about what captain should lead a single squadron of light horse, and you may be sure that I was not careful that this detail should come before him. As for le Marmion, never have I seen a being so full of joy and hope,—joy, that he should be riding once more, a free man among the red and yellow liveries of his mistress—hope, that in the campaign opening thus brightly, his position in the van would bring him the exploit which he so ardently desired.

XII.

Of the miscarriage of Edward of Carnarbon's expedition against the Scots, and of how Sir Walter le Marmion fared forth upon his second quest.

THE season was waxing late; already in equal measure night and day divided the hours, yet have I noted that the fairest skies of all the year sometimes come between the feasts of Saint Matthew[1] and Saint Luke.[2] Hitherto not a surcoat had been smirched nor a corslet dimmed by so much as a passing shower, and, held the weather good, our captains-general reckoned upon occupying the chief places in Scotland before the winter storms befell. Yet hardly had the rereward of our army cleared the outskirts of Dumfries than a change came over the heavens. A chill mist crept up from the firth; the wind backed into the south-east quarter, and we had not marched two leagues up Nithsdale before rain was falling heavily. Wet and comfortless was our lodging that night upon the green plain where the Cample Burn flows into the Nith; still drearier was the prospect at sunrise, when the rising storm roared up the strath with sheets of rain. But ours were no carpet-knights; no fair-weather birds the men-at-arms,

[1] 21st September.

[2] 18th October.

light horse, and archers of King Edward's army. Cornwall had seen well to supplies; abundance of good food was brought up from the fleet lying in the Cockpool of Solway; wine and ale were served out in liberal measure; marching songs rang out briskly as the columns pressed on through dripping woods and across flooded plains.

On the second evening—our fourth out of Carlisle—we came out upon a bleak moorland, cert[illegible] evil a place for bivouac as a man could easily [illegible]. The tempest grew worse; scarcely could the camp fires be kindled from the soaked timber; not a man in the army, not even the king himself, carried a dry thread upon him; every banner and pennon was close wrapped up; every man's harness was red with rust and his face purple with cold. On the morrow no mention was made in orders of the hour of advance; only details of guards and duties, with the usual record of sentences upon defaulters. The day wore on, yet without signs of a move. I had lodging—if lodging it could be called—in the hamlet of Cumnock; the king, his lieutenant, and the chief commanders being housed in that keep where le Marmion had so long held vigil. It was verging to noon when a council was hastily summoned, whereat—oh shameful day for England!—the king announced that after taking due advice (God knoweth he had seen no one of all his commanders that day, save only the accursed Gascon) he had come to the decision that the army must retire.

"It seemeth to us, my lords and gentles," said he, "that the very powers of heaven are against us in this enterprise——"

"Daunted by a few hours' rain!" burst out the fearless Lincoln.

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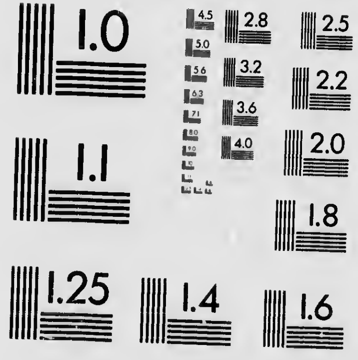
(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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"Our cousin of Lincoln will have opportunity to make known his opinion when we have finished," said the king with unruffled temper. "Meanwhile we feel that enough has been done at this late season. We will return to Westminster, where the obsequies of our sire must be performed. It is our pleasure that the columns be put in march for the south at daybreak on the morrow, and that the levies be sent to their homes from Carlisle. Next year, my lords, may it please the saints to send us further forward in the governance of Scotland."

Not a man of us spoke. Chilled already to the marrow with wet and wind, the cold now fell on our spirits; for when the commander of an army declares the game to be up, who shall have the hardihood to bear a brave front. One by one the barons rose, made silent obeisance and left the chamber. Under the new king I had learnt to be speedy in gathering together my scrolls and leaving him to the society of his sole favourite, Cornwall; yet they were in rapid converse before I could be gone.

The king at first seemed ill at ease: he could not but feel that his nobles were sorely chagrined, and, if left to himself, this Edward would not hurt a fly. But the evil counsellor was at his ear, speaking low, yet not so low but that I heard him say—

"That is well off all our minds, gossip. Soon we shall be clear of these damned foggy wolds, and feel the sun once more. A fair enough island, this, for fighting and hunting in the long days, but my Ned and I both stand in need of repose, and where can that be found so well as in Anjou?"

Returning to my lodgings in the hamlet, I overtook some of the barons, walking slowly for all as stormy as 'twas, by two and three, cloaked and hooded, and

talking earnestly. I joined my lords of Lincoln and Arundel.

"By God!" Lincoln was saying, "I tell thee that poisonous asp must be crushed and flung out, or this is no realm for such as we. To be driven forward or back like a flock of sheep—to allow these rebels to lord it in the land—nay, to leave Richmond for the winter without so much as a diversion in his favour or a single squadron of reinforcements—by the Lord above us! I tell thee, Arundel, I am rank ripe for rebellion myself."

"Nay, my lord," returned the other, "let us not try to make white out of two blacks. I am no friend of the Gascon's, as is very well known; but we are strong enough to purge the king's council of him. If we are not, then assuredly we are in no posture to talk of making a new king."

"Who spoke of a new king?" quoth Lincoln. "Not I, i' faith! but only of controlling the king we have. The king is nothing amiss, if he were delivered from the hands which encompass him. What say you, Sir Maurice? You have longer experience of State matters than any of us."

"In truth, my lord," said I, "I am but the paid servant of the king, held bound to carry out his will. Yet when I see that will committed to the power of a Gascon knight, I cannot but remember that I am an Englishman, and if affairs hold their present course, I shall have no choice but to resign my office, seeing that I cannot serve a foreigner, English earl though he be."

"Well said, Sir Maurice," cried Lincoln, "well said! We will confer on these matters on a more convenient occasion, though I care not who knows my mind now. Meanwhile, before we bring Scotland into subjection, we

must know into whose hands we are bringing it. There is no question, now, but that we must march back again with what countenance we may; but by the Mother of God! before I bring my men from their farms again I must know for whom they are to fight—English king or Gascon knave."

I had scarcely been in my lodging for an hour, disposing my scrolls and other movables for departure on the morrow, ere le Marmion came to me greatly disquieted.

"Sir Maurice," quoth he, throwing his wet cloak on the clay floor, "I have come to you for counsel, there being little to be had elsewhere. The orders are out for the retreat to-morrow, and there is such a babel of argument in the lines, that a man may scarce get a hearing for his own case. We have all been made fools o: that is the plain matter, but that concerns the repute of our commander. Herein, however, my private honour is at stake, and I crave your advice how it is to be redeemed."

"Under favour, Sir Walter," I answered, "I do not take your meaning. It is my lord the king and his chief adviser who are responsible for the disposal of the forces; you and I have but to obey like common soldiers."

"Nay," he cried, pacing to and fro in the narrow chamber, "but see you not how I am placed? Here I have been parading through the land with that golden basnet these six months and more, making mighty promise of the fair exploit that is to render it famous, and lo! what has come of it all? I am made prisoner by the Scots at the first encounter, and among them I should have lain to this hour but for the miraculous intervention of some unknown ransomer. I set out again at the head of the finest squadron in the realm of England; how

would it look if I were to ride back with them to Carlisle, and tell her that sent me that I had failed a second time in my devoir? Why, Sir Maurice, she would tell her household to set me on an ass with my face to the tail, to be led through the streets as an emblem of him who *waits* fortune when he has been bidden to *make* it."

"Softly, softly, Sir Walter," said I. "No shade of discredit can be cast on your shield from what has come to pass, least of all by Mistress Challice. In fact, I have had it on my mind for long to tell you how sorely she repents having sent you into peril; how willingly she would absolve you from your vow, and, Walter, how easy it would be to persuade her to listen while you made one of another kind."

Le Marmion ceased his pacing to and fro, and looked me in the face with a sterner expression than I had ever beheld on his fair young countenance. After some moments of silence he spoke again.

"No: you are not trifling with me. You actually think that I could accept a lady's gift, wear her colours, take on me her devoir, and then come back and say that the task was too hard for me and beg to be excused." He laughed aloud. "No, no, Sir Maurice; it was not to hear such counsel that I sought you. I came to you as the oldest knight in camp, as I am wellnigh the youngest, to demand that a Court of Honour be assembled without delay to relieve me of my command in the king's army, to set me free as knight-errant to fulfil my devoir, and to appoint me, in terms of that devoir, to the most perilous post in the kingdom. As for Mistress Challice," he continued in a more broken voice, "she has shown me the way she may be won, and I will win her in that way or forfeit my life for it. But let her never regret it,

for whether I win or fall, she has made me the proudest and happiest chevalier in Christentie."

I perceived the justice of what le Marmion said, for indeed a knight who abandoned such a quest could scarce hold up his head again among his peers; wherefore I offered to go with him at once to the pavilion of Norroy King of Arms, with whom lay the direction of all such affairs of chivalry. Thither we went accordingly. Norroy gave good heed to the case, and promised that on the arrival of the army at Dumfries a court of seven knights should be assembled to decide the question submitted.

On the following day, therefore, at five of the afternoon, the court was set in a chamber of the castle of Dumfries "to hear the cause of Sir Walter le Marmion, knight bachelor of Shakingdon, in the county of Lincoln,[1] and to give true and impartial judgment in the same." The members sworn of this court were Sir William le Vavasour, Sir Ralph Fitz-William, Sir William de Ferrers, brother to the Lord Groby, Sir Almaric de Saint Amand, Sir Hugh de Courtenay, and Sir Erminion de la Brette, who was distinguished among all other knights by wearing a surcoat of plain scarlet, without figure or adornment of any kind, inasmuch as his scutcheon was simply gules. Over this assemblage of goodly chevaliers I, as eldest of my rank, was appointed by Norroy to preside.

The court, after hearing the case stated, were of one mind upon the first issue—to wit, that Sir Walter had done rightly in seeking to resign his command of the Kendal horse, and they did then and there relieve and acquit him of that duty; for such, as all men know, are

[1] *Le Counte de Nicol,* as Sir Maurice wrote it in accordance with the orthography of his day.—ED.

the powers of a Court of Honour, notwithstanding the king's commission to the pleader, inasmuch as it is rightly held that no knight may be bounden to any service who clearly proves that he is held in honour to proceed elsewhere. Howbeit upon the second issue—namely, what might be declared the most perilous place within the kingdom — there arose much debate. Sir Ralph Fitz-William was for Douglas Castle, so lately razed and burnt by the owner thereof, and the English garrison cruelly slaughtered; but this, although held again for King Edward, was but a heap of ruins now and not likely to attract the enterprise of the Scots. De Ferrers, on the other hand, was for Saint John's town of Perth, or Stirling, seeing that these were places furthest from succour. Roxburgh, Berwick, Edinburgh, Linlithgow—each was considered in turn, yet in the end all were rejected in favour of Norham Castle on the English bank of the Tweed.

"If Sir Walter meet not a fair chance there," said Sir Hugh de Courtenay, "I know not where he may seek it. The constable of Norham is brave old Sir Thomas Gray of Heton; none knows better than he how to set forward deeds of arms. The rebels are strong in that quarter, for Douglas has much power round his house of Lintalee, and it is the only part of Scotland where they are well furnished with horse. In fine," continued Sir Hugh, smiling grimly, "Norham at the present time is just the place in all the realm to which Sir Walter may repair with the slenderest chance of ever coming back again."

Now we all had Sir Hugh de Courtenay in high esteem, and none had more experience than he of Scottish warfare, seeing that he had been summoned five times from distant Devonshire to take part in it

during the reign of the late king, the present unhappy expedition being his sixth campaign. The verdict, therefore, having been given by acclaim in favour of Norham Castle, we did all, according to custom in like cases, embrace the knight-errant on both cheeks, committing him to the care of the saints, and the court was pronounced dissolved.

Now the safest road to Norham lay through Northumberland, where the Bishop of Durham had all defences well appointed and manned, and this way I urged upon Sir Walter that he should take, marching with our vanguard as far as the Eden and striking eastward thence toward Tynedale. But he would not hear me.

"Nay, Sir Walter," said he, "but I will never cross the Esk again till my pledge be redeemed. Norham is on English ground, it is true, but I ride thither through the heart of Scotland; for, mark you! I am pressed to accomplish this task, and perchance the saints may send me some good occasion on the way."

So he went forth, young Gaspard de Neville, brother of the slain Geoffrey, bearing aloft his pennon before him, and carrying his shield, vairy argent and azure with a fess gules, for such are the ancient arms of le Marmion. Michael the Fenman followed on a stout palfrey, leading a sumpter-horse. Besides these there were but a single man-at-arms and two hobelars.

"See thou speed better with thy master this second essay," said I to the honest fenman at parting, pressing a couple of gold pieces into his hand, "and take as much care of him as he will suffer."

"You may trust me for that, Sir Maurice," quoth he. "There be luck in doubles, they say, and the book of the maybe's is a long one."

Now of what befell le Marmion at Norham I could tell little had I only his testimony to guide me, seeing that he was ever most loth to speak of his own deeds; yet had I from old Michael a full and veracious account of the whole proceedings. Before repeating it to you, however, meet is that I should make mention of certain events most nearly affecting the fortunes and standing of Sir Walter, of which tidings came to Carlisle but three days after he had left the army.

It hath been sufficiently shown that the knight of Shakingdon, albeit of most honourable birth, was of exceeding slender means, seeing that his manor had been most deeply mortgaged by his father to the accursed Jews of Lincoln. Walter's uncle, Sir Philip le Marmion of Scrivelsby, owned great possessions both in land and money, but forasmuch as he had most bitterly quarrelled with his own brother, Geoffrey, the father of Walter, no part of that wealth had ever come the way of his nephew. Sir Philip had two sons, handsome, active young men, wherefore it never entered the thoughts of either Sir Philip or his nephew Walter that the line of succession should be altered. These two sons were serving in Scotland under Sir Ingelram de Umfraville, kinsman of the murdered Comyn and a knight of high renown, distinguished wherever he went among others by a red cap borne before him on a spear-point by a man-at-arms. Sir Ingelram held chief command in Galloway, whither came Edward de Brus, brother of him who claimed to be King of Scots, after the discomfiture of de Valence at Loudoun Hill. You may credit me that the rebels had drawn no small arrogance from the victory; their forces swelled to the scale of an army, and forasmuch as the knights who took

part in this most wicked resistance to their liege lord were skilled in arms and with good experience of war — Edward de Brus, James of Douglas, and the like — these churls — the very offscouring of the land, broken men and thieves of every degree—soon became trained and well-disciplined troops. I have fought in many lands and against many and various races; this always have I noted, that, be the commonalty of what quality they may, they may be fashioned into good soldiery if the commanders but know and attend to their duty. Contrariwise, if knights and esquires be sunk in sloth or given overmuch to ease—if they stoop not to learn like the commonest spearman the rules of war and the simple ordering of a camp—their high chivalry and mastery of arms availeth nothing, and their people fail in routine of vigil or fall away in stress of battle. The host, therefore, which Edward de Brus led through the mountain passes from Ayrshire into Galloway, though numbering no more than fifty light horse and fifteen hundred pikes, indifferently equipped, was marvellous obedient and hardy, as I have been assured since by Sir John de Saint-John. Moreover, the Scots were so frugal that they murmured not, as our English yeomen are wont to do, when beef and wine and ale are not to be had. Marry! nay, but they are content although they have but a handful of oaten meal to serve them for a whole day, baking the said meal into naughty sodden cakes which nourish these barbarians, indeed, but fill English stomachs only with wind and noisome humours. Greater marvel still, they are able to encounter grievous fatigue, albeit they go many weeks with nothing better to slacken their tasteless victual than the water of their rivers or, it may be by good

fortune, a draught of milk from the little black kine of the hills. Truly in this they enjoy undue advantage over better soldiery, seeing that our people may scarce be kept to their companies if they lack their measure of wine and ale, or at least the expectation thereof. Hence it came to pass that Sir Ingelram being encamped with two thousand horse and foot in the plain between the mountains and the river Cree, did suffer so continually from the sallies of these light-footed rascals harbouring in the woods and hills, who cut off foraying parties, murdered sentinels, and yet offered no opportunity of chastising any considerable body of them, that he fell back as far as Buittle Tower, the head place of the family of de Baliol, and there awaited the approach of Sir John de Saint-John, who was bringing up a reinforcement of horse from Carlisle.

Now Saint-John, having won much fame in encounters with the Paynim horsemen in the Holy Land, was inclined to hold these rangail Scots in disdain, and could not believe that they would stand before English lances rightly led. Moreover, de Umfraville's distinction of the red cap had fired the jealousy of many knights, amongst whom was Sir John de Saint-John, burning to do some exploit which should throw the said red cap into shade.

"What, Sir Ingelram!" quoth he with affected surprise, "I thought to have found you further advanced against the foe. Is the *bonnet rouge* but a southern blossom, that it withers in the mountain air?"

Sir Ingelram gnawed his beard, little relishing such banter from an officer under his command, to whom, notwithstanding, the custom of chivalry permitted such licence as from one knight to another. I have noted, indeed, that much evil has arisen from the law of perfect

equality in knighthood, which jars on occasions with the due respect of gentles to their military seniors.

"The *bonnet rouge*," replied he, "flourishes in any clime, as the king's enemies have cause to know; but it has been my fortune until this campaign to carry it against men, not catamountains."

"So!" quoth the other with a sneer on his lip; "then your valiancy will doubtless permit me to sweep the ground clear of these vermin. I have fifteen hundred good besoms behind my simple pennon, and I shall be proud to make pure the air so that the *bonnet rouge* shall flourish again."

Sir Ingelram, swallowing his wrath, shook his wise grey head.

"Were this an enterprise for your single spear, Sir John," said he, "I would not be the man to hold you back. But I care not to peril the king's lieges in ground where the skulking rebels have so much vantage over orderly troops. Better wait till the Scots come out into the plain, as come they will to plunder. Remember de Clifford in Glen Trool."

"De Clifford dismounted his men," replied Saint-John, "and went afoot into the wolf's mouth. All I claim, and I claim it as knight from knight, is to be allowed to lead my men wherever men may ride. As long as they are in the saddle they cannot come to harm from half-armed savages."

"Be it so, Sir John, a God's name then!" quoth his chief; "but if you will hearken to a word from one who has not been wont to avoid encounter, you will keep in the open."

Thus Saint-John set forth to seek the Scots, and one summer morning rode out at sunrise from his bivouac

near the sea at the head of four squadrons of horse and twenty-five men-at-arms. By his side, bounden in the saddle, rode a countryman as guide, and behind him rode his two squires, the sons of Sir Philip le Marmion. It was fine, still weather, but the dew lay so heavy that the meadows seemed white with hoar, and a mist came in from the Solway so thick that a man might not see a spear's length before his horse. They rode in column of sections without advanced guard or scouts, fearing to lose them in the fog, and the trumpets of each troop sounded in succession continually from front to rear, lest the squadrons should go astray. Thus, unhappily, the Scots had full warning of their approach, and Edward de Brus was not one to be found unprepared. They advanced as it were blindfold, nor was there either sound or sign of friend or foe till they were passing along the narrow strath separating the sea on their left from the wooded crags of Cassencarry on their right. Suddenly and silently a body of horse flashed out of the darkness and fell full on their right flank with levelled lances. Down went horse and man, and a loud shout of "Brus! Brus!" arose as the Scots cut their way clean through the column and were lost to sight in the mist on the seaward side.

"Damned traitor! you have misled us," cried Saint-John, as with one blow of his mace he brained the unhappy guide beside him. "Trumpeter, sound front form by troops."

None could say by reason of the fog what was the strength of the enemy, nor whence the next attack might come. The trumpet had sounded and the air was full of the cries of captains forming their troops; but before the movement could be executed, a second body of Scots

horsemen dashed upon the flank and through in like manner as the first. The whole column was in disorder; a third attack came from the opposite quarter; this time Saint-John himself was unhorsed, and his two squires went down before the Scottish spears. Thus it went on by the space of half an hour; charge after charge was sustained by our men, until at length they broke and fled. Many had fallen; many were lost in the quags of Solway; others missed the line of retreat and fell into the hands of the Scots, but the two sons of Sir Philip le Marmion perished where they fell.

So it came about that Sir Walter le Marmion—Gautier Sans-avoir as Cornwall had named him in derision—stood next-of-kin to wealthy Sir Philip, who, it is like enough, would have devised his estates to a more distant kinsman, so great had been his hatred towards his deceased brother Geoffrey; but the saints guided it otherwise. When they brought tidings to Sir Philip of the death of both his sons, like the high-priest Eli, the old man fell backwards. Yet brake he not his neck, but lived speechless, sightless, a living wreck, moaning piteously, until three weeks later he passed to his fathers.

Behold, then, Sir Walter le Marmion, no longer the needy knight of Shakingdon, but Lord of Fontenaye in Poitou, of Scrivelsby, Tamworth, and Lutterworth in England, hereditary champion of the kings of England, master of fifteen men-at-arms, three hundred light horse, and twelve score and ten Lincoln archers of the best!

But of his changed fortunes neither he nor we knew aught when we parted at Dumfries. He went his way to Norham through the country of our foes, little wotting of the power and riches that had come to him; nor was

it till I was back in Carlisle that I learnt how matters had fallen, and sent word to Mistress Challice thereof, and of Walter's fresh enterprise.

⁂ ADVERTISEMENT TO THE READER.

[*If Sir Maurice de Bulkeley carried his narrative beyond this point, the remainder has not come into his present editor's hands, and it has been necessary to collect the rest of the adventures of Marmion and Challice from other sources, which, the reader may rest assured, are equally authentic.*—ED.]

XIII.

Of the mortal peril which befell Sir Walter le Marmion in the Tower of Linhope.

SIR WALTER rode with his little clump of spears—six horsemen in all—into the very heart of de Brus's lands of Annandale. The rains had rendered every rivulet a river and every river a torrent; the farmers and peasants sullenly avoided the knight's approach, for upon the English they laid the account of crops trampled, harvest wasted, cattle, sheep, and horses driven off, and homesteads fired, instead of holding their own lord as the true culprit who had brought the scourge of war upon a peaceful land. Nevertheless, Sir Walter's armed force was not so small but that he could command such supplies as he required for man and horse, paying full value in good English money, inasmuch as every true knight scorns to visit upon peasants the punishment he may deem due to their lords. It was lucky he had money with him, Sir Maurice de Bulkeley having skilfully overcome his scruples and induced him to take as a loan a purse well stuffed with current coin. Wherefore they made easy progress, for, as Michael the Fenman sententiously observed—

"Silvern shod horses make good journeys, and prompt payment wins many friends."

Thus they fared across Annandale and, holding up the water of Milk, crossed the hills and lay the first night at Langholm on the Esk. It could scarce be called a tavern where they lodged in this hamlet; it was no more than a hovel, where meat and drink might be had by travellers, and a space on the clay floor round the peat fire whereon to lay their cloaks and sleep, their horses being picketed in a garth at the back.

Thus far they travelled easily without a guide, but now the track bore away into a bare wilderness called Eskdale-muir, where one brown hill was as like another as plums in a pudding.

A couple of brawny fellows with coarse woollen doublets over shirts of rusty mail stood watching the English hobelars as they fed and groomed the horses in the morning. These answered readily enough when Sir Walter asked them to direct him on the way to Hawick. He was to keep along the Ewes water as far as wind and water sheer, a matter of three long leagues or better, then he was to ride five leagues farther into Teviotdale, till he came to Hawick kirk. Albeit these men did not offer to guide the travellers; it seemed that they were bent in the same direction, because before the Englishmen had ridden half a league from Langholm, Michael the Fenman pushed his nag up beside his master and pointed to a hanging birch wood on the far side of the river.

"Yonder ride your messengers, Sir Walter," said he, "no laggards on the errand you committed to them."

"My messengers! What do you mean, Michael?" inquired the knight.

"E'en what I make bold to say to your valiancy. You told them where you would lie to-night, and the faithful fellows are away to make ready the beds. Silence catches the most mice in this country, belike, as in most others. I wish the rascals may not have set us on the wrong road."

The Fenman's suspicion was not astray. Riding forward a short league, they beheld the track which they followed striking to the north away from the river, whereof the banks grew steep and impassable. They had to retrace their course nearly as far as Langholm before they could ford the water, when they struck into the track along which the two strangers had ridden before. Even so their troubles were not at an end, it being no easy task to discern the main stream among its many swollen tributaries. Many times had they to ride back after one of these side-streams had brought them upon a morass which would carry nothing heavier than a Michaelmas goose. Night was gathering before they topped the ridge and turned downwards on the eastern side. It had been raining steadily since daybreak, as, for that matter, it had rained for three whole days, and now, as the rain stopped, a dense mist came sweeping down with the west wind; scarcely could they keep the track, which was no more than the black moor soil worn down to loose stones and clay by the feet of pack-horses. Their own horses, leg-weary and worn, began to flounder in the rough wet path, and Walter began to prepare for a supperless bivouac in the heather, when suddenly Michael's hackney pricked his ears, quickened his pace, and uttered a shrill neigh. From above them out of the darkness came an answering neigh.

"The Lord be praised!" quoth Michael, "if this be

still in Christentie we shall sleep under a roof-tree yet."

Dismounting he scanned the track narrowly, and presently found a path leading steeply up the hillside to the right. Up this they clomb, and discerned a dark mass looming above their heads—a peel tower such as squires, or lairds as they are called in the north, do mostly dwell within in that land. All was still without and within; neither sign nor sound of man or maid; only the stamping and neighing of horses within the barmekyn. Nevertheless a most savoury vapour, betokening the preparation of a toothsome fry, floated out upon the wet wind, mightily tickling the nostrils of the hungry travellers.

The gateway of the barmekyn was stoutly barred and locked from within; there was no door in the outer wall of the tower; wherefore Sir Walter wound a shrill summons on his horn. No answer came to the first blast; at the second, a female voice answered from the battlemented roof in the uncouth speech of the border land.

"Wha's yon?" it cried.

"A knight seeking shelter for his following," cried Sir Walter; "I pray you open speedily, in the name of the saints."

"A bonny-like knight to be dannering ower the Dod Hill when decent folks is seeking their beds," came the reply from above. "Ride on, sir knight, and Saint Cuthbert guide ye aright."

"My good dame," quoth Sir Walter, "not a rood farther do I ride this night. An ye be Christian folk within and peaceable subjects of the king, I pray you open to us without more ado. If not, then must we take by force that which you deny us by favour."

No reply came back; the woman's head had dis-

appeared behind the battlements, whether in refusal of further parley or with the intention of unbarring to the travellers remained to be seen. After waiting some minutes without further movement being heard within, the Fenman, who had been spying round the outside of the barmekyn, returned, and throwing himself off his weary steed, said to Sir Walter—

"They should know here that hungry bellies have angry ears. Methinks, master, we must needs fashion wards for this lock. If we were only as far within as the barmekyn,[1] that were better than the bare hillside, and it will go hard but we find some fodder for our nags."

"You speak as wisely as the whole bench of bishops," answered le Marmion; "but for my part I see not my way plain even as far as the stable door."

"No man may see farther into a millstone than he who picked it," was Michael's reply, "yet it takes more than four inches of oak to keep a hungry man from his supper, and if might fails we must turn to sleight."

At the further angle of the barmekyn stood some wind-warped ash-trees, one of which bent low over the ten-foot wall. To the foot of this Michael made his way and began clambering up the streaming trunk.

"Stay, Michael," cried his master; "you must not venture in there alone, man! You know not what garrison may be in the keep."

"Never fear for me, Sir Walter," cried the bold fellow out of the branches. "Ride you round to the gate and be ready to enter when I unbar. I'll be no longer about it than a dog will be bound with a blood pudding."

So saying he dropped down within the enclosure, and

[1] The enclosure surrounding the peel, and containing stables, out-buildings, &c.

soon the party outside heard the bars falling inside the gate. Luckily, the key had been left in the lock, and it was not quite dark before they had led their horses into a shed on one side of the garth and helped them freely to some sweet, dry hay of which they found good store. But hay is little comfort to hungry men, and the prospect of supper seemed as far off as ever, for the tower stood dark and silent as before. Entrance to it could only be had through a door ten feet above the ground. The door was fast shut, but the wooden steps which gave access to it had not been hauled up.

"It's easy to see there are none but women within," observed Michael.

"How know you that?" asked Sir Walter.

"Men would have pulled up the stairs if they wanted to keep us without," replied the Fenman.

Even as he spoke the chain tightened, and the steps began to ascend slowly; but Michael leaped on the lower rung, which sufficed to overpower the feeble hand on the windlass within.

Sir Walter ran lightly up the steps and rapped loudly on the door with the pommel of his dagger. "Ho, within there!" he cried; "if you do not unbar speedily we will batter down your door."

It was an empty vaunt, for the oak was solid and heavily studded with nails, and the platform outside was so narrow as to give no room for swinging a beam; but it was effectual. The same voice came from within as had spoken from the roof.

"Canny, then, canny! Eh, sirs! can ye no gang yer ain gate, and no come breaking into honest folks' housen at nightfall?"

"No, I tell you," answered Sir Walter from the out-

side; "we go no farther to-night. Open, in the king's name!"

There was a whispering behind the door, a shuffling of feet, then the grinding of bars drawn back, and anon the door opened outwards the space of a hand-breadth. Quickly Walter's sword leapt from the scabbard, for he knew not what hostile force might be within; thrusting his foot and mailed hand into the opening, he dragged the door towards him. There was no one on the threshold; only empty darkness.

"Beware, master," cried Michael; "let me go first; an ill turn is soon done."

But Walter would not pause; with the Fenman at his heels, followed by the rest of the party, he dashed into the house, and, guided by a glimmer of light, turned into an arched chamber illuminated by the glowing embers of a wood fire and the feeble flame of an oil cresset.

Two women stood in the room,—an elder one—she who had parleyed with them from the roof—and behind her a maiden, tall, erect, and with flashing eyes.

"Well, you are in," said the first harshly; "you will scarce expect a welcome, coming like thieves in the night?"

"We can waive the welcome, mistress," quoth Sir Walter, "provided we get some supper."

"Supper, quotha!" cried the dame in rising accents, "and by the same right as ye claim supper I reckon ye'll lay hands on goods and gear and every kind of insight.[1] Oh! ye be brave men of war when there's but a pair of helpless women in the house. But wait a wee; wait till the laird comes back, with them that's behind him. Ye'll scarcely crow sae cruse then, I reckon.

[1] Furniture.

Watty o' Linhope's not just the man to let his house be raked out and cry God-speed upon the spoilers."

"Spoilers!" said Sir Walter, as soon as the dame's volubility had run her out of breath. "Who speaks of spoilers? I will pay you in good money for everything that we and our horses eat. See, mistress,"—and pulling out of his satchel a handful of silver, he flung it on the table,—"help yourself to what you think meet. On the other side of the border a knight's word is reckoned as good as his bond, and payment is not a traveller's first thought on alighting at a gentleman's door."

The dame seemed somewhat disconcerted at this address; muttering something about "unchancy times" and "the rough characters that were travelling through the land," she turned to her young companion and gave some directions, which resulted before long in a steaming and savoury mess being set before the hungry men, with a black tankard of ale. While they were discussing these good things, the women sat by the hearth, the elder upon a high-backed elbow-chair, the younger upon a low "creepie" or oaken stool, attending to a fresh supply of viands which were cooking in a huge pot hung over the fire. A row of fine three-cornered oaten cakes set on end before the blaze were toasting to a seductive degree of crispness.

"You spoke just now of your master; is he expected home to-night, mistress?" inquired Sir Walter of her whom he supposed to be the housekeeper.

"*My* master, quotha!" replied she, with a grim smile, while the girl's dark eyes danced and her teeth gleamed in merriment; "and wha might you be meaning by *my* master?"

"Well, the master of this house," answered the knight.

"I would fain thank him for food and shelter before we leave on the morrow."

"The master of this house is my husband," quoth the dame with more dignity than she had hitherto shown; "and this is my daughter Sybil, at your service, sir knight."

Sir Walter sprang to his feet in confusion. The dress, the speech, even the manner of the elder of these two ladies, differed hardly at all from those of the peasant class; nevertheless, the instinct of chivalry showed him that he had made an almost unpardonable mistake, for in those days the separation between ranks was far more rigidly defined than it has become since. Persons of gentle birth, such as could claim coat armour, were reared in the belief that they were, and were recognised by the law as being, of a different order of creation from the common herd.

"I humbly crave your grace, madame," he began; "I thought—that is, it seemed——"

"Oh aye, I ken what ye would say; ye took us for servant-wenches. Seat yourself, sir knight; the pardon's granted. Well, sir, we see few gentles up here, and my daughter and me were not prepared for company or we'd have busked ourselves more seemly, for I come of the honourable house of Howpasley,[1] that shows the azure bend upon the gold as rightfully as your valiancy, I see, does his fess gules upon the vairey."

"And your husband, madame?" inquired Marmion respectfully, drawing near the hearth; "deign to enlighten my ignorance of the country to which my duty has drawn me."

"My husband is well kent through all the border land

[1] A cadet of the family of le Scot, afterwards Scott, the head of which first rose to eminence in the reign of Alexander III.

as Watty o' Linhope. This is Linhope Tower wherein ye be, and the laird thereof rides behind the laird o' Ferniehirst — Kerr o' Ferniehurst — ye'll have heard o' him? Watty's nearly sib[1] to Ferniehirst, ye see—nothing further than oe[2] to the seventh son o' the laird's grand-uncle, that was laird o' Ferniehirst himself, ye see, though maybe better kenned than cared for at that. Our lands o' Linhope are broad, ye see, marching with Howpasley on the Borthwick water, and good wholesome grazing, bent and hill, once ye cross the Hislop burn, but——."

Perhaps the mistress of Linhope was about to account for the small state kept in her mansion, which, indeed, was not below that customary among the poorer Scottish gentry, differing no whit, except in size and strength, from the household of a common hill farmer, but the rising flow of her garrulity was stayed by the sound of a horn outside.

"Yonder is the laird himself," quoth she, rising actively and beginning to clear the board of the remains of the repast. "Run, Sybil, and unbar the barmekyn yett, and tell your daddy we have company here to-night."

There was a trampling of hoofs in the yard; voices, and the clash of harness, as the newcomers dismounted; but it was a considerable time before Sybil returned to the chamber, followed by four heavy-footed men, rough-looking, shaggy-bearded, powerful fellows as ever swung into a saddle. The cresset shed a dim light through the hall; dim as it was, there flashed across le Marmion the memory of having seen two of them before. But these two kept in the background and averted their faces, so that he could get no right view of them. He dismissed the thought carelessly as he made a reverence to his

[1] Akin, related.

[2] Grandson.

involuntary host, and craved excuse for having made free with his house during his absence.

"You are welcome, gentle sirs," said the laird with remarkably good grace, "to such shelter and poor provender as my house affords. My sons and I were late at Hawick mart"—here Marmion intercepted a swift glance shot by the speaker at his wife—"ill luck, as it happens, which prevented me receiving you in the fashion befitting your rank."

Nothing further was said. The pot having been set upon the table once more, the laird of Linhope and his three sons set to with a will upon the contents, which suffered as severely from the onset of four as the previous supply had done from Sir Walter's party of six. Three retainers of the laird, who, it seems, had ridden with him to market, were supplied with supper on the ground floor; even so, the upper chamber was inconveniently crowded, there being no less than twelve persons within it. Notwithstanding this, Marmion's young squire Gaspard de Neville had been too well and recently schooled as a page to lose any fair opportunity of love-making. The daughter of the house, Sybil, was passing fair; the homeliness of her dress could not mar the exceeding grace and symmetry of her figure; and her speech, though of Northern accent, was not nearly so outlandish as her mother's. Gaspard treated her from the first with the consideration every gentle squire owes to beauty, and opened the first parallel as promptly and according to rule as if he had before him time to conduct a regular siege. He helped her with her labours in providing the tables above stairs and below, talking to her as deferentially and looking into her eyes as wickedly as if she had been a maid of honour.

Supper over, the party disposed themselves for the night. Three of the Englishmen were told off to sleep in the lower chamber with the laird's retainers; Sir Walter, Gaspard, and the Fenman were to share the upper hearth-side with the laird and his three sons. As the ladies withdrew to a chamber still higher, Gaspard gallantly raised Sybil's hand to his lips. She blushed prettily; poor thing! she had seldom or never received in that lonely home the courtly homage which her charms had undoubtedly commanded among kindlier surroundings. It must have touched a tender place in her bosom, for, dropping at Gaspard's feet, as if by accident, the distaff she carried, she bent over him as he stooped to lift it, and whispered—"Have a care! Sleep in thy harness." Then she was gone like a flash.

The Fenman, since entering the dwelling, had spoken no word; as diligent as the others at trencher-work, he had assisted the ladies in their household duties, in placing and removing dishes, and so on; then, supper over, he busied himself beside the wide hearth in burnishing his master's weapons and accoutrements, polishing the gold helmet till it shone like a star. But his eyes had been keen as a hawk's all the time, and now, when the company was separating preparatory to a night's sleep, he took occasion as he drew off Sir Walter's boots to say in a low voice—

"Best not lay aside thy hauberk, master. Safe sleep is aye the sweetest."

"Go to!" answered the knight; "what do you fear, man?"

Michael was silent, but looking round cautiously, made a slight gesture with his thumb towards two of the laird's sons at the farther end of the room.

"Well, what of them?" inquired Sir Walter, who waxed sleepy after a hard day.

"Just this," whispered the Fenman, "that when we parted with those fellows in Langholm this morning, we did not reckon on them as bedfellows to-night."

In a moment Sir Walter's drowsiness disappeared. He scented danger as it flashed on him where he had seen his host's two sons, how they had sent him along a false track, how they had passed him on the far side of the Ewes water. Hawick market! There was something crooked in all this. Just then young Gaspard came to his lord's side, and imparted to him the warning he had received from the girl.

The sleeping accommodation in the tower was of the simplest. Coarse mattresses stuffed with fern were thrown down before the hearth, three on one side, four on the other. The laird and his three sons lay together, opposite Sir Walter, Gaspard, and Michael. While the younger Scots were arranging these rude couches, Marmion seized the opportunity of whispering instructions to his squire and to Michael.

"One of us must watch while the others sleep. I will keep vigil first; then Michael; and you, Gaspard, will take the third watch. But see—make some pretence to leave the chamber, and warn our fellows downstairs that they be on their guard."

It was too late. Gaspard, indeed, slipped out of the door, but one of the sons was as quick as he. At the foot of the stairs was the entrance to the lower hall, where the other Englishmen were to pass the night. This door was already fast closed and barred from within.

"What seek you, young sir?" asked the Scot.

"My lord hath some commands for his man-at-arms

touching the morrow," answered Gaspard; "I pray you open for me."

"That I cannot do," quoth the Scot; "see you not the door is barred from within?"

Upon this Gaspard beat a summons on the oak with the pommel of his dagger. The Scot seized his wrist, exclaiming—"Stay, there! young fellow. If you would lodge in a gentleman's house you must carry yourself quietly."

Some one from within was undoing the door, but the Scot, still keeping an iron grasp on Gaspard, cried out to desist, and the sounds ceased. Gaspard then returned to the upper chamber, and all lay down to sleep.

Marmion, feigning slumber, watched vigilantly through half-closed eyes. The light from the big logs on the hearth flickered fitfully on the rough bare walls and vaulted roof, broken by fantastic shadows cast by the scanty furniture. His companions lay motionless like the dead on the battlefield in opposing ranks; but although from Scots and English alike rose a steady chorus of snores, Marmion had the comfortless conviction that, of them all, young Gaspard was the only one really sleeping. Still, it needed all the watchful habit of soldier and hunter to prevent the knight yielding to an intense desire for repose.

It was well to be watchful. From time to time Marmion perceived one or other of the snoring Scots to raise his head, scan the sleeping English, and then relapse again into feigned slumber. As nearly as he could judge (and in days when horologues were few men were accustomed to measure time mentally even in the dark) it was drawing towards the close of his two hours' watch, when the sound of a shout came faintly to his ears through the

stone floor. He thought he could make out the clash of steel also, but the walls and floor were thick, and, hearing no more, he moved not. But at that moment he saw something that might have unstrung nerves less steady than his own. The head, not of one only, but of every one of the four Scots was lifted: Marmion could detect the gleam of the firelight in the whites of their eyes. Slowly, silently four forms arose to a crouching position, a stout sword in the hand of each.

"À moi, mes amis!" shouted the knight, springing to his feet, bestowing a sharp kick to waken Gaspard. Michael was afoot almost as soon as his master, and all three were ready and armed for the shock. The Scots, four to three, dashed across the floor to attack. One of the sons, catching his foot in a plaid which had served for a sleeping cover, stumbled heavily. Marmion's point caught him just in the armpit, piercing the rusty mail as though it had been parchment, and the fellow fell groaning heavily. But he was a big man and his weight broke the blade of the knight, who was left unarmed save for the poignard he held in his left hand, the crooked guard whereof served to catch and ward a slashing blow from the whinger of one of the fallen man's brethren. But he was like to have fallen under the side attack of another of them, had not Michael dashed his boar-spear into the face of this one, laying it open from eye to chin, so that he too lay weltering on the stone floor. The assailants were now but two to three; Gaspard, heedful lest the odds should be changed from without, dashed to the door quick as light and, shooting the heavy bolt, returned to the fray. It was already near an end. Michael held the laird of Linhope pinned in a corner, for his sword was no match for the terrible spear of the Fenman; Sir Walter, who had snatched up

the weapon of one of the fallen men, was exchanging passes in the uncertain light with the third son, who, after an ineffectual attempt to force his adversary's guard, stepping back was tripped by the nimble Gaspard and fell helpless beside his dead brother. Sir Walter, leaping forward and placing the point at his throat, cried to him to yield, which he did with an evil grace. Seeing how matters had gone, the laird lowered his point and yielded himself also to the Fenman.

"Shame, Gaspard!" said Marmion to his squire. "Why, man, where have you been schooled to spoil sport in that fashion? Two to one is not fair play."

"As fair as four to three, Sir Walter, according to my arithmetic," replied Gaspard; "but I will crave pardon as soon as we know how matters have gone below stairs."

Even as he spoke the latch was raised and voices sounded from without.

"All is siccar[1] below, laird," cried one; "how fares it wi' yourself?"

Marmion signed to the prisoners to be silent on pain of instant death. Michael was busy uncoiling some strong tarred cord which hung from a hook on the wall. With this he swiftly bound the wrists of the laird and his son behind their backs, and then lashed their feet securely, muttering the while—

"I reckon this tow was made ready for your betters. If I had my way it should be round your necks I'd put it. There's for one of you," he continued, as, rising to his feet, he bestowed a hearty kick with his shoeless foot on a part of the laird's geography situated exactly midway between his head and his heels. "How like you that,

[1] Safe.

sirrah? You'll e'en have to do as the maids do—say no, and take it."

Of the wounded men, the first was dead, with two feet of good Toledo sticking through his brisket. The other, although a ghastly object owing to his slashed face, was not otherwise injured; but he was so weak from loss of blood that Sir Walter bade Michael let him be.

"Nay," said the Fenman; "leave a fox but a foot and he will run. Your valiancy has the lads outside to deal with yet; best leave all safe behind us."

"Gently then with him, you old savage," insisted his master. "Have pity upon a fallen man."

"Pity!" quoth Michael—"as much pity as I have for a goose going barefoot."

So after he had bound this one also they turned their attention to escaping from the tower. No footfall sounded on the stairs outside; the men there were in stocking-soles, but Marmion could hear through the door whispering and the clank of steel. The door, as customary in places of defence, opened outwards from the apartment upon a turnpike stair; all attempts therefore to force it from the outside must be vain. To gain the lower chamber where the rest of his men lay, Marmion determined to carry the staircase by a sudden rush, driving all opponents before him, so as to secure the ultimate retreat of his party by the only exit from the tower, which, as has been explained, was from the upper hall. All this, as a wise commander, he explained to his followers. Bidding the Fenman relight the cresset and stir the logs on the hearth so that they might have light to guide them, he made Gaspard gently withdraw the bolt that held the door; then, holding the laird's sword in one hand and the string of the latch in the other, he whispered—"Are you ready?" and

next moment threw the door violently open. The heavy oak struck a man standing behind it and sent him backwards down the stair; two others remained, but, taken unawares by the flood of light and sudden attack, one of them recoiled before Marmion's thrust and fell likewise after his comrade, and the other, turning to fly, received Michael's deadly spear right between the shoulder-blades. Following up the attack, Sir Walter found the two knaves at the foot of the stair with no stomach for more. They were mere moss-riders or hill farmers, tenants of the laird of Linhope, and obedient to his commands. They were promptly disarmed; but this time the Fenman's spear had done its work once for all — the third fellow was stark dead.

Gaspard ran back for the cresset, and, entering the lower hall, Marmion found his three men. One of the hobelars was dead, his skull having been smashed by the blow of an axe; his comrade and the man-at-arms had been overpowered without resistance, and lay unhurt, but securely bound.

Michael was sorely cast down because Sir Walter forbade any more bloodshed.

"Dead men bite not," said the Fenman, "and it would take the blood of three of these lousy Scots to pay for Hob of Marston yonder, as likely a lad as ever sat in pigskin."

But Marmion would not hear of more killing. It was not yet midnight, and a start could not be made before daylight; he therefore directed that all the prisoners, five in number, should be placed, securely bound, in the lower hall; that his own men should take their rest in the upper hall, which commanded the door of egress from the tower, relieving each other in turn as sentry on the stairs.

While these dispositions were being made, the women appeared on the scene, and the elder one, beholding her husband a prisoner, one of her sons dead, and another disfigured by a hideous face-wound, broke out into violent vituperation. Marmion had to silence her by threats of putting his prisoners to death, as he was entitled to do by the law of arms. She lowered her voice, glaring on the Englishmen with intense hatred in her dry eyes. Sybil, on the other hand, was weeping bitterly as she washed her brother's wound. She it was who had warned the handsome squire of his danger, little thinking that it was to cost one of her brothers his life.

Gaspard took the first watch on the stairs, with strict orders to allow no one to pass out of the tower; while Marmion and his men lay down by the fire within to get some much-needed sleep, feeling perfectly secure, seeing that all arms had been removed from reach of the prisoners below, even should the old dame unbind them.

Gaspard had not been long on his post before Sybil came upstairs, passing to her chamber aloft. On the squire inquiring after the state of her wounded brother, she turned and looked upon him sternly. The light of the cresset hanging on the wall revealed her pale features shadowed by the fallen masses of her black hair; she was forgetful of the disorder in her white nightrail, and Gaspard, a connoisseur in feminine charms, vowed afterwards he had never seen a more lovely vision.

"My brother!" said she bitterly. "Much you reck for my brothers. You have slain one and wounded another to the death, I think; a pretty return for my care for your safety."

"It is the fortune of war, ma damoysel," returned

Gaspard. "Had we not vanquished them they would have slain us."

"Oh, I know, I know," she exclaimed, the tears welling afresh from her eyes. "I warned them too, but they would not heed me. I dinna blame you altogether—I wanted but to put you on your guard, lest you should be slain in your sleep, for I am weary—oh that weary! of slaughter."

"Is that the way, then, your people generally serve travellers?" asked the squire.

"Oh, it's just the way they have with Englishmen on the Border; but it's worst in the house, and I'm weary of it."

"Worst in the house," repeated Gaspard. "You mean it would be better done on the moor."

"Assuredly," quoth she. "It is man's work on the open moor, and if blood be shed it is little seen. But in the house, among women——" she broke off shuddering. Then she resumed, with that irrational confidence which cannot be restrained between maid and man—"You see they had ridden on to the Carlanrig; they were to wait you there, and fall on, man to man, in fair fight——"

"Seven men to six," interposed Gaspard.

"Well, well," she said, smiling through her tears, "that would be the fortune of war, as you put it just now. Any way, it would have been clear of the house. But you sent the whole plan awry by stopping at our door."

I think we did wisely," said Gaspard; and then with a levity which, under the circumstances of the night, every moralist must condemn, he passed his arm quickly round the girl's waist, saying—"Had we not stopped here I had never met the fairest damoysel I have ever seen."

Sybil's eyes became soft as silk. Poor girl, it had been

a case of love at first sight with her. Of a sudden she started back with a look of terror.

"Hold!" she cried; "my brother's blood is on your hands."

"Not on mine, dear lady," said he; "I only helped to make your father yield."

"Swear it!" she said.

"I swear it by the blood of God!"

Then she gave him her lips, twining her arms round his mailed neck, and fled up the winding stair.

XIV.

Of the notable exploit wrought upon the Scots by Sir Walter le Marmion, whereby he performed his devoir to his mistress and made famous the golden helmet.

Before daybreak Sir Walter's party were astir, the horses were fed and watered, and necessity compelled the Englishmen once more to break their fast from the store of the laird of Linhope, for nine long leagues lay between them and the English castle of Roxburgh, where they would lie that night. Sybil, like a pale spectre—her mother like a cowed fury—moved about discharging the ordinary duties of the humble household, for cows must be milked on days of mourning as well as in time of merry-making; and although three corpses lay in the lower hall stark under woollen plaids, the wants of the living were none the less pressing. Wooden bowls of oatmeal porridge, which even the addition of the costly luxury of salt could not render grateful to English palates, furnished the solid part of the gloomy repast, washed down with draughts of dark ale or new milk, according to the fancy of each.

By attacking the Englishmen, the laird of Linhope had committed an act, whether of war or mere brigandage,

which Sir Walter knew would justify him in any degree of retaliation. Much to the Fenman's discontent, however, he suffered nothing within the house to be touched, and even offered to settle the expenses of himself, his men, and his horses. Upon this the dame's fury broke out afresh.

"Think ye that I would touch gold in a hand that has my son's blood upon it! Keep it, ye false Southron and forsworn knight! Keep it, and may it carry with you the malison of Cain! Cursed be your head and every hair upon it! Cursed be you in every bone in your body! Cursed be you ganging and riding, waking and sleeping, before and behind, within and without."

And in the anguish of her hate the bereaved woman spat upon the knight. Sybil, who had in vain tried to moderate her mother's violence, started forward with clasped hands and besought Sir Walter not to take offence.

"My mother's heart is sore," she said; "she knows not what she is doing. Begone, sir knight, I pray you, and forget that you ever came to this unhappy house."

"What says the lassie?" interposed the elder woman. "Unhappy house! The tower o' Linhope was aye a happy place till it sheltered traitors."

Then, as she fell again to cursing, Marmion, judging it time to march, signed to Gaspard, made his obeisance to Sybil, and left the tower. The squire lingered a moment behind: taking Sybil's cold hands in his, he knelt and kissed them, then was gone before the mother could deal the blow which she intended upon him.

Despite his clemency to the inmates of Linhope tower, Marmion did not omit to act as behoved a prudent

soldier in an enemy's country. Had he left the laird's horses in the stable, there was risk of the water being warned upon him,[1] and of his party being overpowered before reaching Tweeddale. Michael was for hamstringing the animals, but Sir Walter had too great a respect for good horseflesh to permit that.

"Put up thy knife, Michael," said he; "never spoil a good horse till you know where to put bridle on a better. We will take them with us, and turn them loose when we have ridden a league or two."

"Yet it was for want of a farthing belt that the gold buckle was lost," muttered the Fenman. "It's aye better to be safe than sorry."

The cavalcade was then formed of fourteen horses and five riders, the led horses being tied head and tail in single file, for so the narrow moorland track required. Gaspard rode first with his lord's blue and white pennon, then the knight; after him the Fenman, who had exchanged his master's sumpter-horse for one of the Linhope stud, which he fancied more. The led horses came next, the rear being brought up by the man-at-arms and the surviving hobelar. As they issued from the barmekyn in the cold morning light, and rode under the grey tower, the lady of Linhope from her old post on the battlements continued to pour curses on them.

"May the water of Tweed rise upon ye and drown ye, as the Red Sea rose upon King Pharaoh and his host! May the earth open and swallow ye quick to hell!" and so on.

Gaspard, turning in the saddle to take a last look at Linhope, kissed his hand lightly to Sybil, who waved

[1] *Warning the water* was the term used on the Border to describe calling out the armed men of a valley against an enemy.

a sad farewell and withdrew within her dreary home. Even so must it often be in the world as God hath ordered it: the gallant tarries a while, wins a heart and rides away to forget it in action and adventure; the maid must bide at home to mourn and possess her soul in patience.

"A pretty lass that, Gaspard," observed Marmion, "but she reserves all her favours for thee, thou rogue; whereas that old beldame made me the chief object of her attentions."

"A pretty lass, indeed," replied the squire, "and one that would grace a revel fairly if she were passed through the hands of a skilful tirewoman. And a good lass too, Sir Walter. Had it not been for her timely warning there might have been an end to all our riding."

"A good bairn of an ill breed, then," growled the irrepressible Fenman, who overheard what his superiors said, and must needs put in one of his proverbs; "it is like she is one of those black hens that lay white eggs."

Sir Walter's party fared forward without meeting any obstacle. The way was not hard to find; they had but to keep the beaten track on the right bank of the Frostley burn, and so past Teviot head and down the Teviot. They deemed it prudent to make a detour so as to avoid passing within near view of the strong house of Branxholm, frowning at them across the swollen river, and, after fording the Slitrig above its junction with Teviot, they cast loose their led horses, being now in the lands of the Douglas, through which it was expedient to pass as quickly and attracting as little observation as possible. Leaving Jedburgh on the right hand, and

the great square keep of Ancrum on the left, the road broadened before them through a well-cultivated district leading to Roxburgh Castle, where they were kindly received by the English constable, Sir Guillaume de Fiennes, a knight of Gascony. Thence next day they pushed on through the wooded valley where Teviot steals softly into the masterful embrace of Tweed. They crossed not the river by the fair bridge built by the Black Monks of Kelso, but held along the English bank past King Edward's castle of Wark. The storm-clouds had rolled away, and a brave sun streamed out of the western sky over the fair vale of Tweed as Marmion rode within view of the famous castle of Norham. Set upon a steep eminence on the south bank of the river, the dark pile loomed far over the land. On the keep the red cross of Saint George flaunted defiance to the territory of the Douglas, but above the jumelle gate-towers fluttered a white lion rampant on a scarlet field, the well-known arms of the king's constable, Sir Thomas Gray of Heton. No stauncher servant — no more wary captain — could the Plantagenet reckon on his rolls than this veteran Northumbrian knight; to no more capable hands could the defence of such an important post as Norham have been intrusted. From the outbreak of war in 1306, and especially since the destruction of Douglas Castle in the following year, the possession of this royal keep, the key to the eastern march, had been the chief desire of the Scottish leaders, and especially of Sir James Douglas himself. The principal strength of the King of Scots lay in Selkirk Forest, a district embracing the whole of the counties of Selkirk and Peebles, as well as Clydesdale, to the march of Ayrshire. In this wide tract Douglas held great sway, and in concert with young

Thomas Randolph of Strathdon, King Robert's nephew,[1] had organised a powerful force and gathered to the cause of Bruce many of the most adventurous Scottish chevaliers. From Selkirk Forest, then, issued continually parties of mounted men led by Douglas's lieutenants, sometimes cutting off convoys destined for Norham Castle or foraging detachments sent out from the same; at other times riding under the very walls and challenging the English knights to come out and give them combat. Attempts even had been made regularly to invest the place, but hitherto these had been disturbed by detachments from King Edward's garrisons at Berwick and Wark.

The guard mustered on the barbican wall as Sir Walter's party reined up at the entrance, and his bugle brought the warder from his lodge. The gates swung open and the knight was admitted to make his errand known to the constable. War-worn Sir Thomas had received a frightful wound from the shot of a springald at the siege of Stirling Castle in 1304, which disfigured the whole of one side of his visage and gave it a most grotesque appearance. Although silent about his own part in that notable deed of arms, the siege and its conduct by King Edward I. had been so driven home to his memory, that he could never speak upon military matters (and he rarely spoke about anything else) without illustrations taken from that service. He gave a cordial welcome to the Knight of Shakingdon.

"Well said!" he cried, after listening to Sir Walter's story, and embracing him in knightly fashion, "well said! By Saint Cuthbert! but it does me good to hear one of our young bloods claim such a boon. You shall have it,

[1] To become famous hereafter as Randolph, Earl of Moray.

Sir Walter, you shall have your desire, if there is luck left in loyalty. And you have come to the right place for deeds of chivalry. Scarce a week passes but some party of Scots affronts the king's flag. Sangdieu! it is wellnigh as stirring as the siege of Stirling. Ah, that was a time! Nineteen weeks we lay in the trenches there, battering the walls with the best engines in the world. Trust me, our old king saw to it that we had the best—thirteen of them; let me see, there was the Lincoln and the Segrave, the Robinet and the Kingston, the Dovedale and the Toute-le-monde—all of them hurling great rocks and fire-balls. But you must know we were down in the plain, and the castle upon a lofty rock, so that half the force was spent before the missiles struck the walls, and we might have been lying there to this day if Sir William de Oliphant's garrison had had command of supplies. Nevertheless, it was noble sport, for we had frequent escalade parties from without and sallies from within. The king brought his Queen Margaret thither, and to afford pleasure to her and the French ladies he caused build an oriel window in his house in the town, whence they might view the feats of arms and the destruction wrought by the siege engines. The chief of these was long in arriving, by reason of its great weight and the wickedness of the ways. It came at last, however, the mighty *Loup-de-guerre*, the like whereof the world had never seen, and my lord the king was like a child with a new toy, so eager was he to watch its effect on the walls. Alas! on the very morning it was to be discharged for the first time, the blue banner with the white cross of Saint Andrew was hauled down upon the keep, and in its place was run up the white flag of surrender. Oliphant's garrison had eaten their last crust—nay, the

last rat in the castle — and were starving. You should have seen how the king gnawed his thumb when they told him. 'By the body of Christ!' he cried, 'but I must try one shot from the *Loup-de-guerre*. Let none of our troops enter the castle, and warn the garrison to get to hiding.' Then he went out, and, shaking with excitement, watched the winches wound, the great ball poised, the aim taken, and the shot discharged. 'Viva!' cried he, and flung his bonnet in the air, as the stone crashed against the wall between the barbican towers, smashing the hoists of the portcullis and sending up a cloud of dust and shattered masonry in the sunlight. But pray you pardon, sir knight, you must be weary and hungry. We will discuss these matters at another time. Take your refreshment; make yourself at ease, and rest assured that you will not have many days to wait ere a chance shall be afforded you."

Now it was soon noised abroad how a knight-errant had come to Norham Castle seeking fame by an exploit upon the Scots, for in those days, although knights were ranged on opposite sides in battle, they were united in the common bonds of chivalry. What they learnt, too, was repeated by their retainers, and by them to the country folk, so that from end to end of Tweed and Teviot dales ran the intelligence, and men stood in expectation of a fair deed of arms. However, nothing took place during the first three days of Marmion's sojourn at Norham. On the fourth day, towards nightfall, a solitary light horseman presented himself at the gate, and as his speech bewrayed him for a Scot, he was promptly arrested, disarmed, and put in ward. Questioned whence he came, he would make no answer, but claimed the boon of audience with Sir Walter le Marmion. For a time it

seemed the young man was like to pass the night in durance, seeing that none cared to bring such trivial business to notice of the knight at such an hour, but it happened that young Gaspard de Neville passed through the barbican gate at the moment the stranger was being removed to the guardroom.

"Here is Sir Walter's esquire," cried the Scot; "I trow he will not be so churlish as refuse an honest man a hearing. Master Neville, I pray you get me audience with Sir Walter le Marmion, this night if that be possible."

"How know you my name, sirrah?" quoth Neville, not unwilling to enliven with parley the tedium of a long evening, for time hung heavy on his hands at Norham. "To my knowledge I never saw you before."

"Like enough," said the other, "yet I know you for a gallant esquire, and you will not commit me to a dungeon till I have seen your master and discharged my mission. See, I am unarmed; you need fear no treason."

Something in the youth's manner pleased Gaspard, who, having less than nothing to do, was inclined to humour him. Besides, having failed by further questioning to elicit anything from the stranger, his own curiosity was somewhat aroused, and he strolled back across the bailey to seek Sir Walter. The knight, who was having the incidents of the siege of Stirling explained in detail for the tenth time by good Sir Thomas Gray, willingly availed himself of an excuse to escape, and told Gaspard to have the Scot admitted to a private chamber without delay.

The prisoner, therefore, was brought before him between two of the gate guard — a slightly built youth of

height rather more than middling, with a pale, handsome face, wearing a fair suit of plain mail, without badge or cognisance of any kind on his justaucorps. Marmion's quick eye, however, detected on the sleeves marks whence some device had lately been cut away. The lad wore no steel cap, and his hood of mail thrown back on his shoulders bared a rough shock of thick black hair.

"Your errand, sirrah?" inquired Marmion briefly.

"I heard," quoth the young man, "that your valiancy had lost one of your hobelars in a mellay upon Eskdale muir, and I am come to crave leave to serve in his place under your pennòn."

Sir Walter motioned to the guards to withdraw before he replied, then when there were none with him but the prisoner and Gaspard, he replied—

"But you are a Scot," replied Sir Walter, "as I hear by your speech, and it is not every one of your nation that may be counted loyal to King Edward, lawful King of Scots."

"I am a Scot," said the stranger, "but I am no man's vassal. I am of gentle birth, sir knight, but own neither land nor fortune, and therefore have sworn allegiance to no king. But I have heard of your renown, and am ready to make your king mine, and to render you true and faithful service."

"Do you bear no letters of commendation? How shall I know that you come not as a spy?"

"I bring no letters, sir knight," replied the other, "seeing that my own family hold me in ill-favour because of certain passages between us, and I have no friends willing to stand surety for me. I pray you, sir knight, refuse not my prayer. I ask but to follow you in battle; henceforth your people shall be my people, and

your quarrel my quarrel; and, if I fail you in aught, adjudge me to any death you will, and may I be eternally damned hereafter."

Sir Walter mused awhile. It seemed a foolish thing to enlist in his retinue one of a nation of which one-half at least was in open war with England—one of whom he knew nothing, and who, by his own confession, was of doubtful repute among those who did know him. But Marmion was young in years, and quick is the sympathy of youth with youth. It was falling dark in the chamber, therefore drawing the stranger towards the casement, where stronger light fell on his features, he noted how the colour mounted quickly in his cheeks. Something there was in his steady, trustful eyes, in the full but soft tones of his voice, in the childish sweetness of his countenance, that won strangely upon the knight's fancy and gained his confidence, he could not have said how or why. Laying his hand on the young fellow's shoulder, he looked him full in the face for some moments, and then said sternly—

"Know you not that you stand in mortal peril at this very hour. See! from yonder great ash-tree in the court hang three dead men. A week ago these were Scottish spies; it takes but a single word from me and you shall make a fourth among them."

"Oh, sir knight," quoth the youth, with a smile and a slight toss of his head, "such threats have no terrors for me. Life has not been so sweet to me that I value it a rush; yet I have some concern to quit it in a fashion that shall bring no dishonour upon my name and kin. See! here I offer you my life in service; wilt not have it? then I care not how soon the end comes, for I am full weary thereof already."

Marmion mused for a while, searching deep into the stranger's eyes, which were steadfast and clear, yet nowise bold.

"Well," the knight said at last, "I accept your offer. Methinks I see in you a true man, albeit an unfortunate one, as it seems."

The other fell on his knees, and seizing Sir Walter's hand, kissed it passionately.

"Gaspard," continued Marmion, "take this lad; enrol him as one of my suite; see that he is well fed and suitably lodged, and to-morrow we will see what he is fit for."

"Under what name is he to be entered, your valiancy?" said Gaspard, coming forward out of the gloom. "He speaks of name and kin, but has not told us what they are."

"Call me Richard Runagate," said the youth, rising to his feet. "'Tis not my own name, of course, but it will serve my turn and carries my confession with it."

"Nay," exclaimed Marmion, laughing, "but to give a dog a bad name is to hang him. You cannot come into my service with such a passport to the nearest gallows as that. But you can be Dickon le Déchu, if you like, till you can claim your own name again."

And as Dickon le Déchu the recruit was duly enrolled, and went daily thereafter to exercise with the garrison.

A week had passed since the knight-errant's arrival at Norham Castle, and he seemed as far as ever from accomplishing his purpose. The company were assembled in the great hall at their mid-day meal; the conversation at the upper table had come round as usual to that inexhaustible source of anecdote and military instance—

the siege of Stirling—when the sergeant of the guard presented himself and reported to the constable the approach of two squadrons of Scottish horse.

Even as he spoke, the flourish of trumpets was heard without, and Sir Thomas Gray hastened to the barbican gate to see for himself what was ado. Marmion, standing beside the constable, beheld from the battlements a pretty sight. It was a beautiful autumn day; the sun shone brilliantly upon the Scots cavalry as they deployed on the green slope at a little better than bowshot from the walls, under a banner which both knights recognised instantly with a thrill of soldierly delight. A pure white field with an azure chief, bearing two silver stars, told them that James of Douglas was himself present.[1]

Now it must be clear that even the doughtiest of the Scottish king's captains could avail nothing with a handful of horse against a place of such strength as Norham; and the duty of one intrusted to hold such a place for his king would be equally clear under the conditions of modern warfare—namely, to keep within his defences. Far otherwise was it in the fourteenth century; a fair challenge from knight to knight could seldom be declined without loss of honour. As soon as the Scottish line was formed in four troops, their commander, a tall and singularly graceful horseman, rode forward, and coming close under the gate tower, wound a clear blast upon his bugle.

"Who summons the king's castle of Norham?" cried Sir Thomas Gray from the battlements, "and in whose name doth he come?"

[1] It was not till after the death of Robert I. of Scotland that the sanguine heart was added to the arms of Douglas, in commemoration of "Good Sir James's" mission to carry the king's heart to the Holy Land, and his death in that enterprise.

"I, James of Douglas," replied the knight in a voice peculiarly pleasant, but with a marked lisp; "and in the name of Robert, by the grace of God, King of Scots, I challenge the constable of this tower, or any approved knight whom he may appoint, to meet me and do single combat with spear and sword on horse or on foot. Or otherwise, if he prefer, to meet my troop, man for man, in open mellay."

He spoke, and wheeling his destrier round, galloped off and resumed his place in front of his squadrons, awaiting the constable's reply. The English knights, eager to don their harness, hurried across the paved bailey-ward, where the garrison were already mustering under arms. Sir Thomas returned first; a few moments later Sir Walter appeared, his mail corslet and appointments blazing like silver in the sunlight, and his golden basnet shining like a clear flame.

"Ha! Sir Walter," cried the veteran constable, already afire at the prospect of combat, "here have the good saints accorded your prayer. You have come among us to make your lady's gift famous, and you shall do so. But not afoot, I pray; deeds of high chivalry should be wrought in the saddle. Send for your good destrier; yonder is the foe; you shall charge among them alone, and I pledge all my hopes of heaven if I rescue not your body alive or dead."

"Alive, an' it be the same to you, Sir Thomas," quoth Marmion, and turning to Gaspard, bade him hasten Michael up with Lightheart. It was a foolishly unequal enterprise, yet the knight blenched not; on the contrary, his heart swelled with gratitude to the old constable, for he felt that here, at last, was his opportunity, and that whether he lived or fell, he should make famous his

helmet, and the name of her who gave it, in all places where trouvères sang their lays.

Up came the Fenman leading the beautiful charger, whose swelling neck and forehand were sheeted with fine mail, and on his frontlet stood a sharp spike of steel. Behind the saddle was a short housing of the knight's liveries—vairy, blue and white; but the shapely limbs were bare, and the good horse pawed, and tossing his head proudly, threw the foam-flakes from his fine muzzle, as if he knew that he must carry his master to glory. Gaspard held the stirrup; Marmion swung lightly to his seat and cantered thrice round the enclosure to clear his horse's lungs; then, reining up before the constable, saluted him and demanded to be let forth of the castle.

"Go forth, brave knight," cried Sir Thomas, "in the names of Saint George and King Edward, and may the saints have you in their keeping. And hark in your ear! I remember at the siege of Stirling how Sir Marmaduke de Twenge——"

But Marmion waited for no more. Saluting the constable, he wheeled his horse and trotted to the barbican; at a wave of his hand the castle gates swung outwards, the drawbridge rattled down, and Sir Walter, lance in rest, thundered across it, and swept at a hand-gallop down the gentle slope fair towards the commander of the Scottish squadrons. Douglas, seeing his adversary coming, laughed low to himself. He held no spear, but only a mace in his right hand, so heavy that there were only two other knights in England and Scotland that could handle the same. Consummate master of the *manége*, Douglas waited till the English knight was within two spears' lengths. Then with a dexterous touch of the spur he

made his horse spring aside to the left, and, checking him with the curb, swung him round on his haunches to the right, so as to bring the great mace down upon his assailant's golden basnet. It was a hazardous manœuvre, which, to be effective, could only be attempted by a practised and powerful horseman. Douglas was both, and he performed it to admiration; but in Marmion the Scot had met his match in saddle-craft. Swift as a swallow's wing the good brown horse swerved to the left; the mighty mace descended harmlessly in the air, and, before Douglas could recover himself, Marmion had borne forward at heightened speed full upon the ranks of Scottish horse. Such an onset meant certain, sudden death to whomsoever received it. Marmion's spear struck full on the corslet of a man-at-arms, and, tearing him from his saddle, pierced through and through his lungs and pinned him to the earth. Leaving his spear fast in this human target, he now took up his mace and, still at a gallop, wheeled round to force his way back to the castle. A single cavalier, he had ridden through eight score armed and mounted men; could he but repeat the feat, his purpose was surely accomplished and the meed was won. But, save in that part of the line which he had pierced, there was no disarray. The squadron had wheeled into column of sections, their commander not daring to wheel about, not knowing at what moment the English garrison might issue to take him in rear. Marmion, therefore, without a moment's hesitation set his horse full against the flank of the column, hoping to dash through the interval between two troops. Lightheart's condition was as admirable as his master's spirit,—the Fenman had seen to that,—but to carry a knight in armour up a slope and down the same

are mighty different things. The momentum in the second charge was greatly less than in the first.

"Viva!" lisped Douglas, as the good brown horse with fiery nostrils bore his rider once more into the throng. "Viva! you have a fine style, sir knight, whosoever you may be."

One—two! the nearest files went down under Marmion's swinging mace, but the rest closed thickly round. A gigantic man-at-arms raising a huge battle-axe in both hands brought it down full on the back part of the golden helmet, hearing not or heeding not Sir Alexander de Moubray, the captain of the troop, who shouted, "Hold, you fool! I will not have him killed: he yields himself my prisoner."

"Not kill him!" grumbled the giant, "and what for no? him that has straiked out my ain sister's husband's cousin, Archie o' Eckford."

"Hands off! I tell thee. I hold him to ransom. Come, sir knight, yield you my prisoner."

But Marmion was far beyond reach of such summons. The axe, driven by a pair of powerful arms, had cleft clean through the glittering metal; dark blood welled through the opening, and the knight lay motionless on the trampled sward.

"He is spoilt for ransom that one, I trow," quoth the man-at-arms, wiping his weapon on the grass. "He's no the first pock-pudding[1] this bonny blade has sent on his lang errand, and he'll no be the last, I trow."

The Scots, meanwhile, had to look to themselves, and Douglas prepared to receive the attack of Gray's garrison. The old constable, mindful of his pledge to Marmion, had

[1] The ancient name of contempt among the Scots for an Englishman.

marched them out on foot and formed them up on the declivity in a square or "schiltrom," which his experience of Scottish warfare had taught him to be effective against the best of cavalry. This solid column of two hundred and fifty spears now descended the slope at the *pas de charge*, the drums on the ramparts beating the point of war; it precipitated itself against the cavalry while they were in the act of re-forming to their original front. A terrible scene of confusion ensued; the horsemen recoiled before the weighty impact; many horses were disembowelled by thrusts from the English spears, and rearing threw their riders pell-mell in heaps. The flank sections, attempting to wheel inwards and charge, were kept at bay behind the fence of slain and wounded; till Douglas, seeing his party outnumbered and set at naught by the wall of steel, caused his trumpets to sound the retreat, and, flourishing his hand in defiant farewell to the constable, followed his disordered squadron slowly down to the ford.

Then Gray was free to turn his attention to him whom he was pledged to rescue. Marmion lay without sign of life, his features disfigured with blood and sorely trampled upon in the mellay. They bore him sadly back to the castle.

"In truth," said Gray, "he was a proper knight, and bore himself right nobly. Pity 'tis he could not have lived to claim the meed so fairly won. By'r Lady! how he doubled up that Scottish troop. I have not seen so fair an exploit wrought since John of Ruthven's sally from the castle of Stirling, when——"

Good Sir Thomas's reminiscences were wont to be cut short. While he was speaking, Gaspard and the Fenman were laying their lord's body upon a pallet, and

nobody paid the slightest attention to the constable's commentary. Dickon le Déchu hurried up with water and appliances to wash the wounds.

"Tush, man," said Gaspard impatiently, "let be! He is past all our care."

"I'm something of a leech, Master Gaspard," persisted Dickon; "I pray you let me to my lord. He is but swooned, I believe."

"Go too!" growled the constable. "Why, fool, his brain-pan is cleft, and, leech or no leech, he is half-way to kingdom come ere now."

"Fool or no fool," quoth Dickon quietly, "the wounds must be washed;" and the others, having greater craft in bestowing wounds than in handling them, were fain to let him have his way. Dickon, therefore, gently unfastened the gorget and drew off the helmet, when it was seen that the steel, being of proof, although thickly gilt, had so warded the weapon that the edge had merely shorn a great slice along the scalp grazing the skull. Much blood welled from the gaping wound as the headpiece was removed; Dickon bathed it with skilful fingering, and presently the knight gave a sigh and opened his eyes.

It were hard to say which of the four attendants was most rejoiced to behold him restored to life—Gaspard and Michael, from devotion to their lord; Sir Thomas Gray, by reason of his pledge to rescue having been so fairly accomplished; or Dickon le Déchu, from sheer tenderness of heart. This much is certain, that Gaspard, looking quickly in the young spearman's face, was amazed to perceive that his eyes were streaming with tears. But Dickon's emotion did not hinder his helpfulness. Bending low over the wounded man, he deftly cut away the close-curling locks round the wound, spread some salve on a

piece of linen, and bound all firmly with bandages. Well was it for Marmion that none of his bones had been broken in the rude handling he had received, else had Dickon's simple surgery been at fault. With clean wounds and bruises he seemed to be a practised hand. But as soon as the dressing was complete he took command of the sick-room and desired that all should leave it, so that the wounded man might be in perfect quiet. To this the Fenman would by no means consent.

"I have watched the master," said he, "through many an ailment since he was no higher than my knee, and I'll not leave him now. 'Tis but a bit of hanging skin; no great mystery in that, I trow. Many a far worse broken ship has come to land."

"Come away, come away, Michael," said Gaspard; "Dickon has skill in such matters, he says; and his dressing is warrant thereof, I think. Sir Walter can hardly be in better hands."

Then the Fenman's wrath found vent.

"Aye, aye; better hands, no doubt; better than old Michael's, which are hard and stiff and bent by thirty years' serving of the house of Shakingdon. Here's this Dickon springs from the nearest dunghill, and Michael may go hang himself, and make way for a smockfaced bastard."

"Softly there, Michael," said Gaspard, who felt for the old servant's bitterness; "they say that the young fellow is of good blood."

"I'se warrant it," returned the other, "and so is a black pudding. But I'll e'en take myself off, or I'll be saying summat that I'll be sorry for. This much I know, this bolt never came out of my master's quiver, for there never was a Marmion yet that carried a thankless heart."

The faithful old fellow turned away shaking his head ruefully, and gave his attention to Lightheart in the stable none the less diligently for his disappointment. Women there were in the castle, whose office it would have seemed to act as sick-nurses; but Dickon would let none of them come near his patient; night and day he was constant in attendance, and pled so hard to be allowed to finish what he had so well begun that Gaspard had not the heart to send him back to military exercise.

No woman could have been a nurse more tender or more watchful than Dickon proved himself, and under his care the wounded knight was soon convalescent. Bruises inflicted by the trampling of the Scottish horses were the most serious part of his injury, and kept the patient on his back, from sheer inability to straighten himself, several days after the wound in his head was in fair way of recovery. Waking one day towards noon from a refreshing nap, he saw Dickon seated in the deep splay of the window, his elbow on the sill and his boyish chin resting on his palm, gazing wistfully upon the winding river and the fair vale of Tweed. The slanting November sun lit up the youth's delicate profile, and his slight but graceful figure was well set off by the dark-blue doublet lined with white and long dark-blue hosen, which he had assumed as the proper garb of the household of Shakingdon. For some minutes the knight watched his attendant in silence, scrutinising him more closely than he had yet done, and speculating how one of such gentle mien had fallen into such humble circumstances.

"I wish I knew your story, Dickon," he said at last; and at the sound of his voice the young spearman started violently, the colour rushing into his smooth cheeks and brow. "I wish I knew your story. I be-

lieve you are as much out of place in a hobelar's saddle as I should be in a bishop's throne."

"I am content with my lot, Sir Walter," replied Dickon, mastering his emotion and speaking in a calm, clear voice. "It is one of my own seeking, and I desire no better—for the nonce. As for my story—your valiancy should have it, were it all mine to tell; but short and humble though it be, it belongs in part to another—to others, I mean—and you are too gracious to press me to be untrue to them."

"Assuredly," answered the knight, "keep your own secret and that of the damoysel who shares it with you, for I can read as far into your millstone as that, you see. But such shapely saplings as you do not grow in every hedge; tell me, have you no home of your own?"

"My home is in your valiancy's household, by your grace," quoth the youth, making preparation for his lord's dinner.

"No very substantial edifice at present," laughed Marmion; "it is but a hand-to-mouth establishment, as you see; and I would have you reflect before we set out for Carlisle, as I trust my ribs will suffer me to do before many days are past, whether you do wisely to leave your own people and country. Does your mother live?"

"My mother lives," answered Dickon passionately, his dark eyes flashing and his colour mounting again, "and my father lives, and neither of them know where I am. But their ways are not my ways. The saints befriend them; but rather than go back to them—nay, Sir Walter, rather than leave your service, I would drown myself in the river down yonder. I pray you urge me no more upon this matter."

"Enough said, Dickon, enough said. I care not to

pry into any man's secrets; but neither do I care to accept menial service from one born to better things. See now, you like my young squire Gaspard de Neville, do you not?"

"I do," said Dickon shortly, turning to lift a pot which was seething on the hearth.

"Well, look you, I will relieve you from hobelar's duty and appoint you to service which you have shown yourself so well fitted for, since your countrymen handled me in their own rude fashion. I have Michael the Fenman as my henchman; you shall be Master Gaspard's valet and attend him in the field and chamber. As for wages—well, they must be according as our fortune fares."

Dickon looked up radiantly.

"Oh, I thank you, my lord! It is a boon far beyond my deserts. And think not of reward; I will blithely serve Master Gaspard for—for love."

Thus Dickon le Déchu became henchman to Gaspard de Neville, and the Fenman was restored to his place in his master's chamber.

Towards the close of the month, when the days were getting longer and more windy, le Marmion bade adieu to his kind host, who to the last never wearied of tracing the analogy between Walter's feat upon the Scots and John of Ruthven's famous sally upon Sir Marmaduke de Twenge in the English trenches before Stirling. Lightheart, who had come unscathed through the Scottish spears, thanks to the good mail on his neck and forehand, was in hard condition, fit to go for a man's life, having been exercised sedulously by the Fenman during his master's illness. Also Michael had busied himself in repairing the dints in the golden helmet: the cleft made by the smith's axe had been cunningly restored

by rivets; the whole affair shone almost as brilliantly as when it had left the heaulmier's shop. Far and wide had spread the fame of Sir Walter's exploit, and great was the glory of having encountered the terrible Douglas, which none single-handed had ever done before and lived to tell the tale. The garrison mustered on the walls—the guard behind the barbican battlements—and loud and hearty were the cheers as le Marmion's clump of six spears fared forth upon the road to Carlisle.

XV.

Of Sir Walter le Marmion's renown and the fame of the golden helmet; and furthermore of how he became Lord of Fontenaye.

THIS time Sir Walter chose the shortest route to Carlisle through English territory, traversing the Cheviot hills and striking the North Tyne at Corbridge. For his mission was accomplished; in whatever towns or even villages he passed through his progress partook of the character of a triumph. The display, unusual in those days, of a crest—the rising falcon—upon his helmet, and the gilding of the helmet itself, proclaimed at once the approach of the hero of Norham, for the Northumberland farmers in those days were as keen to hear of deeds of arms wrought upon the Scots as to learn the price of wool in Hexham and Kendal markets. The English, ever since their land became one kingdom, and indeed long before that was accomplished, have ever been martial at heart, ready to take up arms should the need arise, and liberal of honour towards those who bear themselves gallantly. And although they seek peace and put it to busy use when they secure it, and although the warlike core is now more thickly masked by the web

of industry and world-wide commerce than it was in the fourteenth century, it is still sound as of yore, vibrating with as true a response as ever to summons in the hour of danger.

Disappointment was in store for Sir Walter le Marmion when he reached Carlisle. He had reckoned on finding the Court still established there, for it never entered his mind to suppose that the king would move far from the Border until his Scottish realm had been reduced to its allegiance. He had purposed to demand audience of the king, to report how, following the instructions of the Court of Honour, he had carried out his knightly devoir to his mistress, and confidently to claim her hand from the royal grace. But the king and his Court had left Carlisle; from Sir Andrew de Harcla, the governor, Marmion learnt how they had repaired to London early in October to transact the obsequies of Edward I. in Westminster Abbey; that these had already taken place, and that the king was on the point of sailing to France, in order to wed the French Princess Isabella.

Worse was to follow. It was necessary that the king should appoint a Guardian of the Realm, to act as head of the government during his own absence in the parts beyond the seas. That appointment had already been published, to the mighty and just indignation of prelates and barons: the Viceroy of England was announced to be none other than Sir Pierre de Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall, the royal proclamation conferring upon him plenary authority to issue licences to elect, grant royal assents, make restitution of temporalities, collate and present to prebends, and lastly, which touched Sir Walter most nearly of all, *to deal with wardships and marriages.*

Something in the tone of Sir Andrew's voice as he

recited the powers conferred upon Cornwall caused Marmion to look fixedly upon him. Sir Andrew added no comment, save what was conveyed by a shrug of his shoulders.

"But what are men saying to this?" burst out Sir Walter. "By heavens! to hand the realm over to that Gascon rat—will the nobles and commons brook it, think you?"

"I am a plain soldier, Sir Walter," replied the other, "and mell not with matters of state. But this much I say, that I know not with what face we in the north may meet the Scots when they cross the Border, as cross it they will, if we are left thus unsupported and forgotten. Who commands on the Marches? I know not, by Christ; each one of us is left to make our own battle. I tell you, Sir Walter, that rather than see my good troopers falling in a vain struggle for a king who sets more store by a single foreign pimp than by the best blood in his realm, I would make what terms I might with the King of Scots himself. I am ready to shed my last drop, but not for nothing. If I am to do my duty, others must see to it that they do theirs." [1]

Gloomily Sir Walter sought his old lodging in Saint Cuthbert's ward, yet as he trod the familiar street and breathed the chill air of the old border town, associated as they were so closely with the dear memory of his mistress, there fell upon his heart a lightsomeness—the

[1] In after years brave Sir Andrew, despairing of further resistance against the Scots in the grievous disorders brought about by Edward II.'s misrule, carried out what he hinted to Marmion, and entered into treasonable negotiations with the King of Scots, after successfully defending the city against a siege and fierce assault. For this he was brought to trial and suffered death on the gallows at Henriby outside the city walls.

joy of being near the beloved. Thoughts and hopes thronged swiftly through his brain. The king had left the country, therefore from him no boon could be craved; could Marmion seek it from the Viceroy? He frowned at the idea of bending the knee to the odious Cornwall, and then smiled as he reflected what a simple fool that earl would hold him in making such petition to him of all others. No: he would take the law into his own strong hands, seeing that the rightful lawgiver had quitted his post. He would ride to Kendal on the morrow, receive from the Lily acknowledgment that her commands had been fulfilled; she would receive him graciously—he could fancy how her brave eyes would fall before his ardent gaze, how the colour would mount in that lovely face. He would claim her in the face of the world; her scruples on the score of duty to the king would easily be overcome, for had not she as much reason as he to distrust and detest Cornwall? He would persuade her to wed with him without delay, and afterwards, when the king returned, if he could not make his peace with him, the Lady of Kendal was surely too powerful and too well-beloved in the north to have anything to fear for having broken the law. Fear! why, the idea of a muster of the king's forces at Carlisle without the yellow squadrons of Kendal (and not a man of them all would quit the dales without his mistress's summons) was too preposterous to be entertained. So busy were his thoughts with this exciting theme that, all unawares, he wandered far along the Botchergate past his lodging, and was recalled to the present by the warder's challenge at the city gate, for it was long after dark. Returning, he directed Gaspard to prepare for a start at daybreak.

It was still stone-dark when the Fenman presented him-

self next morning for his lord's levée, bearing over his arm the steel hauberk he had diligently polished overnight. Setting the oil-lamp upon the table, he busied himself putting the chamber in order, and from the way he fidgeted about, putting off time unnecessarily, Marmion perceived that he had something of moment to communicate. Long experience had taught him that Michael must be left to take his own way of imparting news, so, springing from his pallet, he asked what kind of weather it was outside.

"Wet," answered the Fenman, "as sure as there's a louse in Pomfret. It raineth as it doth on nineteen days in the score in these northern counties. Mordieu! but it would take the hands of half a troop to dress the harness of a single knight in such a climate as they keep here. Does your valiancy wish this to be carried before you to-day?" he continued, taking up the shield on which le Marmion's arms were brightly painted, poising it and eyeing it with his head on one side as an old magpie might ogle a pewter spoon.

"Why not?" answered Sir Walter impatiently; "I have given no instructions to Master Gaspard to alter the order of our march."

"Why," quoth Michael, with a twinkle in his eye, "there be cunning craftsmen in Carlisle, and methought, seeing that your valiancy must needs give up the bend gules on the field vairey, and that there be no more crowns to be cracked for the nonce, that you might wish the new bearings to be limned upon the old shield."

"New bearings, you old fool," said Sir Walter, "what bee is buzzing in your bonnet this time? Harkye, put it from you, and bestir yourself, for I must be in the saddle by the first stroke of dawn."

"Aye, aye, but the rathe cock has yet to crow. Much water goes by the sleeping miller, and maybe your valiancy has not heard the tidings from Scrivelsby."

"Scrivelsby?" spluttered the knight, withdrawing a glowing face from a great basin of cold water to scrub it dry with the towel. "Scrivelsby? nay, I am not wont to hear much worth the listening from that quarter."

"Aye, you may say that all that you got from Sir Philip in his life you might put in one eye and see none the worse for it; and you might put in your hosen all that you owe him in thanks, and yet your legs be none the bigger. But Sir Philip is dead."

"Dead, say you?" Sir Walter observed without much concern; "well, he was a good knight, I have heard, but he loved not his kin at Shakingdon. You would not have me wear a hair shirt for the good of his soul, would you?"

"Nay, but Sir Philip's two sons, my masters Geoffrey and Roger, are dead likewise, slain in open combat with the Scots."

A flood of light broke in upon Marmion: these two young men had been all that stood between him and the lordship of Shakingdon.

"You mean, Michael, that——"

"I mean, oh my dear master," cried the old man, going down on his knees and kissing Marmion's hands, "I mean that you are the new lord of Scrivelsby, Tamworth, Lutterworth, and Fontenaye, as well as the king's champion. Oh, I bless the saints that I have lived to see this day."

Marmion, quietly bidding the Fenman desist from this unprecedented manifestation, hurried on the preparations for departure; and bright were the visions that floated through his brain as he rode out upon the wet highway in

the grey, mild dawn. He came no longer as Gautier Sans-avoir to claim his bride; he was now by far the wealthiest and most powerful commoner in the county of Lincoln, and might lift his head as a suitor not unmeet even for so great a lady as the Lily of Kendal. Nay, much more than wealth and power had come to him: the hereditary honour of the Championship was his, marking him out in a special manner among all the chivalry of England. As the Fenman had reminded him, he must discard the gay shield of the Marmions, and assume the honourable but sombre bearings of his office, the sword in pale upon the sable field. In an age less busy than our own, men laid much store by the herald's craft and all it told, and be sure that Sir Walter was not so different from his kind as not to anticipate the pride with which he should ride in the lists and display his new cognisance under the bright eyes of Mistress Challice herself. The young knight had been more or less than mortal—he would at least have been out of keeping with the age he lived in—had such not been ingredients in the pleasant draught with which his cup had suddenly overflowed.

It was passing noon on the second day after leaving Carlisle when Sir Walter and his company rode through the defiles of Fawcett Forest and viewed the well-remembered landscape, with Kendal keep rising square and grey above the smoke of a thousand chimneys. But with quick eye Marmion noted that it was not the yellow banner of de Roos that flapped from the staff, but one of sable hue—an apparition which filled his mind with doubts. He spurred quickly down towards the town, until he could descry upon the flag the white escallop shells of Strickland. The Lily then was not upon her lands; her

chamberlain Sir Blaise was in charge, and Marmion muttered a bitter oath as he realised the state of matters.

"But six days ago," Sir Blaise explained in reply to Sir Walter's inquiry, "on the feast-day of the Conception,[1] Mistress Challice set forth for London, having received our lord the king's commands to attend his Court. But you will surely alight, sir knight, and send your horses to the stables. Be assured that Mistress Challice wills that her house be open to the use of all gentle knights at all seasons, and to your valiancy in particular, whom as I know she holdeth in high esteem."

"Six days," repeated Marmion, musing, "six days. It can be done; she may be overtaken. I crave your pardon, Sir Blaise, but I have business of the utmost moment for Mistress Challice, and I must needs force the pace in order that she may give her decision thereon before she reaches London. Know you where she will lodge in the city?"

"Most commonly my niece lieth at the hospital of Saint Mary Rouncivale, which, as I well remember, stands in the village of Charing, midway between the suburb called the Flete and the borough of Westminster. If she be gone to other quarters it is unknown to me; but, if your purpose be to find her lodging, it will doubtless be known to the watch."

Sir Walter would tarry no longer than to bait his horses and eat a hasty dinner. He would lie at Lancaster that night, and as he rode forward his mind was full of busy arithmetic, devising how that start of six days was to be overcome. The Lily would not ride more than seven long leagues a-day, he thought; if he could put in fourteen he might overtake her in six days more, but not

[1] 8th December.

before she crossed the Colne at Watford, and he gnawed his beard savagely when he remembered that half a day's start had been lost already. However, if the saints would befriend him, Challice might tarry somewhere on the road. He could hardly conceive that she had any such burning desire to reach the Court, and so come again within reach of the Earl of Cornwall, as would cause her to press her journey beyond the reasonable despatch consistent with obedience to the king's summons.

Then he began to speculate what possible occasion the king could have for the Lady of Kendal's presence at such a season, when the days were shortest and the ways most evil. The king—he remembered of a sudden Sir Andrew de Harcla's tidings, how the king was about to start, or had already started, for France, and how he had committed all governance in his absence to Cornwall. This remembrance fell upon him like a cold douche; Cornwall could have but one purpose, and that a sinister one, in sending for the Lily. In sheer agony of apprehension, Marmion called Gaspard de Neville to his side, for the impulse of frank spirits and the common custom of soldiers is to take counsel with a comrade in the hour of distress. Marmion delighted in Gaspard's company at all times; the squire had a bright way of making little of difficulties, and always viewed affairs in a sunny aspect; moreover at times his boyish face bore such distinct resemblance to that of his cousin, the Lily, as to be of special solace to the enamoured knight.

"I see no cause for anxiety on account of cousin Challice," said Gaspard. "The king is going to France to fetch his bride; he will require some ladies to make her a fitting suite; upon whom could his choice fall more properly than upon the Lily of Kendal?"

"By Saint Eloy!" exclaimed Sir Walter, "but you are a jewel, Gaspard. I never thought of that. I had made up my mind that this was a device of the Gascon to get Challice into his power."

So he fared forward with a lighter heart, and made such good progress that at the close of the fourth day out of Lancaster he rode into Leicester, taking hospitality there from the Franciscan brethren of Saint Martin's.

He had picked up good news on the way, for it seems that the Lily had not travelled so quickly as he had calculated, and he was informed that the yellow-coated troop had passed but four-and-twenty hours before him. Therefore had his good fortune served he might reckon on overtaking the Lily at the close of the next day. But his strength failed him at the last. The strain of forced travel proved too much for his weakened frame, for he had lost much blood from the wound in his head at Norham; every joint was racked with pain, his eyes burned, his tongue and throat were parched, he could hardly stand when he dismounted at Saint Martin's gate, and the fever mounted so high that Gaspard and Dickon could do no more than strip his harness and lay him between good blankets. Among the monks was one with the training of a leech, who was for bleeding him—the one relief applied to every kind of malady—according to the practice of chirurgery in those days. But Dickon interposed.

"Nay," said he, "but already the chevalier has left too much of his blood beyond the Border; it is that which aileth him now. My mother has had plenty of experience of wounded men, and she never would suffer the lancet to touch them. 'Never take away that which you cannot

restore,' she always said, 'for the blood is the life thereof!'"

Once more, therefore, Michael had to yield his place to Dickon, and once more Dickon assumed the *rôle* of sick-nurse, and watched his lord tenderly through the ravings of a desperate fever.

XVI.

Of the snare spread for Mistress Challice by the Earl of Cornwall.

THE royal summons, in obedience to which Challice de Roos repaired to London, contained a reference to the king's approaching marriage. Concluding, therefore, that it was intended that she should attend the new queen on her passage from Paris, she took with her a suite befitting her rank—Mistress Alison the gouvernante, Gillian the tirewoman, Father Ailwyn the confessor, the page Bertram de Willoughby, and six pack-horses. Her escort consisted of the Captain de Musgrave, an esquire named Alan le Ryder, who carried the lady's banner, two men-at-arms, and eight light horsemen. These made a brave show in the bright frosty noon as they followed the highway through Saint John's Wood, the sunlight streaming through the gnarled oaks upon the yellow and scarlet liveries and lighting up the well-polished harness of the escort. Leaving on their right hand the skirts of the great forest covering Notting Hill, they held through the coppice fringing the banks of the Tye Bourne, and so out upon the level ground, where thick hedgerows, leafless though they were, half concealed the village of Charing.

The sky was beautifully clear, save in the eastern quarter, where dusky vapour hung like a veil in the still, cold air.

"See, Father Ailwyn," exclaimed Challice, "I fear there is some terrible calamity over yonder. The city must be afire, I trow."

"Nay," replied the priest, "methinks that is but the poisonous smoke of sea-coal, which ships bring to the very doors of the indolent citizens, and they prefer to burn the poisonous stuff in their forges — aye, even in their houses — rather than be at the trouble of carting wholesome firewood from the forests."

"But surely that was not so when I was in London last," said Challice. "I remember well how, when the wind set in the east, it used to carry to Charing the sweet fragrance of the logs on ten thousand hearths."

"Aye, that was so in the days of our old king," explained Father Ailwyn. "He could not suffer the noisome fumes of sea-coal, and enacted that all who used that vile mineral should answer for it with their lives. But that good usage, like many another, hath fallen into disuse under our present rulers, as they tell me."

Sending her squire le Ryder with two horsemen across the meadows to the king's palace of Westminster, Challice desired him to notify that she awaited the royal pleasure at the hospital of Saint Mary Rouncivale, but craved permission to rest and refresh herself until the morrow. Le Ryder brought back the required licence, and, in addition, the disquieting intelligence that the king had already quitted the country, leaving the Earl of Cornwall installed with plenary powers of governance. The said earl sent his greeting to the Lady of Kendal, and commanded her attendance upon his Court at Westminster at ten o'clock on

the morrow, provided she should find herself in good health and restored from the fatigue of her long travel.

Challice carried a bold heart under her silken bodice, yet it sank somewhat upon these ominous tidings. She had received no word from Walter since they parted in the summer; she knew not whether he was still at Norham—whether indeed he was still alive; but this uncertainty made no change in her resolution. Waving a signal to her attendants that she would be alone, and seating herself in the deep bay of the window, she set to work calmly to survey her position. Her eyes wandered over a tranquil scene. The winter sun was sinking red, but a reach of the broad river beneath it, not catching the reflection, shone with the faint greenish-blue of the sky. Shapely elms lined the hedgerows, throwing their delicate tracery against the saffron west, yet not so thickly but that the new twin towers of the abbey might be seen to the right of the king's palace roof. The hail of boatmen on the river sounded softly through the still air; the sharper note of a bugle marked the hour of watch-setting. The red sun slipped out of the heaven; the shadows gathered; lights began to twinkle in distant Westminster; still Challice sat on—so still—so silent.

At last she rose.

"Fear not, my love, my darling, my own knight," she said. "You would not doubt me were you here; trust me wherever you be. If you live—I am yours, and yours only; if you be dead—oh, Walter, if you be dead—it is I who have slain you, yet am I still yours. Dead am I also to the world, and in this cloister I shall abide until I may come and be with you once and for aye."

Clear and sweet rang the Angelus from the abbey on the west; the sound was taken up by the belfry of Saint

Martin's-in-the-Fields near at hand, and passed eastward from tower to tower till it was lost in the hum of myriad bells in the distant hive of London city. Challice sank on her knees and buried her sad face in prayer. Then she rose, wrote a few sentences upon a piece of linen paper, shook a tiny silver hand-bell, and desired the answering page to seek out Alan le Ryder, for whom she had another errand.

"Alan," said she, "loth am I to send you abroad again thus late, but my business presseth. Look you, I would have you ride to the Leaden Hall, where my cousin Sir Hugh de Neville keepeth house. With him lodgeth the Clerk to the King's Council, Sir Maurice de Bulkeley. Of him you must demand audience; see"—and she slipped from her forefinger a heavy gold ring, which once belonged to her father, wherein was a large sapphire, uncut, save that there was graven upon it the bold motto of her house—NEC ASPERA TERRENT—"this will obtain you instant admission. Give Sir Maurice this letter. Tell him that I am here in Charing, and do most earnestly desire to confer with him at eight of the clock on the morrow. Now haste, Alan, and see you miss not the road in the dark."

Troubles were gathering thick round the Lily. Two hours later Alan returned, having found his way to Leaden Hall, only to be told that Sir Maurice de Bulkeley had passed to France with his master the king. Then, and not before, Challice's friendless position overcame her fortitude, and in the solitude of her bedchamber she did what was rare indeed for her—she cried herself to sleep.

. . . .

None of her retinue could have discerned on the following morning that their mistress had anything of

greater moment than usual on her mind. She selected her attire with decision, but not with greater effect than was her wont, for Challice always went well dressed, without seeming to bestow the amount of thought on the subject which exercises so many ladies. She talked gaily to her tirewoman Gillian, commended Alan le Ryder for having found Leaden Hall so cleverly in the dark, and kissed her palfrey's velvet muzzle before mounting to ride over to Westminster, stroked his fine neck, and administered the manchet which he was accustomed to receive from her hand. Nor was she unmindful of the mark of seigneurial dignity to which she was entitled, but stooping from the saddle took from little Bertram de Willoughby the falcon which he held ready for her wrist. So they set forward along the broad level way, with a flourish from the captain's bugle; four lances riding forward and four as rereward, Alan le Ryder in front of Challice, Father Ailwyn on her right hand, the page on her left, till they came to the gate of the king's palace beside the shining river. There Challice dismounted, and, handing the falcon back to Bertram, left her escort in the courtyard, her esquire and chaplain in the great hall, while she herself, followed by Bertram, was conducted by a gentleman usher up a great stone stair. Passing two archers of the guard at the stair-head, she was led down a long, lofty passage lit with grisaille windows on one side, through which the sunshine struck sparkles of bright colour upon the stone pavement. All these trifles Challice remembered distinctly in after days, even to the bearings of the coats armorial set in stained glass amid the grisaille.

Pausing at the end of the corridor, the usher, whose office it was to instruct in etiquette persons attending the levée, imparted some unwelcome information.

"It is the pleasure of my lord the Viceroy to receive you in *petite levée*, an honour which, as madame is doubtless aware, is usually reserved for ambassadors and papal envoys. Madame would observe that the guards stamped twice on her approach—the highest mark of respect that can be paid to a subject. For my lord the king himself, or, in his absence, for my lord the Viceroy, they stamp thrice, but for none other. I offer madame my profound congratulation. As for the rest, madame will find my lord the Viceroy alone, or at most with no more than his secretary. Madame will be graciously pleased to leave her page in the ante-room, inasmuch as it is my lord's desire to confer with her in private."

This functionary then led the way down another passage floored with polished oak and patrolled by a man-at-arms, whence a flight of broad oaken steps led up to a single arched doorway. Here were two more archers on duty, who stamped twice like the others, sending fine echoes down the corridor. The door was then thrown open and Challice was admitted to a panelled ante-chamber, of which the sole occupant was one dressed in the sad-coloured raiment of a Dominican lay brother, who stood writing at a high desk. This was the earl's confidential secretary, for, like many public men in that day, he found it convenient to employ one of an order whose members, by reason of the vow of poverty which they had taken, their well-earned reputation for unworldliness, and their practice of bearing no arms, were able to transact much difficult business, whether purely secretarial, financial, or diplomatic, without incurring the suspicion or ill-will which a mere layman might have had to risk. The usher having announced Mistress Challice de Roos, the friar laid down his quill, made a courtly obei-

sance, and saying, "I will advise my lord," passed through a side door into another chamber. Returning presently he said to Challice—

"My lord attends the coming of the Lady of Kendal in the Presence Chamber."

He then led the way through two or three rooms in suite, each tenanted by a couple of archers on duty; finally into a chamber loftier and more richly decorated than the rest, and retired with another obeisance to Mistress Challice, closing the door carefully behind him.

Cornwall was standing before the hearth, for the frosty air struck sharply through the high oriel window giving upon the river. Superbly dressed, as was his wont, with his thick, dark hair combed back from his square brow, his athletic and graceful figure well set off by the knightly jupon of green cloth trimmed with ermine—the exclusive badge of royalty—and belted with the golden symbol of earldom, Pierre de Gaveston certainly had a fine appearance as he stood in the morning light beneath the high chimney-piece, whereon were carved and painted in scarlet and gold the famous leopards of England. As the door closed he stepped lightly forward towards his visitor, and taking both her hands in his, led her to an armed settle near the fire. Much as Challice had learnt to detest and distrust the Viceroy, she could not but acknowledge the tact with which he exempted her from the obligatory obeisance of kissing his hand. His next act did not please her so well. The settle was long, with a high back which kept off the draught from the window, and strewn with cushions. After begging the Lily to be seated, Cornwall took the vacant place beside her, and proceeded to express hopes that it was not inconvenient

to her to attend the Court at that season, that she had not found her journey fatiguing, and so on.

"I thought it well," he continued, "to make your audience a private one, whereby we can more freely discuss our affairs, and take measures—speedy ones, I trust—for their transaction."

"I have no affairs," replied Challice coldly, "which might not be discussed with my lord before the whole Court. Howbeit, seeing that it is my lord's pleasure to receive me apart, I am here to know how I can serve the king."

Cornwall's eyes glistened with admiration as he looked upon the beautiful girl. The ride through the keen air had brought a divine colour into her cheeks; the delicacy of her complexion was enhanced by the scarlet riding dress, the justaucorps lined with lamb's wool, and the black velvet flat cap, looped on one side and fastened with a silver image of Saint Herbert of Derwentwater, the patron of her family. The dominant motives of this earl's actions were love of power and passion for pelf, but he was far from indifferent to feminine charms. If it was the Lady of Kendal's wealth and influence which first attracted him as a suitor, her exquisite beauty soon added fuel to his desires, and it was with something of a lover's hesitation that he made answer—

"Fair damoysel, I believed—that is—I expected that you yourself would prefer that we should speak in private of that which concerns you and me alone."

He paused, but Challice gave him no assistance, sitting silent as she toyed with the silken tassel of her riding-wand.

"It is now more than five months since the king bestowed upon me the priceless boon of your hand. You

cannot wonder that I am impatient to obtain the formal blessing of Holy Church. I would fain do so before the king returns from France, for then will come all the turmoil of his coronation, which, as you know, is appointed for the feast of Saint Matthias[1] next-to-come."

The stately chamber rang with a peal of joyous, heart-whole laughter. One of Challice's most bewitching traits was the way she passed suddenly from extreme gravity to clear, ringing mirth; and she laughed now like a child, displaying two fine rows of pearly teeth to the perplexed Viceroy.

"So that is what you bade me come three hundred miles in the depth of winter to talk about. Marry! your Grace, but had I known that, I think I should have let it wait till the days were longer. It is the custom of our English knights to attend upon the ladies whom they honour with their attentions—not to send orders for them, as though they were bales of wool or firkins of butter."

Cornwall's brows lowered, and a baleful light gleamed in his eyes as he made answer—

"The Lady of Kendal could scarcely disregard a royal summons."

"A vice-royal summons, you mean," retorted Challice, and again the clear laughter rang out. "Not quite the same thing, I fancy, my lord."

"Craving your pardon, precisely the same thing, Mistress Challice," quoth Cornwall, making the man-like blunder of arguing a point subsidiary to the main one. "Know you not that the king has committed to me the entire governance of this realm during his absence? See, if you doubt me, here is my authority under the sign-manual of Edward and the privy seal"—and taking from

[1] 25th February.

a table in the window a cylinder of violet velvet, he drew from it a parchment and spread it before Challice. She scarcely glanced at it, but taking up the case, exclaimed—"What a pretty box!" then turning to the Viceroy with a distracting gleam of mischief in her eyes—

"No, my lord, not quite the same thing, at least to us in the dales. We made our fealty to Plantagenet of England, not to Gaveston of Gascony."

"Have a care, madame!" exclaimed the Viceroy, striding up and down the room, and making a second blunder, as man-like as the first, in beginning to lose his temper. "Have a care! or I shall have to prove to you that our authority is every whit as dread as the king's. Bah!" he changed his tone and seated himself again beside Challice, "why let such questions rise between us. Challice! beautiful Challice! you know that I love you—that I worship the very ground you walk upon. Come, Challice, keep me not longer in suspense. Say, when shall we wed?"

He had taken her hand in one of his; he made as though he would draw her to him with the other; but with one of her swift changes of mood, gently but irresistibly disengaging herself, she resumed her icy tones.

"My lord, I have spoken my mind plainly to you on this subject already. It pains me to have to repeat it. I have told you that my troth is plighted to Sir Walter le Marmion; with him will I wed, or with none. If the king holds that it matches with his honour to annul the pledge given me by his sire that I should have free choice in marriage—if he forbids me to marry Sir Walter—then have I vowed to enter the cloister. The king himself cannot bar that course to me. But with you, my lord, I cannot, I will not wed, and there is my last word in this matter—the same as the first."

"But hear me further, Challice," urged the Viceroy, who knew by experience the value of an ordinary maid's nay-say. "See what you are putting from you. See what a position will be yours—the wife of the first subject in the realm. A subject—nay, who shall say an I shall be always a subject? Few monarchs enjoy such real power as I. Harkye, Challice!" he lowered his voice to a husky whisper, "who is the real ruler of England at this moment? That royal booby who has gone to seek a puling minx from the French king's Court? Bah! give him a block of wood and a few tools to fashion it withal, and he wants no more. See! I turn him as I will round that little finger; the habit grows upon him; more and more the real power comes to me. You shall share it; you shall be my Queen—Queen of Beauty—Queen of England."

Challice was silent, playing again with her riding-wand, and Cornwall, exasperated by her indifference, and perhaps irritated because he had disclosed so much of his secret projects, passed again into the furious vein.

"At all events, madame, I rule England at this moment, and I bid you dismiss this le Marmion from your thoughts for ever. If you will not wed with me, by the God above us, you shall not wed with any other. Take the veil if you will, but remember this—Pierre de Gaveston is not one to forgive an injury; no man ever crossed his path without ruing it, and this upstart lover of yours shall brook a lodging of even greater discomfort than your cloister. Look you, Challice de Roos, wed with me—and le Marmion may ruffle it as he please; I will do him no harm; but go into a convent, and you condemn him to linger out his days in the deepest dungeon within the four seas."

He had touched her to the quick. She would have

committed her own youth in its bloom to the irrevocable discipline—the life-long imprisonment—of the Church, with anguish, no doubt, but without hesitancy. But knowing as she did the Gascon's limitless power and relentless vengeance, how could she sentence her lover to such an awful doom? For a moment she faltered; her lip quivered and the colour fled from her cheeks. But next moment the dauntless spirit of her race was kindled; threats only strung her nerve to the truer pitch. Rising to her feet, she said in full, calm accents—

"I have no other answer for my lord. Permit me to pass to my horse."

"Softly, Mistress Challice," replied Cornwall, with an evil smile that marred his visage far more than his scowl. "Your decision in so important a matter must not be made without reflection. We propose that you shall pass into retreat for a space, and we entreat you to employ the leisure you will have in coming to a more reasonable mind."

Drawing the misericorde from his golden belt, the Viceroy smote loudly thrice upon the panel between the fireplace and the window, and moved quickly round so as to stand between Challice and the door. A few seconds passed; steps were heard behind the panelling; it flew open, disclosing a secret passage, whence four archers, wearing black masks, stepped into the chamber. At a sign from Cornwall these placed themselves round Challice, but laid no hand upon her.

"Kidnapped!" she muttered; then moving swiftly up to the Viceroy, cried "Coward!" and smote him sharply across the face with her riding-wand. Cornwall's nerves were good and he was of tried courage; he scarcely flinched under the pain, which must have been

considerable. The archers started forward and laid rough hands upon the lady, fearing that she meant assassination. But Cornwall only laughed.

"Gently with the lady, men!" he said. "I will not have a feather of the pretty shrew's plumage ruffled. I regret, madame, that I must invite you to take another journey this day. I trust our parting will not be for long. When it is your pleasure to receive me you have but to send me word, and I shall fly to your feet. Archers, do your duty!"

He who stood behind Challice flung over her shoulders a silken mantle, and, drawing the hood over her head and face, bound it round her neck. The others were ready to carry her along had she made any resistance; but she suffered herself to be led to the secret stair. They took her slowly down the winding steps—down—down—till by the damp air, the plashing of water and the echo around, she judged that she stood in a vaulted boat port. The sergeant-archer craved her pardon as he lifted her in his arms and placed her in a barge. A few words of command followed, and presently the Viceroy's barge glided out into the current, and with the measured beat of eight pairs of oars sped smoothly along upon the flood-tide towards the lonely marshes of Battersea.

XVIII.

Of the coming of Sir Walter le Marmion to London town, and of the wise counsel he received from Sir Maurice de Bulkeley.

For ten days Sir Walter le Marmion lay between life and death in the Franciscan house of Saint Martin at Leicester. Time after time, Brother Anthony the leech warned Dickon le Déchu of the peril to which he exposed his lord by refusing to have him bled; but Dickon, though he seemed but a lad of eighteen at the most, had a strangely resolute way with him, would listen to no remonstrance, and succeeded in convincing Gaspard that he knew better how to treat a sick man than all the leeches in Leicestershire. Even stubborn old Michael gradually yielded to Dickon's authority in the sick-chamber.

On the tenth day the fever began to abate; the light of reason returned to Sir Walter's sunken eyes, and although so weak at first that he could not raise his hand to his lips, he drank the seethed milk sweetened with honey which Dickon gave him every two hours, and at the end of three weeks was able to sit up beside the hearth. Yet his strength had to fight its way back

to him against an obstinate and restless foe. Anxiety —the intolerable uncertainty as to what had befallen Challice at the unscrupulous Viceroy's hands—weighed upon his mind and racked it continually. Deep though his love was for Challice, it was not proof against the demon of doubt; for men are ever slower than women to yield implicit faith in another, and these lovers had never enjoyed intercourse of that leisurely kind whence confidence most surely may be generated. At times the remembrance of the Lily's true and trustful eyes would suffice to reassure him; her queenly manner and artless ways were enough to dispel all idea of coquetry; but then he remembered also how she used to tease him in her artful moods, to mock at his solemn manner and mimic his slow speech. There came to his mind what Gaspard de Neville had said one day, with all the flippant worldliness of youth, repeating, no doubt, a piece of shallow philosophy picked up when he was page in a lady's bower:—

"En général les femmes sont plus inconstantes et les hommes plus infidèles."[1]

It haunted him, this bitter saying, as he lay wearily through those long winter evenings in the Franciscan hospital. Had he been up and active, he might so easily have dissipated the impression by applying the cynical phrase to his own case. *Infidèle!* the impossibility of infidelity to such a love as his would have exposed the hollowness of the rest of the adage. But in his feeble state it worried him sorely. Had Challice ever loved him as he loved her? Yes, he could not doubt that—he never would doubt it. But *inconstante!*

[1] Centuries later the French writer Voisenon pronounced much the same sententious formula.

if that was woman's nature how could she help it if she changed? Would she continue to love him—nay, did she love him still? love him enough to put aside all the splendour which Cornwall had to offer—enough to brave the displeasure of the king—enough to sacrifice all her power and great possessions, and become no more than mistress of paltry Shakingdon? The fever had laid such a fierce grip upon him as to drive clean from his memory much that had preceded it. He had forgotten all about the great fortune that had fallen to him through the death of his uncle and cousins; wherefore, although in fact he had been for nearly a month one of the wealthiest commoners in England, he still thought of himself only as the needy Knight of Shakingdon — Gautier Sans-avoir — with means too narrow to maintain easily his scanty following, let alone a wife.

Thoughts like these, revolving in endless monotony through his brain, added to his impatience at being unable to set out and learn the truth for himself, and very seriously retarded his recovery. However it came at last, for, up to the age of five-and-thirty, a robust body generally wins mastery in the end over the mind, whether for good or ill. It was on one of the early days of February that Dickon le Déchu at last yielded to Sir Walter's earnest, almost angry, entreaty, and the knight was permitted to ride out in the soft air a short stage along the London road. To London—yes, whither he had been bound when the fever laid him low; to London, whither so many steps have hastened during all these centuries, so many hopes have turned, where so many prizes wait the winning; to London—the wilderness wherein so much treasure is buried, the grave of so many fair prospects, the rock for so many reputa-

tions. Whither should he go but to London to hear tidings of Challice?

As Marmion rode along the Flete towards the city he perceived that the great houses by the wayside on either hand were decorated as for some public festival. The Earl of Richmond's great house at the Savoy was draped with garlands and scarlet cloth; from the tower of the Templar's beautiful church hard by fluttered the banner with the cross of their order, and the houses of the nobility, standing apart among the groves that lined this great thoroughfare, all displayed some tokens of rejoicing. But when Marmion passed through the city gate he beheld the whole street aflame with bunting, wreaths of holly and fir swinging across it from house to house. Asking of the warder what was ado, the man seemed surprised that a knight of Marmion's fine appearance should be in ignorance, and replied that the king and queen had passed through the city the day before on their return from France.

Marmion knew very little about London, having never been there but once before, when he passed through it in the suite of Sir Robert de Clifford. He would have been at much loss where to turn for proper lodging, seeing that half the population of the neighbouring shires seemed to have crowded into the capital to welcome their new queen. The streets were crowded with sightseers; vendors of every kind of necessary and unnecessary commodity raised such a din that a man might scarce hear his own voice; round the door of nearly every dwelling-house stood the retainers of some great seigneur; brightly dressed girls, in nowise abashed by the broad compliments paid them by these free-spoken soldiers, thronged the narrow pavement, and made their way among a

motley stream of seamen, tradesmen, apprentices, all bound on making holiday. Unoccupied quarters could hardly be found, but Gaspard assured Sir Walter that the Leaden Hall, the great house of his uncle, Sir Hugh de Neville, would contain the whole party, and bade him be certain of a warm welcome. Thither, then, the party took their way, and while yet afar off beheld the well-known banner of the Knight of Raby—a white saltire on a scarlet field—waving proudly over the lofty elms which crowded round his mansion.

Sir Hugh de Neville was a great landowner in the northern counties, but he had added to his resources by embarking upon commercial enterprise with a shrewdness and diligence very rare among gentlemen of birth in those early days. With his own Yorkshire oaks he had built and fitted out a fleet of trading ships which carried wool and hides from his estates to Lubeck, Hamburg, and even to Venice, bringing back various merchandise to be disposed of at good profit in the English markets. So greatly did he prosper in this traffic, and the better to superintend the disposal of his foreign merchandise, that he lived half his time in London, where he was as greatly respected as a merchant prince as he was honoured in the north as a feudal seigneur. Out of his gains he had built himself the splendid mansion known as the Leaden Hall, whereof the ample dimensions and magnificence had been no whit exaggerated by his nephew Gaspard, nor yet the hospitality of the owner thereof. Sir Hugh received Marmion with open arms, bidding his chamberlain prepare accommodation for his retinue and horses.

"By Saint Eloy!" said he, "you arrive in the nick of time; all men were marvelling whether you had betaken

yourself, for we had word from Sir Thomas Gray that you had left Norham on the feast of Saint Thomas,[1] and from de Harcla we learnt of your haste to leave Carlisle. The Viceroy himself—praised be the saints that the king hath returned and that we are no longer under rule of the Gascon!—the Viceroy himself sent a summons for your instant attendance at the Court, but you were not to be heard of at Scrivelsby, nor yet at Shakingdon."

"I have been lying sick at Leicester these six weeks, Sir Hugh; but my comings and goings are seldom of much moment to other people; I am at a loss to know wherefore there should be all this stir."

"Why, man, have you forgotten that you are a great personage now?" exclaimed Sir Hugh—"the man of the moment, in fact. Know you not that the king's coronation is fixed for the feast of Saint Matthias,[1] fourteen days hence, and that cannot go forward without the Champion of England, which is none other than thyself? Pardie! the mercers and craftsmen have but scant time to prepare your housings and equipment. Sir Maurice de Bulkeley, who concerns himself greatly about your affairs, it seems, was speaking about that at noon-meat this very day."

"I did hear word of the death of my kinsmen at Carlisle, but in truth, Sir Hugh, my illness and other business drove that matter out of my head. Will your valiancy instruct me how I should proceed now to the accomplishment of my duties?"

"Your first duty is to stow some prime beef and a pint of Gascony under your belt. Sangdieu! you look more fit for the leading part in a funeral than for the office of king's champion. Nephew," continued Sir

[1] 21st December. [2] 25th February.

Hugh, turning to Gaspard, "you know well the ways of this house, you rascal—away to the buttery hatch and bid them serve without delay; and, see! bid the butler set a measure of old burgundy—say I want the 1295 vintage—that of the Lion d'or—or the old niggard will bring out the anchor brand of 1302. What! the day is young yet; time enough to advise with Clarencieux King of Arms later, and on the morrow you must present yourself at the king's Court and claim privilege to challenge all comers on his Grace's behalf. Men say you have earned the Earl of Cornwall's displeasure, but let be—he dare not touch a hair of your head till you have discharged your office."

Sir Hugh's prescription was precisely what Marmion stood most in want of. The young knight's blood was thoroughly purged of the fever poison, but he was still weak and lacked nourishment, which the splendid appetite of a convalescent made him quite ready to enjoy. While he was discussing the good provender of the Leaden Hall, comes to him the Clerk of the Council, Sir Maurice de Bulkeley, who had lodging under Neville's hospitable roof. Marmion sprang up to greet his aged friend, whose eyes swam with tears as he put his arms round the younger knight's neck.

"Oh, my boy, my boy!" said he, "so you have come back to us at last, glory be to God! You are thin, but you are alive; and in truth I had almost lost hope of seeing you again. Oh, my boy! my boy!" and the old man wept quietly for very joy.

"Yes, I am here again to give you trouble, Sir Maurice. I have performed my devoir at last; my lady's gift is famous, I believe, but I am in sore perplexity to find my lady herself. Can you give me tidings about her?"

"Alas! no, Sir Walter," replied de Bulkeley, "herein is some dark mystery. Nay, be not alarmed; no evil can have come to Mistress Challice; only we know not where she is. You have powerful enemies, Sir Walter, such as it takes a bold heart and a wise head to encounter; be alert and wise, and I doubt not you shall prevail against them. Listen! When I returned from France, I found a short letter from Mistress Challice advising me of her coming to the house of Saint Mary Rouncivale, and desiring me to go thither and take counsel with her. Now this letter bore date upon the eve of Saint Hilary,[1] whereas I returned not to London until the Purification.[2] Nevertheless I hastened to the house in Charing; there found I Father Ailwyn, grievously cast down, and, as you know, it needs something of weight to lower his spirit. He told me how he had ridden with Mistress Challice when she repaired to Westminster on Saint Hilary's day in obedience to the Viceroy's summons; how she passed into the palace alone, Father Ailwyn being commanded to remain with her retinue in the great hall; how they waited by the space of two hours without word from their mistress; and how, towards midday, the Viceroy's Dominican secretary came to them and, drawing the Father aside, informing him that Mistress Challice, being about to take noon-meat with the Viceroy, desired that he and the rest of her retinue should return to Saint Mary Rouncivale and there await her coming. 'By what token am I to know this command is from my mistress?' asked Father Ailwyn, bluntly enough, as I can believe. 'By this,' answered the Dominican, 'that if it is not obeyed without delay, the body-guard have the Viceroy's commands to put you all in ward.' Now the palace swarmed

[1] 12th January. [2] 2nd February.

with archers and men-at-arms—to offer resistance was hopeless; therefore Master Alan le Ryder, after hearing from Father Ailwyn the state of matters, set his party in march and returned to Charing. It is three weeks since then, yet no tidings have come from Mistress Challice, nor hath any man knowledge of where she is."

"And her women," said Marmion, "Mistress Alison and Mistress Gillian—what of them?"

"They abide in Charing," replied de Bulkeley, "waiting their lady's command, yet wotting nothing of her whereabouts."

"But this is an outrage!" exclaimed the other. "Is this a free country and such things be done in open day? I will go before the king on the moment and demand the privilege of his lieges."

"Nay, my friend," quoth Sir Maurice, "but methinks here is more occasion for the wisdom of the serpent than the courage of the lion. See! Mistress Challice is the king's ward; the law gives him power over her until she be married; that power he committed to the Earl of Cornwall, who has exercised it wantonly—cruelly—but still not unlawfully. Do not put your own liberty in jeopardy, else how will you restore hers to the Lily? Of one thing we may be assured, her life is safe. Even if Cornwall were wicked enough to attempt that, it would not serve his interest to do so, seeing that the Kendal lands, the which he chiefly covets, would pass from his grasp to the Lily's cousin, the Nevilles."

"But she may be persuaded—she may be driven by despair to marry that caitiff," groaned le Marmion.

"Out on you, Walter, for a faint heart!" retorted Sir Maurice. "Nay, I have had occasion to know men—and women too—in my time, and can judge shrewdly

upon whom to rely. It were a small thing for me—poor as I am in this world's goods—to declare that I would hazard all my possessions upon my judgment; but this I declare to you solemnly, that I will stake all my hopes in the world to come on the perfect constancy of Challice de Roos."

"To me?" asked le Marmion doubtfully.

"Aye, to thee—to whom else but thee, oh thou of little faith! Remember, I have seen her and talked to her about you long after you and she parted. The only object I retain in life is to bring you and her together again."

How easy it is to persuade young hearts of that about which they would fain be convinced! Sir Maurice's manner carried conviction: his assurance brought vigour to le Marmion's spirit as Sir Hugh's beef and burgundy had done to his frame. His eye brightened, his despondency disappeared, doubt and perplexity shrank to insignificance under the restored radiance of hope.

"The first thing," continued Sir Maurice, "is to find out where the Lily is detained. I am but these five days back in London, yet have I not been idle. I have set secret inquiry on foot in every part of the realm. You see, the Order of Saint Francis, of which I am a humble lay brother, is numerous and powerful; we have houses in every city and almost every shire, and it would take more than even Cornwall's subtlety to throw dust in the eyes of the brotherhood. Already I have ascertained that on the very day when Mistress Challice had audience of the Viceroy, a barge left the watergate of the palace conveying a hooded lady, and landed on the shore of the Battersea marsh. If this was the Lily—and I can scarcely doubt it—one of two things,—she is either in

ward in one of the king's castles in the south of England, or she has been conveyed into Anjou."

"Anjou!" exclaimed le Marmion in accents of dismay.

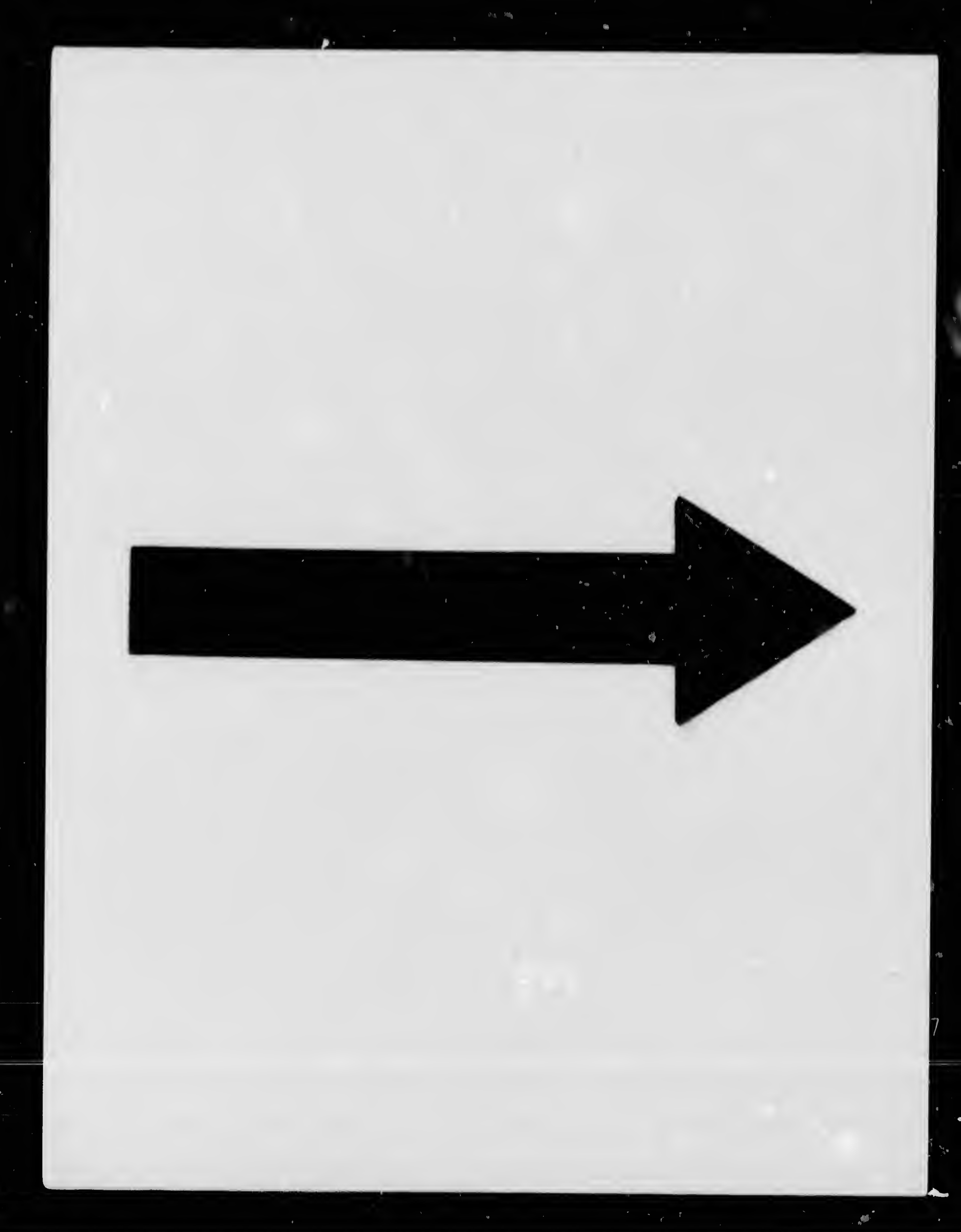
"Yes, possibly Anjou; and what if that be so? Your prowess is not cramped within the four seas. Wheresoever your lady may be in duresse, there must you prevail to succour her. But I greatly hope that Cornwall has not moved her out of the land; indeed I can perceive no end which he could serve by doing so."

"I am the last man who would propose that you should betray the secrets of your office," said le Marmion; "nevertheless, so weighty a matter as the forcing of one of the king's lieges—a great landowner—into ward must surely come before the Privy Council."

"Aye, possibly," replied Sir Maurice; "albeit I think it more likely that Cornwall has the king's conscience in keeping upon certain affairs. But even were it otherwise—even were the Lily detained by an Order in Council—I should be none the wiser as to where her prison is, seeing that I hold no longer the office of clerk."

"What! you have given up the seals?" exclaimed the other.

"That have I, and to my greater ease of mind. The truth is, that ever since Edward of Carnarvon came to the throne matters have gone contrary to my liking. Things have been done of which I cannot approve, whether I have regard to the welfare of the realm or the peace of my own conscience. If I spoke my mind in Council, as my old master used to encourage me to do, Cornwall would remind me sharply that my office was to clerk it and keep the seals. Therefore, before my lord the king set out for France, I gave notice that upon his return I should



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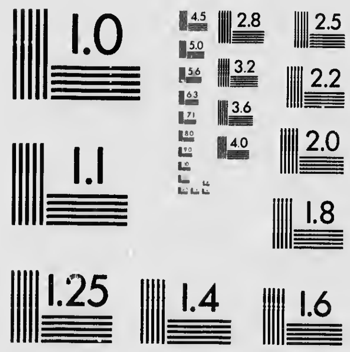

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crave leave to retire. Marry! they made little ceremony in granting it. They have appointed Walter Reynolds in my place, though I vacated it only yesterday before noon."

"What! Reynolds the gambler, that sleek rogue whom men call Cornwall's pimp?" exclaimed Marmion.

"The same, although the worst I know about him is that he is Cornwall's creature. As for me, I am a free man now—the readier and abler to serve your turn. I do but wait to see your affair in a right posture before I retire from this weary world, and prepare in my cell for the next."

"What would you counsel me to do?" inquired Marmion thoughtfully.

"To do? why, your plain duty. Make all preparation for your part in the coronation, and leave me to gather information. I will keep you duly advised, but I must walk warily. I bear too many secrets about with me to allow this old head to be very safe upon my shoulders. Go you and bear yourself gallantly; let the nobles at Court believe that time has cured you of your love for the Lily, as it has cured many of themselves of the like; so shall you best lull the suspicions of Cornwall."

XVIII.

Of the Crowning of Edward of Carnarbon at Westminster, and of the part borne in the same by Sir Walter le Marmion.

IN the year 1309 the feast-day of Saint Matthias came with warm sunshine, blue sky, and a gentle west wind, and well it was so for the crowds who, long before daybreak, thronged into the little red-roofed borough of Westminster. Banners, evergreens, and coloured drapery flaunted everywhere—on the grey palace walls, the fresher tinted towers and buttresses of the abbey, as well as on the humbler house-fronts of the commonalty—for the burgesses of Westminster were nothing if not effusively loyal, and concerned themselves little about the discontent with which the country districts had been seething ever since the death of the late king,—always provided that nothing interfered with their profits as purveyors to the Court, and so long as their senses were agreeably titillated from time to time by military pageants and royal processions.

It was different in the northern and midland parts of the realm, where the disastrous conduct of the Scottish war had filled all classes with distrust of the king and

impatience with his councillors, and where every county, every city, almost every hamlet was mourning the loss of their best and bravest. Englishmen have never been inclined to flinch from sacrifice in purse or person for the national cause, but once let them have reason to connect misfortune with infirmity or maladroitness in their rulers, and their stubborn indignation is quickly aroused and not easily allayed. Therefore outside the metropolis and its neighbourhood discontent and disaffection were spreading from county to county like a smouldering fire, and had been prevented bursting into conflagration solely by reason of the powerlessness of the masses, except when acting under their feudal superiors. Had these been kept in good humour Edward II. might have reigned with undisputed, if inglorious, authority, all the more securely because of jealousy and want of concord among the barons themselves. But this was not to be. As if possessed by some malignant demon, the king took the only course which could unite his most powerful subjects in resistance to his rule. By extravagant favours lavished upon Pierre de Gaveston, he caused the Earl Marshal, the Earls of Warwick, Lancaster, Hereford, Lincoln, Leicester, Arundel, and many other[illegible] merge all their internal jealousies in making co[illegible] cause against the Gascon intruder; while Cornwall united all his peers in a common enmity to himself by reckless personal insolence towards these dignified individuals, by filling all the fattest offices with foreigners, and by the shameless avarice he displayed in enriching himself at the expense of others. The nobles, in short, discerned in the course which affairs were taking the speedy subjugation of England to continental rule, while the national honour was brought into contempt by the wasteful and

negligent operations in Scotland. Acting under the influence of the wise old Earl of Lincoln, they assented to the king's journey to France to conclude his marriage with Princess Isabella, but as soon as Edward had brought home his bride, they took decisive steps to put an end to the prevailing misrule. Very early in the morning of the day fixed for the coronation, a meeting of prelates and nobles was held at Westminster, whereat a petition was drawn up for presentation to the Council, when it should assemble immediately before the public ceremony, demanding the immediate dismissal of Cornwall from his offices and his removal from the realm. The petitioners agreed among themselves not to allow the coronation to proceed unless they received a solemn pledge that the king would fulfil their demands.

The queen, attended by the Duchess of Brabant, was present at the Council, all unaware of what was brewing. Most of the privy councillors present were in the secret; not so Cornwall and his friends, who were completely taken by surprise. The king also was unprepared, but his easy phlegmatic nature received no shock. He had always found the barons troublesome, and this was only a fresh instance of the rude manner in which they were accustomed to interfere with his comfort.

"What shall we say, Pierre?" said he; "I suppose we must give them some kind of answer."

"Only one kind of answer, an it please your Grace," quoth the stout Earl of Lincoln, who had presented the petition; "and that must be to grant the petition forthwith, and in all its terms."

The king paid little attention to Lincoln, whose advice he had always found highly inconvenient and contrary to his inclination. He turned again to Cornwall, who was

whispering earnestly in his ear. The queen had been married just a month, but that had proved long enough to inspire her with a hearty dislike for Cornwall, whose excessive intimacy with her husband she not unnaturally resented. Her dark eyes flashed as she turned to speak low a few words to the Duchess of Brabant, then laying her jewelled hand on the king's sleeve, she said in French—

"My lord of Lincoln claims your Grace's attention. My lord of Cornwall will be pleased to reserve his communication till your Highness has made known his mind regarding the petition of the prelates and barons."

Then the king spoke with dignity and firmness, as he was well able to do when Cornwall put words into his mouth, which thing greatly vexed those who loved their country, reflecting what a noble ruler he had been had he lent his ear to sober counsels.

"My lord of Lincoln," said he, "you may tell those whose petition you bear that we have well weighed the matter thereof, albeit the season and the matter we have presently in hand be unmeet for considering the governance of the realm. We cannot entertain the prayer of these our lieges, which infringes upon our royal prerogative in the appointment of our ministers, and we regard those who plot against my lord of Cornwall as resisting our authority, and guilty of rebellious and unnatural conduct."

A loud murmur broke out upon these bold words; several of the nobles present sprang to their feet and began to speak angrily; but Lincoln, who bore great authority among them as the trusted councillor of their late king, stepped forward and quelled the tumult by simply raising his hand.

"Softly, my lords," said he, "softly. It is now my duty to inform my lord the king, with all loyal reverence, of the resolve of the prelates and barons who have appointed me bearer of this petition, and also of some of us here present who, being of the king's Council, have not thought meet to give to the said petition our hands and seals. Forasmuch as the king cannot be crowned without the assent of the lords spiritual and temporal and the commons of this realm, we do hereby declare that the coronation shall not go forward this day unless and until Pierre de Gaveston, Earl of Cornwall, be removed from all his offices, and be utterly and finally expelled from the realm. We be no rebels, but honourable lieges of his Grace the king, and we do entreat our sovereign lord to hearken ere it be too late, for we be resolved to enforce our lawful demands by arms, if need be, for which purpose we have at hand forces sufficient to overcome all resistance."

"Oyez, oyez!" cried the other barons in approval. Cornwall listened without change of colour, but with a bitter smile upon his handsome face.

"My lord the king might have spared me this humiliation," said the queen bitterly to Edward, whom she had learnt already to despise for his subserviency to the favourite. "Harkye, my lord——" and she leant towards him so as to speak privately with him; but Cornwall, sitting on his left hand, pulled the king's sleeve, so that yielding to long habit Edward turned away from his queen and listened to the earl's whispers. Then once more his steady, full voice filled the chamber as with perfect temper he made reply—

"My lord of Lincoln, you demand what is impossible. (Murmurs.) Nay, but hear us out! Our coronation, as you well know, hath been appointed this day at one hour

before noon. You demand that before that hour our trusted councillor the Earl of Cornwall should be removed from his offices and put forth of the realm. My lords, how can these things be? It wanteth now but three hours of noon. The clerks, it is true, might prepare the instruments for the dismissal of the earl from the offices he holds, but as for the rest—our realms are wide, and there be not horses in our stables fleet enough to carry him to a seaport and thus remove him from the realm. But, my lords, we are not so tyrannical as to retain in office a servant, however dear he may be to us, whom our other councillors, and certain prelates and barons high in our esteem, do hold in disfavour. Therefore our will is that ye allow the appointed ceremony to proceed without let, we on our part undertaking and passing our royal word that upon the next meeting of Parliament we will accept the decision of the three estates of our realm upon this matter."

This adroit speech, though inspired by the object of the barons' animosity, was delivered with all that persuasive charm which was natural to Edward when he was once roused to an effort, and it took immediate effect. Probably none of the lords present, least of all the loyal Lincoln, desired to array themselves in arms against the king; and although they had learnt by experience that Edward's promise was not exactly the same thing as performance, yet they felt that the assurance that the removal of Cornwall would be left to the decision of Parliament, gave them no alternative but to proceed with the coronation or go into open rebellion. There were men present at the Council board who were ready for any extreme, so deeply did they feel the dishonour which was gathering upon the kingdom. Of these were Warenne, Warwick,

Lancaster, and perhaps Arundel; but once more the wise authority of Lincoln prevailed, and the king's pledge was accepted.

Nevertheless, even Lincoln's moderation was severely strained by a fresh affront put upon the baronage that day. The king and queen were to pass in procession from the palace along a carpet laid down to the abbey. Clarencieux Herald with his pursuivants were busy marshalling the order of march, a hazardous task, which he could only perform without offence by strict adherence to precedence. The king and queen were to walk under a canopy of purple silk, supported upon four silver spears, carried by the barons of the Cinque Ports. Immediately in front of these the crown was to be borne, as all men supposed, by the Earl Marshal, according to use and wont. But no! a thrill of indignation ran through the courtiers when the Earl of Cornwall stepped forward, magnificently habited in silvered mail, wearing a green silk surcoat embroidered with the golden eagles which he bore for arms. The king signed to him to take the crown and place himself in front of the canopy, hence it came to pass that the cheers with which the populace greeted the gay procession as it wound its way to the abbey on that bright February morning were hushed in ominous silence, and even turned to hoots and groans, when the crown and its bearer came in view.

While the ceremony was proceeding inside the abbey, a remarkable company drew up outside the western entrance, and formed a body-guard for the king on his return. First walked two trumpeters, followed by the sergeant-trumpet carrying a silver mace; next followed two sergeants-at-arms in front of the champion's esquires, behind whom Norroy Herald marched alone, clad in a gorgeous tabard. Then came the champion himself, Sir Walter le Marmion,

Lord of Fontenaye, mounted on a splendid white destrier, magnificently caparisoned. He no longer carried the armorial bearings, blue and white vairey, to which his exploits had brought so much fame; his silken surcoat was black, with a sword embroidered thereon in silver, the official bearing of the hereditary champion. But he wore also that which men had learnt to reckon famous, the Lily's golden helmet with its soaring falcon crest. All the chroniclers are agreed that the cheers which followed this famous knight exceeded in fervour any that were accorded to any other individual that day. Behind the champion walked four pages in cloth of gold broidered with scarlet, bearing up the sable and silver housings of his horse. The king marched next, wearing his golden crown; twice the array halted and twice the champion issued his challenge. Then the king having entered the great hall of Westminster, his champion remained outside until Norroy Herald coming out cried, "Doth any man champion the cause of our lord the king?"

"I do," quoth Sir Walter in a loud clear voice.

"And who be you, sir knight, who would be champion to the King of England?"

"I am the Lord of Fontenaye in France, and I claim my hereditary right as champion."

"Enter then, my lord of Fontenaye, and perform your devoir."

Then Marmion, spurring forward and checking his steed with the curb, caused him to caracole up the hall, the lofty roof resounding with the trampling of the hoofs, and halted before the stairs whereon stood the king. Wheeling round he proclaimed in a loud voice—

"Oyez, oyez! If any person of what degree soever, high or low, shall deny or gainsay our sovereign lord King

Edward to be right heir to the Crown of England, or that he ought not to enjoy the same, here am I, Walter le Marmion, Lord of Fontenaye, to tell him he is a liar and a false traitor. I am ready in person to combat with him and to adventure my life in this quarrel, and there lyeth my gauntlet—let him raise it who list."

Then there was silence in the great hall for the space of three paternosters, the gauntlet lying on the pavement and no man coming forward to lift it. After the pause Norroy Herald stepped out, lifted the gauntlet and restored it to the champion, who, wheeling his horse round upon his haunches, dismounted and advanced on foot to make obeisance to the king. Next, the cupbearer brought up a covered cup of wine, in which the champion pledged the king, who in his courtly and kindly way said to him—

"We thank you, my lord of Fontenaye, for the good service you have done us this day, and in token of our favour and goodwill do bid you keep the cup as your guerdon."

Then all the assembly shouted Vive le Roi! and gave English hurrahs for the champion, and so the coronation was complete according to the old manner. Yet so indiscreet was Cornwall—so impossible it seemed for him to bridle his insolent tongue—that he succeeded in bringing about discord when all men wished only to do honour to the new king, for was he not the son of the old one whom they had loved? Marmion's foot was in the stirrup to mount when these words smote his ear, spoken so loud that all who stood round the king might hear, and followed by a laugh which made the champion's blood tingle.

"Body of God! Behold our Gautier Sans-avoir in such fine plumes. Surely all beggars may hope to ride, an the Scottish war last long enough."

It was Cornwall who spoke. Marmion, maddened with

the insult so that he forgot what was seemly in the presence, strode up to him and said—

"Sir earl! you shall answer to me for this affront."

Cornwall laughed again, and made a sign to the captain of the body-guard, who ordered two of his men to arrest Marmion. But Thomas of Lancaster, the king's cousin, sprang forward, exclaiming—

"Nay, by our Lady! this shall not be. There be fifty swords in this hall to defend the honour of knighthood. Sire," turning to the king, "we have brooked this Earl of Cornwall so far, because it is your Grace's pleasure to have him about your person; but if he is suffered to live with gentlemen he must behave like a gentleman, and all of us here insist that he makes amend to my lord of Fontenaye."

A murmur of approval went up from the bystanders, most of whom had smarted under Cornwall's bitter jibes; but he was always at his grandest when his victims became most vengeful, one of his qualities which did most to secure him in the indolent Edward's affections. His courage was so famous that he could afford to parry a challenge, and with a wave of his hand he said with the utmost good humour—

"I am greatly to blame for jesting in the king's presence. Sir Walter le Marmion strangely mistook my meaning. I do assure him that I meant nothing injurious to his honour, which stands beyond all question."

Marmion stood with lowering countenance, the more wroth because he could not but accept such a handsome amende. He could not bring himself to speak, but, turning away with a haughty inclination of his head, mounted and rode out of the hall.

He went straight to the Leaden Hall; being relieved

from his official duties his purpose was to devote himself to finding the lost Lily. As yet, Sir Maurice de Bulkeley had gathered no clue to her hiding-place from his correspondents and agents in the brotherhood, but now, when Marmion hastened to de Bulkeley's chamber, the aged knight welcomed him with a glad countenance.

"Be of good cheer, my friend," he said, "for I have tidings at last, though not through the channels I expected them. There—read that!"

Therewith he handed Marmion a sheet of Spanish paper, folded and bound with thin ribbon in the fashion lately come in vogue. Sir Walter, with whom reading, as has been shown, was a recent accomplishment, still slow and difficult to be transacted, went to the window, and spreading the document out upon the sill deciphered it as follows:—

"*Right trusty and valiant knight and assured friend,*

"*At last the saints have listened to my prayers, and I avail myself of the means which they have miraculously wrought to enable me to inform my friends of all that has befallen me. For six weeks I have lain in this strong house, having been carried hither against my will by the servants of my lord of Cornwall, whom may God visit with judgment! All my people have been kept away from me; I am not permitted to go abroad beyond the outer bailey-ward of the castle, nor to hold any communication without the walls, and I am attended only by strangers, or they whom my oppressors believe to be strangers. Howbeit, there is only one All-knowing, who, moved thereto as I am confident by our Saint Herbert of Derwentwater, hath so disposed that among the women appointed to serve me there is one from my own north country. She is the daughter of*

a yeoman in Northumberland, Robert Robson of Reedsmouth, and is wedded to an archer in the Bishop's guard. She hath kinsmen living upon my lands of Kendal, and her heart is full of anger and pity for my hard case. She hath pledged herself to have this conveyed to you by a sure hand. I know not whether you can do aught for my succour, but at the least you will not grudge to write to me a reply, which you may commit with confidence to the same hand which beareth this to you. The good woman Joan of whom I have spoken hath liberty to go to her house in the town, and will securely carry to me anything which you may send.

"*For the rest, they keep but slack ward in this house, saving only at the barbican gate, and it were easy for me to pass the sentinels at night were I sure of friends without. But how should I pass to Westmorland without a guide and alone? Meanwhile, I have vowed should I get free to build and endow a house and church of Saint Herbert in the Stramongate of Kendal.*

"*Pray always on my behalf.*

"*Challice de Roos.*

"*My lord of Cornwall hath declared that I shall not pass hence except as his bride; but you know well, Sir Maurice, that I will die rather than be the bride of any man save of one only. I pray you send me tidings of that one, if tidings there be.*

"*From the Bishop's House of Wolvesey, in the city of Winchester, upon this the eve of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin in the first year of the reign of King Edward, second of the name.*"

"Know you this house of Wolvesey, Sir Maurice?" inquired Marmion after he had read the letter; "methinks it is one from which it should not be difficult to plan a rescue."

"I have stood within it," replied the other, "but only on the king's business, and took no special note of the plan thereof. Howbeit, there is one at hand who should know it well, and hath the welfare of Mistress Challice as loyally at heart as either you or I. Father Ailwyn was one of the chaplains of Saint Swithun's in his younger days, and lived many years at Winchester. He is even now at the house of Saint Mary Rouncivale, and comes here daily to learn if I have tidings of our lost one."

Next morning found the two knights deep in consultation with Father Ailwyn. A despatch was written and sent off to the prisoner at Wolvesey, bidding her be of good cheer, for that friends were at hand taking measures for her escape. These measures Father Ailwyn proceeded to explain to the knights. He proposed that Sir Walter should repair to Winchester with a small following; that he himself should accompany him and make use of his acquaintance with some of the bishop's household to refresh his memory of the lie of the defences, and assist in planning a night escape.

"Even when that is happily over, Sir Walter," said he, with a wicked twinkle in his eye, "mayhap my services may still be of some poor use, seeing that I can tie a knot with my tongue which my lord of Cornwall can never undo with his teeth."

Marmion's heart gave a bound. The difficulties and dangers before him shrank to insignificance as he realised how near he stood to the prize.

Sir Maurice sounded a warning note.

"I pray you set to work warily. The penalty for carrying off a king's ward is death; you must not attempt to ride through the land, or you will certainly be taken. Tell me, Sir Walter, know you the city of Winchester?"

"I have been in it but once," replied the other—"that was when I passed with Sir Robert de Clifford to the king's hunting-lodge at Itchenstoke, just two years ago."

"Well, look you, 'tis a city where a stranger may easily find himself astray, by reason of the many watercourses which are led through its streets, whereof they raise the bridges at night, so that no man may pass. Survey the ground well by daylight before you act at night—sound counsel for every soldier planning an exploit. Leave your horses in their stalls—you will lodge, I trow, at the George tavern—and trust to the river, whereon you must have a boat ready to convey you to Southampton, where you must take shipping to the coast of France, and abide there till we see how events shape themselves over here. My own belief is that Cornwall's power is not for long, seeing how bitterly the lords are banded against him."

Thus they discussed the plan of campaign, till Marmion's course had shaped itself clearly in his mind. Suddenly the elder knight struck his hand on his brow.

"Dotard that I am," quoth he, "why did I not think of that before?" Going to an oaken cabinet, he searched carefully among a mass of documents, till at length he found a case of green silk, whence he drew out a strip of parchment, blank, save for a signature, and with a seal in red wax attached.

"Here," said he, "is something that may smooth many difficulties. My lord the late king gave me his whole confidence, as you know. He was careful that I should always have in my scrip a blanksegn or two, to be filled

up if any emergency arose, and to be used only in his service. See! there is his sign-manual—EDWARDUS REX—and his privy seal depending therefrom. Heaven be my judge! I conceive that I shall violate no faith if I fill this up as a passport in your favour; for well I know how my old master detested the Gascon, and did he not pass his royal word that Mistress Challice should choose a husband for herself?"

He sat down and wrote upon the parchment; then drying it, folding it, replacing it carefully in the silken cover, said to Marmion as he handed it to him—

"There. If any of the king's servants challenge or oppose you, flash that out upon them, and see if it does not act like a charm. *Le roi est mort—vive le roi!* My master is in keeping of the saints, but his gracious favour is with us still."

XIX.

Of the house wherein Mistress Challice de Roos lay in ward, and of her cunning delivery from imprisonment.

It may well be imagined that Marmion tarried not long in London after the intelligence he had received on coronation day. He had the greater reason for hastening his departure, because he knew not how soon or how sharply Cornwall might interfere with his freedom. He felt that he had incurred the direct animosity of that all-powerful lord, and although he might easily have obtained protection from Lancaster, Lincoln, or one of the other earls who loved not the Gascon, such a course would have involved loss of time and restriction upon his liberty, and complete liberty he felt to be of as much importance as time to the success of his scheme.

His first care was to replenish his purse, hitherto in a chronic condition of tenuity. Although he was now in fact a very rich man, none of the revenue of his broad lands of Scrivelsby and Lutterworth had come to him as yet, and he was actually worse off for cash than he had ever been before, having had to make heavy payments for his outfit for the coronation. Sir Maurice showed him an easy way out of this embarrassment, taking him to the

Jewry in the parish of Saint Laurence on the north side of the Cheap, where a money-lender was found willing to make him advances to almost any extent for the moderate consideration of fifteen per centum.

This matter having been satisfactorily concluded, he took leave of kindly Sir Hugh de Neville at nightfall, and rode with his squire Gaspard, Dickon le Déchu, Father Ailwyn, and Michael the Fenman, from the Leaden Hall through the city to London Bridge. None were permitted to cross this bridge after sunset without a pass from the Constable of the Tower, a somewhat futile precaution, except against such as travelled post, seeing that any man might hire a wherry at the Tower stairs to set him across to the Surrey shore. Marmion found the gates closed, and the bridge-guard demanded to see his pass before opening to his party. Luckily he remembered the blanksegn, which he handed to the sergeant, who took it to his officer. Neither of them could read, it is true, whereby they missed the imperious terms of the royal mandate ordering "all our good subjects, English, French, and Scots, to suffer Walter le Marmion, Lord of Fontenaye, etc., to pass at his pleasure at all seasons, and without let or hindrance in all parts of our realm, and in all cities, towns, hamlets, castles, and fortalices of the same, all wards, passwords, and countersigns notwithstanding"; but the well-known privy seal acted like a charm: the gates swung open, and the guard saluted as the knight's party issued forth free into the shire of Surrey.

Marmion rode as a knight, with esquire and attendants, and armorial bearings displayed. It may well seem that he had done better to separate his party and travel without symbols of rank, seeing that he was bound upon a

secret expedition; but that course would have exposed him to risks which he avoided by travelling openly. Solitary travellers in those disturbed days were liable to detention by curious officials as well as to attacks from robbers, for the period of misrule which the land had suffered since the death of Edward I., although short as kings' reigns are reckoned, had been long enough to destroy the public security established under the firm governance of the late monarch. Speed was essential to the success of Marmion's scheme, nor could Marmion afford the chance of being interrupted on his journey to Winchester. Neither was it mere ostentation that caused him to proclaim his identity by the armorial bearings on his surcoat and upon the shield borne by Gaspard de Neville. According to the custom of that time a knight passing through the country with his retinue, but without displaying the arms whereby he might be known to all men, would have excited as much suspicion as a ship in our days which should refuse to show her colours. Nevertheless, circumstances had given Sir Walter the advantage of *incognito*, inasmuch as he had been obliged to discard, not without some regret, his family bearings and assume the sable field and silver sword which distinguished the hereditary champion. Although well enough known in London, these arms passed without recognition in the southern counties, and when he who bore them was announced in the towns through which he rode as Lord of Fontenaye, the title was as unfamiliar as the shield, and men believed him to be a French noble about to pass into his own country.

One precaution Marmion was mindful to take. So well and completely had he fulfilled his devoir to Challice de Roos, that the country in every part of it rang with the

fame of the golden helmet. Gleemen sang virelays telling of his prowess; mummers had made the affair at Norham their favourite theme in the Yuletide revels; children had learnt the tale of the Chevalier of the Splendid Crest from their mothers, as an older generation had listened to stories of the last crusade. Wherefore Marmion, knowing that, if he went forth in the famous basnet with the falcon crest, he would be recognised wherever he went, doffed it and wore a plain *chapelle-de-fer*, ornamented only with a fillet of what had once been red and yellow silk. Thus he arrived with his companions without hindrance at the fair city of Winchester.

Wolvesey House, originally the palace of the kings of Wessex, and named from the tribute of wolves' heads imposed by King Eadgar upon all holders of land, had become the residence of the Bishop of Winchester. It stood upon low ground in the south-eastern angle of the walled town, which still retained the rectangular form and space of the Roman legionary camp upon which it had risen. You may see to this day the outer wall of Wolvesey enclosure, forming part of the ancient defences of the city, as it was built by Æthelbald, son of Æthelwulf, King of Wessex, under the personal advice of wise Bishop Swithun, more than a thousand years ago. Nay, there remain in the structure remnants of a still earlier occupation in the shape of Roman bricks, which speak of the original settlement of Venta Belgarum.

Wolvesey House was built within a spacious walled enclosure, next to that of the great minster of Saint Swithun, which closed it in upon the north-west, as that of the Nunnaminster—the abbey and convent of Saint Mary—did upon the north-east. To the east again, the abbey mill and the church of Saint Peter Colebrooke

filled all the ground down to the river. This river, the lucid Itchen, well-beloved of all good trout-fishers, was suffered no longer to run in its old wayward course, for Bishop Godfrey Lucy had erected a series of locks upon it in the reign of King John, so that it should be navigable all the way from Alresford to the sea. Accordingly, outside the southern and eastern walls of Wolvesey it lay in a broad and deep canal, known as Our Lady's Lake, so that the only public access into the defences of Wolvesey was the great gate opening upon the West Soke. Furthermore, above the town, in the Danemark mead, this patient stream had been dammed and diverted into a score of channels in which it flowed through the town, and one of these stone-built courses ran swift, clear, and waist-deep through the enclosure of Wolvesey.

Marmion found suitable lodging in the George tavern, a famous house of entertainment in the ancient capital of Wessex,[1] and early on the morning after his arrival set about reconnoitring the ground and making dispositions for his enterprise. Father Ailwyn was busy also. As a priest he obtained easy access from the minster to Wolvesey House, where he found an old crony in the cellarer Cyprian, and received such a welcome as was meet from the holder of so important an office. Artfully he led the conversation to his experiences in the north, spoke of the people there, and then remarked casually—

"There was a woman here not long since, Joan by name, married to one of the bishop's archers. If she be still in Wolvesey I would fain speak to her in private, for she belongs to the north country, and I bear tidings to her from her kinsfolk."

[1] It is said that Winchester has never been without a "George" since the fourteenth century.

"Joan," replied the cellarer; "yea, verily there is such an one, the wife of Raymond of Romsey. She attends upon a lady we have in ward here; who or what she is I know nothing, save that she is passing fair, as I have seen when she takes the air of a morning in the outer bailey. It was rumoured when they brought her here that she was a witch, and that she was presently to be put to trial of the hot ploughshares in the Minster; yet she hath been here a matter of six weeks and nothing done thereanent. For my part I set small store by these tales. If a woman be fair, say I, it is rank wastefulness to mar a pretty piece of goods; all out as bad as if I were to allow this cask of good Gascony to run into the ground. Take another cup, father; 'tis a famous medicine for this windy March weather."

"Well, just one more for old fellowship's sake, Cyprian," quoth the jolly priest, "and then I pray you bring me to this woman Joan, and let me discharge my business with her, for I have other pressing matter in the Cyp."[1]

Off went the cellarer, suspecting no guile, and returned after some lapse of time to say that Joan would attend presently. Father Ailwyn firmly resisted his invitation to "yet another cup," and soon obtained his desire of a private interview with the archer's wife. To her safe-keeping he committed a missive from Marmion to the Lily, of which the grave defects in caligraphy and spelling were amply atoned for by expressions of confidence and devotion. He told Joan that she must warn Mistress Challice to be ready upon any night when the plans for her flight had been perfected; he made her show him

[1] *The Cyp*, now High Street, from the Anglo-Saxon *ceáp*, barter, trade, as in "Cheapside" and "chapman."

the window of the captive's chamber—alas! it was too narrow to admit the passage even of her slender figure, and so high up in the donjon tower of Henri de Blois that such passage, could it be accomplished, would expose her to frightful danger from a fall.

"But never fear for that," said Joan cheerfully; "the guards here are slack enough, God wot; a cup of sack or a silver florin will tempt the stiffest of them from his post, if he can but get a comrade to take his turn. Bless you, father, they do that often and often, and the sergeant is generally half drunk when he goes the rounds, and never sees the difference between one man and another. Give me but six hours' warning, and my man Raymond shall be on guard at the postern below my lady's stair."

"H'm—you can trust Raymond, I suppose."

"Trust him!" said Joan, with a gleam in her black eyes; "he knows better than to play *me* false, I trow. Not that he would ever try it, father; he's a dear, good lad is Raymond, and would do aught that I bid him."

So far so good; there seemed to be no great difficulty in bringing the Lily out of her tower; but it was clean another affair how to convey her beyond the outer works of Wolvesey. The minster and the nunnery barred the way effectually on two sides, the third side being closed by the great wall which defended the city, flanked outside by the Lady's Lake. All this Father Ailwyn noted with furtive eye as, having dismissed Joan, he paced the courts, breviary in hand, mechanically repeating psalms and prayers. His presence attracted no attention from the custodians of the house: in no city in England were there collected so many of the religious orders; the streets swarmed with them—

members of the great Benedictine minsters of Saint Swithun within the gates and of Hyde without the gates, priests of a score of churches, Franciscan, Dominican, and Augustinian brethren, black friars, white friars, and grey friars—they thronged every lane and passage, every ambulatory and mart; it had been strange had Father Ailwyn's presence been the only one to rouse suspicion. Thus by the space of half an hour he paced to and fro on the smooth sward like a great swart raven in the joyous spring sunshine, eyeing askance every baluardo and banquette that broke the even surface of the great curtain wall of the fortress, calculated the height of the rampart, and marked the beats of the wall sentinels. Small solace he drew from his survey. The warlike bishop, Henri de Blois, had planned his stronghold on scientific principles; the enceinte and inner defences offered equal impediment to prisoners within and foemen without.

Yet as he took his way slowly towards the Soke gate, which occupied the blunt apex of the triangular enclosure towards the south-west, the priest's eye brightened as he noted an open conduit flowing in a straight line along the city side of the enceinte. Still muttering his psalms and paternosters for the better baffling of any inquisitive archer or servant who might take note of his proceedings, stopping now and again as if engaged in earnest prayer, the sly old fellow retraced his steps along the bank of the current. Turning once more, he followed it down to where the water rushed under a low arch, disappearing in the culvert which conveyed it under the city wall and the causeway beyond. One glance was enough: where that stream found escape it were strange if flesh and blood and brains could not find

the like. Crossing himself with a fervent "Laus Deo!" Father Ailwyn paced slowly to the gate, bestowing a less conventional "Pax tecum tuisque!" upon the warder than that functionary was accustomed to receive from the bishop's visitors, and hastening his pace as soon as he was outside, hied away to the George tavern to impart to Marmion the valuable intelligence that he had gleaned.

Meanwhile the amphibious experience of the Fenman had been put to use by his master, who had despatched him to Southampton to engage a galley, if possible; if not, then any kind of craft capable of crossing to the French coast. This he was to retain at some convenient anchorage near Itchen, until such time as there should be occasion to employ it. As for Gaspard de Neville and his man Dickon, they had become wellnigh inseparable by this time; Gaspard seldom went abroad without his henchman; the inequality of rank between the esquire, a scion of one of the proudest families in the north, and the nameless Scots spearman of unknown origin, had not sufficed to prevent the growth of such confidence and intimacy between master and servant as nearly obliterated all social difference. But it was well understood, as indeed had been plain to see from the first, that Dickon came of no clownish race, although for the nonce fortune or freak had caused him to figure in masquerade. Chattering, then, with the irresponsible freedom of a couple of college comrades, these two spent the day reconnoitring the canal into which the river was fashioned between Winchester and the sea. They brought back the report that there were five locks upon it, besides that one at the foot of the Lady's Lake; that these were closed at sundown, and that no vessel

might pass through them thereafter until sunrise unless under the express order of one of the four powers which ruled in Winchester—the king, the bishop, the mayor, and the Prior of Saint Swithun's, as Principal of the Manor of Godbiete. Herein was an unforeseen obstacle to nocturnal flight by water, for to sue the king for a *laissez-passer* was to put themselves at the mercy of Cornwall; the bishop was the gaoler of the prisoner they wished to set free; and as for the other two authorities, it would be difficult to find a plausible excuse for preferring a journey by night to one by day. However, Marmion had tested already the virtue of the blanksegn, and upon this he would rely to secure a free passage.

One thing remained to be done, nor did it escape the watchful attention of Father Ailwyn. He had seen the upper end of the culvert conveying the water from within the Wolvesey enceinte; all men might see the lower end where the stream issued from below the causeway and flowed away through the Soke to the river, it had still to be proved whether there was clear passage for human beings through the outlet.

This could not be done till next day, for it would have to be undertaken from outside the wall, and there was no free exit from the city gates after dark. Father Ailwyn, therefore, Gaspard and Dickon, took their supper the following evening at the hospital of Noble Poverty at Saint Cross, where the brethren of Saint Swithun offered free entertainment to travellers, and no questions asked.[1] It was a gusty, starlit night, and very cold, as they took their darkling way across the meadows

[1] Bread and ale are given free at Saint Cross to all who care to ask hospitality, even at this day.

to the spot where the water gushed forth from its prison under the city wall. Luckily there was no moon, and therefore little chance of their being perceived.

"Speak not above your breath," whispered the priest as they crouched low beside the stream, "the sentinel's walk is just above our heads. Now, my old bones relish not cold water; strip, Master Gaspard, and see how far you can pass up yon conduit."

But Gaspard fancied the enterprise as little as did Father Ailwyn, seeing that there was little glory to be gained thereby.

"Nay," said he, "but here is a Scots otter that will do it more featly than I. There is more water than land in the country he comes from. Dickon, here is a task after your own mind."

The Scot made no objection, and was moving stealthily down the bank towards the dark current, when his master pulled him back.

"Nay, but you must strip to it, man," said he. "I will not have my serving-man destroy his livery."

"Suffer me to go as I am, Master Gaspard," replied the youth, "for so we always use in my country. My jerkin and hose are of better stuff than to be spoilt by fair water."

Gaspard persisting, Dickon declared roundly he would do the business as he was or not at all. It was not a time to punish the serving-man for insubordination.

"Go, then, and a murrain on thee for a contumelious knave!" hissed Gaspard savagely, for he cared not to have his pleasure disputed, and gave Dickon a vicious shove with his foot, which sent the lad with a splash up to his middle in the icy stream.

"Have a care, my master," whispered the priest, "or

we shall have a crossbowman buzzing a bolt at us from the rampart."

Dickon, thus unceremoniously dismissed, lost no time about his business, but stemming the strong current, disappeared under the low arch where, as Gaspard observed, it was as dark as a wolf's mouth. Progress was extremely difficult, for there was just room between the roof of the conduit and the water to enable Dickon to carry his head clear of the surface, and this he could do only by immersing his whole body. The cold was intense; the strong current seemed as if it was flowing off a snow-field, and the lad felt his very marrow freezing, but he pushed gallantly forward some thirty paces, when his head struck hard against some obstacle. With his hands he ascertained that this was an iron grating, once strong, no doubt, but now greatly weakened by corrosion. Still it resisted all his efforts to dislodge or break it, and, turning round with some difficulty in the narrow passage, he made his way out and was helped upon the bank by the others in a sadly numb condition. Having made his report—

"Mother of mercy!" ejaculated the priest, "then is there no more to be done to-night, and another day is lost. We must return to-morrow with files to remove the grating. But the lad will die of cold—here, wrap thyself in that, and let us back to our quarters with what speed we may," and taking off his cloak he threw it over Dickon's shaking shoulders.

"Qui vive!" shouted a loud voice from the ramparts above them, for Father Ailwyn in his agitation had forgotten the necessity for silence. Luckily, it was too dark for the sentinel to see anything; "begone!" he cried, "lest I drill a hole in your jackets for ye."

They lay still till all was quiet; then hurried back to

the King's Gate, astride of which the little church of Saint Swithun sits so quaintly, and being in possession of the countersign, were admitted without further parley within the city.

Dickon's young blood was proof against the effects of severe exposure. At first he exhibited signs of collapse, and Gaspard was full of compunction for the heartless way he had dismissed him on such a perilous enterprise; but a cup of hot spiced hippocras which Father Ailwyn made the lad swallow as soon as they got him back to the tavern sent the blood coursing and tingling into his numbed limbs once more.

"And now to bed, Dickon," said Gaspard; "I will be your valet this time, and strip those dripping clothes off you."

"Nay," cried Dickon, roused apparently by the shocking solecism of a sprig of nobility waiting upon a serving-man, "but that may never be, my master. I should die of shame, which were worse than dying of cold. Prithee suffer me to depart, and I shall slip off my slough in the winding of a crossbow."

After a few hours between the blankets, Dickon was himself again; nevertheless Gaspard would not permit him to repeat the attempt to penetrate the culvert. Accordingly when the three conspirators, duly armed with files, rasps, and chisels, repaired to the same spot the following night, it was Gaspard himself who undertook the unpleasant task. Stripped to the skin, but keeping on his shoes, and with the tools in a satchel over his shoulder, he glimmered one moment in the starlight like an ivory statue, and then disappeared in the tunnel. Making his way to the grating, he judged by the twilight beyond that it was within a few feet of the

upper and inner end of the culvert. Imagine that his position was as painful as it was unusual. Naked, unable to stand upright, and immersed to his neck in a strong current not many degrees above freezing, he began to doubt whether his endurance was sufficient to enable him to work his tools effectively. Could the grating not be torn down? Dickon had tried its strength and failed, though he had reported the metal as being much rusted away; but Dickon was a slender stripling scarcely fit to wield a full-sized spear. Gaspard seized the corroded bars in his strong grasp; the fabric shook; another wrench—it yielded perceptibly; a third tug and away it came. The squire was half drowned in the effort, but it was successful; a quantity of unsavoury objects, which had been held back by the bars, rushed past his ears and nose, but the passage was clear, and, if fortune favoured them, the disappearance of the grating would not be noticed, seeing that it had been fixed a few feet within the mouth of the conduit.

Next day was a busy one with the whole party. Gaspard and Dickon were despatched at daybreak to obtain intelligence how it had fared with the Fenman in his quest for a ship. They returned in the afternoon with the welcome intelligence that he had secured—not a galley, indeed, for there was none to be had—but a German carvel laden with wool and hides for Hamburg. The captain undertook to land passengers at a French port for the exorbitant hire of thirty gold bezants, and his craft would be held in readiness for them from one hour before dawn, at which time the Flemish skipper reckoned that the flood-tide would have reached her as she lay on the mud at Itchen mouth, where she was to show a red light and a white one to guide her passengers. Father Ailwyn had held daily

interviews with the archer's wife Joan at her house in the Soke: he now told her that the plan must be put in execution that very night; that one hour after the second watch was set, Mistress Challice must leave her postern and make straight for the culvert, through which she must pass alone.

"Alone!" cried Joan; "nay, but that cannot be. When they find the bird flown they'll hang Raymond and drown me, just as sure as there be geese on the green. Nay, Father Ailwyn, if Mistress Challice is to flit, we must flit with her; and that's the plain truth."

Here was unforeseen difficulty. It was true enough that upon Raymond and Joan would fall the penalty of allowing a prisoner to break ward. Better not inquire too narrowly which consideration weighed most with the good father—the prospective fate of his instruments, or the certainty that these instruments could only be had upon their own terms.

"Nay, nay, your reverence," reiterated Joan, "Wolvesey House will be no place for me and Raymond after this night's work. We are servants of the Lily of Kendal henceforward, and where she goes we go."

Father Ailwyn carried a good clear brain under his white hairs; circumstances had become unpleasantly complicated, but he perceived the imprudence of raising any objections at the last moment.

"You have no children have you, Joan?" he inquired.

"Never a one," answered Joan. "Your reverence must know that the saints have ordered it this way. Raymond is as likely a lad as ever mounted a bunch of ribbons at St Giles's fair, and as for me, I was one of thirteen in a family, so nobody can lay the blame at my door; but——"

The priest ruthlessly cut short what promised to be an interesting chapter in domestic history.

"Anan," said he, "we can provide for you and your man; but, mark you! not a word must you speak from the moment you leave the Lily's chamber, or the knight will cut your throat in a moment. He is a terribly resolute man, I can tell you."

"Depend on me, your reverence," said Joan, who was in truth a most sensible woman; "there is none will wag her tongue faster than I when occasion serves; but I know how to observe times and seasons better, maybe, than some that are finer scholars."

That night for the third time the adventurers gathered at the appointed spot. Marmion was outwardly calm, but inwardly he was torn with a terrible anxiety. Besides the ordinary risks attending an attempt at escape from prison, there was the dread of effects upon a delicate lady from the wetting and exposure. He would have gone to the other end of the culvert to await her coming, but Gaspard assured him that no man could stand long immersed in that cold current and live. Store of warm, dry clothing for the fugitives was laid up in the wherries, of which a couple lay waiting below the lock in the meadows, with four stout rowers in each.

Clear and sweet rang out upon the windy night the bells from the cathedral tower, announcing the ninth—the appointed hour. Eagerly Marmion applied his ear to the stone-work that he might catch the first sound of the expected coming. They were very punctual. It was but few minutes past the hour when a slight splashing was audible in the tunnel, and next moment appeared at its mouth, not the countenance of his beloved, but

the round, scared visage of Joan. Behind her followed the Lily, rising from the flood like a pale, dripping naiad, and bringing up the rear came stalwart Raymond—surely as strange a trio as ever stood together in the Soke of Saint Swithun.

A few whispered words and all set off at sharp speed for the boats. There remained still the anxiety about getting through the locks, how to rouse the lock-keepers, and how to persuade illiterate officials of the validity of a passport signed by a dead king. However all went well with them; Hampshire lay far from the seat of war; Marmion, having experience of life on the Scottish border, congratulated himself upon the ease with which all inquiries were satisfied in this sleepy land and upon the facilities afforded for clandestine excursions. He little suspected that, even as they passed through Twyford, barely one-third of the distance between Winchester and the sea, their flight had been discovered—that, but for the noise of the rowlocks, they might almost have heard the great bell of the minster ringing the alarm, and that armed pickets were being sent out to scour the highways in every direction. Nevertheless such was the case. Even the lax discipline observed by the garrison of Wolvesey House received a shock on the first relief going round, when the sentinel's post at the postern of the keep was found deserted and the prisoner's chamber empty. Luckily, the night was far spent before it became known that the fugitives had escaped by the river, by which time the wherries were gliding down to meet the tide between the muddy shores of the estuary.

They neared the little jetty where it had been arranged that they should meet the Fenman. A shrill whistle from Raymond was answered out of the gloom by a

similar signal from the shore, and they pulled in confidently.

"Where is the ship, Michael?" inquired Marmion.

"She has not lit up her lamps yet," replied the Fenman, "which signifies one of two things—either that she is not yet afloat, or the lazy lubbers are keeping no watch. Either way, we must bite on our bridles for a while."

"What's ado then?" asked the knight.

"Why, nothing, my master, but to lie by till she makes a signal."

The two boats pulled into the jetty; the boatmen shipped their oars, and all resigned themselves with what patience they could summon to a period of anxious waiting. Anxious—because if their skipper had played them false, recapture was almost certain, for they were still within the limits of the bishop's jurisdiction. It were hard if in a chain so well forged the last link should snap. Eagerly their eyes swept the dark estuary, looking for the signal which was to lead them to liberty. None came, and aloft the night began to melt into dawn. The eastern sky was grey before they could distinguish objects in the channel, but at last Michael touched Marmion's arm, and pointing seaward said—

"Yonder is our craft, my master, a matter of three bowshots out; and afloat too, by the bones of Saint Benedict. It is as I thought; the knaves are all asleep."

Even as he spoke a white point of light kindled on the ship, followed by a red one, sending wavering reflection across the flowing waters of the bay. The rowers who had betaken themselves to slumber were immediately roused, the boats were pushed off and the oars dipped, but at that moment the clattering of hoofs sounded upon the causeway which ran close along the

river-bank and behind the jetty. A party of horsemen, dimly visible in the twilight, halted at the pier-head, and a loud command was shouted by their leader.

"Halt there! in the name of my Lord Bishop of Winchester."

The boats by this time were but a stone-throw from the shore, and the boatmen ceased rowing, awestruck by the name of the potentate whom most greatly they had learnt to dread. Marmion in one boat, Gaspard and Dickon in the other, drew sword and dagger, and by threats compelled them to proceed. They complied unwillingly enough, till danger of another sort forced the fellows to give way with a will. The horsemen on the bank, half a score of the bishop's archer-guard, had dismounted and bent their bows; the boats were still within range of the shore, and, although their aim was uncertain in the half light, yet the cloth-yard shafts starred the water all around; one stuck quivering in the gunwale within a few inches of Marmion's hand. His boat carrying the Lily, Father Ailwyn, Raymond, and Joan was leading by a few yards; it was just about out of bowshot when a sharp cry of pain was heard in the other wherry, in which were Gaspard, Dickon, and the Fenman. The pace was too hot to stop and inquire who was hit; the boatmen were now tugging at their oars, sending the light craft hissing through the dark water towards the friendly light. Soon Marmion's boat was within hail and shot alongside; the skipper and his crew of three lent rough but kindly hands to help them aboard, and Challice was invited to go into a little fore-cabin—the only one in the ship, for the cargo filled all the hold.

"Nay, Walter," said she with the ringing laugh to which his heart knew so well how to thrill, "but I have

been prisoner long enough. Let me enjoy my liberty and look about me. I have never been on the sea before."

A proud lover was Marmion when he saw how little the adventures and fatigues of that trying night had lowered the free spirit of his lady-love, but she was soon to have her attention diverted from the novelty of a sea voyage. The men in the first wherry had been well paid and had shoved off, declaring their intention of making for Southampton, where at least they would be outside the jurisdiction of the dreaded bishop, whose anger they had incurred unwittingly. The second boat now came alongside. Gaspard handed Joan aboard the carvel, and stepped up himself; but the others still tarried in the stern-sheets.

"Haste thee, Michael!" cried the squire. "What the devil, man! d'ye think we're going to lie here till the galleys come out of Southampton to catch us?"

"Here is one, my master," replied the Fenman, "who must needs go aboard feet foremost, and I doubt he carries his death-warrant without need of clerking."

Raymond and he were stooping to raise a dark, limp form which lay on the bottom boards. A low groan broke from it as they bore it unsteadily over the thwarts. Then they laid it upon the deck, and in the cold grey light Marmion and Gaspard recognised the wan features of Dickon le Déchu.

Gaspard was on his knees beside him in an instant, for he loved his serving-man.

"How now, Dickon, lad," said he, raising the wounded man's limp arm, "art hurt? Speak, man! where is it?"

But Dickon was past speaking; he had swooned away with the pain of moving. An arrow had pierced him

just under the shoulder-blade; the shaft had broken short off as he fell in the boat; but the cruel iron point had pierced the lung, and the life-blood gathered in a crimson pool about him on the deck.

There was no time to spare. They bore Dickon into the humble little cabin; Challice, with a true woman's readiness in trouble, claimed the right to tend the wounded lad. She and Joan tore up bandages and began gently to remove his steel cap, gorget, and cloth doublet. While the women were thus occupied, the other passengers bore a hand in hoisting the sails and weighing anchor. The carvel began to ripple through the waves, leaning over before a stiff easterly breeze, and soon she was fair on her course in broad daylight, hauled as close as she would lie, though indeed that was not very close. Then Gaspard found time to go to the cabin door to ask after his humble friend. Challice came out to him with grave horror written upon her features.

"Not dead?" asked Gaspard, dismayed by the Lily's expression.

"Nay, not dead, but wounded unto the death, as I greatly fear," was the reply. "Oh, Gaspard! how could you do this, my cousin whom I trusted?"

"I? this is none of my doing, Challice. What do you mean? 'Tis but the fortune of war, and I swear to you I had liefer that shaft had struck myself than Dickon, for I love the lad, cousin Challice."

"The lad!" repeated Challice coldly; "so you love the lad, do you?"

"Aye, do I, and with good cause, albeit he is a Scot. But I am well assured that he is not what he seems. He is of gentle blood, or else I am a rebel Scot myself. Prithee let me pass to him."

Gaspard's simple frankness and distress could not consist with guile.

"Then you know not?" exclaimed Challice, barring the narrow door with her arm; "nay, Gaspard, you have never deceived me. Hark in your ear,"—and she drew him towards her,—"Dickon is a girl—a woman."

There was no make-believe in the horror in Gaspard's face as he started back.

"A woman! oh my God!"

"Leave her to us. 'Tis a sorry case, I fear; yet Joan and I will do what in us lies to save her. Tell nobody meanwhile. Now go."

Gaspard went, pacing the deck apart. The carvel held her course a little to the east of south, for her clumsy square sail would hardly allow her to lie within six points of the wind, but she bowled along at a fair speed, throwing the short waves off her bluff bows in gallant style. With such a craft and the wind setting due east it was hopeless to weather the Foreland; therefore, as soon as they opened the Solent, the helm was pushed a-weather and the Bonne Esperance bore away for the Needles. Thence with the wind as it stood, the master reckoned on making Barfleur before sunset. But it was an anxious time for Marmion and Father Ailwyn till the blue water was fairly under the keel. They knew not whether the alarm had been given in Southampton, nor at what moment the Bonne Esperance might not be overhauled by a king's galley.

They were not kept long in suspense. Hurst Castle had just been sighted on the lee-bow, when a war-ship issued from Southampton Water, close-hauled on a course which would bring her right across that of the carvel. The pressure of her canvas and the steady

swing of her sweeps, flashing in the morning sun, gave her great speed, and there seemed no doubt of her hostile intention. Marmion held a hurried consultation with the priest. Fighting was almost out of the question; the Flemish skipper and his men, four in all, could not be reckoned upon to resist such superior force. The only chance was to hold their course and to avoid incurring suspicion. Marmion made his party lie close under the weather bulwark. The red cross of Saint George flew out from the main of the warship; the Flemish skipper ran up the red, white, and blue flag of the Hanseatic League in response. There was an interval of breathless suspense while the carvel's helm was put a-weather so as to take her clear of the galley's stern. The warship held her way steadily, evidently beating up channel, and took no further notice of the merchantman. That danger was safely past; a little later, and the lee-braces were hauled in and the Bonne Esperance luffed up into the smooth water in shelter of the Needles, and set a fair course for the coast of Normandy.

Joan came aft with woe depicted upon her countenance, and whispered a summons to Father Ailwyn to go to the fore-cabin. Soon afterwards she came again to call Marmion and Gaspard. They found the priest performing the extreme unction to the wounded Dickon, who reclined on the narrow berth supported in the arms of Challice. The dew of death stood upon the sufferer's brow; a beam of glad sunshine came dancing through the larboard port, and fell on the simple deathbed. Never before had the Scot's features seemed to them of such unearthly beauty. The eyes were closed, the heavy lashes deepening the dark tint under the lids; but when the priest finished his office they opened and

looked forth as from another world. Eagerly they passed from face to face till they rested upon Gaspard's. Sybil of Linhope put out a feeble hand to seek the hand of him she loved.

"Gaspard," she whispered, and he knelt beside her to catch the faint accents, while all the others but Challice withdrew from the little cabin, "Gaspard, forgive me. I could not go back to the old life. I felt I must be with you, dear. But if I had lived you should never have known. I would have been your servant always—always."

Then the truth broke in upon Gaspard. He saw it all in one of those momentary flashes of illumination and memory which come to us at supreme moments, of which we can no more trace the mechanism than we can doubt the truth. If the soft passages with Sybil during that awful night in the border tower had ever come to his mind since they occurred, they had but taken their place among the experiences of a precociously worldly boy; it is doubtful if he could have repeated even the names of Sybil and Linhope. But he remembered all now; how blindly, how callously he had accepted the devotion which had been so freely lavished upon him. His was no hard heart, and as he raised the dying girl's hand to his lips, hot tears coursed down his cheeks.

"Speak to her, cousin," said Challice gently. "She wants to hear your voice again."

"You forgive me, Gaspard," spoke Sybil, in stronger accents than before, and with intense anxiety shining in her dark eyes.

"Nay," murmured Gaspard, "but what have I to forgive? How could I know? Oh, why did I not know? It is I to crave forgiveness—for exacting service from you

—for being hasty and rough with you at times. Oh, but how *could* I know, Dickon?"

Sybil smiled faintly.

"Nay, I am Dickon no longer. Call me Sybil, dear boy, and kiss me once before I go."

Gaspard was too much overcome to speak. He kissed tenderly her brow and lips; then the girl smiled again, saying—

"I am happy now; I would fain sleep. I am very happy—very happy."

Poor, troubled, guileless spirit! It passed peacefully to its rest, while Challice's warm embrace supported the drooping head, and the small, cold hands rested in Gaspard's firm clasp.

At noontide the sorrowful company assembled on deck to commit the body of Sybil of Linhope to its rest. The fair morning had become overcast; an easterly haar hung low on the leaden waves, and there seemed a special significance in the penitential psalm which opens the burial-service of the Church of Rome—

"De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine."

Over many a brother and sister had Father Ailwyn chanted the solemn rite, yet his voice broke more than once before the burden was committed to the deep and the concluding versicles were sung—

"*V.* Eternal rest give unto her, O Lord.
R. And let perpetual light shine upon her.
V. Requiescat in pace.
R. Amen."

XX.

Of the marriage of the Lord of Fontenaye and the Lily of Kendal.

In all the brakes about Barbeflot (which in modern fashion we write Barfleur) throstle and merle were singing that summer was at hand, as confidently as if they had never experienced the treachery of northern springtide. Daisies starred all the meads, dandelions the waysides; under the hedges the cuckoo-pint had shot up its quaint green hoods; the hazel boughs were splashed with crimson; willow catkins burst their silvery casing and feathered out in sulphurous plumes. All the land was palpitating with life and growth and promise; only in the crooked streets of the old seaport, things took much their accustomed way.

There was some little stir even there this morning, as a small procession—five men and two women—climbed the steep causeway towards the *mairie* or town-hall. Fishermen, busy baiting lines and mending nets under the sunny harbour wall, looked up and speculated lazily what business might have brought the tall fair-bearded knight and the bonny English maiden to their quiet town; but all sea-faring folk are men of the world, and these

were well used to seeing foreigners, for as yet their fine harbour and respectable trade had not been ruined, as both were forty years later, in the English war. But the women about the house-doors found ample matter for whispered conversation in the dress of the strange lady, which, simple as it was and somewhat the worse for travel, was of fine material and fashionably cut. Even the more homely garb of her female attendant drew forth comment, for that was an age when every country—almost every county—boasted its characteristic costume.

The Bonne Esperance had landed her passengers safely in the Norman port. Marmion, with his companions in travel, was now on his way to the *mairie*, to satisfy the *maire* as to his own identity, and to get his papers *visés* so as to enable him to pass in safety to his lands of Fontenaye, which lay in Poitou, two hundred miles to the south. Strange as it may seem, an English gentleman landing in Normandy six hundred years ago felt and was regarded much less as a foreigner than he would be now. French was then the official language in both countries, spoken as habitually by the ruling classes in one land as the other. Furthermore, it was not very long since Normandy had passed from the English Crown to that of France; the ancient memory of how the Duke of Normandy had become King of England by conquest had not been obliterated when the dukedom was united to Anjou, and its more recent annexation to the kingdom of France inclined its people to turn towards Westminster rather than to Paris as the seat of their legitimate rulers.

Therefore, although Marmion was furnished with no regular passport, he anticipated no difficulty in persuading the chief civic functionary of the town to accept the

signature of Edwardus Rex as his warrant to pass them free.

All went smoothly in the interview. Hedged with the awful dignity of his office, and conscious thereof in every fibre of his five feet four inches, the fat little *maire* received the English knight with a coldly official bow, and haughtily demanded how he could be of service to "his valiancy." Upon the rest of the party, who remained behind when Marmion advanced to the table, the *maire* at first bestowed no attention. Not until he had run his eye over the papers submitted to him did he say—

"I observe that your valiancy has a *laissez-passer* for your party. It is necessary that I should be informed of their number and designation."

"They are all present, monsieur," replied Marmion, and Challice, in compliance with a signal, placed herself at his side.

Instantly the little man was transfigured. The surpassing loveliness of the Lily, by no means impaired, but rather enhanced, by the sea winds, seemed to dazzle him. Never had the magic of beauty more immediate and overpowering effect. The *maire's* official slough fell from him; he rose to his feet, he twirled his moustache; he beamed and smirked and bowed like a mountebank. He shuffled the papers aside and began to ogle Challice in a manner which made it difficult for her not to laugh in his face. But she was clever enough to encourage the little man with sundry bright glances of intelligence, and to return his compliments with interest.

"Mademoiselle has been in Barbeflot before? No? Ah then, let us hope that she will not hasten away from us. We have many beautiful buildings in our town, which I should esteem it an honour to display to mademoiselle.

So! you have never been in Normandy before. Would that mademoiselle would come to reside there—to make her home in our hearts."

And the *maire* clasped both hands upon the spot where his doublet of black Genoese began to swell into the ample convexity it acquired above the girdle.

"Indeed, monsieur, you almost persuade me. There is I know not what of charm to be found on this side of the Manche. As a woman, I cannot fail to be attracted by the exquisite bearing of the men. Perhaps you do not know that in our land, albeit the men are brave and even handsome, they lack polish, which we women value perhaps more than we ought to do."

She shot a mischievous glance at Marmion as she spoke, who, while he understood the game, yet, lover-like, felt daggers towards anybody who encroached upon his monopoly of Challice's looks and conversation. Still he could not but be tickled when the little *maire*, straightening himself from a low obeisance towards the Lily, glared contemptuously at the English knight, who, it was obvious, did not understand the way to gain a lady's favour.

"Everything I possess shall be at the disposal of mademoiselle," said he, "if she will but prolong her stay in our romantic neighbourhood. It is true I have a wife," he continued, conscientiously scrupulous about raising false hopes in the English maiden's breast, "but for the rest—I devote my time, my energy, my resources for the entertainment of mademoiselle."

"Alas! that I must postpone the pleasure till I return this way," said Challice, observing signs of growing impatience on the part of Marmion. "At present we are pressed to travel with speed; perhaps *monsieur le maire*

will graciously examine our papers and grant us the necessary facilities to proceed on our journey."

"Assuredly; that shall be done, but immediately. Mademoiselle will not, then, forget the faithful heart that beats for her in Barbeflot. Ah!" and he sighed deeply as he looked languishingly over the bristles of his moustache, "mademoiselle will certainly make her impression wherever she goes. For me, there is but to retain her hallowed memory."

At last he was persuaded to attend to the business in hand, and began perusing the papers, but continually broke off to resume a conversation which was so much to his taste.

"Mademoiselle will favour me with her name, that I may enter it in the register of voyagers. She is doubtless the sister of his valiancy—no?—the niece, then, or perhaps the cousin?"

"Nay, but I am not of kin to the Lord of Fontenaye," said Challice mischievously.

"How? not of kin? but it seems strange then that she should be travelling in company with his valiancy. She is not then his wife?"

"No, monsieur," answered Challice, "I have not that great honour."

"But I comprehend not," exclaimed the *maire*, sniffing a scandal. "Mademoiselle will pardon me, but to me is committed the duty of research into such matters. I would spare her feelings; if she will withdraw into my private apartment I will there put to her the necessary questions."

Marmion's patience was not proof against any more; his blood was at boiling-point when, stamping his foot on the tiled floor, he exclaimed—

"It is not necessary, monsieur. This is Mistress Challice de Roos, seignorial lady of Kendal in the county of Westmorland. She is indeed not of kin to me, but she is my affianced bride, and as soon as it is your pleasure to restore my papers, we propose to go to the church of Saint Philip, to be wedded by this reverend father here."

It was Challice's turn to feel confusion now. Burning blushes mounted to her brow, which she sought to conceal by turning to speak to Joan, who was watching the whole scene with quick, intelligent eyes, although quite unable to understand the language.

The *maire* of Barbeflot was a great man, but the Lord of Fontenaye was even greater; municipal authority was at that time but in its infancy, and shrank from the punishment which territorial lords might bring upon those who exercised it indiscreetly. The *maire* obsequiously complied with the knight's demand, and before the party withdrew Challice recovered composure to assure him that she looked forward with eagerness to revisiting Barbeflot and its *mairie* at no distant date.

"And now, Challice, we go to make all this irrevocable," said Marmion, smiling proudly as they stood once more in the sunny street. "There are not many moments of liberty left to you, dear."

Challice spoke no word—only pressed his arm closer. Strange was the difference wrought within two years upon these two natures. Walter le Marmion, once shy, taciturn, and devoted only to the chase and the chances of war, sensitively proud, but with the pride that is nourished on poverty, unknown to rumour, and thinking less of the rose on a cheek or the turn of a figure than of the shapes of a horse or the fit of a hauberk, had now been transformed by circumstances into one of the notable figures in

chivalry, self-possessed, courtly, commanding, and about to sacrifice a great inheritance for the sake of a penniless maiden. Yes; Challice de Roos, once the wealthiest of the royal wards, had incurred by her own act forfeiture of all her possessions, a penalty which Cornwall might be trusted to see enforced; Challice, once so hard to please that she vowed she would live and die a maid—and meant it too—was now blushing and shrinking like any yeoman's wench, and was surrendering all she possessed—her lands, her name, her own sweet person—for pure love of the knight who had won her.

In such random fashion fly the shafts of the rosy god, and such is the topsy-turvy he works in the affairs of mortals.

XXI.

Of the peaceful household of Fontenaye, and of momentous tidings from England.

The chronicles reveal little of the lives of Walter and Challice during three or four years after those lives had become one, for chroniclers ever dwelt most diligently upon battle and tumult, fire and sword, march and siege. Not that they are to be blamed for so doing, seeing how their readers yawn most surely over annals of domestic peace, and that vendor is a fool who persists in offering wares of which no man stands in want.

Long summers shone and brief winters glowered over the towers of Fontenaye; each autumn the wheat whitened over the plain and the vintage blushed upon the slopes, and still the Chevalier of the Splendid Crest lingered in his southern home, leading a life strangely in contrast with its stormy, adventurous outset. The peasantry, who, until his coming, had never known the presence of their feudal lord, had dreaded his first coming among them; for their grandsires had handed down traditions of the bad old times, when the Seigneurs of Fontenaye had wielded iron rule over their tenantry, enforcing the cruel penalties of the forest laws with heartless rigour, and when no man dared

to add comfort to his hovel or increase the yield of his land, lest such be made the excuse for further exactions. Tales there were about one Sieur Godfrey de Fontenaye too terrible, one had said, to be believed, yet believed they were. Wives listened trembling to their husbands as they told how this Sieur Godfrey, returning one bitter night from the forest, complained that his feet were cold as marble, and ordered up from the dungeon two miserable captives—of his own people, in durance for deer-stealing—and caused them to be ripped before his eyes. Then thrusting his feet into their quivering entrails, he laughed as he felt the warmth creeping back to his frozen limbs. The horror of this deed had been too strong for the stomachs even of those dark days, when no man might call a seigneur to account for the punishment he meted to his own malefactors; wherefore the king had enacted that thenceforward no seigneur should be entitled to slay more than one peasant in a single day to warm his feet withal.

More fearful stories still were current about this Sieur Godfrey and his nine sons—so fearful that they were whispered only between man and man or man and wife, for careful mothers would not suffer it to be known by their daughters that the good God allowed such wickedness to be wrought upon earth. Enough cause, therefore, had people on the lands of Fontenaye to apprehend the return of a seigneur among them as an immeasurable calamity, forasmuch as during the long life of Sir Philip le Marmion he had lived upon his English estates, as his father had done before him, and had set never a foot within his inheritance in Poitou. As long as the oldest of them could remember, the rents had been collected without alteration by an exact, but not over-exacting,

chamberlain; industrious peasants had bestowed their best labour upon the soil, confident of reaping the fruits of their industry, and had housed themselves comfortably, so that in all the land of France there was no such fertile champaign, no such prosperous and happy people, as those which owned the sway of the absent Lord of Fontenaye. Nay, even the rigour of forest law had fallen in abeyance; verderers and rangers, appointed from among the people themselves, knew how to turn a blind eye upon Jacques or Pierre if they met them in the woodland paths; and often in passing some farmhouse of an evening one might perceive the savour of roe venison from the forest or wild pork from the sounder, as the housewife prepared the bread-winner's supper. A community enviably peaceful and well-to-do, over whom, if shadow fell, it fell from afar; yet mothers, with the ancient terror bred in their blood, did still chide refractory children—"Beware lest the seigneur catch thee!" and men whose business led them near the château would cross themselves and mutter a paternoster as they hurried past the silent towers, mindful of the bones which were said to moulder in the vaults below.

Small matter, then, were it for wonder if dismay and gloomy apprehension of the unknown spread among villagers and countrymen when it was bruited that their seigneur was coming to dwell in their midst. It was the season when the vines begin to push and the rye to sprout, and men went about their work with heavy hearts, almost wishing that the year's promise should be ill kept, whereby they might not seem too prosperous in the eyes of their lord. But long before the rye was garnered and the clusters came to the press, they had learnt that there was nothing to fear from the kindly Englishman with the ruddy cheeks. He had a gracious word for all, as he

rode along the slopes with the beautiful dame at his bridle-arm, showed an eager interest in methods of agriculture novel in the eyes of a gentleman of Lincolnshire, and won ready esteem by paying good prices for such young horses as took his fancy or suited his purpose. Nothing did so much as the last to reassure the people, for in this matter it was not upon tradition that their knowledge of the ways of seigneurs was based, but upon daily observation of the custom upon neighbouring estates, where the *droit du seigneur* was still enforced, securing to the lord of the manor not only the privilege of taking the best horse and the best cow for himself, but of other easements and services whereon it profits not to dwell at this season.

Golden, too, was the meed of favour, warming as the summer went by into real love, which Challice won by what she conceived to be the duties of her high degree. The vast chasm which in those days separated gentle and simple, lord and clown, still yawns at our feet, but kind hearts and wise heads have succeeded in throwing many a bridge across it. If rich and poor in modern times do not always see eye to eye, they seldom forget to regard each other as human, with similar desires, hopes, fears, and failures.

Challice belonged to a class—the Norman baronage—lifted by intellectual ascendancy and prowess in arms so far above the necessity for labour as to cause labour to appear in their eyes inseparable from indignity. By the code of chivalry four motives for exertion only were reckoned honourable in a baron—namely, love, war, wealth, and prayer; nay, these might even be reduced to three, seeing that if wealth could but be come by, prayers might always be bought. Toil in any other fields was

the lot of serfs and craftsmen. And so, as the centuries rolled on and riches increased, generation after generation of these privileged mortals grew into being, conceiving of the villeins and carles as of an intelligent kind of domestic animal, to be used for their lord's purposes, and entitled to just so much consideration as would keep them fit for work and warfare.

Now it so had happened that the disposition and influence of two great kings ruling simultaneously in Britain —Edward I. in England and his cousin Alexander III. in Scotland — had gone a great way to modify a social condition which must appear to us at this day unnatural and altogether evil. Both of these kings were large-hearted men first, and resolute monarchs after. They had set the example of frank, considerate treatment of their inferiors and dependents, speaking to them as to free men and not slaves. The fashion had spread, as from example in the highest places fashion always must spread, and when Edward I. died England and Scotland stood far ahead of all other European nations in recognition of the rights of all men to equal justice and due consideration. Far different it was in France, and already much evil had been wrought in England since the death of the great Plantagenet by the French nobles and scions of nobility whom Edward II. permitted to swarm in the wake of Pierre de Gaveston, and whom he appointed to many of the chief executive offices in the realm. Harsh and rigorous exercise of seignorial rights had begun to supplant the soldierly fellowship of which the greater Edward had set the fashion, and which his former subject Robert, King of Scots, still cultivated; whereby it came to pass that, not only was the difficulty of reclaiming Scotland enormously increased, but in England also, where

the older barons were in almost open revolt against the king and his foreign favourites, disaffection spread fast among the commonalty. These might have taken little willing part in the quarrel of their lords, had their own withers not been wrung and their just pride wounded by return to the old oppressive and humiliating conditions. Let but a people once taste of liberty and gain self-respect, and, if they are men, they will never go back into bondage and contempt.

We have seen the Lily of Kendal in her own northern home, and we have noted the mutual bonds of affection which bound the dalesmen to her service. Challice was now an exile from the friends of her girlhood; her broad lands had been forfeited, and, like those of her husband, had been added to the plunder which the insatiate Earl of Cornwall amassed during the years of his power. But habits of well-doing are as hard to throw off as evil ones, and she practised in her new home the innocent arts which had won the devotion of the Westmorland yeomen. It was not in her nature to know of suffering without attempting to relieve it, or to perceive happiness and honest industry without exerting herself to increase and encourage them. There was awkwardness at first, and stammering servility, when she dismounted from her palfrey and entered humble dwellings; but the people soon forgot to be suspicious; none could withstand the sunny, smiling countenance of this great dame, the frank courtesy of her greeting, the respectful tenderness of her inquiries. It was not long before, instead of hiding themselves from their seigneur and his lady, as they did instinctively at first, the people learnt to look for their coming, crowding to the house-doors or running down between the vine-rows to greet them as they passed, hawk on wrist, and reproach-

fully complaining that they did not come often enough. Children began to associate the good madame's visits with comfits and sweetmeats of indescribable succulence; brides proudly displayed ornaments which had come as wedding gifts from the château; and many a weary sick-bed was soothed, many a scanty store eked out, by timely attention from the Lady of Fontenaye. They had been a happy and prosperous community, the people of that valley lying so fair to the sun—happier than other people in this, that they had neither seen nor known their lord; but a year had not passed since that lord had brought his lady among them, before they added to their happiness and prosperity a new and ennobling sentiment—one of devotion to a superior the like of which could not be found in all the realm of France.

The first summer passed away, and the second, and the third was mellowing to the fall, when Challice became aware by certain outspoken village dames of a cause of reproach that was rising against her. "What!" ran the tenor of their complaint, "madame has wealth and lands and a fine château, all of which are good to be enjoyed; she has also a husband, which, God knows, is sometimes a gift to be accepted with precaution, yet have the saints befriended madame in this respect. But what of all these? Madame will grow old like one of ourselves; she will die one day and be forgotten, unless she has children to bear her name. Ah! madame must be good to us; she must give us a young seigneur to love and to worship. It is not right that so great a house should be without a child."

Challice laughed with the old overflowing mirth of her maidenhood.

"I suppose," said she, "that may befall in the good

God's time, which I, at least, am quite content to await. Let us enjoy health and happiness while we may, my friends, for neither of them come at our command."

"Nay, but madame has much in her power. She is rich; she ought to go at once upon a pilgrimage to the shrine of our Lady of Verdelais, and make there a handsome offering."

Then the gossips closed round her, each with a tale of the marvellous effects of a pilgrimage to this shrine or to that, together with much homely advice which it boots not to set forth in detail. Challice laughed in their faces, telling them that they were an ungrateful set of crones, and ought to be content with things as they were. Then she rode off, leaving them wagging their heads and disputing among themselves as to the precise saint whom childless wives should most profitably propitiate.

The Lady of Fontenaye made no special oblation at any of the shrines recommended by these experienced mothers, and as for her husband, I doubt whether he considered any addition essential to the happiness of his wedded life. If any such thoughts ever troubled his head, he dismissed them summarily, and certainly would have grudged to motherhood the measure in which it must have interfered with his delight in that charming companion who rode with him, read with him, hunted with him, hawked with him, and shared with him all the varied, if simple, interests of a country gentleman. This childless couple were as well content with their lot as any mortals have been since Adam lost his bachelorhood; the share each had in the other was enough to ensure their Eden; and if Challice, as the village matrons murmured, was culpably neglectful of invoking the aid of the saints to that end which is assumed to be first in the wishes of all

ladies who love their lords, she never forgot fervently to thank God and Saint Herbert of Derwentwater for having preserved her dear knight and united his life to hers.

Nevertheless, boons come unsought as often as they do in answer to the most ardent, faithful prayers: in the fulness of time Challice, who had ministered to many wants, and smoothed the pillow of many a humble sufferer round the château, herself stood in need of aid from the wisest of the village dames. For the first time since the birth of bad Sieur Godfrey's ninth son, a hundred years before, the feeble cry of an infant sounded within those solemn walls, and great was the rejoicing on all the lands of Fontenaye when it was known that an heir was born to that house, once so detested and feared, but now so well beloved and profoundly honoured.

"Walter," said Challice when this important babe was about a fortnight old, "I insist upon your taking it in your arms. It is a disgrace, sir, that you have never done so yet; it is high time that you came in practice, or you will be sure to drop the darling when you hand it to Father Ailwyn to be christened. Gillian, give Sir Walter the baby to hold."

Gillian, it must be explained, had followed her mistress not only into exile, but into matrimony. She had all an islander's contempt for foreigners, and consistently refused to learn their language, which naturally threw her a great deal into society with the only other English dependents in the establishment of Fontenaye—Raymond of Romsey, his wife Joan, and Michael the Fenman. Now Michael was far advanced in years, and accompanied his master less often than of yore in hunting expeditions, whence it came to pass that time hung heavy on his hands. He was but mortal after all, in spite of his constant display of pro-

verbial wisdom, and Gillian's black eyes found a soft place in his old heart. "An empty hand is no lure to a hawk," he said, and, counting up the little store he had laid by in his long service, he came to the conclusion it would serve to take a small farm withal. His wooing was peculiar, but it was brief and successful. "All meats to be eaten, all maids to be wed," was the exordium with which he opened the siege; and Gillian proving not unkind, they were soon established in a snug little stone house on the bank of the Vendée, with as much land as would keep a pair of oxen in work and feed a small herd of cows. But as soon as the great occasion came, Gillian deserted the Fenman's fireside and was installed as nurse for the nonce.

Sir Walter took his firstborn out of Gillian's arms and held it in the shamefaced, awkward way habitual with young fathers.

"Look at him, Gillian!" exclaimed the pretty mother from her couch with a fine show of indignation. "Was there ever a creature so clumsy as a man? Don't clutch it like that, Walter," she added, laughing in her old way; "it can't bite you, for it has no teeth yet. There, spread out this hand comfortably — so, and put the other to support its legs."

"I feel sure it will fall," protested Marmion, "or I shall damage it somehow, and then you will be angry."

"*Bêtise!*" quoth Challice, "now sit down quietly beside me—there—isn't it a perfect angel, and are you not proud of it?"

"Not particularly," replied the Lord of Fontenaye foolishly; "to tell the truth, it seems to me a very ugly little creature. But I am proud of you, dear, and think you more beautiful than ever."

"*Le premier embellit*, they say," Challice observed, "but this is no time for compliments. We must agree upon a name to be given to our son, and I may tell you at once that there is only one name I will consent to, so you may consider that as settled."

"You will call him Thomas, I suppose, after the good knight your father. Well, Thomas is an honourable name, and you shall have your way."

"An honourable name in truth," said Challice, "and dear to me for my father's memory; but know this, Walter, that I would as lief have the son christened Rominagrobis or Mohammed, as Thomas. No; there is but one name he shall bear, and that is your own, my Walter, or nothing."

"Nay, but I set little store by Walter," Marmion said, "seeing the course affairs have taken with us. Walter comes from Scrivelsby and Tamworth; these lands have been taken from us; we have neither lot nor part with England now; better to forget that we ever had, and begin a new page in a new land."

Challice laid her white hand upon Marmion's shoulder, and looked earnestly in his eyes as she replied—

"Nay, there spake not my true knight. Forget England! forget that it was in England we first met! forget my kindly dalesmen and the yellow coats of the Kendal horse! That may never be. Walter, deeply as I love you—sharp pain though it would be to see you ride forth to battle again—yet had they not stripped you and me of all power of serving against the king's enemies—were it not certain that you would be cast in prison if you returned to our country—you *know* that I would not keep you here in the hour of England's need. I never took much pleasure in Father Ailwyn's story about Her-

cules and Omphale. Nay, sir," she went on in a lighter tone, "so far from letting you harbour here and grow fat —you *are* a little fatter than you were, Walter, already"— putting her slender fingers into the slack of his girdle—"I would put you to the door as I did in the old days at Kendal."

"And I would go," said he, "to do your bidding as proudly as it was once my fortune to do; but there were no writs of arrestment out against me in those days. My poor Challice! see what I have brought upon you: we should both be laid by the heels if we ventured across the Manche. In England we are houseless, landless; surely we are better off in Poitou, and not to be blamed if we enjoy what we have, without repining for what we have lost."

"Yes, I am ungrateful, Walter, to the good God and to you. I would not have it otherwise; and it is only when I am weak like this—you know I never had a day's illness till that little brat came on the scene—it is only when I feel weak and impatient to get strong, that I long for a breath of the north wind from Fawcett Forest or a whiff of salt air blowing over Morcambe Bay."

Need it be told that Challice had her own sweet will, and that the illustrious babe was duly christened in his father's name.

Something in Challice's words had pricked the conscience of the Lord of Fontenaye. He certainly found life to be a pleasant thing in that fat southern land, and, like every true Englishman, he felt no aversion from ease and leisure. But, after the manner of Englishmen, his conception of ease and leisure was not one of bodily indolence. The hunting was excellent, and the time he did not spend in that was fully occupied with the duties

of a great landowner, the administration of justice, the improvement of land and farms, the introduction of choice strains of horses and cattle—all the manifold interests which early training had fitted him to find in country life.

He was barely in his early prime — not yet turned seven-and-twenty—and bore what Gillian termed "a pretty figure of a man"; still there was some foundation for Challice's warning about growing fat. Possessed of a magnificent appetite and the Englishman's tendency to put on weight, Marmion undoubtedly would have found it inconvenient to draw the buckle of his hunting-belt to the hole which fitted him the morning he followed the great boar of Waltham Chace. He had parted with Light-heart in parting from England, and, in the choice of successors to that good horse, he found it expedient to look rather to bone and back ribs than to capacity for great speed. He was well content with life as he found it, having associations of penury and disappointment with his memories of Shakingdon, and no experience whatever of the more liberal resources of Scrivelsby and Lutterworth. Kendal he had loved and delighted to remember, and the yellow jackets of the squadrons he used to lead, but these were dear to him chiefly for the Lily of Kendal's sake—and was not the Lily with him for evermore? He winced as he called to mind the former humiliating sense of the disparity between her wealth and his own poverty; he could not repine that the position was altered now, and that it was he who laid his possessions at her feet, bidding her take and dispose of them all.

Yet as he mused, it pained him to think that he, and he only, had brought this heavy loss upon his wife; he, and her love for him, had been the occasion of her

princely station being forfeited and bestowed upon Cornwall; she had stripped herself of all without a sigh or the droop of an eyelid. He knew that it was sheer love for her native dales and hills and for the people among them, and not regret for the loss of power and riches, that had found momentary expression in her hour of bodily weakness; and it was a revelation to him, because it was the first time, in all the unbroken intercourse of those three golden years, that any hint of home-sickness had escaped her lips.

Marmion felt a glow of shame—shame that he had been so happy, that he had made no plans, taken no thought for the redress of the grievous wrong wrought upon his wife. True, it was not easy to see what good would come of worrying himself about it. He and Challice had broken the law by marrying without the king's consent—a law which was held to be one of the most sacred foundations of the monarchy, and for the breaking of which exceedingly severe penalties were exacted. Whether Edward I.'s promise to Challice de Roos could be repealed by Edward II. was a point which only the law judges could determine; and what chance was there of even justice so long as Cornwall kept the king's conscience and manipulated appointments to the Bench? Marmion, indeed, had contemplated pressing a suit for setting aside the forfeitures, but the Earl of Lincoln and Sir Robert de Clifford both warned him of the hopelessness of such an attempt, told him plainly that the king's writ was out for his arrest and that of his wife, and implored him, if he valued his liberty, not to return to England.

But of late home letters had assumed a different tone. Great changes were impending in England, and Marmion was bidden to be of good cheer by reason that the Par-

liament which the king had so long delayed summoning was at length about to meet. Its chief work would assuredly be to deal with the Earl of Cornwall, and to deprive him of the wealth he had so unscrupulously won. Never was there a man so universally detested by his peers as this Gascon adventurer. It was not his success, his ambition, or his avarice which had set the tide of hatred so powerfully against him; the cause was that, with all his undoubted talents, he lacked the wisdom to perceive that those heedless personal jibes which he was accustomed to pass upon his inferiors in intellect must in the end pile up such a mountain of cumulative resentment which one day should topple over and crush him. He had not a single friend in the land except the king; sycophants and flatterers he had in plenty, attached by hopes of favours to come; partisans and dependents, secured by scraps and doles from his enormous wealth; but of friends who should endure adversity with him, not one; even the queen, never over-scrupulous in bestowing her favour, could not tolerate de Gaveston.

And now the storm was about to burst. The barons had sunk their private jealousies and differences for the nonce, making common cause against the common enemy. Parliament met, ostensibly for the purpose of taking measures to put an end to the disastrous Scottish war, which, alternately forced forward without proper concert between commanders and allowed to subside into affairs of outposts and isolated attack and defence of castles, had gone uniformly in favour of the vigilant King of Scots; but from the opening of the first debate it was clear that the barons were far more eager to make an end of the Earl of Cornwall than to quell the rebel Scots. In fact, Lincoln, Hertford, and Lancaster plainly declared that so long as

Cornwall was suffered to remain in the realm not a man would they put in the field against the king's enemies. And the barons prevailed. Sentence of perpetual banishment was passed upon Pierre de Gaveston, and the Primate issued a solemn warning of excommunication as the doom of any person that should hold any intercourse with him and afford him any relief. Forfeiture of all the Gascon's English possessions followed as matter of course, and restitution or — for the barons were not wholly disinterested — redistribution. Among the lands of which Cornwall was divested were those of Kendal in the north, and of Scrivelsby, Lutterworth, Tamworth, and Shakingdon in the midlands. Such spoil had not been thrown down for division since the estates of Robert de Brus and his followers had been shared among the English nobles. These had been for the most part Scottish estates, but here were some of the fairest domains in England to be scrambled for, and, all things considered, a single acre of English soil was well worth ten of Scots. Nevertheless, there were high-souled men among the leaders of the barons, men who had received and cherished the principles of rule and justice bequeathed by Edward I., and were powerful enough already to sink private considerations in maintaining them.

Walter le Marmion, not long since an obscure squire of Lincolnshire, could number no great personages among his intimate friends. De Valence and de Clifford, who knew him best, were absent on service in Scotland, and the good old Earl of Lincoln was dead.[1] The Earl of Gloucester, who had succeeded to the office of Chan-

[1] It is from Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, the favourite minister of Edward I., that Lincoln's Inn, formerly known as the Old Temple, derives its present name.

cellor, was Cornwall's brother-in-law, for Cornwall, after Challice and her wealth had eluded his grasp, had married the Lady Margaret de Clare. But Gloucester was a fine-spirited young knight, deeply concerned for the welfare of his country, and soon lent all his influence to curbing the power of the Gascon. Moreover, he was ardently enamoured of deeds of chivalry, and Marmion's exploits, performed when Gloucester was on the eve of manhood, had powerfully impressed his imagination. Therefore when Cornwall's disgrace brought a fresh disposal of Marmion's forfeited estates under consideration, Gloucester vehemently urged their restoration to the rightful owner. In this he was supported by the many powerful kinsfolk of Challice de Roos — the Nevilles, Percys, and de Vaux—who naturally espoused her husband's cause. Therefore, seeing that it was matter of common knowledge that, although disobeying the reigning king in marrying without his consent, they had acted on the faith of the late king's promise, Marmion was by common acclaim reinvested in possession of his great estates. The same principle applied, of course, to the Lady of Kendal; nor did the king make the slightest difficulty about signing a free pardon to both the delinquents. He had acted all along in this matter solely in the interests and at the instigation of Cornwall; now that the object of his infatuation had been reft from him, he cared nothing about what should become of his spoils, for he was of a generous nature, wholly free from avarice.

The heir of Fontenaye had convulsed the sphere of which he was the undoubted despot by cutting four teeth in succession, each one of which was hailed by his admiring court as an unparalleled achievement. Of

all the inhabitants of the château, Marmion was the only one who withheld abject homage from its latest inmate; Challice pronounced her husband heartless and ungrateful, because he showed himself far more solicitous for the health of herself than the welfare of her son, and betrayed a little impatience when the constant calls of the nursery took her to the turret where her jewel was enshrined. Hitherto in the years of their exile, Challice had been his one companion and confidante; as active and fond of exercise as a boy, she had hunted with him, ridden from farm to farm with him, and shared all his schemes for building and improvement. Now it was otherwise: for six months maternal duties had kept her within a very brief radius of the cradle; and the leagues seemed long indeed to the chevalier when he had no longer that charming face to respond to his commonplace— that queenly figure mingling its shadow with his own as they paced along the dusty white roads or galloped across the windy upland. During the whole of that winter, one of the severest that ever befell in Poitou, Challice had forsaken the saddle, which she had once pronounced to be the only place where life was worth living; and it was one of the happiest hours of Marmion's experience when he persuaded her once more to mount her palfrey and ride forth with him along the river-banks.

It was sweet April weather; the poplars dropped their purple catkins thickly on the ways; the meadows atoned for their winter dishevelment by wrapping themselves in extravagant green; and bullfrogs, immersed to the very corners of their wide mouths, croaked perpetual guttural content in the abundant sunshine. They were lovers still, the Chevalier of the Splendid Crest

and the Lily of Kendal, yet not quite the same as heretofore. In Challice's eyes there came at times a far-off look, which Marmion had never seen in the days of courtship and early married life—a look in which he had small part, and could not follow as yet. It neither pained nor chafed him, but he was conscious of it, and at first it puzzled him.

"What are you thinking of?" he once asked as they rode down a forest alley, where the sunlight fell chequer-wise through a network of tender sprays.

"As if I must tell you all I think about, old jealous one!" replied Challice, with her own mischievous gleam in her eyes. "Finely the world would wag along if nobody took thought except for what you can see over your horse's ears."

"Your thoughts seemed to have travelled a long way off, *ma belle*," said Marmion, passing his arm round her shapely waist, "and mine felt a trifle lonely at being left behind; that was all. I sometimes wonder if you are pining to be back among your Westmorland wilds."

"Nay," answered his wife, "but you have divined ill this time, Walter. My thoughts were not in Westmorland, though I confess they often stray thither when I am alone. Think how gay the Lenten lilies must be just now over there, along all the green banks!"

"My poor Lily!" said Marmion tenderly, "it is all my fault that you are not among them at this moment. Do you hate me sometimes for having brought you so far away?"

There ensued a little passage at this period, not the less expressive because it was inarticulate, and a fine colour had mounted to the Lily's eyes, which swam with a very tender light as she made reply—

"You know better than that, my Walter; and I am not going to spoil you by assuring you for the thousandth time that my happiness is where you are, and there only. But I will tell you the subject of my musing; it is one which has come often to my mind of late, and you must bear with me if I cannot dismiss it. You are an English knight—I an English woman; well, what are we doing for England? There is our boy growing up——"

"He has reached the reverend age of fifteen months," interposed Marmion, smiling.

"Never mind, sir; it would be the same if he were no more than fifteen hours old. He must be brought up to know that he is no Frenchman, and how is he to learn that when he sees us leading our lives far from our own countrymen? What will he think of you, if he sees you hunting and farming and taking your ease at a time when England has need of all the wise heads and strong arms she can muster?"

"Meantime England has declined my valuable service," returned Marmion, "and has given me pretty plainly to understand that I should be running my head into a very ugly noose if I were to set foot upon her shores."

"True, most true," said Challice earnestly; "and all I mean is that our boy must not grow up to see you sitting down contentedly under such a state of affairs. Oh, Walter! you will think me ungrateful, unreasonable, but it would make me so happy if I could feel sure that you are *not* contented; that you will lose no chance — spare no effort — to get restitution of your rights. It is not the lands I want—the good God knows we have enough here for all our needs — it is not the power that goes with the land, save as such power may be used to deliver our country and save the king.

But I want to see you in a position to do your duty as a Christian knight and an Englishman. You understand me, I am sure."

"Indeed I do," answered Marmion, "and I praise the saints for giving me a wife who saves me from falling into indolence. I confess that at this moment I do not see my course clear. You speak of duty: the first duty I recognise is to keep a home for you, dear Challice; but as soon as our friends in England give any sign for my return, you will not find me slack to do my part. Meanwhile, they do nothing but warn me to keep away."

"Yes, and as long as that is so you must remain here," said Challice with a sigh of happiness. "All I ask is that you should not forget, and never be *quite* content till you are able to serve king and country once more."

By this time they had ridden clear of the forest; the château was in view at the end of a shining reach of the river Vendée, the sable banner of the King's Champion flapping idly on its staff in the morning breeze. On the far bank of the river ran the northern road, distant not three bow-shots from where they rode, and upon it they could see three horsemen making for the château.

"Unless the sun deceives me," said Marmion, "I ought to know those liveries. If they are not those of the King of England, they are a very close imitation. Let us spur forward, Challice, and meet them at the bridge. News comes so seldom in this quiet land that we may as well get the first of it."

They cantered on and reached the bridge before the strangers. Marmion's eyes had told him true: the white surcoat lined with scarlet of the esquire who rode fore-

most showed him to be a king's messenger, attended by two spearmen wearing the same liveries, with the well-known broom badge in their steel caps.

"Good morrow, sir!" cried Marmion; "you have ridden far, it seems; may I bid you to alight and refresh at our poor house of Fontenaye?"

"It is for Fontenaye that I am bound," replied the squire, "on the king's service, with letters for the lord of that place."

"Then here is the lord thereof, fair sir, at your service. I trust your tidings be of good. How fares it with my lord the king?"

"Better than for this many a day past," returned the other. "As for the letters I bear for your valiancy, I may not presume to know the purport, but this I know, that they were issued at the instance of my kinsman the Earl of Gloucester and Sir Hugh de Neville, and that I was bidden to ride hither with all speed. Sir, there have fallen great changes in England within these past months. Sieur Pierre de Gaveston having been deprived of his earldom by Parliament and banished forth of the realm, had the great hardihood of returning thereto. My lord the king received him back to favour and appointed him governor of Scarborough Castle. But the Earl of Lancaster would none of him, and summoning the other barons, advanced in arms against my lord the king. Sieur Pierre then surrendered to my lord of Pembroke, who, as some do affirm, gave him assurance of his life if he would submit to the will of the earls. My lord the king was then at York, and did condescend to intercede with the earls for the life of Sieur Pierre; but they would not, vowing that they had been deceived in this matter over often already; and lo! then my lord

of Warwick came with an armed force to Deddington in the county of Oxford, where my lord of Pembroke had Sieur Pierre in keeping, and despite my lord of Pembroke's remonstrance, bore Sieur Pierre away with him to his castle of Warwick. Nevertheless my lord of Warwick would not shed the blood of the said Pierre within his own fee, but delivered him into the hands of my lords of Lancaster, Arundel, and Hereford, who had him away to a certain place called Gaversyk between Warwick and Kenilworth, without my lord of Warwick's fee and within that of my lord of Lancaster, and there caused a villain Welshman to strike the head of the said Sieur Pierre from off his neck, and that in the presence of a great assembly of barons, gentry, and commonalty, who made loud rejoicing, crying aloud 'God save the King of England from all foreign traitors,' and again, 'God save the King!' And now my lord the king hath taken about him a new set of counsellors, chief of whom are my lords of Lancaster, Gloucester, Hereford, and Arundel, with whom hath lately joined my lord of Warenne, so that men do greatly hope that the kingdom will now be settled, and honest Englishmen come by their rights."

The king's letter formed a remarkable sequel to the conversation of Walter and Challice. It called upon all good men to take note that the King of England, in fulfilment of the promise made by his father of blessed memory, did recognise and ratify the choice of a husband made by his ward Mistress Challice de Roos, Lady of the Honor of Kendal, confirmed and approved her marriage to Sir Walter le Marmion, Lord of Fontenaye, Scrivelsby, &c., did absolutely revoke and annul the forfeiture made of the lands of both of them, and

extend to them a free pardon for all crimes and misdemeanours done by or imputed to them in the past.

In a second letter the king summoned and enjoined his faithful liege knight to attend at Wark on the feast of Saint Barnabas next-to-come,[1] with five hundred Lincoln archers and two hundred fully equipped horsemen drawn from his lands in mid-England, also with forty men-at-arms and three hundred light horsemen from the lands of Kendal, which he had acquired by his wife, all to form part of the forces with which the king was about to effect the submission of Scotland at midsummer.

"*Voilà, ma belle,*" observed Marmion quietly to his wife when the reading of the letters was finished, "there is the accomplishment of your wishes. It shall be my blame if you have any reason to complain of my slackness now that the king has seen fit to accept my service."

Challice smiled proudly and said nothing; but inwardly she felt that she would gladly have resigned all her English possessions as the price to be paid for assurance of that tranquil companionship with her husband which, an hour earlier, she had been so bravely anxious to interrupt.

[1] 11th June.

XXIII.

Of the pact between Sir Edward de Brus and Sir Philip de Mowbray, and of the great army which King Edward assembled for the deliverance of Stirling.

THE sun of early June cast its broad radiance over a magnificent scene upon the undulating plain round Wark. Spread far and wide over the rich verdure the white tents of the English were ranged in regular ranks; brilliant banners floated over the pavilions of the barons —pavilions which those of some of the wealthier knights rivalled in size, though the lesser degree of their owners was denoted by the pennons befitting their order. The glitter of steel might be seen afar as fresh contingents continued to march in from the south, while the troops already in camp were constantly at exercise, marching, counter-marching, and making mimic charges, preparing for the expedition which no man doubted was to decide the fate of the King of Scots and his misguided people. The activity by sea was as fervent as that on land. The watchmen at Bamborough lost all count of the sails which, filled by the light land breeze, passed northward to Berwick, carrying stores for the greatest army that had ever been led across the Scottish border. England was indeed putting forth her force, and not a man in that

mighty host had any misgivings as to the result. King Edward's scouts, organised by that vigilant prelate, the Archbishop of York, had brought sure intelligence of the nature and position of King Robert's troops. Hardly one-third of the force which lay waiting for attack on the banks of the Forth were of the quality to be reckoned as soldiers. That third, it is true, were of good material, seasoned, disciplined, and well armed, but they numbered not more than seven thousand at the utmost, and could boast of only five hundred horse among them, which it were contemptible to reckon as able to operate against the twenty thousand English cavalry under the most experienced commanders in Europe. The remainder of King Robert's army made the total force up to about twenty thousand, but they were Lothian peasants, Highland clansmen, Galloway hill-men—a motley throng, individually brave and hardy, no doubt, but unused to discipline, so it was said, or to act in large organised bodies. One consideration only, and it was an important one, damped in some degree the enthusiasm of Edward's commanders—namely, that in their coming triumph they could not expect to make any prisoners who would bring much reward in the shape of ransom. The Scots, including the King of Scots himself, were ridiculously poor; for years they had been laying waste their own land in order to destroy the subsistence of English expeditionary forces and garrisons; and although they had certainly indemnified themselves to some extent by exacting levies from English towns in continual raids during the recent anarchy, the funds thus obtained had all been expended in munitions of war. The English knights, therefore, could only look to the forfeiture of Scottish lands to reward them for their exertions.

By the eve of Saint Barnabas there were upwards of fifty thousand horse and foot encamped in the neighbourhood of Wark, and orders had been issued for the advanced guard under the Earl of Gloucester to march one hour after sunrise on the morrow. Gloucester had been delighted to welcome Marmion back. As has been shown already, this gallant young earl had been the chief agent in obtaining the knight's restoration, and he now made a special point in having him, with his Lincoln archers and Kendal horse, under his own command. In addition to that, he made up a brigade for Sir Walter, by adding the contingent of the Earl of Warwick—namely, eight hundred stout bowmen from the Forest of Arden, clad in lighter green than the Lincoln men, with corbuyle caps[1] and the famous badge of the bear and ragged staff worked in worsted upon their sleeves, and four hundred Hampshire horse sent by the Earl of Arundel. Warwick nor Arundel had not fully made up their quarrel with the king, neither had the Earl of Warenne, but each of the three had sent a strong force of levies. Marmion's brigade, therefore, amounted to two thousand two hundred and forty men.

The sun was declining over the woods of Birgham as the knight rode back into camp after finally inspecting his men, well pleased with their spirit and behaviour under arms. Dismounting, he entered his pavilion, and bade Gaspard, now grown up to be a fine young man, to relieve him of his harness.

"Have any tidings come of my lord of Lancaster?" he asked; "it is not his fashion to hang back when the king's drums are beating the point of war."

[1] *Cuir bouilli*, jacked leather, rendered so hard and tough as to resist sword or battle-axe better than steel.

"There be tidings, Sir Walter," replied the squire, "but not of a sort that is good to hear. Men say that he hath sent an insolent letter to my lord the king, complaining that certain promises made before the Westminster Parliament have not yet received effect, and refusing to muster his full levy until these be fulfilled. Then those beggarly Scots have been taunting our people, shouting ribald verses across the river. See! here is a scroll which one of our cavalry pickets found nailed against the church door of Coldstream at sunrise this morning. Read it, my master, and say if aught but fire and sword will cure this people of their malignity."

Marmion took the ragged scrip and read as follows:—

"Long beardes, hartelesse,
Paynted hoodes, witlesse,
Gaie cotes, gracelesse,
Make Englande thriftlesse."

"Bah!" quoth he, tossing it aside, "banter such as that breaks no bones. But there is a sting of truth in it withal. I love as much as any man to see soldiers go seemly clad, with their jerkins of one colour and cut, and their harness sightly burnished. Also I have noted in my time that the knights who spend most care on the fit of a jupon or the painting of a shield are not seldom first in a mellay. Yet, sangdieu! I had fain seen a lighter baggage train and fewer of the camp rangail, each one with a pair of jaws for gnawing into the provender of fighting men."

"That is what I hear some of the old soldiers grumbling about," answered Gaspard. "They speak of the manner of King Longshanks in his campaigns, when knight and serving-man fared much alike. As for wine, say they, it was not to be found even on the king's table —only nut-brown ale for gentle and simple; neither was

there so much as a groat dispended upon singing-wenches, spices, wax, comfits or other delicacies, such as make this camp like a Bartlemy fair. However, my master, the men are of high courage and disciplined spirit; they ask no better than to close with the Scots once for all, and to be dismissed thereafter to their harvest."

"Both of which boons they are like to attain," said Marmion, "if King Hobbe will keep his word and meet us in fair field before Midsummer Day. And as for you, my poor Gaspard, you will look to it that you miss not this chance of winning your spurs. Many a time have I blamed myself for suffering you to tarry all these years at Fontenaye, while your beard grew and no chance opened for your knighthood. Now, I'll wager a hide of my best Lincolnshire pasture that, once across the border, you stand not again upon English ground save as Sir Gaspard de Neville!"

"Amen say I to that, Sir Walter; yet I would not have you think that I have wearied in your service. These have been years when people of my way of thinking were the better of a strip of salt water between themselves and mischief."

It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader of the peculiar circumstances under which King Edward had undertaken a fresh invasion of Scotland. During the miserable years following upon his marriage and coronation, Edward's energy, at no time easy to arouse or concentrate, had been wasted in the vain attempt to maintain the ascendency of his favourite Cornwall, and to combat the increasing hostility of barons and people towards that mode of rule. In the meantime, the King of Scots had gone from strength to strength; one English

garrison after another, despairing of succour, had surrendered to his forces, until by Pasktide in 1314, of all the chief castles of Scotland the English flag remained flying only over those of Berwick, Bothwell, Lochmaben, and Stirling. Of the last-named city, which for many years disputed with Perth and Edinburgh which should be capital of the kingdom, it was of prime importance for each party to gain or regain possession; because its great natural strength, added to its position upon that narrow land where north and south join bounds, secured for its holder the command of central Scotland. To Stirling, then, Edward de Brus had laid leaguer in Lent, 1313, and held it so closely invested till midsummer that the governor, Sir Philip de Mowbray, was fain then to sue for an armistice.

Now Sir Edward de Brus was a dashing and able commander, and had proved scarcely second to Sir James of Douglas himself in conduct of the prolonged campaign. He was scarcely inferior to his brother, the King of Scots, in the art of winning devotion from men serving under him and of inspiring them with courage, but the warm heart and generous sympathy which gave him this peculiar power, rendered him also especially liable to yield to the extravagances of chivalry. None knew better how to appeal to this weakness than wily Sir Philip de Mowbray, who had been his intimate friend in old days at the Court of Edward I. Accordingly, he persuaded de Brus to agree to a suspension of arms for the space of a year, pledging his knightly word that he, Sir Philip, would surrender unconditionally if he were not relieved by Midsummer Day, 1314. It was a foolish act on the part of the Scottish knight, but he was neither unwilling to spare the lives of his own men by avoiding the necessity of

storming the place, nor to humour his ancient brother-in-arms by such an honourable courtesy.

The King of Scots was exceedingly angry when this piece of folly was made known to him. It evidently pledged him to that which he had of set purpose consistently avoided—a pitched battle with the English—his strategy being to harass the enemy by incessant raids over the border, and by shutting up their garrisons in isolated strongholds. However, he was not a man to shrink from maintaining his brother's honour, and he set about mustering the somewhat meagre resources of his realm to encounter the overpowering force which the King of England could set in the field against him. By the utmost efforts of his lieutenants, a little more than twenty thousand men came true to tryst in the skirts of the great Tor Wood. Then were brought into play the qualities of the consummate soldier. He would not be lured to attack, as his ancestor had been lured at the Battle of the Standard, nor would he expose his columns to the murderous enfilading of English archery, as Wallace had done and rued it at Falkirk. To bar the invaders' path to Stirling was his only game, which game he must win, or with it lose his crown. He was weak in numbers, he must be strong in position.

The traveller visiting Stirling for the first time may leave that fair town and, walking somewhat less than a couple of miles along the great south road, cast his curious eyes right and left, yet detect no decisive features such as generally mark a defensive position. Standing upon a gentle eminence such as those with which the plain undulates before him and on either hand, he perceives a brook—at midsummer a mere rivulet—winding among the sloping fields and flat meadows on its way to the Forth.

Is he a trout-fisher? he will hardly take note of a stream of such puny dimensions, where there does not seem depth to cover a fingerling; a lover of landscape? he has crossed a score of such in many a morning's stroll; a soldier? there is scarcely enough in such an obstacle to cause horse or foot to break their ranks. He can hardly believe when he is told that this runlet of water ranks in history with such historic floods as the Jordan and the Rhine, the Douro and the Berezina, that this unassuming channel formed a circumstance as cardinal in the destiny of the Scots as the Red Sea in that of the Israelites. Yet so it is; for this is none other than the Bannock Burn, whereon and whereby the very existence of a nation was determined.

But, although the Bannock Burn was not larger in volume six hundred years ago than we see it now, it was different in character. The drainer's craft has altered levels and quickened the flow; yet still, when the March dust is flying and the harrows are combing the fields, you may note by the darkened soil where the waters of the brook once soaked through the hollows, forming dangerous morasses. Straight as arrow-flight between these ancient bogs ran the Roman causeway, marking one of the lines by which the English might march to raise the siege of Stirling.

The only other line by which they could come lay to the east of the Roman way, where the great carse spread for many miry miles along the crawling Forth; but this was more difficult, owing to numerous morasses and pools of water, wherefore King Robert did most earnestly hope and pray that his enemy would be tempted to choose the upper and firmer ground.

In following the fortunes of Sir Walter le Marmion from this point, the reader will do so the more easily by

placing himself, as it were, in the neighbourhood of the Scottish king's quarters; because, in proportion as the English army approached Stirling, it was obliged to reduce its front, owing to the natural features of the ground, so that the different columns fell into much confusion, and the press was so great that it became impossible for those in the rearward divisions to obtain any right view of the course of events.

The King of Scots, then, chose his ground in view of either alternative. If the English came by the carse, he would attack them in flank under the very walls of Stirling, where a sharp sweep in the Forth leaves but a narrow space between its muddy bank and the upland. But if, as King Robert desired, they should advance in one body along the upper line, then he would simply await their attack, trusting to the natural obstacles to throw it into confusion. A third alternative there was, which, though he thought it most probable, he scarcely dared to contemplate, namely, that King Edward should divide his army and advance by both lines. To oppose such a manœuvre the King of Scots was well aware he had not sufficient force. It would oblige him to retire westward into the Tor Wood, and thence into the Lennox, leaving the siege of Stirling to be raised, and driving him to have recourse to his old and laborious strategy of avoiding great encounters.

Having made his dispositions for the first and second alternatives, the King of Scots bivouacked his army in the Tor Wood, where shelter could be had from the heat by day and the dew by night, and calmly awaited the approach of King Edward's host.

Saint John's day[1] was that appointed for the encounter;

[1] 24th June.

if the siege of Stirling could be raised upon that day, Sir Philip Mowbray might go free, and the King of Scots must seek refuge in the Lennox hills. King Robert's scouts brought him word daily of the progress of the English. On Friday, 21st June, they lay at Edinburgh, whereof the castle had been laid in ruins after its capture by Randolph in the foregoing summer. Next day they were heard of on the road to Falkirk, and the morrow's sun would disclose the line of King Edward's attack. The King of Scots moved out from his lair, taking up the position designed to bar approach along the upper line, from which position he could easily move into that commanding the line of approach by the carse, as he could fall back upon the Tor Wood in the unhappy event of an attack being delivered along both these lines.

It was daintily chosen. In the case of the attack coming along the upper line, there were only two points where it could be delivered upon the Scottish front—one, towards the centre where the Roman way threw a firm but narrow spine between and across the marshes, the other opposite his right flank, where a space of hard and fairly even ground, some two hundred paces in width, stretched between the thickets of the Tor Wood and the western verge of the morass. The latter was undoubtedly the point of greatest danger, because here the enemy could deliver his attack upon a far wider front than upon the Roman way, where there was no room to manœuvre. Accordingly King Robert caused this portion of his front to be protected by digging a vast number of pits, deep enough to take a horse to the knee, and cunningly covering them over with turf resting upon branches. To hold this part of the position he appointed his brother Edward, deeming that the post of honour was his due whose

over-zealous chivalry had brought about the coming combat.

To young Thomas Randolph, Earl of Moray, the king assigned the centre of the line. Moray's division was to be several paces in rear of Edward's, but clear of its inner flank, so as to form that disposition known among soldiers as the échelon, or ladder; and in like manner the left division, under good Sir James of Douglas and young Walter the Steward, was made to prolong the line till its flank rested upon the hamlet and church of Saint Ninian's. Of the reserve, King Robert charged himself with the command, upon the superior eminence of Coxet Hill, whence he could move to one or another part of his line as occasion should require. Never was more sagacious use made of simple and inconspicuous resources of ground: the entire front was protected by the marshes, save at two contracted points; the left flank was unapproachable except by a wide detour through the difficult carse land, by reason of a precipitous ravine through which the Bannock falls at this part of its course; the right flank rested upon the Bannock where it issued from the impassable defiles of the Tor Wood.

In two respects King Robert was greatly conscious of the inferiority of his forces to the English. In his whole army he only possessed five hundred cavalry under Sir Robert de Keith, whereas the English horse numbered nothing less than ten thousand; and, saving a hundred and fifty good marksmen from Ettrick Forest, his archery was contemptible as opposed to the finest bowmen in the world. The issue must be decided by the ashen pikes of his Lowlanders, the swords and targes of his Highlanders, and the favourable features of the ground.

It was glorious midsummer weather. Roses, red and

white, spangled the thicket with their gracious sprays; larks carolled in the lift; a pearly mist veiled, but did not hide, the soaring summit of Dunmyat, as the sun rose in a cloudless sky bringing in the morning of Sunday, the vigil of Saint John. Its earliest rays shone on the Scottish soldiers, kneeling in their ranks, as the Abbot of Inchaffray celebrated mass and offered the immemorial Scottish prayer—"God schaw the right!" No sign of the enemy was visible upon the plain to the south, although the Scottish commanders were well informed that he had lain at Falkirk overnight, barely three leagues distant. It was nearly high noon before the scouts brought word that the English were in full march upon Stirling, and nearly two hours later their advanced guard could be descried upon the rising ground about Plean. None doubted that the attack would be delivered that day, and Gloucester's glittering array drew near and ever nearer, till the Scottish knights could distinguish the bearings on the banners, and began reckoning in jest the price of ransom they would ask from their owners.

While all eyes were bent upon the coming foe, an untoward event took place. The Scottish picket in the village of Saint Ninian's, the extreme left of the line, gave the alarm that a clump of spears had ridden as if from Stirling, under the brow of the rising ground, and so cut across the carse to meet the English advanced guard. It was Sir Philip de Mowbray, the governor of besieged Stirling, who, well informed by spies of the nature of the Scottish king's dispositions, had escaped in order to urge King Edward not to press his attack.

"My lord of Gloucester," he said, when he was brought before the commander of the English vanguard, "I do beseech you to advance no farther till you have taken

advice with my lord the king. The Scots position cannot be approached by cavalry. I am well persuaded that if you pursue your present line, you will encounter disaster."

"What! would you have me turn tail before the rangail on yonder hills?" asked the proud young earl. "Sir Philip, Sir Philip, such is not the kind of counsel that will prevail with me at this hour. We shall brush them aside, and you shall ride with me to sup in Stirling."

"I am not one to counsel turning of tails, my lord," retorted Sir Philip, "but I tell you a cavalry attack by the Roman way must fail. My lord the king must send his cavalry by the carse, making a diversion while the divisions of foot press their attack in front."

"You may carry your advice to the king himself, then," said Gloucester, taking fire, "for I am not one of those who turn aside when the enemy is in sight. God's blood! Sir Philip, have a care that the king does not chide you for abandoning your castle at such a moment as this."

"At another time, my lord, you shall answer for this affront. Meanwhile, please God that your folly does not cost us a defeat," and Sir Philip drew his horse aside and said no more words.

Gloucester held his way, but Mowbray, long versed in Scottish warfare, was so strongly convinced of the only kind of tactics which might overcome King Robert's opposition, that he spurred on to meet the king. From him he got a more patient hearing. A council of war was summoned, and the majority of voices were given for delaying the attack until next day, seeing that both horse and foot were greatly exhausted by the sultry heat. Gloucester paid no heed to the summons recalling his

advanced guard. The school of chivalry was a bad academy of discipline; he was nettled at Mowbray's attempt to delay his advance, and thought to settle the whole affair by a brilliant *coup-de-main.*

"If Stirling is so loosely beleaguered that Sir Philip can ride out at his pleasure, what hinders but that we should ride in?"

He halted his division upon the green hillside of Charters Hall in plain view of the Scottish array, distant not more than two bowshots, the brook running between them. Although rash to a fault, Gloucester had the talents of a skilful tactician, and perceived that, in order to throw a body of horse into Stirling, he must divert the attention of the Scottish army from their left flank by a demonstration in their front. He chose a device characteristic not only of himself, but of the times and of the whole ceremonial character of the campaign. He sent Sir Henry de Bohun, one of the most redoubted champions of the lists, riding forward alone, to challenge any Scottish knight to single combat. Then he ordered Sir Robert de Clifford, commanding the cavalry of the advanced guard, to take three squadrons of his best horse and lead them under the brae of Saint Ninian's, and so into the besieged town.

Clifford, a dashing and intrepid commander, found this duty exactly to his liking. He chose for the work Sir Henry de Beaumont, Sir Thomas Gray, and Sir Walter le Marmion, and these formed their squadrons upon the right of the English line, waiting for the signal to march.

Meanwhile Sir Henry de Bohun, glittering in silver and blue, his horse splendidly caparisoned with blue cloth housings, embroidered with silver lioncels, rode forward alone upon the Roman way. This led through the

marshes upon an amphitheatre of firm pasture, in the middle of which he halted and winded a defiant blast upon his horn. The challenge was well understood. The King of Scots, who had been riding up and down the ranks exhorting his men and correcting their position, reined up his palfrey. To him galloped up Sir James of Douglas on a splendid black war-horse.

"A challenge, my lord!" said he; "I crave the favour of accepting it in person for the honour of Scotland."

"Better champion could no king desire," returned Robert, "but I have a mind to renew my old acquaintance with Bohun in person."

"Surely, sire, you will not expose yourself mounted and armed as you are. Bethink you what issues hang upon your life; for all our sakes, I beseech you to let another take up this challenge."

"Never fear for me," answered the king. "God hath given me a head as well as hands, and I am accustomed to rely upon the one as much as upon the other. Ride you back to your people, and I will speak to you anon. Nay, go, Douglas," he added firmly, as he saw Sir James hesitating, "for such is our pleasure at this time."

Then was enacted a wonderful scene before the soldiers of both nations—a scene which none who witnessed it would ever forget. The King of Scots had left aside his surcoat by reason of the heat; he was plainly clad in shirt and cuisses of mail, which had gathered some rust in the bivouac. He carried no shield; the only indication of his rank was a light diadem of gold encircling his simple cap of corbuyle; neither held he a spear, only a battle-axe, of such weight as few but himself could wield. Bestriding a hill-pony, he looked almost mean as he

trotted down the gentle slope in the broad sunlight to meet the English chevalier, who seemed to tower above him on his noble destrier.

De Bohun appeared to hesitate for a moment, as if disdaining such an unequal opponent; then dropping his spear-point to the charge, he set spurs to his horse and drove straight against the king. Not a sound stirred among the thirty thousand spectators; the destiny of the two kingdoms was at stake. Next moment a great roar crashed along the Scottish line. The English knight's charger was careering back towards Gloucester's columns, his rider lay on the greensward with a great cleft through helm and brain-pan, and the King of Scots was riding quietly up the northern slope, eyeing the broken shaft of a battle-axe in his hand. His pony, answering nimbly to the bit, had swerved when his adversary's spear-point was within a cubit of its mark; true was the eye and tough the sinew that sped a back-handed blow. Brave de Bohun had ridden his last course.

Gloucester's ruse to divert attention from de Clifford's movement had been perfectly effective. King Robert had specially charged the Earl of Moray to watch the road through the carse to Stirling, of which his higher position gave him a better view than could be had from other parts of the Scottish line. But almost the first thing which met King Robert's eyes as he reached the crest where his standard was planted was the glitter of English spears and steel-caps in rear of his own left flank. The road to Stirling lay open to these squadrons; in a few minutes the gage would be redeemed by King Edward, and the garrison would be relieved. A bitter curse rose to his lips.

"Randolph, Randolph! could you not watch one hour?

Go tell our nephew that he has let fall a rose from his chaplet, and bid him keep surer watch."

Moray was stung with shame; yet who shall blame him? What soldier so staunch or so stolid as could have kept his eyes turned from that momentous combat in the plain? The young earl had no cavalry; to set out after de Clifford's squadrons with infantry seemed a futile enterprise; yet he did it. There was nothing else to do. By keeping along the firm ground his light-footed spearmen might yet intercept the English men-at-arms as they rode heavily in the clay; and with two thousand "gillie-wet-foots" from Findhorn and Strathspey, he was immediately in hot pursuit.

Vain attempt! By the time they cleared the skirts of the forest at Torbrex, the English squadrons were already as far as Wester Livilands, and Moray gnashed his teeth in impotent wrath at the consequences of his oversight. Nevertheless, the foolish confidence of the English knights restored to him the chance he had forfeited. Sir Henry de Beaumont, riding with de Clifford at the head of the column, happened to cast his eyes towards the Scottish position, and descried Randolph's spears issuing from the wood.

"Ha!" cried he, "look at the Highland kernes; they have missed their mark by five minutes. By the wounds of Christ! de Clifford, we must read these fellows a lesson in punctuality. Let them come into the open, and then we shall see how they relish the taste of English steel."

Clifford had been trained in a school which held fair mellay the dearest boon that could befall a knight. He halted his column, and, wheeling to the left, deployed in line of battle.

"We are in luck," quoth he to Marmion, as he passed

down the ranks of the Kendal horse. "I see the white star of Moray on yonder banner. Well would I love to take the young traitor, were it but to pay him off for his masquerade on the Water of Lyne."

But Marmion, for once, was indisposed for adventure. He had heard de Clifford receive his orders, which were that he should ride straight into Stirling, and thus fulfil the King of England's pledge, and he knew the Scottish pikemen too well not to foresee hazard to the mission in thus going out of their way to encounter them.

"I crave your grace, Sir Robert," said he, "but were it not well to push on to Stirling while the road is clear? I reckon there are nothing less than two thousand pikes in yonder column."

"Look you, Marmion!" interposed de Beaumont roughly, "if you are afraid, we can do this bit of work without you and your yellow jackets. Away with you! and get behind the walls as quickly as you please."

"Sir," replied Marmion quietly, "you know me better than to suspect me of fear. My whole jealousy is for the king's service."

By this time the Scots were out upon the level ground, advancing in that solid "schiltrom" formation which Wallace had borrowed from the Flemings. It was one of the traditions of chivalry that foot-soldiers could not hold their own upon even ground against good cavalry; but it was a tradition which was doomed to be washed from the record in much blood. When Randolph heard the English trumpets sounding the advance he halted his schiltrom: the men faced outwards, the outer ranks kneeling with their pike-butts firmly planted on the soil, the inner ranks, with longer pike-shafts, holding their weapons horizontally below the breast; thus presenting a

hedge of steel to all assailants, impregnable as long as those who held the pikes did not flinch.

There was no flinching among Moray's men. The English squadrons launched themselves again and again in vain against the dauntless Highlanders, then circled round about the schiltrom, yet found never a weak spot. Sir William d'Eyncourt fell at Marmion's side in the first charge; in the second, Marmion's good horse was fairly impaled on the pikes, and a score of brown hands clutched his jupon and drew him, struggling fiercely, within the press.

Gaspard de Neville, burning to win his spurs and charging at his master's side, met a more cruel fate. Such was the speed and force with which he drove his horse against the fence of bristling points, that he crushed the kneeling rank to the ground; but the pikeman standing behind received the gallant squire upon his weapon, as he was thrown forward with fearful violence. The tough ashen shaft bent like a reed, yet the point went home, piercing the mail of proof as though it had been parchment. He fell at Marmion's feet, as his brother had fallen in the Glen of Trool; and even in the stress of that awful combat, when his comrades were dying on every hand and his own plight was a maddening one, the knight's thoughts flew back to the days when Challice had sent him first one, then another, of her kinsmen to win their way to fame.

It was pitiful to see those fine horsemen dashing themselves upon the cruel points and unable to exchange death and wounds with those who dealt them so securely. Clifford saw the game was up; hurling his heavy mace with all his might and with such good aim that it tore the brooch from Moray's shoulder and felled a rear-rank man on the far side of the square, he bade his trumpeter sound

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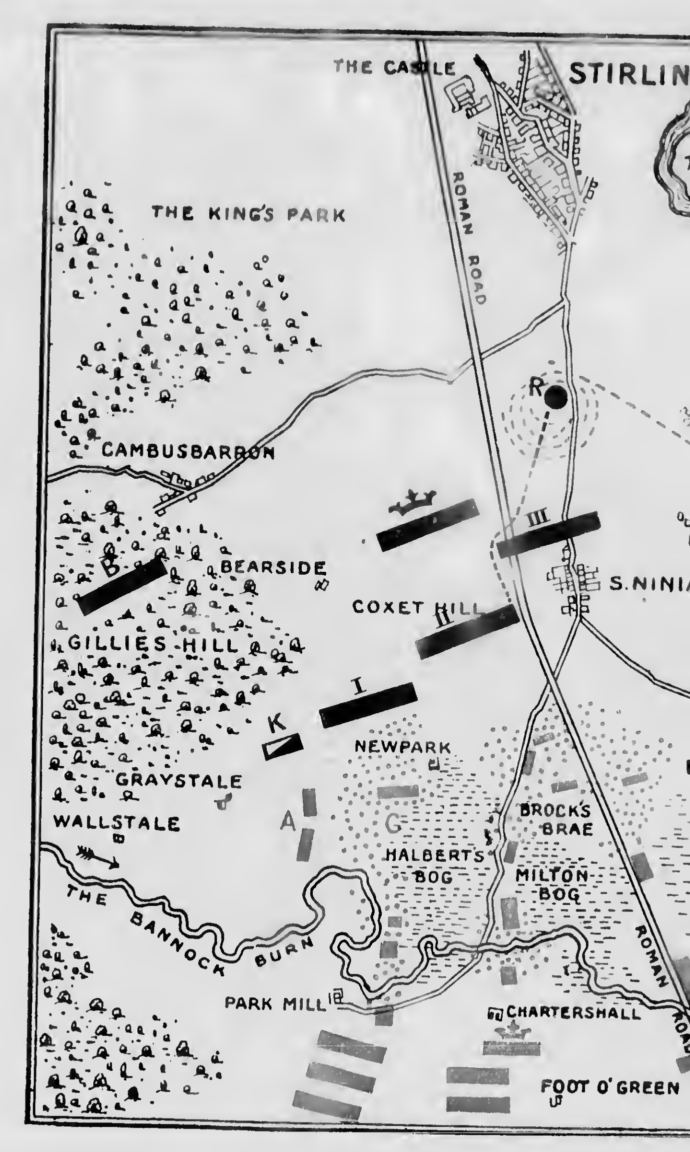
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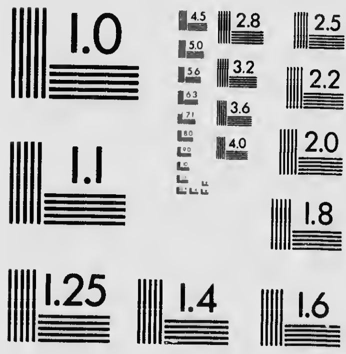
THE BATTLE OF BANNOCKBURN,
24th June 1314.

♔	The King of Scots commanding Reserve.
▬	Scottish Divisions.
I	Edward de Brus.
II	Randolph.
III	Douglas and Walter the Steward.
K	Sir Robert de Keith's Horse.
B	Baggage and camp-followers.
R	Randolph's Engagement on 23rd June.
♔	The King of England.
▬	English Columns advancing.
A	English Archers playing on Edward de Brus's flank.
G	Gloucester's Heavy Cavalry charging.
C	De Clifford and De Beaumont's Ride with Light Cavalry on 23rd June.

MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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the "retire," and drew off his shattered squadrons, just as Douglas was approaching with a reinforcement.[1] He left more than fourscore dead horses round the fatal schiltrom, and as many of his knights and soldiers either slain or taken prisoners.

Marmion's golden helmet marked him out as a great prize; indeed he was easily recognised thereby, for the fame of the splendid crest had not been forgotten in Scottish camp-lore. For the second time he stood before the King of Scots, a prisoner taken in open mellay.

"Ha, sir knight!" quoth King Robert, when he saw him, "so the fortune of war has unfriended you once again. Blame us not if your ransom stands at a higher figure than when we last fixed it in the Glen of Trool. It is your own valour which has enhanced its value."

"Your troops have taught us a lesson, sire, this day," said Marmion, "which I trust King Edward's commanders will lay to heart. They are the only foot-soldiers I ever saw that could withstand a charge of de Clifford's horse."

"That is a matter, sir knight, which we will gladly discuss with you at a time of more leisure," replied the king. "Meanwhile, in order that your captivity may be as little irksome to your valiancy as may be, we will accept your parole, if you care to give it, not to go beyond our outposts, and to surrender to us at sundown to-morrow."

"I thank you, sire," said Marmion; "but seeing that the Earl of Moray has taken many prisoners, we must put him to the trouble of guarding us till such time as fair rescue appears."

[1] Two large stones, set up about a hundred yards west of the high-road leading south from Stirling, mark the position of Randolph Moray's "schiltrom," and the place is known to this day as Randolph's Field.

"There spoke a true soldier," exclaimed King Robert approvingly. "Know, sir knight, that we esteem you not the less that you prefer your king's interest to your own convenience."

"I, too, may claim the honour of acquaintance with Sir Walter le Marmion," lisped Sir James of Douglas, "bearing as I do in lively remembrance his skill as a horseman. We are neither of us likely to forget the braes of Norham, I trow."

He spoke with such kindly grace as immediately won the English knight's favour. War is shorn of much of its rigour when opponents in the mellay meet without rancour after the fray.

It was easy for the Scottish leaders to be of gentle humour that night. Their spirits and the spirits of all their men had been greatly cheered by the events of the day. Gloucester, on the other hand, fell back in the evening to join the bivouac of the main body of the English, profoundly chagrined by the evil omens which had befallen his first essay, and vowing that next day should see exemplary vengeance wrought upon the Scots.

Marmion, too, was cast down in spirit, not so much because of his imprisonment,—he had learnt enough of the soldier's *hodie mihi, cras tibi* philosophy to despair greatly upon that account,—but because of the gallant fellows in Challice's squadron who had fallen before the cruel Scottish pikes. He knew how sorely their lady would mourn for the honest blue eyes closed for evermore, and for the mourning that would darken many a Westmorland grange, and all because of de Beaumont's headstrong folly. But more than all was he filled with apprehension by something that occurred while he sat in Douglas's booth of branches, discussing salmon-steak, broiled mutton, and

rye-bread. The captain of the Selkirk bowmen presented himself to his chief and announced that an English knight had delivered himself to the outposts with his men-at-arms, and desired to be brought before Douglas, who bade him be admitted at once. To his horror, Marmion recognised Sir Alexander de Seton, a Scot it is true, but one who had consistently served the English cause and held an important command in Gloucester's division.

"I have come," said he, "to tell you that I am King Edward's man no more. My heart smote me this morning when I heard the pibroch of Moray, and I vowed that, come what might, I would bear arms against my countrymen no more."

"Your conversion savours something of deathbed repentance," observed Douglas with hauteur. "Do you wish to take service under the King of Scots?"

"That is as my lord the king pleases," returned the deserter. "I renounce my allegiance to King Edward; I am ready to do fealty to the King of Scots. Meanwhile, I yield myself your prisoner; do with me as you list."

"I can but do my duty," said Douglas still more coldly, for he was suspicious of some ruse. "Your valiancy must submit to be disarmed, and your followers also, until I can take the king's pleasure in the matter. Meanwhile, Sir Alexander, it grieves me that I cannot bid you sit at our humble board until you have made your peace with the king. You will not be offended if I offer you refreshment under the stars."

"I understand," replied Seton bitterly; "appearances are certainly against me. But if you put not my case before the king this night, at least give him these tidings. Say to him, that if he would be King of Scotland his

hour has come. He must strike, and strike home, on the morrow. Tell him there is dismay in the English camp; that my lord of Gloucester is at issue with de Valence and the other lords, who blame him for the disasters of this day; that all the nobles alike are murmuring at the favour shown to Sir Hugh le Despenser, the king's new favourite; that the common soldiers are dispirited and dreading an attack. I would counsel the king to lead the assault upon them where they lie, and not wait until another sun revives their spirit."

Something in Seton's manner, added to what Douglas knew of his honourable character, more than half-convinced him that he was sincere. He took Seton before the king, who listened attentively to his tale, and then bade him withdraw.

"Now look you, Douglas," said he, when they were alone together, "think you this knight is either a spy or a common renegade?"

"Spy he is none," replied Douglas, "for no good knight would venture his credit in that dirty traffic. As for renegade—sangdieu! that cap fits him well who deserts his colours on the eve of battle; but *common* Seton never was nor will be. Sire, I believe he has told you the whole truth."

"I am of the same mind," said the King of Scots, "and I am determined to shape my plan accordingly. The night is young yet, but our people sleep sound. It had been my purpose to wake them before daybreak and to strike into the Lennox, leaving the road to Stirling open to the English king. Hunger would soon work as great havoc in his ranks as I could hope to do at great cost to my own subjects. Yet even now, at the eleventh hour, I am not too proud to change my counsel. If Edward

is so simple as to attack us in front only, I shall hold my ground. If he threatens our left flank also, there will yet be time to move off by our right, and so into the Tor Wood; whither I cannot wish him a worse doom than to follow us."

"Well spoken, sire!" exclaimed Douglas, with blazing eyes. "By the five wounds! but that is a hearing refreshes me like a cup of good wine."

And thus it was settled that the great issue should be determined in the open field.

XXIII.

Of the meeting of the Kings before Stirling, and of the calamity that God sent upon the Leopards of England.

UPON that night, the shortest of all the year, profound stillness wrapt all the Scottish bivouac. The watch-fires were allowed to burn down to ash-heaps; scarcely a breeze stirred the warm air; light-shod reliefs moved silent and ghost-like across the moonlit turf, and all was silent, save for the challenge of the rounds and sentries. Marmion, after sharing Douglas's simple fare, had been removed to join his fellow-prisoners upon a wooded hill[1] in the King's Park, a mile or so in rear of the Scottish position, where the baggage and camp-followers lay in a separate camp strongly guarded. Despite his fatigue, despite the comparative comfort of the bed of heather prepared for him, he could not sleep for anxiety as to the fortunes of the coming day. Seton's description of the discord among his brothers-in-arms filled him with apprehension; his experience in war, and the sample he had witnessed already of the steadiness of King Robert's levies, convinced him that, even with his immensely superior numbers, King Edward must not throw away a single point in

[1] Known to this day as the Gillies Hill.

the game if he would rise a winner—could not afford any errors in tactics if he would avoid a terrible disaster.

King Robert's strategy was far too wary and well thought out to permit him to listen to Seton's advice to move out from the position he had so carefully planned in order to deliver a counter-attack. At daybreak on the feast of Saint John, the Scottish troops stood to arms : once more the good Abbot of Inchaffray celebrated mass and carried the host in procession down the entire front, followed by a priest carrying the silver shrine of Saint Fillan, enclosing a relic of peculiar sanctity. Then the camp-fires were rekindled; the great kettles began to steam, and the men set to at what was to be a last meal for many of them.

The sun was not very high before the English advanced guard appeared in sight for the second time, and the Scottish scouts began returning within the outposts. Eagerly King Robert questioned them about the enemy's line of march, and gladly flashed the light from his eyes when each one declared that the English were moving along the line of the Roman way in ten divisions, formed in two parallel columns, with Gloucester's single division as advanced guard, and that of the Earl of Angus as rear-guard. There were no signs of a parallel movement by the carse, of which the surface was seamed by innumerable water-courses, deeply cut in the clay, and broken by marshes and water-pans, exceedingly embarrassing to heavy cavalry.

"Douglas," exclaimed the King of Scots, turning to his trusted lieutenant, "God and Saint Fillan have not failed us. We have but to hold our ground, and the day must be ours!"

From his position in the baggage-camp on Gillies Hill

Marmion could plainly distinguish the English array, as division after division moved into view upon the open ground about Plean. The Scottish pickets and vedettes fell back before the advanced guard, which was led, as on the previous day, by the Earl of Gloucester, his golden gonfalon, with scarlet chevronals, flaming afar in the clear morning light. A pang shot through Sir Walter's heart as he marked a yellow-coated troop of horse—the remnant of his own command, Challice's Kendal squadron—with whom he might not charge that day.

An ordinary spectator, unversed in Scottish warfare, and without experience of the stern quality of King Robert's levies, the contrast between the opposing armies must have felt little doubt as to which should conquer in the coming strife. King Edward's host wound like a glittering dragon across the undulating plain, the sunlight flashing upon tens of thousands of steel points and lighting up the glory of myriad gonfalons, pennons, and pencils. Powerful as the approaching columns were, and actually outnumbering the Scottish force by three to one, the great strength of the English cavalry increased their seeming disparity, and lent them an appearance of weight which should make their onset irresistible. It was hardly possible to believe that of the four compact "schiltroms," drawn up on the hither side of the Bannock, anything but shattered fragments could survive the passage of that steel-clad torrent. There was little display of heraldry or gay clothing in the Scottish ranks. The royal gonfalon, indeed—the sanguine lion within the tressure upon the golden field—flamed from its lofty staff like a beacon planted in the midst of Randolph Moray's schiltrom. A few other banners there were, bearing well-known devices—the stars and chief of Douglas, the fess chequy of the

Steward, the scarlet chevron of Carrick, displayed by Edward de Brus—but the general effect was sombre. The dews of many nights had dimmed the brightness of arms and harness; the principal chevaliers wore gay jupons broidered with their arms, but their chargers carried no housings such as blazed in all the English ranks. Hodden grey was the dominant tone in the westland levies of the Steward; the king's own men of Carrick wore the same; while the Islesmen under Angus Og were dark with ill-burnished steel and brown leathern doublets. Even the tartan of Moray's Highlanders showed black upon the field; Douglas's archers were in green. The only dainty display in the whole Scottish line was made by Sir Robert de Keith's little brigade of horse—five hundred strong—finely clad over their mail in white doublets lined with scarlet.

But to a soldier's eye there was something ominous in the steadiness and silence of the Scottish columns. Marmion, who had proved more than once the mettle of King Robert's pikemen, and who noted the skill with which the masses had been placed, foresaw that it would be no child's play to dislodge them. Gloucester he loved and valued as an intrepid leader, but he could not conceal from himself that the reconnaissance of the previous day had been conducted rather in bravado and impatience for the fray than with serious purpose of ascertaining the enemy's exact position and studying the approaches to it.

"Now God grant," quoth he to old Sir Thomas Gray, standing beside him, a prisoner like himself, "that my lord the king will not be so ill advised as to deliver a frontal attack, unless he sends a strong turning force round their left flank."

"Faith! our captains have little liking for that low

ground with its runnels and pools," answered the other. "Each man hugs the hard ground, and those of our troop who escaped yesterday will carry a sorry description of the going in the plain."

"Bah!" exclaimed Marmion impatiently, "if our lords are afraid of soiling their silk jupons and horse-housings, there is no more to be said. But mark you this, Sir Thomas, if the whole advance comes where my lord of Gloucester is now leading, there will be sore trouble over it. Why, sir, there is neither space to manœuvre a peloton between those bogs, nor room to form for attack after defiling."

The suspense was acute, but it was not prolonged. Gloucester's brilliant squadrons halted on the south side of the stream, delaying their attack while King Edward, the royal leopards floating before him, took up a position at Charter's Hall, opposite the centre of the Scottish line, and to the west of the Roman road. There had been disputes and heartburning about the order of those in attendance upon him, as there were disputes and heartburning about most matters concerning this unhappy king. Edward had laid commands upon his new favourite, Sir Hugh le Despenser, to ride at his right rein; but the Earl of Pembroke claimed his right to that post of honour as premier baron of England after the absent Henry of Lancaster; neither would Sir Giles de Argentine suffer the Despenser to ride at the left rein, which was Argentine's place in virtue of his rank as the third knight in Christendom. So the Despenser had to ride behind the king, with the grim old warrior Sir Ingram de Umfraville.

King Edward presented in his person the very ideal of Christian knighthood. Tall, handsome, athletic, he sat

his magnificent destrier with all the power and grace of his sire; he wore no vizor, but a circlet of gold round his flat steel cap, his coif and shirt of mail shone like pure silver, and the scarlet jupon, with the golden leopards passant on the breast, proclaimed afar the conqueror of Scotland. As he scanned the obscure array upon the opposing height, he laughed aloud.

"Do they really mean fighting, these clowns?" quoth he, "or shall we shake our spears and scare them from our path? See! they kneel for mercy already."

In truth they were kneeling, but to no earthly potentate. The Scots bent the knee to the crucifix which, at this last moment, the Abbot of Inchaffray carried in procession from flank to flank.

None made answer but Sir Ingram—one who never spoke without purpose.

"Be not deceived, sire," he said; "I know these men; they will fight, and to the death. Beseech you, sire, be advised in time; while the Scots are in that formation upon such ground, you cannot break them. There is but one way to deal with them. If your Highness will order a retreat, the feint will lure them to pursuit; we shall then turn and have them at our mercy."

"You speak a hard saying, Sir Ingram," replied the king. "We cannot even feign retreat before such a rabble as is yonder. We will take a shorter way with them. Send five companies of our best archers forward on the left to skirt yon wood and play on the Scottish right, while our cousin of Gloucester charges them in front. Now let the trumpeters sound the assault, and our drums beat the point of war."

Gloucester wanted no second bidding. Down the green slope before them swept the stately squadrons with clatter

of harness, thunder of hoofs, and fluttering of banners. Then might be seen, or ever they reached the foe, a wavering in the ranks; a score or so of men-at-arms fell crashing, horse and man, as the treacherous pitfalls did their deadly work. Those behind pressed on, or, pulling aside to clear their fallen comrades, were mired in the boggy ground. The whole array was in confusion before a blow could be struck; but still the cry was "Forward!" They did not flinch from it, the brave fellows; by twos and threes they struggled through the labyrinth, but leaving half their number behind. The captains reformed their troops under the hill on the Scottish side of the brook; they were within bowshot of the enemy now, but the shafts fell almost harmless among them, for men and horses were mail-clad.

Forward again! A thousand spears were lowered to rest as Gloucester, shouting "Saint George! Saint George!" led the charge upon Edward de Brus's schiltrom. But the ground was against him; the weight of armour on man and horse, which ought to have lent force to the impact, told against the assailants charging up hill. The solid square never rocked or flexed. The attack completely failed; but Gloucester, frantic at the miscarriage, rallying a few of his best round him, launched them in a supreme attempt. He succeeded in breaking the ranks, and dealt death around him with whirling mace. But it was to no avail; the men of Ayr and Lanark closed up as their comrades fell. Gloucester's horse went down; the rider stood a few moments at bay, for he was a prize too rich for common butchery; but he would accept no quarter: a bruised and bloody corpse was soon all that remained of the noblest of England's chivalry.

Of all this Marmion beheld not the details from his

distant point of view; only he saw that the attack had most grievously failed. Gloucester's men-at-arms straggled back singly and in broken groups across the brook, leaving their course strewn with dead and dying beasts and men; powerless for offence, yet sufficing to throw into much confusion the foremost companies of infantry, which were now hurrying forward to support Gloucester's attack. The pressure in the narrow ground became terrible; the air rang with commands which the men could not move to obey; many went down, stumbling in the pitfalls or sinking in the mire, never to rise again, trampled to suffocation under their comrades' feet.

But in the meantime some impression was being made upon the Scottish right, which had stood the brunt of heavy horse so well. The English archers had extended across the brook upon the bushy slopes of Graystale, and, as soon as Gloucester's horse fell back, began to pour a heavy enfilading fire upon Edward de Brus's solid column. Men were dropping fast there — men who had never flinched before the mailed men-at-arms, turned restless under the stinging storm that hissed upon their flank. The King of Scots perceived this ominous stir in the grey-coated ranks, and moved Randolph's schiltrom along the ridge to steady them with his support. Then he galloped to where Keith held his white squadrons in reserve.

"You see yonder hornets that have come out of the wood: rid me of them! Take them in flank and drive them to the devil!"

Keith wanted no second bidding. Swiftly, without sound of trumpet, his light horsemen took ground to the right; then, wheeling left, swept upon the scattered bowmen, who were completely surprised. Many a brave lad

from Lincolnshire and Sherwood Forest fitted his last notch to string, and took his last look at this fair world. King Edward's only good bit of tactics that day had been wrecked by the vigilance of his rival.

Of what befell thereafter it is pitiful to tell. The two great columns continued to press forward, the English king trusting by sheer weight to bear down the Scottish defence. He had no choice but to retire, or to thrust troop upon troop, battalion upon battalion, for room there was none to manœuvre. But the weight was spent or ever it could tell upon the enemy. Secure upon their trifling eminence —an eminence on the scale of that which wrinkles the plain stretching from Hougomont by La Haye Sainte to Papelotte—the Scots stood motionless, unharmed, beholding the entire hollow between Park Mill and the Whins of Milton filling with a struggling, sweltering, swearing mass of horse and foot, utterly without semblance of formation. On the Scottish left, Douglas extended some Selkirk bowmen, better and stronger marksmen than the rest of their nation, who played upon the seething crowd with deadly effect. It was horrible work. A few knights and men-at-arms got through the throng and with noble devotion breasted the hill, only to perish upon the fatal pikes. Horrible! but worse was to come. The King of Scots saw that the valley of death would hold no more; neither could those within it retreat, because of the masses behind. Moving up the royal gonfalon and aligning his reserve upon the divisions of Randolph and Douglas, he rode before the whole line, and, horse and man standing in the clear sunlight, held his right hand aloft as a signal to advance. It does his leaders credit that there was no breaking away; they held their men well in hand. A hundred pipes struck up the well-known air, "Hey tutti

taiti," and the dark wave rolled steadily over the crest upon the helpless mass below. Then it was slay, slay, slay! upon the common men, and "Yield you my prisoner!" between the knights. King Edward, his father's spirit afire within him, had ridden forward in the mellay. Edward de Brus's men had nearly taken him; their hands were actually on his horse-trappings; but he plied his mace and cleared his room. Then Aymer de Valence, pale as parchment, but sweating great drops of agony, cried in his ear so that he might hear above the din—

"The day is lost, sire; you must turn with me and ride for your life."

His other attendant, Sir Giles de Argentine, was of a like mind. He bade the king ride to Stirling, where he might be in safety.

"But I must resign your rein, sire. An Argentine quits not thus a stricken field. I commend you to God!"

Then this famous knight turned his horse's head, and, laying lance in rest, drove at speed into the press. There was a crashing sound, and such stir in the multitude as a bold swimmer makes when he plunges into the tide. Argentine transfixed a Carrick spearman, and, dropping his lance, plied right and left with busy mace. This tall figure, clad in scarlet, closely semée with golden cups and crosslets, towered for an instant over the throng; then he too went under, and the hero of a score of battles was no more.

When the gillies and camp-followers beheld the Scottish line move forward, they could be restrained no longer. With loud cries of "Spulzie! spulzie!" and with blankets and plaids set on poles in lieu of banners, they broke through the baggage-guard and rushed down the hill,

eager for a share of booty. It marked the turning of the tide. English commanders in rear of the fighting line thought they beheld the coming of a great reinforcement to the Scots. Unable to advance a step because of the throng in the valley, and pressed upon intolerably by their own comrades farther to the rear, they sent back urgent entreaties that the advance might be stayed. The messengers enforced their words with such vehement gestures as were interpreted as signals for flight. Here half-a-dozen files broke away—there a whole company; like a fell contagion the panic spread: battalions, brigades, divisions, lost their fair array; horse and foot, bowmen and spearmen—green, red, white, and blue—wavered, swayed, and melted into a shapeless horde; in vain knights and captains pled and swore, and even smote their men; soon a vast swarm of flying soldiery filled the whole upland from Foot-o'-Green to Plean. Never, since England was a nation, had such ruin come upon her arms.

XXIV.

Of certain gests whereof it ill pleaseth an Englishman to hear, and of other matter which he will brook with the greater patience seeing that it is brief.

THE guard upon the English prisoners in the Scottish camp joined in the maddened throng that flew upon the plunder, thus. Marmion and his fellows found themselves at liberty. A graceless, bootless boon for seven-and-twenty unarmed men with the solid Scottish line of schiltroms between them and their friends.

"Sir Thomas Gray," said Marmion to his chief companion in misfortune, "there are but two courses for us—either to go and die like sheep in yonder slaughter-yard, or to make for the gates of Stirling and help Sir Philip's defence. Say which you will and I am with you."

"I hold little by life after this day," answered the veteran, "yet I care not to go to my death with not so much as a misericorde in my fist. Here we cannot bide, for it pleases me not to look longer upon that ugsome strife. Methinks we will serve a better purpose by going to Stirling; nay, it is our duty, de Mowbray's garrison being the nearest of the king's forces to this place."

They set off without further parley—a downcast mournful band—Sir Thomas Gray having not so much spirit

left as even to allude to his early experience in the memorable siege.

They had not traversed half the distance when they saw a troop of horse advancing at speed from the castle.

"The king!" exclaimed Marmion in amazement, as he discerned the leopards on the royal surcoat. "The king! how comes he here?"

It was the King of England, indeed, without banner or pennon, but with de Valence still at his rein, and a troop of horse as escort. They swept swiftly past, their horses stripped of the gay caparison of the morning and all that could encumber speed, nor had one of the company a glance or a word for the wayfarers.

"How comes he here?" Marmion repeated; and it was not till he stood within the walls of Stirling that he found an answer.

"My lord of Pembroke brought the king here for refuge," said Sir Philip de Mowbray. "'If the day be lost indeed,' quoth I, 'take my lord the king back to the field, and there let him yield to King Hobbe, rather than be taken like a stag in the toils, for I must keep my pledge and give up the keys to Edward de Brus this night.' 'Now blast me for a fool if I had any mind of that!' cried de Valence, and then he swore the king should not yield yet. He asked me if I could give him a sure guide through the passes of the Tor Wood, and I answered yea, but that he must leave one of his troop in place of him, seeing that I was bound by my troth to deliver up the full muster under arms upon Saint John's day. He cursed me for a prater, but I paid no heed, seeing that the stress was sore; and anon they set out again, holding course for Dunbar, I ween, where my lord the king will take ship for England."

"Better had he found his death," exclaimed Marmion fiercely, "than play the dastard thus. Give me arms and a horse, Mowbray, and let me back to the field, a God's name. You have no use for me here."

He would listen to no remonstrance; he could not rest within walls when his men were in distress. It was about three hours after noon when he set out with a few trusty spears, and rode at a gallop to Saint Ninian's. But the battle had roared and rolled away to the south. Dead and dying horses and men strewed all the ground; heaps of them lay in the brook, damming it into gory pools; crowds of men and women, aye, and children too, had gathered to the ghoulish work which follows the fray, stripping the dead, snarling and fighting over heaps of blood-soaked spoil. Sick in body and soul, Marmion made what speed he could over the cumbered sward, burning to strike yet one blow for his country, and to meet a soldier's death.

He thought of Challice as he rode, waiting his return to Kendal with that confidence which all men felt in the speedy success of the war. How sweet was the vision of that far-off, orderly home, with its tranquil monotony of peace and love; sweeter because of the misery and ruin around—the despair before him. It cost him an effort to persevere. He had done all that duty required; the king had fled, leaving his subjects to the fate his own folly had prepared for them. Why should one of his knights do more? *Sauve qui peut* was the word: why should he be the only one to be deaf to it? Such thoughts as these whirled through his brain, but they found no tarrying there. Marmion was not one to slip on the knightly profession like a holiday garment, to be cast aside as occasion suited. The image of his wife

still floated before him, but he knew that her brave spirit was one with his; she would never have bid him seek safety by sharing his king's dishonour. Rather than lose her he would have risked eternal salvation; but rather than see the shade of shame in her eyes, he would never look upon her again.

So he spurred on, but he had not ridden half a league past the Bannock before he fell in with another king. Surrounded by a troop of Keith's white-coated horsemen, the King of Scots was picking his way to whence he came. The pursuit had been carried as far as men afoot could follow to any good purpose. The victory was assured, and King Robert bade his captains recall their men and march back to camp. Only Douglas was allowed to persevere, with sixty of Keith's cavalry, hot upon King Edward's track. Marmion's first impulse was to charge the king's body-guard, but his common-sense prevailed. What purpose could it serve but to rid himself of life and sacrifice his handful of followers? He disdained to fly; indeed the way to flight was barred, for now he could see detached columns of Scots coming up behind their king. So he simply stood his ground, feeling it were no dishonour to yield himself prisoner to such a king.

King Robert was weary; long years of warfare had wasted the frame and stiffened the limbs which once had seemed of more than mortal endurance; but his eye brightened as he recognised the Lord of Fontenaye.

"Your friends have met with a rude handling this day, sir knight," he said. "Our troops have taken many prisoners, yet not one has fallen to our own share. They will mock at us if we return empty-handed. Come, yield you to the King of Scots!"

"These three times, sire," replied Marmion, "has my fortune played me false; but yield I see I must, and truly it could not be to a more puissant captain than your Grace."

Then Marmion and his companions gave up the arms they had borrowed from Mowbray, but the gracious king would not suffer the knight to feel all the humiliation of defeat. He caused Sir Walter to ride at his rein the whole way back to Stirling, discussing with him earnestly the various points in the battle, criticising with professional keenness the errors in Edward's tactics, and bearing generous testimony to the extraordinary devotion and fortitude displayed by English soldiers of every degree under most disheartening conditions.

Next day there was laid before the king in Stirling Castle a report of the prisoners taken. It contained the names of no fewer than twenty-two barons and bannerets, sixty knights, and many esquires. Besides these, there were known already to have been slain of notable men twenty-one English barons and bannerets, among whom Marmion had to mourn for his ancient captain the dauntless de Clifford, and his firm friend the Earl of Gloucester; also the enormous number of nearly seven hundred gentlemen of coat-armour. Of the common men who perished no estimate could be made, nor can any be made at this day by reckoning them in any proportion to those of rank, inasmuch as in warfare, as it was then waged, no quarter was offered to one who could not be held to ransom. Landless and moneyless prisoners were but a costly encumbrance; whereas nobles and knights and esquires of degree all carried a price upon their heads. Only this may be gathered from the English chronicles, that of the great

army which marched from Wark on the morrow of Saint Barnabas's day, less than twenty thousand ever stood again besouth the Tweed. All the rest perished between Bannockburn and Falkirk, or were slain by the hostile peasantry as they wandered miserably among the moors on their way back to the Border.

It was according to the custom of war that the commander of an army, whose duties in the field prevented him from taking prisoners by his own prowess, was assigned by lot a proportion of the prisoners taken. One prisoner, it has been shown, had yielded to the King of Scots in person; among the others who fell to his share were his kinsman, Sir Marmaduke de Twenge, and his former brother-in-arms, Sir Ralph de Monthermer, who had carried King Edward's shield in the battle. The aggregate ransom of these three wealthy knights would amount to a figure which even a monarch could not despise—nay, to one which many a monarch might deem booty enough for a whole year's campaign. But the King of Scots won more hearts by his grace than he conquered by his arms. Of the twelve prisoners at his own disposal he summoned these three before him, and addressed them thus:—

"Cousin Marmaduke, it grieves us to war against our own kith and kin, and we are rejoiced indeed that you have not suffered hurt from our people in the fight. Sir Ralph de Monthermer, we ourselves beheld how well you bore yourself in the field; and albeit we grieve that our ancient comrade and tried friend should thole the bitterness of defeat, we cannot but rejoice that fortune has put it in our power to show our favour towards him. My Lord of Fontenaye," he continued, turning to Marmion with a smile, "twice already you have refused to give us

your parole. We will not incur the chance of a third refusal. We would fainer see that golden basnet near our own gonfalon than in the array against us; but of that, we fear, there is little hope. Gentlemen, we bid you receive your swords again and go free without any conditions whatsoever. Whatever counsels may prevail in the time to come, you will bestow a kindly thought now and again upon the King of Scots; and we pray you use your influence to put an end to this unhappy war, and that for the sakes of both our nations. Tell your king once more, as we have told him in the past, that it is our earnest desire that peace should be restored and maintained between us for evermore; but tell him also this, that he kicks in vain against the pricks; that so long as a hundred Scots remain to put shoulder to shoulder, they will never submit to England. We fight neither for glory nor for gain, but for the liberty we deem our right."

. . . .

There remains little to be told of the fortunes of the Lily of Kendal and the Chevalier of the Splendid Crest. Marmion rejoined his wife at Kendal, and, seeing that King Edward made as little attempt at this time to bring the war to an end as to carry it on with vigour, they made their residence in Westmorland, whereby Sir Walter might the more readily use his forces in the defence of the Border. Truly the years to come were busy and stirring in the north, where the King of England abandoned to his lieutenants all the duty of guarding his realm. He himself fell into fresh discord with his nobles about the Despensers and other matters. Berwick was taken by the Scots, and with that key of the eastern Marches disappeared the last hold upon the northern kingdom.

Douglas and Moray were incessantly raiding and invading Northumberland, Cumberland, and even Westmorland; the very Crown of England seemed in jeopardy, and nothing saved it except the noble exertions of William de Melton, Archbishop of Gloucester, and the stout knights and dalesmen between Tyne and Eden.

Looking back over the records of those distant years, foray seems to follow so fast upon foray, siege upon siege, burning upon burning, as to leave no leisure for any man to mind his affairs or enjoy the sweets of home. Yet it was not so. Men value that most which is hardest to win and which it costs most effort to keep. There are no bonds so close between man and man as those knit in time of war; no love between man and wife so deep and strong as that which is nourished by eternal strife and tempered in the fire of mortal peril.

The very names of de Roos and le Marmion have passed away from Fawcett Forest and Silverside; the broad lands of Kendal Honor have become the heritage of other lords; English and Scots long since have made up all difference, and in the whole world there is no more peaceful people—there are no more tranquil homes—than among those westland fells and dales. Yet for those who are not too busy, too happy, or too well-to-do to spare a thought for the makers of our land, the memory of the chivalrous Lord of Fontenaye and the peerless Lily of Kendal shall endure as long as the Kent runs to the sea.

THE END.

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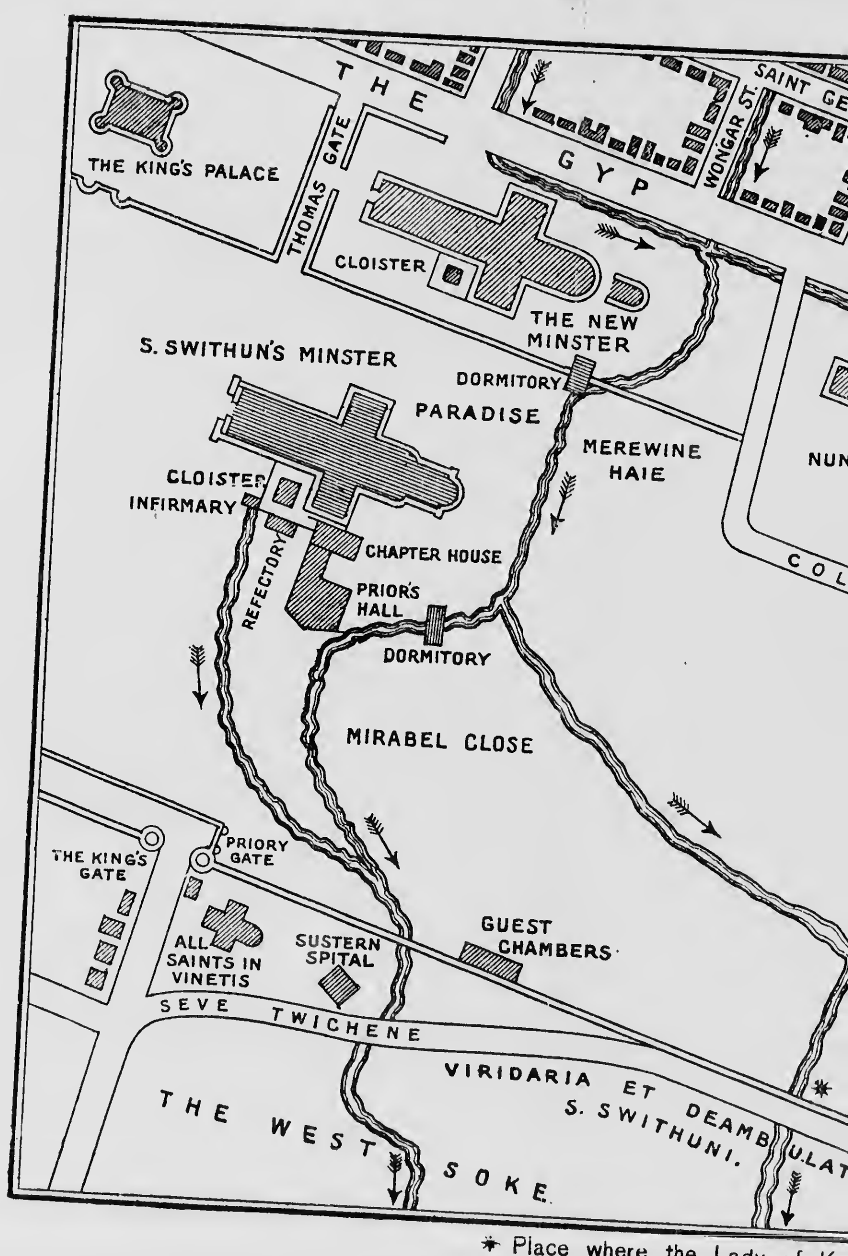

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