THE WHITE COMPANY

—By A. CONAN DOYLE—

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CHAPTER XXII.

How the Bowmen Held Wassail at the "Rose De Guienne."

"Mon Dieu! Alleyne, saw you ever so lovely a face? cried Ford as they hurried along together. "So pure, so peaceful and so beautiful!"

"In sooth, yes. And the hue of the skin the most perfect that ever I saw. Marked you also how the hair curled round the brow? It was wonder fine."

"Those eyes, too!" cried Ford. "How clear and how tender—simple, and yet so full of thought!"

"If there was a weakness it was in the chin," said Alleyne.

"Nay, I saw none."

"It was well curved, it is true."

"Most daintily so."

"And yet——"

"What then, Alleyne? Wouldst find flaw in the sun?"

"Well, bethink you, Ford, would not more power and expression have been put into the face by a long and noble beard?"

"Holy Virgin!" cried Ford, "the man is mad. A beard on the face of little Tita!"

"Tita! Who spoke of Tita?"

"Who spoke of aught else?"

"It was the picture of St. Remy, man, of which I have been discoursing."

"You are indeed," cried Ford, laughing, "a Goth, Hun, and Vandal, with all the other hard names which the old man called us. How could you think so much of a smear of pigments, when there was such a picture painted by the God himself in the very room with you. But who is this?"

"If it please you, sirs," said an archer, running across to them, "Aylward and others would be right glad to see you. They are within here. He bade me say to you that the Lord Loring will not need your service to-night, as he sleeps with the Lord Chandos."

"By my faith!" said Ford, "we do not need a guide to lead us to their presence." As he spoke there came a roar of singing from the tavern upon the right, with shouts of laughter and stamping of feet. Passing under a low door, and down a stone-flagged passage, they found themselves in a long, narrow hall lit up by a pair of blazing torches, one at either end. Trusses of straw had been thrown down along the walls, and reclining on them were some twenty or thirty archers, all of the Company, their steel caps and jacks thrown off, their tunics open, and their great limbs sprawling upon the clay floor. At every man's elbow stood his leathern black-jack of beer, while at the further end a hogshead with its end knocked in promised an abundant supply for the future. Behind the hogshead, on a half circle of kegs, boxes and rude settles, sat Aylward, John, Black Simon and three or four other leading men of the archers, together with Goodwin Hawtayne, the master-shipman, who had left his yellow cog in the river to have a last feast with his friends of the Company. Ford and Alleyne took their seats between Aylward and Black Simon, without their entrance checking in any degree the hubbub which was going on.

"Ale, mes camarades!" cried the bowman, "or shall it be wine? Nay, but ye must have the one or the other. Here, Jacques, thou limb of the devil, bring a bottrine of the oldest vernage, and see that you do not shake it. Hast heard the news?"

"Nay," cried the squires.

"That we are to have a brave tourney."

"A tourney?"

"Aye, lads. For the Captal du Buch hath sworn that he will find five knights from this side of the water who will ride over any five Englishmen who ever threw leg over saddle, and Chandos hath taken up the challenge, and the prince hath promised a golden vase for the man who carries himself best, and all the court is in a buzz over it."

"Why should the knights have all the sport?" growled Hordle John. "Could they not set up five archers for the honor of Aquitaine and of Gascony?"

"Or five men-at-arms," said Black Simon.

"But who are the English knights?" asked Hawtayne.

"There are three hundred and forty-one in the town," said Aylward, "and I hear that three hundred and forty cartels and defiances have already been sent in, the only one missing being Sir John Ravenshoime, who is in his bed with the sweating sickness, and cannot set foot to ground."

"I have heard of it from one of the archers of the guard," cried a bowman from among the straw. "I hear that the prince wished to break a lance, but that Chandos would not hear of it, for the game is likely to be a rough one."

"Then there is Chandos."

"Nay, the prince would not permit it. He is to be marshal of the lists, with Sir William Felton and the Duc d'Armagnac. The English will be the Lord Audley, Sir Thomas Percy, Sir Thomas Wake, Sir William Beauchamp and our own very good lord and leader."

"Hurrah for him! and God be with him!" cried several. "It will be honor to draw string in his service."

"So you may well say," said Aylward. "By my ten finger bones! if you match behind the pennon of the five roses you are like to see all that a good bowman would wish to see. Ha! yes, mes garcons, you laugh, but, by my bill! you may not laugh when you find yourselves where he will take you, for you can never tell what strange vow he may not have sworn to. I see that he has a patch over his eye, even as he had at Poictiers. There will come bloodshed of that patch, or I am the more mistaken."

"How charged it at Poictiers, good Master Aylward?" asked one of the young archers, leaning upon his elbows, with his eyes fixed respectfully upon the old bowman's rugged face.

"Aye, Aylward, tell us of it!" cried Hordle John.

"Here is to old Sir Nigel Aylward!" shouted several at the further end of the room, waving their black jacks in the air.

"Ask him!" said Aylward, modestly, nodding towards Black Simon. "He saw more than I did. And yet, by the holy nails! there was not very much that he did not see either."

"Ah, yes," said Simon, shaking his old head. "It was a great day. I never hope to see such another. There were some fine archers who drew their best shaft that day. We shall never see better men, Aylward."

"By my bill! no. There was little Bob by Withstaff, and Andrew Salblaster, and Walt Alspye, who broke the neck of the German Mor Dieu! what men they were! Take them how you would, at long butts or short, hoyles rounds, or rovers, better bowmen never twitched a shaft over their thumb-nails."

"But the fight, Aylward, the fight!" cried several impatiently.

"Let me fill my jack first, lads, for it is a thirsty tale. It was at the first fall of the leaf that the prince set forth and he passed through Auvergne and Berry, and Anjou, and Touraine. In Auvergne the maids are kind, but the wines are sour. In Berry it is the women that are sour, but the wines are rich. Anjou, however, is a very good land for bowmen for wine and women are all that heart wish. In Touraine I got nothing save a broken pate, but at Vouvant I had a great good fortune for I won a golden nyx from the minister for which I afterwards got 9 Genoan francs from a goldsmith in the Rue Mont Olive. From thence we went to Bourges, where I had a tunic of flame-colored silk and a very fine pair of shoes with tassels of silk and drops of silver."

"From a stall, Aylward?" asked one of the young archers.

"Nay, from a man's foot, lad. I have reason to think that he might not need them again, seeing that a thirty-inch shaft had feathered in his back."

"And what then, Aylward?"

"Oh, we went, coz, some six thousand of us, until we came to Isoudun, and there again a very great thing befell."

"A battle, Aylward?"

"Nay, nay; a greater thing than that. There is to be [illegible] There is little to be gained out of a battle, unless one have the fortune to win a ransom. At Isoudun I and three Welshmen came upon a house which all others had passed, and we had the profit of it to ourselves. For myself, I had a fine feather-bed—a thing which you will not see in a long day's journey in England. You have seen it, Alleyne, and you, John. You will bear me out that it is a noble bed. We put it on a sutler's mule, and bore it after the army. It was on my mind that I would lay it by until I came to start a house of mine own, and I have it now in a very safe place near Lyndhurst."

"And what then, master-bowman?" asked Hawtayne. "By St. Christopher! it is indeed a fair and goodly life which you have chosen, for you gather up the spoil as a Warsash man gathers lobsters, without grace or favor from any man."

"You are right, master-shipman," said another of the older archers. "It is an old bowyer's rede that the second feather of a fenny goose is better than the pinion of a name one. Draw on, old lad, for I have come between you and the clout."

"On we went then," said Aylward, after a long pull at his black-jack. "There were some six thousand of us, with the prince and his knights, and the feather-bed upon a sutler's mule in the centre. We made great havoc in Touraine, until we came into Romorantin, where I chanced upon a gold chain and two bracelets of jasper, which were stolen from me the same day by a blank-eyed wench from the Ardennes. Mon Dieu! there are some folk who have no fear of Domesday in them, and no sign of grace in their souls, for ever clutching and and clawing at another's chattels.

"But the battle, Aylward, the battle!" cried several, amid a burst of laughter.

"I come to it, my young war-pups. Well, then, the King of France had followed us with fifty thousand men, and he made great haste to catch us, but when he had us he scarce knew what to do with us, for we were so drawn up among hedges and vineyards that they could not come nigh us, save by one lane. On both sides were archers, men-at-arms and knights behind, and in the centre the baggage, with my feather-bed upon a sutler's mule. Three hundred chosen knights came straight for it, and, indeed, they were very brave men, but such a drift of arrows met them that few came back. Then came the Germans, and they also fought very bravely, so that one or two broke through the archers and came as far as the feather-bed, but all to no purpose. Then out rides our own little hothead with the patch over his eye, and my Lord Audley with his four Cheshire squires, and a few others of like kidney, and after them went the prince and Chandos, and then the whole throng of us, with axe and sword, for we had shot away our arrows. Ma foi! it was a foolish thing, for we came from the hedges, and there was naught to guard the baggage had they ridden round behind us. But all went well with us, and the king was taken, and little Robby Withstaff and I fell in with a waggon with twelve jenkins of wine for the king's own table, and, by my bill! if you ask me what happened after that, I cannot answer you, nor can little Robby Withstaff either."

"And next day?"

"By my faith! we did not tarry long, but we hied back to Bordeaux, where we came in safety with the King of France and also the feather-bed. I sold my spoil mes garcons, for as many gold pieces as I could hold in my hufken, and for seven days I lit twelve wax candles upon the altar of St. Andrew; for if you forget the blessed when things are well with you, they are very likely to forget you when you have need of them. I have a score of one hundred and nineteen pounds of wax against the holy Andrew, and, as he was a very just man, I doubt not that I shall have full weight and measure when I have most need of it."

"Tell me, master Aylward," cried a young fresh-faced archer at the further end of the room, "what was this great battle about?"

"Why, you jack-fool, what would it be about save who should wear the crown of France?"

"I thought that maybap it might be as to who should have this feather-bed of thine."

"If I come down to you, Silas, I may lay my belt across your shoulders," Aylward answered, amid a general shout of laughter. "But it is time young chickens went to roost when they dare cackle against their elders. It is late, Simon."

"Nay, let us have another song."

"Here is Arnold of Sowly will troll as good a stave as any man in the Company."

"Nay, we have one here who is second to none," said Hawtayne, laying his hand upon big John's shoulder. "I have heard him on the cog with a voice like the wave upon the shore. I pray you, friend, to give us 'The Bells of Milton,' or, if you will, 'The Franklin's Maid.'"

Hordle John drew the back of his hand across his mouth, fixed his eyes upon the corner of the ceiling, and bellowed forth in a voice which made the torches flicker, the southland ballad for which he had been asked.

The franklin he hath gone to roam,
The franklin's maid she bides at home,
But she is cold and coy and staid,
And who may win the franklin's maid?

There came a knight of high renown
In basinet and clelatoun,
On bended knee full long he prayed,
He might not win the franklin's maid.

There came a squire so debonair,
His dress was rich, his words were fair,
He sweetly sang, he deftly played,
He could not win the franklin's maid.

There came a mercer wonder-fine
With velvet cap and galeardine,
For all his ships, for all his trade,
He could not buy the franklin's maid.

Then came an archer bold and true,
With brace[illegible] gaiard and stave of yew;
His purse was light, his jerkin frayed;
Here, alas, the franklin's maid!

Oh, some have laughed and some have cried
And some have scoured the country-side
But off they ride through wood and glade,
The bowman and the franklin's maid.

A roar of delight from his audience, with stamping of feet and beating of black jacks against the ground, showed how thoroughly the song was to their taste, while John modestly retired into a quiet pot, which he drained to four silent gulps. "I sang that ditty to Hordle Hordle John. I ever thought to be an archer himself," quoth he.

"Fill up your stoups," cried Black Simon, thumping his own goblet into the open hogshead in front of him. "Here, a health up to the White Company, and every Frenchman who walks behind the power of Loring!"

"To the wood, the flax and the grand, ye wots," said an old gray-headed archer in the corner.

"The needle hose and the king of Spain to-morrow morrow at fourteen score!" [illegible]

"The bloody war," shouted a fourth. "May it come and it be come."

"Well, the most gold to the best shaft," added a fifth.

"And a last cup to the maids of our land," cried Aylward. "A steady hand and true eye have they, so let two quarts be drunk in their honor." With shout and last gulp each of song they streamed from the room, and all was peaceful once more in the "Rose de Guienne."

CHAPTER XXIII

How England Held the Lists at Bordeaux.

Second were the good burghers of Bordeaux to spread display and knightly sport. But an ordinary joust or tournament was an everyday matter with them. The fame and brilliancy of the prince's court had drawn the knights, squires and pursuivants-of-arms from every part of Europe. In the long lists by the fortress on the landward side of the northern gate there had been many a strange conflict when the Teutonic knight fresh from the conquest of the Prussian heathen ran a course against the knight of Calatrava, hardened by continual struggle against the Moors, or careless from Portugal broke a lance with Scandinavian warriors from the further shore of the great Northern Ocean. Here fluttered many an outland pennon, bearing symbol and blazonry from the banks of the Danube, the wilds of Lithuania, and the mountain strongholds of Hungary; for chivalry was of no clime and of no race, nor was any land so wild that the fame and name of the prince had not sounded through it from border to the border.

Great, however, was the excitement through town and district when it was learned that on the third Wednesday in Advent there would be held a passage-at-arms in which five knights of England would hold the lists against all-comers. The great concourse of noblemen and famous soldiers, the national character of the contest, and the fact that this was a last trial of arms before what promised to be an arduous and bloody war, all united to make the event one of the most notable and brilliant that Bordeaux had ever seen. On the eve of the contest the peasants flocked in from the whole district of the Medoc, and the fields beyond the walls were whitened with the tents of those who could find no warmer lodging. From the distant camp of Dax, too, and from Blaye, Bourge, Libourne, St. Emilion, Castillon, St. Macaire, Cardillac, Ryons, and all the cluster of flourishing towns which look upon Bordeax as their mother, there thronged an unceasing stream of horsemen and of footmen, all converging upon the great city. By the morning of the day on which the courses were to run, not less than eighty people had assembled round the lists and along the low grassy ridge which looks down upon the scene of the encounter.

It was, as may well be imagined, no easy matter among so many noted cavaliers to choose out five on either side who should have precedence over their fellows. A score of secondary combats had nearly arisen from the rivalries and bad blood created by the selection, and it was only the influence of the prince and the efforts of the older barons which kept the peace among so many eager and fiery soldiers. Not till the day before the courses were the shields finally hung out for the inspection of the ladies and the heralds, so that all men might know the names of the champions and have the opportunity to prefer any charge against them, should there be stain upon them which should disqualify them from taking part in so noble and honorable a ceremony.

Sir Hugh Calverley and Sir Robert Knolles had not yet returned from their raid into the marches of the Navarre, so that the English party were deprived of two of their most famous lances. Yet there remained so many good names that Chandos and Felton, to whom the selection had been referred, had many an earnest consultation, in which every feat of arms and failure or success of each candidate was weighed and balanced against the rival claims of his companions. Lord Audley of Cheshire, the hero of Poictiers, and Loring of Hampshire, who was held to be the second lance in the army, were easily fixed upon. Then, of the younger men, Sir Percy of Northumberland, Sir Thomas Wake of Yorkshire, and Sir William Beauchamp of Gloucestershire, were finally selected to uphold the honor of England. On the other side were the veteran Captal de Buch and the brawny Olivier de Clisson, with the free companion Sir Perducas d'Albert, the valiant Lord of Mucident, and Sigismond von Altenstadt, of the Teutonic Order. The older soldiers among the English shook their heads as they looked upon the escutcheons of these famous warriors, for they were all men who had spent their lives upon the saddle, and bravery and strength can avail little against experience and wisdom of war.

"By my faith! Sir John," said the prince as he rode through the winding streets on his way to the list, "I should have been glad to have splintered a lance to-day. You have seen me hold a spear since I had strength to lift one, and should know best whether I do not merit a place among this honorable company."

"There is no better seat and no truer lance, sire," said Chandos; "but, if I may say so without fear of offence, it were not fitting that you should join in this debate."

"And why, Sir John?"

"Because, sire, it is not for you to take part with Gascons against English, or with English against Gascons, seeing that you are lord of both. We are not too well loved by the Gascons now, and it is but the golden link of your princely coronet which holds us together. If that be snapped I know not what would follow."

"Snapped, Sir John!" cried the prince, with an angry sparkle in his dark eyes. "What manner of talk is this? You speak as though the allegiance of our people were a thing which might be thrown off or on like a falcon's jessel."

"With a sorry hack one uses whip and spur, sire," said Chandos; "but with a horse of blood and spirit a good cavalier is gentle and soothing, coaxing rather than forcing. These folk are strange people, and you must hold their love, even as you have it now, for you will get from their kindness what all the pennons in your army could not wring from them."

"You are over-grave to-day, John," the prince answered. "We may keep such questions for our council chamber. But how now, my brothers of Spain, and of Majorca, what think you of this challenge?"

"I look to see some handsome jousting," said Don Pedro, who rode with the King of Majorca upon the right of the prince, while Chandos was on the left. "By St. James of Compostella! but these burghers would bear some taxing. See to the broad-cloth and velvet that the rogues bear upon their backs! By my troth! if they were my subjects they would be glad enough to wear falding and leather ere I had done with them. But mashap it is best to let the wool grow long ere you clip it."

"It is our pride," the prince answered coldly. "That we rule over freemen and not slaves."

"Every met to his own humor," said Pedro carelessly. "Carajo! there is a sweet face at yonder window! Don Fernando, I pray you to mark the house, and to have the maid brought to us at the abbey."

"Nay, brother, nay!" cried the prince impatiently. "I have had occasion to tell you more than once that things are not ordered in this way in Aquitaine."

"A thousand pardons, dear friend," the Spaniard answered quickly, for a flush of anger had sprung to the dark cheek of the English prince. "You make my wife so like a home that I forget at times that I am not in very truth back in Castile. Every land hath indeed its ways and manners; but I promise you, Edward, that when you are my guest in Toledo or Madrid you shall not yearn to woo for any commoner's daughter on whom you may deign to cast your eye."

"Your talk, sire," said the prince still more coldly, "is not such as I love to hear from your lips. I have no taste for such amours as you speak of, and I have sworn that my name shall be coupled with that of no woman save my own dear wife."

"Ever the mirror of true chivalry!" exclaimed Pedro, while James of Majorca, frightened at the stern countenance of their all-powerful, plucked hard at the mantle of his brother exile.

"Have a care, cousin," he whispered; "for the sake of the Virgin have a care, lest you have angered him."

"Pshaw! fear not," the other answered in the same low tone. "If I miss one stoup I will strike him on the next. Mark me else. Fair cousin," he continued, turning to the prince, "these be rare men-at-arms and lusty bowmen. It would be hard indeed to match them."

"They have journeyed far, sire, but they have never yet found their match."

"Nor never will, I doubt not. I feel myself to be back upon my throne when I look at them. But tell me, dear coz, what shall we do next, when we have driven this bastard Henry from the kingdom which he hath filched?"

"We shall then compel the King of Aragon to place our good friend and brother, James of Marjoca, upon the throne."

"Noble and generous prince!" cried the little monarch.

"That done," said King Pedro, glancing out of the corners of his eyes at the young conqueror, "we shall unite the forces of England, of Aquitaine, of Spain, and of Marjorca. It would be shame to us if we did not do some great deed with such forces ready to our hand."

"You say truly, brother," cried the prince, his eyes kindling at the thought "Methinks that we could do anything more pleasing to Our Lady than to drive the heathen Moors out of the country."

"I am with you, Edward, as true as hilt to blade. But, by St. James! we shall not let these Moors make mock at us from over the sea. We must take ship and thrust them from Africa."

"By heaven, yes!" cried the prince. "And it is the dream of my heart that our English pennons shall wave upon the Mount of Olives, and the lions and lilies float over the holy city."

"And why not, dear cos? Your bowmen have cleared a path to Paris, and why not to Jerusalem? Once there, your arms might rest."

"Nay, there is more to be done," cried the prince, carried away by the ambitious dream. "There is still the city of Constantine to be taken, and war to be waged against the Soldan of Damascus. And beyond him again there is tribute to be levied from the Cham of Tarnory and from the kingdom of Cathay. Ha! John, what say you? Can we not go as far eastward as Richard of the Lion Heart?"

"Old John will bide at home, sire," said the rugged soldier. "By my soul! as long as I am seneschal of Aquitaine I will find enough to do in guarding the marches which you have entrusted to me. It would be a blithe day for the King of France when he heard that the seas lay between him and us."

"By my soul! John!" said the prince, "I have never known you turn laggard before."

"The babbling hound, sire, is not always the first at the mort," the old knight answered.

"Nay, my true heart! I have tried you too often not to know. But, by my soul! I have not seen so dense a throng since the day we brought King John down Cheapside."

It was indeed an enormous crowd which covered the whole vast plain from the line of vineyards to the river bank. From the northern gate the prince and his companions looked down at a dark sea of heads, brightened here and there by the colored hoods of the women, or by the sparkling head-pieces of archers and men-at-arms. In the centre of this vast assemblage the lists seemed but a narrow strip of green marked out with banners and streamers, while a gleam of white with a flutter of pennons at either end showed where the marquees were pitched, which served as the dressing rooms of the combatants. A path had been staked off from the city gate to the stands which had been erected for the court and the nobility. Down this, amid the shouts of the enormous multitude, the prince cantered with his two attendant kings, his high officers of state, and his long train of lords and ladies, courtiers, counsellors and soldiers, with toss of plume and flash of jewel, sheen of silk and glint of gold—as rich and gallant a show as heart could wish. The head of the cavalcade had reached the lists ere the rear had come clear of the city gate, for the fairest and the bravest had assembled from all the broad lands which are watered by the Dordogne and the Garonne. Here rode dark-browed cavaliers from the sunny south, fiery soldiers from Gascony, graceful courtiers of Limousin or Saintonge, and gallant young Englishmen from beyond the seas. Here too were the beautiful brunettes of the Gironde, with eyes which out-flashed their jewels, while beside them rode their blonde sisters of England, clear cut and aquiline, swathed in swans' down and ermine, for the air was biting though the sun was bright. Slowly the long and glittering train wound into the lists, until every horse had been tethered by the varlets in waiting, and every lord and lady seated in the long stands which stretched, rich in tapestry and velvet and blazoned arms, on either side of the centre of the arena.

The holders of the lists occupied the end which was nearest to the city gate. There, in front of their respective pavillions, flew the marliets of Audley, the roses of Loring, the scarlet bars of Wake, the lion of the Percies and the silver wings of the Beauchamps, each supported by a squire clad in hanging green stuff to represent so many Tritons, and bearing a huge conch-shell in their left hands. Behind the tents the great war horses, armed at all points, champed and reared, while their masters sat at the doors of their pavillions, with their helmets upon their knees, chatting as to the order of the day's doings. The English archers and men-at-arms had mustered at the end of the lists, but the vast majority of the spectators were in favor of the attacking party, for the English had declined in popularity ever since the bitter dispute as to the disposal of the royal captive after the battle of Poictiers. Hence the applause was by no means general when the herald-at-arms proclaimed, after a flourish of trumpets, the names and styles of the knights who were prepared for the honor of their country and for the love of their ladies, to hold the field against all who might do them the favor to run a course with them. On the other hand, a deafening burst of cheering greeted the rival herald, who, advancing from the other end of the lists, rolled forth the well-known titles of the five famous warriors who had accepted the defiance.

"Faith, John," said the prince, "it sounds as though you were right. "Ha! my grace D'Armagnac, it seems that our friends on this side will not grieve if our English champions lose the day."

"It may be so, sire," the Gascon nobleman answered. "I have little doubt that in Smithfield or at Windsor an English crowd would favor their own countrymen."

"By my faith! that's easily seen," said the prince, laughing. "For a few score English archers at yonder end are bellowing as though they would out-shout the mighty multitude. I fear that they will have little to shout over this journey, for my gold vase has small prospect of crossing the water. What are the conditions, John?"

"They are to tilt singly not less than three courses, sire, and the victory to rest with that party which shall have won the greater number of courses, each pair continuing till one or other have the vantage. He who carries himself best of the victors hath the prize, and he who is judged best of the other party hath a jeweled clasp. Shall I order that the flakirs sound, sire?"

The prince nodded, and the trumpets rang out, while the champions rode forth one after the other, each meeting his opponent in the centre of the lists. Sir William Beauchamp went down before the practical lance of the Captal de Buch. Sir Thomas Percy won the vantage over Lord of Musident, and the Lord Audley struck Sir Perducas d'Albert from the saddle. The burly De Clisson, however, restored the hopes of the attackers by beating to the ground Sir Thomas Wake of Yorkshire. So far there was little to choose betwixt challengers and challenged.

"By Saint James of Santiago!" cried Don Pedro, with a tinge of color upon his pale cheeks, "win who will, this has been a most notable contest."

"Who comes next for England, John?" asked the prince in a voice which quivered with excitement.

"Sir Nigel Loring of Hampshire, sire."

"Ha! he is a man of good courage, and skilled in the use of all weapons."

"He is indeed, sire. But his eyes, like my own, are the worse for wars. Yet he can tilt or play his part at hand-strokes as merrily as ever. It was he, sire, who won the golden crown which Queen Philippa, your royal mother gave, to be jousted for by all the knights of England after the harrying of Calais. I have heard that at Twynham Castle there is a buffet which groans beneath the weight of his prizes."

"I pray that my vase may join them," said the prince. "But here is the cavalier of Germany, and by my soul! he looks like a man of great valor and hardiness. Let them run their full three courses, for the issue is over-great to hang upon one."

As the prince spoke, amid a loud flourish of trumpets and the shouting of the Gascon party, the last of the assailants rode gallantly into the lists. He was a man of great size, clad in black armor without blazonry or ornament of any kind, for all worldly display was forbidden by the rules of the military brotherhood to which he belonged. No plume or nobloy fluttered from his plain tilting salade, and even his lance was devoid of the customary banderole. A white mantle fluttered behind him, upon the left side of which was marked the broad black cross picked out with silver which was the well-known badge of the Teutonic Order. Mounted upon a horse as large, as black and as forbidding as himself, he cantered slowly forward, with none of those prancings and gambades with which a cavalier was accustomed to show his command over his charger. Gravely and sternly he inclined his head to the prince, and took his place at the further end of the arena.

He had scarce done so before Sir Nigel rode out from the holders' enclosure, and galloping at full speed down the lists, drew his charger up before the prince's stand with a jerk which threw it back upon its haunches. With white armor, blazoned shield, and plume of ostrich feathers from his helmet, he carried himself in so jaunty and joyous a fashion, with tossing pennon and curvetting charger, that a shout of applause ran the full circle of the arena. With the air of a man who hastes to a joyous festival, he waved his lance in salute, and reining the pawing horse round without permitting its forefeet to touch the ground, he hastened back to his station.

A great hush fell over the huge multitude as the two last champions faced each other. A double issue seemed to rest upon their contest, for their personal fame was at stake as well as their party's honor. Both were famous warriors, but as their exploits had been performed in widely sundered countries, they had never before been able to cross lances. A course between such men woud have been enough in itself to cause the keenest interest, apart from its being the crisis which would decide who should be the victors of the day. For a moment they waited—the German sombre and collected, Sir Nigel quivering in every fibre with eagerness and fiery resolution. Then, amid a long-drawn breath from the spectators, the glove fell from the marshal's hand, and the two steel-clad horsemen met like a thunder-clap in front of the royal stand. The German, though he reeled for an instant before the thrust of the Englishman, struck his opponent so fairly upon the vizor that the lace burst, the plumed helmet flew to pieces, and Sir Nigel galloped on down the lists with his bald head shimmering in the sunshine. A thousand waving scarves and tossing caps announced that the first bout had fallen to the popular party.

The Hampshire knight was not a man to be disheartened by a reverse. He spurred back to the pavilion, and was out in a few seconds with another helmet. The second course was so equal that the keenest judges could not ascertain vantage. Each struck fire from the other's shield, and each endured the jarring shock as though welded to the horse beneath him. In the final bout, however, Sir Nigel struck his opponent with so true an aim that the point of the lance caught the bars of the vizor and tore the front of his helmet out, while the German, aiming somewhat low, and half stunned by the shock, had the misfortune to strike his arversary upon the thigh, a breach of the rules of the tilting-yard, by which he not only sacrificed his chances of success, but would also have forfeited his horse and his armor, had the English knight chosen to claim them. A roar of applause from the English soldiers, with an omnious silence from the vast crowd who pressed round the barriers, announced that the balance of victory lay with the holders. Already the ten champions had assembled in front of the prince to receive his award, when a harsh bugle call from the further end of the lists drew all eyes to a new and unexpected arrival.

CHAPTER XXIV.

How a Champion Came Forth from the East.

The Bordeaux lists were, as has already been explained, situated upon the plain near the river upon those great occasions when the tilting-ground in front of the Abbey of St. Andrew's was deemed to be too small to contain the crowd. On the eastern side of this plain the country side sloped upwards, thick with vines in summer, but now ridged with the brown bare enclosures. Over the gently rising plain curved the white road which leads inland, usually flecked with travelers, but now with scarce a living form upon it, so completely had the lists drained all the districts of its inhabitants. Strange it was to see such a vast concourse of people, and then to look upon that broad, white, empty highway which wound away, bleak and deserted, until it narrowed itself to a bare streak against the distant uplands.

Shortly after the contest had begun, any one looking from the lists along those road might have remarked, far away in the extreme distance, two brilliant and sparkling points which glittered and twingled in the bright shimmer of the winter sun. Within an hour these had become clearer and nearer, until they might be seen to come from the reflector from the head-pieces of two horsemen who were riding at the top of their speed in the direction of Bordeaux. Another half hour had brought them so close that every point of their bearing and equipment could be discerned. The first was a knight in full armor, mounted upon a brown horse with a blaze upon breast and forehead. He was a short man of great breadth of shoulder, with vizor closed, and no blazonry upon his simple white surcoat or plain black shield. The other, who was evidently his squire and attendant, was unarmed save for the helmet upon his breast, but bore in his right hand a very long and heavy oaken spear which belonged to his master. In his left hand the squire held not only the reins of his own horse but those of a great black war-horse, fully harnessed, which trotted along at his side. Thus the three horses and their two riders rode swiftly to the lists, and it was the blare of the trumpet sounded by the squire as his lord rode into the arena which had broken in upon the prize-giving and drawn away the attention and interest of the spectators.

"Ha, John!" cried the prince, craning his neck, "who is this cavalier, and what is it that he desires?"

"On my word, sire," replied Chandos, with the utmost surprise upon his face, "it is my opinion that he is a Frenchman."

"A Frenchman!" repeated Don Pedro. "And how can you tell that, my Lord Chandos, when he has neither coat-armor, crest or blazonry?"

"By his armor, sire, which is rounder at elbow and at shoulder than any of Bordeaux or of England. Italian he might be were his bassinet more sloped, but I will swear that those plates were welded betwixt this and the Rhine. Here comes his squire, however, and we shall hear what strange fortune hath brought him over the marches."

As he spoke the attendant cantered up the grassy enclosure, and pulling up his steed in front of the royal stand, blew a second fanfare upon his bugle. He was a raw-boned, swarthy-cheeked man, with black bristling beard and a swaggering bearing. Having sounded his call, he thrust the bugle into his belt, and, pushing his way betwixt the groups of English and of Gascon knights, he reined up within a spear's length of the royal party.

"I come," he shouted in a hoarse, thick voice, with a strong Breton accent, "as squire and herald from my master, who is a very valiant pursuivant-of-arms, and a liegeman to the great and powerful monarch, Charles, king of the French. My master has heard that there is jousting here, and prospect of honorable advancement, so he has come to ask that some English cavalier will vousafe for the love of his lady to run a course with sharpened lances with him, or to meet him with sword, mace, battle-axe, or dagger. He bade me say, however, that he would fight only with a true Englishman, and not with any mongrel who is neither English nor French, but speaks with the tongue of the one and fights under the banner of the other."

"Sir!" cried De Clisson, with a voice of thunder, while his countrymen clapped their hands to their swords. The squire, however, took no notice of their angry faces, but continued with his master's message.

"He is now ready, sire," he said, "albeit his destrier has traveled many miles this day, and fast, for we were in fear lest we come too late for the jousting."

"Ye have indeed come too late," said the prince, "seeing that the prize is about to be awarded; yet I doubt not that one of these gentlemen will run a course for the sake of honor with this cavalier of France."

"And as to the prize, sire," quoth Sir Nigel, "I am sure that I speak for all when I say this French knight hath our leave to bear it away with him if he can fairly win it."

"Clear word of this to your master," said the prince, "and ask him which of these five Englishmen he would desire to meet. But stay; your master bears no coat-armor, and we have not yet heard his name."

"My master, sire, is under vow of the Virgin neither to reveal his name nor to open his vizor until he is back upon English ground once more."

"Yet what assurance have we," said the prince, "that this is not some varlet masquerading in his master's harness, or some caitiff knight, the very touch of whose lance might bring infamy upon the honorable gentleman?"

"It is not so, sire," cried the squire earnestly. "There is no man upon earth who would demean himself by breaking a lance with my master."

"You speak out boldly, squire," the prince answered; "but unless I have some further assurance of your master's noble birth and gentle name I cannot match the choicest lances of my court against him."

"You refuse, sire?"

"I do refuse."

"Then, sire, I was bidden to ask you from my master whether you would consent if Sir John Chandos, upon hearing my master's name, should assure you that he was indeed a man with whom you might yourself cross swords without indignity."

"I ask no better," said the prince.

"Then I must ask, Lord Chandos, that you will step forth, I have your pledge that the name shall remain ever a secret, and that you will neither say nor write one word which might betray it. The name is ——" He stooped down from his horse and whispered something into the old knight's ear which made him start with surprise, and stare with much curiosity at the distant knight, who was sitting his charger at the further end of the arena.

"Is this indeed sooth?" he exclaimed.

"It is, my lord, and I swear it by St. Ives of Brittany."

"I might have known it," said Chandos, twisting his moustache, and still looking thoughtfully at the cavalier.

"What then, Sir John?" asked the prince.

"Sire, this is a knight whom it is indeed great honor to meet, and I would that your grace would grant me leave to send my squire for my harness, for I would dearly love to run a course with him."

"Nay, nay, Sir John, you have gained as much honor as one man can bear, and it were hard if you could not rest now. But I pray you, squire, to tell your master that he is very welcome to our court, and that wines and spices will be served [illegible] would refresh himself before jousting."

"My master will not drink," said the squire.

"Let him then name the gentleman with whom he would break a spear."

"He would contend with these five knights, each to choose such weapons as suit him best."

"I perceive," said the prince, "that your master is a man of great heart and high of enterprise. But the sun already is low in the west, and there will scarce be light for these courses. I pray you, gentlemen, to take your places, that we may see whether this stranger's deeds are as bold as his words."

The unknown knight had sat like a statue of steel, looking neither to the right nor to the left during these preliminaries. He had changed from the horse upon which he had ridden, and bestrode the black charger which his squire had led beside him. His immense breadth, his stern, composed appearance, and the mode in which he handled his shield and his lance, were enough in themselves to convince the thousands of critical spectators that he was a dangerous opponent. Aylward, who stood in the front row of the archers with Simon, big John, and others of the Company, had been criticising the proceedings from the commencement with the ease and freedom of a man who had spent his life under arms and had learned in a hard school to know at a glance the points of a horse and his rider. He stared now at the stranger with a wrinkled brow and the air of a man who is striving to stir his memory.

"By my hilt! I have seen the thick body of him before to-day. Yet I cannot call to mind where it could have been. At Nogent beilge, or was it at Auray? Mark me, lads, this man will prove to be one of the best lances of France, and there are no better in the world."

"It is but child's play, this poking game," said John. "I would fain try my hand at it, for, by the black rood! I think that it might be amended."

"What then would you do, John?" asked several.

"There are many things which might be done," said the forester thoughtfully. "Methinks I would begin oy breaking my spear."

"So they all strive to do."

"Nay, but not upon another man's shield. I would break it over my own knee."

"And what the better for that, old beef and bones?" asked Black Simon.

"So I would turn what is but a lady's bodkin of a weapon into a very handsome club."

"And then, John?"

"Then I would take the other's spear into my arm or my leg, or where it pleased him best to put it, and I would dash out his brains with my club."

"By my ten finger-bones! old John," said Aylward, "I would give my feather-bed to see you at spear-running. This is a most courtly and gentle sport which you have devised."

"So it seems to me," said John seriously. "Or, again, one might seize the other round the middle, pluck him off his horse and bear him to the pavilion, there to hold him to ransom."

"Good!" cried Simon, amid a roar of laughter from all the archers round. "By Thomas of Kent! we shall make a camp-marshal of thee, and thou shalt draw up rules for our jousting. But, John, who is it that you would uphold in this knightly and pleasing fashion?"

"What mean you?"

"Why, John, so strong and strange a tilter must fight for the brightness of his lady's eyes or the curve of her eyelash, even as Sir Nigel does for the Lady Loring."

"I know not about that," said the big archer, scratching his head in perplexity. "Since Mary hath played me false, I can scarce fight for her."

"Yet any woman will serve."

"There is my mother then," said John. "She was at much pains at my upbringing, and, by my soul! I will uphold the curve of her eyelashes, for it tickleth my very heart-root to think of her. But who is here?"

"It is Sir William Beauchamp. He is a valiant man, but I fear that he is scarce firm enough upon the saddle to bear the thrust of such a tilter as this stranger promises to be."

Aylward's words were speedily justified for even as he spoke the two knights met in the centre of the lists. Beauchamp struck his opponent a shrewd blow upon the helmet, but was met with so frightful a thrust that he whirled out of his saddle and rolled over and over upon the ground. Sir Thomas Percy met with little better success, for his shield was split, his vambrace torn, and he himself wounded slightly in the side. Lord Audley and the unknown knight struck each other fairly upon the helmet; but, while the stranger sat as firm and rigid as ever upon his charger, the Englishman was bent back to his horse's crupper by the weight of the blow, and had galloped half-way down the lists ere he could recover himself. Sir Thomas Wake was beaten to the ground with a battle-axe—that being the weapon which he had selected—and had to be carried to his pavillion. These rapid successes, gained one after the other over four celebrated warriors, worked the crowd up to a pitch of wonder and admiration. Thunders of applause from the English soldiers, as well as from the citizens and peasants, showed how far the love of brave and knighly deeds could rise above the rivalries of race.

"By my soul! John," cried the prince, with his cheek flushed and his eyes shining, "this is a man of good cour