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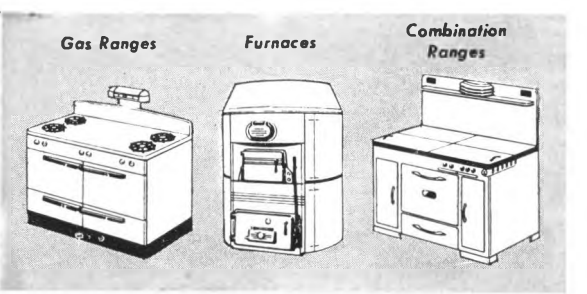

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VOL. VI SEPTEMBER, 1945 NO. 6

Book-Length Novel

Short Story

Cover and illustrations by Lawrence.

All stories in this publication are either new or have never appeared in a magazine.

Published quarterly by All-Fiction Field, Inc., 2256 Grove Street, Chicago, 16, Ill. Editorial and executive offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City, 17. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary. Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as second class matter May 28, 1943, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copy price 25c. Yearly subscription $1.00 in United States, its dependencies, and Mexico and Cuba. Other countries, $1.35. Subscription Dept. 205 E. 42nd Street, New York, N. Y. For advertising rates address Sam J. Perry, 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. When submitting manuscripts kindly enclose self-addressed stamped envelope for their return if found unavailable and send them to Editorial Dept., 205 E. 42nd St., New York, N. Y. The publishers cannot accept responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts, although care will be exercised in handling them. Printed in U. S. A.

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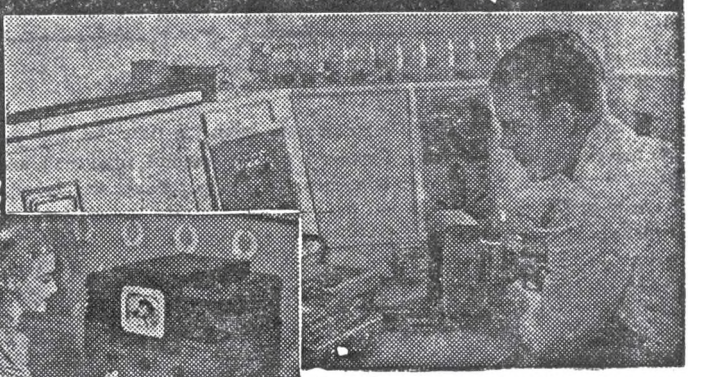

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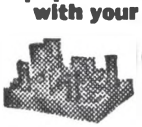

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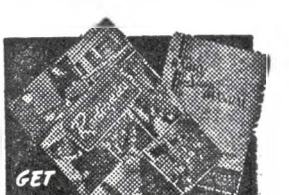

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The Readers' Viewpoint

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, All-Fiction Field, Inc., 205 East 42nd St., New York 17, New York

HIGH PRAISE FOR F.F.M.

Dear Editor:

Seldom do I venture from the concealment of obscurity; seldom do I lend the weight of approbation to stories I read in magazines; but, seldom have I read the equal of Hodgson's "The Boats of the *Glen Carrig*." Why haven't I heard of the man before? Methinks 'tis but the just punishment for one who adheres to book classics. About face! I surrender. There is no other choice that I may make with intellectual honesty. I note with horror, (principles of historical precedent dissolving about me!) Hodgson's literary ability to weave a completely enthralling tale about a principal character *who is never named!* Shades of the classic novelists!

I should like to congratulate the editors upon a delicious choice, a veritable *mierum sal* of choices! —And, what a man the "Bosun" is! I have a new weakness now (if I have the cash . . .): your magazine. Alas! Against my formerly concrete prejudice, you have made me what I am today, Mr. Editor, a fan of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries!* J. S. Bradford's gem not only added to the already overwhelming weight of Hodgson's masterpiece, but it made me burn my bridges behind me. I swim in the swirling, beautiful mists of your magazine's excellent fantasy!

PAUL F. ANDERSON.

6702 WINDSOR AVE.,
BERWYN, ILL.

"THE BOATS" FIRST-RATE

"The Boats of the *Glen Carrig*" far exceeded my expectations. All in all, it made a first-rate selection for F.F.M. Hodgson's skilful descriptions of the weed-men, the valley of the fungi, and the wailing trees certainly classify as fantasy writing on a plane with that of the old master, A. Merritt. Still, the author managed to inject an atmosphere of convincing reality and a certain flavor of adventure at sea that added immeasurably to the literary quality of the story. I enjoyed it immensely. Tales such as this seem ample proof that a carefully-done, literary story is infinitely more entertaining than fast-action stuff.

The Lawrence illustrations for the lead novel were up to snuff. The full-page drawings on pages 19 and 51 were particularly impressive.

I received my copy of the Lawrence Portfolio some time ago. It is undoubtedly worth many times the small price asked for it. The high-quality paper stock used in the folio is especially commendable, for the fine detail and small line work are made clearer, enhancing the drawings greatly. The illustrations are all so well produced that it's difficult to pick favorites, but my own choice for top honors among the eight is the minor masterpiece for the garden scene in "The Man Who Was Thursday." Ahh!

"The Machine Stops" in the previous issue was exceptionally good, as was Kuttner's excellent short. The latter tale was somewhat reminiscent of Bradbury's "King of the Grey Spaces," although the setting and development were entirely different.

Now for a few random suggestions (also known as gripes). Let's have some more poetry in future issues. F.F.M. made a bit of a reputation for itself as a publisher of good fantasy poetry. What about it? A verse or two helps to provide interesting contrast against pages and pages of story.

I, too, should like to put in a plea for novels by Stapledon. Especially "Last and First Men" and "The Star Maker."

After the Hodgson novel this issue, further tales by this writer might be more than welcome (gentle hint). "The House on the Borderland" and "The Night Land", for instance. I understand that Hodgson himself regarded the latter novel as his best. It's not a sea story, and is highly fantastic. A fine choice for F.F.M.

Others that might be worthwhile selections: "When Worlds Collide", "After Worlds Collide" (Balmer and Wylie), "The House of Sounds" (Shiel), "Carnacki the Ghost-Finder" (Hodgson), "The Purple Sapphire" (Taine), and "The Lurker at the Threshold" (Lovecraft and Derleth). The last-mentioned is at present awaiting publication—the authorship alone should be a good recommendation!

Would it be possible to feature some *new* material by Clark Ashton Smith?

This suspense of waiting three months for a new copy of F.F.M. is gettin' me down! After the war—I gloat—mayhap monthly publication . . . 160 pages . the return of trimmed edges . . . Finlay back again . . . Finlay on the covers; Lawrence on most of the interiors. Daydreams, but pleasant ones.

The Readers' Viewpoint is up to standard in the June issue. For the serious fantasy fan, this is probably about the best letter column around. A number of interesting letters this trip, with orchids to Gerry de la Ree, Thyril L. Ladd, Jack Rosenblatt, Mrs. C. W. Vallette, and Lester Mayer. Surprised to find you included my letter commenting on the March 1944 issue.

This communication seems to have grown by leaps and bounds into a slightly longer size than I had originally intended. Ah, but it's difficult to be shortwinded when discussing good fantasy.

"Phra the Phoenician" looks good indeed. I'll be looking forward to it.

JOE KENNEDY.

84 BAKER AVE.,
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(Continued on page 120)

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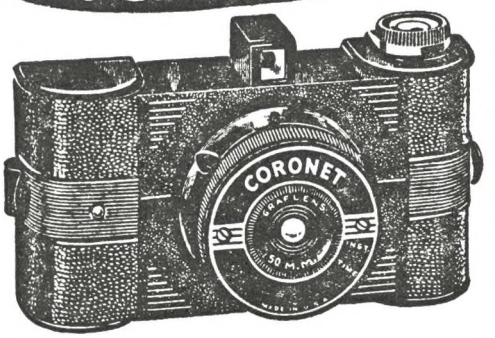

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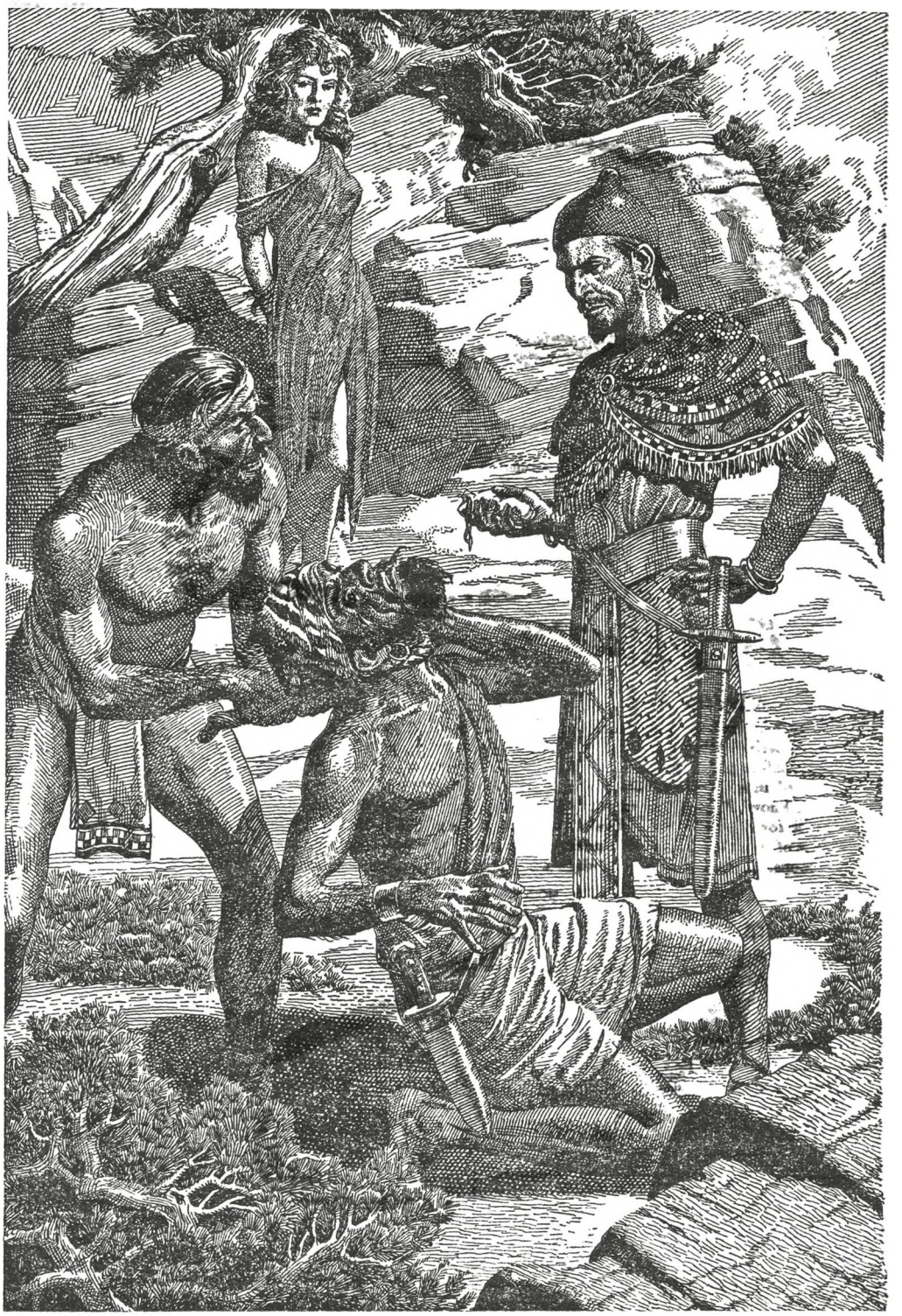


"Give me a fairer price for this slave-maid," I told the sea-roving rascal.

Phra The Phoenician

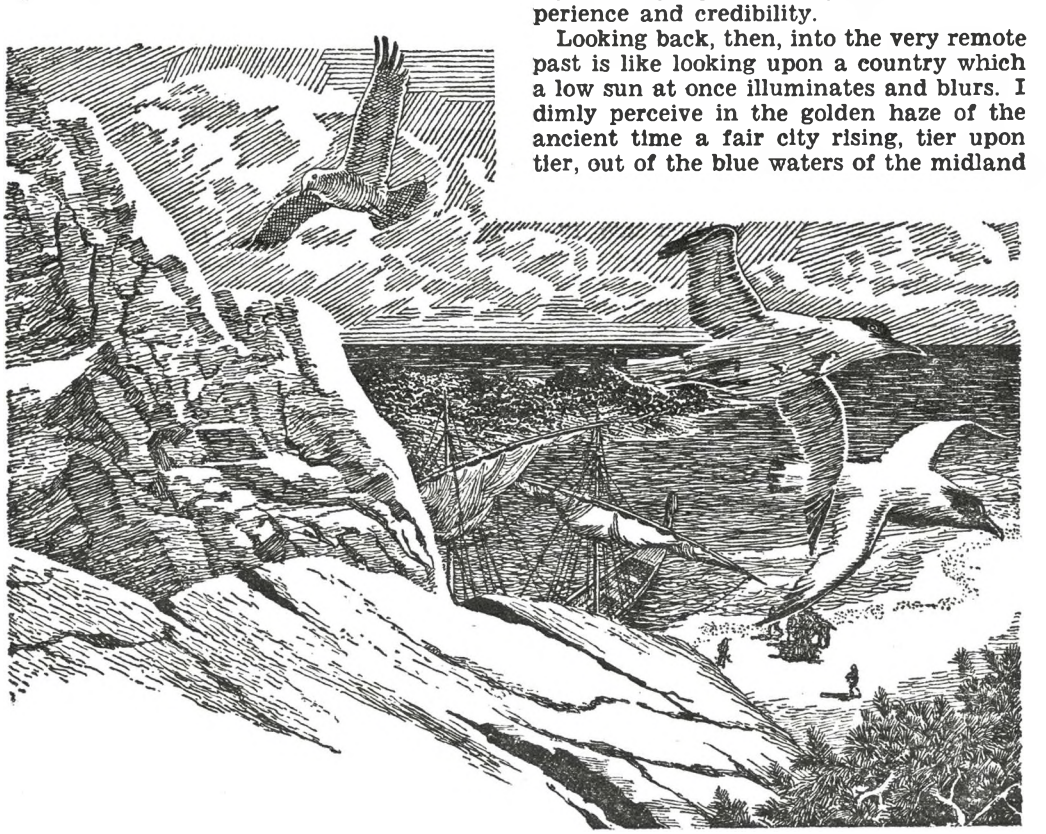
By Edwin Lester Arnold

From the days of Caesar's legions to the court of Queen Elizabeth. . . . From a Byzantine slave galley to a Druid altar. . . . Through the long bloody centuries one man had been given a cloak of strange immortality, to fight through the wars of a hundred generations and find the girl he had loved and lost in the dawn of England's history.

CHAPTER I

REGARDING the exact particulars of my earliest wanderings I do confess I am somewhat uncertain. This may tempt you to reply that one whose memory is so far-reaching and capacious as mine will presently prove, might well have stored up everything that befell him from his very beginning. All I can say is, things are as I set them down; and those facts which you cannot believe you must continue to doubt. The first thirty years of my life, it will be guessed in extenuation, were full of the frailties and shortcomings of an ordinary mortal; while those years which followed have impressed themselves indelibly upon my mind by right of being curious past experience and credibility.

Looking back, then, into the very remote past is like looking upon a country which a low sun at once illuminates and blurs. I dimly perceive in the golden haze of the ancient time a fair city rising, tier upon tier, out of the blue waters of the midland



sea. A splendid harbor frames itself out of the mellow uncertainty—a harbor whereof the long white arms are stretched out to welcome the commerce of all the known world.

I was young then, no doubt, nor need I say a fool; and very likely the sight of a thousand strange sails at my father's door excited my daily wonder, while the avarice which recognizes no good fortune in a present having was excited by the silks and gems, the rich stuffs and the gums, the quaint curiosities of human ingenuity and the frolic things of nature, which were piled up there. More than all, my imagination must have been fired by the sea captains' tales of wonder or romance, and, be the cause what it may, I made up my mind to adventure like them, and carried out my wilful fancy.

It is a fitting preface to all I have learned since that my first real remembrance should be one of vanity. Yet so it was. And then, countless centuries ago, I set out on a first voyage. It might be yesterday, so well it comes before me—with my youthful pride as the spirit of a man was born within, and I felt the strong beat of the fresh salt waves of the open sea upon my trading vessel's prow, and knew, as I stood there by her steering-oar, that she was stuffed with a hundred bales of purple cloth from my father's vats along the shore, and bound whither I listed.

Who could have been prouder than I?—who could have heard finer songs of freedom in the merry hum of the warm southern air in the brown cordage overhead, or the frothy prattle of the busy water alongside, as we danced that day out of the white arms of Tyre, the queenly city of the ancient seas, and saw the young world unfurl before us, full of magnificent possibilities?

IT IS not my wish or intention to write of my early travels, were it possible. On this voyage (or it may be on some others that followed, now merged into the associations of the first) we traded east and west, with adventure and success. The adventure was sure enough, for the great midland sea was then the center of the world, and what between white-winged argosies of commerce, the freebooters of a dozen nations who patrolled its bays and corners, and rows of royal galleys sailing to the conquest of empires, it was a lively and perilous place enough. As for the profit, it came quickly to those who opened a hundred virgin markets in those days.

We sailed into the great Egyptian river up to Heliopolis, bartering stuffs for gold-dust and ivory; at another time we took Trinacrian wine and oranges into Ostia—a truly magnificent port, with incredible capacities for all the fair and pleasant things of life. Then we sailed among the beautiful Achaian islands with corn and olives; and so, profiting everywhere, we lived, for long, a jolly, uncertain life, full of hardship and pleasure.

For the most part, we hugged the coasts and avoided the open sea. It was from the little bays, whose mouths we thus crossed, that the pirates we greatly dreaded dropped down upon merchantmen, like falcons from their perches. When they took a vessel that resisted, the crew, at those rough hands, got scant mercy. I have come across a galley drifting idly before the wind, with all her crew, a grim row of skeletons, hanging in a row along her yard, and swinging this way and that, and rattling drearily against the sail and each other in melancholy unison with the listless wallow of their vessel. At another time, a Roman trireme fell upon a big pirate of Melita and stormed and captured her. The three hundred men on board were too ugly and wicked to sell, so the Romans drove them overboard like sheep, and then burned the boat.

When we sailed over the spot at sundown the next day she was still spluttering and hissing, with the water lapping over the edge of her charred side, and round among the curls of yellow smoke overhead a thousand gulls were screeching, while a thousand more sat, gorged and stupid, upon the dead pirates. Not for many nights did we forget the evil picture of retribution, and how the setting sun flooded the sea with blood. Nor how the dead villains, in all their horror, swirled about in twos and threes in that crimson light, and fell into our wake, drawn by the current, and came jostling and grinning, and nodding after us, though we made all sail to out-pace them, in a gloomy procession for a mile or so.

It often seemed to me in those days there were more freebooters afloat than honest men. At times we ran from these, at times we fought them, and again we would give a big marauder a share of cargo to save the ship from his kindred who threatened us. It was a dangerous game, and one never knew, on rising, where his couch would be at night, nor whether the prosperous merchant of the morning might not be the naked slave of the evening, storing his own

wealth in a robber cave under the lash of some savage sea tyrant.

Yet even these cruel rovers did me a good turn. We were short of water, and had run down along a lonely coast to a free spring we knew of to fill water-butts and skins. When we let go in the little inlet where the well was to be found, another vessel, and, moreover, a pirate, lay anchored before us. However, we were consciously virtuous, and, what was of more consideration, a larger vessel and crew than the other, so we went ashore and made acquaintance round the fresh water with as villainous a gang of sea-robbers as ever caused the blood of an honest trader to run cold in his veins. The very air of their neighborhood smelled so of treachery and cruelty we soon had but one thought—to load up and be gone.

But this was a somewhat longer process than we wished, as our friends had baled the little spring dry, and we had to wait its refilling. While we did so, I strolled over to a group of miserable slaves turned out for an airing, and cowering on the black and shadeless rocks. There were in that abject group captives from every country that fared upon those seas, and some others besides. The dusky peasant of Boeotia, that fronts the narrow straits, wrung her hands by the fair-cheeked girl snapped up from the wide Gulf of Narbo; the dark Numidian pearl-fisher cursed his patron god; and the tall Achaian from the many islands of Peloponnesian waters gritted his teeth as he cowered beneath his rags and bemoaned the fate that threw him into the talons of the unmerciful sea-hawks.

I looked upon them with small interest, for new-taken slaves were no great sight to me, until I chanced, a little way from the others, upon such a captive as I had rarely or never seen. She struck me at once as being the fiercest and most beautiful creature that mortal eyes had ever lit upon.

Never was Umbrian or Iberian girl like that; never was Cyprian Aphrodite served by a maid so pink and white. Her hair was fiery red gold, gleaming in the sunshine like the locks of the young goddess Medusa. Her face was of ruddy ivory, and her native comeliness gleamed through the unwashed dust and tears of many long days and nights. Her eyes were as blue under her shaggy wild hair as the sky overhead, and her body—grimy under its sorrow-stains—was still as fair as that of some dainty princess.

KNOWING the pirate captain would seek a long price for his property, I determined to use a little persuasion with him. I went back to my men, and sent one of them, proficient in the art of the bow-string, to look at the slaves.

Then I drew the unsuspecting scoundrel up there for a bargain, and, well out of sight of his gang, we faced the red-haired girl and discussed her price. The rascal's first figure was three hundred of your modern pounds, a sum which would then have fetched the younger daughter of a sultan, full of virtue and accomplishments. As this girl very likely had neither one nor the other, I did not see why it was necessary to pay so much, and, stroking my beard, in an agreed signal, with my hand, as my man was passing behind the old pirate, he slipped a length of twisted cloth over his wicked neck and tightened it with a jerk that nearly started the eyes from his head, and brought him quickly to his knees.

"Now, delicately minded one," I said, "I don't want to fight you and your crew for this maid here, on whom I have set my heart, but you know we are numerous and well-armed, so let us have a peaceful and honest bargain. Give me a fairer price," and, obedient to my signal, the band was loosened.

"Not a sesterce will I take off," spluttered the wretch, "not a drachma, not an ounce!"

"Come! come! think again," I said, persuasively, "and the cloth shall help you." Thereon, another turn was taken, and my henchman turned his knuckles into the nape of the swarthy villain's neck until the veins on his forehead stood out like cordage and the blood ran from his nose and eyes.

In a minute the rover threw up his hands and signed he had enough, and when he got his breath we found he had knocked off a hundred pounds. We gave him the cord again, and brought him down, twist by twist, to fifty. By this time he was almost at his last gasp, and I was contented, paying the coins out on the rock and leaving them there, with the rogue well bound. I was always honest, though, as became the times, a trifle hard at bargains.

Then I cut the red maid loose and took her by the elbow and led her down to the beach, where we were secretly picked up by my fellows, and shortly afterward we set sail again for the open main.

Thus was acquired the figurehead of my subsequent adventures—the Siren who

lured me to that coast where I have lived for many centuries.

It was the inscrutable will of Destiny that those shining coins I paid down on the bare, hot African rock should cost me all my wealth, my cash and credit at many ports, and that that fair slave, who I deemed would serve but to lighten a voyage or two, should mock my forethought, and lead my fate into the strangest paths that ever were trodden by mortal foot.

In truth, that sunny virago bewitched me. She combined such ferocity with her grace, and was so pathetic in her reckless grief at times, that I, the immovable, was moved, and softened the rigor of her mischance as time went on so much as might be. At once, on this, like some caged wild creature, which forgives to one master alone the sorrows of captivity, she softened to me. Before many days were over she had bathed, and, discarding her rags for a length or two of cloth, had tied up her hair with a strand of ribbon she found, and, looking down at her reflection in a vessel of water (her only mirror, for we carried women but seldom), she smiled for the first time.

Though at first we could only with difficulty make ourselves understood, yet she soon picked up something of the Southern tongue from me, while I very fairly acquired the British language of this comely tutoress. Of her I learned she was of that latter country, where her father was a chief; how their coast village had been surprised by a Southern rover's foray; she knew not how many of the people slain, or made captive, and herself carried off. Afterward she had fallen into the hands of other pirates by an act of sea barter, and they were taking her to Alexandria, hoping, as I guessed, in that luxurious city to obtain a higher price than in the ordinary markets of Gaul or Italy.

What I heard of Britain from these warm lips greatly fired my curiosity, and, after we touched at several ports and found trade but dull, chance clenched my resolution.

We had sailed northward with a cargo of dates, and on the sixth day ran in under the high promontory of Massilia, which you moderns call Marsellles. Here I rid myself of my fruit at a very good profit, and, after talking to a brother merchant I met by chance upon the quay, fully determined to load up with oil, wine, stuffs, and such other things as he recommended, and sail at once for Britain.

Little did I think how momentous this hasty decision would be! It was brought about partly as I have explained, and partly by the interest which just then that country was attracting. All the weapons and things of Britain were then in good demand: no tin and gold, the smiths roundly swore, were like the British; no furs in winter, the Roman ladies vowed, were so warm as those; while no patrician from Tarentum to the Tiber held his house well furnished unless a red-haired slave-girl or two from the remote place idled, sad and listlessly, in his painted proticoes.

In these slaves there was a brisk and increasing traffic. I went into the market that ran just along the inner harber one day, and saw there an ample supply of such curious goods suitable for every need.

All down the middle of a wide street rough booths of sailcloth had been run up, and about and before these crouched slaves of every age and condition. There were old men and young men—fierce and wild-looking barbarians, in all truth—some with the raw, red scars on chest and limbs they had taken a few weeks before in a last stand for liberty, and some groaning in the sickness that attended the slaver's lash and their condition.

There were lank-haired girls, submitting with sullen hate to the appraising eyes of purchasers laughing and chatting in Latin or Gaulish, as they dealt with them no more gently than a buyer deals with sheep when mutton is cheap. Mothers again—sick and travel-stained themselves—were soothing the unkempt little ones who cowered behind them and shrank from every Roman footstep as the quails shrink from a kestrel's shadow. Some of these children were very flowers of comeliness, though trodden into the mire of misfortune. I bought a little girl to attend upon her upon my ship, who, though she wore at the time but one sorry cloth, and was streaked with dirt and dust, had eyes clear as the southern sky overhead, and hair that glistened in uncared-for brightness upon her shoulders like a tissue of golden threads.

Her mother was loth to part with her, and fought like a tiger when we separated them. It was only after the dealer's lash had cut a dozen red furrows into her back, and a bystander had beat her on the head with the flat of his sword, that she gave in and swooned, and I led the weeping little one away.

So we loaded up again with Easter nothings, such as the barbarians might be supposed to like, and in a few weeks started once more. We sailed down the green coast

of Hispania, through the narrow waters of Herculis Fretum, and then, leaving the undulating hills of that pleasant strait behind, turned northward through the long waves of the black outer sea.

FOR many days we rolled up a sullen and dangerous coast, but one morning our pilot called me from my breakfast of fruit and millet cakes, and, pointing over the green expanse, told me yonder white surf on the right was breaking on the steep rocks of Armorica, while the misty British shore lay ahead.

So I called out Blodwen the slave, and told her to snuff the wind and find what it had to say. She knew only too well, and was vastly delighted, wistfully scanning the long gray horizon ahead, and being beside herself with eagerness.

We steered westwardly toward the outer islands called Cassiterides, where most of our people collected and bought their tin, but we were fated not to reach them. On the morrow so fierce a gale sprang out of the deep we could by no means stand against it, but turned and fled through the storm, and over such a terrible expanse of mighty billows as I never saw the like of.

To my surprise, my girl thought naught of the wind and sea, but came constantly to the groaning bulwarks, where the angry green water swirled and gleamed like a caldron, and, holding on by a shroud, looked with longing but familiar eyes at the rugged shore we were running down. At one time I saw her smile to recognize, close in shore, and plunging heavily toward some unknown haven, half a dozen of her own native fisher-boats.

Later on, Blodwen brightened up even more as the savage cliffs of the west gave way to rolling downs of grass, and when these, as we fled with the sea-spume, grew lower, and were here and there clothed with woods, and little specks among them of cornfields, she shouted with joy, and, leaping down from the tall prow, where she had stood, indifferent to the angry thunder of the bursting surges upon our counter, and the sting and rattle of the white spray that flew up to the swinging yard every time we dropped into the bosom of the angry sea, she said exultingly, with her face red and gleaming in a salt wet glaze, she could guide us to a harbor if we would.

I was by this time a little sick at heart for the safety of all my precious things in bales and boxes below, and something like the long invoice of them I knew so well rose in my throat every time we sank with a horrible sinking into one of those shadowy valleys between the hissing crests—so I nodded. Blodwen at once made the helmsman draw nearer the coast.

By the time we had approached the shore within a mile or so the white squalls were following each other fast, while heavy columns of western rain were careering along the green sea in many tall, spectral forms. But nothing cared that purchase of mine. She had gone to the tiller, and, like some wild goddess of the foam, stood there, her long hair flying on the wet sea wind, and her fierce, bright eyes aglow with pleasure and excitement as she scanned the white ramparts of the coast down which we were hurtling.

She was oblivious of the swarthy seamen, who eyed her with wonder and awe; oblivious of the white bed of froth which boiled and flashed all down the rim of our dipping gunwale; and equally indifferent to the heavy rain that smoked upon our decks, and made our straining sails as hard and stiff as wood.

Just as the great shore began to loom over us, and I sorely doubted my wisdom in sailing these unknown waters with such a pilot, she gave a scream of pleasure—an exulting, triumphant note that roused a sympathetic chorus in the piping wild fowl overhead—and, following the point of her finger, we saw the solid rampart of cliffs had divided, and a little estuary was opening before us.

Round went our felucca to the impervious gesture of that girl, and, gripping the throbbing tiller over the hands of the strong steersman, aglow with excitement, yet noting everything, while the swart brown sailors shouted at the humming cordage, she took us down through an angry caldron of sea and over a foaming bar (where I cursed, in my haste, every ounce I had spent upon her) into the quieter waters beyond.

And when, a few minutes later—reeking with salt spray, but safe and sound—we slowly rolled in with the making tide to a secure, landlocked haven, that brave girl left the rudder, and, going forward, gave one look at the opening valley, which I afterward knew was her strangely recovered home. And then her fair head fell upon her arms, and, leaning against the mast, under the tent of her red hair, she burst into a passionate storm of tears.

She soon recovered, and stole a glance at me as she wiped her lids with the backs of her hands, to note if I were angry. Her feminine perception found my eyes gave

the lie to the frown upon my forehead, so she put on some extra importance (as though the air of the place suited her dignity), and resumed command of the ship.

Well! There is much to tell, so it must be told briefly. We sailed into a fair green estuary, with woods on either hand dipping into the water and nodding their own glistening reflections, until we turned a bend and came upon a British village down by the edge. There were, perhaps, two hundred huts scattered round the slope of a grassy mound, upon top of which was a stockade of logs and mud walls encompassing a few better-built houses. Canoes and bigger boats were drawn up on the beach, and naked children and dogs were at play along the margin; while women and some few men were grinding corn and fashioning boat-gear.

As our sails came round the headland, with one single accord the population took to flight, flung down their meal-bags and tools, tumbling over each other in their haste, and, yelling and scrambling, they streamed away to the hill.

This amused Blodwen greatly, and she let them run until the fat old women of the crowd had sorted themselves out into a panting rear guard halfway up, and the long-legged youngsters were already scrambling over the barrier; then, with her hand over her mouth, she exerted her powerful voice in a long, wailing signal cry. The effect was instantaneous. The crowd stopped, hesitated, and finally came scrambling down again to the beach; and, after a little parley, being assured of their good-will, and greatly urged by Blodwen, we landed, and were soon overwhelmed in a throng of wondering, jostling, excited British.

But it was not me to whom they thronged, but rather her; and such wonder and surprise, broadening slowly in joy as she, with her nimble woman's tongue, answered their countless questions, I never witnessed. At last they set up yelling and shouting, and, seizing her, dragged and carried her in a tumultuous procession up the zigzag into the fortalice.

Blodwen had come home—that was all; and from a slave girl had blossomed into a Princess!

Never before was there such a yelling and chattering and blowing of horns and beating of shields. While messengers rushed off down the woodland paths to rouse the country, the villagers crowded round me and my men. And, having, by the advice of one of their elders, relinquished their first intention of cutting all our throats in the excess of their pleasure, they treated us very handsomely, feeding and feasting the crew to the utmost of their capacity.

AS YOU will suppose, I was ill at ease for my fair barbarian who had thus turned the tables upon me, and in whose power it was impossible not to recognize that we now lay. How would the slave Princess treat her captive master? I was not long in doubt. Her messenger presently touched me on the shoulder as I sat, a little rueful, on a stone apart from my rollicking men, and led me through that prehistoric village street up the gentle slope and between the oaklog barrier into the long, low dwelling that was at once the palace and the citadel of the place.

Entering, I found myself in a very spacious hall, effective in its gloomy dignity. All round the three straight sides the massive walls were hidden in drapery of the skins and furs of bear, wolf, and deer, and over these were hung in rude profusion light round shields embossed with shining metal knobs, javelins, and boar spears, with a hundred other implements of war or woodcraft. Below them stood along the walls rough settles, and benches with rougher tables, enough to seat, perhaps, a hundred men. At the crescent-shaped end of the hall, facing the entrance door, was a daïs—a raised platform of solid logs closely placed together and covered with skins—upon which a massive and ample chair stood, also of old, and wonderfully fashioned and carved by the patient labor of many hands.

Nigh it were a group of women, and one or two white-robed Druids, as these people call their priests. But chief among them was she who stepped forth to meet me, clad (for her first idea had been to change her dress) in fine linen and fair furs—how, I scarcely know, save that they suited her marvelously.

Fine chains of hammered gold were about her neck, a shining gorget belt set with a great boss of native pearls upon her middle, and her two bare white arms gleamed like ivory under their load of bracelets of yellow metal and prismatic pearl shell that clanked harmoniously to her every movement. But the air she put on along with these fine things was equally becoming, and she took me by the hand with an affectionate condescension, while, turning to her people, she briefly ha-

rangued them, running glibly over my virtues, and bestowing praise upon the way in which I had "rescued and restored her to her kindred," until, so gracefully did she pervert the truth, I felt a blush of unwonted virtue under my callous skin. And when they acclaimed me friend and ally, I stood an inch taller among them to find myself of such unexpected worth—one tall Druid alone scowling on me evilly.

For long that pleasant village by the shallow waters remembered the coming of Blodwen to her own. Her kinsmen had all been slain in the raid of the sea-rovers which brought about her captivity, and thus—the succession to headship and rule being very strictly observed among the Britons—she was elected, after an absence of six months, to the oak throne and the headship of the clan with an almost unbroken accord. But that priest, Dhuwallon, her cousin, and next below her in birth, scowled again to see her seated there, and hated me, I saw, as the unconscious thwarter of his ambition.

Those were fine times, and the Princess bought my cargo of wine and oil and Southern things, distributing it to all that came to pay her homage, so that for days we were drunk and jolly. Fires gleamed on twenty hilltops round about, and the little becks ran red down to the river with the blood of sheep and bullocks slaughtered in sacrifice. And the foot-tracks in the woods were stamped into highways; and the fords ran muddy to the ocean; and the grass was worn away; and birds and beasts fled to quieter thickets; and fishes swam out to the blue sea; and everything was eaten up, far and wide; that time my fair slave girl first put her foot upon the daïs and prayed to the manes of her ancestors among the oak trees.

CHAPTER II

NOTHING whatever have I to say against Blodwen, the beautiful British Princess, and many months we spent there happily in her town; and before the black long winter was worn through I had married her before all the tribe. Truly then I was rich by her constant favor, nor, need it be said, more loth than ever to leave her. As for that, she had her own answer.

Going down one morning to the shore, somewhat sad and sorry, for the inevitable time of parting was near, my ship lying ready loaded by the beach, I rubbed my

eyes again and again to see that the felucca had gone from the little inlet where she had lain so long. Nor was comfort at hand when, as I rushed to a promontory commanding a better view, to my horror there shone the golden speck of her sail in the morning sunlight on the blue rim of the most distant sea.

I have often thought, since, the crafty Princess had a hand in this desertion. She was so ready with her condolence, so persuasive that I should "bide the winter and leave her in the spring" (which was said with her most detaining smile), that I could not think the catastrophe took my gentle savage much by surprise.

In truth, she was a good Princess, but very variable. Blodwen the chieftainess urging her clansmen to a tribal fight, red hot with the strong drink of war, or reeking with the fumes and cruelty of a bloody sacrifice to Baal, was one thing; and, on the other hand, Blodwen tending with the rude skill of the day her kinsmen's wounds, Blodwen the daughter, weeping gracious, silent tears in the hall of her fathers as the minstrels chanted their praises—I loved her better than I have ever loved any of those other women who have loved me since.

But sterner things were coming my erratic way. The proud Roman Eagle, having in these years long tyrannized over fertile Gaul, must needs swoop down on our brothers along that rocky coast of Armorica that faces our white shore, carrying death and destruction among our kinsmen as the peregrines in the cliffs harry the frightened seamews.

Forthwith the narrow waters were black with our hide-sailed boats rushing to succor. But it was useless. Who could stand against the Roman? Our men came back presently—few, wounded, and crestfallen, with long tales of the foeman's deadly might by sea and shore.

Then, a little later on, we had to fight for ourselves, though scantily we had expected it. Early one autumn a friendly Veneti came over from Gaul and warned the Southern Princess the stern Roman Consul Caesar was collecting boats and men to invade us. At once on this news were we all torn by diverse counsels and jealousies, and Blodwen hung in my arms for a tearful space, and then sent me eastward with a few men—all she could spare from watching her own dangerous neighbors—to oppose the Roman landing; while the priest Dhuwallon, though exempt by his order from military service, followed, sullen, along with my warlike clansmen.

We joined other bodies of British, until by the beginning of the harvest month we had encamped along the Kentish downs in very good force, though disunited. Three days later, at dawn, came in a runner who said that Caesar was landing to the westward—how I wished that traitor lie would stick in his false throat and choke him!—and thither, bitterly against my advice, went nearly all our men.

Even now it irks me to tell this story. While the next young morning was still but a yellow streak upon the sea, our keen watchers saw sails coming from the pale Gaulish coast, and by the time the primrose portals of the day were fully open, the water was covered with them from one hand to the other.

IN VAIN our recalling signal-fires smoked. A thousand scythed chariots and four thousand men were away, and by noon the great Consul's foremost galley took the British ground where the beach shelved up to the marshy flats, which again rose, through coppices and dingles, to our camp on the overhanging hills. Another and another followed, all thronged with tawny stalwart men in brass and leather. What could we do against this mighty fleet that came headlong upon us, rank behind rank, the white water flashing in tangled ribbons from their innumerable prows, and the dreaded symbols of Roman power gleaming from every high-built stern?

We rushed down, disorderly, to meet them, the Druids urging us on with song and sacrifice, and waded into the water to our waists, for we were as courageous as we were undisciplined, and they hesitated for some seconds to leave their lurching boats. I remember at this moment, when the fate of a kingdom hung in the balance, down there jumped a Centurion, and waving a golden eagle over his head, drew his short sword, and calling out that "he at least would do his duty to the Republic," made straight for me.

Brave youth! As he rushed impetuously through the water my ready javelin took him true under the gilded plate that hung upon his chest, and the next wave rolled in to my feet a lifeless body lapped in a shroud of crimson foam.

But now the legionaries were springing out far and near, and fighting hand to hand with the skin-clad British, who gave before them slowly and stubbornly. Many were they who died, and the floating corpses jostled and rolled about among us

as we plunged and fought and screamed in the shallow tide, and beat on the swarming, impervious golden shields of the invaders.

Back to the beach they drove us, hand to hand and foot to foot, and then, with a long shout of triumph that startled the seafowl on the distant cliffs, they pushed us back over the shingles ever farther from the sea, that idly sported with our dead—back, in spite of all we could do, to the marshland.

There they formed, after a breathing space, in the long, stern line that had overwhelmed a hundred nations, and charged us like a living rampart of steel. And as the angry waves rush upon the immovable rocks, so rushed we upon them. For a moment or two the sun shone upon a wild uproar, the fierce contention of two peoples breast to breast, a glitter of caps and javelins, splintered spears and riven shields, all flashing in the wild dust of war that the Roman Eagle loved so well. And then the Britons parted into a thousand fragments and reeled back, and were trampled under foot, and broke and fled!

Britain was lost!

Soon after this all the coppices and pathways were thronged with our flying footmen. Yet Dhuwallon and I, being mounted, had lingered behind the rest, galloping hither and thither over the green levels, trying to get some few British to stand again; but presently it was time to be gone. The Romans, in full possession of the beach, had found a channel, and drawn some boats up to the shelving shore. They had dropped the hinged bulwarks, and, with the help of a plank or two, had already got out some of their twenty of thirty chargers. On to these half a dozen eager young patricians had vaulted, and, I and Dhuwallon being conspicuous figures, they came galloping down at us. We, on our lighter steeds, knowing every path and gully in the marshlands, should have got away from them like starlings from a prowling sheepdog; but teachery was in the black heart of that high priest at my elbow, and a ravening hatred which knew neither time nor circumstance.

It was just at the scraggy foothills, and the shouting Centurions were close behind us; the last of our fighters had dashed into the shelter ahead; and I was galloping down a grassy hollow, when the coward shearer of mistletoe came up alongside. I looked not at him, but over my other shoulder at the red plumes of the pursuers dancing on the sky-line. All in an instant something sped by me, and, shrieking in pain, my horse plunged forward, missed his footing, and rolled over into the long autumn grass, with the scoundrel priest's last javelin quivering in his throat. I heard that villain laugh as he turned for a moment to look back, and then he vanished into the screen of leaves.

Amazed and dizzy, I staggered to my feet, pushed back the long hair and the warm running blood from my eyes, and grasping my sword, waited the onset of the Romans. They rode over me as though I were a shock of ripe barley in August, and one of them, springing down, put his foot to my throat and made to kill me.

"No, no, Fabrius!" said another Centurion from the back of a white steed. "Don't kill him! He will be more useful alive."

"You were always tender-hearted, Sempronius Faunus," mumbled the first one, reluctantly taking his heel from me and giving permission to rise with a kick in the side. "What are you going to do with him? Make him native Prefect of these marshes, eh?"

Disregarding their banter, the Centurion Sempronius, who was a comely young fellow, and seemed just then extremely admirable in person and principles to me, mounted again, and, pointing with his short sword to the shore, bid me march, speaking the Gallic tongue, and in a manner there was no gainsaying.

SO I was a prisoner to the Romans, and they bound me, and left me lying for ten hours under the side of one of their stranded ships, down by the melancholy afternoon sea, still playing with its dead men, and rolling and jostling together in its long green fingers the raven-haired Etrurian and the pale, white-faced Celt. Then, when it was evening, they picked me up and took me away through their camp, and a mile down the dingles, where the Roman legionaries were digging fosses and making their camp in the ruddy flicker of watch-fires.

Here the main body of the invaders were lying in a great crescent toward the inland, and crowning the hillock was a scarp, where a rough pavilion of skins, and sails from the vessels on the beach, had been erected.

As we approached this all the noise and laughter died out of my guard, who now moved in perfect silence. A bow-shot away we halted, and presently Sempronius was seen backing out of the tent with an air

of the greatest diffidence. Seizing me by my manacled arms, he led me to it. At the very threshold he whispered in my ear.

"Briton, if you value that tawny skin of yours I saved this morning, speak true and straight to him who sits within," and without another word he thrust me into the rough pavilion. At a little table, dark with usage, scarred with campaigning, a man was sitting, an ample toga partly hiding the close-fitting leather vest he wore beneath it. His long and nervous fingers were urging over the tablets before him a stylus with a speed few in those days commanded, while a little earthenware lamp, with a flickering wick burning in the turned-up spout, cast a wavering light upon his thin, sharp-cut features—the imperious mouth that was shut so tight, and the strong lines of his dark, commanding face.

He went on writing as I entered, without looking up; and my gaze wandered round the poor walls of his tent, his piled-up arms in one place, his truckle bed in another, there a heap of choice British spoil, flags, and symbols, and weapons, and there a foreign case, half opened, stocked with bags of coins and vellum rolls. All was martial confusion in the black and yellow light of that strange little chamber, and as I turned back to him I felt a shock run through me to find the blackest and most piercing pair of eyes that ever shone from a mortal head fixed upon my face.

He rose, and, with the lamp in his hand, surveyed me from top to toe.

"Of the Veneti?" he said, in allusion to my dark unBritish hair, and I answered "No."

"What then?"

I told him I was a knight just now in the service of the British king.

"How many of your men opposed us today?" was the next question.

"A third as many as you brought with you where you were not invited."

" And how many are there in arms behind the downs and in this southern country?"

"How many pebbles are there on yonder beach? How many ears of corn did we pull last harvest?" I answered, for I thought I should die in the morning, and this made me brave and surly.

He frowned very blackly at my defiance, but curbing, I could see, his wrath, he put the lamp on the table, and, after a minute of communing with himself, he said, in a voice over which policy threw a thin veil of amiability:

"Perhaps, as a British knight and a good soldier, I have no doubt you could speak better with your hands untied?"

I thanked him, replying that it was so; and he came up, freeing, with a beautiful little golden stiletto he wore in his girdle, my wrists. This kindly, slight act of soldierly trust obliged me to the Roman general, and I answered his quick, incisive questions in the Gaulish tongue as far as honestly might be. He got little about our forces, finding his prisoner more effusive in this quarter than communicative. Once or twice, when my answers verged on the scornful, I saw the imperious temper and haughty nature at strife with his will in that stern, masterful face and those keen black eyes.

But when we spoke of the British people I could satisfy his curious and many questions about them more frankly. Every now and then, as some answer interested him, he would take a quick glance at me, as though to read in my face whether it were the truth or not, and, stopping by his little table, he would jot down a passage on the wax, scan it over, and inquire of something else. Our life and living, wars, religions, friendships, all seemed interesting to this acute gentleman so plainly clad, and it was only when we had been an hour together, and after he had clearly got from me all he wished, that he called the guard and dismissed me, bidding Sempronius, in Latin, which the General thought I knew not, to give me food and drink, but keep me fast for the present.

Sempronius showed the utmost deference to the little man in the toga and leather jerkin, listening with bent head, and backing from his presence; while I roughly gave him thanks for my free hands, and stalked out after my jailer with small ceremony.

ONCE in the starlight, and out of earshot, the Centurion said to me, with a frown:

"Briton, I feel somewhat responsible for you, and I beg, the next time you leave that presence, not to carry your head so high or turn that wolf-skinned back of yours on him so readily, or I am confident I shall have orders to teach you manners. Did you cast yourself down when you entered?"

"Not I."

"Jove! And did not kneel while you spoke to him?"

"Not once," I said

"Now, by the Sacred Flame! do you mean

to say you stood the whole time as I found you, towering in your ragged skins, your bare, bracelet arms upon your chest, and giving Caesar back stare for stare in his very tent?"

"Who?"

"Caesar himself. Why, who else? Caesar, whose word is the life and death from here to the Apennines; who is going to lick up this country of yours as a hungry beggar licks out a porringer. Surely you knew that he to whom you spoke so freely was our master, the great Praetor himself!"

Here was an oversight. I might have guessed so much; but, full of other things, I had never supposed the little man was anything but a Roman general sent out to harry and pursue us. Strange ideas rose at once, and while the Tyrian in me was awestruck by the closeness of my approach to a famous and dreaded person, the Briton moaned at a golden opportunity lost to unravel, by one bold stroke—a stroke of poniard, of burning brand from the fire, of anything—the net that was closing over this unfortunate island.

So strong rose these latter regrets at having had Caesar, the unwelcome, the relentless, within arms' length, and having let him go forth with his indomitable blood still flowing in his lordly veins, that I stopped short, clapped my hand upon my swordless scabbard, and made a hasty stride back to the tent.

At once the ready Sempronius was on me like a wild cat, and with two strong legionaries bore me to the ground and tied me hand and foot. They carried me down to the camp, and there pitched me under a rock, to reflect until dawn on the things of a disastrous day.

But by earliest twilight the bird had flown! At midnight, when the tired soldiers slept, I chafed my hempen bonds against a rugged angle of earth-embedded stone, and in four hours was free, rising silently among the snoring warriors and passing into the forest as noiselessly as one of those weird black shadows that the last flashes of their expiring campfires made at play on the background of the woods.

I stole past their outmost pickets while the first flush of day was in the east, and, then, in the open, turned me to my own people and ran, like a hind to her little one, over the dewy grasslands and through the spangled thickets, scaring the conies at their earliest meal, and frightening the merles and mavis ere they had done a bar of their matin songs, throwing myself down in the tents of my kinsmen just as the round sun shone through the close-packed oak trunks.

But, curse the caitiff fools who welcomed me there! It would have been far better had I abided Caesar's anger, or trusted to that martial boy, Sempronius Faunus!

The British churls, angry and sullen at their defeat of yesterday, were looking for a victim to bear the burden of their wrongs. Now the priest Dhuwallon, who had turned livid with fear and anger when I had come back unharmed from the hands of the enemy, with a ready wit which was surely lent him from hell, saw he might propitiate the Britons and gratify his own ends by one more coward trick to be played at my expense. I do not deny his readiness, or grudge him aught, yet I hate him, even now, from the bottom of my heart, with all that fierce old anger which then would have filled me with delight and pride if I could have had his anointed blood smoking in the runnels of my sword.

Well. It was his turn again. He procured false witnesses—not a difficult thing for a high priest in that discontented camp—and by midday I was bound once more, and before the priests and chiefs as a traitor and Roman spy.

What good was it for me to stand up and tell the truth to that gloomy circle while the angry crowd outside hungered for a propitiary sacrifice? In vain I lied with all the resources I could muster, and in vain, when this was fruitless, denounced that pale villain, my accuser. When I came to tell of his treachery in killing my horse the day before, and leaving me to be slain by the enemy, I saw I was but adding slander, in the judges' eyes, to my other crimes.

When I declared I was no Roman, but a Briton—an aged fool, his long, white locks fileted with oak leaves—rose silently and held a polished brass mirror before me, and by every deity in the Northern skies I must own my black hair and dusky face were far more Roman than native.

So they found me guilty, and sentenced me to be offered up to Baal next morning, before the army, as a detected spy.

WHEN that silvery dawn came it brought no relief or respite, for the laws of the Druids, which enjoined slow and deliberate judgments, forbade the altering of a sentence once pronounced. It was as fine a day as could be wished for their infernal ceremonial, with the mellow autumn mist lying wide and flat along the endless vistas of oak and hazel that then hid almost all the valleys, and over the

mist the golden rays of the sun spread far and near, kissing with crimson radiance the green knobs of upland that shone above that pearly ocean.

Here in this fairy realm, while the thickets were still beaded with the million jewels of the morning, and the earth breathed of repose and peace, they carried out that detestable orgy of which I was the center.

My memory is a little hazy. Perhaps, at the time, I was thinking of other things—a red-haired girl, for instance; my shekels of brass and tin and silver; my kine, my dogs, and my horses, mayhap; such things will be—and thus I know little of how it came. But presently I was on the fatal spot.

A wide circle of green grass, kept short and close, in the heart of a dense thicket of oak. Round this circle a ring of great stone columns, crowned by mighty slabs of the same kind, and hung, to-day, with all the skins and robes and weapons of the assembled tribesmen; so that the mighty enclosure was a rude amphitheater, walled by the wealth of the spectators. And in the center an oblong rock, some eight feet long, with a gutter down it for the blood to run into a pit at its feet. This was the fatal slip from which the Druids launched that poor vessel, the soul, upon the endless ocean of eternity.

All round the great circle, when its presence and significance suddenly burst upon me, were the British, to the number of many hundreds, squatting on the ground in the front rows, or standing behind against the gray pillars, an uncouth ring of motley barbarians, shaggy with wolf and bear skins.

They forced me and two other miserable wretches to the altar, and then, while our guards stood by us, and the mounted men clustered among the monoliths behind, a deadly silence fell upon the assembly. It was so still we could hear the beat of our own hearts, and so intolerable that one of us three fell forward in a swoon ere it had lasted many minutes. When the white procession of executioners came chanting up the farther avenue of stones, into the arena, I breathed again, as though it were a nuptial procession, and they were bringing me a bride less grim than the golden adze which shone at their head.

They sang round the circle their mystic song, and then halted before the rude stone altar. Mixing up religion and justice, as was their wont, the chief Druid recited the crimes of the two culprits beside me, with their punishment, and immediately the first one, tightly bound, was pitched upon the stone altar. And while the Druids chanted their hymns to Baal the assembled multitude joined in, and clanged their shields in an infernal tumult which effectually drowned his yells for mercy. The sacred adze fell, and first his head, and then his body rolled into the hollow, while little streams of crimson blood trickled down the sides of the altar stone. The next one was treated in the same way, and tumbled off into the hollow below, and I was hoisted up to that reeking slab.

While they arranged me, that black priest stole up and hissed in my ear: "Is it of Blodwen you think when you shut your eyes? Take this, then, for your final comfort," he said, with a malicious leer—"I, even I, the despised and thwarted, will see to Blodwen, and answer for her happiness. Ah!—you writhe—I thought that would interest you. Let your last thought, accursed stranger, be I and she: let your last conception be my near revenge! Villain! I spit upon and deride you!" And he was as good as his word, glowering down upon me, helpless, with insatiate rage and hatred in his eyes, and then, stepping back, signed to the executioner.

I heard the wild hymn to their savage gods go ringing up again through the green leaves of the oaks; I heard the clatter of the weapons upon the round, brass-bound targets, the voices of the priests, and the cry of a startled kite circling in the pleasant autumn mist overhead. I saw the great crescent of the sacred golden adze swing into the sky, and then, while it was just checking to the fall which should extinguish me, there came a hush upon the people, followed by a wild shout of fear and anger, and I turned my head half over as I lay, bound, upon the stone.

I saw the British multitude seethe in confusion, and then burst and fly, like the foam strands before the wind, as, out of the green thickets, at the run, their cold, brave faces all emotionless over their long brass shields, came rank upon rank of Roman legionaries. I saw Sempronius, on his white charger, at their head, glittering in brass and scarlet, and, finding my tongue in my extremity, "Sempronius!" I yelled, "Sempronius to the rescue!" But too late!

With a wavering, aimless fall, the adze descended between my neck and my shoulder, and black curtain of dissolution fell over the painted picture of the world, there was a noise of a thousand rivers tumbling into a bottomless cavern, and I expired.

CHAPTER III

I DO confess I can offer no justification for the continuation of my story. Once so fairly sped as I was on that long-distant day, thus recalled in such detail as I can remember, the natural and regular thing would be that there should be an end of me, with, perhaps, a page or two added by some kindly scribe to recall my too quickly smothered virtues. Nevertheless, I write again, not a whit the worse for a mischance which would have silenced many a man, and in a mood to tell you of things wonderful enough to strain the sides of your shallow modern skepticism, as new wine stretches a goat-skin bottle.

All the period between my death on the Druid altar and my reawakening was a void, whereof I can say but little. The only facts pointing to a faint clue to the wonderful lapse of life are the brief phenomena of my reawakening, which came to hand in sequence as they are here set down.

My first consciousness was little better than a realization of the fact that practically I was extinct. To this pointless knowledge there came a dawning struggle with the powers of mortality, until very slowly, inch by inch, the negativeness was driven back, and the spark of life began to brighten within me. To this moment I cannot say how long the process took. It may have been days, or weeks, or months, or ages, as likely as not; but when the vital flame was kindled the life and self-possession spread more quickly, until at last, with little fluttering breaths like a new-born baby's, and a tingling trickle of warm blood down my shrunken veins, in one strange minute, at least one hundred years after the close of my last spell of living (as I afterward learned), I feebly opened my eyes, and recognized with full contentment that I was alive again.

But, oh! the sorrows attendant on it! Every bone and muscle in me ached to that awakening, and my very fiber shook to the stress of the waking tide of vitality. You who have lain upon an arm for a sleepy hour or two, and suffered as a result ingenious torments from the new-moving blood, think of the like sorrows of four hundred years' stagnation! It was scarcely to be borne, and yet, like many other things of which the like might be said, I bore it in bitterness of spirit, until life had trickled into all the unfamiliar pathways of my clay, and then at length the pain decreased, and I could think and move.

In that strange and lonely hour of temporal resurrection almost complete darkness surrounded me, and my mind (with one certain consciousness that I had been very long where I lay) was a chaos of speculation and fancy and long-forgotten scenes. But as my faculties came more completely under control, and my eyes accepted the dim twilight as sufficient and convenient to them, they made out overhead a dull, massy roof of rock, rough with the strong masonry of mother earth, and descending in rugged sides to an uneven floor. In fact, there could be no doubt I was underground but how far down, and where, and why, could not be said. All around me were cavernous hollows and midnight shadows, round which the weird gleam of rude pillars and irregular walls made a heavy, mysterious coast to a black, uncertain sea.

I sat up and rubbed my eyes—and as I did so I felt every rag of clothing drop in dust and shreds from my person—and peered into the almost impenetrable gloom. My outstretched hands on one

side touched the rough rocks of what was apparently the arch of a niche in this chamber of the nether world, and under me they discovered a sandy shelf, upon which I lay, some eight or ten feet from the ground, as near as could be judged. Not a sound broke the stillness but the gentle monotony of falling water, whereof one unseen drop, twice a minute, fell with a faint silver cadence on to the surface of an unknown pool. I did not fear, I was not frightened, and soon I noticed as a set-off to the gloom of my sullen surroundings the marvelous purity of the atmosphere. It was a preservative itself.

Such an ambient, limpid element could surely have existed nowhere else. It was soft as velvet in its absolute stillness, and pure beyond suspicion. It was like some thin, sunless vintage that had mellowed, endless years, in the great vat of the earth, and it now ran with the effect of a delicate tonic through my inert frame. Nor was its sister and ally—the temperature—less conducive to my cure. In that subterranean place summer and winter were alike unknown. The trivial changes that vex the cuticle of the world were here reduced to an unalterable average of gentle warmth that assimilated with the soulless air to my huge contentment. You cannot wonder, therefore, that I throve apace, and explored with increasing strength the limits of my strange imprisonment.

All about me was fine, deep dust, and shreds, which even then smelt in my palm like remnants of fur and skins. At my elbow was a shallow British eating-dish, with a little dust at the bottom, and by it a broken eathenware pitcher such as they used for wine.

On my other side, as I felt with inquisitive fingers, lay a handleless sword, one of my own, I knew, but thin with age, the point all gone, rusty and useless. By it, again, reposed a small jar, heavy to lift, and rattling suggestively when shaken. My two fingers, thrust into the neck, told me it was full of coins, and I could not but feel a flush of gratitude in that grim place at the abortive kindness which had put food and drink, weapons and money, by my side, with a sweet ignorance, yet certainty, of my future awakening.

BUDDING curiosity suggested wider search, and, rising with difficulty, I cautiously dropped from my lofty shelf on to the ground. Then a wish to gain the outer air took possession of me, and, as I peered this way and that, a tiny point of light far away on the right attracted my attention. Upon my approach, it turned out to be a small hole in the cave, out of reach overhead. But, as I felt about below this little star of comfort, the walls appeared soft and peaty to the touch, so at once I was at work digging hard, with a pointed stone; and the farther I went the more leafy and rough became the material, while hope sent my heart pounding against my ribs in tune to my labor.

At last, after half an hour's work, an impulsive fancy seized me that I could heave a way out with my shoulder. No sooner said than done. I took ten steps back, and then plunged fiercely in the darkness of the great cavern into the moldy screen.

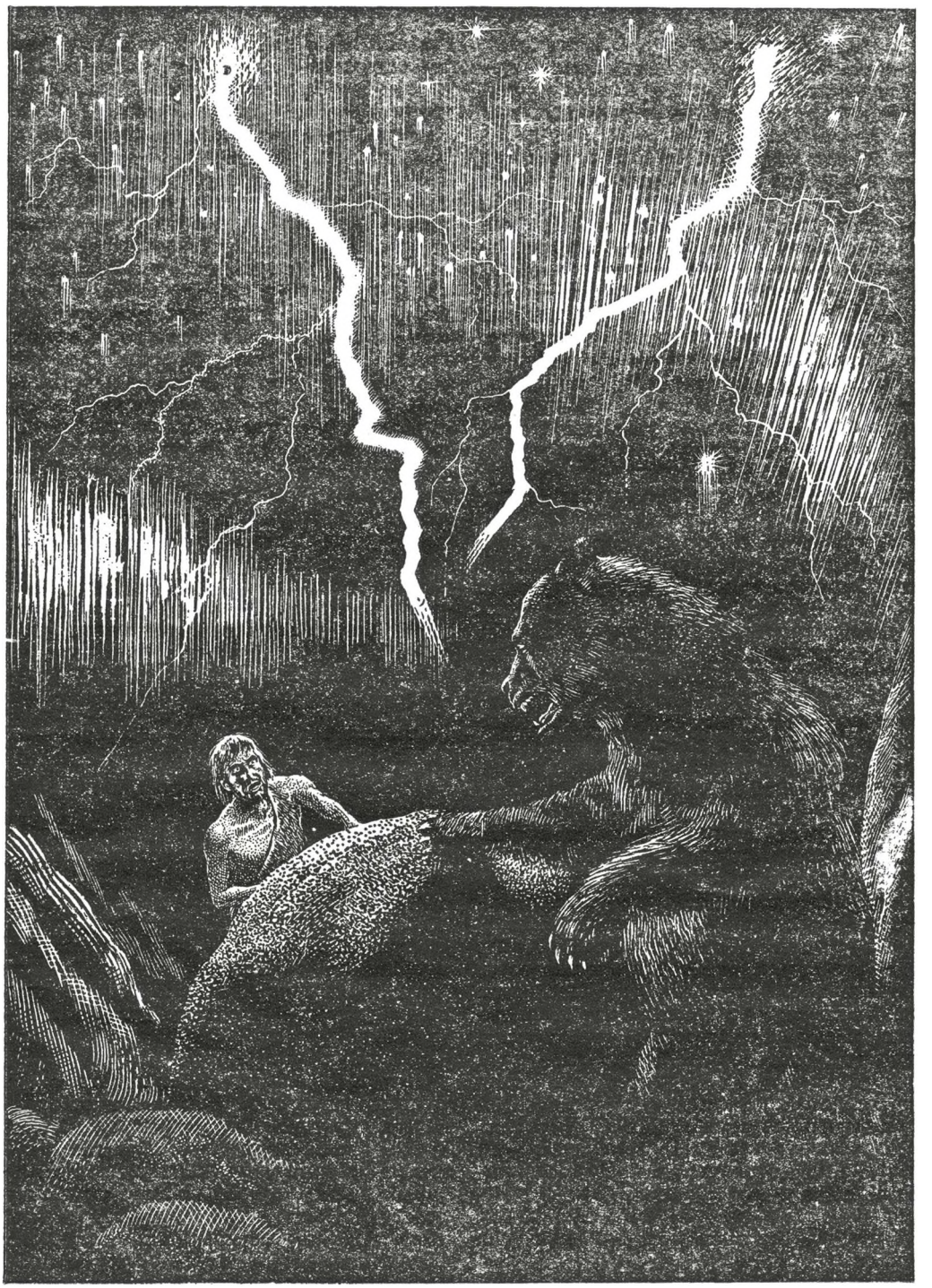
How can I describe the result! It gave way, and I shot, in a whirlwind of dust, into a sparkling, golden world! I rolled over and over down a spangled firmament, clutching in my bewilderment, my hands full of blue and yellow gems at every turn, and slipping and plunging, with a sirocco of color—red, green, sapphire, and gold—flying round before my bewildered face.

I finally came to a stop, and sat up. You will not wonder that I glared round me, when I say I was seated at the foot of all the new marvels of a beautiful limestone knoll, clothed from top to bottom with bluebells and primroses, spangled with the young spring greenery of hazel and beech overhead, and backed by the cloudless blue of an April sky!

On top of this fairy mountain, at the roots of the trees that crowned it, hidden by bracken and undergrowth, was the round hole from which I had plunged; nor need I tell you how, remembering what had happened in there, I rubbed my eyes, and laughed, and marveled greatly at the will of the Inscrutable, which had given me so wonderful a rebirth.

To you must be left to fill up the picture of my sensations and slowly recurring faculties. How I lay and basked in the warmth, and slowly remembered everything; to me belongs but the strange and simple narrative.

One of my first active desires was for food—nor, as my previous meal had been centuries earlier, will I apologize for this weakness. But where and how should it be had? This question soon answered itself. As I sauntered hither and thither, the low shoulder of the ridge was presently crossed, and a narrow footway in the woods leading to some pleasant pastures entered upon. Before I had gone far up



The cave was deluged with living, oscillating blue flame.

this shady track, a pail of milk in her hand, and whistling a ditty to herself, came tripping toward me as pretty a maid as had ever twisted a bit of white hawthorn into her amber hair.

I let her approach, and then, stepping out, made the most respectful salutation within the knowledge of ancient British courtesy. But, alas! my appearance was against me, and Roman fancies had peopled the hills with jolly satyrs, for one of which, no doubt, the damsel took me. As I bowed low the dust of centuries cracked all down my back. I was tawny and grim, and unshaved, and even my excellent manners could not warrant my disingenuousness against such a damning appearance. She screamed with fear, and, letting go her milk-jar, turned and fled, with a nimbleness which would have left even the wicked old wood-god himself far in the rear.

However, the milk remained, and as I peered into the pitcher, here seemed the very thing to recuperate me by easy stages. So I retired to a cozy dell, and, between copious draughts of that fine natural liquor, overwhelmed with blessings the sleek kine and the comely maid who milked them. Indeed, the stuff ran into my withered processes like a freshet stream into a long-dry country; it consoled and satisfied me; and afterward I slept as an infant all that night and far into another ...n.

The next day brought several needs with it. The chief of these were more food, more clothes, and a profession (since fate seemed determined to make me take another space of existence upon the world). All three were satisfied eventually. As for the first two, I was not particular as to fashion or diet, and easily supplied them. In the course of a morning stroll a shepherd's hut was discovered, and when I approached it cautiously the little shed turned out to be empty. However, the owner had left several sheepskin mantles and rough homespun clothes on pegs round the walls, and to these I helped myself sufficiently to convert an unclothed caveman into a passable yeoman. Also, I made free with his store of oat-cakes and coarse cheese, putting all not needed back upon his shelf.

HERE I was again, fed and clothed, but what to do next was the question. To consider the knotty matter after spending most of the day in purposeless wandering, I went up to the top of my own hill—the one that, unknown to everyone, had the cavern in it—and there pondered the subject long. The whole face of the country perplexed me. It was certainly Britian, but Britian so amplified and altered as to be hardly recognizable.

Wide fields were everywhere, broad roads traversed the hills and valleys with impartial straightness, the great woodlands of the earlier times were gone, or much curtained, while wonderful white buildings shone here and there among the foliage. And down away in the west, by a river, the sunbeams glinted on the roofs and temple fronts of a fine, unknown town. That was the place, it seemed to me at length, to refit for another voyage on the strange sea of chance; but I was too experienced in the ways of the world to travel cityward with an empty wallet.

While meditating upon the manner in which this deficiency might be met, the golden store of coins left in the cave below suddenly presented themselves. The very thing! And, as heavy purple clouds were piling up round the presently sinking sun, earth and sky alike presaging a storm that evening, the cavern would be a convenient place to sleep in.

Then I found the entrance with some difficulty, and noticed, but with no special attention, that it looked a little larger than when last seen.

My first need was fire. This I had to make for myself. In the pouch of the shepherd's jerkin was a length of rough twine; this would do for matches, while as a torch a resinous pine branch, bruised and split, served well enough. Fixing one end of the string to a bush, I took a turn round a dry stick, and then began laboriously rubbing backward and forward. In half an hour the string fumed pleasantly, and, something under the hour—one was nothing if not patient in that age—it charred and burst into flame.

Just as the evening set in, and the earth opened its pores to the first round drops of the warm-smelling rain that pattered on the young forest leaves, and the thunder began to murmur distantly under the purple mantle of the coming storm, my torch spluttering and hissing, I entered the vast gloomy chamber of my sleep. And, not without a sense of awe, I stole up along the walls a hundred yards or more, to my strange couch.

The coins were safe, and shining greenly in their earthen jar; so, sticking the light into a cleft, I poured them on to the sand, and then commenced to tuck the stuff

away, as fast as might be, into my girdle. It was strange, wild work, the only company my own contorted shadow on the distant rocks and such wild forms of cruel British superstition as my excited imagination called up; the only sound the rumble of the storm, now overhead, and the hissing drip of the red resin gleaming on the wealth, all stamped with images of long-dead Kings and Consuls, that I was cramming into my pouch!

By the time the task was nearly finished, I was in a state of nerves equal to seeing or hearing anything—no doubt long fasting had shaken a mind usually calm and callous enough—and therefore you will understand how the blood fled from my limbs and the cold perspiration burst out upon my forehead, when, having scarified myself with traditions of ghouls and cave devils, I turned to listen for a moment to the dull rumble of the thunder and the melancholy wave-like sough of the wind in the trees, even here audible, and beheld, twenty paces from me, in the shadows, a vast, shaggy black form, grim and broad as no mortal ever was, and red and wavering in the uncertain light, seven feet high, and possessed of two fiery, gleaming eyes that were bent upon my own with a horrible fixity!

At the same instant, before we could catch our breath, the whole side of the cave opposite to us, some hundred paces of rugged wall, was deluged with a living, oscillating drapery of blue flame! That magnificent refulgence came down from above, a glowing cascade of light. It overran the rocks like a beautiful gauze, clinging lovingly to their sinuousness, and wrapping their roughness in a tender, palpitating mantle of its own lovely brightness.

It ran its nimble, fiery tendrils down the veins and crevices, and leaped in fierce playfulness from point to point, spinning its electric gossamers in that vacuum air like some enchanted tissue spread between the crags; it ran to the ledges and trickled off in ambient, sparkling cascades, it overflowed the sandy bottom in tender sheets of blue and mauve, feeling here and there with a million fingers for the way it sought, and then it found it, and sank, as silent, as ghostly, as wonderful as it had come!

All this was but the work of an instant, but an instant of such concentrated brightness that I saw every detail, as I have told you, of that beautiful thing. More; in that second of glowing visibility, while the blue torch of the storm still shone in the chamber of the underground, I saw the stone by me, and beyond it, towering amazed and stupid, with his bulky strength outlined against the light, a great cave bear in all his native ruggedness! Better still, a bowshot on my right was the narrow approach of the entrance—and as the gleam sank into the nether world, almost as quick as that gleam itself, with a heart of wonder and fear, and a foot like the foot of the night wind overhead, I was gone, and down the sandy floor, and through the gap, and into the outer world and midnight rain I plunged once more, grateful and glad!

After such hairbreath escapes there was little need to bemoan a wet coat and an evening under the lee of a heathery scar.

WHEN the morning arrived, clear and bright, as it often does after a storm, I felt in no mood to hang about the locality, but shook the rain from my fleece, and breakfasting on a little water from the brook, a staff in my hand, and my dear-bought wealth in my belt, set out for the unknown town, whose wet roofs shone like molten silver over the dark and dewy oak woods.

Five hours' tramping brought me there; and truly the city astonished me greatly. Could this, indeed, be Britian? was the constant question on my tongue as I trod fair white streets, with innumerable others opening down from them on either hand, and noticed the evidence of such art and luxury as, hitherto, I had dreamed the exclusive prerogative of the capital of the older empires. Here were baths before which the Roman youth dawdled, stately theaters with endless tiers of seats, from whose rostra degenerated sons of the soil, aping their masters in dress and speech, recited verse and dialogue trimmed to the latest orator in fashion by the Tiber. Mansions and palaces there were, outside which the sleek steeds of Consuls and Praetors champed gilded bits while waiting to carry their owners to gay procession and ceremonial; temples of Apollo, and shrines to Venus, dotted the ways, forums, market places, and the like, in bewildering profusion.

And among all these evidences of the new age thronged a motley mixture of people. The thoughtful senator, coming from conclave, with his toga and parchments, elbowed the callous British rustic in the rude raiment of his fathers. The wild, blue-eyed Welsh Prince, upon his rough mountain pony, would scarce give

right of way to the bronzed Roman mercenary from the Rhine: Umbrians and Franks, pale-haired Germans, and olive Tuscans, laughed and chaffered round the booths and fountains, while here and there legionaries stood on guard before great houses, or drank on the tressels of wayside wine-shops. Now and again two or three soldiers came marching down the street with a gang of slaves, or a shock-headed chieftain from the wild north, fierce and sullen, on his way to Rome.

Half the day I stared, and then, having eaten some dry Etrurian grapes—the first for four hundred years— I went to the bath and threw down a golden coin in the doorkeeper's marble slab.

"Why, my son," said that juvenile official of some trivial fifty summers, "where in the name of Mercury did you pick up this antique thing?" and he handled it curiously. But being in no mind to tell my tale just then, I put him off lightly, and passed on into the great bathing place itself. Stage by stage, "balneum," "concamerata," "sudatio," "tepidarium," "frigidarium," and all their other chambers, I went through, until in the last a mighty slave, who had rubbed me with the strength of Hercules himself for half an hour, suddenly stopped, and, surveying me intently, exclaimed:

"Master! I have scrubbed many a strange thing from many a Roman body, but I will swallow all my own towels if I can get this extraordinary dirt from you," and he pointed to my bare and glowing chest.

There, to my astonishment, revealed for the first time, was a great serpent-like mark of tattoo and woad circling my body in two wide zones! What it meant, how it came, was past my comprehension. Shrunk and shriveled as I was with long abstemiousness, it seemed but like a gigantic smudge meandering down my person—a smudge, however, that with a little goodly living might stretch out into an elaborate design of some nature. Of course, I knew it was thus the British warriors were accustomed to adorn themselves, but who had been thus purposely decorating one that had never knowingly submitted to the operation, and to what end, was past my guessing.

"Never mind, sir, don't despond," said the slave. "We will have another essay." And hitching me on to the rubbing couch, he knelt upon my stomach—these bath attendants were no more deferential than they are now—and exerted his magnificent strength, armed with the stiffest towel that ever came off a loom, upon me, until I fairly thought that not only would he have the tattoo off, but also all the skin upon which it was engrossed.

But it was to no purpose. He rose presently and sulkily declared I had had my money's worth. "The more he rubbed, the bluer those accursed marks became." This might well be, so I tossed him an extra coin, and, dressing hastily, covered my uninvited tattoo and went forth, fully determined to examine and read it—for those things were nearly always readable—more closely on a better and more private opportunity.

MY next visit was to an Etruscan barber, who was shaving all and sundry under a green-white awning, in a pleasant little piazza. I hastily paid him one of those antique green coins of mine, and then passed on again down the great wide street.

Even he who lives two thousand years is still the serf of time, therefore I cannot describe all the strange things I saw in that beautiful foreign city set down on the native English land. But presently I tired, and, having become a Roman by exchanging my sheepskins for a fine scarlet toga, over a military cuirass of close-fitting steel, inlaid, after the fashion, with turquoise and gold enamel, sandals upon my feet, and a short sword at my side, I sought some shelter.

Presently I found an open villa where travelers might rest, and here I took a chamber on one side of the square marble courtyard, facing on a garden and fountain, and looking over a fair stretch of country.

No sooner had I eaten, than, very curious to understand the nature of the bath slave's discoveries upon my skin, I went to the disrobing-room of the private baths, and, discarding my gorgeous cuirass, and piling the gilded arms and silken wrappings with which a new-born vanity had swathed me, in a corner, I stood presently revealed in the common integument—the one immutable fashion of humanity. But rarely before had the naked human body presented so much diversity as mine did. I was mottled and pictured, from my waist upward, in the most bewildering manner, all in blue and purple tints, just as the slave had said.

There were more pictures on me than there are on an astrologer's celestial globe; and as I turned hither and thither, before my great burnished metal mirror, a whole constellation, of dim, uncertain meaning,

rose and set upon my sphere! Now this was the more curious, because, as I have said, I had never in my life submitted me for a moment to the needle and unguents of those who in British times made a practice of the art of tattooing. I had seen young warriors under that painful process, and had stood by as they yelled in pain and reluctant patience while the most elaborate designs grew up, under the stolid draftsman's hands, upon their quivering cuticle. But, to Blodwen's grief, who would have had me equal to any of her tribesmen in pattern as in place, I had ever scorned to be made a mosaic of superstition and flourishes.

How, then, had this mighty maze, this pictorial web of blue myth and marvel, grown upon me during the night time of my sleep? On studying it closely it evolved itself into some order, and, though that night I made not very much of it, yet, as time went on, and my body grew sleek and fair with good living, the design came up.

Indeed, the narrative I translated from it was so absorbingly interesting to one in my melancholy circumstances that again and again I would hurry away to my closet and mirror to see what new detail, what subtle deduction of stroke or line, had come into view upon the scroll of the strangest diary that ever was written.

For it was Blodwen's diary that circled me thus. It began in the small of my back with the year of my demise upon the Druid altar, and ever as she wrote it she must have rolled, with tender industry, her journal over and over, and so worked up from my back, in a splendid widening zone of token and hieroglyphic, for twenty changing seasons, until my chest was reached, and there the tale ran out in a thin and tremulous way, which it made my heart ache to understand.

There is no need to describe exactly the mode of deduction, or how I came to comprehend, without key or help, the sense of the things before me, but you will understand my wits were sharp in the quest, and once the main scheme of the idea was understood the rest came easily enough. The Princess, then, had taken a sheaf of corn as her symbol of the year. There were twenty of them upon me, and I judged their very varying sizes were intended to indicate good or bad harvest seasons in the territories of my careful British chieftainess.

Round these central signs she had grouped such other marks or outlines as served to hint the changing fortunes of the times. There were heads of oxen by each sheaf, varying in size according to the conditions of her herds; and fishes, big or small, to indicate what luck her salmon spearsmen had met with by the tuneful rapids of that ancient stream I knew so well.

FOLLOWING these early designs was one that interested me greatly. The gentle chieftainess had, when I left her, expectation of another member to her tribe of her own providing. I had thought when we should have beaten the Romans to hurry back, and mayhap be in time to welcome this little one; but you know how I was prevented; and now here upon my skin, nigh over to my heart, was the sketch and outline of what seemed a small, new-born boy, all beswaddled in the British fashion, and very lovingly limned. But what was more curious, was that its wraps were turned back from its baby shoulders, and there, to my astonished interpretation, in that silent maternal narrative, was just the likeness, broad, lasting, indelible, of the frightful scar I wore myself!

Long I pondered upon this. Had that red-haired slave-princess by some chance received me back—perhaps at Sempronius's compassionate hands—all hurt as I was, and had that portentous wound set its seal during anxious vigils upon the unborn babe? I could not guess—I could but wonder—and, wondering still, pass on to what came next.

Here was a graphic picture, no bigger than the palm of my hand, and not hard to unriddle. An eagle—no doubt the Roman one—engaged in fierce conflict with a beaver—that being Blodwen's favorite tribal sign, for there were many of those animals upon her river. Jove! how well 'twas done! There were the flying feathers, and the fur, and the turmoil and the litter of the fight, and well I guessed the proud Roman bird—that day he brought my gallant tribe under the yoke—had lost many a stalwart quill, and damaged many a lordly pinion!

And besides these main records of this fair and careful chancelloress of her State, there were others that moved me none the less. Yes! by every gloomy spirit that dwelt in the misty shadows of the British oaks, it gave me a hot flush of gratified revenge to see—there by the symbol of the first year—a severed, bleeding head, still crowned with the Druid oak.

"Oh! oh! Dhuwallon, my friend," I laughed, as I guessed the meaning of that bloody sign, "so they tripped you up at last, my crafty villain. By all the fiends of your abominable worship, I should like to have seen the stroke that made that grisly trophy! Well, I can guess how it came about! Some slighted tribesman who saw me die peached upon you. Liar and traitor! I can see you stand in that old British hall, strong in your sanctity and cunning, making your wicked version of the fight and my undoing, and then, methinks, I see Blodwen leap to her feet, red and fiery with her anger. Accursed priest! how you must have sickened and shrunk from her fierce invective, the headlong damnation of her bitter accusation, with all the ready evidence with which she supported it.

"Mayhap your cheeks were as pale that day, good friend, as your infernal vestments, and first you frowned, and pointed to the signs and symbols of your office, and pleaded your high appointment before the assembled people against the answering of the charge. And then, when that would not do, you whined and cringed, and called her kinswoman. Oh, but I can fancy it, and how my pretty Princess—there upon her father's steps—scorned and cursed you before them all, and how some ready, faithful hand struck you down, and how they tore your holy linen from you and dragged you, screaming, to the gateway, and there upon the threshold log struck your wicked head from your abominable shoulders! By the sacred mistletoe, I can read my Blodwen's noble anger in every puncture of that revenge-commemorating outline!"

The record stopped suddenly at the twentieth season, and the cause thereof I could guess only too well!

There, in that Roman hotel, I stayed, reflecting. It was in this rest-house, from the idle gossip of the loungers and chatter of Roman politicians, that I came to comprehend the extent of my sleep in the cave, and as the truth dawned upon me, with a consciousness of the infinite vacuity of my world, I went into the garden. And there was no light in the sunshine, and no color in the flowers, and no music in the fountain, and I threw my toga over my head and grieved for my loneliness, with the hum of the crowd outside in my ears, and mourned my fair Princess and all the ancient times so young in memory, yet so old in fact.

Many days I sorrowed purposeless, and then my grief was purged by the good medicine of hardship and more adventure.

CHAPTER IV

ONE day I was sitting, in gloomy abstraction, in the sunny garden, when I looked up suddenly and saw a little maid standing by, demurely, and somewhat compassionately, regarding me. Grateful then for any sort of sympathy, I led her to talk, and presently found, as we thawed into good-fellowship, drawn together by some mutual attraction, that she was of British birth, and more—from my old village! This was bond enough in my then state; but think how moved and pleased I was when the comely little damsel laughingly said, "Oh, yes! it is only you Roman lords who come and go more often than these flowers. We British seldom move; I and my people have lived yonder on the coast for ages!" So I let my lonely fancy fill in the blanks, and took the little maid for a kinswoman, and was right glad to know some one in the void world into which four hundred years' sleep had plunged me.

Strange, too, as you will take it, Nu-

midea, who, now and then to my mind, was so like the ancestress she knew naught of: Numidea, the slave-girl who had stood before me by predestined chance in that hour of sorrow—it was she who directed my destiny and saved and ruined me in this chapter, just as her ancestress had done distant lifetimes before!

Between this fair little friend and my inexhaustible wallet I dried up my grief and turned idle and reckless in that fascinating town of extravagance and debauchery. It was not a time to boast much of. The degenerate Romans had lost all their valor and most of their skill in the arts of government. All their hardihood and strength had sunk under the evil example of the debased capital by the Tiber. And, though some few unpopular ones among them railed against the effeminate luxury of the times, few heeded, and none were warned.

It shamed me to find that all these latter-day Romans thought of was silks and linens, front seats at the theater, pageantry and spectacles, trinkets and scents. It roused my disdain to see the senators go by with gilded trains of servitors and the young Centurions swagger down the streets in their mock armor—their toy, peace-time swords hanging in golden chains from their tender sides, and the wind warning one of their perfumed presence even before they came in sight. Such were not the men to win an empire, I thought, or to hold it!

Well, it is not my province to tell you these things. The gilded fops who thronged the city ways, I soon found, were good enough for drinking bouts and revelry, and, by all Olympus! my long sleep had made me thirsty, and my sorrow full of a moroseness which had to be constantly battened down under the hatches of an artificial pleasure. All the old, cautious, frugal, merchant spirit had gone, and the Roman Phra, in his gold and turquoise cincture, his belt full of his outlandish, never-failing coins, was soon the talk of the town, the life and soul of every reckless bout or folly, the terror of all lictors and honest, benighted citizens.

And, like many another good young man of like inclinations, his exit was as sudden as his entry! Well I remember that day, when my ivory tablets were crowded with suggestions for new idleness and vanities, and bore a dozen or two of merry engagements to plays and processions and carnivals, and all my new-found world looked like a summer sea of pleasure.

Under these circumstances, I went to my hoard one evening, as I had done very often of late, and was somewhat chagrined to discover only five pieces of money left. However, they were big plump ones, larger than any I had used before, and, as all those had been good gold, these still might mean a long spell of frolic for me—when they were nearly spent it would be time to turn serious.

I at once sat down to rub the general green tint of age from one, noticing it was more verdant than any of its comrades had been, and rubbed with increasing consternation and alarm, moment after moment, until I had reduced it at last to an ancient British copper token, a base, abominable thing, not good enough to pitch to a starving beggar!

Another and another was snatched up and chafed, and, as I toiled on by my little flickering earthen lamp in my bachelor cell, every one of these traitor coins in an hour had shed its coating of time and turned out, under my disgusted fingers, common plebeian metal. There they lay before me at length, a contemptible five pence, wherewith to carry on a week's carousing. Five pence! Why, it was not enough to toss to a noisy beggar outside the circus—hardly enough for a drink of detestable British wine, let alone a draught of the good Italian vintages that I had lately come to look upon as my prerogative! Horrible! And as I gazed at them stolidly, that melancholy evening, the airy castle of my pleasure crumbled from base to battlement.

As the result of long cogitation—knowing the measure of my friends too well to think of borrowing of them—I finally decided to make a retreat, and leave my acquaintances my still unblemished reputation in pawn for the various little items owing by me. Taking a look round, to assure myself every one in the house was asleep, I argued that to-night, though a pauper, I was still of good account, whereas with daylight I should be a discredited beggar. So that it was, in fact, a meritorious action to leave my host an old pair of sandals in lieu of a month's expenses, and drop through the little window into the garden, on the way to the open world once more. Necessity is ever a sophist.

IT IS needless to say the gray dawn was not particularly cheerful as I sprang into the city fosse and struck out for the woods beyond. The fortune which makes a man one day a gentleman of means and

the next a mendicant is more pleasant to hear of when it has befallen one's friends than to feel at first hand. It was only the fear of the detestable city jail, and the abominable provender there, added to the ridicule of my friends, perhaps, that sent me, scripless, thus afield. Gray as the prospect ahead might be, behind it was black: so I plodded on, with my spear for a staff and Melancholy for a companion.

By midday a valley opened before me, and at the head, a mile or so from the river, was a very stately white villa. Thither, out of curiosity, my steps were turned, and I descended upon that lordly abode by coppices, ferny brakes, and pastures, until one brambly field alone separated us. An ordinary being, whom the Fates had not set themselves to bandy forever in their immortal hands, would have gone around this enclosure, and so taken the uneventual pathway, but not so I; I must needs cross the brambles, and thus bring down fresh ventures on my head.

In the midst of the enclosure was an oak, and under the oak, five or six white cows, with a massive bull of the fierce old British breed. This animal resented my trespass, and, shaking his head angrily as I advanced, he came after me at a trot when I was halfway across. Now, a good soldier knows when to run, no less than when to stand, and so my best foot was put forth in the direction of the house, and I presently slipped through a hole in the fence directly into the trim gay garden of the villa itself.

So hasty was my entry that I nearly ran into a stately procession approaching down one of the well-kept terraces intersecting the grounds: a seneschal and a butler, a gorgeously arrayed mercenary or two, men and damsels in waiting, all this lordly array attending a litter borne by two negro slaves, whereon, with a languidness like that of convalescence, belied, however, by the bloom of excellent health and the tokens of robust grace in the every limb, reclined a handsome Roman lady. There was hardly time to take all this in at a glance, when the gorgeous attendants set up a shout of consternation and alarm, and, as I glanced over my shoulder to see the cause, there appeared that resentful bull bursting the hedge, a scanty twenty paces away, with vindictive purpose in his widespread nostrils and angry eyes.

Down went the seneschal's staff of office, down went the base mercenaries' gilded shields; the butler threw the dish of grapes he was carrying for his lady's refreshment into the bushes; the waiting-maids dropped their fans, and, shrieking, joined the general rout. Worse than all, those base villains, the littermen, slipped their leather straps, and in the general panic dropped the litter, and left to her fate that mistress who, with her sandaled feet wrapped in silks and spangled linens, struggled in vain to rise.

There was no time for fear. I turned, and as the bull came down upon us two in a snorting avalanche of white hide and sinew, I gave him the spear, driving it home with all my strength just in front of the ample shoulder, as he lowered his head. The strong seven-foot shaft of ash, as thick as a man's wrist, bent between us like a green hazel wand, and then burst into splinters right up to my grasp. The next moment I was hurled backward, crashing into the flowers and trim parterres as though it were by the fist of Jove himself I had been struck. Hardly touching the ground, I was up again, my short sword drawn, and ready as ever—though the gay world swam before me—to kill or to be killed.

It was not necessary. There had been few truer or more forceful spears than mine in the old times; and there lay the great white monster on his side in a crimson pool of blood, essaying in vain to lift his head, and dying in mighty tremors all among the pretty things the servants had thrown down. The gush of red blood from his chest was wetting even the silken fringes of the comely dame's skirts and wrappings, while she, now at last on her feet, frowned down on him, with angry triumph rather than fear in her countenance.

Though there was hardly a change of color on her face or a tremor in the voice with which she thanked me, yet I somehow felt her ladyship was in a fine passion behind that disdainful mask. But whether it were so or not, she was civil enough to me, personally evincing a condescending interest in a trifling wound that was staining my bare right arm with crimson, and sending her "good youth" away in a minute or two to the house to get it bound. As I turned to go, the stately lady gathered up tunic folds and skirt in her white fist and moved down upon the group of trembling servants, who were gathering their wits together slowly under the nervous encouragement of the seneschal. What she said to them I know not, but if ever the countenances of men truly reflected their

sensations, her brief whispers must have been exceedingly unpleasant to listen to.

THE damsel who bound the scratch upon my shoulder told me something of this beautiful and wealthy dame. But, in truth, when she called her Lady Electra, I needed to hear little more. It was a name that had circulated freely in the city yonder, and especially when wine was sparkling best and tongues at lightest! I knew, without asking, the lady was niece to an emperor, and was reputed as haughty and cruel as though she had been one of the worst herself. I knew her lawful spouse was away, like most Romans, from his duty just then, and she stood in his place to tyrannize over the British peasants and sweep the taxes into his insatiate coffers. I knew, too, why Rome was forbidden for a time to the vivacious lady, as well as some stories, best untold, of how she enlivened the tedium of her exile in these "savage" places.

In fact, I knew I had fallen into the gilded hold of a magnificent outlaw, one of the worst productions of a debased and sinking State, and, being wayward by predestinations, I determined to play with the she-wolf in her own den.

No fancy of mine is so rash but that Fate will countersign it. When Electra sent for me presently in the great hall, where the fountains played into basins of rosy marble, it was to inform me that the destruction of the bull, and my bearing thereat, had caught her fancy. I was to "consider myself for the present in her private service, and attached to the bodyguard." This decision was announced with an easy imperialness which seemed to ignore all suggestion of opposition—a suavity such as Juno might use in directing the most timorous of servitors—so, as my wishes ran in unison, I bowed my thanks. I kissed the fringe of my ladyship's cloak, and thought, as she lay there before me on her silken couch in the tessellated hall of her stately home, that I had never before seen so beautiful or dangerous-looking a creature.

Nor had I long to wait for a sight of the Vice-Prefect's talons. While she asked me of my history, the which I made up as I told it (and, having once balked the truth, never afterward told her the real facts), a messenger came, and, standing at a respectful distance, saluted his mistress.

"Ah!" she said, with a pretty look of interest in her face, and rising on her elbow. "Are they dead?"

"One is, madam," the man responded: "one of your bearers fled, but the other we secured. We took him into the field and tied him, as your ladyship directed, to the horns of the strongest white cow. She dragged him here and there, and gored him for full ten minutes before he died—and now all that remains of him," with a wave of the hand toward the vestibule, "most respectfully awaits your ladyship's inspection in the porch!" And the messenger bowed low.

"It is well. Fling the dog into a ditch! And, my friend, let my brave henchmen know if they do not lay hands on the other villain before sunset to-morrow, I shall come to them for a substitute."

The successful termination of this episode seemed to relieve my new mistress.

"Ah! my excellent soldier," she said, with a pretty sigh, "you cannot conceive what a vexation my servants are to me, or how rebellious and unruly! Would there were but a man here, such as yourself, for instance, to protect and soften a lonely matron's exile."

This was very flattering to my vanity, more especially as it was accompanied by a gracious look, with more of condescension in it than I fancied usually fell to the lot of those who met her handsome eyes. In such circumstances, under a lordly roof, and careless again of to-morrow, a new spell of experience was commenced in the Roman villa, and I learned much of the ways of corrupt Roman government and a luxurious society there which might amuse you were it not all too long to set down.

For a time, when her ladyship gave, as was her frequent pleasure, gorgeous dinners, and all the statesmen and soldiers of the neighboring towns came in to sup with her, I pleaded one thing and another in excuse for absence from the places where I must have met many too well known before. But Electra, as the time went on, was proud of her handsome, stalwart Centurion, and advanced me quicker than my modest ambition could demand, clothed me in the gorgeous livery of her household troops, raised me to the chief command. And finally, one evening, she sat me at her side on her own silken couch, before all the lords and senators, and, deriding their surprise and covert sarcasm, proclaimed me first favorite there with royal effrontery.

Did I but say Electra was proud of her new find? Much better had it been simply so; but she was not accustomed to modera-

tion in any matters, and perhaps my cold indifference to her overwhelming attractions, when all else fawned for an indulgent look, excited her fiery thirst of dominion. Be this as it may, no very long time after my arrival it was palpable her manner was changing; and as the days went by, and she would have me sit on the tiger-skin at her knee, a second Antony to this British Cleopatra, telling wonderful tales of war and woodcraft, I presently found the unmistakable light of awakening love shining through her ladyship's half-shut lids.

Many and many a time, before and since, has that beacon been lit for me in eyes of every complexion—it makes me sad to think how well I know that gentle gleam—but never in all my life did I experience anything like the concentrated fire that burned silently but more strongly, day by day, in those black Roman eyes.

THE more dense I was to her increasing love, the more she suffered. Truly, it was pitiful to see her, who was so little accustomed to know any other will, thwarted by so fine an agency—to see her imperialness strain and fret at the silken meshes of love, and fume to have me know and answer to her meaning, yet fear to tell it, and at times be timorous to speak, and at others start up, palely wrathful, that she could not order in this case as elsewhere. Indeed, my lady was in a bad way, and now she would be fierce and sullen, and anon gracious and melancholy. In the latter mood she said one day, as I sat by her *bisellium:*

"I am ill and pale, my Centurion. I wonder you have not noticed it."

"Perhaps, madam," I said, with the distant respect that galled her so, "perhaps your ladyship's supper last night was overlarge and late—and those lampreys, I warned you against them that third time."

"Gross! Material!" exclaimed Electra, frowning blackly. "Guess again—a finer malady—a subtler pain."

"Then, maybe the valley air affects my lady's liver, or rheumatism, perhaps, exacts a penalty for some twilight rambles."

Such banter as this, and more, was all the harder to bear since she could not revenge it. I was sorry for the tyrantess, for she was wonderfully attractive thus pensivewise, and woefully in earnest as she turned away to the painted walls and sighed to herself.

She was jealous, too. Very soon after I had taken service with her, whom should I espy, one morning, feeding the golden pheasants outside the veranda, but my little friend, Numidea. Often I had thought of that maid, and determined to discover that "big house" where she had told me she was bondwoman, and the "great lady" who sent her tripping long journeys into the town for the powders and silk stuffs none could better choose. And now here she was on my path again, a roof-mate by strange chance, with her graceful, tender figure, and her dainty ways, and that chronic friendly smile upon her mouth that brought such strange fancies to my mind every time I looked upon it.

Of course, I befriended the maid as though she were my own little one, not so many times removed, and equally, of course, Lady Electra noticed and misread our friendship. Poor Numidea! She had a hard life before I came, and a harder, perhaps, afterward. You compassionate moderns will wonder when I tell you that Numidea had shown me her white silk shoulders laced with the red scars of old floggings laid on by Electra herself, and the blood-spotted dimples here and there, where that imperious dame had thrust, for some trivial offense, a golden bodkin from her hair deep into that innocent flesh. No one knew better than my noble mistress how to give acute torture to a slave without depreciating the market price of her property.

But when I became of more weight—when, in brief, my comely tigress was too fast bound to be dangerous—I spoke up, and Electra grew to be jealous and to hate the small Christian slave-girl with all the unruly strength that marked her other passions.

Thus, one day having discovered Numidea weeping over a new-made wound, I sought out the offender, and as she sauntered up and down her tessellated pavements I shook my fist at her Queenship, and said:

"By the bright flame of Vesta, Lady Electra, and by every deity, old or new, in the endless capacity of the skies, if you get out your abominable flail for that girl again, or draw but once upon her one of your accursed bodkins, I will marry her among the smoking ruins of this white sty of yours!"

When I spoke to her thus under the lash of my anger, she would uprise to the topmost reach of her height, and thence, frowning down upon me, her shapely head tossed back, and her draperies falling from her crossed arms and ample shoulders to

the marble floor, she would regard me with an imperious stare that might have withered an ordinary mortal. So beautiful and statuesque was her ladyship on these occasions, towering there in her own white hall like an image of an offended Juno in the first flush of her queenly wrath, that even I would involuntarily step back a pace.

But I did not cower or drop my eyes, and when we had glowered at each other so for a minute or two the royal instinct within her was no match for traitor love. Slowly then the woman would come welling into her proud face, and the glow of anger gave way upon her cheeks; her arms dropped by her sides; she shrank to mortal proportions, and lastly sank on the ebony and ivory couch in a wild gust of weeping, woefully asking to know, as I turned upon my heels, why the slave's trivial scars were more to me than the mistress's tears.

My Vice-Prefect was avaricious, too. There was stored in the spacious hollows below her villa I know not how much bronze and gold squeezed from those reluctant British hinds whose old-world huts clustered together in the oak clumps dotting the fertile vales as far as the eye could see from our roof-ledges on every hand. Had all the offices of the imperial Government been kept as she kept her duties of tax collecting, the great empire would have been further by many a long year from its ruin. And the closer Electra made her accounts, the more deadly became her exactions, the more angry and rebellious grew the natives around us.

Already they had heard whispers of how hard barbarians were pressing upon Rome. Day by day they saw Britain depleted of the stalwart legionaries who had occupied the land four hundred years, and as phalanx after phalanx went south through Gaul to protect the mother city on the Tiber, their demagogues secretly stirred the people up to ambition and discontent.

Nor can it be denied the villains had something to grumble about. Society was dissolute and debased, while the country was full of those who made the good Roman name a byword. The British peasant had to toil and sweat that a hundred tyrants, the rank production of social decay, might squander and parade in the luxury and finery his labor purchased. Added to this, the pressing needs of the Emperor himself demanded the services of those who had taken upon themselves for centuries the protection of the country.

As they retired, Northern rovers, at first

fitfully, but afterward with increasing rigor, came down upon the unguarded coasts, and sailing up the estuaries, harried the rich English vales on either side, and rioted amid the accumulated splendor and plenty of the luckless land to their hearts' content.

Saddled thus with the weight of luxurious conquerors who had lost nearly every art but that of extortion, miserable at home, and devastated from abroad, who can wonder that the British longed to throw off the Roman yoke and breathe the fresher air of a wholesome life again? And as the shadow of the Imperial wings was withdrawn from them their hopes ripened; they thought they were strong and rule-worthy. Fatal mistake! I saw it bud, but I saw it bitterly fruitful!

THE British grew more and more unruly as time went on, and legion after legion left us. At length, when the last of Romans were down to the coast, about to embark, Electra made up her mind to go, too—and with all her hoards. But in this latter particular the new authorities in the neighboring town could not concur, and they sent two brand-new civilian senators to expostulate and detain her, the last representative of the old rule. Electra had those gentlemen stripped in the vestibule, and flogged within an ace of their lives, and then sent them home, bound, in a mean country cart.

All that afternoon we were busy sewing up the gold and bronze in bags, and by dusk a long train of mules set out for the coast, in charge of a score of our mercenaries, who, having served a long apprenticeship to cruelty and extortion, had more to fear from the natives than even we. Nor was it too soon. As the last of the convoy went into the evening darkness, Electra and I ascended the flat, wide roof of her home, and there we saw, westward, under the stormy red of the setting sun, the flashing of arms and the dust-wreaths against the glow which hung above the bands of people moving out and bearing down on us in a mood one well could guess.

Her ladyship, having safely packed, was disdainful and angry. Her fine lips curled as she watched the gray column of citizens swarming out to the assault; but when her gaze wandered over the fair valleys she had ruled and bled so long, she was, perhaps, a little regretful and softened.

"My good and stalwart Captain," she said, coming near to me, "yonder sun, I fear, will never rise again on a Roman Briton! We must obey the Fates. You know what I would do, had I the power, to yonder scum; but, since we must desert this house to them (as I see too clearly we must), how can we best ensure the safety of the treasure?"

We arranged there and then, with small time for parley, that I should stay with a handful of her mercenaries and make a stand about the villa, while she, with the last of her servants, should go on and hurry up by every means in her power the slow caravan of her wealth. In truth, my mistress was as brave as she was overbearing, and but for those endless shining bags of gold, I do believe she would have stayed and fought for the place with me.

We made such preparation as we could, with the small time at our disposal, barricading the white façade of the villa and closing all approaches. Then we pulled the winter stacks to pieces in the yard, making two great mounds of fagots in front of the porch, pouring oil upon each, and stationing a man to fire them, by way of torches, at a given signal. My hope was that, as the wide Roman way ran just below the villa, the avengers of the Ambassadors would not think of passing on until they had demolished the house and us.

Of the loyalty of the few men with me I had little fear. They were brave and stubborn, all their pay was on Electra's mules, and the British hated them without compunction. There were in our little company that black evening, seven wild Welshmen, under a shaggy-haired, blue-eyed princeling: Gwallon of the Bow, he called himself—fifteen swarthy Iberians, all teeth and scimitar—a handful of Belgic mercenaries, with great double-headed axes—but never a Roman among them all in this last stand of Roman power in Britain!

Was I a Roman? I wondered, as I stood on the terrace, waiting the onset of the liberated slaves. What was I? Who was I? How came it that he who was first in repelling the stalwart Roman adventurers of endless years before was the last to lift a sword in their defense? And, more personally, was this night to be, as it greatly seemed, the last of all my wild adventures; or had fate infinite others in store for her bantling?

We had not long to wait. In an hour the mob came scuffling round the bend, shouting and disorderly, with innumerable torches borne aloft, and they set up a yell when they caught sight of our shining white walls silently agleam in the moonlight.

There could be no parley with such a leaderless rush, and we attempted none. Without a thought of discipline they stormed the pastures and swarmed into the garden, a motely, angry crowd, armed with scythes and hooks and axes, and apparently all the town pressing on behind.

Well, we fired our fagots, and they gleamed up fiercely to welcome the scullion levies to their doom. Never did you see such a ruddy, wild scene—such a motely parody of noble war! The bright flames leaped into the tranquil sky in volcanoes of spark and hissing tongues, the British rushed at us between the fires like imps of darkness, and we met them face to face and slew them like the dogs they were. In a few minutes we were hemmed in the veranda, under whose columns we had some shelter, and then my brave Welshmen showed me how they could pull their long bows, which indeed they did in right good earnest, until all the trim terraces were littered with writhing, howling foemen.

But again they drove us back, this time into the house, and there we soon had a better light to fight by, for the sparks had caught the roof, and soon everything far and near was ablaze. Every man with me that night fought like a patrician, and Electra's walls, with their endless painted garlands of oak and myrtle, their cooing doves and tender Cupids, were horribly besmeared and smudged; and her marble pillars were chipped by flying javelins and gashed by random axe-strokes.

TEN times we hurled ourselves upon the invaders and drove them staggering backward over the slippery pavements into the passages—sixteen men had fallen to my own arm alone, and we crammed their bodies into the doorways for barricade. But it would not do. The sheer weight of those without made the men within brave against their will. Nothing availed the stinging shafts of my Welshmen, the Iberian scimitars played hopelessly (like summer lightning in the glare) upon a solid wall of humanity, and the German axes could make no pathway through that impenetrable civilian tangle.

It was so hot in that flaming marble battle-place that foreigner and Briton broke off fighting now and then to kneel together for a moment at the red fountain basins where the jets still played (for the fugitives had forgotten to turn them off), and quenched their thirst in hurried gasps, ere flying again at each other's throats. And so wild the confusion and uproar, and so dense the smoke and flame, so red and slippery were the pavements, and so thick the dead and dying, that hardly one could tell which were friends and which foes.

For an hour we kept them at bay, and then, when my arms ached with killing, all of a sudden the face of a man whom I never had seen before, shone in the gleam at my shoulder.

"Phra the Phoenician," he said, calling me by an appellation no living man then knew, "I am bidden to get you hence. Come to the inner doorway—quick."

I hardly knew what he meant, but there was that about him which I could not but obey, so I turned and followed his retreating figure.

I ran with him across the courtyard, under the white marble pillars all aglow, through the silent banquet-hall that had echoed so often to the haughty laughter of my Roman lady, and then when we reached the cool, damp outer air—like a wreath of mist in November, like an eddy among the dead leaves—my guide vanished and left me!

Angry and surprised, but with no time for wonder, I turned back.

Even as I did so there was a mighty crack, a groaning of a thousand timbers, and there before my very face, with a resounding roar, Electra's lordly mansion, and all the wings, and buttresses, and basements, the rooms, and colonnades, and corridors of that splendid home of luxury and power, lurched forward, and heaved, and collapsed in one mighty red ruin that tinctured the sky from east to west, and buried alike in one vast, glowing hecatomb besiegers and besieged!

IT HAD fallen, the last stronghold of Roman authority, and there was nothing more to defend! I turned, and took me to the quiet forest pathways, every nook and bend of which I knew. As I ran, the sweet, moist air of the evening was like an elixir to my heated frame; now into the black shadows I plunged, and anon brushing the silver moonlight dew from bramble and bracken, while a thousand fancies of our stubborn fight danced around me.

In a little time the road went down to a river that sparkled in flood under the moonbeams. Here the laden mules had crossed into camparative safety, and now I had to follow them with a single guide-rope to feel my way alone across the dangerous ford. I struggled through the swollen stream safely, though it rose high

above my waist, and then who should loom out of the dark on the far side but Electra, standing alone and expectant at the brink.

Faithful, stately matron! She was so glad to see me again I was really sorry I did not love her more. I told her something of the fight, and she a little of the retreat. Some time before the long train of mules and slaves had gone on up the steep slowing bank, and into the coppice beyond, and now I and the Roman dame lingered a minute or so by the brink of the turgid stream to see the last flickers of her burning home. We were on the point of turning; indeed, Lady Electra seemed to be anxious to be gone, when, stepping out of the dark pathway into a patch of moonlight on the farther shore, a little silver casket in her duteous hands, and those dainty skirts in which she took so much pride muddy and soiled, appeared the slave girl Numidea.

She tripped fearfully forth from the shadow and down to the brink, where the water was swirling against the stones in an ivory and silver inlay; and when she saw (not perceiving us in the shadow) that all the people had gone on and she was deserted to the tender mercies of the foemen behind, she dropped her burden, and threw up her white, clasped hands in the moonlight, and wailed upon us in a way that made my steel cuirass too small for my swelling heart.

Surely such a pitiful sight ought to have moved any one, yet Electra only cursed those nimble feet under her breath, and from this, though I may do her heavy injustice, I have since feared she had planned the desertion and sent the maid back to be killed or taken on some false errand which for her jealous purpose was too quickly executed.

That noble Roman lady pulled me by the hand, and would have had me leave the girl to her fate, scolding and entreating; and when I angrily shook myself free, turning her wild, untutored passions into the channels of love, told me she had guessed my project of leaving her "for Numidea," and clung to me, and endeared me, and promised me "the tallest porch on Palatina" as I threw off my buckler and broadsword (to be lighter in the stream) and "the whitest arms for welcome there that ever a Roman matron spread" (as I pitched my gilded helmet into the bushes and strode down to the torrent), if I would but turn my back once for all upon my little kinswoman.

Three times the white arms of that magnificent she-devil closed around me, and three times I wrenched them apart and hurled her back. Three times she came anew to the struggle, squandering her wild, queenly love upon me, while, under the white light overhead, the tears shone in her wonderful upturned eyes like very diamonds. Three times she invoked every deity in the hierarchy of the southern skies to witness her perjured love, and cursed, for my sake, all those absent youths who had fallen before her.

Three times she knelt there on the black and white turf, and wrung her fair hands and shook out her long, thick hair, and came imploring and begging down to the very lapping of the water. And there I stood—for I too was a Southerner, and could be hot and fierce—and spoke such words as she had never heard before—abused and scoffed and derided her: laughed at her sorrow and mocked her grief, and then turned and plunged into the torrent.

The ford was not long: in a minute or two I struggled out on the farther shore, and Numidea, with a cry of pleasure and trustfulness, came to my dripping arms.

The British, hot on the track, were shouting to one another in the dark pursuit, so the little maid was picked up securely, and, with her in my left arm upon my hip, her warm wrists about my neck, and my other hand on the guide-rope, we went back into the stream again. By the sacred fane of Vesta, it ran stronger than a mill sluice, and tugged and worried at my limbs like the fingers of a fury!

I felt the pebbly gravel sifting and rolling beneath my feet, and the strong lift of the water, as it swirled, flying by in the moonlight, hissing and bubbling at my heaving chest in a way that frightened me—even me. At last, with every muscle on fire with the strain and turmoil, and my head giddy with the dancing torrent all about it, I saw the farther bank loom over us once more, and, heaving a heavy sigh of fatigue, collected myself for one more crowning effort.

BUT I had forgotten that royal harpy, my mistress; and, even as I gathered my last strength in the swirl of the black water below, she sprang to the verge of the bank overhead, vengeance and hatred flashing in the eyes that I had left full of gentleness and tears, and gleaming there in her wrath, her white robes shining in the moonlight against the ebony setting of the night, she glowered down upon us.

"Down with the maid!" she screamed, with all the tyrant in her voice. "Down with her, Centurion, or you die together!"

"Never! never!" I shouted, for my blood was boiling fiercely, and I could have laughed at a hundred such as she. But while I shouted my heart sank, for Electra was terrible to behold—an incarnation of beautiful cruelty, hot, reckless hatred ruling the features that had never turned upon me before but in sweetness and love. For one minute the passion gathered head, and then, while I stood in the current with dread of the coming deed, she snatched my own naked sword from the ground. "Die, then!" she yelled; "and may a thousand curses weigh down your souls!"

As she said it the blade whirled into the moonlight, descending on the guide-rope just where it ran taut and hard over the posts, severing it clean to the last strands with one blow of those effective white arms, and the next minute the hempen cord was torn out of my grasp, and over and over in a drowning, bewildered cascade of foam we were swept away down the stream.

It was the wildest swim that ever a mortal took. So fiercely did we spin and fly that heaven and earth seemed mixed together, and the white clouds overhead were not whiter than the sheets of foam that ran down seaward with us. I am a good swimmer, but who could make the bank in such a caldron of angry waters? and now Numidea was on top, and now I.

It went to my heart to hear the poor little Christian gasp out on "Good St. Christopher!" and to feel the flutter of her breast against my leather jerkin, and then presently I did not feel it at all. Many an island of wreckage passed us, but none that I could lay hold on, until presently a mighty log came foaming down upon us, laboring through that torrent surf like a full-sailed ship. As it passed I threw an arm over a strong root, and thus, for an hour, behind that black midnight javelin we flew downward, I knew not whither. Then it presently left the strong stream, and towing me toward a soft alluvial beach, just as dawn was breaking in the east, deposited me there, and slowly disappeared again into the void.

This is all I know of Roman Britain; this is the end of the chapter.

As I reeled ashore with my burden some friendly fisher-folk came forward to help, but I saw them not. Numidea was dead! my poor little slave-girl—the one speck of virtue in that tyrant world—and I bent over her, and shut her kindly eyes, and spread on the sand her long wet braids, and smoothed the modest white gown she was so careful of, with a heart that was heavier than it ever felt yet in storm or battle!

Then all my grief and exertions came upon me in a flood, and the last thing I remember was stooping down in the morning starlight to kiss the fair little maid upon that pallid face that looked so wan and strange amid the wild-spread tangles of her twisted hair.

AND then it seemed all of a sudden a mighty gust of wind swept down, and, as I looked up, there—strange, incredible as you will pronounce it—was Blodwen, drawing her wild, rain-wet British tresses through her supple fingers—calm, indifferent, happy—gazing upon me with the gentle wonder I had seen before, and once again herself!

Need it be said how wild and wonderful that winsome apparition seemed in that uncouth place, how the hot flush of wonder burned upon my swart and weathered cheeks as I sat there and glared at that pallid outline? Absently she went on with her rhythmical combing, bewitching me with her unearthly grace and the tender substance of her immaterial outline, as I glowered with never a ready syllable upon my idle tongue, or any emotion but wonder in the heart beating tumultuously under my tunic.

That time I did not fear, and presently the Princess looked up and said, in a faint, distant voice, that was like the sound of the breeze among seashore pine trees.

"Well done, my Phoenician! Your courage gives me strength." And as she spoke the words seemed gradually clearer and stronger, until presently they came sweeter to me than the murmur of a sunny river —gentler than the whispers of the ripe corn and the south wind.

"Shade!" I said. "Wonderful, immaterial, immortal, whence came you?"

"Whence did I come?" she answered, with the pretty reflection of a smile upon her face. "Out of the storm, O son of Anak!—out of the wild, wet night-wind!"

"And why, and why—to stir me to my inmost soul, and then to leave me?"

"Phoenician," she said, "I have not left you since we parted. I have been the unseen companion of your goings—I have been the shadowless watcher of your sleep. Mine was the unfelt hand that bore your chin up when you swam with the Christian

slave-girl—mine was the arm that had turned, invisibly, a hundred javelins from you—and to-night I am come, by leave of circumstance, thus to see you."

"I should have thought," I said, becoming now better at my ease, "that one like you might come or go in scorn of circumstances."

"Wherein, my dear master, you argue with more simplicity than knowledge. There are needs and necessities to the very verge of the spheres."

But when I questioned what these were, asking the secret of her wayward visits, she looked at the dead Numidea, and said I could not understand.

"Then if you can do this, how was it, Blodwen, you never came before?"

"In truth, I often tried," she said, with something like a sigh, "but Numidea was not good to fit my subtle needs, and the other one, Electra, was all beyond me." And here that versatile shadow threw herself into an attitude, and there before me was the Roman lady, so sweet, so enticing, that my heart yearned for her—ah! for the queenly Electra!—all in a moment. But before I could stretch out my arms the airy form had whisked her ethereal draperies across her breast, and had risen, and there, towering to the low roof, flashing down scorn and hatred on me, quaking at her feet, shone the very semblance of Electra as I saw her last in the queenly glamour of her vengeance.

"Yes," said Blodwen, resuming her own form with perfect calmness before I, astounded, could catch my breath, and stroking out the tangles of her long red hair, "there was no doing anything with her, and so, Phoenician, I could not get translated to your material eyes."

All this was very wonderful, yet presently we were chatting as though there were naught to marvel at. Many were the things we spoke of; many were the wonders that she hinted at, and as she went on my curiosity blazed up apace.

"And, fair Princess," I said presently, "turner of javelins, favorer of mortals, is it then within the power of such as yourself to rule the destiny of us material ones?"

"Not so; else, Phoenician, you were not here!"

This made me a little uncomfortable, but, nothing daunted, I looked the strangest visitor that ever paid a midnight visit full in the face, and persisted, "Tell me, then, you bright reflection of her I loved, how seems this tinsel show of life upon its other side? Is it destiny or man that is master? How looks the flow of circumstances to you?—to us, you will remember, it is vague, inexplicable."

"You ask me more than I can say," she answered, "but so far I will go—you, material, live substantially, and before you lies unchecked the illimitable spaces of existence. Of all these you are certain heir."

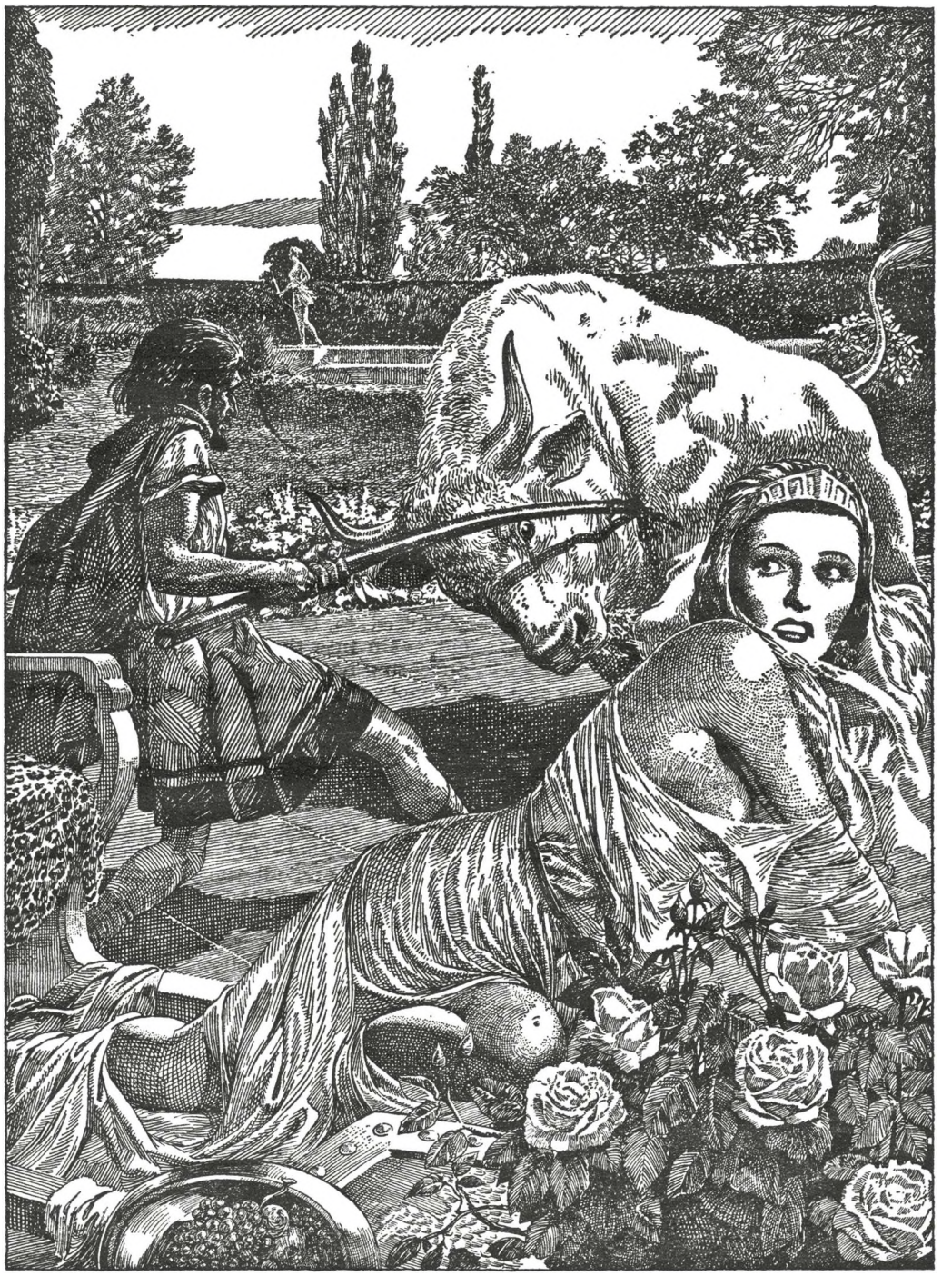
"SPEAK on!" I cried, for now and then her voice and attention flagged. "And is there any rule or sequence in this life of ours—is it for you to guide or mend our happenings?"

"No, Phoenician! You are yourselves and true forgers of the chains that bind you, and that initial apprenticeship you serve there on your world is ruled by the aggregate of your actions. I tell you, Tyrian," she exclaimed, with something as much like warmth as could come from such a hazy air-stirred body—"I tell you nothing was ever said or done but was quite immortal; all your little goings and comings, all your deeds and misdeeds, all the myriad leaves of spoken things that have ever come upon the forests of speech, all the rain-drops of action that have gone to make the boundless ocean of human history, are on record. You shake your head, and cannot understand? Perhaps I should not wonder at it."

"And have all these things left a record upon the great books of life, and is it given to the beings of the air to refer to them, even as yonder hermit finds secreted on his yellow vellums the things of long ago?"

"It is so in some kind. The actions of that life of yours leave spirit-prints behind them from the most infinitesimal to the largest. Now, see! I have but to wish, and there again is all the moving pantomime around you of that unhappy day when you well-nigh died upon this spot," and the chieftainess leaped to her feet and swept her arm around and looked into the void and smiled and nodded as though all the wild spectacle she spoke of were enacting under her very eyes. "Surely, you see it!" Look at the priests and the people, and there the running foreigners and that tall youth at their head—why, O trader in oils and dyes! it is not the remembrance of the thing, it is, I swear it, the thing itself. . . ."

But never a line of color could I perceive, only the curling smoke overhead looped and hung like tapestries upon the gray lichened walls, and the black night-



I gave him the spear—driving it home with all my strength.

time through the crevices. And, discovering this, Blodwen suddenly stopped and looked upon me with vexed compassion. "I am sorry, I am no good teacher to so outrun my pupil. Ask me henceforth what simple questions you will, and they shall be answered to the best I can."

And so presently I went on, "If those things which have been are thus to you—and it does not seem impossible—how is it with those other things of to-day, or still unborn of the future? How far can you more favored ones foresee or guide those things to which we, unhappy, must submit?"

"The strong tide of circumstance, Phoenician, is not to be turned by such hands as these"—and she held her pallid wrists toward the blaze, until I saw the ruddy gleam flash back from the rough gold bosses of her ancient bracelets. "There are laws outside your comprehension which are not framed for your narrow understanding. We obey these as much as you, but we perceive with infinitely clearer vision the inevitable logic of fate, the true sequence of events, and thus it is sometimes within our power to amend and guide the details of that brief episode which you call your life."

"Do you say that priceless span, my comrades, yonder girl, and all the others I set so high a value on, is but 'an episode'?"

"Yes—a halting step upon a wondrous journey, half a graduation upon the mighty spirals of existence!"

"And time?" I asked, full of a wonder that scarce found leisure to comprehend one word of hers before it asked another question. "Is there time with you? Even I, reflective now and then upon this long journey of mine, have thought that time must be a myth, an impossibility to larger experience."

"Of what do you speak, my merchant? I do not remember the word."

"Oh, yes; but you must. Is there period and change yonder? Is time—time, the great braggart and bully of life, also potent with you?"

"Ah! now I do recall your meaning; but, my Tyrian, we left our hour-glasses and our calendars behind us when we came away! There is, perhaps, time yonder to some extent, but no mortal eyes, not mine even, can tell the teaching of that prodigious dial that records the hours of universes and of spaces."

I bent my head and thought, for I dimly perceived in all this a meaning appearing through its incomprehensibleness. Much else did we talk through the live-long night, whereof all I may not tell, and something might but weary you. At one time I asked her of the little one I had never seen, and then she, reflective, questioned whether I would wish to see him. "As gladly," was my reply, "as one looks for the sun in springtime."

At this the comely chieftainess seemed to fall a-musing, and even while she did so an eddy in the curling smoke of the low red fire swung gently into consistency there by her bare shoulder, and brightened and grew into mortal likeness, and in a moment, by the summons of his mother's will, from where I knew not, and how I could not guess, a fair, young, ruddy boy was fashioned and stood there leaning upon the gentle breast that had so often rocked him, and gazing upon me with a quiet wonder that seemed to say, "How came you here?"

But the little one had not the substance of the mother, and after a moment, during which I felt somehow that no slight effort was being made to maintain him, he paled, and then the same waft of air that had conspired to his creation shredded him out again into the fine thin webs of disappearing haze.

Comely shadow! Dear British wife! Great was thy condescension, passing strange thy conversation, wonderful thy knowledge, perplexing, mysterious thy professed ignorance!

When I turned again, the cave was empty! I ran out into the open air and whispered "Blodwen!" and then louder "Blodwen!" and all those gray, uncouth, sinful old monoliths, standing there in the half-light up to their waist in white mist, took up my word and muttered out of their time-worn hollows one to another, "Blodwen, Blodwen!" but never again for many a long year did she answer to that call.

And then, I know not how it was, but all of a sudden the world melted away into a shadowy fantasy, my head sank and I fell into a pleasant, dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER V

THIS time, wakefulness came upon me in a prolonged gray and crimson vision; and for a long spell—now I think of it closely—probably for days, I was wrestling to unravel a strange web of light and gloom, in which all sorts of dreamy colors shone alternate in a misty blending upon the blank field of my mind.

These colors were now and again swallowed up by an episode of deep obscurity, and the longer I studied them in an unwitting, listless way the more pronounced and definite they became, until at last they were no more a tinted haze or uncertain tone, but a checkered plan, silently passing over my shut eyelids at slow, measured intervals. Well, upon an afternoon—which, you will understand, I shall not readily forget—my eyes were suddenly opened, and, with a deep sigh, like one who wakes after a good night's repose, existence came back upon me, and, all motionless and dull, but very consciously alive and observant, I was myself again.

To the inexperience of my long forgetfulness everything around was quaint and grotesque! Everything, too, was gray, and crimson, and green. As I stared and speculated, with the vapid artlessness of a baby novice, the new world into which I was thus born slowly took form and shape. It opened out into unknown depths, into aisles and corridors, into a wooden firmament overhead, checkered with clouds of timberwork and endless mazes (to my poor untutored mind) of groins and buttresses. Long gray walls—the same that had been the groundwork of my fancy—opened below them, and a hundred windows letting in the comely daylight above. But best of all was that long one by me which the crimson sun smote strongly upon its varied surface, and, gleaming through the gorgeous patchwork of a dozen parables in colored glasses, fell on the ground below in pools of many-colored brightness. As I watched, inertly, these shifting beams, I perceived in them the cause of those gay mosaics with which the outer light had amused my sleeping fancies!

All these things in time appeared distinct enough to me, and tempted a trial of whether my physical condition equaled the apparent soundness of my senses. I had hardly had leisure as yet to wonder how I had come into this strange position, or to remember—so strong were the demands of surrounding circumstances on my attention—the last remote pages of my adventures—remote, I now began to entertain a certain consciousness, they were. I was so fully taken up with the matter of the moment, that it never occurred to me to speculate beyond, but the pressing question was in what sort of a body were those sparks of sight and sense burning.

It was pretty clear I was in a church, and a greater one than I had ever entered before. My position, I could tell, spoke of funeral rites, or rather the stiff comfort of one of those marble effigies with which sculptors have from the earliest times decorated tombs. And yet I was not entombed, nor did I think I was marble, or even the plaster of more frugal monumenters. My eyes served little purpose in the deepening light, while as yet I had not moved a muscle.

As I thought and speculated, the dreadful fancy came across me that, if I were not stone, possibly I was the other extreme—a thin tissue of dry dust held together by the leniency of long silence and repose, and perhaps—dreadful consideration!—the sensations of life and pleasure now felt were threading those thin wasted tissues, as I have seen the red sparks reluctantly wander in the black folds of a charred scroll, finally to drop out one by one for pure lack of fuel.

Was I such a scroll? The idea was not to be borne, and, pitting my will against the stiffness of I knew not what interval, I slowly lifted my right arm and held it forth at length.

My chief sentiment at the moment was

wonderment at the limb thus held out in the dim cathedral twilight, my next was a glow of triumph at this achievement, and then, as something of the stress of my will was taken off and the arm flew back with a jerk to its exact place by my side, a flood of pain rushed into it. And with the pain came slowly at first, but quickly deepening and broadening, a remembrance of my previous sleeps and those other awakenings of mine attended by just such thrills.

I will not weary you with repetitions or recount the throes that I endured in attaining flexibility. I have, by Heaven's mercy, a determination within me of which no one is fit to speak but he who knows the extent and number of its conquests. A dozen times, so keen were these griefs, I was tempted to relinquish the struggle, and as many times I triumphed, the unquenched fire of my mind but burning the brighter for each opposition.

At last, when the painted shadows had crept up the opposite wall inch by inch and lost themselves in the upper colonnades, and the gloom around me had deepened into blackness, I was victorious, and weak, and faint, and tingling; but, respirited and supple, I lay back and slept like a child.

THE rest did me good. When I opened my eyes again it was with no special surprise (for the capacity of wonder is very volatile) that I saw the chancel where I lay had been lighted up, and that a portly Abbot was standing near, clad in brown fustian, corded round his ample middle. He was picking his teeth with a little splinter of wood as he paced up and down muttering to himself something, of which I only caught such occasional fragments as "fat capons," "spoiled roasts" (with a sniff in the direction of the side door of the abbey), and a malison on "unseemly hours" (with a glance at an empty confessional near me), until he presently halted opposite—whereon I immediately shut my eyes—and regarded me with dull complacency.

As he did so an acolyte, a pale, grave recluse on whose face vigils and abnegation had already set the lines of age, stepped out from the shadow, and, standing just behind his superior, also gazed upon me with silent attention.

"That blessed saint, Ambrose," said the fat Abbot, pointing at me with his toothpick, apparently for want of something better to speak about, "is nearly as good to us as the miraculous cruse was to the woman of Sarepta: what this holy foundation would do just now, when all men's minds are turned to war, without the pence we draw from pilgrims who come to kneel to him, I cannot think!"

"Indeed, sir," said the sad-eyed youth, "the good influence of that holy man knows no limit: it is as strong in death as no doubt it was in life. 'Twas only this morning that by leave of our Prior I brought out the great missals, and there found something, but not much, that concerned him."

"Recite it, brother," quoth the Abbot with a yawn, "and if you know anything of him beyond the pilgrim pence he draws you know more than I do."

"Nay, my lord, 'tis but little I learned. All the entries save the first in our journals are of slight value, for they but record from year to year how this sum and that were spent in due keeping and care of the sleeping wonder, and how many pilgrims visited this shrine, and by how much Mother Church benefited from their dutiful generosity."

"And the first entry? What said it?"

"All too briefly, sir, it recorded in a faded passage that when the saintly Baldwin—may God assoil him!" quoth the friar, crossing himself—"When Baldwin, the first Norman Bishop in your Holiness's place, came here, he found yon martyr laid on a mean and paltry shelf among the brothers' cells. All were gone who could tell his life and history, but your predecessor, says the scroll, judging by the outward marvel of his suspended life, was certain of that wondrous body's holy beatitude, and, reflecting much, had him meetly robed and washed, and placed him here. 'Twas a good deed," sighed the studious boy.

"Ah! and it has told to the advantage of the monastery," responded his senior, and he came close up and bent low over me, so that I heard him mutter, "Strange old relic! I wonder how it feels to go so long as that—if, indeed, he lives—without food. It was a clever thought of my predecessor to convert the old mummy-bundle of swaddles into a Norman saint! Baldwin was almost too good a man for the cloisters; with so much shrewdness, he should have been a courtier!"

"Oh!" I thought, "that is the way I came here, is it, my fat friend?" And I lay as still as any of my comrade monuments while the old Abbot bent over me, chuckling to himself a bibulous chuckle, and pressing his short, thick thumb into my sides as though he was sampling a plump pigeon or a gosling at a village fair.

"By the forty saints that Augustine sent

to this benighted island, he takes his fasting wonderfully well! He is firm in gammon and brisket—and, by that saintly band, he has even a touch of color in his cheeks, unless these flickering lights play with my eyes a trick!" Whereupon his Reverence regarded me with lively admiration, little knowing it was more than a breathless marvel, a senseless body, he was thus addressing.

In a moment he turned again: "Thou didst not tell me the date of this old fellow's—Heaven forgive me!—of this blessed martyr's sleep. How long ago said the chronicles since this wondrous trance began?"

"My Lord, he has lain here more centuries than anyone knows."

The portly Abbot whistled as though he were on a country green, and I, so startling, so incredulous was it, involuntarily turned my head toward them, and gathered my breath to cast back that audacious lie. But neither movement nor sign was seen, for at that moment they both turned away.

I sat up there on the white stone, and bowed my head and dangled my apostolic heels against my own commemorative marbles below, while gusts of alternate dread and indignation swept through the leafless thickets of remembrance.

PRESENTLY these meditations were disturbed by some very different outward sensations. There came stealing over the consecrated pavements of that holy pile the sound of singing, and it did not savor of angelic harmony; it was rough, and jolly, and warbled and tripped about the columns and altar steps in most unseemly sprightliness.

"Surely never did St. Gregory pen such a rousing chorus as that," I thought to myself, as, with ears pricked, I listened to the dulcet harmonies. And along with the music came such a merry odor as made me thirsty to smell of it. 'Twas not incense—'twas much more like cinnamon and nutmegs—and never did censer—never did myrrh and galbanum smell so much of burnt sack and roasted crab-apples as that unctuous, appetizing taint.

I got down at once off my slab, and, being mighty hungry, as I then discovered, I followed up that trail like a sleuth-hound on a slot. It was not reverent, it did not suit my saintship, but down the steps I went hot and hungry, and passed the reredos and crossed the apse, and round the pulpit, and over the curicula, and through the aisles, and by many a shrine where the tapers dimly burned I pressed, and so, with the scent breast high, I flitted through an open archway into the checkered cloisters. Then, tripping heedlessly over the lettered slabs that kept down the dust of many a roystering abbas, I—the latest hungry one of the countless hungry children of time—followed down that jolly trail, my apostolic linens tucked under my arm, jeweled miter on a head more accustomed to soldier wear, and golden crook carried, alas! like a hunter lance "at trail" in my other hand, till I brought the quest to bay.

At the end of the cloisters was a door set ajar, and along by the jamb a mellow streak of yellow light was streaming out, rich with those odors I had smelled and laden with laughter and the sound of wine-soaked voices noisy over the end, it might be, of what seemed a goodly supper. I advanced to the light, and then pushed wide the panel and entered.

It was the refectory of the monastery, and a right noble hall wherein ostentation and piety struggled for dominion. Overhead the high-peaked ceiling was a maze of cunningly wrought and carved woodwork, dark with time and harmonized with the assimilating touches of age. Round by the ample walls right and left ran a corridor into the dim far distance; and crucifix and golden ewer, cunning saintly image, and noble-branching silver candlesticks, gleamed in the dusk against the ebony and polish of balustrade and paneling. Under the heavy glow of all these things the Brothers' bare wooden table extended in long demure lines; but wooden platter and black leathern mugs were now all deserted and empty.

It was from the upper end came the light and jollity. Here a wider table was placed across the breadth of the hall, and upon it all was sumptuous magnificence—holy poverty here had capitulated to priestly arrogance. Silver and gold, and rare glasses from cunning Italian molds, enriched about with shining enamels wherein were limned many an ancient heathen fancy, shone and sparkled on that monkish board. On either side, in mighty candelabra, bequested by superstition and fear, there twinkled a hundred waxen candles, and up to the flames of these steamed, as I looked, many a costly dish uncovered, and many a mellow brew beaded and shining to the very brim of those jeweled horns and beakers that were the chief accessories to that pleasant spread.

They who sat here seemed, if a layman might judge, right well able to do justice to these things. Half a dozen of them, jolly, rosy priors and prelates, were round that supper table, rubicund with wine and feeding. And in the high carved chair, coif thrown back from head, his round, ruddy face aflush with liquor, his fat red hand asprawl about his flagon, and his small eyes glazed and stupid in his drunkenness, sat my friend the latest Abbot of St. Olaf's fane.

He had been singing, and, as I entered, the last distich died away upon his lips, his round, close-cropped head, overwhelmed with the wine he loved so much, sank down upon the table, the red vintage ran from the overturned beaker in a crimson streak, and while his boon comrades laughed long and loud his holiness slept unmindful. It was at this very moment that I entered, and stood there in my ghostly linen, stern and pale with fasting, and frowning grimly upon those godless revelers.

Jove! it was a sight to see them blanch—to see the terror leap from eye to eye as each in turn caught sight of me—to see their jolly jaws drop down, and watch the sickly pallor sweeping like icy wind across their countenances. So grim and silent did we face each other in that stern moment that not a finger moved—not a pulse, I think, there beat in all their bodies, and in that mighty hall not a sound was heard save the drip, drip of the Abbot's malmsey upon the floor and his own husky snoring as he lay asleep amid the costly litter of his swinish meal.

STERN, inflexible, there by the black backing of the portal I frowned upon them—I, whom they only deemed of as a saint dead centuries ago—I, whom lifeless they knew so well, now stood vengeful upon their theshold, scowling scorn and contempt from eyes where no life should have been. Can you doubt but they were sick at heart, with pallid cheeks answering to coward consciences? For long we remained so, and then, with a wild yell of terror they were all on foot, and, like homing bats by a cavern mouth, were scrambling and struggling into the gloom of the opposite doorway. I let them escape, then, stalking over to the archway, thrust the wicket to upon the heels of the last flyer, and glad to be so rid of them, shot the bolt into the socket and barred that entry.

Then I went back to my friend the Abbot, and stood, reflective, behind him, wondering whether it were not a duty to humanity to rid it of such a knave ever as he slept there. But while I stood at his elbow contemplating him, the unwonted silence told upon his dormant faculties and presently the heavy head was raised and, after an inarticulate murmur or two he smiled imbecilely, and, picking up the thread of his revelry, hiccoughed out: "The chorus, good brothers!—the chorus—and all together!" And he sang:

"Die we must, but let us die drinking at an inn.
Hold the winecup to our lips sparkling from the bin!
So, when angels flutter down to take us from our sin,
'Ah! God have mercy on these sots!' the cherubs will begin.

"Why, you rogues!" he said, as his drunken melody found no echo in the great hall. "Why, you sleepy villains! Am I a strolling troubadour that I should sing thus alone to you?" And then, as his bleared and dazzled eyes wandered round the empty places, the spilled wine and overturned trestles, he smiled again with drunken cunning. "Ah!" he muttered; "then they must be all under the tables! I thought the last round of sack would finish them! Hallo, there! Ambrose! De Voeux! Jervaulx! Jolly comrades!—sleepy dogs! Come forth! Fie on ye!—to call yourselves good monks, and yet to leave thy simple, kindly Prior thus to himself!" and he pulled up the table linen and peered below. Sorely was the Churchman perplexed to see nothing; and first he glared up among the oaken rafters, as though by chance his fellows had flown thither, and then he stared at the empty places, and so his gaze wandered round, until, in a minute or two, it had made the complete circle of the place, and finally rested on me, standing, immovable, a pace from his elbow.

At first he stared upon me with vapid amusement, and then with stupid wonder. But it was not more than a second or two before the truth dawned upon that hazy intellect, and then I saw the thick, short hands tighten upon the carving of his priestly throne, I saw the wine flush pale upon his cheeks, and the drunken light in his eyes give place to the glare of terror and consternation. Just as they had done before him, but with infinite more intensity, he blanched and withered before my unrelenting gaze.

He turned in a moment before my grim, imperious frown, from a jolly, rubicund old

bibber, rosy and quarrelsome with his supper, into a cadaverous, sober-minded confessor, lantern-jawed and yellow. And then with a hideous cry he was on foot and flying for the doorway by which his friends had gone! But I had need of that good confessor, and ere he could stagger a yard the golden apostolic crook was about the ankle of the errant sheep, and the Prior of St. Olaf's rolled over head-long upon the floor. I sat down to supper, and as I helped myself to venison pasty and malmsey I heard the beads running through the recumbent Abbot's fingers quicker than water runs from a spout after a summer thunder shower. "Misericordia, Domine, Nobis!" murmured the old sinner, and I let him grovel and pray in his abject panic for a time, then bade him rise. Now, the fierceness of this command was somewhat marred, because my mouth was very full just then of pasty crust, and the accents appeared to carry less consternation into my friend's heart than I had intended. The paternoster began to run with more method and coherence, and, soon finding he was not yet halfway to that nether abyss he had seen opening before him, he plucked up a little heart of grace.

Besides, the avenger was at supper, and making mighty inroads into the provender the Abbot loved so well; this took off the rough edge of terror, and was in itself so curious a phenomenon that little by little, with the utmost circumspection, the monk raised his head and looked at me.

I kept my baleful eyes turned away, and busied me with my loaded platter—which, by the way, was far the most interesting item of the two—and so by degrees he gained confidence, and came into a sitting position, and gazed at the hungry saint, so active with the victuals, wonder and awe playing across his countenance. "I see, Sir Priest," I said, "you have a good cook yonder in the buttery." But the Abbot was as yet too dazed to answer, so I went on to put him more at his ease (for I designed to ask him some questions later on), "Now, where I come from, the great fault of the cooks is, they appreciate none of your elegant niceties—they broil and roast forever, as though every one had a hunter appetite, and thus I have often been weary of their eternal messes of pork and kine."

"Holy saints!" quoth the Abbot. "I did not dream you had any cooks at all."

"No cooks! Thou fat wine-vat, what, didst thou think we ate our viands raw?"

"Heaven forbid!" the Abbot gasped. "But, truly, your sanctity's experiences astound me! 'Tis all against the canons. And if they be thus, as you say, at their trenchers, may I ask, in all humbleness and humility, how your blessed friends are at their flagons?"

"Ah! Sir, good fellows enough my jolly comrades, but caring little for thy red and purple vintages, liking better the merry ale that autumn sends, and the honeyed mead, yet in their way as merry roysterers for the most part as though they were all blessed Abbots," I said, glancing askance at him.

BY THIS time the Prior was on his feet, as sober as could be, but apparently infinitely surprised and perplexed at what he saw and heard. He cogitated, and then he diffidently asked: "An it were not too presumptive, might I ask if your saintship knows the blessed Oswald?"

"Not I."

"Nor yet the holy Sewall de Monteign?" he queried with a sigh—"once head of these halls and cells."

"Never heard of him in my life."

"Nor yet of Grindal? or Gerard of Bayeux? or the saintly Anslem, my predeces-

sor in that chair you fill?" groaned the jolly confessor.

"I tell you, priest, I know none of them —never heard their names or aught of them till now."

"Alas! alas!" quoth the monk, "then if none of these have won to heaven, if none of these are known to thee so newly thence, there can be but small hope for me!" And his fat round chin sank upon his ample chest, and he heaved a sigh that set the candles all a-flickering halfway down the table.

"Enough, priest," I said, and I rose. Then, taking my hasty resolution, I turned to him sternly. "Make what capital thou list of to-night's adventure, but remember the next time thou seest a saint may Heaven pity thee if thou art not in better sort—turn thy face to the wall!"

The frightened Abbot obeyed; I shed in a white heap upon the floor my saintly outer vestments, my miter and crook on top, and then, stepping lightly down the hall, mounted upon a bench, unfastened and threw open a lattice, and, placing my foot upon the sill, sprang out into the night and open world again!

I walked and ran until the day came, southward constantly, now and again asking my way of an astonished hind, but for the most part guided by some strange instinct, and before the following noon I was at the river bank where Numidea had breathed her last.

But could it be? Not a sign of life, not a sound to break the stillness!

I dropped upon my knee and buried my face and wept. What mattered the eclipse while I slept of all the kingly planets that had shone in the English firmament compared to the setting of this one white star of mine? I buried my head in my arms and hurled myself upon the ground and cursed that tender green moss that should have been so hard—cursed that golden English sunlight that suited so ill with my sorrows—and cursed again and again in my bitterness those lying blossoms overhead that showered down their petals on me, saying it was spring, when it was the blackest winter of desolation, the night-time of my disappointment.

CHAPTER VI

I AM not of a nature to be long overwhelmed. All that night and far into the next day I lay there, alternately sleeping and bewailing the chance which tossed me to and fro upon the restless ocean of time, and then I finally arose

What could it matter where my wandering feet were turned? All the world was void and vapid, east and west alike indifferent, to one so homeless, and thus stalked on through glades and coppice for hours and days, with my chin upon my chest, and feeling marvelously cheap and lonely. But enough of this. Never yet did I crave sympathy of any man: why should I seem to seek it of you—skeptical and remote?

There were those who appeared at that time to take compassion on me unasked and I remember the countrywomen at whose cottage doors I hesitated a moment —yearning with pent-up affection over their curly-headed little ones—added to the draught of water I begged such food as their slender stores provided. One of these gave me a solid green forester's cape and jerkin; another put shoes of leather upon my feet; and a third robbed her husband's pegs to find me headwear. And so through the gifts of their unspoken good-will I came by degrees into the raiment of the time.

But nothing seemed to hide the inexpressible strangeness I began to carry about with me. No sorry apparel, no woodman's cap drawn down over my brows, no rustic clogs upon my wandering feet masked me for a moment from the awe and wonder of these good English people None of them dared ask me a question how I came or where I went, but everywhere it was the same. They had but to look upon me, and up they rose, and in silence, and, drawn involuntarily by that stern history of mine they knew naught of, they ministered to me according to their means.

The women dropped their courtesies, and —unasked, unasking—fed the grim and ragged stranger from their cleanest platter. The men stood by and uncapped them to my threadbare russet, and whole groups would watch spellbound upon the village mounds as I paced moodily away.

In course of time my grief began to mend, so that it was presently possible to take a calmer view of the situation, and to bend my thoughts upon what it were best to do next. Though I love the greenwood, and am never so happy as when solitary, yet my nature was not made, alas! for sylvan idleness. I felt I had the greatest admiration and brotherhood with those who are recluse and shun the noisy struggles of the world; yet had I always been a leader of men, I now remembered,

as all the pages of my past history came one by one before me and I meditated upon them day and night.

No, I was not made to walk these woods alone, and, if another argument were wanting, it were found in the fact that I was here exposed to every weather, hungry and shelterless! I could not be forever begging from door to door, eternally throwing my awe-inspiring shadow across the lintels of these gentle-mannered woodland folk. And my tastes, though never gluttonous, rebelled most strongly against the perpetual dietary of herbs and roots and limpid brooks.

Reflecting on these things one day, as I lay friendless and ragged in the knotty elbow of a great oak's earthbare roots, after some weeks of homeless wandering, I fell asleep, and dreamed all the fair and shining landscape were a tented field, and all the rustling rushes down by the neighboring streamlet's banks were the serried spears of a great concourse of soldiers defiling by. The sparkle of the sunlight on the ripples seemed like the play of rays upon their many warlike trappings, the yellow flags and waterflowers making no poor likeness of dancing banners and bannerets.

'Twas a simple dream, such as came of an empty stomach and a full head, yet somehow I woke from that sleep with more of my old pulse of pleasure and life beating in my veins than had been there for a long time. And with the wish for another spell of bright existence, spent in the merry soldier mood that suited me so well, came the means to attain it.

IN THE first stage of these wanderings, while still fresh from the cloister shrine, I had paid but the very smallest heed to my attire and its details. I was clad in clean, sufficient wraps, so much was certain, with a linen belt about me, and sandals upon my feet; yet even this was really more than I noticed with any closeness. But as I ran and walked, and my flesh grew hot and nervous with the fever of my sorrow, a constant chafing of my feet and hands annoyed me. I had stopped by a woodside river bank, and there discovered with wrathful irritation that upon my bare apostolic toes and upon my sanctified thumbs—those soldier thumbs still flat and stong with years of pressing sword-hilts and bridle-reins—there were glistening in holy splendor such a set of gorgeous gems as had rarely been taken for a scramble through the woods before!

There were beryls and sapphires and pearls, and ruddy great rubies from the caftans of Paynim chiefs slain by long-dead Crusaders, and onyx and emerald from Cyprus and the remotest East set in rude red gold by the rough artificers of rearward ages. And all these had been put upon me, no doubt, after the manner in which at that time credulous piety was wont to bedeck the shrine and images of saints and martyrs. I was indeed at that moment the wealthiest beggar who ever sat forlorn and friendless on a grassy lode.

But what was all this glistening store to me, desolate and remorseful, with but one remembrance in my heart, with but one pitiful sight before my eyes? I pulled the shining gems angrily from my swollen fingers and toes and hurled them one by one, those princely toys, into the muddy margin of the stream, and there, in that rude setting, ablazing, red and green, and white, and hot and cool, with their wonderful scintillations they mocked me. They mocked me as I sat there with my chin in my palms, and twinkled and shone among the sludge and scum so merrily to the flickering sunshine, that presently I laughed a little at those cheerful trinkets that could shine so bravely in the contumacy of chance. And after a time I picked up one and rinsed it and held it out in the sunshine, and found it very fair—so fair, indeed, that a glimmer of listless avarice was kindled within me, and later on I broke a hawthorn spray and groped among the sedge and mire and hooked out thus, in better mood, the greater part of my strange inheritance.

Then, here I was, upon this other bank, waking up after my dream, and, turning over the better to watch the fair landscape stretching below, my waistcloth came unbound, and out upon the sand amid the oak roots rolled those ambient, glistening rings again. At first I was surprised to see such jewels in such a place, and stared in wonderment while I strove to imagine whence they came. But soon I remembered piece by piece their adventure as has been told to you, and now, with the warm blood in my veins again, I did not throw them by, but lay back against the oak and chuckled to myself as my ambitious heart fluttered with pleasure under my draughty rags. I crossed my legs, and weighted upon my finger-tips, and inventoried, and valued, all in the old merchant spirit, those friendly treasures.

How unchanging the passions of humanity! I tossed those radiant playthings

up in the sunlight and caught them, I counted and recounted them, I tore shreds from my clothing and cleaned and polished each in turn, I started up angry and suspicious as a kite's wheeling shadow fell athwart my hoard. Forgotten was hunger and houselessness—I no longer mourned so keenly the emptiness of the world or the brevity of friendships: I, to whom these treasures should have been so light, overlooked nearly all my griefs in them, and was as happy for the moment in this unexpected richness as a child.

And then, after an hour or so of cheerful avarice, I sat up sage and reflective, and, having swathed and wrapped my store safely next my heart, I must needs climb the first grassy knoll showing above the woodlands and search the horizon for some place wherein a beginning might be made of spending it. Nothing was to be seen thence but a goodly valley spread out at a distance, and there my steps were turned —for men, like streams, ever converge upon the lowlands.

Now that I had the heart to fall into beaten tracks, coming out of the sheltering thicket byways I observed the new people and times among whom fate had thus thrown me. And truly it was a very strange meeting with these folk, who were they whom I had known when last I walked these woods, and yet were not. I would stare at them in perplexity, marveling at the wondrous blend of nations I saw in face and hair and eyes. Their very clothes were novel to me, and unaccountable, while their speech seemed now the oddest union of many tongues—all foreign, yet upon these English lips most truly native —and wondrous to listen to. I would pass a sturdy yokel leading out his team to plowing, and when I spoke to him it made my ears tingle to hear how antique Roman went hand in hand with ancient British.

That polyglot youth, knowing no tongue but one, was most scholarly in his ignorance. To him 'twas English that he spoke; but to me, who had lived through the making of that noble speech, who knew much of the individual quantity that made that admirable whole, his jargon was most wonderful!

Nor was I yet fully reconciled to the unity of these new people and their mutual kinsmanship. I could not remember all feuds were ended.

At one time I met a strange piebald creature, all tags and tassels, white and red, with a hundred little bells upon him, a cap with peaks hanging down like asses' ears, and a staff, with more bells, tucked away under his arm. He was plodding along dejected, so I called to him civilly:

"Why, friend! Who are you?"

"I am a fool, Sir!"

"Never mind," I replied cheerfully, "there is the less likelihood of your ever treading this earth companionless."

"Why, that is true enough," he said, "for it was too much wisdom that sent me thus solitary afield," and he went on to tell how he had been ejected that morning from a neighboring castle. "I had belauded and admired my master for years—therein I had many friends, yet was a fool. Yesterday we quarreled about some trifle—I called him beast and tyrant, and therein, being just and truthful, I lost my place and comrades over the first wise thing I said for years!—it is a most sorry, disorderly world."

THIS strange individual, it seemed, lived by folly, and, though I had often noticed that wit was not a fat profession, I could not help regarding him with wonder. He was, under his veneer of shallowness, a most gentle and observant jester. Long study in the arts of pleasing had given him a very delicate discrimination of moods and men. He could fit a merriment to the capacity of any man's mind with extraordinary acumen.

He had stores of ill-assorted learning in the empty galleries of his head, and wherewithal a kindly, gentle heart, a whimsical companionship for sad-eyed humanity which made him haste to laugh at everything through fear of crying over it. We were companions before we had gone a mile, and many were the things I learned of him. When our way parted I pressed one of my rings into his hand. "Good-by, fool!" I said.

"Good-by, friend!" he called. "You are the first wise man with whom I ever felt akin"; and indeed, as his poor buffoon's coat went shining up the path, I felt bereft and lonely again for a spell.

Then I found another craftsman of this curious time. A little way farther on, near by to a lordly house standing in the wide stretches of meadow and park lands, a most plaintive sound came from a thicket lying open to the sun. Such a dismal moaning enlisted my compassion, for here, I thought, is some luckless wight just dying, or, at least, in bitterest extremity of sorrow: so I approached, stepping lightly round the blossoming thicket—peering this way and that, and now down on my hands

and knees to look under the bushes, and now on tiptoe, craning my neck that I might see over, and so, presently, I found the source of the sighs and moans.

It was a young man of most dainty proportions, with soft, fine-combed hair upon his pretty sloping shoulders, his sleeves so long they trailed upon the moss, his shoes laced with golden threads and toed and tasseled in monstrous fashion. A most delicate perfume came from him: his clothes were greener than grass in springtime, turned back, and puffed with damask. In his hand he had a scroll whereon now and again he looked, and groaned in most plaintive sort.

"Why, man," I asked, "what ails you? Why that dreadful moaning?"

"Fie! not to see! I am a minstrel—a bard; my lord's favorite poet up at yonder castle, and this is an ode to his mistress's eyebrows. I was in travail of a rhyme when thy black shadow fell upon the page."

"Give me the leaf! Why, it is the sickliest stuff that ever did dishonor to virgin paper! There, take it back," I said, angry to find so many fools abroad. "You a stirrer of passions—you a tightener of the strong sinews of warrior hearts!—fie! for shame upon your silly trivial sonnets, your parti-colored suits and sweet insipid vaporings! Out, I say! Get home to thy lady's footstool, or I will give thee a beating out of pure respect for noble rhyming!"

The poet did not wait to argue. I was angry and rough, and the rudest-clad champion that ever swung a flail in the cause of the muses. So he took to his heels, and I watched that pretty butterfly aiming across the sunny meadows for his master's portals, and stopping not for hedge or ditch.

Then I went on again, and had not gone far, when down the road there came ambling on a mule a crafty-looking Churchman, with big wallets hanging at his saddle-bows, a portentous rosary round his neck, and bare, unwashed feet hanging stirrupless by his palfrey's side.

"Now here's another tradesman," I muttered to myself. "Good-morning, Father!"

"Good-morning, Son! Art going into the town to take up arms for Christ and His servant Edward?"

"Yes," I answered, "I am bound to the town, but I have not yet chosen a master."

"Then you are all the more sure to go to the fighting, for every one, just now, who has no other calling, is apprentice to arms."

"It will not be the first time I have taken that honorable indenture."

"No, I guess not," said the shrewd Friar, eyeing me under his pent-house eyebrows, "for thou art a stout and wiry-looking fellow, and may I never read anything better than my breviary again if I cannot construe in your face a good and varied knowledge of camps and cities. But there was something else I had to say to you." ("Here comes the point of the narrative," I thought to myself.) "Now, so trim a soldier as you, and one wherewithal so reflective, would surely not willingly go where hostile swords are waving and cruel French spears are thicker than yonder tall-bladed glass, unshriven—with all thy sins upon thy back?"

"Why then, monk, I must stay at home. Is that what you would say?"

"Nay, not at all. There is a middle way. But soft! Hast any money with thee?"

"Enough to get a loaf of bread and a cup of ale."

"Oh!" said the secret pardoner (for his calling was then under ban and fine), a little disappointedly, "that is somewhat small, but yet, nevertheless," he muttered partly to himself, "these are poor times, and when all plump partridges are abroad Mother Church's falcons must necessarily fly at smaller game. Look here! good youth. Forego thy mortal appetites, defer thy bread and ale, and for that money saved thereby I will sell thee one of these priceless parchments here in my wallet—scrolls, young man, hot from the holy footstool of our blessed father in Rome, and carrying complete unction and absolution to the soul of their possessor!

"Think, youth! is not eternal redemption worth a cup of muddy ale? Fie to hesitate! Line thy bosom with this blessed scroll, and go to war cleaner-hearted than a newborn babe. There! I will not be exacting.

For one of those silver groats I fancy I see tied in thy girdle I will give thee absolute admittance into the blessed company of saints and martyrs. I tell thee, man, for half a zecchin I will make thee comrade of Christ and endow thee with eternity! Is it a bargain?"

Silent and disdainful, I, who had seen hierarchies rise and set in the various peopled skies of the world, took the parchment from him and turned away and read it. It was, as he said—more shame on human intellect!—a full pardon of the possessor's sins wrote out in bad Latin, and bearing the sign and benediction of St. Peter's chair. I read it from top to bottom, then twisted its red tapes round it again and threw it back to that purveyor of absolutions. Yes; and I turned upon that reverend traveler and scorned and scouted him and his contemptible baggage. I told him I had met two sad fools since noon, but he was worse than either. I scoffed him, just as my bitter mood suggested, until I had spent both breath and invention, then turned contemptuous and left him at bay, mumbling inarticulate maledictions upon my biting tongue.

No more of these shallow panderers fell in my path to vex and irritate me, and before the white evening star was shining through the brilliant tapestry of the sunset over the meadow-lands in the west, I had drawn near to and entered the strong, shadowy, moated walls of my first English city.

I TOOK lodgings that evening with some rough soldiers who kept guard over the town gate, and slept quite as soundly by their watch-fire as though my country clothes were purple, and a stony bench in an angle of the walls were a princely couch. But when the morning came I determined to better my condition.

With this object in view one of the smallest of my rings was selected, and, with this conveniently hidden, I went down into the town to search for a jeweler's. A strange town indeed it struck me as being. Narrow and many were the streets, and paved with stones; timber and plaster jutting out overhead so as to lessen the fair, free sky to a narrow strip, and greatly to compress my country spirit.

At every lattice window, so amply provided with glass as I had never known before, they were hanging out linen at that early hour to air; and the 'prentice lads came yawning and stretching to their masters' shutter booths, and every now and then down the quaint streets of that curious city which had sprung—peopled with a new race—from the earth during the long night of my sleep, there rumbled a country tumbril loaded with rustic things. The women came out to chaffer and buy of the smocked cartsmen who spoke the glib English so novel to my ear and laughed and gossiped with them.

The early ware I noticed in his cart was still damp and sparkling with the morning dew, so close upon the dawn had he come in, and there in the town where the deep street shadows still lay undisturbed, now and then a peddler, still ashamed, it seemed, to meet any of those sleepy Christian eyes, would steal by to an early bargain, wrapped to his chin in his gabardine—I knew that garment a thousand years ago—and fearfully slinking, in that intolerant time, from house to house and shadow to shadow.

Now and then as I sauntered along in a city of novelties, a couple of revelers in extraordinary various clothes, their toes longer than their sleeves, their velvet caps quaintly peaked, and slashed doublets showing gay vests below, came reeling and singing up the back ways, making the half-waked dogs dozing in the gutters snarl and snap at them, and disturbing the morning meal of the crows rooting in the litter-heaps.

As the sun came up, and the fresh, white light of that fair Plantagenet morning crept down the faces of the eastward walls, the city woke to its daily business. A page came tripping over the cobbles with a message in his belt, the good wives were astir in the houses, and the 'prentices fell to work manfully on booth and bars as merchant and mendicant, early gallant and basketed maid, began the day in earnest.

All these things I saw from under the broad rim of my rustic hat—my ragged, sorrel-green cloak thrown over my shoulder and across my face, and, so disguised, silent, observant—now recognizing something of that yesterday that was so long ago, and anon sad and dubious, I went on until I found what I sought for, and came into a smooth, broad street, where the jewelers had their stall. I chose one of those who seemed in a fair way of business, and entered.

"Are you the master here?" I asked of a gray-bearded merchant who was searching for the spectacles he had put away overnight.

"My neighbors say so," he answered gruffly.

"Then I would trade with you."

Whereon—having found and adjusted his great hornglasses—he eyed me superciliously from head to foot; then said:

"As you wish, friend countryman. But will you trade in pearl and sapphire, or diamond pins and brooches, perhaps—or is it only for broken victuals of my last night's supper?"

"Keep thy victuals for thy lean and hungry lads! I will trade with you in pearl and sapphire." And thereon, from under my moldy rags, I brought a lordly ring that danced and sparkled in the clear sunlight stealing through the mullioned windows of his booth, and threw quivering rainbow hues upon the white walls of the little den, dazzling the blinking, delighted old man in front of me. "How much for that?" I asked, throwing it down in front of him.

It was a better gem than he had seen for many a day, and, having turned it over, loving and wistful, he whispered to me (for he thought I had surely stolen it) one-sixteenth of its value! Thereon I laughed at him, and threw down my cap, and took the ring, and gave him such a lecture on gems and jewels—all out of my old Phrygian merchant knowledge—so praised and belauded the shine and water of each single shining point in that golden circlet, that presently I had sold it to him for near its value!

Then I bought a leather wallet and put the money in, and traded again lower down the street with another ring.

And then again at good prices—for competition was close among these goldsmiths, and none liked me to sell the beautiful things I showed them one by one to their rivals—I sold two more.

"Surely! surely! good youth," questioned one merchant to me, "these trinkets were made for some master Abbot's thumb, or some blessed saint."

"And surely again, my friend," I answered, "you have just seen them drawn from a layman's finger."

"Well, well," he said, "I will give you your price." And then, as he turned away to pack them, he muttered to himself, "A stout cudgel seems a good profession nowadays! If it were not through fear yon Flemish rascal over the road might take the gem, I at least would never deal with such an obvious footpad."

BY THIS time I was rich, and my wallet-purse hung low and heavy at my girdle, so away I went to where some tailors lived, and accosted the best of them. Here the cross-legged sewers who sat on the sill among shreds of hundred-colored stuffs and the bent, white-fingered embroiderers stopped their work and gaped to hear the ragged, wayworn loafer, whose broad shadow darkened their doorway, ask for silks and satins, yepres and velvet.

One youthful churl, under the master's eyes, unbonneted, and in mock civility asked me whether I would have my surtout of crimson or silver—whether my jupons should be strung with seedling pearls, or just plain sewn with golden thread and lace.

He said, that harmless scoffer, that he knew a fine pattern a noble lord had lately worn, of minever and silver, which would very neatly suit me—but I, disdainful, not putting my hand to my loaded pouch as another might have done, only let the ragged homespun fall from across my face, and, taking the cap from my raven hair and grim, weatherbeaten face, turned upon them.

The laughter died away in that little den as I did so, the embroiderer's needle stuck halfway through its golden fabric, the workers stared upon me open-mouthed. The cutter's shears shut with a snap upon

the rustling webs, and then forgot to open, while 'prentice lads stood, all with yard-wands in their hand, most strangely spell-bound by my presence. The conquest was complete without a word, and no one moved, until presently down shuffled the master tailor from his dusky corner, and, waving back his foolish boys, bowed low with sudden reverence as he asked with many epithets of respect in how he might serve me.

"Thanks," I said, "my friend. What I need is only this—that you should express upon me some of these tardy but courteous commendations. Translate me from these rags to the livery of gentility. Express in good stuffs upon me some of that 'nobility' your quick perception has now discovered—in brief, suit me at once as a not too fantastic knight of your time is clad; and have no doubt about my paying." Whereon I quickened his willingness by a sight of my broad pieces.

Well, they had just such vests and tunics and hose as I needed, and these, according to the fashion, being laced behind and drawn in at the middle by a loose sword-belt, fitted me without special making. My vest was of the finest doeskin, scalloped round the edge, bound with golden tissue, and worked all up the front with the same in leaves and flowers. My hose were as green as rushes, and my shoes pointed and upturned halfway to my knees. On my shoulders hung a loose cloak of green velvet of the same hue as my hose, lined and puffed with the finest grass-green satin that ever came in merchant bales from over seas. Over my right arm it was held by a gold-and-emerald brooch—a "morse" that worthy clothier termed it—bigger than my palm, and this tunic hung to my small-laced middle.

My maunch-sleeves were lined by ermine, and hung to my ankles a yard and more in length. On my head, my cap, again, was all of ermine and velvet, bound with strings of seed-pearls. That same kindly hosier got me a pretty playtime dagger of gold and sapphire for my hip and green-satin gloves, sewn thick upon the back with gold threads. This, he said, was a fair and knightly vestment, such as became a goodly soldier when he did not wear his harness, but with naught about it of the courtly sumptuousness which so hard and warlike-seeming a lord as I no doubt despised.

From hence I went by many a cobble pavement to where the noisy sound of hammers and anvils filled the narrow streets. And mighty busy I discovered the armor-smiths. There was such a riveting and hammering, such a fitting and filing and brazing going on, that it seemed as though every man in the town were about to don steel and leather. There were long-legged pages in garb of rainbow hue hurrying about with orders to the armorers or carrying home their masters' finished helms or warlike gear. There were squires and men-at-arms idly watching at the forge doors the pulsing hammers weld rivet and chains. And ever and anon a man-at-arms would come pushing through these groups with sheaves of broken arrows to be ground, or an armful of pikes to be re-handled, casting them down upon the cumbered floor. Or perhaps it was a squire who came along the way, leading over the cobbles a stately war-horse to the shoeing.

In truth, it was a sight to please a soldier's eyes, and right pleasant was it to me to hear the proud neighing of the chargers, the laughing and the talk, the busy whirr of the grindstone on sword and axes, the clangor of the hammers as the hot white spearheads went to the noisy anvil, while the forges beat in unison to the singing of the smith! Ah! and I walked slowly down those streets, wondering and watching with vast pleasure in the busy scene, though every now and then it came over me how solitary I was—I, the one impassive in this turmoil, to whom the very stake they prepared to fight for was unknown!

A little way off were the booths where stores of Milan armor were for sale. To them I went, and was shown piles and stacks of harness such as never man saw before, all of steel and golden inlay, covering every point of a warrior, and so rich and cumbersome that it was only with great hesitation I submitted my free Phrygian limbs to such a steel casementing. But I was a gentleman now, whereof to witness came my gorgeous apparel, backing the grim authority of my face, and the bargaining was easy enough. How those swart, olive-skinned, hook-nosed apprentices screwed me up and braced me down into that suit of Milan steel until I could scarcely breathe—their black-eyed master all the time belauding the sit and comfort of it.

"Gads! Sir," quoth he, "many's a hauberk I have seen laced on knightly shoulders, but by the mail from the back of the Gittite, who fell in Shochoh, I never saw a coat of links sit closer or truer than that!" And then again, "There's a gorget

for you, Sir! Why, if Ahab had but possessed such a one, as I am a miserable poor merchant and your Valor's humble servant, even the blessed arrows of Israel would have glanced off harmlessly from his ungodly body! And the cunning, sanctimonious old merchant went fawning and smiling round while his helpers pent me up in my glittering hide until I was steel-and-gold inlay from head to heel.

"Noble Sir, those greaves become your legs!—And here's a tabard, Sir, of crimson velvet and emblazoned borderings a prince might gladly wear!"

Then they put a helm upon me with a visor and beaver, through which I frowned, as ill at ease as a young goshawk with his first hood, and girded me with a broad belt chosen from many, and a good English broadsword, the dagger "misericordia" at my other hip, and knightly spurs (they gave me that rank without question) upon my heels. So that I was completely armed at last, after the fantastic style of the time, and fit to take my place again in the red ranks of my old profession.

CHAPTER VII

I WILL not weary you with many details of the process whereby I adapted myself to the times. From the armorer's shop I went—leaving my mail to be a little altered—to a hostelry in the center square of the town, and there I fed and rested. There, too, I chose a long-legged squire from among those who hung about every street corner, and he turned out a most accomplished knave. I never knew a villain who could lie so sweetly in his master's service as that particolored, curly-headed henchman.

He fetched my armor back the next day, cheating the armorer at one end of the errand and me at the other. He got me a charger—filling the gray-stoned yard with capering palfreys that I might make my choice—and over the price of my selection he cozened the dealers and hoodwinked me. He was the most accomplished youth in his station that ever thrust a vagrom leg into green-and-canary tights, or put a cock's feather into a borrowed cap.

He would sit among the wallflowers on the inn-yard wall and pipe French ditties till every lattice window round had its idle sewing-maid. He would swear, out in the market-place, when he lost at dice or skittles, until the bronzed troopers looking on blushed under their tawny hides at his supreme expurlatives. There was not such a lad within the town walls for strut, for brag, or bully, yet when he came in to render the service due to me, he ministered like a soft, white-fingered damsel. He combed my long black hair, anointing and washing it with wondrous scents, whereof he sold me phials at usurious interest. He whispered into my sullen, unnoticing ear a constant stream of limpid, sparkling scandal. He cleaned my armor till it shone like a brook in May time, and stole my golden lace and a dozen of the sterling links from my dagger chain. He knew the wittiest, most delicately licentious songs that ever were writ by a minstrel, and he could cook such dishes as might have made a dying anchorite sit up and feast.

Strange, incomprehensible! that wayward youth went forth one day on his own affairs, and met in the yard two sturdy loafers who spoke of me, and calling me penniless, unknown, infamous — and French, perhaps—for they doubted I was good English—whereon that gallant youth of mine fell on them and fought them—there right under my window—and beat them both, and flogged their dusty jackets all across the market-place to the tune of their bellowings, and all this for his master's honor! Then, having done so much, he proceeded with his private errand, which was to change, for his own advantage at a mean Fleming's shop, those pure golden spurs of mine, secreted in his room, into a pair of common brass ones.

For five days I had lain in that town in magnificent idleness, and had spent nearly all my rings and money, when, one day, as I sat moody and alone by the porch of the inn drinking in the sun, my idle valor rusting for service, and looking over the market square with its weather-worn central fountain, its cobblestones mortared together with green moss and quaint surroundings, there came cantering in and over to my rest-house three goodly knights in complete armor with squires behind them—their pennons fluttering in the wind, tall white feathers streaming from their helms, and their swords and maces rattling at the saddle bows to the merriest of tunes. They pulled up by the open lattice, and, throwing their broad bridles to the ready squires, came clattering up, dusty and thirsty, past where I lay, my inglorious silken legs outstretched upon the window bench.

They were as jolly fellows as one could wish to see, and they tossed up their beavers and called for wine and poured it down their throats with a pleasure pleasant

enough to watch. Then—for they could not unlace themselves—in came their lads and fell to upon them and unscrewed and lifted off the great helms, and piece by piece all the glittering armor, and piling it on the benches—the knights the while sighing with relief as each plate and buckle was relaxed—and so they got them at last down to their quilted vests. And then the gallants sat to table and fell to laughing and talking until their dinner came.

From what I gathered, they were on their way to war, and war upon that fair, fertile country yonder over the narrow seas. Jove! how they did revile the Frenchman, and drain their beakers to a merry meeting with him, until ever as they chattered the feeling grew within me that here was the chance I was waiting for—I would join them—and, since it was the will of the Incomprehensible, draw my sword once more in the cause of this fair, many-mastered island.

Nor was there long to wait for an excuse. They began talking of King Edward's forces presently, and how that every man who could spin a sword or sit a war-horse was needed for the coming onset, and how more especially leaders were wanting for the host gathering, so they said, away by the coast. Whereon at once I arose and went over, sitting down at their table, and told them that I had some knowledge of war, and though just then I lacked a quarrel I would willingly espouse their cause if they would put me in the way of it.

In my interest and sympathy I had forgot they had not known I was so close, and now the effect which my sudden appearance always had on strangers made them all stare at me as though I were a being of another world—as, indeed, I was. And yet the comely, stalwart, raven-tressed, silk-swathed fellow who sat there before them at the white-scrubbed board, marking their fearful wonder with regretful indifference, was solid and real. And presently the eldest of them swallowed his surprise and spoke out courteously for all, saying they would be glad enough to help my wishes, and then—warming with good fellowship as the first effect of my entry wore off—he added they were that afternoon bound for the rendezvous (as he termed it) at a near castle; "and if I could wear harness as fitly as I could wear silk, and had a squire and a horse," they would willingly take me along with them. So it was settled, and in a great bumper they drank to me and I to them, and thus informally was I admitted into the ranks of English chivalry.

WE ATE and drank and laughed for an hour or two, and then settled with our host and got into our armor. This to them was customary enough, nor was it now so difficult a thing to me, for I had donned and doffed my gorgeous steel casings, by way of practice, so often in seclusion that, when it came to actual test, assisted with the nimble fingers of that varlet of mine, I was in panoply from head to heel, helmeted and spurred, before the best of them.

Ah! and I was not so old yet but that I could delight in what, after all, was a noble vestment! And as I looked round upon my knightly comrades draining the last drops of their flagons while I knew in my heart that if they were strong and stalwart I was stronger and more stalwart—that if they carried proud hearts and faces shining there, under their nodding plumes, of gentle birth and handsome soldierliness—no less did I. Knowing all this, I say, and feeling peer to these comely peers, I had a flush of pride and contentment again in my strangely varied lot. Then the grooms brought round our gay-ribboned horses to the cobbles in front, where, mounting, we presently set out, as goodly a four as ever went clanking down a sunny market place, while the maids waved white handkerchiefs from the overhanging lattices and townsmen and 'prentices uncapped them to our dancing pennons.

We rode some half-score miles through a fertile country toward the west, now cantering over green undulations, and anon picking a way through woodland coppices, where the checkered light played daintily upon our polished furniture, and the spear-points rustling ever and anon against the green boughs overhead.

"What of this good knight to whose keep we are going?" asked one of my companions presently. "He is reputed rich, and, what is convenient in these penurious times, blessed only with daughters."

"Why!" responded the fellow at his elbow, who set no small store by a head of curly chestnut hair and a handsome face below it, "if that is so, in truth I am not at all sure but that I will respectfully bespeak one of those fair maids. I am half convinced I was not born to die on some scoundrel Frenchman's rusty toasting-iron. 'Tis a cursed perilous expedition this of ours, and I never thought so highly of the advantages of a peaceful and Christian life as I have this last day or two. Now, which of these admirable maids dost thou think most accessible, good Delafosse?" he asked,

turning to the horseman who acted as our guide by right of previous knowledge here.

"Well," quoth that youth, after a moment's hesitation, "I must frankly tell you, Ralph, that I doubt if there are any two maids within a score of miles of us who have been tried so often by such as you and proved more intractable. The knight, their father, is a rough old fellow, as rich as though he were an abbot, hale and frank with every one.

"You may come or go about his halls, and (for they have no mother) lay what siege you like to his girls, nor will he say a word. So far so well, and many a pretty gallant asks no better opportunity. But, because you begin thus propitious, it does not follow either fair citadel is yours! No! these virgin walls have stood unmoved a hundred assaults and as much escalading as only a country swarming with poor desperate youths can any way explain."

"St. Denis!" exclaimed the other, "all this but fans the spark of my hopes."

"Oh, hope by all means. If wishes would bring well-dowered maidens to the altar, those were a mighty scarce commodity. But, soberly, does thy comprehensive valor intend to siege both these heiresses at once, or will one of them suffice?"

"One, gentle Delafosse, and, when my exulting pennon flutters triumphant from that captured turret, I will in gratitude help thee to win the other. Difference them, beguile this all too tedious way with an account of their peculiar graces. Which maid dost thou think I might the most aptly sue?"

"Well, you may try, of course, but remember I hold out no hope, neither of the elder nor the younger. That one, the first, is as magnificent a shrew as ever laughed an honest lover to scorn. She is as black and comely as any daughter of Zion. 'Tis to her near every Knight yields at first glance; but—gads!—it does them little good! She has a heart like the nether millstone; and, as for pride, she is prouder than Lucifer! I know not what game it may be this swart Circe sees upon the skyline—some say 'tis even for that bold boy the young Prince himself, now gone with his father to France, she waits. And some others say she will look no lower than a Duke backed by the wealth of the grand Soldan himself. But whoever it be, he has not yet come."

"BY THE bones of St. Thomas à Becket," the young Knight laughed, "I have a mind that that Knight and I may cross the drawbridge together! Canst tell me, out of good comradeship, any weak place in this damsel's harness?"

"There is none I know of. She is proof at every point. Indeed, I am nigh reluctant to let one like you whose heart has ripened in the sun of experience so much faster than his head, engage upon such a dangerous venture. They say one gallant was so stung by the calm scorn with which she mocked his offer that he went home and hung himself to a cellar beam. And another, blind in desperate love, leaped from her father's walls and fell in the courtyard, a horrid, shapeless mass! Young De Vipon, as you know, stabbed himself at her feet, and 'tis told the maid's wrath was all because his spurting heart's-blood soiled her wimple a day before it was due to go to wash! How thrives thy inclination?"

"Oh! well enough: 'twould take more than this to spoil my appetite! But, nevertheless, let us hear something of the other sister. This elder is obviously a proud minx, who has set her heart on lordly game, and will not marry because her suitors seem too mean. How is it with the other girl?"

"Why," said Delafosse, "it is even more hopeless with her. She will not marry, for the cold sufficient reason that her suitors be all men!"

"A most abominable offense."

"Ah! so she thinks it. Such a tender, shy and modest maid there is not in the boast of the county. While the elder will hear you out, arms crossed on pulseless bosom, cold, disdainful eyes fixed with haughty stare to yours, the other will not stop to listen—no, not so much as to the first inkling of your passion! Breathe so little as half a sigh, or tint your speech with a rosy glint of dawning love, and she is away, lighter than thistledown on the upland breeze.

"I know of but two men—loose, worldly fellows both of them—who cornered her, and they came from her presence looking so crestfallen, so abashed at their hopes, so melancholy to think on their gross manliness as it had appeared against the white celibacy of that maid, that even some previous suitors sorrowed for them. This is, I think, the safer venture, but even the least hopeful."

"Is the maid all fallow like that? Has she no human faults to set against so much sterile virtue?"

"Of her faults I cannot speak, but you must not hold her altogether insipid and shallow. She is less approachable than her sister, and contemns and fears our kind,

yet she is straight and tall in person, and, I have heard from a foster-brother of hers, can sit a fiery charger, new from stall, like a groom or horse boy. She is the best shot with a crossbow of any on the castle green, and in the women's hall as merry a romp, as ready for fun or mischief, as any village girl that ever kept a twilight tryst on a Saturday evening."

"Gads! a most pleasant description. I will keep tryst with this one for a certainty, not only Saturdays, but six other days out of the week. The black jade may wait for her princeling for a hundred years as far as I am concerned. How far is it to the castle?—I am hot impatience itself!"

"Nor need your patience cool! Look!" said Delafosse, and as he spoke we turned a bend in the woodland road, and there, a mile before us, flashing back the level sun from towers and walls that seemed of burnished copper, was the noble pile we sought.

CERTES! when we came up to it, it was a fine place indeed, cunningly built with fosses round about, long barbican walls within them, turreted and towered, and below these again were other walls so shrewd designed for defense as to move any soldier heart with wonder and delight.

But if the walls did pleasure me, the great keep within, towering high into the sky with endless buttresses, and towers, and casements, grim, massive, and stately, rearing its proud circumference, embattled and serrated far beyond the reach of rude assault or desperate onset, filled me with pride and awe.

I scarce could take my eyes from those red walls shining so molten in the setting sun, yet round about the country lay very fair to look at. All beyond that noble pile the land dropped away—on two sides by sheer cliffs to the shining river underneath —and on the others in gentle, grassy undulations, dotted with great trees, whereunder lay, encamped by tent and watch-fire, the rear of King Edward's army, and then on again into the pleasant distance that lay stretched away in hill and valley toward the yellow west.

All over that wide campaign were scattered the villages of serfs and vassals who grew corn for the lordly owner in peace-time, and followed his banner in battle. And in that knightly stronghold up above there were, I found when I came to know it better, many kinsmen and women who sheltered under my Lord's liberality. Dowagers dwelt in the wings, and young squires of good name—a jolly, noisy, unruly crew —harbored down in the great vaulted chambers by the sally-port.

There were kinsmen of the left-hand degree in the warder's lodge by the gates, and poor wearers of the same noble escutcheon up among the jackdaws and breezes of the highest battlements. And so generous was the Knight's bounty, so ample the sweep of his castellated walls and labyrinthine the mazes of the palace keep they encircled, so abundant the income of his tithes and tenure, dues and fees, that all these folk found living and haborage with him. And not only did it not irk that Lord, but only to his steward and hall porter was it known how many guests there were, or when a man came or went, or how many hundred horses stood in the stalls, or how many score of vassals fed in the great kitchen.

On Sundays, after mass, the smooth green in the center of the castle would be thronged with men and maids in all their finery; while the quintains spun merrily under the mock onsets of the young knights, and dame and gallant trod the stony battlements. And down among the wide shadow of the cedar-trees on the slope ('twas a Crusader who brought the saplings from Palestine) vassal and yeoman idled and made love or frolicked with their merry little ones. Over all that gallant show my Lord's great blazon snapped and flaunted in the wind upon the highest donjon. And in the halls beneath the lords and ladies sat in the deep-seated windows, and laughed and sang and jested in the mullion-tinted sunshine with all the courtly extravagance of their brilliant day.

Ah! by old Isis! at that time the world, it seemed to me, was less complex, and the rules of life were simpler. Kingcraft had found its mold and fashion in the courageous Edward, and the first duty of a noble was then nobility: the Knights swore by their untarnished chivalry, and the vassals by their loyalty. Yes! and it was priestly then to fear God and hell, and every woman was, or would be, lovely! So ran the simple creed of those who sang or taught, while nearly every one believed them.

But you who live in a time when there is no belief but that of Incredulence, when the creative skill and forethought of the great primeval Cause is open to the criticism and cavil of every base human atom it has brought about—you know better—you know how vain their dream was, how foolish their fidelity, how simple their sim-

plicity, how contemptible their courage, and how mean by the side of your love of mediocrity their worship of ideals and heroes! By the bright Theban flames to which my fathers swore! by the grim shadow of Osiris which dogged the track of my old Phoenician bark! I was soon more English than any of them.

But while I thus tell you the thoughts that came of experience, I keep you waiting at the castle-gate. They admitted us by drawbridge and portcullised arch into the center space, and there we dismounted. Then down the steps, to greet guests of such good degree, came the gallant, grizzled old Lord himself in his quilted under-armor vest. We made obeisance, and in a few words the host very courteously welcomed his guests, leading us in state (after we had given our helmets to the pages at the door) into the great hall of his castle, where we found a throng of ladies and gallants in every variety of dress filling those lofty walls with life and color.

In truth, it was a noble hall, the walls bedecked with antlers or spoils of woodcraft, with heads and horns and bows and bills, and tapestry; and the ceiling wonderfully wrought with carved beams as far down that ample corridor as one could see. The floor of oak was dark with wear, yet as smooth and reflective to many-colored petticoats and rainbow-tinted shoes as the Parian marble of some fair Roman villa. And on the other side there were fifty windows deep-set in the wall, with gay stainings on them of parable and escutcheon. While on the benches, fingering ribboned mandolins, whispering gentle murmurs under the tinseled lawn of fair ladies' kerchiefs, or sauntering to and fro across the great chamber's ample length, were all these good and gentle folk, bedecked and tasseled and ribboned in a way that made that changing scene a very fairy show of color.

STRANGE, indeed, was it for me to walk among the glittering throng, all prattling that merry medley they called their native English, and to remember all I could remember, I had known each and all of those peoples were gone—gone forever—gone beyond a hope or chance of finding—and yet, again, to know that each and every one of those whose strong life in turn had given color to my life, was here—here before me, consummated in this people—oh, 'twas strange, and almost past belief! And ever as I went among them in fairer silks and ermines than any,

When I again opened my eyes, I saw that the chancel where I lay had been lighted up.

yet underneath that rustling show I laughed to know that I was nothing but the old Phoenician merchant!

And if I thought thus of them in sooth, they thought no less strangely of me! Ever, as my good host led me here and there from group to group, the laughter died away on cherry lips, and minstrel fingers went all a-wandering down their music strings as one and all broke off in mid pleasure to stare in mute perplexity and wonder at me. From group to group we went, my host at each making me known to many a glittering lord and lady.

Presently in this way we came to a gay knot of men collected round two fair women, the one of them seated in a great velvet chair, holding court as I could guess by word and action over the bright constellations that played about her, the other within the circle, yet not of it, standing a little apart and turned from us as we approached. Alianora, the first of these noble damsels, was the elder daughter of the master of the house, and the second, Isobel, was his younger child. The first of these was a queen of beauty, and from that first moment when I stood in front of her, and came under the cold, proud shine of those black eyes, I loved her! Jove! I felt the hot fire of love leap through my veins on the instant as I bowed me there at her footstool and forgot everything else for the moment, merging all the world against the inaccessible heart of that beautiful girl.

Indeed, she was one who might well play the Queen among men. Her hair was black as night, and, after the fashion of the time, worked up to either side of her head into a golden filagree crown, beaded with shining pearls, extraordinarily regal. Black were her eyes as any sloe, and her smooth, calm face was wonderful and goddess-like in the perfect outline and color. Never a blush of shame or fear, never a sign of inward feeling, stirred that haughty damsel's mood.

By Venus! I wonder why we loved her so. To whisper gentle things into her ear was but like dropping a stone into some deep well—the ripples on the dark, sullen water were not more cold, silent, intangible than her responding smile. She was too proud even to frown, that disdainful English peeress, but, instead, at slight or negligence she would turn those unwavering eyes of hers upon the luckless wight and look upon him so that there was not a knight, though of twenty fights, there was not a gallant, though never so experienced in gentle tourney with ladies' eyes, who durst meet them.

To this maid I knelt—and rose in love against all my better instinct—wildly, recklessly enamored of her shining Circean queenliness—ah! so enthralled was I by the black Alianora that my host had to pluck me by the sleeve ere he whispered to me, "Another daughter, sir stranger! Divide your homage," and he led me to the younger girl.

Now, if the elder sister had won me at first sight, my feelings were still more wonderful to the other. If the elder had the placid sovereignty of the evening star, Isobel was like the planet of the morning. From head to heel she was in white. Upon her forehead her fair brown hair was strained back under a coverchief and wimple as colorless as the hawthorn flowers. This same fair linen, in the newest fashion of demurity, came down her cheeks and under her chin, framing her face in oval, in pretty mockery of the steel coif of an armed knight.

Her dress below was of the whitest, softest stuff, with long, hanging sleeves, a wondrous belt made like a warrior's sword-wear, and a skirt that descended in pretty folds to her feet and lay atwining about them in comely ampleness. She was as supple as a willow wand, and tall and straight, and her face—when in a moment she turned it on me—was wondrous pleasant to look at—the very opposite of her sister's—all pink and white, and honestly ashine with demure fun and merriment, the which constantly twinkled in her downcast eyes, and kept the pretty corners of her mouth a-twitching with covert, ill-suppressed, unruly smiles. A fair and tender young girl indeed, made for love and gentleness!

Unhappy Isobel!—luckless victim of an accursed fate! Wretched, perverse Phoenician! Ill-omened Alianora! Between us three sprang up two fatal passions. Read on, and you shall see.

CHAPTER VIII

NOW, when that fair young English girl, at her father's voice, turned to acknowledge my presence—thinking it was some other new knight of the many who came there every hour, she lifted her eyes to mine—and then, all of a sudden without rhyme or reason, she started back and blanched whiter than her own wimple, and then flushed again, equally unaccountably, and fell a-trembling and staring at me in a wondrous fashion.

She came a step forward, as though she would greet some long-looked-for friend, and then withdrew—and half held out her hand, and took it back, the while the color came and went upon her cheeks in quick flushes, and, stirred by some strange emotion, her bosom rose and fell under the golden cestus and the lawn with the stress of her feelings. The sudden storm, however invoked, shook that sweet fabric most mightily. There, in that very minute, it seemed—there, in that merry, careless place in sight of me, but a gaudy gallant a little more thoughtful-looking, perhaps, than those she often saw—moved by some affinity within us, before my eyes I saw in that fair girl's pallid face love flush through her veins and light her heart and eyes with a responding blush.

And I—I the unhappy, I the sorrow bestower, as I saw her first, what of all things in this wide world should I think of—what should leap up in my mind as I perked my gilded scabbard and bowed low to the polished floor in my glittering Plantagenet finery—what vision should come to me in that latter-day hall, among those mandolin-fingering courtiers, before that costly raimented maiden, the fair heiress of a thousand years of care and gentle living, that girl leaning frightened and shy upon the arm of her strong father like a soft white mist-cloud in the shadow of a mountain—what thought, what idea, but a swift revision of Blodwen, my wild, ruddy, untutored British wife!

All those gaudy butterflies of the new day, that stately home and that fair flower herself, shrank into nothing; and as the white lightning leaps through the dull void of midnight, and shows for one dazzling second some long-remembered country, ashine in every leaf and detail, to the startled pilgrim, and then is gone with all the ghostly mirage of its passage, so in that surprising moment, so full of import, Blodwen rose to my mind against all reason and likelihood—Blodwen the Briton, the ruddy-haired—Blodwen radiant with her gentle motherhood — Blodwen who could scream so fiercely to her clansmen in the forefront of conflict, and drive her bloody chariot through the red mud of battle with wounded foemen writhing under her remorseless wheels more blithely than a latter-day maid would trip through the spangled meadow grass of springtime —Blodwen rose before me!

Oh! 'twas foolish, past explaining, nonsense: and, angry with myself and that white maid who stood and hung her head before me, I stroked my hand across my face to rid me of the fancy, and, gathering myself together, made my bow, murmuring something fiercely civil, and turned my back upon her to seek another group.

Yes; but if you think I conquered that fancy, you are wrong. For days and days it haunted me, even though I laughed it to scorn, and, what made the matter more difficult, more perplexing, was that I had not guessed in error—the unhappy Isobel had loved me from first sight, and, against every precedent her nature would have warranted, grew daily deeper in the toils.

And I, who never yet had turned from the eyes of suppliant maid, watched her color shift and fly as I came or went, and strode gloomy, unmindful, through all her pretty artifices of maiden tenderness, burning the meanwhile with love for her disdainful sister. It was a strange medley, and in one phase or another pursued me all the time I was in that noble keep. When I was not wooing I was being wooed. Alas! and all the coldness I got from that black-browed lady with the goddess carriage and faultless skin I passed on to the poor, enamored girl who dogged my idle footsteps for a word.

Thus, one day we had a tournament. All round the great castle, under the oaks, were pitched the tents of the troopers, while the pennons and bannerets of knights and barons, as we saw them from the turret top, shone in the sunlight like a field of flowers. The soldier-yeomen had their sports and contests on the greensward, and we went down to watch them.

I never saw such bronzed and stalwart fellows, or witnessed anything like the truth and straightness of those stinging flights of shafts the archers sent against their butts! Then the next day, following the sports of the common people, in the tilt-yard inside the barbican, we held a tourney, a mock battle and a breaking of spears, a very gorgeous show indeed, and near as exciting as an honest mêlée itself.

SO TUNEFUL in my ears proved the shivering of lances and the clatter of swords on the steel panoply of the knights, that, though at first I held aloof, stern and gloomy with my futile passion, yet presently I itched to take a spear, and, since those sparkling riders liked the fun so much, to let them try whether my right hand had lost the cunning it learned before their fathers were conceived.

And as I thought so, standing among the chief ones in that brilliant tourney ring,

up came the white rose and tempted me to break a lance, and sighed so softly and brushed against me with her scented draperies, and tried with feeble self-command to meet my eyes and could not, and was so obviously wishful that I should ride a course or two, and so prettily in love, that I was near relenting of my coldness.

I did unbend so much as to consent to mount. A page fetched my armor and my mighty black charger draped in crimson-blazoned velvet and ribboned from head to tail, and then I went to the rear of the lists and put on the steel.

"Thanks, good squire!" I said to the youth who thrust my pointed toes into the stirrups when I was on my horse. "Now give me up my gauntlets and post me in my principles."

"Fie, Sir, not to know," quoth he, "the worship of weapons and the honor of fair ladies!"

"Thanks. That is not difficult to remember; and as to my practice?"

"Ah! there you confuse him," put in a jester standing by. "No good knight likes to be bound too closely as to that."

As I rode round the lists, a white hand from under the sister's daïs—to whom belonging I well could guess—threw me a flower, the which fell under my sleek charger's hoofs and was stamped into the trodden mold. And then the trumpet sounded. "Avant!" called the glittering marshal—and we met in mid career.

Seven strong knights did I jerk from their high-peaked saddles that morning, and won a lady's golden head-ring, and rode round about the circus with it on my lance-point. When I came under where Isobel sat, I saw her fair cheeks redder than my ribbons with maiden expectation; but, as I passed without a sign, they grew whiter than her lawn. And then I reined up and deposited that circlet at the footstool of her sister. The proud, cold maid accepted the homage as was her duty, but scarcely deigned to lower her eyes to the level of my helmet-plumes while her father put it on her forehead.

A merry time we had in that courtly place waiting for the signal to start; and much did I learn and note—soon the favorite gallant in that goodly company, the acknowledged strongest spearman in the lists, the best teller of strange stories by an evening fire! But never an inch of way could I make with the impenetrable girl on whom my wayward heart was set, while the other—the younger—made her sweet self the pointing stock of high and low, she was so blindly, so very obviously in love.

One day it came to a climax. We met by chance in a glade of black shadows among the cedar branches, I and that damsel in white, and, finding I would not woo her, she set to work and wooed me—so sweet, so strong, so passionate, that to this day I cannot think how I withstood it. Yes, and that fair, slim maid, renowned through all the district for her gentle reticence, when I would not answer love with love, and glance for glance, fired up with white-hot passion, threw hesitance to the wind, and besought and knelt to me, and asked no more than to be my slave, so sweet, so reckless in her passion, that it was not the high-born English lady who knelt there, but rather it seemed to me my dear, fiery, untutored British Princess! Fool I was not to see it then, witless after so much not to guess the tameless spirit, the intruder soul that poor girl at my feet held unwitting in her bosom!

She came to me, as I have said, all in a gust of feeling unlike herself, and, when I would not say that which she longed to hear, she wrung her hands, and then down she came upon her knees and clipped me round my jeweled belt and confessed her love for me in such a headlong rush of tearful eloquence I durst not write it.

"Lady," I said, lifting the supple girl to her feet, "I grieve, but it is useless. Forget! forgive! I cannot answer as you would."

"Ah, but," she answered, rushing again to the onset, sighing as now the hot, strange love that burned within her, and now her sweet native spirit strove for mastery—("surely, I think, I am possessed), I will not take 'No' for an answer. I am consumed (oh! fie to say it) for thee. I am not first in thy dear affection—why, then, I will be second. Not second! then I will be the hundredth from thy heart! My light, my life and fate, I cannot live without thee. Oh! as you were born by your mother's consummated love, as thou hast ever felt compunction for a white-cheeked maid, have pity on me! I tell thee I will follow thee to the ends of the earth (Lord! how my tongue runs on!). For one moiety of that affection perhaps a happier woman has, I will serve thee through life. Thou hast no wife, 'tis said, to hinder; thou art a soldier, and a score of them, ere I was touched with this strange infection, have sued hopeless for but a chance of that which is proffered thee so freely. Truth! they have told me I was fair and tall, with a complexion that ridiculed the water-

lilies on the moat; my hair, one said, was like ripe corn with a harvest sun upon it (it makes me blush"—I heard her whisper to herself—"to apprise myself like this), and yet you stand there averse and sullen with eyes turned from me, and deaf ears! Am I a sight so dreadful to you?"

"Maid!" I cried, shutting out her suppliant beauty from my heart—overfull as I thought it, of that other one, her sister—"no man could look at you and not be moved. The wayward Immortals have given you more sweetness than near any other woman I ever saw—'a sight so dreadful to me?'—why, you are fairer than an early morning in May when the new sun gets up over the wet-flowered hawthorns! And for this very reason, for pity on us both, stand up, and dry your tears! Believe me, dear maid, where I go you cannot come.

"You tread the rough soldier's path! Why, those pretty velvet buskins would wear out in the first march. And turn those dainty hands to the rough craft of war, to scouring harness and grooming charges—oh! that were miserable indeed; those cherry lips are worse suited than you know for the chance fare of camp and watchfire, and those round arms would soon find a sword was heavier than a bodkin—there, again forget, forgive—and, perhaps, when I come back . . ."

But why should I further follow that sad love-scene under the broad-spreading cedars? Let it be sufficient for you that I soothed her as well as might be and stanched her tears and modified my coolness, taking her pretty hands and whispering to as dainty and greedy an ear as ever was opened to hear, perhaps, a little more of lover friendliness than I truly meant, and so we parted.

NOW see the shield turned. That very afternoon did the other sister unbend a point with cruel suavity, and set me joyous by promising to meet me at nightfall, whereat, as you will readily understand, every other event of the day faded into nothingness. At the appointed hour, just as the white mist floated in thin fine wisps from the shadowed moat on the eastward of the castle wall and the red setting sun was throwing the strong black shadows of cedar branches upon the copper-gleaming windows and walls of the side that faced him, I rose, and, making some jesting excuse, slipped away from my noisy comrades in the hall into the shadows of the corridors.

Yes! and, though you may smile, he who thought this Phoenician had plumbed the well of mortal love to the very depth, had learned all there was to learn, and left nothing that could stir him so much as a heartbeat in this fair field of adventure, was now tripping through the ruddy and black dust, anxious and alert, his pulses beating a quicker measure than his feet, the native boldness of his nature all overlaid with new-born diffidence, fingering his silken points as he went, and conning pretty speeches, now hoping in his lover hesitance the tryst would not be kept, and then anon spurning himself for being so laggard and fainthearted, and thus progressing in moods and minds as many as the gentle shadows checkering his path from many an oriel window and many a fluted casement, he came at length within sight of the deep-set window looking down over the pale-shining water and the heavy woods beyond, where his own love-tale was to be told.

And there as I plucked back the last tapestry that barred my passage and stood still for a moment on the threshold—there before me sitting on the tressels under the mullions in the twilight, was the figure of my fair and haughty English girl.

She had her face turned away from the evening glow, her ample white cap, peaked and laced with gold on either crescent point, further threw into shadow the features I knew so well, while the fine shapely hands lay hidden in the folds of the ample dress which shone and glimmered in the dusk against the oak panelings of that ancient lobby in misty uncertainy.

Gentle dame! My heart bounded with expectant triumph to see how pensive and downcast was her look—how still she sat and how, methought, the white linen and the golden ceinture above her heart rose and fell even in that silent place with the tumult of maidenly passion within.

My heart opened to her, I say, as though I were an enamored shepherd about to pour a brand-new virgin love into the frightened ears of some timid country maid, and within my veins, as the heavy arras fell from my hands behind me, there surged up the molten stream of Eastern love! I waited neither to see nor hear else, but strode swiftly over the floor and cast myself down there at her feet upon one knee—gods! how it makes me smart to think of it!—I who had never bent a knee before in supplication to earth or heaven, and poured out before her the offering of my passion. Hot and swiftly I wooed her,

saying I scarce know what, loosening my heart before that silent shrine, laying bare the keen, strong throb of life and yearning that pulsed within me, persuading, entreating, cajoling, until both breath and fancy failed. And never under all that stream of love had the damsel given one sign, one single indication of existence.

Then on I went again, deeming the maid held herself not yet wooed enough, disporting myself before her, and pleading the simplicity of my love, saying how that, if it brought no great riches with it, yet was it the treasure of a truthful heart. Did she sigh to widen her father's broad lands? I swore by Osiris I would do it for her love better than any petty lordling could. Did she desire to shine, honored above all women, where spears were broken or feasts were spread? "Think of yon littered lists," I cried, and told her there was not a champion in all the world I feared—none who should not come humbled to her footstool; while, as for honor and recognition—Jove! I would pluck them from the king himself, even as I had plucked them from his betters. Yet never a sign that fair girl gave.

Full of wonder and surprise, I waited for a moment for some sign or show, if not of answering fire, at least of reason; and then, as I checked in full course my passionate pleadings, that wretched thing before me burst, not into the tears I expected of maidenly capitulation, nor into the proud anger of offended virgins, but into a silly plebeian simper, which began in ludicrous smothered merriment under the folds of the lawn she held across her face, and ended amid what appeared contending feelings in a rustic outburst of sobs and exclamations.

I WAS on my feet in an instant, all my wild lovemaking dammed back upon my heart by suspicion and surprise, and as I frowned fiercely at that dim-seen form under the distorting shadow of the windows, it rose—to nothing like Alianora's height—and stepped out where the evening light better illumined us. And there that poor traitoress tore off in anger and remorse the lace and linen of a well-born English maiden, and stood revealed before me the humblest, the meanest-seeming, and the most despised kitchen wench of any that served in that baronial hall!

You will guess what my feelings were as this indignity I had been put to rushed upon me, how in my wounded pride I crossed my arms savagely upon my breast, and turned away from that poor, simpering, rustic fool, and clenched my teeth, and swore fierce oaths against that cruel girl who, in her pride and insolence, had played me this sorry trick. Wild and bitter were the gusts of passion that swept through my heart, and all the more unduly since it was by and for a woman I had fallen, and there was none for me to take vengeance on.

In a few minutes I turned to the wretched fool of a vixen mistress. "Hast any explanation of these?" I sternly asked, pointing to the disordered finery that lay glimmering upon the floor.

The unhappy kitchenmaid nodded behind her tears and the thick red hands wherewith she was streaking two wet, round cheeks with alternate hues of grief and dinginess, and put a hand into her bosom and handed me a folded missive. I tore it open and read, in prettily scrawled old Norman French, that cruel message:

> This is to tell that nameless knight who has nothing to distinguish him but presumption, that although the daughter of an English peer must ever treat his suit with the contempt it deserved, yet will she go so far as to select him from among her father's vassals one to whom she thinks he might very fitly unburden his soul of its load of "love and fealty."

Such was the missive, one surely penned by as ungentle a hand as ever ministered to a woman's heart. I tore it into a hundred fragments, and then grimly pointed my traducer to the narrow wicket in the remote wall leading down by a hundred stony stairs to the scullion places whence she had come. She turned and went a little way toward it, then came sobbing back, and burst out into grief anew, and "Alas! alas! Sir," she cried, "this is the very worst task that ever I was put to! Shame upon Lady Alianora, and double shame upon me for doing her behests. I am sorry, Sir! indeed I am! Until you began that wonderful tale I thought 'twas but a merry game; but, oh, Sir! to see you there upon your knee, to see your eyes burning in the dark with true love for my false mistress—why, Sir, it would have drawn tears from the hardest stone in the mill down yonder.

"And ever as your talk went on just now, I kept saying to myself, Sure! but it must be a big heart which works a tongue like that; and when you had done, sir, ah! before you were halfway through, though I could not stop you, yet I loathed my errand. I am sorry, Sir, indeed I am! I cannot go until I be forgiven!"

"There, there, silly girl," I said, my wrath quenched by her red eyes and humble amendment, "you are fully absolved."

She kissed my hands and dried her eyes, and swept together, with woman swiftness, the tattered things in which she had masqueraded, and then, as she was about to leave, I called her back.

"Stay one moment, damsel! How much had you for thus betraying me?"

"Two zequins, Sir," she answered with simplicity.

"Why, then, here's three others to say naught about this evening's doings in the servants' hall. You understand? There, go! and no more tears or thanks," and, as the curtain fell upon her, I could not help muttering to myself, "What! two zequins to undo you, Phra, and three to mend it? Why, Phoenician, thou hast not been so cheap for thirteen hundred years!"

CHAPTER IX

GRIM and angry, all that night I chewed the bitter cud of my rejection, and before the new day was an hour old determined life was no longer worth the living in that place. I determined to leave those walls at once, to leave all my songs unsung, my trysts unkept, to leave all my jolly comrades, the tiltyards and banquets. But I could not do this so secret as I would. The very paying off of my score down in the buttery, the dismissing of my attendants, each with largess, the seriousness I could not but give to my morning salutation of some of those I should never see again, betrayed me. And thus a whisper, first down in the vaulted guard-room, and then a rumor, and anon a widening murmur the news was spread, until surely the very jackdaws on the battlements were saying to themselves, "Phra is going! Phra!—Phra is going!"

Yes! and the tidings spread to that fair floor of a hundred corridors, where the Norman-arched windows looked down four score feet upon the river winding amid its shining morning meadows, bringing a sigh to more than one silken pillow. It reached the unhappy, red-eyed Isobel, and presently she tripped down the twining stone staircase, the loose folds of her skirt thrown over her arm to free her pretty feet, and in her hand a scrap of writing, a "cartel" she called it, seeming newly opened.

She came to the sunny empty corridor where I stood alone, and touched me on the arm as I watched from a lattice, my charger being armed and saddled in the courtyard underneath, and when I turned held out her hand to me in frank and simple fashion. How could I refuse the proffer of so fair a friendship?

Pulling my velvet cap from my head, I put her white fingers to my lips. And was it true, she asked with a sigh, I was really going that morning, and so suddenly? Only too true, I answered, and, saving her presence, not so sudden as my inclination prompted. Much I saw she wished to question the why and wherefore, but of this, as of nothing touching her stern sister, would I tell her.

So presently she came to her point, and, fingering that scroll she had, very downcast and blushful, said: "You are a good knight, Sir Stranger, and strong and experienced in arms."

"Your Ladyship's description wakes my ambition to deserve your words."

"And generous, I have noticed, and as indulgent to page and squire of tender years as you are the contrary to stronger folk."

"And if this were so, Madam," I asked, "what then?"

"Oh! only," she said, wondrous shy and frightened, "that I have here a cartel from a friend of mine, a youth of noble family, who has heard of thee, and would go to the wars in your company—as your comrade, I mean: that is, if you would take him."

"Why, damsel, the wars are free to every one; but I am in no mood just now to tutor a young gallant in slitting Frenchmen's throats!"

"But this one, Sir, very particularly wishes to travel with you, of whose prowess he is so convinced. He has, alas! quarreled with those at whose side he should most naturally ride—he will be no trouble; for my sake you must take him. And," said the cunning girl, standing on tiptoe to be the nearer to my ear, "he is rich, though friendless by a rash love—he will gladly see to both your horses and disburse your passage over to France, even for the honor of remembering that he did it."

Now, this touched me very nearly. One by one my rings had gone, and that morning, after paying scores and largess, in truth I had found my wallet completely empty once again! If this youth had money, even though it were but sufficient to buy corn for our chargers on the way, and pay the ferry over to yonder fair field of adventure, why, there was no denying he

would be a very convenient traveling companion, and it would go hard but that I could teach him something in return. Thinking this, I lifted my eyes, and found those of Isobel watching the workings of my face with pretty cunning.

"In truth, maid, if thy friend has so much gold as would safely land us with King Edward in Flanders, why, I must confess that just at present that does greatly commend him to me. What sort of a man is he?"

This question seemed to overwhelm the lady, who blushed and hung her head like a poppy that has stood a whole week's drought.

"In truth, Sir!" she murmured, "I do not know."

"Not know! Why, but you said he was your friend."

"Oh! so I did. And, now I come to think of it, he is a tall youth—about my size and make."

"Gads! but he will be a shapely, if somewhat sapling gallant," I laughed, letting my eye roam over the supple maiden figure before me.

"But though he be so slim," the girl hastened to add, as if she feared she has been indiscreet, "you will find the youth a rare good horseman, and clever in many things. He can cook (if thou art ever belated) like a Frenchman, and can read missals to thee, and write like a monk—thy comrade, Sir Knight, will be one in a thousand —they tell me he can sing like a mavis on a firtop."

"I LIKE not these singing knights, fair maid: their verses are both too smooth for soldier ears, and too licentious for maidens!"

"Ah! but my friend," quoth Isobel, with a blush, "never sang an ungentle song in his life; you will find him a most civil, most simple-spoken companion, I assure you."

"Well, then, I will have him—not doubt we shall grow as close together as boon companions should."

"Would that you might grow so close together as I could wish!" said the English girl, with a sigh I did not understand.

"And now, how am I to know this friend," I asked, "this slim and gentle youth? What is his name, and what his face?"

"I had near fogotten that; and it was like a woman, for they say they ever keep the most important matter to the last! This boy, for good reasons that I know but may not mention, has sworn a vow, after the fashion of the chivalry he delights in, not to show his face, not to wear his honorable name, until some happier times shall come for him. He is in love—like many another—and does conceive his heart to be most desperately consumed thereby. Wherefore he has taken the name of Flamaucoeur, and bears upon his shield a device to that effect.

"This alone will point him out to you, over and above the dropped visor, which no earthly power will make him lift until this war and quest of his be over. But you will know him, I feel in my heart, without consideration. Sir Knight, you will know this youth when you meet him, something in my innermost heart does tell me, even as I should know one that I loved or that loved me, behind twenty thicknesses of steel. And now, good-by until we meet again!"

The fair maid gave me her hand as though to part, and then hesitated a moment. Presently she mustered up courage and said:

"Thou bear'st me no ill-will for yonder wild meeting of ours?"

"Maiden, it is forgotten!"

"Well, let it be so. I do not know what possessed me. I was hurried down the stream of feeling like a leaf on a tide. 'Twas I that met thee there by the cedars, and yet it was not I. Something so wild and fierce, such a hot intruder spirit burned within this poor circumference, that I think I was damnate and bewitched. Thou dost most clearly understand that this hot-headed fit is over now."

"I clearly understand!"

"And that I love thee no longer," quoth the lady, with a sigh, "or, at least, not near so much?"

"Madam, so I conceive it. Be at ease: it is sacred between us two, and I will forget."

"Thanks! a thousand thanks, even for the relief that cold forgetfulness does give me. And now again, good-by. Be gentle to Flamaucoeur, and—and," burst out the poor girl, as her control forsook her—"if there is an eye in the whole of wide heaven, oh, may it watch thee! if ever prayers of mine can pierce to the seat of the Eternal, oh, may they profit thee! Gods! that my wishes were iron bars for thy dear body, and my salt tears could but rivet them! Good-by! good-by!" and, kissing my hands in a fierce outburst of weeping, that fair white girl turned and fled, and disappeared through the tapestries that screened the Norman archways.

BEFORE nightfall I was down by the English coast and made many a long league from the castle. Thoughtful and alone, my partings made, I had paced out from its gloomy archway, the gay feathers on my helmet-top near brushing the iron teeth of the portcullis lowering above, and my charger's hoofs falling as hollow on the echoing drawbridge as my heart beat empty to the sounds of happy life behind me. Away south went the pathway, trodden day after day by contingents of gallant troops from that knightly strong-hold.

Jove! one might have followed it at midnight: those jolly bands had made a trail through copse and green wood, through hamlet and through heather, like the track of a storm-wind. They had beaten down grass and herbage, they had robbed orchards and spinneys, and here their wayside fires were still a-smoldering, and there waved rags upon the bushes, and broken shreds and baggage.

Now and then, as I paced along, I saw in the hamlets the folk still looking southward, and standing gossiping on the week's wonders, the boys meanwhile careering in mock onset with broken spear-shafts or discarded trappings. Oh! 'twas easy enough to know which way my friends had gone!

It happened then that as evening fell and found me still some two miles from where our troops lay camped along the shore, waiting to-morrow's ferrying across to France, I rode down the steep bank of a small river to a ford, and slowly waded through.

There be episodes of action that live in our minds, and incidents of respose that recur with no less force. So, then—that placid evening stream has come before me again and again—in the hot tumult of onset and mêlée, in court and camp, in the cold of winter and in summer's warmth, I have ridden that ford once more.

I have gone down sad and thoughtful as I did, my loose reins on my charger's arching neck, watching the purple shine of the water where it fretted and broke in the evening light against his fetlocks. Again and again I have listened to the soft lisp of the stream as he drank of that limpid trough, and I have seen in its cool, fresh mirror my own tall image, my waving crimson plumes, and the one white star of the evening above, reflected upon it. And yet, if these things of a remote yesterday are fresh in my mind, even more so is my meeting with the slim gallant whose figure rose before me as I emerged from the ford.

As my good English charger bore me up from the hollow, on the brow of the opposite rise was a mounted figure standing out clear and motionless against the yellow glow of the sunset. At first I thought it would be some wandering spearman bound on a like errand with myself, for more than one or two such had passed that day.

We scrambled up that sandy, heathery scar, the strong sinews of my warhorse playing like steel cordage under my thighs as he lifted me and my armor up the gravelly path, and then, as we topped the rise and came into the evening breeze, that strange warrior advanced and held out a hand.

Never in all my experience had I known a knight extend the palm of friendship to another so demure and downcast. "Truth!" I thought to myself, "this friend of Isobel's is, in fact, as she said, the most modest-mannered soldier who ever took a place in the rough game of war!" But I was pledged to like him and therefore, in the most hearty manner possible, as we came up knee to knee, I slapped my heavy hand into his extended fingers and welcomed him loudly as a long-looked-for comrade.

And in truth he was a very pretty fellow, whose gentle presence grew upon me after that first meeting each hour we lived together. He seemed, as far as I could judge, no more than twenty-five years of age, yet even that was but a guess, for his armor was complete from top to toe, his visor was down, and there was, indeed, naught to judge by but a certain slightness of limb and suppleness that spoke of no more mature years. In height this gallant was very passable enough, and his helmet, with its nodding plumes, added some grace and inches to his stature, while his pale-gray mail was beautifully fashioned and molded, and spoke through every close joint and

cunning finished link of a young but well-proportioned soldier.

THE arms this warrior carried were better suited to his strength than to that of a man who rode beside him. His lance was long and of polished inlay, while mine beside it was like the spear of Goliath to a fisher's hazel wand. His dagger was better for cutting the love-knot on a budget of sonnets than for disburdening foemen's spirits of their mortal shackles. His cross-hilted sword was so light it made me sigh to look at it. On his shield was a heart wrapped in flames, most cunningly painted, and expressive enough in those days, when every man took a pride in being as vulnerable to women as he was unapproachable among men.

But who am I that I should judge that gentle knight by myself—by me, whose sinews countless fights have but matured, who have been blessed by the gods with bulk and strength above other mortals? Why should I measure his brand-new lance, gleaming in the pride of virgin polish, against the stern long spear I carried; or that dainty brand of his, that mayhap his tender maid had belted on him for the first time some hours before, with such a broad blade as long use had made lighter to my hand than a lady's distaff?

Before we had paced a mile, Flamaucoeur had proved himself the sprightliest companion who ever enlivened a dull road with wit and laughter. At first 'twas I that spoke, for he had not one word in all the world to say—he was so shy. But when I twitted him for this, and laughed, and asked him of his lady-love, and how she had stood the parting—how many tears there had been, and whether they all were hers; and whose heart was that upon his shield, his own or the damsel's and so on, in bantering playfulness, I got down to the metal of that silent boy.

He winced beneath my laughter for a little time, and fidgeted upon his saddle, and then the gentle blood in his veins answered, as I hoped it would, and he turned and gave me better than I offered. Such a pretty fellow in wordy fence I never saw: his tongue was like a woman's, hard to silence. When I thought I had him at disadvantage on a jest, he burked the point of my telling argument, and struck me below my guard.

When I would have pinned him to some keen inquiry regarding that which he did not wish to tell, he turned questioner with swift adroitness, and made—quicker than it takes to write—his inquisitor and humble answerer to his playful malice. He was better at that fence than I, there could be no doubt, and very speedily his nimble tongue, which sounded so strange and pleasant in the hollow of his helmet, had completely mastered mine. So, with a laugh, I did acknowledge to the conquest.

Whereon that generous youth was pleased, I saw, and laid aside his coyness, and chattered like a millstream among the gravels on an idle Sunday. He turned out both shrewd and witty, with a head stuffed full of romance and legend, just such as one might have who had spent a young life listening to troubadours and minstrels. And I liked him none the less because he trimmed the gross fables of that time to such a decent shape. He told me one or two that I had heard before, although he knew it not. And as I had heard them from the licentious lips of courtly minstrels they are not fit to write or tell, but my worthy wayfarer clipped and purged them so adroitly, and turned them out so fair and seemly, all with such a nice unconsciousness, I scarce could recognize them.

He was a most gentle-natured youth, and there was something in his presence, something in the half-frankness he put forth, and something in that there was strange about him which greatly drew me. Now you would think, to listen to him, he was all a babbling stream as shallow as could be, and then, anon, a turn of sad wisdom or a sigh set you wondering, as when that same stream runs deep into the shadows, and you hear it fret and fume with gathering strength far away in unknown depths of mother Earth. A most enticing, a most perplexing comrade.

Beguiling the way in this fashion, and liking my new ally better and better as we went, we came a little after nightfall on a wet and windy evening to the hamlet near the sea where the rearguard of the English troops were collected for ferrying over to France. Here we halted and sought food and shelter, but neither were to be had for the asking.

That little street of English dwellings was crowded with hungry troopers. They were camping by their gleaming watch-fires all along the grassy ways, so full was every lodgment, while every yellow window of the dim gabled alehouse in the midst shone into the wet, dark night, and every room within was replete with stamping, clanking, noisy gallants. Their chargers filled the yard and were picketed a furlong down the muddy road, that sloped to the

murmuring, unseen sea, and there was not space, it seemed, for one single other horse or rider in the whole friendly village.

BUT the insidious Flamaucoeur found a way and place. He sought out the master of the inn himself, and, unheeding of his curt refusals, made request so cunning and used his money pouch so liberally that that strong and surly yeoman, with much to do, found us two small rooms in a loft to sleep in, which was better than the wayside, though still but a rough makeshift.

Then Flamaucoeur waylaid the buxom, hurrying housewife, and on an evening when many a good gentleman was going supperless to bed, got us a load of white bread and a wooden bowl of milk, the which we presently shared most comradelike, my friend lifting his visor so much as might suffice to eat, but yet not enough to show his face. He waylaid a lad, and, for a coin or two, and a little of his sweet-voiced cajoling, got our steeds watered and sheltered, though many another lordly, sleek-limbed beast stood all night unwashed, unminded. A most persuasive youth was Flamaucoeur!

And then, our frugal supper made and our horses seen to, we went to bed. Diffident, ingenious young knight! He made my couch of all the soft things he could lay his hands on—as though, forsooth, I were some tender flower—and for himself hardly spread a horsecloth on the bare floor of his room! Now, when I came up and found this done, without a word I sent the boy to go and see what the night was like, and if the moon yet showed, or if it rained, and, when he went forthwith, pulled that couch to bits, and put some of the soft warm things on his.

Ah! And when Flamaucoeur came back, I rated him soundly, telling him that, though it was set in the law of arms that a young knight should show due deference to an older, yet all that comrades had of hard or soft was equally dividable, both board and bed, and good luck and misfortune. And he was amenable, though still a little strange, and soon he said goodnight.

Presently I too lay down and slept, and all through my dreams went surging the wildest fancies of tilt and tourney and lady's love. And now I heard in the uproar of the restless village street and the neighing of the chargers at their pickets the noise of battle and of onset. And then I thought I had, on some unknown field, five thousand spearmen overset against a hundred times as many; and while my heart bounded proudly in answer to that disadvantage, I now rode up and down our glittering ranks speaking words of strength and courage to those scanty heroes, waving my shining sword in the sun that shone for victory on us and curbing my fretting charger's restless valor.

Methought, somehow, the word dried up upon my lips, and the proud murmur of my firm-set veterans turned to a low moaning wail, and a gray mist of tears put out the sun, and black grief drank up the warriors; and while I wrestled with that melancholy, Blodwen, my Princess, was sitting by my side, cooling my hot forehead with her calm, immortal hand, and calling me, with smiling accent, "dull, unwitful, easily beguiled."

So passed the checkered fancies of the night, and the earliest dawn found us up, in arms, and ready for sterner things. And again I had to owe to Flamaucoeur's ready wit and liberal purse precedence for our needs above all the requirements of the many good knights who would have crossed with the haste they could, but had, perforce, to wait. It was he who got us a vessel sufficient for our needs when the fisher folk were swearing there was not a ship to be hired for twenty miles up or down the coast. In this we embarked with our horses, and one or two other gentlemen we knew, and in a few hours' sailing the English shore went down and the sunny cliffs of Normandy rose ahead of us.

Will you doubt but that I stood thoughtful and silent as the green and silver waves were shivered by our dancing prow, and that strange, familiar land rose up before us? I, that British I, who had seen Caesar's galleys, heavy with Umbrian and Etrurian, put out from that very shore. I, this knightly, steel-bound I, stood and watched that country grow upon us, with thoughts locked in my heart there were none to listen to and none to share.

Oh! it was passing strange, and I did not rouse me until our iron keel went gently grinding up the Norman gravel, and our vessel was beached upon the hostile shore.

CHAPTER X

STRANGE, eventful, and bloody, were the incidents that followed. King Edward, burning for glory, had landed in Normandy a little time before, had knighted on these yellow beaches that

gallant boy his son, and with the young Prince and some fourteen thousand English troops, ten thousand wild Welshmen, and six thousand Irish, pillaging and destroying as he went, he had marched straight into the heart of unready France. With that handful of men he had burned all the ships in Hogue, Barfleur, and Cherbourg; he had stormed Montebourg, Carentan, St. Lo, and Valognes, sending a thousand sails laden with booty back to England, and now, day by day, he was pressing southward through his fair rebellious territories, deriding the French King in his own country, and taking tithes and taxes in rough fashion with fire and sword.

Nor had we who came late far to seek for the Sovereign. His whereabouts was well enough to be told by the rolling smoke that drifted heavily to leeward of his marching columns and the broad trail of desolation through the smiling country that marked his stern progress. To travel that sad road was to see naked War stripped of all her excusing pageantry, to see gray desolation and lean sorrow following in the gay train of victory.

Gods! it was a sad path. Here, as we rode along, would lie the still smoldering ashes of a burned village, black and gray in the smiling August sunshine. In such a hamlet, perhaps, across a threshold, his mouth agape and staring eyes fixed on the unmoved heavens, would lie a peasant herdsman, his right hand still grasping the humble weapon wherewith he had sought to protect his home, and the black wound in his breast showing whence his spirit had fled indignant to the dim Place of Explanations.

Neither women nor babes were exempt from that fierce ruin. Once we passed a white and silent mother lying dead in midpath, and the babe, still clasped in her stiff arms, was ruddy and hungry, and beat with tiny hands to wake her and crowed angry at its failure, and whimpered so pitiful and small, and was so unwotting of the merry game of war and all it meant, that the laughter and talk died away from the lips of those with me, as, one by one, we paced slowly past that melancholy thing.

At another time, I remember, we came to where a little maid of some three tender years was sitting weaving flowers on the black pile of a ruined cottage, that, though her small mind did not grasp it, hid the charred bodies of all her people. She twined those white-and-yellow daisies with fair smooth hands, and was so sunny in the face and trustful-eyed I could not leave her to marauding Irish spears, or the cruel wolf-dogs who would come for her at sunset. I turned my impatient charger into the back ruin, and *maugre* that little maid's consent, plucked her from the ashes and rode with her upon my saddle-bow until we met an honest-seeming peasant woman. To her I gave the waif, with a silver crown for patrimony.

Out in the open the broad stream of war had spread itself. The yellow harvests were trodden under foot, and hedge and fence were broken. The plow stood halfway through the furrow, and the reaper was dead with the sickle in his hand. Here, as we rode, went up to heaven the smoke of coppice and homestead; and there, from the rocks hanging over our path, luckless maids and widowed matrons would hail and spit upon us in their wild grief, cursing us in going, in coming, in peace and in war, while they loaded the frightened echoes with their shrieks and wailings.

Now and then, on grass and roadside, were dark patches of new-dried blood, and by them, maybe, lay country cloaks and caps and weapons. There we knew men had fallen singly, and had long lain wounded or dead, until their friends had taken them to grave or shelter. Out in the open again, where skirmishes had happened and bill and bow or spear had met their like, the dead lay thicker. Gods! how dread those fair French fields did lie in the autumn moonlight, with their scattered dead in two and threes and knots and clusters!

There were some who sprawled upon the ground—still clutching in their dead fingers the grass and earth torn up in the moment of their agony. And here was he who scowled with dead white eyes on the pale starlight, one hand on his broken hilt and the other fast gripped upon the spear that pinned him to the earth. Near him was a fair boy, dead, with the shriek still seeming upon his livid lips, and the horrid rent in his bosom that had let out his soul looming black in the gloom.

Yonder a tall trooper still stared out grimly after the English, and smiled in death with a clothyard shaft buried to the feather in his heart. Some there were of these horrid dead who still lay in grapple as they had fallen—the stalwart Saxon and the bronzed Gaul with iron fingers on each other's throats, smiling their black hatred into each other's bloodless white faces. Others, again, lay about whose arms were fixed in air, seeming still to implore with

bloody fingers compassion from the placid sky.

ONE man I saw had died stroking the thin, pain-streaked muzzle of his wounded charger—his friend, mayhap, for years in camp and march. Indeed, among many sorrowful things of that midnight field, the dead and dying horses were not least. It moved me to compassion to hear their pain-fraught whinnies on every hand, and to see them lying so stiff and stark in the bloody hollows their hoofs had scooped through hours of untempered anguish.

What could I do for all those many? But before one I stopped, and regarded him with stern compassion many a minute. He was a splendid black horse, of magnificent size and strength; and not even the coat of blood and mud with which his sweating sides were covered could hide, here and there, the care that had but lately groomed and tended him. He lay dying on a great sheet of his own red blood, and as I looked I saw his tasseled main had been plaited not long before by some soft, skilful fingers, and at every point was a bow of ribbon, such as might well have been taken from a lady's hair to honor the war-horse of her favorite knight.

That great beast was moaning there, in the stillness, thinking himself forgotten, but when I came and stood over him he made a shift to lift his shapely head, and looked at me entreatingly, with black hanging tongue and thirst-fiery eyes, the while his doomed sides heaved and his hot, dry breath came hissing forth upon the quiet air. Well I knew what he asked for, and, turning aside, I found a trooper's empty helmet, and, filling it from the willowed brook that ran at the bottom of the slope, came back and knelt by that good horse, and took his head upon my knee and let him drink.

Jove! how glad he was! Forgotten for the moment was the battle and his wounds, forgotten was neglect and the long hours of pain and sorrow! The limpid water went gurgling down his thirsty throat, and every happy gasp he gave spoke of that transient pleasure. And then, as the last bright drops flashed in the moonlight about his velvet nozzle, I laid hand across his eyes and with the other drew my keen dagger—and, with gentle remorselessness, plunged it to the hilt into his broad neck, and with a single shiver the great war-horse died!

In truth, 'twas a melancholy place. On the midnight wind came the wail of women seeking for their kindred, and the howl and fighting of hungry dogs at ghastly meals, the smell of blood and war—of smoldering huts and black ruins! A stern pastime, this, and it is as well the soldier goes back upon his tracks so seldom!

We passed two days through such sights as I have noted, meeting many a heavy convoy of spoil on its way to the coast, and not a few of our own wounded wending back, luckless and sad, to England. And then on the following evening we came upon the English rear, and were shortly afterward part and parcel of as desperate and glorious an enterprise as any that was ever entered in the red chronicles of war. From the coast right up to the white walls of the fair capital itself, King Edward's stern orders were to pillage and kill and spoil the country, so that there should be left no sustenance for an enemy behind. I have told you how the cruel Irish mercenaries and the loose soldiers of a baser sort accomplished the command.

Our English archers and the light-armed Welsh, who scoured the front, were mild in their methods compared to them. They mayhap disturbed the quiet of some rustic villages, and in thirsty frolics broached the kegs of red vintage in captured inns, robbed henroosts, and kissed matrons and set maids screaming, but they, unlike the others, had some touch of ruth within their rugged bosoms. But, as for keeps and castles, we stormed and sacked them as we went, and he alone was rogue and rascal who was last into the breach. As our wild kerns and escaladers rioted in those lordly halls, many a sight of cruel pillage did I see, and many a time watched the red flame bursting from the embrasures and windows of these fair baronial homes, and could not stay it.

The Frenchmen in these cases, such of them as were not away with the army we hoped to find, fought bravely and stubbornly, and we piled their dead bodies up in their own courtyards. Many a comely dame and damsel did I watch wringing white hands above these ghastly heaps, and tearing loose locks of raven hair in piteous appeal to unmoved skies, the while the yellow flames of their comely halls went roaring from floor to floor, and in mockery of their sobs, crashing towers and staircases mingled with the yells of the defenders and the shouting of the pillage.

I fear long ages begin to sap my fiber! There was a time when I would have sat my war-horse in the courtyard and could have watched the red blood streaming

down the gutters and listened to the shrieking as cold amid the ruin as any Viking on a hostile [illegible]red strand. But somehow, with this s[illegible]panoply of mine I had put on softer moods; I was degenerated by the pretty theories of what they called their chivalry.

FAR be it from me to say the English army was all one pack of bloodhounds. War is ever a rough game, the country was foreign, and the adventure we were on was bold and desperate, therefore these things were done, and chiefly by the unruly regiments, and the scullion Irish who followed in our rear, led by knights of ill-repute, or none. These hung like carrion crows about our flanks and rear, and, after each fight, stole armor from dead warriors bolder hands had slain, and burned, and thieved from high and low, and butchered, like the beasts of prey they were.

On one occasion, I remember, a skirmish befell shortly after we joined the main army, and a French noble, in their charge, was unhorsed upon our front by an English archer. Now, I happened to be the only mounted man just there, and as this silver shining prize staggered to his feet, and went scampering back toward his friends with all his rich sheathing safe upon his back, his gold chains rattling on his iron bosom, and his jeweled belt sparkling as he fled, a savage old English swashbuckler, whose horse was ham-strung—Sir John Enkington they called him—fairly wrung his hands.

"After him, Sir Knight," screamed that unchivalrous ruffian to me, "after him, in the name of hell! If thou rid'st hard he cannot get away, and run thy spear in under his gorget so as not to spoil his armor—'tis worth, at least, a hundred shillings!"

I never moved a muscle, did not even deign to look down at that cruel churl. Whereon the grizzly old boar-hound clapped his hand upon his dagger and turned on me—ah! by the light of heaven, he did.

"What! not going, you lazy braggart!" he shouted, beside himself with rage—"not going, for such a prize? Beast—scullion—coward!"

"Coward!" Had I lived so many years in a soldier-saddle to be cowarded by such a hoary whelp of butchery—such a damnable old taint on the honorable trade of arms? I spun my charger round, and with my gloved left hand seized that bully by his ragged beard, and perked him here and there; lifted him fairly off his feet, stretched his corded, knotted throttle till his breath came thick and hard; jerked and pulled and twisted him—then cast the ruffian loose. Then, drawing my square iron foot from my burnished stirrup, spurned him here and there, and kicked and pommeled him, and so at last drove him howling down the hill, all forgetful for the moment of prize and pillage!

These lawless soldiers were the disgrace of our camp, they did so rant and roar if all went well and when the battle was fairly won whereto they had not entered, they were so coward and cruel among the prisoners or helpless that we would gladly have been rid of them if we could.

But, after the manner of the time, the war was open to all. Behind the flower of English chivalry who rode round the Sovereign's standard, and the gallant bill and bowmen who wore his livery and took his pay, observing the decencies of war, came hustling and crowding after us a host of rude mercenaries, a horde of ragged adventurers, who knew nothing of honor or chivalry, and had no canons but to plunder and destroy.

They made a trade of every villainy just outside the camp, where, with scoundrel hawkers who followed behind us like lean vultures, they dealt in dead men's goods, bought maids and matrons, and sold armor or plunder under our marshal's very eyes.

One day, I remember, I and my shadow Flamaucoeur were riding home after scouting some miles along the French lines without adventure, when, entering our camp by the pickets farthest removed from the Royal quarter, we saw a crowd of Irish kerns behind the wood where the King had stocked his baggage, all laughing round some common object. Now, these Irish were the most turbulent and dissolute fighters in the army. Such shock-headed, fiery ruffians never before called themselves Christian soldiers. They and the Welsh were forever at feud; but, whereas the Welshmen were brave and submissive to their chiefs, keen in war, tender of honor, fond of wine-cups and minstrels—gallant, free soldiers, indeed, these savage kerns, on the other hand, were remorseless villains, rude and wild in camp, and cutthroat rascals, without compunction, when a fight was over.

In ordinary circumstances we should have been rid of these noisy rogues, for they cared not a jot for any one less than the Camp Marshal with a string of billmen behind him, and feuds between knights

of King Edward's table and these shock-haired kerns were unseemly. But on this occasion, over the hustling ring of rough soldiers, as we sat high-perched upon our Flemish chargers, we saw a woman's form, and craned our necks and turned a little from our course to watch what new devilry they were up to.

There, in the midst of that lawless gang of ruffian soldiers, their bronzed and grinning faces hedging a space in with a leering, compassionless wall, was a fair French girl, all wild and torn with misadventure, her smooth cheeks unwashed and scarred with tears, her black hair wild and tangled on her back, her skirt and bodice rent and muddy, fear and shame and anger flying alternate over the white field of her comely face, while her wistful eyes kept wandering here and there amid that grinning crowd for a look of compunction or a chance of rescue. The poor maid was standing upon an overturned box such as was used to carry cross-bow bolts in, her hands tied hard together in front, her captor by her side, and as we came near unnoticed he put her up for sale.

"By Congal of the Bloody Fingers," said that cruel kern in answer to the laughing questions of his comrades, interlarding his speech with many fiery and horrid oaths, the which I spare you—"I found this accursed little witch this morning hiding among the rubbish of yonder cottage our boys pulled to pieces in the valley; and, as I could not light on better ware, I dragged her here. But may I roast forever if I will have anything more to do with her. She is a tigress, a little she-devil. I have thrashed and beat and kicked her, but I cannot get the spirit out. Let some other fellow try, and may Heaven wither him if he turns her loose near me again!

"Now then, what will the best of you give? She is a little travel-stained, perhaps—that comes of our march hither, and our subsequent disagreements—but all right otherwise, and, if some one could cure her of her spitfire nature and make her amenable to reason, she would be an ornament to any tent. Now you, Borghil, for instance—it was you, I think, who split the mother's skull this morning—give me a bid for the daughter: you are not often bashful in such a case as this."

"A penny then!" sang out Borghil of the Red Beard; "and, with maids as cheap as they be hereabouts, she's dear at that," and, while the laughter and jest went round, those rude islanders bid point by point for the unhappy girl who writhed and crouched before them. What could I do? Well I knew the vows my golden spurs put upon me, and the policy my borrowed knighthood warranted—and yet, she was not of gentle birth—'twas but the fortune of war. If men risked lives in that stern game, why should not maids risk something too?

King Edward hated turmoil in the camp, and here on desperate venture, far in a hostile country, my soldier instinct rose against kindling such a blaze as would have burst out among these lawless, hot-tempered kerns, had I now but drawn my sword a foot from its scabbard. And, thinking thus, I sat there with bent head scowling behind my visor-bars, and turning my eyes now to my ready hilt that shone so convenient at my thigh, and anon to the tall Normandy maid, so fair, so pitiful, and in such sorry straits.

WHILE I sat thus uncertain, the girl's price had gone up to fivepence, and, there being no one to give more, she was about to be handed over to an evil-looking fellow with a scar destroying one eye, and dividing his nose with a hideous yellow seam that went across his face from temple to chin. This gross mercenary had almost told the five coins into the blood-smudged hand of the other Irishman, and the bargain was near complete, when, to my surprise, Flamaucouer, who had been watching behind me, pushed his charger boldly to the front, and cried out in that smooth voice of his: "Wait a spell, my friends! I think the maid is worth another coin or two!" and he plunged his hand into the wallet that hung beside his dagger.

This interruption surprised every one, and for a moment there was a hush in the circle. Then he of the one eye, with a very wicked scowl, produced and bid another penny, the which Flamaucoeur immediately capped by yet another. Each put down two more, and then the Celt came to the bottom of his store, and, with a monstrous oath, swept back his money, and, commending the maid and Flamaucoeur to the bottommost pit of hell, backed off amid his laughing friends.

Not a whit disconcerted, my peaceful gallant rode up to the grim purveyor of that melancholy chattel, and having paid the silver, with a calm indifference which it shocked me much to see, unwound a few feet of the halter-rope depending from his Fleming's crupper. The loose end of this the man wound round and tied upon the withies wherewith the maid was tied.

Such an escape from the difficulty had never occurred to my slower mind, and now, when my lad turned toward the quarter where his tent lay, and, apparently mighty content with himself, stepped his charger out with the unhappy girl trailing along at his side, his lightness greatly pained me. Nor was I pleasured by the laughter and gibes of English squires and knights who met us.

"Hullo! you valorous two," called out a mounted captain, "whose hen-roosts have you been robbing?" And then another said, "Faith! they've been recruiting," and again, " 'Tis a new page they've got to buckle them up and smooth their soldier pillows." All this was hard to bear, and I saw that even Flamaucoeur hung his head a little and presently rode along by byways less frequented. At one time he turned to me most innocent-like and said:

"Such a friend as this is just what I have been needing ever since I left the English shore."

"Indeed!" I answered, sardonically, "I do confess I am more surprised than perhaps I should be. It is as charming a handmaid as any knight could wish. Shall you send one of those long raven tresses home to thy absent lady with thy next budget of sighs and truelove tokens?"

But Flamaucoeur shook his head, and said I misunderstood him bitterly. He was going on to say he meant to free the maid "to-morrow or the next day," when we turned a corner in our martial village street, and pulled up at our own tent doors.

Now, that Breton girl had submitted so far to be dragged along, in a manner of lethargy born of her sick heart and misery, but when we stayed our chargers the very pause aroused her. She drew her poor frightened wits together and glared first at us, and then at our knightly pennons fluttering over the white lintels of our lodgment; then, jumping to some dreadful, sad conclusion, she fired up as fierce and sudden as a trapped tigress when the last outlet is closed upon her. She stamped and raged, and twisted her fair white arms until the rough withies on her wrists cut deep into the tender flesh and the red blood went twining down to her torn and open bodice. She screamed and writhed, and struggled against the glossy side of that gentle and mighty warhorse, who looked back wondering on her and sniffed her flagrant sorrow with wide velvet nostrils—no more moved than a gray crag by the beating of the summer sea—and then she turned on us.

Gads! she swore at us in such mellow Bisque as might have made a hardened trooper envious! Cursed us and our chivalry, called us forsworn knights, stains upon manhood, dogs and vampires!—then dropped upon her knee, and there suppliant, locked her swollen and bloody hands, and, with the hot white tears sparkling in her red and weary eyes, knelt to us, and in the wild, tearful grief of her people, "for the honor of our mothers, and for the sake of the bright distant maid we loved," begged mercy and freedom.

AND all through that storm of wild, sweet grief that callous libertine, Flamaucoeur, made no show of freeing her. He sat his prick-eared, wondering charger, stared at the maid, and fingered his dagger-chain as though perplexed and doubtful. The hot torrent of that poor girl's misery seemed to daze and tie his tongue: he made no sign of commiseration and no movement, until at last I could stand it no longer. Wheeling round my war-horse, so that I could shake my mailed fist in the face of that sapling villain:

"By the light of day!" I burst out, half in wrath and half in amused bewilderment, "this goes too far. Why, Flamaucoeur, can you not see this is a maid in a hundred, and one who well deserves to keep that freedom which she asks for? Jove! man, if you must have a servant, why, the country swarms with forlorn ones who will gladly be that. But this one!—come!—let my friendship go in pawn against her, and free the maid. If you must have something more solid—still, set her free, unharmed, and I will give thee a helmetful of pennies—that is to say, on the first time that I come to own so many."

But Flamaucoeur laughed more scornfully than he often did, and, muttering that we were "all fools together," turned from me to the wild thing at his side. "Look here," he said, "you mad girl. Come into my tent and I will explain everything. You shall be all unharmed, I vow it, and free to leave me if you will not stop—this is all mad folly, though out here I cannot tell you why."

"I will not trust you," she screamed, up in arms again, straining at those horrid red wrists of hers and glaring on us. She shouted, turning to a knot of squires and captains who had gathered around us, "For the dear Light of Heaven some of you free my wretched spirit with your maces,

As two waves meet with thunderous arrogance, so we fell upon each other that great day at Crécy!

here—here—some friendly spear for this friendless bosom—one dagger-thrust to rid me from these cursed tyrants, and I will take the memory of my slayer straight to the seat of mercy and mix it forever with my grateful prayers. Oh, in Christian charity unsheath a weapon!"

I saw that slim soldier Flamaucoeur groan within his helmet at this, then down he bent. "Mad, mad girl!" I heard him say, and then followed a whisper which was lost between his hollow helmet and his prisoner's ear. Whatever it was, the effect was instantaneous and wonderful.

"Impossible!" burst out the French girl, starting away as far as the cords would let her, and eyeing her captor with surprise and amazement.

"'Tis truth, I swear it."

"Oh, impossible!—thou a —"

"Hush, hush," cried Flamaucoeur, putting his hand upon the girl's mouth, and speaking again to her in his soft low voice, and as he did so her eyes ran over him, the fear and wonder slowly melted away, and then, presently, with a delighted smile at length shining behind her undried tears, she clasped and kissed his hand with a vast show of delight as ungoverned as her grief had been. And when he had freed her and descended from his charger, to our amazement, she led rather than followed that knight most willingly to his tent, and there let fall the flap behind them.

"Now that," said the King's jester, who had come up while this matter was passing—"that is what I call a truly persuasive tongue. I would give half my silver bells to know what magic that gentleman has that will get reason so quickly into an angry woman's head."

"If you knew that," quoth a stern old knight through the steel bars of his morion, "you might live a happy life, although you knew nothing else."

"Poor De Burgh!" whispered a soldier near me. "He speaks with knowledge, for men say he owns a vixen, and is more honored and feared here by the proud Frenchman than at his own fireside."

"Perhaps," suggested another to the laughing group, "he of the burning heart whispered that he had a double Indulgence in his tent. Women will go anywhere and do anything when it is the Church which leads them by the nose."

"Or, perhaps," put in another, looking at the last speaker—"perhaps he hinted that if the maid escaped from his hated clutches she would fall into thine, St. Caen, and she chose the lesser evil. It were an argument that would well warrant so sudden a conversion!"

"Well! Well!" quoth the fool, "we will not quarrel over the remembrance of the meat which another dog has carried off. Good-by, fair Sirs, and may God give you all as efficient tongues as Sir Flamaucoeur's when next you meet your distant ladies!" and laughing and jesting among themselves the soldiers strolled away, leaving me to seek my solitary tent in no good frame of mind.

CHAPTER XI

SUCH sights and scenes as these will show the chivalrous army with whom I served in but an indifferent light. And ill it would beseem me, who remember this time with pride, and the gloomy pleasure of my latter life, to stain the fair fame of English chivalry or to discredit with the foul life of its outer remnant our gallant army or that Royal person who shone in the white light of his day, the bravest knight and the gentlest king of any then living.

This Sovereign was, above everything, a soldier. He observed all that passed in his camp with extraordinary acumen. It was my chance, soon after we joined the army, to catch his eye by some small deed of prowess in a mêlée near his standard, and that shrewd Sovereign called me to him, and asked my name and fame—the which I answered plausibly enough, for my tongue was never tied to the cold sterility of truth—and then, pointing to where there lay on his shield a famous dead English captain of mercenaries, asked me if I would do duty for that soldier.

I knew the troops he had led. They were grizzled veterans, rough old dogs every one of them, who had ridden their close-packed chargers, shoulder to shoulder, through the thick tangles of a hundred fights. I had seen them alone, those stern old fellows, put down their lances and, altogether, like the band of close united brothers that they were, go thundering over the dusty French campagnas, and, to the music that they loved so well, of ringing bits and hollow-sounding scabbards, of steel martingale and harness—delighting in the dreadful odds—charge ten times their number, and burst through the reeling enemy, and override and trample him down, and mow great swathes from his seething ranks, and revel in that thunderous carnage, as if the red dust of

the mêlée were the sweetest air that had ever fanned their aged beards!

"Ah! Prince!" I said, speaking out boldly as that remembrance came before me, "if those good fellows will take so young a one as I for leader, in place of a better, I will gladly let it be a compact."

"They will have you readily enough," replied the King, "even if it were not mine by right to name their captain, according to their rules." And, mounting the gray palfrey, he rode in camp, the better to spare his roan war-horse, he took me to where the troops were ranged up after the charge that had cost them their leader, and gave them over to me.

Thus was I provided with a lordly following, and the King's gratitude for my poor service expressed; but still I appeared strangely to haunt the Sovereign's memory. He looked back at me once or twice as though I were something most uncommon, and not long afterward he would have me sup with him.

It happened as we fell back from the farthest limit of our raid, burning and plundering as we went along the Somme. One evening a fair French château on a hill, bending down by grassy slopes to the slow stream below, had fallen to our assault. In truth, that fair pile had found us rude visitors. Twice in the storm the red flames had burst out of its broad upper corridors, and twice had been subdued. Its doors and gateways were beaten in, its casements burst and empty, the moat about it was full of dead men, the ivy hung in unsightly tatters from its turrets, and on the smooth grass glacis coping-stone and battlements—hurled on us by the besieged as we swarmed up the ladders—lay in crumbling ruins. Yet it was, as I say, a stately place, even in this new-made desolation; and I was standing at the close of a long, dusty autumn day by my tent door, watching the yellow harvest moon come over the low French hills, and shedding as it rose a pale light over the English camp and the lordly place a little set back from it, when down through the twilight came a page who wore on sleeve and tunic-breast the royal cognizance. Was I, he questioned, the stranger knight new come from England? and, that being answered, he gave his message: "King Edward would be glad if that knight would take his evening meal with him."

I went—how could I else?—and there in the great torn and disordered hall of the castle we had taken was a broad table spread and already laid with rough magnificence. Page and squire were hurrying here and there in that stately pillared chamber, spreading on the tables white linens that contrasted most strangely with the black, new-made smoke-stains on the ceiling; piling on them gold and silver basins and ewers and plates bent and broken, just as our men-at-arms had saved them from pillaged crypts or rifled treasure-cells.

Others were fixing a hundred gleaming torches to the notched, scarred columns of that banquet-place, and while one would be wiping half-dried blood of French peer and peasant from floor and doorway, or sprinkling rushes or sawdust on those gory patches, another was decanting redder burgundy—the which babbled most pleasantly to thirsty soldier ears as it passed in gushing streams from the cellar skins to supper flagon! It was an episode full of quaint contradictions!

BUT it was not at the feast I looked—not at the gallant table already flashing back the gleaming crimson lights from its stored magnificence. There round that hall in groups of two and threes, chatting while they waited, laughing and talking over the incidents of the day, were some hundred warlike English nobles. And amid them, the most renowned warrior where all were famous, the tallest and most resolute-looking in a circle of heroes, stood the King.

His quick, restless eye saw me enter, and he came toward me, slighting my reverence, and taking my hand like one good soldier welcoming another. He led me round that glittering throng, making me known to prince and captain, and knight and noble, and ever as we went a hush fell upon those gallant groups. Maybe 'twas all the King's presence, but I doubt it. It was not on him all eyes were fixed so hard, it was not for him those stern soldiers were silent a spell and then fell to whispering and wondering among themselves as we passed down the pillared corridor—ah! nor was it all on account of that familiar, knightly host that the page-boys in gaping wonder upset the red wine, and the glamoured servers forgot to set down their loaded dishes as they stood staring after us! No matter! I was getting accustomed to this silent awe, and little regarded it. It was but the homage, I thought, their late-born essences paid unwitting to my older soul.

Well! we talked and laughed a spell, seeming to wait for something, the while

the meat grew cold, and then the arras over the great arch at the bottom of the hall lifted, and with hasty strides, as of those late to a banquet, came in two knights. The first was black from top to toe—black was his dancing plume, black was his gleaming armor, black were his gloves and gyves, and never one touch of color on him but the new golden spurs upon his heels and the broad jewel belt that held his cross-handled sword.

As this dusky champion entered, a smile of pleasure shone over the King's grave face. He ran to him and took his hand, the while he put his other affectionately on his shoulder.

"My dear boy!" he said, forgetting monarch in father, "I have been thinking of thee for an hour. You are working too hard; you must be weary. Are there no tough captains in my host that you must be in the saddle early and late, and do a hundred of the duties of those beneath you, trying with that young hand of yours each new-set stake of our evening palisades, sampling the rude soldiers' supperrations, seeing the troops go down to water, and counting and conning the lay of the Frenchman's twinkling watch-fire? My dear hungry lad, you are over-zealous —you will make me grieve for that new knighthood I have put upon you!"*

"Oh, 'tis all right, father! I am but trying to infuse a little shame of their idle ways into this silken company of thine. But I do confess I am as hungry as well can be—hast saved a drink of wine and a loaf for me?"

"Saved a loaf for thee, my handsome boy! Why, thou shouldst have a loaf though it were the last in France and though the broad stream of England's treasure were run dry to buy it. We have waited—we have not e'en uncovered."

"Why, then, father, I will set the example. Here! some of you squires discover me; I have been plated much too long!" and the ready pages ran forward, and with willing fingers rid the young prince of his raven harness. They unbuckled and unriveted him, until he stood before us in the close-fitting quilted black silk that he wore beneath, and I thought, as I stood back a little way and watched, that never had I seen a body at once so strong and supple. Then he ran his hands through his curly black hair, and took his place midway down the table; the King sat at the head; and when the chaplain had muttered a Latin grace we fell to work.

It was a merry meal in that ample hall, still littered under the arches with the broken rubbish of the morning's fight. The courteous English King sat smiling under the stranger canopy, and overhead —rocking in the breeze that came from broken casements—were the tattered flags our dead foeman's hands had won in many wars. Our table shone with heaped splendor shot out from the spoil-carts at the door; the King's seneschal blazed behind his chair in cloth of gold; while honest rough troopers in weather-stained leather and rusty trappings (pressed on the moment to do squires' duty) waited upon us, and ministered, after the fashion of their stalwart inexperience, to our needs.

Amid all those strange surroundings we talked of wine, and love, and chivalry; we laughed and drank, tossing off our beakers of red burgundy to the health of that soldier Sovereign under the daïs, and drank deep bumpers to the gray to-morrow that was crimsoning the eastern windows ere we had done. Indeed, we did that night as soldiers do who live in pawn to chance, and snatch hasty pleasures from the brink of the unknown while the close foeman's watch-fires shine upon their faces, and each forethinks, as the full cups circle, how well he may take his next meal in Paradise.

Of all the courtly badinage and warrior-mirth that ran round the loaded table while plates were emptied and tankards turned, but one thing lives in my mind. Truth, 'twas a strange chance, a most quaint conjunction, that brought that tale about, and put me there to hear it!

I HAVE said that when the Black Prince entered the banquet hall there came another knight behind him, a strong, tall young soldier in glittering mail, something in whose presence set me wondering how or where we two had met before. Ere I could remember who this knight might be, the King and Prince were speaking as I have set down, and then the trumpets blew and we fell to meat and wine with soldier appetites, and the unknown warrior was forgotten, until—when the feast was well begun, looking over the rim of a circling silver goblet of malmsey I was lifting, at a youth who had just taken the empty place upon my right—there—unhelmeted, unharnessed, lightly nodding to his comrades and all unwotting of his wondrous neighborhood, was one Lord Codrington, a curly-headed young earl.

*The Black Prince, then sixteen years old, was knighted on the Normandy beach, where the expedition landed.

That soldier glanced heedlessly over me —wiped his lips with his napkin, and took a long draught of the wine within the cup. Then smiling as he handed it on, and turning lightly round as he laughed, "A very good tankard, indeed, Sir Stranger —such a one as is some solace for eight hours in a Flemish saddle! But there was just a little too much nutmeg in the brew this time—didst thou not think so?

I murmured some faint agreement, and sat back into my place, watching the great beaker circle round the table.

"You are new from England, Lord Worringham," the young Earl said across me to a knight upon my other hand: "is there late news of interest to tell us?"

"Hardly, Codrington. All of the news we had was stale reports of what you here have done. Men's minds and eyes have been all upon you, and each homeward courier has been rifled of his budget at every port and village on his way by a hundred hungry speculators, as sharply as though he were a rich wanderer beset by footpads on a lonely heath. The common people are wild to hear of a great victory, and will think of nothing else. There is not one other voice in England—saving, perhaps, that some sleek city merchants do complain of new assessments, and certain reverend abbots, 'tis said, of the havoc you have played with this year's vintage."

"Yes," answered the Earl with a laugh, "one can well believe that last. Sanctity, I have had late cause to know, is thirsty work. Why, the very Abbot of St. Olaf's himself, usually esteemed a right reverend prelate, did charge me at my last confessional to send him hence some vats of malmsey! No doubt he shrewdly foresaw this dearth that we are making."

"What!" exclaimed the other Knight, staring across me. "Hast thou actually confessed to that bulky saint? *Mon Dieu!* but you are in luck! Why, Lord Earl, thou hast disburdened thyself to the wonder of the age—to the most favored son of Mother Church—the associate of beatified beings—and the particularly selected of the Apostles! Dost not know the wonder that has happened to St. Olaf's?"

"Not a whit. It was ordinary and peaceful when I was there a few weeks back."

"Then, by my spurs, there is some news for you! You remember that wondrous thing they had, that sleeping image that men swore was an actual living man, and the holy brothers, who, no doubt, were right, declared was a blessed saint that died centuries ago? You too must know him, Sir," he said, turning to me, and looking me full in the face: "you must know him, if you ever were at St. Olaf's."

"Yes," I answered, calmly returning his gaze. "I have been at St. Olaf's at one time or another, and I doubt if any man living knows that form you speak of better than I do myself."

"And I," put in the devout young Earl, "know him too. A holy and very wondrous body! Surely God's beneficence still shields him in his sleep?"

"Shields him! Why, Codrington, he has been translated; removed just as he was to celestial places; 'tis on the very word of the Abbot himself we have it, and, where good men meet and talk in England, no other tale can compete for a moment with this one."

"Out with your story, bold Worringham!" cried the Earl. "Surely such a thing has not happened since the time of Elijah."

Gods! you may guess how I did glare at Codrington over the sculptured rim of that great beaker, the while the red wine stood stagnant at my lips—and then how my breath did halt and flag as presently he turned slow and calm upon me, and there—a foot apart—the living and the dead were face to face, and front to front! I scarce durst breathe as he took the heavy pledgecup from my hand—would he know me? would he leap from his seat with a yell of fear and wonder, and there, from some distant vantage-point among the shadowy pillars, with trembling fingers impeach me to that startled table? Hoth! I saw in my mind's eye those superstitious warriors tumbling from their places, the while I alone sat gloomy and remorseful at the littered tressels, and huddling and crowding to the shadows—as they would not for a thousand Frenchmen—while that brave boy with chattering teeth and white fingers clutched upon the kingly arm did, incoherent, tell my tale, and with husky whisper say how 'twas no soldier of flesh and blood who sat there alone at the long white table, under the taper lights, self-damned by his solitude! I waited to see all this, and then Worringham spoke.

" 'Tis simple enough, and I had it from one who had it from the Abbot's lips. That saintly recluse had spent a long day in fast and vigils amid the cloisters of his ancient abbey—so he said—and when the evening came had knelt after his wont an hour at the shrine, lost in holy thought and pious exercise. Nothing new or strange appeared about the Wonder. It lay as it had ever lain, silent, in the cathedral twi-

light, and the good man, full of gentle thoughts and celestial speculations, if we may take his word for it—and God forfend I should do otherwise!—the holy father ever bent over him in fraternal love and reverence the while, he says, the beads ran through his fingers as Ave and Paternoster were told to the sleeping martyr's credit by scores and hundreds. Not a sign of life was on the dead man's face. He slept and smiled up at the vaulted roof just as he had done year in and out beyond all memory, and therefore, as was natural, the Abbot thought he would sleep on while two stones of the cathedral stood one upon another.

"He left him, and, pacing down the aisles, wended to the refectory, where the brothers had near done their evening meal, and there, still in holy meditation, sat him down to break that crust of dry bread and drink that cup of limpid water which (he told my friend) was his invariable supper."

"HAST thou ever seen the reverend father, good Worringham?" queried a young knight across the table as the story-teller stopped for a moment to drink from the flagon by his elbow.

"Yes, I have seen him once or twice."

"Why, so have I," laughed the young soldier—"and, by all the saints in Paradise, I do not believe he sups on husks and water."

"Believe or not as you will, it is a matter between thyself and conscience. The Abbot spoke, and I have repeated just what he said."

"On with the story, good sirs," laughed another: "we are all open-mouthed to hear what came next, and even if his Reverence—in holy abstraction, of course—doth sometime dip fingers into a venison pasty by mistake for a bread trencher, or gets hold of the wine-vessel instead of the water-beaker—'tis nothing to us. Suppose the reverent meal was ended—as Jerome says it should be—in humble gladness, what came then?"

"What came then?" cried Worringham. "Why, the monks were all away—the tapers burned low—the Abbot sat there by himself, his praying hands crossed before him —when wide the chancery door was flung, and there, in his grave-clothes, white and tall, was the saint himself!"

Every head was turned as the English knight thus told his story, and, while the younger soldiers smiled disdainfully, good Codrington at my side crossed himself again and again, and I saw his soldier lips trembling as prayer and verse came quick across them.

"Ah! the saint was on foot without a doubt, and it might have chilled all the breath in a common man to see him stand there alive, and witful, who had so long been dead and mindless, to meet the light of those sockets where the eyes had so long been dull! But 'tis a blessed thing to be an abbot!—to have a heart whiter than one's mother's milk, and a soul of limpid clearness. That holy friar, without one touch of mortal fear—it is his very own asseveration—rose and welcomed his noble guest, and sat him in the daïs, and knelt before him, and adored, and, bold in goodness, waited to be cursed or canonized—withered by a glance of those eyes no man could safely look on, or hoist straight to St. Peter's chair, just as chance should have it."

"Wonderful and marvelous!" gasped Codrington. "I would have given all my lands to have knelt at the bottom of that hall whose top was sanctified by such a presence."

"And I," cried another knight, "would have given this dinted suit of Milan that I sit in, and a tattered tent somewhere on yonder dark hillside (the which is all I own of this world), to have been ten miles away when that same thing happened. Surely it was most dread and grim, and may Heaven protect all ordinary men if the fashion spreads with saints!"

"They will not trouble you, no doubt, good comrade. This one rose in no stern spirit of rebuke, but as the pale commissioner of Heaven to reward virtue and bless merit. Ill would it beseem me to tell, or you, common, gross soldiers of the world, to listen to what passed between those two. 'Twere rank sacrilege to mock the new-risen's words by retailing them over a camp-table, even though the table be that of the King himself. And who are we, rough, unruly sons of Mother Church, that we should submit to repetition the converse of a prelate with one we scarce dare name!" Whereupon Worringham drank silently from his goblet, and half a dozen knights crossed themselves devoutly.

"And there is another reason why I should be silent," he continued. "The Abbot will not tell what passed between them. Only so much as this: he gives out with modest hesitance that his holy living and great attainments had gone straighter to Heaven than the smoke of Abel's altar-fire, and thus, on these counts and others,

he had been specially selected for divine favors, and his ancient Church for miracle.

"The priest, so the Wonder vowed, must be made a cardinal, and have next reversion of the Papal chair. Meanwhile pilgrims were to hold the wonder-shrine of St. Olaf's no less holy tenantless than tenanted, to be devout, and above all things liberal, and pray for the constant intercession of that Messenger who could no longer stay. Whereon, quoth the Abbot, a wondrous light did haze the watcher's sight—unheard, unseen of other men the walls and roof fell wide apart—and then and there, amid a wondrous hum of voices and countless shooting stars, that Presence mounted to the sky, and the Abbot fell fainting on the floor!"

"Truly a strange story, and like to make St. Olaf's coffers fuller than King Edward's are."

"And to do sterling service to the reverend Prior! What think you, Sir?" said one, turning to me, who had kept silent all through this strange medley of fact and cunning fiction. "Is it not a tale that greatly redounds to the holy father's credit, and like to do him material service?"

"No doubt," I answered, "it will serve the purpose for which 'twas told. But whether the adventure be truly narrated or not, only the Abbot and he who supped with him can know."

"Ah!" they laughed, "and, by Our Lady! you may depend upon it the priest will stick to his version through thick and thin."

"And by all oaths rolled in one," I fiercely cried, striking my fist upon the table till the foeman's silver leaped (for the lying Abbot's story had moved my wrath), "by cruel Osiris, that saint will never contradict him!"

Shortly after we rose, and each on his rough pallet sought the rest a long day's work had made so grateful.

YES! we sought it, but to one, at least, it would not come for long! Hour after hour I paced in meditation about my tent with folded arms and bent head, thinking of all that had been or might have been, and, after that supper of suggestions, the last few weeks rose up strongly before me. Again and again all that I had seen and done in that crowded interval swept by my eyes, but the one thing that stayed while all others faded, the one ever-present shadow among so many, was the remembrance of the fair, unhappy girl Isobel.

Full of rougher thoughts, I have not once spoken of her, yet, since we landed on this shore, her winning presence had grown on me every day I lived, and now to-night, here, close on the eve, as we knew it, of a desperate battle, wherefrom no man could see the outcome, the very darkness all about me, after the flickering banquet lights, were full of Isobel. I laughed and frowned by turn to myself in my lonely walk that evening, to find how the slighted girl was growing upon me. Was I a silly squire at a trysting-place, decked out with love-knots and tokens, a green gallant in a summer wood, full of sighs and sonnets, to be so witched by the bare memory of a foolish white wench who had fallen enamored of my swart countenance?

It was idle nonsense; I would not yield. I put it behind me, and thought of to-morrow—the good King and my jolly comrades—and then there again was the outline of Isobel's fair face in the yellow rift of the evening sky; there were Isobel's clear eyes fixed, gentle and reproachful, on me, and the glimmer of her white draperies amid the shifting shadow of the tent, and even the evening wind outside was

whispering as it came sighing over the wild grass lands—"Isobel!"

Ah! and there was something more behind all that thought of Isobel. There were eyes that looked from Isobel's shadowy face, wherever in my fancy I saw it, that filled me with a strange unrest, and a whisper behind the whispers of that maiden voice that was hers and yet was not—fine thin music that played upon the fibers of my heart; a presence behind a haunting presence; a meaning behind a meaning that stirred me with the strangest fancies. And before another night was over I understood them!

Well, in fact and in deed, I was in love like many another good soldier, and long did I strive to find a specific for the gentle malady, but when this might not be—why, I laughed!—the thing itself must needs be borne; 'twas a common complaint, and no great harm; when the war was over, I would get back to England, and, if the maid were still of the same way of thinking—had I not stood a good many knocks and buffets in the world?—a little ease would do me good. Ah! a very fair maid—a fair maid, indeed! And her dower some of the fattest land you could find in a dozen shires!

Thus, schooling myself to think a due entertainment of the malady were better than a churlish cure, I presently decided to write to the lady; for, I argued, if to-morrow ends as we hope it may, why, the letter will be a good word for a homeward traveling hero crowned with new-plucked bays; and if to-morrow sees me stiff and stark, down in yon black valley, among to-morrow's silent ones, still 'twill be a meet parting, and I owe the maid a word or two of gentleness.

I determined, therefore, to write to her at once a scroll, not of love—for I was not ripe for that—but of compassion—of just those feelings that one has to another when the spark of love trembles to the kindling but is not yet ablaze. And because I did not know my own mind to any certainty, and because that youth Flamaucoeur was both shrewd and witty—as ready-witted and as nimble, indeed, with tongue and pen as though he were a woman—I determined it should be he who should indite that epistle and ease my conscience of this duty which had grown to be so near a pleasure.

I sent forthwith for Flamaucoeur, and he came at once, as was his wont, sheathed in comely steel from neck to heel, his close-shut helmet upon his head, but all weaponless as usual, save for a toy dagger at his side.

"Good friend," I said, "you carry neither sword nor mace. That is not wise in such a camp as this, and while the Frenchman's watch-fires smoke upon the eastern sky. But, never mind, I will arm thee myself for the moment. Here"—passing him the things a writer needs—"here is a little weapon wherewith they say much mischief has been done at one time or another in the world, and some sore wounds taken and given. Wield it now for me in kinder sort and write me the prettiest epistle thou canst—not too full of harebrained love or the nonsense that minstrels deal in—but friendly, suave and gentle, courteous to my lady-love!"

"To whom?" gasped Flamaucoeur, stepping back a pace.

"*Par Dieu*, boy!" I laughed. "I spoke plain enough! Why, thou consumed dog in the manger, while thy own heart is confessedly in condition of eternal combustion, may not another knight even warm himself by a spark of love without your glowering at him so between the bars of thine iron muzzle? Come! Why should not I love a maid as well as you—ah! and write to her a farewell on the eve of battle?"

"Oh! write to whom you will, but I cannot—will not—help you"; and the youth, who knew nothing of my affections, and to whom I had never spoken of a woman before, walked away to the tent door and lifting the flap, looked out over the dim French hills, seeming marvelous perturbed.

POOR lad, I thought to myself, how soft he is! My love reminds him of his own, and hence he fears to touch a lover's pen. And yet he must. He can write twice as ingeniously, shrewdly, as I, and no one else could do this letter half so well. "Come, Flamaucoeur! indeed, you must help me. If you are so sorry over your own reflections, why, the more reason for lending me thy help. We are companions in this pretty grief, and should render to each the help due between true brothers in misfortune. I do assure you I have near broken a maiden heart back in England."

"Perhaps she was unworthy of thy love—why should you write?"

"Unworthy! Gods! She was unhappy, she was unfortunate—but unworthy, never! Why, Flamaucoeur, here, as I have been chewing the cud of reflection all these days, I have begun to think she was the whitest, sweetest maid that ever breathed."

"Some pampered, sickly jade, surely, Sir

Knight," murmured the young man in strange jealous-sounding tones whereof I could not fail to heed the bitterness; "let her by, she has forgotten thee mayhap, and taken a new love—those pink-and-white ones were ever shallow!"

"Shallow! you wayward boy! By Hoth! had you seen our parting you would not have said so. Why, she wept and clung to me, although no words of love had ever been between us—"

"A jade, a wanton!" sobbed that strange figure there by the shadowy tent-flap.

Whereon, flaming up, "God's death!" I shouted, "younker, that goes too far! Curb thy infernal tongue, or neither thy greenness nor unweaponed state shall save thee from my sword!"

"And I," quoth Flamaucoeur, stepping out before me—"I deride thy weapon—I will not turn one hair's breadth from it—here! point it here, to this heart, dammed and choked with a cruel affection! Oh! I am wretched and miserable, and eager against all my instincts for to-morrow's horrors!"

Whereat that soft and silly youth turned his gorget back upon me and leaned against the tent-pole most dejectedly. And I was grieved for him, and spun my angry brand into the farthest corner, and clapped him on the shoulder, and cheered him as I might, and then, half mindful to renounce my letter, yet asked him again.

"Come! thou art steadier now. Wilt thou finally write for me to my sweetheart?"

"By every saint in Paradise," groaned the unhappy Flamaucoeur, "I will not!"

"What! not do me a favor and please thy old friend, Isobel of Oswaldston, at one and the same time?"

"Please whom?" shrieked Flamaucoeur, starting like a frightened roe.

"Why, you incomprehensible boy. Isobel of Oswaldston, thy old playmate. Surely I had told thee before it was of her I was thus newly enamored?"

WHAT passed then within that steel casque I did not know, though now I well can guess, but that slim gallant turned from me, and never a word he spoke. A gentle tremor shook him from head to heel, and I saw the steel plates of his harness quiver with the throes of his pent emotion, while the blue plumes upon his helmet-top shook like aspen-leaves in the first breath of a storm, and over the bars of his cruel visor there rippled a sigh such as surely could only have come from deep down in a human heart.

All this perplexed me very much and made me thoughtful, but before I could fashion my suspicions, Flamaucoeur mastered his feelings, and came slowly to the little table, and, saying in a shy, humble voice, wondrously altered, "I will write to thy maid!" drew off his steel gauntlet and took up the pen. That smooth, fine hand of his trembled a little as he spread the paper on the table.

And then we began.

OUR CAMP BY THE SOMME

August 24, 1376

To the Excellent Lady Isobel of Oswaldston this brings greeting and salutation.

Madam: May it please you to accept the homage of the humblest soldier who serves with King Edward?

"That," said Flamaucoeur, stopping for a moment to sharpen his pen, "is not a very amorous beginning."

"No," I answered, "and I have a mind first only to tell her how we fare. You see, good youth, our parting was such she weeps in solitude, I expect, hoping nothing from me, and therefore, I would wish to break my amendment to her gently. Faith! she may be dying of love for aught I know, and the shock of a frank avowal of my new-awakened passion might turn her head."

"Why yes, Sir Knight," quoth my comrade, taking a fresh dip of ink, "or, on the other hand, she may now be footing it to some gay measure on those polished floors we wot of, or playing hide-and-seek among the tapestries with certain merry gallants!"

"Jove! If I thought so!"

"Well, never mind. Get on with thy missive, and I will not interrupt again."

After leaving your father's castle, Madam, I fell in about nightfall with that excellent youth, Flamaucoeur, according to your Ladyship's supposition. We crossed the narrow sea; and since, have scarcely had time to dine or sleep, or wipe down our weary chargers, or once to scour our red and rusty armour. We joined King Edward, Madam, just as His Highness unfurled the lions and fleur de lys upon the green slopes of the Seine, and thence, right up to the walls of Paris, we scoured the country. We turned then, Queen of Tournaments, northward, toward Flanders.

At this Flamaucoeur laid down his pen for a moment, and, heaving a sigh, exclaimed, "That 'Queen of Tournaments' does not come well from thee, Sir Knight! Thou slighted this very girl once in the lists when the prize was on thy spear-point."

"*Par Dieu!* and so I did. I had clean forgotten it! But how, in Heaven's name, came you to know of that, who were not there?"

"Some one told me of it," replied the boy, looking away from me, as though he were lying.

"Well, cross it out!"

"Not I! The maid already knows, no doubt, the fickleness of men, and this will surprise her no more than to see a weathercock go round when the wind doth change. Proceed!"

> Heavily laden with booty, we turned toward Flanders. We gained two days ago the swelling banks of the Somme, and down this sluggish stream, taking what we listed as we went with the red license of our revengeful errand, we have struggled until here, fair lady. But each hour of this adventurous march has seen us closer and more closely beset. The broad stream runs to north of us, the burgher levies of Amiens are mustering thick upon our right and behind. God! so close are they, that now as this is penned the black canopy of the night is all ruddy where his countless watch-fires glimmer on the southern sky. Behind us comes the pale respondent in this bloody suit that we are trying—Philip, who says that France is hit by Salic law, and no rod of it, no foot or inch on this side of the salt sea, ever can or shall be Edward's.
>
> And for jurors, Madam, to the assize that will be held so shortly he has gathered from every corner of his vassal realm a hundred thousand footmen and twenty thousand horse. A score of perjured Princes make his false quarrel doubly false by bearing witness to it, and here, to-morrow at the farthest, we do think, they will arraign us, and put this matter to the sharp adjustment of the sword.
>
> Against that great host that threatens us, we are but a handful, four thousand men at arms all native to the English shires, ten thousand archers, as many light-armed Welshmen, and four thousand wild Irish.
>
> And, Madam, to-morrow's battle, if it comes, will be no light affair. He who sends this to thee may, ere it reaches thy hand, be numbered among the things that are past. Therefore he would also that all negligence of his were purged by such atonement as he can make, and all crudeness likewise amended. And in particular he offers to thee, whose virtues and condescension late reflection have brought lively to his mind, his most dutiful and appreciative homage.
>
> You, who have so good a knowledge of his poor taste, will pardon his ineloquence, but he would say to thee, in fact, that thy gentleness and worth were never so conscious to him as here to-night, when the red gleam of coming battle plays along the evening sky, and, if he wears no token in his helmet in to-morrow's fray, 'tis because he has none of thine.

"There!" I said with pride, as Flamaucoeur's busy pen came to a stop—"There! she will know now how it goes with King Edward's gallant English."

"Why, yes, no doubt she may," responded my friend; "but maids are more apt to be interested in the particular than in the general. You have addressed her so far like the presiding captain of a warlike council. Is there nothing more to come?"

"Gads! that's true enough! I have left out all the love!"

"Yet that is what her hungry eyes will look for when her fingers untie this silk."

He took up his pen and began again to write.

"There, boy! 'tis not what I meant to say—and very halting, yet she will guess its meaning. Dost thou not think so?"

"Guess its meaning! Oh, dear comrade, she will live again and feed upon it—wake and sleep upon it, and wear it next her heart, just as I should were I she and you were he."

"But it is so beggarly and poor expressed," I said with pleased humility.

"She will not think so," cried Flamaucoeur. "If I know aught of maids, she will think it the most blessed vellum that ever was engrossed, she will like its style better than the wretched culprit likes the style of the reprieve the steaming horseman flaunts before him. She'll con each line and letter, and puncture them with tears and kisses—thou hast had small ken of maids, I think, sweet soldier!"

"Well! well! It may be so. Do up the letter, since it will read so well, and put it in the way to be taken by the first messenger who sails for England. Then we will ride round the posts and see how near the Frenchman's watch-fires be. And so to sleep, good friend, and may the many-named Powers which sit on high wake us to a happy to-morrow!"

CHAPTER XII

A VOLUME might well be written on what I must compress into this chapter. On the narrow canvas of these few pages must be outlined the crowded incidents of that noble fight above Crécy, whereof your historians know but half the truth, and these same lines, charged with the note of victory, full of the joyful exultation of the mêlée and dear delight of hard-fought combat—these lines must, too,

record my own unconsoled, illimitable grief.

If while I write you should hear through my poor words aught of the loud sound of conflict, if you catch aught of the meeting of two great hosts led on by kingly captains, if the proud neighing of the war-steeds meet you through these heavy lines and you discern aught of the thunder of charging squadrons, aught of the singing wind that plays above a sea of waving plumes as the chivalry of two great nations rush, like meeting waves, upon each other, so shall you hear, amid all that joyful tumult, one other sound, one piercing shriek, wherefrom not endless scores of seasons have cleared my ears.

Listen, then, to the humming bow-strings on the Crécy slopes—to the stinging hiss of the black rain of English arrows that kept those heights inviolable—to the rattle of unnumbered spears, breaking like dry November reeds under the wild hog's charging feet, as rank behind rank of English gentlemen rush on the foe! Listen, I say, with me, to the thunderous roar of France's baffled host, wrecked by its own mightiness on the sharp edge of English valor, listen to the wild scream of hireling fear as Doria's cross-bowmen see the English pikes sweep down upon them; listen to the thunder of proud Alençon sweeping round our lines with every glittering peer in France behind him, himself in gemmy armor—a delusive star of victory, riding, revengeful, on the foremost crest of that wide, sparkling tide! Hear, if you can, all this, and where my powers fail, lend me the help of your bold fancy.

IT WAS a hard-fought day indeed! Hotly pursued by the French King, numbering ourselves scarce thirty thousand men, while those behind us were four times as many, we had fallen back down the green banks of the Somme, seeking in vain for a ford by which we might pass to the farther shore. On this morning of which I write so near was Philip and his vast array that our rearguard, as we retreated slowly toward the north, saw the sheen of the spear-tops and the color on whole fields of banners, scarce a mile behind us. And every soldier knew that, unless we would fight at disadvantage, with the river at our backs, we must cross it before the sun was above our heads.

Swiftly our prickers scoured up and down the banks, and many a strong yeoman waded out, only to find the hostile water broad and deep; and thus, all that morning, with the blare of Philip's trumpets in our ears, we hunted about for a passage and could not find it, the while the great glittering host came closing up upon us like a mighty crescent storm-cloud—a vast somber shadow, limned and edged with golden gleams.

At noon we halted in a hollow, and the King's dark face was as stern as could be. And first he turned and scowled like a lion at bay upon the oncoming Frenchmen, and then upon the broad tidal flood that shut us in that trap. Even the young Prince at his right side scarce knew what to say; while the clustering nobles stroked their beards and frowned, and looked now upon the King and now upon the water. The archers sat in idle groups down by the willows, and the scouts stood idle on the hills. Truth, 'twas a pause such as no soldier likes, but when it was at the worst in came two men-at-arms dragging along a reluctant peasant between them. They hauled him to the Sovereign, and then it was:

"Please your Mightiness, but this fellow knows a ford, and for a handful of silver says he'll tell it."

"A handful of silver!" laughed the joyful King. "God! let him show us a place where we can cross, and we will smother him with silver! On, good fellow—the ford! the ford! and come to us to-morrow morning and you shall find him who has been friend to England may laugh henceforth at sulky Fortune!"

Away we went down the sunburnt, grassy slopes, and ere the sun had gone a handbreadth to the west of his meridian a little hamlet came in sight upon the farther shore, and, behind it a mile, pleasant ridges trending up to the woods and trees. Down by the hamlet the river ran loose and wide, and the ebbing stream (for it was near the sea) had just then laid bare the new-wet, shingly flats, and as we looked upon them, with a shout that went from line to line, we recognized deliverance. So swift had been our coming that when the first dancing English plumes shone on the August hill-tops the women were still out washing clothes upon the stones, and when the English bowmen, all in King Edward's livery, came brushing through the copses, the kine were standing knee-deep about the shallows, and the little urchins, with noise and frolic, were bathing in the stream that presently ran deep and red with blood. And small maids were weaving chaplets among those meadows where kings and princes soon lay dying, and tumbling in their play about the sunny meads,

little wotting of the crop their fields would bear by evening, or the stern harvest to be reaped from them before the moon got up.

We crossed; but an army does not cross like one, and before our rearward troops were over the French vanguard was on the hill-tops we had just quitted, while the tide was flowing in strong again from the outer sea.

"Now, God be praised for this!" said King Edward, as he sat his charger and saw the strong salt water come gushing in as the last man toiled through. "The kind heavens smile upon our arms—see! they have given us a breathing space! You, good Sir Andrew Kirkaby, who live by pleasant Sherwood, with a thousand archers stand here among the willow bushes and keep the ford for those few minutes till it will remain. Then, while Philip watches the gentle sea fill up this famous channel, and waits, as he must wait, upon his opportunity, we will inland, and on yonder hill, by the grace of God and sweet St. George, we will lay a supper-place for him and his!"

So spoke the bold King, and turned his war-horse, and, with all his troops—seeming wondrous few by comparison of the dusky swarms gathering behind us—rode north four hundred yards from Crécy. He pitched upon a gentle ridge sloping down to a little brook, while at top was woody cover for the baggage train, and near by, on the right, a cornmill on a swell. 'Twas from that granary floor, sitting stern and watchful, his sword upon his knees, his impatient charger armed and ready at the door below, that the King sat and watched the long battle.

Meanwhile, we strengthened the slopes. We dug a trench along the front and sides, and, with the glitter of the close foeman's steel in our eyes, lopped the Crécy thickets. And, working in silence (while the Frenchman's song and laughter came to us on the breeze), set the palisades, and bound them close as a strong fence against charging squadrons, and piled our spears where they were handy, and put out the archers' arrows in goodly heaps.

Jove! we worked as though each man's life depended on it, the Prince among us, sweating at spade and axe, and then—it was near four o'clock on that August afternoon—a hush fell upon both hosts, and we lay about and only spoke in whispers. And you could hear the kine lowing in the valley a mile beyond, and the lapwing calling from the new-shorn stubble, and the whimbrels on the hill-tops, and the river fast emptying once again, now prattling to the distant sea.

'Twas a strange pause, a sullen heavy silence, no longer than a score of minutes. And then, all in a second, a little page in the yellow fern in front of me leaped to his feet, and, screaming in shrill treble that scared the feeding linnets from the brambles, tossed his velvet cap upon the wind and cried:

"They come! they come, St. George! St. George for merry England!"

And up we all sprang to our feet, and, while the proud shout of defiance ran thundering from end to end of our triple lines, a wondrous sight unfolded before us. The vast array of France, stretching far to right and left and far behind, was loosed from its roots, and coming on down the slope—a mighty frowning avalanche—upon us, a flowing, angry sea, wave behind wave, of chief and mercenary—countless lines of spear and bowmen and endless ranks of men-at-arms behind—an overwhelming flood that hit the country as it marched shot with the lurid gleam of light upon its billows, and crested with the fluttering of endless flags that crowned each of those long lines of cheering foemen.

THAT tawny fringe there in front a furlong deep and driven on by the host behind like the yellow running spume upon the lip of a flowing tide was Genoese crossbowmen, selling their mean carcasses to manure the good Picardy soil for hireling pay. Far on the left rode the grim Doria, laughing to see the little band set out to meet his serried vassals, and, on the right, Grimaldi's olive face scowled hatred and malice at the hill where the English lay.

There, behind these tawny mercenaries in endless waves of steel, D'Alençon rode, waving his princely baton, and marshaled as he came rank upon rank of glittering chivalry—a fuming, foamy sea of spear and helmets that flashed and glittered in the sun, and tossed and chafed, impatient of ignoble hesitance, and flowed in stately pride toward us, the white foam-streaks of twenty thousand plumed horsemen showing like breakers on a shallow sea, as that great force, to the blare of trumpets, swept down.

And, as though all these were not enough to smother our desperate valor even with the shadow of their numbers, behind the French chivalry again advanced a winding forest of spearmen stooping to the lie of the ground, and now rising and now falling

like water-reeds when the west wind plays among them. Under that innumerable host, that stretched in dust and turmoil two long miles back to where the gray spires of Abbeville were misty on the sky, the rasp of countless feet sounded in the still air like the rain falling on a leafy forest.

Never did such a horde set out before to crush a desperate band of raiders. And, that all the warlike show might not lack its head and consummation, between their rearguard ranks came Philip, the vassal monarch who held the mighty fiefs that Edward coveted. Lord! how he and his did shine and glint in the sunshine! How their flags did flutter and their heralds blow as the resplendent group—a deep, strong ring of peers and princes curveting in the flickering shade of a score of mighty blazons—came over the hill crest and rode out to the foremost line of battle and took places there to see the English lion flayed. With a mighty shout—a portentous roar from rear to front which thundered along their van and died away among the host behind—the French heralded the entry of their King upon the field, and, with one fatal accord, the whole vast baying pack broke loose from order and restraint and came at us.

We stood aghast to see them. Fools! Madmen! They swept down to the river—a hundred thousand horse and footmen bent upon one narrow passage—and rushed in, every chief and captain scrambling with his neighbor to be first—troops, squadrons, ranks, all lost in one seething crowd—disordered, unwarlike. And thus—quivering and chaotic, heaving with the stress of its own vast bulk—under a hundred jealous leaders, the great army rushed upon us.

While they struggled thus, out galloped King Edward to our front, bareheaded, his jeweled warden staff held in his mailed fist, and, riding down our ranks, and checking the wanton fire of that gray charger, which curveted and proudly bent his glossy neck in answer to our cheering, proud, calm-eyed, and happy, King Edward spoke:

"My dear comrades and lieges linked with me in this adventure—you, my gallant English peers, whose shiny bucklers are the bright bulwarks of our throne, whose bold spirits and matchless constancy have made this just quarrel possible—oh! well I know I need not urge you to that valor which is your native breath. Right well I know how true your hearts do beat under their steely panoply; and there is false Philip watching you, and here am I! Yonder, behind us, the gray sea lies, and if we fall or fail it will be no broader for them than 'tis for us. Stand firm to-day, then, dear friends and cousins! Remember, every blow that's struck is struck for England, every foot you give of this fair hillside presages the giving of an ell of England. Remember, Philip's hungry hordes, like ragged lurchers in the slip, are lean with waiting for your patrimonies. Remember all this, and stand as strong to-day for me as I and mine shall stand for you.

"And you, my trusty English yeomen," said the soldier King—"you whose strong limbs were grown in pleasant England—oh! show me here the mettle of those same pastures! God! when I do turn from yonder hireling sea of shiny steel and mark how square your sturdy valor stands unto it—how your clear English eyes do look unfaltering into that yeasty flood of treachery—why, I would not have one single braggart yonder the less for you to lop and drive; I would not have that broad butt that Philip sets for us to shoot at the narrower by one single coward tunic!

"Yonder, I say, ride the lank, lusty Frenchmen who thirst to reeve your acres and father to-morrow, if so they may, your waiting wives and children. To it, then, dear comrades—upon them, for King Edward and for fair England's honor! Strike home upon these braggart bullies who would heir the lion's den; strike for St. George and England! And may God judge now 'tween them and us!"

AS THE King finished, five thousand English archers went forward in a long gray line, and, getting into shot of the first ranks of the enemy, drew out their long bows from their cowhide cases and set the bowfeet to the ground and bent and strung them; and then it would have done you good to see the glint of the sunshine on the hail of arrows that swept the hillside and plunged into those seething ranks below.

The close-massed foemen writhed and winced under that remorseless storm. The Genoese in front halted and slung their crossbows, and fired whole sheaves of bolts upon us, that fell as stingless as reed javelins on a village green, for a passing rainstorm had wet their bowstrings and the slack sinews scarce sent a bolt inside our fences, while every shaft we sped plunged deep and fatal.

Loud laughed the English archers at this, and plied their biting flights of arrows with fierce energy; and, all in wild confusion, the mercenaries y e l l e d and screamed and pulled their ineffectual weapons, and, stern shut off from advance by the flying rain of good gray shafts, and crushed from behind by the crowding throng, tossed in wild confusion, and broke and fled.

Then did I see a sight to spoil a soldier's dreams. As the coward bowmen fell back, the men-at-arms behind them, wroth to be so long shut off the foe, and pressed in turn by the troops in rear, fell on them, and there, under our eyes, we saw the first rank of Philip's splendid host at war with the second. We saw the billmen of fair Bascquerard and Bruneval lop down the olive mercenaries from Roquemaure and the cities of the midland sea. We saw the savage Genoese falcons rip open the gay livery of Lyons and Bayonne, and all the while our shafts rained thick and fast among them and men fell dead by scores in that hideous turmoil—and none could tell whether 'twas friends or foes that slew them.

A wonderful day, indeed; but hard was the fighting ere it was done. My poor pen fails before all the crowded incident that comes before me, all the splendid episodes of a stirring combat, all the glitter and joy and misery, the proud exultation of that August morning and the black chagrin of its evening. Truth! But you must take as said a hundred times as much as I can tell you, and line continually my bare suggestions with our generous understanding.

Well though our archers stood the first brunt, the day was not left all to them. Soon the French footmen, thirsting for vengeance, had overridden and trampled upon their Genoese allies, and came at us up the slope, driving back our skirmishers as the white squall drives the wheeling seamews before it, and surged against our palisades, and came tossing and glinting down upon our halberdiers. The loud English cheer echoed the wild yelling of the Southerners: bill and pike, and sword and mace and dagger sent up a thunderous roar all down our front, while overhead the pennons gleamed in the dusty sunlight, and the carrion crows wheeled and laughed with hungry pleasure above that surging line. Gods! 'twas a good shock, and the crimson blood went smoking down to the rivulets, and the savage scream of battle went up into the sky as that long front of ours, locked fast in the burnished arms of France, heaved and strove, and bent now this way and now that, like some strong, well-matched wrestlers.

A good shock indeed! A wild tremendous scene of confusion there on the long grass of that autumn hill, with the dark woods behind on the ridge, and, down in front, the babbling river and the smoking houses of the ruined village. So vast was the extent of Philip's array that at times we saw it extend far to right and left of us; and so deep was it, that we who battled amid the thunder of its front could hear a mile back to their rear the angry hum of rage and disappointment as the chaotic troops, in the bitterness of the spreading confusion, struggled blindly to come at us.

Their very number was our salvation. That half of the great army which had safely crossed the stream lay along outside our palisades like some splendid, writhing helpless monster, and the long sell of their dead-locked masses, the long writhe of their fatal confusion, you could see heaving that glittering tide like the golden pulse of a summer sea pent up in a crescent shore. And we were that shore! All along our front the stout, unblenching English yeomen stood to it—the white English tunic was breast to breast with the leathern kirtles of Genoa and Turin. Before the frightful blows of those stalwart pikemen the yellow mail of the gay troopers of Châteauroux and Besaçon crackled like dry December leaves; the rugged boar-skins on the wide shoulders of Vosges peasants were no protection against their fiery thrust.

Down they lopped them, one and all, those strong, good English hedgemen, till our bloody foss was full—full of olive mercenaries from Tarascon and Arles—full of writhing Bisc and hideous screaming Genoese. And still we slew them, shoulder to shoulder, foot to foot, and still they swarmed against us, while we piled knight and vassal, serf and master, princeling and slave, all into that ditch in front.

The fair young boy and gray-bearded sire, the freeman and the serf, the living and the dead, all went down together, till a broad rampart stretched along our swinging, shouting front, and the glittering might of France surged up to that human dam and broke upon it like the futile waves, and went to pieces, and fell back under the curling yellow stormcloud of mid-battle.

MEANWHILE, on right and left, the day was fiercely fought. Far upon the one hand the wild Irish kerns were repelling

all the efforts of Beaupreau's light footmen, and pulling down the gay horsemen of fair Bourges by the distant Loire. Three times those squadrons were all among them, and three times the wild red sons of Shannon and the dim Atlantic hills fell on them like the wolves of their own rugged glens, and hamstrung the sleek Southern chargers, and lopped the fallen riders, and repelled each desperate foray, making war doubly hideous with their clamor and the bloody scenes of butchery that befell among their prisoners after each onset.

And, on the other crescent of our battle, my dear, tuneful, licentious Welshmen were out upon the slope, driving off with their native ardor one and all that came against them, and, worked up to a fine fury by their chanting minstrels, whose shrill piping came ever and anon upon the wind, they pressed the Southerners hard, and again and again drove them down the hill—a good, gallant crew that I have ever liked, with half a dozen vices and a score of virtues!

I had charged by them one time in the day, and, cantering back with my troop behind their ranks, I saw a young Welsh chieftain on a rock beside himself with valor and battle. He was leaping and shouting as none but a Welshman could or would, and beating his sword upon his round Cymric shield, the while he yelled to his fighting vassals below a fierce old British battle song.

Oh! it was very strange for me, pent in that shining Plantagenet mail, to listen to those wild, hot words of scorn and hatred—I who had heard those words so often when the ancestors of that chanting boy were not begotten—I who had heard those fiery verses sung in the red confusion of forgotten wars—I who could not help pulling a rein a moment as that son of exultation, full of words and phrases none but I could fully understand, swelled up through the eddying war-dust over the Welshmen's reeling line.

I, so strong and young; I, who yet was more ancient than the singer's vaguest traditions—I stopped a moment and listened to him, full of remembrance and sad wonder, while the paean-dirge of victory and death swelled to the sky over the clamor of the combat. And then—as a mavis drops into the covert when his morning song is done—the Welshman finished, and, mad with the wine of battle, leaped straight into the tossing sea below, and was engulfed and swallowed up like a white spume-flake on the bosom of a wave.

For three long hours the battle raged from east to west, and men fought foot to foot and hand to hand, and 'twas stab and hack and thrust, and the pounding of ownerless horses and the wail of dying men, and the husky cries of captains, and the interminable clash of steel on steel, so that no man could see all the fight at once, save the good King alone, who sat back there at his vantage-point.

It was all this, I say; and then, about seven in the afternoon, when the sun was near his setting, it seemed, all in a second, as though the whole west were in a glow, and there was Lord Alençon sweeping down upon our right with the splendid array of Philip's chivalry, their pennons a-dance above and their endless ranks of spears in serried ranks below.

There was no time to think, it seemed. A wild shout of fear and wonder went up from the English host. Our reserves were turned to meet the new danger; the archers poured their gray-goose shafts upon the thundering squadrons; princes and peers and knights were littered on the road that brilliant host was treading—and then they were among the English yeomen with a frightful crash of flesh and blood and horse and steel that drowned all other sound of battle with its cruel import! Jove! What strong stuff the English valor is! Those good Saxon countrymen, sure in the confidence of our great brotherhood, kept their line under that hideous shock as though each fought for a crown, and, shoulder to shoulder and hand to hand, an impenetrable living wall derided the terrors of the golden torrent that burst upon them.

Happy King to yield such stuff—thrice-happy country that can rear it! In vain wave upon wave burst upon those hardy islanders, in vain the stern voice of Alençon sent rank after rank of proud lords and courtly gallants upon those rugged English husbandmen—they would not move, and when they would not the Frenchmen hesitated.

'Twas our moment! I had had my leave just then new from the King, and did not need it twice. I saw the great front of French cavalry heaving slow upon our hither face, galled by the arrow-rain that never ceased, and irresolute whether to come on once again or go back, and I turned to the cohort of my own dear veterans.

I do not know what I said, the voice came

thick and husky in my throat, I could but wave my iron mace above my head and point to the Frenchmen. And then all those good gray spears went down as though 'twere one hand that lowered them, and all the chargers moved at once. I led them round the English front, and there, clapping spurs to our ready coursers' flanks, five hundred of us, knit close together, with one heart beating one measure, shot out into array, and, sweeping across the slope, charged boldly ten thousand Frenchmen!

WE RACED across the Crécy slope, drinking the fierce wine of expectant conflict with every breath, our straining chargers thundering in tumultuous rhythm over the short space between, and, in another minute, we broke upon the foemen.

Bravely they met us. They turned when we were two hundred paces distant, and advancing with their silken fleur de lys, and pricking up their chargers, weary with pursuit and battle, they came at us as you will see a rock-thwarted wave run angry back to meet another strong incoming surge. And as those two waves meet, and toss and leap together, and dash their strength into each other, the while the white spume flies away behind them, and, with thunderous arrogance, the stronger bursts through the other and goes streaming on triumphant through all the white boil and litter of the fight, so fell we on those princelings.

'Twas just a blinding crash, the coming together of two great walls of steel! I felt I was being lifted like a dry leaf on the summit of that tremendous conjunction, and I could but ply my mace blindly on those glittering casques that shone all round me, and, I now remember, cracked under its meteor sweep like ripe nuts under an urchin's hammer. So dense were the first moments of that shock of chivalry that even our horses fought. I saw my own charger rip open the glossy neck of another that bore a Frenchman; and near by—though I thought naught of it then—a great black Flemish stallion, mad with battle, had a wounded soldier in its teeth, and was worrying and shaking him as a lurcher worries a screaming leveret.

So dense was the throng we scarce could ply our weapons, and one dead knight fell right athwart my saddle-bow; and a flying hand, lopped by some mighty blow, still grasping the hilt of a broken blade, struck me on the helm; the warm red blood spurting from a headless trunk half blinded me. And, all the time, overhead the French lilies kept stooping at the English lion, and now one went down and then the other, and the roar of the host went up into the sky, and the dust and turmoil, the savage uproar, the unheard, unpitied shriek of misery and the cruel exultation of the victor, and then—how soon I know not—we were traveling!

Ah! by the great God of battles, we were moving—and forward—the mottled ground was slipping by us—and the French were giving! I rose in my stirrups, and, hoarse as any raven that ever dipped a black wing in the crimson pools of battle, shouted to my veterans.

I had fought least well of any in that grim company, and now, with one accord, we pushed the foeman hard. We saw the great roan Flanders jennets slide back upon their haunches, and slip and plunge in the purple quagmire we had made, and then—each like a good ship well freighted—lurch and go down, and we stamped beribboned horse and jeweled rider alike into the red frothy marsh under our hoofs. And the fleur de lys sank, and the silver roe of Mayenne, proud Montereau's azure falcon, and the white crescent of Donzenac went down, and Bernay's yellow cornsheaf and Sarreburg's golden blazon, with many another gaudy pennon, and then, somehow, the foemen broke and dissolved before our heavy, foam-streaked chargers, and, as we gasped hot breath through our close helmet-bars, there came a clear space before us, with flying horsemen scouring off on every hand.

The day was wellnigh won, and I could see that far to left the English yeomen were driving the scattered clouds of Philip's footmen pell-mell down the hill, and then we went again after his horsemen, who were gathering sullenly upon the lower slopes. Over the grass we scoured like a brown whirlwind, and in a minute were all among the French lordlings. And down they went, horse and foot, riders and banners, crowding and crushing each other in a confusion terrible to behold, now suffering even more from their own chaos than from our lances.

Jove! brother trod brother down that day, and comrade lay heaped on living comrade under that red confusion. The pennons—such as had out-lived the storm so far—were all entangled sheaves, and sank, whole stocks at once, into the floundering sea below. And kings and princes, hinds and yeomen, gasped and choked and glowered at us, so fast-locked in the dead-

ly wedge that went slowly roaring back before our fiery onsets, they could not move an arm or foot!

The tale is nearly told. Everywhere the English were victorious, and the Frenchmen fell in wild dismay before them. Many a bold attempt they made to turn the tide, and many a desperate sally and gallant stand the fading daylight witnessed. The old King of Bohemia, to whom daylight and night were all as one, with fifty knights, their reins knotted fast together, charged us, and died, one and all, like the good soldiers that they were.

And Philip, over yonder, wrung his white hands and pawned his revenue in vows to the unmoved saints; and the soft, braggart peers that crowded round him gnawed their lips and frowned, and looked first at the ruined, smoldering fight, then back —far back—to where, in the south, friendly evening was already holding out to them the dusky cover of the coming night. It was good day indeed, and may England at her need ever fight so well!

WOULD that I might in this truthful chronicle have turned to other things while the long roar of exultation goes up from famous Crécy and the strong wine of well-deserved victory filled my heart! Alas! there is that to tell which mars the tale and dims the shine of conquest.

Already thirty thousand Frenchmen were slain, and the long swathes lay all across the swelling ground like the black rims of weed when the sea goes back. Only here and there the battle still went on, where groups and knots of men were fighting, and I, with my good comrade Flamaucoeur, now at sunset, was in such a mêlée on the right. All through the day he had been like a shadow to me—and shame that I have said so little of it! Where I went there he was, flitting in his gray armor close behind me; quick watchful, faithful, all through the turmoil and dusty warmist; escaping, Heaven knows how, a thousand dangers; riding his light war-horse down the bloody lanes of war as he ever rode it, as if they two were one; gentle, retiring, more expert in parying thrust and blow than in giving—that dear friend of mine, with a heart made stout by consuming love against all its native fears, had followed me.

And now the spent battle went smoldering out, and we there thought 'twas all extinguished, when, all on a sudden—I tell it less briefly than it happened—a desperate band of foemen bore down on us, and, as we joined, my charger took a hurt, and went crashing over, and threw me full into the rank tangle of the under fight. Thereon the yeomen, seeing me fall, set up a cry, and, with a rush, bore the Frenchmen four spear-lengths back, and lifted me, unhurt, from the littered ground. They gave me a sword, and, as I turned, from the foeman's ranks, waving a beamy sword, plumed by a towering crest of nodding feathers and covered by a mighty shield, a gigantic warrior stepped out.

Hoth! I can see him now, mad with defeat and shame, striding on foot toward us—a giant in glittering, pearly armor, that shone and glittered as the last rays of the level sun against the black backing of the evening sky, as though its wearer had been the Archangel Gabriel himself! It did not need to look upon him twice: 'twas the Lord High Constable of France, himself—the best swordsman, the sternest soldier, and the brightest star of chivalry in the whole French firmament. And if that noble peer was hot for fight, no less was I. Stung by my fall, and glorying in such a foeman, I ran to meet him, and there, in a little open space, while our soldiers leaned idly on their weapons and watched, we fought. The first swoop of the great Constable's humming falchion lit slanting on my shield and shore my crest. Then I let out, and the blow fell on his shield, and sent the giant staggering back, and chipped the pretty quarterings of a hundred ancestors from that gilded target.

At it again we went, and round and round, raining our thunderous blows upon each other with noise like boulders crashing down a mountain valley. I did not think there was a man within the four seas who could have stood against me so long as that fierce and bulky Frenchman did. For a long time we fought so hard and stubbornly that the blood-miry soil was stamped into a circle where we went round and round, raining our blows so strong, quick, and heavy that the air was full of tumult, and glaring at each other over our morion bars, while our burnished scales and links flew from us at every deadly contact, and the hot breath steamed into the air, and the warm, smarting blood crept from between our jointed harness.

Yet neither would bate a jot, but, with fiery hearts and heaving breasts and pain-bursting muscles, kept to it, and stamped round and round those grimy, steaming lists, redoubtable, indomitable, and mad with the lust of killing.

And then—Jove! how near spent I was!

—the great Constable, on a sudden, threw away his many-quartered shield, and, whirling up his sword with both hands high above his head, aimed a frightful blow at me. No mortal blade or shield or helmet could have withstood that mighty stroke! I did not try, but, as it fell, stepped nimbly back—'twas a well-tried trick, learned in the distant time—and then, as the falchion-point buried itself a foot deep in the ground, and the giant staggered forward, I flew at him like a wild cat, and through the close helmet-bars, through teeth and skull and the three-fold solid brass behind, thrust my sword so straight and fiercely, the smoking point came two feet out beyond his nape, and, with a lurch and cry, the great peer tottered and fell dead before me.

Now comes that thing to which all other things are little, the fellest gleam of angry steel of all the steel that had shone since noon, the cruelest stab of ten thousand stabs, the bitterest cry of any that had marred the full yellow circle of that August day! I had dropped on one knee by the champion, and, taking his hand, had loosed his visor, and shouted to two monks, who were pattering with bare feet about the field (for, indeed, I was sorry, if perchance any spark of life remained, so brave a knight should die unshriven to his contentment), and thus was forgotten for a moment the fight, the confronting rows of foemen, and how near I was to those who had seen their great captain fall by my hands.

Miserable, accursed oversight! I had not knelt by my fallen enemy a moment, when suddenly my men set up a cry behind me, there was a rush of hoofs, and, ere I could regain my feet or snatch my sword or shield, a great black French rider, like a shadowy fury dropped from the sullen evening sky, his plumes all streaming behind him, his head low down between his horse's ears, and his long blue spear in rest, was thundering in mid career against me not a dozen paces distant.

As I am a soldier and have lived many ages by my sword, that charge must have been fatal. And would that it had been! How can I write it? Even as I started to my feet, before I could lift a brand or offer one light parry to that swift, keen point, the horseman was upon me. And as he closed, as that great vengeance-driven tower of steel and flesh loomed above me, there was a scream—a wild scream of fear and love—(and I clap my hands to my ears now, so many years afterward, to deaden the undying vibrations of that sound—and Flamaucoeur had thrown himself 'tween me and the spear-point, had taken it, fenceless, unwarded, full in his side, and I saw the cruel shaft break off short by his mail as those four, both horses and both riders, went headlong to the ground.

Up rose the English with an angry shout, and swept past us, killing the black champion as they went, and driving the French before them far down into the valley. Then ran I to my dear comrade, and knelt and lifted him against my knee. He had swooned, and I groaned in bitterness and fear when I saw the strong red tide that was pulsing from his wound and quilting his bright English armor. With quick, nervous fingers—bursting such rivets as would not yield, all forgetful of his secret, and that I had never seen him unhelmed before—I unloosed his casque, and then gently drew it from his head.

With a cry I dropped the great helm, and wellnigh let even my fair burden fall, for there, against my knee, her white, sweet face against my iron bosom, her fair yellow hair, that had been coiled in the emptiness of her helmet, all adrift about us, those dear curled lips that had smiled so tenderly and indulgently on me, her gentle life ebbing from her at every throe, was not Flamaucoeur, the unknown knight, the foolish and lovesick boy, but that wayward, luckless girl Isobel of Oswaldston herself!

And if I had been sorry for my companion in arms, think how the pent grief and surprise filled my heart, as there, dying gently in my arms, was the fair girl whom, by a tardy, late-born love, new sprung into my empty heart, I had come to look upon as the point of my lonely world, my fair heritage in an empty epoch, for the asking!

SOON she moved a little, and sighed, and looked up straight into my eyes. As she did so the color burnt for a moment with a pale glow in her cheeks, and I felt the tremor of her body as she knew her secret was a secret no longer. She lay there bleeding and gasping painfully upon my breast, and then she smiled and pulled my plumed head down to her and whispered:

"You are not angry?"

Angry? Gods! My heart was heavier than it had been all that day of din and carnage, and my eyes were dim and my lips were dry with a knowledge of the coming grief as I bent and kissed her. She took the kiss unresisting, as though it were her right, and gasped again:

"And you understand now all—everything? Why I ransomed the French maiden? Why I would not write for thee to thy unknown sweetheart?"

"I know—I know, sweet girl!"

"And you bear no ill-thought of me?"

"The great Heaven you believe in be my witness, sweet Isobel! I love you, and know of nothing else!"

She lay back upon me, seeming to sleep for a moment or two, then started up and clapped her hands to her ears, as if to shut out the sound of bygone battle that no doubt was still thundering through them, then swooned again, while I bent in sorrow over her and tried in vain to soothe and stanch the great wound that was draining out her gentle life.

She lay so still and white that I thought she were already dead; but presently she gasped, her eyes opened, and she looked wistfully to where the western sky was hanging pale over the narrow English sea.

"How far to England, dear friend?"

"A few leagues of land and water, sweet maid!"

"Could I reach it, dost thou think?" But then, on an instant, shaking her head, she went on: "Nay, do not answer; I was foolish to ask! Oh! dearest, dearest sister Alianora! My father—my gentlest father! Oh! tell them, Sir, from me—and beg them to forgive!" And she lay back white upon my shoulder.

She lay, breathing slow, upon me for a spell, then, on a sudden, her fair fingers tightened in my mailed hand, and she signed that she would speak again.

"Remember that I loved thee!" whispered Isobel, and, with those last words, the yellow head fell back upon my shoulder, the blue eyes wavered and sank, and her spirit fled.

Back I went then, by the lines of gleeful shouting troops—back by where the laughing English knights, with visors up, were talking of the day's achievements—back by where the proud King, hand in hand with his brave boy, was thanking the south English yeomen for Crécy and another kingdom—back by where the champing, foamy chargers were picketed in rows—back by the knots of archers, all, like honest workmen, wiping down their unstrung bows—back by groups of sullen prisoners and gaudy heaps of captured pennons, we passed.

In front four good yeomen bore Isobel upon their trestled spears; then came I, bareheaded—I, kinsmanless, to her in all that camp the only kin; and then our drooping chargers, empty-saddled, led by young squires behind, and seeming—good beasts!—to sniff and scent the sorrow of that fair burden on ahead. So we went through the victorious camp to our lodgment, and there they placed Isobel on her bare soldier couch, her feet to the door of her soldier tent, and left us.

CHAPTER XIII

UNWASHED, unfed, my dinted armor on me still—battle-stained and rent—unhelmeted, ungloved, my sword and scabbard cast by my hollow shield in a dark corner of the tent, I watched, tearless and stern, all that night by the bier of the pale white girl who had given so much for me and taken so poor a reward. I, who, so fanciful and wayward, had thought I might safely toy with the sweet tender of her affection—sprung how or why I knew not—and take or leave it as seemed best to my convenience, brooded, all the long black watch, over that gentle broken vessel that lay there white and still before me, alike indifferent to gifts or giving.

And now and then I would start up from the stool I had drawn near to her, and pace, with bent head and folded arms, the narrow space, remembering how warm the rising tide of love had been flowing in my heart for that fair dead thing so short a time before. "So short a time before!" Why, it was but yesterday that she wrote for me that missive to herself: and I, fool and blind, could not read the light that shone behind those gray visor-bars as she penned the lines, or translate the tremor that shook that sweet scribe's fingers, or recognize the heave of the maiden bosom under its steel and silk!

I groaned in shame and grief, and bent over her, thinking how dear things might have been had they been otherwise, and loving her no whit the less because she was so cold, immovable, saying I know not what into her listless ear, and nourishing in loneliness and solitude, all those long hours, the black flower of the love that was alight too late in my heart.

I would not eat or rest, though my dinted armor was heavy as lead upon my spent and weary limbs—though the leather jerkin under that was stiff with blood and sweat, and opened my bleeding wounds each time I moved. I would not be eased of one single smart, I thought—let the cursed seams and gashes sting and bite, and my hot flesh burn beneath them! mayhap 'twould ease the bitter anger of my

mind—and I repulsed all those who came with kind or curious eyes to the tent door, and would not hear of ease or consolation.

Even the King came down, and, in respect to that which was within, dismounted and stood like a simple knight without, asking if he might see me. But I would not share my sorrow with any one, and sent the page who brought me word that the King was standing in the porch to tell him so; and, accomplished in courtesy as in war, the victorious monarch bent his head, and mounted, and rode silently back to his own lodging.

The gay gallants who had known me came on the whisper of the camp one by one (though all were hungry and weary), and lifted the flap a little, and said something such as they could think of, and peered at me, grimly repellent, in the shadows, and peered curiously at that fair white soldier lain on the trestles in her knightly gear so straight and trim, and went away without daring to approach more nearly. My veterans clipped their jolly soldier-songs, though they had well-deserved them, and took their suppers silently by the flickering camp-fire.

Once they sent him among them that I was known to like the best with food and wine and clean linen, but I would not have it, and he went back as gladly as he who retreats skin-whole from the cave where a bear keeps watch and ward.

Last of all there came the fall of quieter feet upon the ground, and, in place of the clank of soldier harness, the rattle of the beads of rosaries and cross; and I looked out. There was the King's own chaplain, bareheaded, and three gray friars behind him. I needed ghostly comfort just then as little as I needed temporal, and at first I thought to repulse them surlily; but, reflecting that the maid had ever been devout and held such men as these in high esteem, I suffered them to enter, and stood back while they did by her the ceremonial of their office.

They made all smooth and fair about, and lit candles at her feet and gave her a crucifix, and sprinkled water, and knelt, throwing their great black s h a d o w s athwart the white shrine of my dear companion, the while they told their beads and the chaplain prayed. When they had done, the priest rose and touched me on the arm.

"Son," he said, "the King has given an earl's ransom to be expended in masses for this girl's soul."

"Father," I replied, "tender the King my thanks for what was well meant and as princely generous as becomes him. But tell him all the prayers thy convent could count from now till the great ending would not bleach this white maid's soul an atom whiter. Earn your ransom if you will, but not here; leave me to my sorrow."

"I will give your answer, soldier; but these holy brothers—the King wished it—must stay and share your vigil until the morning. It is their profession; their prayerful presence can ward off the spirits of darkness; weariness never sits on their eyes as it sits now on thine. Let them stay with thee; it is only fit."

"Not for another ransom, priest! I will not brook their confederate tears—I will not wing this fair girl's soul with their hireling prayers—out, good fellows, my mood is wondrous short, and I would not willingly do that which to-morrow I might repent of."

"But, brother. . . ." said one monk gently.

"Hence—hence! I have no brothers—go! Can you look on me here in this extremity, can you see my hacked and bleeding harness, and the shine of bitter grief in my eyes, and stand pattering there of prayers and sympathy? Out! Out! or by every lying relic in thy cloisters I add some other saints to thy chapter rolls!"

They went, and as the tent-flap dropped behind them and the sound of their sandaled feet died softly away into the gathering night, I turned, sorrowful and sad, to my watch. I drew a stool to the maiden bier, and sat and took her hand, so white and smooth and cold, and looked at the fair young face that death had made so passionless—that sweet mirror upon which, the last time we had been together in happiness, the rosy light of love was shining and sweet presumption and maiden shame were striving.

And as I looked and held her hand the dim tent-walls fell away, and the painted lists rose up before me, and the littered flowers my quick, curveting c h a r g e r stamped into the earth, and the blare of the heralds' trumpets, the flutter of the ribbons and the gay tires of brave lords and fair ladies all centered around the daïs where those two fair sisters sat. Gods! was that long sigh the night-wind circling about my tent-flap or in truth the sigh of slighted Isobel, as I rode past her chair with the victor's circlet on my spear-point and laid it at the footstool of her sister?

I BENT over that fair white corpse, so sick in mind and body that all the real was unreal and all the unreal true. I saw

"You shall not, must not go, wife, priestess, queen!" I entreated that shadowy form.

the painted pageantry of her father's hall once more.

I sat again, and presently the wavering shadows spread out into the likeness of great cedar branches casting their dusky shelter over the soft, sweet-scented ground, and, as the hushed air swayed to and fro those great velvet screens, Isobel stepped from them, all in white, and ran to me, and stopped, and clapped her hands before her eyes and on her throbbing bosom —then stretched those trembling fingers beseechingly to me fresh from that sweet companionship — then down upon her knees and clipped me round with her fair white arms and turned back her head and looked upon me with wild, wet, yearning eyes and cheeks that burned for love and shame.

I would not have it; I laughed with the bitter mockingness of one possessed by another love, and unwound those ivory bonds and pushed the fair maid back, and there against the dusk of leaf and branch she stood and wrung her fingers and beat her breast and spoke so sweetly and passionately, that even my icy mood half thawed under the white light of her reckless love. And I let her take my hand and hold and rain hot kisses on it and warm pattering tears, till all the strength was running from me, and I half turned and my fingers closed on hers—but, gods! how cold they were! And with a stifled cry I woke again in the little tent, to find my hand fast locked in the icy fingers of the dead.

It was a long, weary night, and, sad as was my watch and hectic as the visions which swept through my heavy head, I would not quicken by one willing hour of sleep the sad duties of that gray to-morrow which I knew must come. At times I sat and stared into the yellow tapers, living the brief spell of my last life again—all the episode and change, all the hurry and glitter, and unrest that was forever my portion—and then, in spite of resolution, I would doze to other visions, outlined more brightly on the black background of oblivion; and then I started up, my will all at war with tired Nature's sweet insistence, and paced in weary round our canvas cell, solitary but for those teeming thoughts and my own black shadow, which stalked, sullen and slow, ever beside me.

But who can deride the great mother for long? 'Twas sleep I needed, and she would have it; and so it came presently upon my heavy eyelids—strong, deep sleep as black and silent as the abyss of the nether world. My head sank upon my arm, my arm upon the foot of the velvet bier, and there, in my mail, under the thin taper-light, worn out with battle and grief, I slept.

I know not how long it was, some hours most likely, but after a time the strangest feeling took possession of me in that slumber, and a fine ethereal terror, purged of gross material fear, possessed my spirit. I awoke—not with the pleasant drowsiness which marks refreshment, but wide and staring, and my black Phrygian hair, without the cause of sight or sound, stood stiff upon my head, for something was moving in the silent tent.

I glared around, yet nothing could be seen: the lights were low in their sockets, but all else was in order: my piled shield and helmet lay there in the shadows, our warlike implements and gear were all as I had seen them last, no noise or vision broke the blank, and yet—and yet—a coward chill sat on me, for here and there was moving something unseen, unheard, unfelt by outer senses.

I rose, and, fearful and yet angry to be cowed by a dreadful nothing, stared into every corner and shadow, but naught was there. Then I lifted a dim taper, and held it over the face of the dead girl and stared amazed! Were it given to mortals to die twice, that girl had! But a short time before and her sweet face had worn the reflection of that dreadful day: there was a pallid fright and pain upon it we could not smooth away, and now some wonderful strange thing had surely happened, and all the unrest was gone, all the pained dissatisfaction and frightened wonder.

The maid was still and smooth and happy-looking. Hoth! as I bent over her she looked just as one might look who reads aright some long enigma and finds relief with a sigh from some hard problem. She slept so wondrous still and quiet, and looked so marvelous fair now, and contented, that it purged my fear, and, strong in that fair presence—how could I be else? —I sat, and after a time, I slept again.

I DOZED and dozed and dozed, in happy forgetfulness of the present while the black night wore on to morning, and the last faint flushes of the priestly tapers played softly in their sockets; and then again I started up with every nerve within me thrilling, my clenched fists on my knees, and my wide eyes glaring into the mid gloom. For that strange nothing was moving gently once more about us, fanning me, it seemed, with the rhythmed swing of unseen draperies, voiceless, pres-

enceless, and yet so real and tangible to some unknown inner sense that hailed it from within me that I could almost say that now 'twas here and now 'twas there, and locate it with trembling finger, although, in truth, nothing moved or stirred.

I looked at the maid. She was as she had been; then into every dusky place and corner, but nothing showed; then rose and walked to the tent-flap and lifted it and looked out. Down in the long valley below the somber shadows were seamed by the winding of the pale river; and all away on the low meadows, piled thick and deep with the black mounds of dead foemen, the pale marsh lights were playing amid the corpses—leaping in ghostly fantasy from rank to rank, and heap to heap, coalescing, separating, shining, vanishing, all in the unbroken twilight silence. And those somber fields below were tapestried with the thin wisps of white mist that lay in the hollows, and were shredded out into weird shapes and forms over the black bosom of the near-spent night.

Up above, far away in the east, where low hills lay flat in the distance, the lappet fringe of the purple sky was dipped in the pale saffron of the coming sun, and overhead a few white stars were shining. And now and then the swart, almost unseen wings of a raven went gently beating through the star-lit void. And as I watched, I saw him and his brother check over the Crécy ridges and with hungry croak, like black spirits, circle round and drop one after another through the thin white veils of vapor that shrouded prince, chiefs, and vassals, peer and peasant, in those deep long swathes of the black harvest we cut, but left ungarnered, yesterday.

Near around me the English camp was all asleep, tired and heavy with the bygone battle, the listless pickets on the misty, distant mounds hung drooping over their piled spears, the metaled chargers' heads were asag, they were so weary as they stood among the shadows by their untouched fodder, and the damp pennons and bannerets over the knightly porches scarce lifted on the morning air!

That air came cool and sad yonder from the English sea, and wandered, melancholy, down our lifeless, empty canvas streets, lifting the loose tent-flaps, and sighing as it strayed among the sleeping groups, stirring with its unseen feet the white ashes of the dead camp-fires, the only presence in all the place—sad, silent, and listless. I dropped the hangings over the chill morning glimmer, the camp of sleeping warriors and dusty valley of the dead, and turned again to my post. I was not sleepy now, nor afraid—even though as I entered a draught of misty outer air entered with me and the last atom of priestly taper shone fitful and yellow for a moment upon the dead Isobel, and then went out.

I sat down by the maid in the chill dark, and looked sadly on the ground, the while my spirits were as low as you may well guess, and the wind went moaning round and round the tent. But I had not sat a moment—scarcely twenty breathing spaces—when a faint, fine scent of herb-cured wolf-skins came upon the air, and strange shadows began to stand out clear upon the floor.

I saw my weapons shining with a pale refulgence, and—by all the gods!—the walls of the tent were a-shimmer with pale luster! With a half-stifled cry I leaped to my feet, and there—there across the bier—though you tell me I lie a thousand times—there, calm, refulgent, looking gently in the dead girl's face, splendid in her ruddy savage beauty, bending over that white marbeled body, so ghostly thin and yet so real, so true in every line and limb, was Blodwen—Blodwen, the British chieftainess — my thousand - years - dead wife.

STANDING there serene and lovely, with that strange lavender glow about her, was that wonderful and dreadful shade—holding the dead girl's hand and looking at her closely with a face that spoke of neither resentment nor sorrow. I stood and stared at them, every wit within me numb and cold by the suddenness of it, and then the apparition slowly lifted her eyes to

mine, and I—the wildest sensations of the strong old love and brand-new fear possessed me. What! do you tell me that affection dies? Why, there in that shadowed tent, so long after, so untimely, so strange and useless—all the old stream of the love I had borne for that beautiful slave-girl, though it had been cold and overlaid by other loves for centuries, welled up in my heart on a sudden.

I made half a pace toward her, I stretched a trembling, entreating hand, yet drew it back, for I was mortal and I feared; and an ecstasy of pleasure filled my throbbing veins, and my love said: "On! she was thine once and must be now—down to thy knees and claim her!—what matters anything, if thou hast a lien upon such splendid loveliness!" and my coward flesh hung back cold and would not, and now back and now forward I swayed with these contending feelings, while that fair shadow eyed me with the most impenetrable calm. At last she spoke, with never a tone in her voice to show she remembered it was centuries since she had spoken before.

"My Phoenician," she said in soft monotone, looking at the dead Isobel who lay pale in the soft-blue shine about her, "this was a pity. You are more dull-witted than I thought."

I bent my head but could not speak, and so she asked:

"Didst really never guess who it was yonder steel armor hid?"

"Not once," I said, "O sweetly dreadful!"

"Nor who it was that stirred the white maid to love over there in her home?"

"What!" I gasped. "Was that you?—was that your face, then, in truth I saw, reflecting in this dead girl's when first I met her?"

"Why, yes, good merchant. And how you could not know it passes all comprehension."

"And then, it was you, dear and dreadful, who moved her? Jove! 'twas you who filled her beating pulses there down by the cedars, it was you who prompted her hot tongue to that passionate wooing? But why—why?"

That shadow looked away for a moment, and then turned upon me one fierce, fleeting glance of such strange, concentrated, unquenchable, impatient love that it numbed my tongue and stupefied my senses, and I staggered back, scarce knowing whether I were answered or were not.

Presently she went on. "Then, again, you are a little forgetful at times, my master—so full of your petty loves and wars it vexes me."

"Vexes you! That were wonderful indeed; yet, 'tis more wonderful that you submit. One word to me—to come but one moment and stand shining there as now you do—and I should be at your feet, strange, incomparable."

"It might be so, but that were supposing such moments as these were always possible. Dost not notice, Phoenician, how seldom I have been to thee like this, and yet, remembering that I forget thee not, that mayhap I love thee still, canst thou doubt but that wayward circumstance fits to my constant wish but seldom?"

"Yet you are immortal; time and space seem nothing; barriers and distance—all those things that shackle men—have no meaning for you. All thy being formed on the structure of a wish and every earthly law subservient to your fancy, how is it you can do so much and yet so little, and be at once so dominant and yet so feeble?"

"I told you, dear friend, before, that with new capacities new laws arise. I near forget how far I once could see—what was the edge of that shallow world you live in—where exactly the confines of your powers and liberty are set. But this I know for certain, that, while with us the possible widens out into splendid vagueness, the impossible still exists."

"And do you really mean, then, that fate is still the stronger among you?—this fair girl, here, sweet shadow! Oh! with one of those terrible and shining arms crossed there on thy bosom, couldst thou not have guided into happy void that fatal spear that killed? Surely, surely, it were so easy!"

The priestess dropped her fair head, and over her dim-white shoulders, and her pleasant-scented, hazy wolf-skins her ruddy hair, all agleam in that strange refulgence, shone like a cascade of sleeping fire. Then she looked up and replied, in low tones:

"The swimmer swims and the river runs, the wished-for point may be reached or it may not, the river is the stronger."

Somehow, I felt that my shadowy guest was less pleased than before, so I thought a moment and then said: "Where is she now?" and glanced at Isobel.

"The novice," smiled Blodwen, "is asleep."

"Oh, wake her!" I cried, "for one moment, for half a breath, for one moiety of a pulse, and I will never ask thee other questions."

"Insatiable! incredulous! how far will thy reckless love and wonder go? Must I lay out before thy common eyes all the things of the unknown for you to sample as you did your bags of fig and olive?"

"I loved her before, and I love her still, even as I loved and still love thee. Does she know this?"

"She knows as much as you know little. Look!" and the shadow spread out one violet hand over that silent face.

I looked, and then leaped back with a cry of fear and surprise. The dead girl was truly dead, not a muscle of a finger moved, yet, as at that bidding, I turned my eyes upon her there under the tender glowing shadow of that wondrous palm, a faint flush of colorless light rose up within her face, and on it I read, for one fleeting moment, such inexplicable knowledge, such extraordinary felicity, such impenetrable contentment, that I stood spellbound, all of a tremble, while that wondrous radiance died away even quicker than it had risen. God! 'twas like the shine of the herald dawn on a summer morning, it was like the flush on the water of a coming sunrise—I drew my hand across my face and looked up, expecting the chieftainess would have gone away, but she was still there.

"ARE you satisfied for the moment, dear trader, or would you catechize me as you did just now yonder by the fire under the altar in the circle?"

"Just now!' I exclaimed, as her words swept back to me the remembrance of the stormy night in the old days when that shade had appeared before—

"Why, Blodwen, forests have been seeded, and grown venerable, and decayed about those stones since we were there!"

"Well, maybe they have. I now remember that interval you call a year, and what strange store we set by it, and I dimly recollect," said the dreamy spirit, "what wide-asunder episodes those were between the green flush of your forests and the yellow. But now—why, the grains of sand here on thy tent-floor are not set more close together—do not seem more one simple whole to you, than your trivial seasons do to me. Ah! dear merchant, and as you smile to see the ripples of the sea sparkle a moment in frolic chase of one another, and then be gone into the void from whence they came, so do we lie and watch thy petty years shine for a moment on the smooth bosom of the immense."

Deep, strange, and weird seemed her words to me that night, and much she said more than I have told I could not understand. I sat with bent head and crossed arms full of strange perplexity of feeling, now glancing at the dead soldier-maid I loved, and then looking at that comely column of blue woman-vapor, that sat so placid on the foot of the bier and spoke so simply of such wondrous things.

For an hour we talked, and then on a sudden Blodwen started to her feet and stood in listening attitude. "They are coming, Phoenician," she cried, and pointed to the door.

I arose with a strange, uneasy feeling and looked out. The gray dawn had spread from sky to sky, and an angry flush was over all the air. The morning wind blew cold and melancholy, and the shrouded mists, like bands of pale specters, were trooping up the bloody valley before it, but otherwise not a soul was moving, not a sound broke the ghostly stillness. I dropped the awning, and shook my head at the fair priestess, whereon she smiled superiorly, as one might at a wayward child, and for a minute or two we spoke again together. Then up she got once more, tall and stately, with dilated nostrils and the old proud, expectant look I had seen on her sweet red face so often as we together, hand in hand, and heart to heart, had galloped out to tribal war. "They come, Phoenician, and I must go," she whispered, and again she pointed to the tent-door, though never a sound or footfall broke the stillness.

"You shall not, must not go, wife, priestess, Queen!" I cried, throwing myself on my knee at those shadowy feet, and extending my longing arms. "Oh! you that can awake, put me to sleep—you, that can read to the finish of every half-told tale, relieve me of the long record of my life! Oh, stay and mend my loneliness, or, if you go, let me come too—I ask not how or whither."

"Not yet," she said, "not yet. . . ." And then, while more seemed actually upon her lips, I did hear the sound of footfalls outside, and, wondering, I sprang to the curtain and lifted it.

There, outside, standing in the first glint of the yellow sunshine, were some half-dozen of my honest veterans, all with spades and picks and in their leathern doublets.

"You see, Sir," said the spokesman, sorrowfully, the while he scraped the half-dry clay from off his trenching spade, "we have come round for our brave young cap-

tain—for the sweet lady, Sir—the first. Presently we shall be very busy, and we thought mayhap you would like this over as soon and quiet as might be."

They had come for Isobel! I turned back into the tent, wondering what they would think of my strange guest, and she was gone! Not one ray of light was left behind—not one thread of her lavender skirt shone against my black walls—only the cold, pale girl there, stiff and white, with the shine of the dawn upon her dead face; and all my long pain and vigils told upon me, and, with a cry of pain and grief I could not mask, I dropped upon a seat and hid my face upon my arm.

I HAD had enough of France with that night, and three hours afterward went straight to the King and told him so, begging him to relieve me from my duty and let me get back to England, there to seek the dead maid's kindred, and find in some new direction forgetfulness of everything about the victorious camp. And to this the King replied, by commending my poor service far too highly, saying some fair kind things out of his smooth courtier tongue about her that was no more, and in good part upbraiding me for bringing, as he supposed I had brought, one so gentle-nurtured so far afield.

Then he said, "In faith, good soldier, were to-day but yesterday, and Philip's army still before us, we would not spare you even though our sympathy were yours as fully as 'tis now. But my misguided cousin is away to Paris, and his following are scattered to the four winds—for which God and all the saints be thanked! There is thus less need for thy strong arm and brave presence in our camp, and if you really would—why then, go, and may kind time heal those wounds which, believe me, I do most thoroughly assess.

"But stay a minute!" he cried after me. "How soon could you make a start?"

"I have no gear," I said, "and all my prisoners have been set free unransomed. I could start here, even as I stand."

"Soldierly answered," exclaimed the King; "a good knight should have no baggage but his weapons, and no attachments but his duty. Now look! I can both relieve you of irksome charges here and excuse with reason both ample and honorable your going. Come to me as soon as you have put by your armor. I will have ready for you a scrip sealed and signed—no messenger has yet gone over to England with the news of our glorious yesterday, and this charge shall be thine. Take the scrip straight to the Queen in England. There, no thanks, away! away! thou wilt be the most popular man in all my realm before the sun goes down, I fear."

I well knew how honorable was this business that the good King had planned for me, and made my utmost despatch. I gave my tent to one esquire and my spare armor to another. I ran and gripped the many bronzed hands of my tough companions, and told them (alas! unwittingly what a lie that were!) that I would come again; then I bestowed my charger (Jove! how reluctant was the gift!) upon the next in rank below me, and mounted Isobel's light war-horse, and paid my debts, and settled all accounts, and was back at our great captain's tent just as his chaplain was sanding the last lines upon that despatch which was to startle yonder fair country waiting so expectant across the narrow sea.

They rolled it up in silk and leather and put it in a metal cylinder, and shut the lid and sealed it with the King's own seal, and then he gave it to me.

"Take this," he said, "straight to the Queen, and give it into her own hands. Be close and silent, for you will know it were not meet to be robbed of thy news upon the road: but I need not tell you of what becomes a trusty messenger. There! so, strap it in thy girdle, and God speed thee—surely such big news was never packed so small before."

I left the Royal tent and vaulted into the ready saddle without. One hour, I thought, as the swift steed's head was turned to the westward, may take me to the shore, and two others may set me on foot in England. Then, if they have relays upon the road, three more will see me kneeling at the lady's feet, the while her fingers burst these seals. Lord! how they shall shout this afternoon! how the 'prentices shall toss their caps, and the fat burghers crowd the narrow streets, and every rustic hamlet green ring to the sky with gratitude! Ah! six hours I thought might do the journey; but read, and you shall see how long it took.

Scouring over the low grassy plains as hard as the good horse could gallop, with the gray sea broadening out ahead with every mile we went, full of thoughts of a busy past and uncertain future, I hardly noticed how the wind was freshening. Yet, when we rode down at last by a loose hill road to the beach, strong gusts were piping amid the treetops, and the King's galleys were lurching and rolling together at

their anchors by the landing-stage as the short waves came crowding in, one close upon another, under the first pressure of a coming storm.

But, wind or no wind, I would cross; and I spoke to the captain of the galleys, showing him my pass with its Royal signet, and saying I must have a ship at once, though all the cave of Eblis were let loose upon us, and he agreed, brave soul, to take me.

BY NOON the next day we saw the English shore gleam ghostly white through the flying reek in front; but by then, so fierce was the northeaster howling, that, though we went to windward and off again, doing all that good seamen could, now stealing a spell ahead, and anon losing it amid a blinding squall, we could not near the English port for which we aimed, there, in the cleft of the dim white cliffs.

A short time before dusk, while we wallowed heavily in the long furrows, my poor palfrey, stabled below, was thrown and broke her fore legs over her trestle bar, and between fear and pain screamed so loud and shrill, it chilled even my stalwart sailors. Then, later on, as we rode the frothy summit of a giant wave, our topmast snapped, and fell among us and the wild, loose ropes writhed and lashed about worse than a hundred biting serpents, and the bellowing sail, like a great bull, jerked and strained for a moment so that I thought that it would unstep the mast itself, and then went all to tatters with a hollow boom, while we, knee-deep in the swirling sea that filled our hollow, deckless ship, gentle and simple, 'prentice and knight, whipped out our knives and gave over to the hungry ocean all that riven tackle.

Hour after hour we reeled down the English coast with the wild mid-channel in fury on our left and the dim-seen ramparts of breakers at the cliff feet on our right. Then, as we went, the light began to fail us, and through the gloom and storm, the beating spray and the wild pelting rain, just as the wet evening fell, we neared the land.

We swept in from the storm, and soon there was the bar plain enough—a shining, thunderous crescent—glimmering pallid under the shadow of the land, a frantic hell of foam and breakers that heaved and broke and surged with an infernal storm-deriding tumult, and tossed the fierce white fountains of its rage mast-high into the air, and swirled and shone and crashed in the gloom, sending the white litter of its turmoil in broad ghostly sheets far into that black still water we could make out beyond under the veil of spume and foam hanging above that boiling caldron.

Straight to it we went through the cold, fierce wind, with the howl of the black night behind us, and the thunder of that shine before.

With the speed of a javelin thrown by a strong hand, we rushed into the wrack; one blinding moment of fury and turmoil, and then I felt the vessel stagger as she touched the sand; the next instant her sides went all to splinters under my very feet, and the great wave burst over us and rushed thundering on in conscious strength, and not two planks of that ill-fated ship, it seemed, were still together.

Over and over through the swirl and hum I was swept, the dying cries of my ship-fares sounding in my ears like the wail of disembodied spirits—now, for a moment, I was high in the spume and ruck, gasping and striking out as even he who likes his life the least will gasp in like case, and then, with thunderous power, the big wave hurled me down into the depth, down, down, into the inky darkness and the great churning waters pressing on with all the noises of Inferno in my ears, and the great churning waters pressing upon me till the honest air seemed leagues above, and my strained, bursting chest was dying for a gasp. Then again, the hideous, playful waters would tear asunder and toss me high into the keen, strong air, with the yellow stars dancing above, and the long line of the black coast before my salt tear-filled eyes.

And when I did not die, when the savage sea, like a great beast of prey, let me live by gasps to spread its enjoyment the more, and tossed and teased me, and shouted so hideously in my ears and weighed me down—why, the last spark of spirit in me burnt up on a sudden, fierce and angry.

At last I found myself floating up a narrow estuary on a dim, foam-flecked but peaceful tide. I staggered ashore, and sat down as wet and sorry as well could be. Life ran so cold and numb within, it seemed scarce worth the cost spent in keeping. My scrip was still at my side, but my sword was gone, my clothing torn to ribbons, and a more buffeted messenger never eyed askance the scroll that led him into such a plight. Where was I? The great gods who live forever alone could tell, yet

surely scores of miles from where I should be! I got to my feet, reeking with wet and spray, the gusty wind tossing back the black Phrygian locks from off my forehead, and glared around. Sigh, sigh, sigh went the gale in the pines above, while mournful pipings came about the shore like wandering voices, and the sea boomed sullenly out yonder in the darkness! I stared and stared, and then started back a pace, and stared again.

The lonely harbor, that of a thousand harbors I had come to, was the old British beach. It was my Druid priestess' village place that I was standing on!

I LAUGHED long and loud as I, the old trader in wine and olives—I, the felucca captain, with cloth and wine below and a comely red-haired slave on deck—I, again, in other guise, Royal Edward's chosen messenger—as good a knight as ever jerked a victorious brand home into its scabbard—stood there with chattering teeth and shaking knee, mocking fate and strange chance in reckless spirit. I laughed until my mood changed on a sudden, and then, swearing by twenty forgotten hierarchies I would not stand shivering in the rain for any wild pranks that Fate might play me, I staggered off on to the hard ground.

Every trace of my old village had long since gone; yet though it were a thousand years ago I knew my way about with a strange certainty. I left the shore, and pushed into the overhanging woods, dark and damp and somber, and presently I even found a well-known track (for these things never change); and, half glad and half afraid—a strange, tattered, dismal prodigal come strangely home—I pushed by dripping branch and shadowy coverts, out into the open grass hills beyond.

Here, on some ghostly tumuli near about, the gray shine of the night showed scattered piles of mighty stones and broken circles that once had been our temples and the burial places for great captains. I turned my steps to one of these on the elbow of a little ridge overlooking the harbor, and, perhaps, two hundred paces inland from it, and found a vast lichened slab of stupendous bulk undermined by weather, and all on a slope with a single entrance underneath one end.

Did ever man ask lodgment in like circumstances? It was the burial mound of an old Druid headman, and I laughed a little again to think how well I had known him—grim old Ufner of the Reeking Altars. Hoth! what a cruel, bloody old priest he was—never did a man before, I chuckled, combine such piety and savagery together. How that old fellow's cruel small eyes did sparkle with native pleasure as the thick, pungent smoke of the sacrificial fire went roaring up, and the hiss and splutter half drowned the screaming of men and women pent in their wicker cages amid that blaze! Oh! Old Ufner liked the smell of hot new blood, and there was no music to his British ear like the wail of a captive's anguish. And then for me to be pattering round his cell like this in the gusty dark midnight, shivering and alone, patting and feeling the mighty lid of that great crypt, and begging a friendly shelter in my stress and weariness of that ghostly hostelry—it was surely strange indeed.

Twice or thrice I walked round the great coffer—it was near as big as a herdsman's cottage—and then, finding no other crack or cranny, stopped and stooped before the tiny portal at the lower end. I saw as I knelt that that tremendous slab was resting wondrous lightly on a single point of upright stone set just like the trigger of an urchin's mouse-trap, but, nothing daunted, pushing and squeezing, in I crept, and felt with my hands all that I could not see.

The foxes and the weather had long since sent all there was of Ufner to dust. All was bare and smooth, while round the sides were solid, deep earth-planted slabs of rock—no one knew better than I how thick they were and heavy!—and on the floor a soft couch of withered leaves and grasses.

Now one more sentence, and the chapter is ended. I had not coiled myself down on those leaves a minute, my weary head had nodded but once upon my arm, my eyelids dropped but twice, when, with a soundless start, undermined by the fierce storm, and moved a fatal hair's-breadth by my passage, the propping key-stone fell in, and all at once my giant roof began to slide. That vast and ponderous stone, that had taken two tribes to move, was slipping slowly down, and as it went, all along where it ground, a line of glowing lambent fire, a smoking, hissing band of dust marked its silent, irresistible progress—a hissing belt of dust, and glow that shone for a half-moment round the fringe of that stupendous portal—And then, too late as I tottered to my weary knees, and extended a feeble hand toward the entrance, that mighty door came to rest, that ponderous slab, that scarce a thousand men could move, fell with a hollow click three

inches into the mortises of the earth-bound walls, and there in that mighty coffer I was locked—fast, deep, and safe!

I listened. Not a sound, not a breath of the storm without moved in that strange chamber. I stared about, and not one cranny of light broke the smooth velvet darkness. What mattered it? I was weary and tired—to-morrow I would shout and some one might hear, to-night I would rest; and, Jove! how deep and warm and pleasant was that leafy bed that chance had spread there on the floor for me!

CHAPTER XIV

I CANNOT say, distinctly, what roused me next morning. My faculties were all in a maze, my body cramped and stiff as old leather—no doubt due to the wetting of the previous evening, or my hard couch—while the darkness bewildered and numbed my mind. Yet, indeed, I awoke, and, after all, that was the great thing. I awoke and yawned, and feebly stretched my dry and aching arms—good heavens! how the pain did fly and shoot about them—and rolled my stiff and rusty eyeballs, and twisted that pulsing neck that seemed in that first moment of returning life like a burning column of metal through which the hot river of my starting blood was surging in a hissing, molten stream. I stretched, and looked and listened as though my faculties were helpless prisoners behind my numb, useless senses; but, peer and crane forward as I would, nothing stirred the black stillness.

Nothing, did I say? Truly it was nothing for a time, and then I could have sworn, by all the rich repository of gods and saints that the wreck of twenty hierarchies had stranded in my mind, that I heard a real material sound, a click and rattle, like metal striking stone, this being followed immediately by a star of light somewhere in the mid black void in front.

Fie! 'twas but a freak of fancy, the stretching of my cramped and aching sinews, but a nucleus of those swimming lights that mocked my still sleepy eyes! I covered them with my hands and groaned to be awake; I strove to make point or sense out of the wild flood of remembrance that ebbed and flooded in thunderous sequence through my head; and then again, obtrusive and clear, came the click! click! of the unseen metal, and the shine of the great white planet that burned in the black firmament of my prison behind it.

I staggered to my feet, stretching out eager hands in the void space to touch the walls, and tried to move; and, as I did so, my knees gave way beneath me; I made a wild grasp in the darkness, and fell in a loose heap upon the littered, dusty floor. Lord! how my joints did ache! how the hot, swift throes that monopolized my being shot here and there about my cramped and twitching limbs! I rolled upon the dust-dry earth of that gloomy chamber and cursed my last night's wetting; cursed the salt-sea spray that could breed such fiery torments; and even sent to Hades my errand and my scrip of victory, the which, however, I was cheered to note, in its bronze case now and then, with a movement or a spasm of pain, knocked against my bare ribs as though to upbraid me as a laggard embassy for lying sleeping here while all men waked to know my tidings.

I rose again, with rare difficulty but successfully this time, and peered and listened till the dancing colors in my eyes filled the empty air with giddy spinning suns and constellations, and the making tide of wakefulness, flooding the channels of my veins, cheated my ears to fancy some hideous storm was raging up above, and thunderbolts were tearing shrieking furrows down the trembling sides of mountains, and all the rivers of the world (so hideous was that shocking sound) were tumbling headlong in wild confusion into the void middle of the world.

I stuffed my ears and shut my eyes, and turned sick and faint at that infernal tumult.

My head spun and throbbed, and now my light feet felt the world give under them. I had nearly fallen, when once again, just as my spinning brain was growing numb, and the close, thin air of that place failed to answer to the needs of my new vitality, there came that click! click! again, and the blessed white star that followed it. This time that gleam of hope was broad and strong. On either side as it shone, white zig-zag rays flew out and stood so written upon the black tablet of my prison. Ah! and a draught of nectar, of real, divine nectar, of sweet white country air, came in from that celestial puncture!

I leaped to it and knelt, and put my thirsty lips to that refulgence and drank the simple ambient air that came through, as though I were some thirsty pilgrim at a gushing stream. And it revived me, cooling the rising fever of my blood, and

numbing, like the sweet sedative it was, the pains, that soon ran less keen and throbbed less strong, and, in a few more minutes, went gently away into the distance under its beneficent touch.

Mayhap I fainted or slept for some little time, overwhelmed by the stress of those few waking moments. When I looked up again all was changed. I myself was new and fresh, and felt with every pulse the strong life beating firm and gentle within me; and my prison cell—it was no more a prison!

There was a gap bigger than my fist where the star had been, with great fissures marking the outline of one of the stones that had supported the topmost slab, and through the gap a peep of countryside, of yellow grass, and sapphire sea, of pearly waves lisping in summer playfulness around a golden shore, and overhead a sky of delightful blue.

I was grateful, and understood it all. The storm had gone down during the night and the sun had risen; these were good folk outside; who, by some chance, knew of my sheltering-place and had come early to release me—a happy chance indeed! And it was their strong blows and crowbars working on my massive walls that let in the light, and—none too soon—had refreshed me with a draught of outer air. Fool that I was to let an uneasy night and salt-sea soaking cloud my wit!

I WAS so pleased at the prospect of speedy release that I was on the point of calling out to cheer my lusty friends at their work and show the prisoner lived. But had I done so this book had never been written! That shout was all but uttered—my mouth was close to the orifice through which came the pleasant gleam of daylight, when voices of men outside speaking one to another fell upon my ear.

"By St. George," I heard one fellow say, "and every fiend in hell! they who built this place surely meant it to last to Judgment! Here we have been heaving at it since near daylight and not moved a stone."

"Ah! and if you stand gaping there," chimed in another, "we'll not have moved one by Tuesday week. On, you log! let's see something of that strength you brag of—why, even now I saw a shine and twinkle in the opening there. This crib may prove the cradle of our fortunes, may make us richer men than any strutting sheriffs, and recompense us for a dozen disappointments! To it again; and you Harry, stand ready with the wedges to put them in when we do lift."

I pricked my ears at this, as you will guess, for there was no mention of me expectant, and only talk of wealth and recompense. I listened, and heard the sulky workman take again this crowbar. I heard him call for a drink, and the splash of the liquid into the leathern cup sounded wonderfully clear in my silent chamber; then, as though in no hurry, he asked, "What of the spoil we have already, mates? A sight of those baubles would greatly lighten our labor, I think."

"Now, as I had a man for my father," burst out the first speaker, "never did I see so small a heart in so big a body! Show him the swag, Harry! rattle it under his greedy nose! and when he has done gloating on it perhaps he'll turn to and do something for a breakfast!"

At this there was a pause and a moving of feet, as though men were collecting round some common object. Then came the tinkle of metals, and, by Jove! I had not yet forgotten so much of merchant cunning in my soldiering but that I recognized the music of gold and silver over the base clink of lesser stuff. They tried, and sampled, and rung those wares over my head; and presently he who was best among them said:

"A very pretty haul, mates, and, wisely disposed of, enough to furnish us well, both inside and out, for a long time. These circlets here are silver, I take it, and will run into a sweet ingot in the smelting-pot. Yon boss is a brooch, by the pin, and of gold; though surely such a vile fashion was never forged since Shem's hammer last went silent."

"What, gold, sir!"

"Ah! what else, old bullet-costard? Dost thou think I come round and prize cursed devil-haunted mounds for lumps of clay? The brooch is gold, I say; and the least of these trinkets" (whereon there came a sound like one playing with bracelet and bangle)—"the worst of them white silver. To it, then, good fellows, again! Burst me this stony crypt, and, if it prove such a coffer as I have right to hope, before the day is an hour older, you shall down to yonder town and there get drunk past expectation and your happiest imaginings."

So, my friends, I mused, 'tis not pure neighborliness that brings you thus early to my rescue! Never mind; many a good deed has been done in search of a sordid object, and whether you come for me or gold, it shall vantage me alike. I will lend

a hand on my side, since it were a pity to keep this big fellow from his breakfast longer than need be.

While they plied spade and lever outside, I scraped below, and put in, as well as I was able, a stone wedge now and then, whenever their exertions canted the great stone a little to one side or the other. The interest of all this, and because I was never apt in deceit, made me somewhat reckless about showing too soon at the narrow opening, and presently there came a guttural cry above, and a sound as though some one had dropped a tool and sprung back.

"Hullo! stoutheart," called the captain's voice, "What now? Is it another swig of the flask you want to swell your shallow courage, or has thy puissant crowbar pierced through to hell?"

"Hell or not," whined the fellow, "I do think the fiend himself is in there. I did but stoop on a sudden to peer within, and may I never empty a flagon again but there was something hideous moving in the crypt! something round and shaggy, that toiled as we toiled, and pushed and growled, and had two flaming yellow eyes . . . ."

"Beast! coward! Oh, that I had brought a man instead of thee! 'Twas gold you saw—bright, shining metal—think, thou swine, of all it will buy, and how thou may'st hereafter wallow in thy foul delights! And wilt thou forego the stuff so near? Gods! I would have a wrestle for it though it were with the devil himself! Give me the crowbar."

APPARENTLY the captain's avarice was of stouter kind than the yeoman's, for soon after this the stone upright began to give, and I saw the moment of my deliverance was near. Now, I argued to myself, these gentlemen outside are obvious rogues, and will much rather crack me on the head than share their booty with such a strange-found claimant, hence I must be watchful. Of the two under-rogues I had small fear, but the captain seemed of bolder mold, and, unless his tongue lied, had some sort of heart within him.

So I waited watchful, and before long a more than usually stalwart blow set the stone off its balance. It slipped and leaned, then turning over on its side, rolled to the edge of the slope, and there, revolving quicker and more quickly, went rumbling and crashing down through the brambles into the valley a quarter of a mile below. As it fell outward, a blaze of daylight burst upon my prison, and, with a shout of joy, the foremost of the rogues dashed into my cell.

At the same moment, with such an old British battle yell as those monoliths had not heard for a thousand years, but sorely dazed, I sprang forward. We met in mid career, and the big thief went floundering down. He was up again in a moment, and, yelling in his fear that the devil was certainly there, rushed forth—I close behind him—and infected his timorous comrade, and away they both went toward the woods, racing in step and screaming in tune, as though they had practised it together for half a lifetime.

The fellows fled, but their leader stood, white and irresolute, as he well might be, yet made bold by greed; and for a moment we faced each other—he in his greasy townman finery, a strong, sullen thief from bonnet to shoe, and I, grim, gaunt, and ragged, haggard, wild, unshorn, standing there for a moment against the black porch of the old Druid grave-place—and then, wiping the sunshine from my dazzled eyes and stooping low, I ran at him!

Many were the ribbons and trinkets I had taken long ago at that game. I ran at him, and threw my arms round his leather-belted middle, and, with a good strong twist, tossed his heels fairly into the air and threw him full length over my shoulder. He fell behind me like a tree on the greensward, while his head striking the buttress of a stone stunned him, and he lay there bleeding and insensible.

"Hoth! good fellow," I laughed, bending over him, "I am sorry for that headache you will have to-morrow, but before you challenge so freely to the wrestle you should know somewhat more of a foeman's prowess!"

When I turned to the little heap of spoil the ravishers of the dead had gathered and laid out on a cloth upon the stones, at once my mood softened. There in that curious pile of trinkets were things so ancient and yet so fresh that I heaved a sigh as I bent over them, and a whiff of the old time came back—the jolly wild days when the world was young rose before me as I turned them tenderly one by one.

There lay the bronze nobs from a British shield, and there, corroded and thin, the long, flat blade that my rugged comrades once could use so well.

There again, in more peaceful wise, was a shoulder-brooch some British maid had worn, and the wristlet and rings of some red-haired Helen of an unfamous Troy.

There lay a few links of the neck-chains of a dust-dead warrior, and there, again, the head of his boar-spear. Here was the thin gold circlet he had on his finger, the rude pin of brass that fastened his colored cloak and the buckle of his sandal. Jove! I could nearly tell the names of the vanished wearers, I knew all these things so well!

But it was no use hanging over the pile like this. The ruffian I had felled was beginning to move, and it served no purpose to remain: therefore—and muttering to myself that I was a nearer heir to the treasure than any among those thieves—I selected some dozen of the fairest, most valuable trinkets, and put them in my wallet. Then, feeling cold—for the fresh morning air was thin and cool here, above the sea—the best coat from the ragged pile the rogues had thrown aside, to be the lighter at their work, was chosen, and, with this on my back, and a stout stave in my hand, I turned to go. But ere I went I took a last look round—as was only natural—at a place that had given me such timely shelter overnight. It was strange, very strange; but my surroundings, as I saw them in the white daylight, matched wondrous poorly with my remembrance of the evening before!

The sea, to begin with, seemed much farther off than it had done in the darkness. I have said that when I swam ashore my well-remembered British harbor had, to my eyes, silted up wofully, so that the knoll on which Blodwen's stockades once stood was some way up the valley. But small as the estuary had shrunk last night, I had, it seemed, but poorly estimated its shrinkage. 'Twas lesser than ever this morning, and some kine were grazing among the yellow kingcups on the marshy flats at that very place where I could have sworn I came ashore on the top of a sturdy breaker!

The greedy green and golden land was cozening the blue channel sea out of beach and foreshore under my very eyes; the meadow-larks were playing where the white surf should have been, and tall fern and mallow flaunted victorious in the breeze where ancient British keels had never even grated on a sandy bottom. I could not make it out, and turned to look at the tomb from which I had crept. Here, too, the turmoil of yestere'en and my sick and weary head had cheated me.

In the gloom the pile had appeared a bare and lichened heap washed out from its old mound of rains: but, Jove! it seemed it was not so. I rubbed my eyes and pulled my peaked beard and stared about me, for the crypt was a grassy mound again, with one black gap framed by a few rugged stones jutting from the green, as though the slope above it had slipped down at that leveler Nature's prompting, and piled up earth and rubbish against the rocks, had escaladed them and marched triumphant up the green glacis, planting her conquering pennons of bracken and bramble, mild daisy and nodding foxglove, on that very arch where, by all the gods! I thought last night the withering lightning would have glanced harmless from a smooth and lichened surface. Well, it only showed how weary I had been; so, shouldering my cudgel, and with a last sigh cast back to that pregnant heap of rusty metal, I turned, and with fair heart, but somewhat shaky limbs, marched off inland to give my wondrous news.

HOW pleasant and fair the country was, and after those hot scenes of battle, the noise and sheen of which still floated confusedly in my head, how sweetly peaceful! I trod the green, secluded country lanes with wondrous pleasure, remembering the bare French campagnas, and stood stock-still at every gap in the blooming hedges to drink the sweet breath of morning, coming, golden-laden with sunshine and the breath of flowers, over the rippling meadow-grass! In truth, I was more English than I had thought, my step was more elastic to tread these dear domestic leas, and my spirits rose with every mile simply to know I was in England!

Then it was a homestead that, all unseen, I paused by, watching the great sleek kine knee-deep in the scented yellow straw, the spangled cock defiant on the wall, the tender doves a-wooing on the roof-ridge, and presently the swart herdsman, with flail and goad, come out from beneath his roses and stoop and kiss the pouting cherry lips of the sweet babe his comely mate held up to him. "Jove!" I meditated, "and here's a goodly kingdom. Oh, that I had a realm with no politics in it but such as he has!" and so musing I went along from path to path and hill to hill.

At one time my feet were turned to a way-side rest-house, where a jug of wine was asked for and a loaf of bread, for I did remember that saving a handful of dry biscuit, which I broke in my gauntlet palm and ate between two charges, I had not broken fast since the morning before Crécy. The master of the tavern took up

the coin I tendered and eyed it critically.

He brought me wine and cheese and bread, whereon I sat on a corner of the trestle table munching them outside in the sun under shadow of my broad felt yokel hat, with the quaint inn sign gently creaking overhead, and my moldy, sea-stained legs dangling under me.

I sat and thought how my errand was to be most speedily carried out, for you see I might trudge days and days afoot like this before good luck or my own limbs brought me to the footstool of Edward's Royal wife, and gave me leave to burst that green and rusty case that, with its precious scroll, still dangled at my side.

I had no money to buy a horse—the bangles taken from the crypt-thieves would not stand against the value of the boniest palfrey that ever ambled between a tinker's legs—and last night's infernal wetting had made me into the sorriest, most moldy-looking herald that ever did a kingly bidding. Surely, I thought, as I glanced at my borrowed clay-stained rustic cloak, my cracked and rotten leather doublet, my tarnished hose all frayed and colorless, my shoon, that only held together, methought, by their patching of gray sea-slime and mud, surely no one will lend or loan me anything like this; they will laugh at my knightly gage of honorable return, and scout the faintest whisper of my errand!

Thus ruefully reflecting, I had finished my frugal luncheon, yet still scarce knew what to do, and maybe I had sat dubious like that on the trestle edge for near an hour I looked up and, on a sudden, there was a blooming little maid of some three tender years standing in the sun staring hard upon me, her fair blue eyes a-shine with wonder, and the strands of her golden hair lifting on the breeze like gossamers in June. She had in one rosebud hand a flower of yellow daffodil, and in fault of better introduction proffered it to me. My stern soldier heart was melted by that maid. I took her flower and put it in my belt, and lifted the little one on my knee, then asked her why she had looked so hard at the stranger.

"Oh!" she said, pointing to where some older children were watching all this from a safe distance, "Johnnie and Andrew, my brothers, said you were surely the devil, and as they feared, I came myself to see if it were true."

"And am I? Is it true?"

"I do not know," said the little damsel, fixing her clear blue eyes upon mine—"I do not know for certain, but I like you! I am sorry for you, because you are so dirty. If you were cleaner I could love you"—and very cautiously, watching my eyes the while, the pretty babe put out a petal-soft hand and stroked my grim and weathered face.

I could not withstand such gentle blandishment, and forgot all my musings and my haste, and kissed those pink fingers under the shadow of my hat, and laid myself out to win that soft little heart, and won it, so that, when presently the wondering mother came to claim her own, the little maiden burst into such a headlong shower of silver April tears that I had to perjure myself with false promises to come again, and even the gift of my last coin and another kiss or two scarce set me free from the sweet investigator.

BUT now I was aroused, and stalked down the green country road full of speed and good intention. I would walk to the Royal city, since there were no other way, and these fair shires must have grown expansive since the olden days if I could not see a march or two while the sun was up. Eastward and north I knew the Court should lie, so bent my steps through glades and commons with the midday sun behind my better shoulder. But the journey was to be shorter than seemed likely at the outset. After asking, to no purpose, my road of several rustics, a venerable wayfarer was chanced upon, ambling down a shady gully.

This quaint old fellow sat a rough little steed, one indeed, of the poorest-looking, most knock-kneed beasts I had ever seen a gentleman of gentle quality stride of. And, in truth, the rider was not better kept. He wore a great widespreading cloak of threadbare stuff, falling from his shoulders to his knees in such ample folds that it half hid the neck and quarters of his steed. Below this mantle, splashed with twenty shades of mud and most quaintly patched, you saw the pricks of rusty iron spurs on old and shabby leather boots, and just the point of a frayed black leather scabbard peeping under his stirrup-straps. The hat he wore was broad-brimmed and peaked, and looked near as old as did its wearer. Under that shapeless cover was a most strange face. I do not think I ever saw so much and various writ upon so little parchment as shone upon the dry and wrinkled surface of that rider's features. There were cunning and closeness on it, and yet they did not altogether hide the

openness of gentle birth and liberal thought.

He could look as small and mean about the mouth as a usurer on settling day; and then, when his mood changed, and he fell thoughtful, the gentle melancholy of his face—the goodly soul that spoke behind that changeful mask, the strange dissatisfaction, the incompleteness, the unhappy longing for something unattainable there reflected, made you sad to look upon it!

I overtook this quaint rider as he rode alone, my active feet being more than a match for the shaky limbs of that mean beast he sat upon.

"Good morning, Sir!" I said; and as the old man looked up with a start and saw me, a stranger, walking by his side, all the fervor and the fancy died from off his face, the fine features shut upon themselves; and there he was, the meanest, shallowest, most paltry-looking of old rogues that had ever pulled of a cap to his equal!

He returned my first light questionings with a sullen suspicion, which gradually thawed, however, as his keen scrutiny took, apparently, reassuring stock of my face and figure, and we spoke, as fellow-travelers will, for a few moments on the roads, the weather, and the prospect of the skies. Then I asked him, with small expectation of much advantage in his answer, "Which is the best way to Court?"

"There are many ways, my son," he said. "You may get there because of extreme virtue, or on the introduction of peculiar wickedness."

"Ah! but I meant otherwise . . ."

"Shining wisdom, they say, brings a man to Court—or should. And, God knows, there is no place like Court for folly! If thou art very beautiful thou may come to it, and if thou art as ugly as hell they will have thee for a laughing-stock and nine-days' wonder."

"No! no!" I cried, "I meant only to ask, in ordinary material manner, which was the best way to the palace, which the nearest road, the safest footpath for a hasty stranger to our good Queen's footstool. I have a Royal script to deliver to her."

"What, is it the Queen you want to see? Why I am bound that road myself, and in a few minutes I will show you the pennons glancing among the trees where they be camped."

"Where they be camped?" I exclaimed in wonder. "I thought that was many a mile from here—in fact, Sir, in the great city itself, and yet you say a few minutes will show us the Royal tents."

"Praise Heaven, young man, there is no one who knows less of the goings and comings of her and hers than I do, but there is where the Court is. I hate them," he said sourly; " a lying swarm of locusts round that yellow jade they call a Queen—a shallow, cruel, worthless crew who stand in the way of light and learning, and laugh the poor scholar out of face and heart! But you do not laugh—you have some bowels of compunction within you—you can be as civil to a threadbare cloak as to a silken doublet. Gads! fellow, there is something about thee that moves me very strangely. Art thou of gentle quality?"

"I have been of many qualities in my time, Sir."

"So I guessed. There is a presence about thee that makes me fear—that puts a dread upon me, why I know not. And then, again, I feel drawn to thee by a strong, strange sense, as the Persian says one planet is drawn toward another."

At last we came out of the hazel dingles. There, sure enough, down in the valley was a white road winding among the trees, and a stately park, a goodly house of many windows. And amid the fair meadows among the branches shone the white gleam of tents, and overhead the flutter of silken tags and gonfalons, and now and then there came the glint of steel and gold from out that goodly show, and the blare of trumpets, and more softly on the afternoon air the shout of busy marshals, the neighing of steeds, and the low murmur of many voices.

Then, making my friendly salutation to the dreamy pedant, "Here, Sir," I said, "I fear we part forever."

"Not so," he said: "we shall meet once more, and soon," and he looked at me with strange significance.

"Well! well! Soon or distant, we will meet again in friendship," and, with a wave of the hand, off I set.

THE broad park gates were open, and inside, amid the oak-trees around the great house, gay confusion reigned. There, on one hand, were the fair white tents bright with silk and golden trappings, and, while a hundred sturdy yeomen were busy setting up these cool pavilions, others spread costly rugs about their porches, and displayed within them lordly furniture enough to dazzle such rough soldier eyes as mine. There in long rows beneath the branches were ranked a wondrous show of

mighty gilded coaches with empty shafts a-trail, all still dusty from the road, and hurrying grooms were covering these over for the night, while others fed and tended a squadron of sleek, fat horses, whose beribboned manes and glistening hides so well filled out struck me amazed when I recalled those poor, ragged, muddy charges whereon we had borne down the hosts of Philip's chivalry two days before.

All about the green were groups of gallant gentlemen and ladies, and I overheard, as I brushed by, some of them speaking of a splendid show to be given that night in the court of the great house near by, and how the proud owner of it, thus honored by the great Queen's presence, had beggared him and his for many a day in making preparation. It was most probable, for the white-haired seneschal was tearing his snowy locks, entreating, imploring, amid a surging, unruly mass of porters, cooks, and scullions, while heaps of provender, vats of wine, and mighty piles of food for men and horses, littered all the rearward avenues.

But little I looked at all of these things. Clad like many another countryman come there to see the show (only a little more ragged and uncouth), I passed the outer wickets, and, skirting the groups of idlers, strode boldly out across the trim lawns and breasted the wide sweep of steps that led to the great scutcheoned doorway.

All down these steps gilded fellows were lolling in splendid finery, who started up and stared at me, nothing noticing their gentle presence, now hot upon my errand, I bounded by. At top were two strong yeomen, gay in crimson and black livery, of most quaint kind, with rampant lions worked in gold upon their breasts, and tall, broad-bladed halberds in their hands. They made a show of barring the way with those mighty weapons; but I came so unexpectedly, and showed so little hesitation, they faltered. Also, I had pulled off my cap, and better men than they had stepped back in fear and wonder from a glance of that grim, stern face that I thus did show them.

Past these, and once inside, I found the Queen was receiving the country-folk, and up the waiting avenue of these good rustic lieges I pushed, brushing through the feeble fence of stewards' marshaling-rods held out to awe, and, nothing noticing a score of curly pages who threw themselves before me, I burst into the presence chamber.

Hoth! 'Twas a fine room, like the mid-aisle of a great cathedral, and all around the walls were banners and bannerets, antlers of deer, and goodly shows of weapons, and suits of mail and harness. And this splendid lobby was thronged with courtiers in silks and satins, while ruffs and stocks and mighty collarets, and pearls and gems, and cloth of gold and sarsanet glittered everywhere, and a gentle incense of lovely scents mingled with a murmur of courtly talk went up to the fair carved oaken ceiling. Right ahead of me was a splendid carpet of wondrous pile and softness, and at the far end of that stately way a daïs, and on it, lightly chatting amid a pause in the Royal business—the Queen!

She was not the least what I had looked for. I had pictured Edward's noble dame, the daughter of knightly house of Hainault, as pale and proud and dark—the fit wife of her warlike husband, and a meet mother to her son. But this one was lank and yellow, comely enough no doubt and tall, with a mighty proud light in her eyes when occasion served, and a right royal bearing, yet still somehow not quite that which I expected.

What did it matter? Was it not the Queen, and was not that enough? Gods! What should it count what color was her hair, since my master found it good enough? And, in truth, but I had something to say would bring the red into those lack-luster cheeks, or Philippa were unlike all other women. Therefore, with a shout of triumph that shocked the mild courtiers, brandishing my precious script above my head, I leaped forward, and, dashing up that open crimson road, ran straight to the footstool of the Royal lady, and there dropped on one knee:

"Hail! Royal mother," I cried.

"Thanks!" she said sardonically, as soon as she regained her composure.

"Madam," I cried, "I come, a herald, charged with splendid news of conquest! But one day since, over in famous France, thy loyal English troops have won such a victory against mighty odds as lends a new luster even to the broad page of English valor. But one day since, in your noble General's tent—"

But by this time all the throng of courtiers had found their tongues, and some certain quantity of those senses whereof my sudden entry had bereft them. While a few, who caught the meaning of my word, and, stopping not to argue, thought it was the news indeed of a victory that glittering Court had long hoped for, broke out into tumultuous cheering—

waving scarf and handkerchief, and throwing wide the lattices, that the common fold without might share their noisy joy, those others who stood closer around, and saw my ragged habiliments, could not believe it.

"You a herald!" exclaimed one grizzled veteran in slashed black velvet over pearly satin. "You a messenger chosen for such an errand! Madam," he cried, drawing out a long rapier from its velvet case, "it is some madman, some brain-sick soldier. I do implore your Grace to let me call the guards."

"An assassin! an assassin!" cried another. "Run him through, Lord Fodringham! Give him no chance or parley!"

" 'Tis past belief!" exclaimed a dainty fellow, all perfumed lace and golden chains. "Such glad tidings are not trusted to base country curs."

"A fool!" "A rogue" "A graceless villian!" they shouted. "Stab him! drag him from the presence!"

Up, then, I jumped to my feet, and hot and wrathful, shaking my clenched fist in the faces of those glittering lords, broke out: "By the bright light of day, Sirs, he who says I have a better here in this hall, lies—lies loud and flatly. Do you think, because I come clad like this, you may safely spend your shallow wit upon me? I tell you all, pretty silken spaniels that you are! you, Fodringham, with the gilded toothpick you miscall a sword! you there, Sir, who reek of musk! and all you others, who keep so discreetly out of arms' reach! —I tell you every one that, in court or camp, in tilt or tourney, I am your mate!"

But none of that glittering throng had aught to say. Those bold, silken lordlings pushed back in a wide circle from where I stood, fierce and tall in my muddy rags, and fumbled their golden dagger-knobs, and studied with drooped heads the dainty silk rosettes upon their cork-heeled shoes.

AFTER waiting a moment, to give their valor fair chance of answering, I turned disdainfully from them, and, bending again to fair Queen Philippa, "Madam," I said, "these noisy boys make me forget the smooth reverence that I owe your Grace, yet surely the noble daughter of Hainault will forgive a hasty word spoken in defense of soldier honor?"

"I know nothing, good fellow," replied the Queen, eyeing her discomfited nobles with inward glee, "of thy Hainault, but I like thy outspokenness extremely. By Heaven! you make me think it was some time since I last saw a man about me."

"And have I leave to do my mission, noble lady?"

"Ay, Sir, to it at once! We care not how you come, or who you are, or for the exact condition of your smock, so that you bring news of victory."

"But, Madam," put in Fodringham, "it is not safe—he has some desperate purpose. . . ."

"Silence!" shouted the Queen, springing to her feet and stamping a pretty foot, cased in a dainty pearl-encrusted slipper.

"Then, sovereign lady," I began, "but two days since, in France, the English troops, fair set upon a sunny hillside, were attacked by a vast array of foemen, and thanks to happy chance, to thy princely General's captainship, and to the incredible valor of thy lieges, they were victorious!"

"Now may the dear God who rules these things accept my grateful and most humble thanks!" And the proud Queen, with bright moisture in her eye, looked skyward for a moment, and was so moved with true joy and pleasure in her country's conquest that thereon at once she went up most mightily in my esteem.

"Most welcome of all heralds," she went on, "how fared the English leader in that desperate fight? If aught has happed to Lord Leicester, it will spoil all else that you can say."*

I did not quite catch the name she mentioned under breath, but I thought it was the Royal mother asking how my noble young master had prospered, so I spoke out at once.

"Madam, he is unhurt and well! It is not for me, a humble knight, to praise that shining star of honor, but he for whom thou art so naturally solicitous" (here the Queen blushed a little and looked down, while there was a scarce-suppressed laugh among the fair damsels behind me), "he, Madam, has done splendid deeds of valor. Three times, noble Queen, right along the glittering front of France he charged, three times he pierced so deep into that sea of steel that he near lay hands upon their golden lilies in mid-host.

"The proud Count of Poligny fell before him, and the Lord of Lusigny was overthrown in single combat; Besançon and Arnay went down under his maiden spear; he pulled an ancient crest from the Bohemian eagle in mid-battle. In brief,

*The Earl of Leicester, in the spring of 1586, had command of the English forces in Flanders, and news of the great victory which he constantly promised but never achieved was daily expected.

Madam, a more valorous knight was never buckled into armor; he was the prop and pillar of our host, and to him this victory is as largely due as it is to any."

"Herald," said the Queen, with real gratitude and pleasure in her voice again, "indeed your news is welcome. There was nothing I had rather than such a victory, and because 'tis his, because it will stifle the envious clamor of his enemies, and embolden me to do that which I hope to. Oh! your news fills up to overflowing the measure of my joy and satisfaction!" And the fair lady bent her head and fell into a reverie, like a maid who cogitates upon the prowess of an absent lover.

SO FAR the woman—then the Queen came back, and lifting her shapely head, with its high-piled yellow hair, laced with strings of amethyst and pearl, and well set off by the great stiff-starched ruff behind, she asked:

"And my dear English nobles, and my stout halberdiers and pikemen—God forgive me that I should forget them!—how told the fight upon them? My heart bleeds to think of the odds you say they did withstand."

"Be comforted, fair Sovereign! The tide of war set strong against our enemies, our palisades and trenches were well laid; the keen English arrows carried disaster far afield on the iron points ere the battle joined; the great host of France fell by its own mightiness; and victory, this time at least, shall wring but few tears from English maids or matrons."

"Heaven be truly thanked for that!"

"Indeed, Madam"—so I went on—"none of great account fell those few hours since. Lord Harcourt I saw bear him like the bold soldier that he was, and when the battle faded into evening he it was who marshaled our scattered ranks and set the order for the night."

"Who did you say?"

"Harcourt, lady, thy bold captain. And Codrington, too, was redoubtable, and came safe from the fight. Chandos dealt out death to all who crossed his path, like an avenging fury, yet took no scratch. Hot Lord Walsingham swept like an avalanche in spring through the close-packed Frenchmen, yet lives to tell of it, and old Sir John Fitzherbert, when I left the field —his white beard all athwart his shredded broken armor—was cheering loudly for our victory, the while they lapped him up in linens, for a French axe had shorn his left arm off at the shoulder. All have taken dints, but now near all are safe and well."

" 'Tis strange," said the Queen, thoughtfully, " 'tis strange I know so few of these. I have a Harcourt, but he is not warlike; and cunning, cruel Walsingham lives in the north, and sits better astride of a dinner-stool than a charger. Codrington and Fitzherbert leading my troops to war! Here, let me see thy script: it may explain." And she held out her jeweled hand.

Thereon a strange uneasiness possessed me, and seemed to cloud my honest courage. What was it? What had I to fear? I did not know. And yet my strong fingers, that never wearied upon a hilt though the day were ne'er so long, trembled as I slung round my pouch, and my heart set off a-beating with craven fear, as it had never beat before in sack or mêlée.

It was too foolish; and, a little angry at the blood that ran so slowly in my veins, and the heavy sense of evil that sat on me all of a sudden, I pulled the metal letter-case from my wallet, and burst the seal and pressed the lid. The wallet split from side to side as though the stout leather were frail paper, and the strong metal crumbled in my fingers like red, rotten touchwood.

I stared at it in amazement. What could it mean? Then shook the thin, rusty fragments from my hand, and, putting on a bold face I did not feel drew out the parchment from the strangely frail casing, brushed off the dust and litter, and handed it to the Sovereign.

"Lady," I said in a voice I fain would have made true and clear, "there is the full account, and though seas have stained it, and rough travel spoiled the casing, as you saw, yet have I made all diligence I could. It was yesterday morning King Edward gave me that, and 'Take it,' he said, 'as fast as foot can go to sweet Queen Philippa, my wife. Say 'twas penned on battlefield, and comes full charged with my dear and best affections.' Thus, Madam, have I brought it straight to thee from famous Crécy, and here place it, the warrant of my truth, in Queen Philippa's own hand." And gave her the scroll.

Jove! how yellow and tarnished it did look! The frail silk that bound it was all afray and colorless; and the King's great seal, that once had been so cherry-red, was bleached to sickly pallor! The Queen took it, and while I held my breath in nameless terror she turned it over and slowly round about, and stared first at me, and then at that fatal thing.

She begged a dagger from a courtier at

her side, and split the binding, and unfolded that tawny scroll that crackled in her fingers, it was so old and stiff, and read the address and superscription; and then, all on a sudden, while a deathlike silence held the room, she turned her stern, cold eyes, full of wrath and wonder, to me kneeling there, and burst out:

"Why, fellow! what mummery is all this? Philippa and Crécy? Why, thou incredible fool! Philippa of Hainault has been dust these twenty generations; and Crécy—thy 'famous Crécy'—was fought near three hundred years ago! I am Elizabeth Tudor!"

Slowly I rose from my feet and stared at her—stared at her in the hush of that wondering room, while a cold chill of fear and consternation crept over my body. Incredible! "Crécy fought three hundred years ago!"—the hall seemed full of that horrible whisper, and a score of echoes repeated, "Queen Philippa has been dust these twenty generations, and Crécy—thy famous Crécy—was fought near three hundred years ago!" Oh, impossible—cruel—ridiculous!—and yet—and yet!

There, as I stood, glaring at the Queen with strained, set face, and clenched hands, and heaving breath, gasping, wondering, waiting for something to break that hideous silence or give the lie to that accursed sentence that still floated round on the ambient air, and took new strength from the disdainful light in those clustering courtier eyes, and their mocking, scornful smiles—while I waited I remembered—by all the infernal powers I remembered—my awakening, and all the things I should have noted and had not.

I recalled the bitter throes that had wracked my stiff joints in the old British grave as never mortal rheums yet twisted common sinew and muscle. I recalled the long labor of the crypt thieves, and the altered face of rocks and foreshore when my eyes first lit upon them after that long sleep. The very April season that sorted so ill with the August Crécy left behind took new meaning to me now all on an instant; and my ragged, crumbling raiment, in shreds and tatters, so ruinous as never salt spray yet made a good suit in one mortal evening, the strange garb and speech of those I met, and then this tawny, handsome yellow lioness on the throne where should have been a pale, black Norman girl. Oh! hell and fiends! But she spoke the truth. I had lain three hundred years in Ufner's stones, and with a wild, fierce cry of shame and anger, one long yell of pain and disappointment, I tore the cursed wallet from my neck and hurled it down there savagely at her feet, and turned and fled!

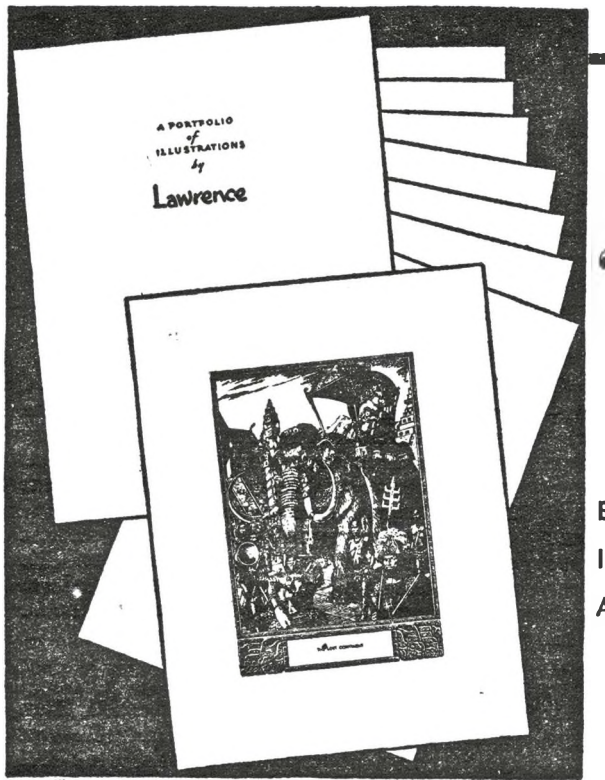
IT IS over, and I in turn have time to laugh. I have come here, here to my secret den in the thickness of these great walls, staggering slowly here by dim, steep stairs, and rare-trodden landings—here to die; and I have double-locked the oaken door, and shot the bolts and pitched the key out of my one narrow window-slit, and, gently rocking and swaying as the strong poison does its errand, I have thrown down my belt and sword and opened my great volume once again.

Misty the letters swim before me, and the strong pain ebbs and flows within. All the room is hazy and dim, and I grow weak and feeble, and my heavy head sags down upon the leaf I strive to finish. Some other time shall find that leaf, and me a dusty, ancient remnant. Some other hand shall turn these pages than those I meant them for: some other eyes than theirs shall read and wonder, and perhaps regret. And now I droop anon, and then start up, and the pale swinging haze seems taking the shapes of friendliness and beauty. There are no longer limits to this narrow kingdom, and before my footstool sweep in soft procession all the shapes that I have known and loved.

Electra comes, a pale, proud shade, sweeping down that violet road, and holding out her ivory palm in queenly friendship; and Numidea trips behind her, and nods and smiles; earlier Sempronius, brave and gentle; and two and two, a trooping band of ancient comrades.

There strides gallant Codrington, leading a pale shadow all in white, and Isobel turns a fair pale face upon me as she goes by. Oh! I am dead—dead, I know it, all but the hand which writes and the eyes that see, and I laugh as the last fitful flashes of the pain and life fly through the loosening fabric of my body. . . . And now, and now a hush has fallen on those silent shades, and their hazy ranks have fallen wide apart, and through them glides ruddy Blodwen—Blodwen, who comes to claim her own—and, approaching, looks into my eyes, and all those stately shadows are waiting, two and two, for us two to head them hence; and she, my princess, my wife, has come near and touched my hand, and at that touch the mantle of life falls from me!

Blodwen! I come, I come!



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HEAVEN ONLY KNOWS

By Joe Archibald

. . . . Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness and destroyed the cities thereof, that opened not the house of his prisoners? . . . Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land and slain thy people. . . .

—Isaiah xiv, 12-20.

IT WAS a Mustang pilot, Lieutenant Isidor Shapiro, of all people, who spotted the big plane high over the Vosges mountains an hour after dawn. Despite the highly significant instructions he had received before leaving the airdrome near Nancy, the lieutenant was uncertain, for the big, four-engined job bore no markings and he did not remember having seen such a silhouette on the big chart back at the station. He had always kept well up on aircraft identification, had learned to recognize a friendly or enemy plane in 1/75 of a second, which was par for the essential course.

Orders. *Lieutenants Korowski and Shapiro will patrol Sector G at an altitude of thirty-five thousand feet and keep a close watch for any mysterious aircraft. . . .* Isidor felt the pitter-patter of little icy feet the length of his spine. *All German four-engined bombers in service have low wings, as opposed to Britain's mid-wing types, and differ from American four-engine—*

But, Lieutenant Shapiro told himself, as he gulped oxygen, the Nazis were finished and not a single unit of the *Luftwaffe* had been in the air for over forty-eight hours. Even now American and British tank columns were rumbling into Berlin to make contact with the spearheads of Joe Stalin's eager armies, and everywhere radio commentators were making wild conjectures regarding the whereabouts of. . . .

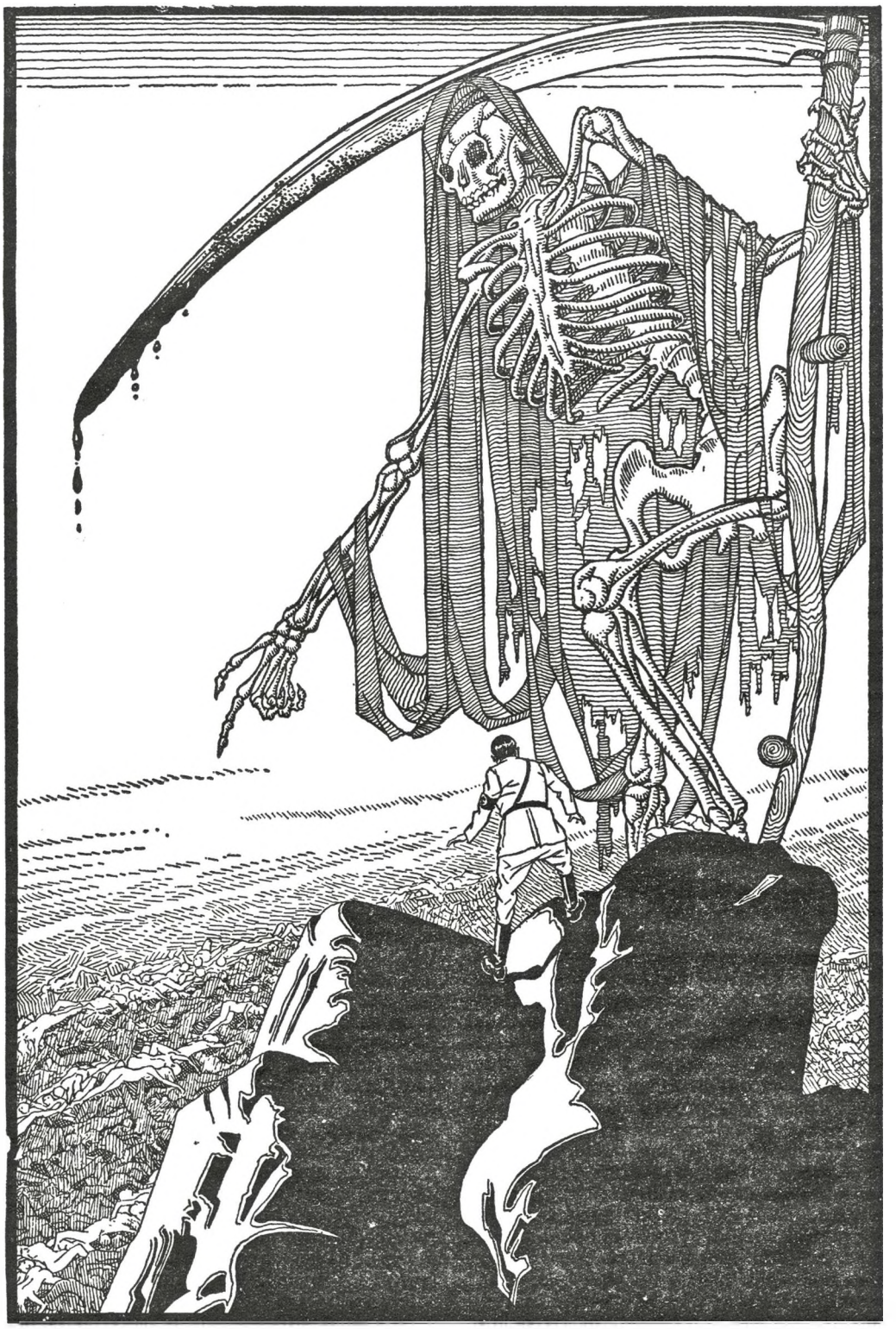
The enormity, the incongruousness, of the probability facing Pilot Isidor Shapiro froze his muscles and glued his tongue to the roof of his mouth. Without being fully aware of it, he gave the powerful Mustang engine a hypo of high octane and the plane jumped like a startled wallaby, flinging Shapiro's head back against the rest. An only too familiar thumping sound cut through the roar of thousands of horses, and bullets howled close to the Mustang's canopy and chewed part of it away, at the same time scattering any doubts that lingered in Lieutenant Shapiro's mind that out of all the millions engaged in the war, he had been chosen to write the final chapter to the grossly misspent lives of certain notorious and undesirable citizens. He pirouetted the Mustang in the sky above the unfriendly heavy and prepared to make history, a subject in which he had been particularly dense back in P.S. 41, Brooklyn.

He had generally been late for school on Blue Monday mornings but now he was getting in a little before eight o'clock and he rang the bell with the first burst from his gun batteries, the ammo chewing into the big crate's wing and making an engine belch fire. He went over and up and around again and smashed the big plane's flight deck and heated up another powerplant. Pieces flew out of the engine and whanged against the Mustang's sides before it cleared.

Lieutenant Shapiro bared his nice white teeth and thought of Warsaw. This did his ancestral heart good. He said, "Two fifteen-cent cigars for Shapiro!" and came roaring back at the cripple from six o'clock, fed it another short, wicked burst, and nearly turned it over on its back, still not daring to be positive of the identity of the occupants of the bucketing steel cocoon although an unusually strong stink was coming out of it. Climbing, he wondered if the people of his beloved borough would some day erect a statue of Isidor Shapiro in Prospect Park.

Any moment now he would sit straight up in his cot back at the field and question the legitimacy of the forebears of a certain pilot named Wee Willie Sparkes who always derived fiendish delight out of holding the flame of a cigarette lighter in close proximity to an exposed bare foot.

He hovered around, waiting for the oc-



cupants of the doomed craft to bail out. If one of them should prove to be big and fat. . . . A voice sounded in his earphones. Korowski's gravelly voice. "You got it, Izzy! It has to be them. They shot at you, didn't they? An' there's no Japs around here!"

Lieutenant Shapiro pushed the button of his microphone but could not push a word out of his throat, it being dryer than a Sahara July. He saw Korowski's Mustang bear off to the left and Korowski yelled again, "They're ditchin', Izzy! Look!"

Shapiro counted four small shapes dropping away from the burning heavy. One was big and fat. His parachute did not open quickly. Shivering violently with the significance of it all, Isidor counted three white flowers blooming in the sky. He looked for the fourth but could not find it. He threw the Mustang down as close to the plummeting bomber as he dared and then he saw that one of the chutes had fouled and a tiny figure flopped at the ends of the shrouds like a rag doll for a few charged moments. It suddenly broke loose and tumbled over and over, down through thousands of feet of space. Lieutenant Shapiro felt a little scooped out inside. There was a buzzing in his ears and through it came Korowski's crazily pitched voice.

"Izzy, you did it. You! You'll get a dozen medals. The squadron will be decorated. Say somethin', Izzy—"

ADOLF HITLER, née Schickelgruber, found himself on a hillside, lying supine in the softest and greenest grass he had ever seen and the sweetness of it washed the stink of airplane engine coolant out of his nose. He looked up at a sky that was as blue as the eyes of a newborn, pure Aryan babe, and strove mightily to accept the fact that even the Fuehrer could drop down through over thirty thousand feet of space *sans* parachute without as much as splintering a tibia or a clavicle. His mind backtracked faster than had Rommel out of Libya and went back to a hideout in southern Bavaria where a nightmare had begun. . . . With Himmler and Goering he had just managed to escape being hung up by the seat of his pants on an Allied spearhead coming out of Austria. . . . There had been a ride by night that shouldn't have happened to an English setter . . . then the secret drome near the Swiss border . . . the takeoff . . . brief dreams of a hacienda in the foothills of the Andes . . . then the *verdammt* Mustang—and *aput!*

"Gott!" Schickelgruber sighed, and he moved an arm. He moved a leg, and then he seemed to rise up from the soft green grass with very little motive power of his own and he was on his feet and staring out over a countryside that stretched away to dim purple horizons. The rolling fields and hills were splashed with multicolored wildflowers and silvery ribbons that were waterways wound in and out of the topography and that sparkled brilliantly in the soft, warm sun.

Adolf acknowledged the beauty of the land only abstractedly, confining his thoughts primarily to an analysis of its absolute vulnerability to a *Luftwaffe* such as he had enjoyed in 1940 and '41, and was amazed and highly incensed over the fact that his geopoliticians had overlooked such a ripe and defenseless plum in the very shadows of the Vosges.

This lush duchy, or whatever it called itself, had to be near those mountains, for the last fix given Pilot Otto Schmeerhorn by the pseudo-navigator, Heinrich Himmler, had been made right over that range a few seconds before the Mustang had appeared to kick over the whole pot of *Hasenpfeffer*. But where were Heinrich and Hermann and Otto Schmeerhorn? Where was the smoke boiling out of a wrecked plane? Where was everybody? There was not a single house visible to the naked eye. Adolf began to have his doubts regarding his indestructibility. He looked up into the sky again and saw no sun, and when he moved his feet he experienced that unpleasant sensation of not being on too firm a footing, the way he had felt the first time he had climbed a paper-hanger's ladder. In other words, he suspected that not far under his boots, a lot of space began.

"Nein," Adolf whispered. "I am dreaming yet. It is warm and bright yet there is no sun. If the sun does not shine down it must shine up. *Ach, Himmelkreuzdonnervetter!"* He tried not to think. If the sun did shine up— He looked hopefully for signs of life again, saw nothing, yet he was vaguely conscious of strange stirrings all about him, and once he was sure he heard the sound of gay, childish laughter. Maybe he was as crazy as his enemies always claimed, but he was certain of his hunger and wondered what kind of emergency rations were forthcoming in this seemingly unoccupied country.

He began walking and felt a buoyancy that was alarming, and he knew somehow that if he flapped his arms like a bird he

would surely fly. He came to two big trees the leaves of which appeared to have been washed by a rain of liquid gold. Great, luscious-looking yellow apples grew thick upon them and bent the branches down. Adolf naturally chose the biggest apple within reach and curled his fingers around it and tried to jerk it loose, but there was no strength in his arms. He tried both hands with the same results and flew into a fit of rage and dropped to his hands and knees and chewed at the grass like a famished bull calf.

"Blimie," said a voice. "It is 'im, Orville. Carst yer eye on the ruddy cove. I wouldn't give you a blinkin' tanner for 'im."

"You can say that again, Herbert."

"An' right orf, Orville, he tries to grab the bloomin' appil, forgettin' wot 'appened to Adam."

Adolf spat out a mouthful of Celestial alfalfa and quickly raised his head. *"Gott sei dank,"* he muttered when he saw the two men moving down the hillside. One was tall and lanky and he had an unruly mop of hair the color of cinnamon. He wore the uniform of the *Amerikanischer* army and his bony, freckled face was split with a wondering grin. Adolf knew that the short one with the big, predatory nose and the chin that sloped off a bit too soon was a *verdammt* Britisher. *"Guten morgen,"* he greeted.

"Phlur-r-r-r-t!" Herbert said. "So you are the gormless 'un that's been muckin' about, yus? The bloody beast of Burke's Garten! Got yer comeuppance, didn't yer?"

"If I am the prisoner of war," Adolf Schickelgruber said haughtily, "I expect to be treated with the respect that was laid down by the Geneva Conference, *ja!* Where *ist* Heinrich and Hermann? *Was ist los?"*

"Me an' Herbert haven't seen the mugs," Orville Wiggin, once very much of a mortal back in Putney, Vermont, said. "All we know is, we was sent down here to pick you up, Furrier. We are kind of non-coms like we was in the army only we do not git pushed around and do not have to salute nobody up here. If that ain't paradise, Schickelgruber, you tell me—"

"Hein? Paradise—?" Adolf's lower jaw dropped down and shook like an oriole's nest in a stiff breeze. *"Himmel?"*

"If that is Kraut for Heaven," Orville said. "Yes."

"Ach, das ist gut, hein?" Adolf laughed gleefully. "So—I was guided by a Divine Power like I told everybody. To make the world strong by destroying the weak was my destiny, *ja? Mein Kampf! Lebensraum!* Utilitarian massacre. *Ach,* perhaps I am here to eliminate the undesirables here. But where are the fortifications? I, *der Führer,* will build the war machine—"

"'Ark at 'im, Orville," Herbert Snorkle, late of the King's London Rifles, sniffed. "Incurable, wot?"

"Take me to your *Gefechstand* at once!" Adolph Hitler said, highly indignant, and drawing himself up to his full height, which brought the top of his head approximately two inches below Orville Wiggin's right shoulder. *"Schweinhunds,* you are talking to *der Führer!"*

"Swine, is it?" Herbert snapped, and gave Adolf a buffet with a flat hand the size of a dried hake that rattled his teeth. "Always wanted t' 'and you wot's wot. He called you a pig too, Orville. Heil the bloke!"

Orville connected neatly and got Adolf on the rebound and the now defunct Fuehrer spun around twice, did several waltz steps and shagged on through before his eyes were in focus once more.

"Ach du lieber," Adolf puled. "You hit *der Führer* and nothing happened. I don't understand—"

"Have patience," Orville grinned. "You will soon enough. The supervisor, that is our immediate superior orficer up here, was sayin' only yesterday why he arranged for you to git up here. He didn't think Beezlebub had a tough enough punishment for the likes of you downstairs. Not even with them innovations he put in for which he can't take much credit, seein' as how he stole the idea from the Natzi roasting ovens in that town of Maidanek, Poland. You should sue the bum, Adolf."

"Yus," Herbert Snorkle agreed. "I guess that is where you could find 'Ermann an' 'Einrich about now, Furor, gettin' their ruddy carcasses toasted a bit of any afternoon."

"Hein? And you say there is a worse punishment?" Adolf asked in a nasty scoffing manner. "It is impossible, *ja.* Even I know *Himmel* would not commit the atrocities. And I am already dead, is so?"

"Coo," Herbert said and sadly shook his head. "These bloomin' Narsties think only of the agony of the meat and bones, wot, Orville? Now—"

"Sh-h-h-h, Herbert," the Vermonter admonished. "Let'm find out fer himself. Up with you, Schickelgruber. We have a nice li'l walk ahead of us. Hup—one-two-three — Hup—three-four—an' don't let your

seat drag or we'll lift it the hard way, won't we, Herbert?"

Off they went with Herbert Snorkle playing a not so reasonable facsimile of *God Save the King* on a mouth organ. *Ach,* something was *schmutzig!* The terrible dubiety and perplexity of the moment crowded into all the painful disorder that had been inside Adolf's head ever since the influx of frantic telegrams from Stalingrad. Adolf beat his fists against his aching pate and suddenly called upon Wotan to assert himself and smite these enemies down. He screamed for *Die Valküre* to come down with the horses and not to spare the brutes. He wanted out, but *schnell!*

"Phlur-r-r-r-rt!" Herbert interrupted liquidly. "Bung off with the blinkin' rat cellar speech or I'll 'and you a packet that this 'eathen yer callin' for will feel in his backside."

"They told us he was nuts," Orville observed.

SHAKEN out of his incipient delirium by the threat of a cocked fist the size of a Vermont ham, Adolf Schickelgruber walked like a somnambulist along a path that finally led to a bosky dell filled with bird song and delicious spicy odors, and here he beheld paradisiacal readjustments that were beyond his powers of absorbence. A grinning fox and a happy English hound running along side by side; a lamb and a wolf cuddled together in a nest of soft leaves and sleeping peacefully. There were rabbits playing a sort of game with a lion, and ferrets and rats cavorted about in happy fraternity. All these and many more, every known species of fauna, apparently immune from destruction, one from the other.

"Ach, but the lion has to have meat, *hein?* The ferret has to haff der blood?" Adolf forced out. "I am dreaming yet."

"This is 'Eaven like we tol' yer, smutty lip," Herbert said impatiently. "Carn't you git it through yer thick skull, Furor? An' when did yer ever 'ear of a spirit eatin'? We look like we got bodies t' feed but, in other words, we bloomin' well 'aven't, wot, Orville?"

"Jackpot," Orville grinned.

Adolf was still befuddled and more alarmed than ever. "But no cities, no railroads or highways. No houses. You say nobody eats, *ja?* Where *ist* the manna from *Himmel?"*

"All mullarkey," Orville sniffed. "Mortal properganda. If you are hungry it is 'cause you are not etherealized yet, Schickelgruber. Why should we have beds when we got such deep soft grass t' sleep in, huh? Who wants to leave Heaven when it is so hard to git to, and where is a better place to go? It is silly. The Master has control of the weather an' can turn it on an' off as He pleases. Any more questions, Hitler? What fun, Herbert!"

"Yus, it is a blinkin' paradise, right enough," the cockney agreed. "Orf with you now, 'Itler. Me an' Orville cannot waste time on you. We 'ave a date with two angels in 'alf an hour."

Adolf Schickelgruber, his stomach growling like his old dogs of war, walked and walked and walked, his brain atilt and wondering as to the modus operandi of his arrival in *Himmel* and why he had been rendered only partially incorporeal. The path soon resolved into flights of steps that was spiral and nearly perpendicular and he climbed until his head swam and felt as light as a gobbet of meringue, and he was sure no Focke-Wulf or Messerschmitt had ever attained such an altitude.

"Now, you'll be surprised, Furrier, when you see the court," Orville said. "We're just plain folks up here who didn't git a chance to change clothes when they got the call. The judge who has your case was on his way to a trout stream when he was took an' so don't let his ol' khaki pants, windbreaker an' old slouch hat with the fishin' flies stuck in it fool you, Adolf. Down below he was a big judge, so works at his trade up here."

"Yus," Herbert Snorkle said. "You'll also see a big bracket sittin' next to the judge. 'E'll be wearin' an ol' barth-robe, which was all 'e 'ad on when the blitz bomb got 'im. Then there is a Greek in tails an' top 'at, an' a Roosian wearin' a bear-skin coat —but don't think the jury is packed, mind yer."

"I know my rights," Adolf squeaked. "I'll get a lawyer."

"Nope," Orville said. "Couldn't get one to take *your* case, Furrier, not even a little shyster who used t' be on the Capone payroll. Well, here we are."

Adolf Schickelgruber found himself on the flat summit of the Celestial mesa, staring at the welcoming committee, a dozen men seated on a semicircular stone bench. A more unmilitary and less dignified group he had never hoped to see, and once more he felt only contempt for soft and decadent democracies. *Ach,* there was nothing much to worry about.

The fat man in the wind-breaker said, "Bring the prisoner to the bar, Wiggin."

Orville gave Hitler a poke. "Hop to it, Junior," he said, then cleared his throat and began announcing in his rich Vermont twang. "If it please the court, we have brought you Adolf Hitler, born Shickelgruber, once a paper-hanger an' a lous—bad one, Your Honor. An artist, he says with a straight face, but better known as Chancellor of the Third Reich. He is charged with murder, rape, arson, coercion, robbery, sacrilege, extortion—"

"Enough, Corporal," the judge said, shoving his old felt hat further back on his bald head. "We are well acquainted with the rascal's misdeeds. Scraggy-looking character, isn't he? I've thrown the book at pickpockets who were more respectable-looking. Well, let's get it over with, gentlemen. I have a game of chess to finish with Leo Tolstoi. Court is now in session. You are the defendant, Adolf Schickelgruber?"

"Jawohl," Hitler mumbled, having his grave doubts now. He silently cursed all German pundits from Barbarossa to von Hindenberg for feeding this claptrap anent the superiority of German arms and German *Kultur* to the rank and file for centuries. The *dumkopfs!*

The judge, Milo Spinnaker, formerly of Hohokus, N. J., asked sternly, "How many people do you think you have killed, directly and indirectly, since you took over Germany, Schickelgruber?"

"Hein? I do not know. I kept—no—records."

"Careless of you, to say the least," Judge Spinnaker chided. "We believe it to be close to twelve million, Hitler!"

"So why ask me?" Adolf replied insolently. "Let me go down below and the quicker *ist* better. At least the devil feeds his own."

"Oh, so you are hungry, Schickelgruber?" the judge said, and exchanged amused glances with the members of his court. The Greek in the top hat laughed outright. "But it won't get any better or any worse, Hitler. Nothing changes here. But regarding your penance. It'll be one you'll never forget. You, who called yourself *Führer,* you shall count all you have killed for we have all of them here. You shall remain up here until your total checks

with The Master's. We trust you are good at figures, Schickelgruber?"

"Coo," enthused Herbert Snorkle.

"This is goin' to be good," said Orville Wiggin.

"*Nein, nein!* Always was I poor in arithmetic, *meine Herren.* You all know I did not get much of *der* school and was a poor paper-hanger. You make *das lustspiel, hein?*"

"He thinks we are comedians," Judge Spinnaker chuckled. "Well, I'm a monkey's uncle!" He got up and walked up to Adolf, picked the erstwhile Fuehrer up by the scruff of the neck and nearly lifted him out of his boots. He carried him to the edge of the eminence and set him down. "Look, Schickelgruber, they are all down there in that great bowl. Men and women and children of all nationalities, even millions of Germans. The souls of the millions you liquidated, Hitler! You will count them all. Corporal Wiggin, the tablets of paper and the crayons for the guilty one."

"Roger," Orville grinned.

Adolf looked out over the immense bowl thousands and thousands of feet below and his knees turned to aspic and his teeth rattled like a million castanets. Millions upon millions of little figures milled about down there like as many ants busily engaged in repairing a violated hill.

"Start when you're ready, Schickelgruber," the judge said.

"If they won't stay still, how can I count them?" Hitler screeched, and he hopped up and down like a piece of popcorn on a hot stove-lid. "Tell them to form *der* lines and march past!"

"Oh, brother," Orville sighed.

"You'll take them as you found them originally," the judge snapped. "Going about their work and their play, minding their own business. Start counting, Hitler. The quicker you start the quicker you'll go to hell. We'll return in a few days to check your count."

"*Ja—jawohl*—Your Honor."

THE court adjourned and left the eminence, and Herbert Snorkle said before retiring, "I 'opes you git mud in your bloomin' eye, 'Itler. Orville, this is worth forgettin' t' duck at Dunkirk. Coo."

Left alone, Adolf began to count. He counted for seventeen Celestial days and nights, until his head was merely an aching pulpy lump atop his sagging shoulders. He cursed every Nazi general and soldier who had ever borne arms for the Reich for having killed so many, especially those who had liquidated children, for the little spirits kept running about like startled rabbits, hiding behind trees, in the thickets and under their mothers' skirts. Their laughter tormented him and kept mixing him up in his count and made him go back and start over and over again. Once he contemplated flight but found he could not move the seat of his pants off the hard flat rock as much as an inch. And his meridian kept growling and it was icy cold on the high mesa although everything below was bathed in soft liquid sunshine. Finally, satisfied with his count, he waited for the return of the disciplinarians.

A flood of warmth suddenly enveloped the eminence and a voice said, "What's the good word, Adolf?" and Hitler turned and saw Judge Milo Spinnaker standing there, flanked by Orville Wiggin and Herbert Snorkle. The judge was smoking a cigar that burned eternally and his old angling hat was cocked over his right eye.

"Yus, Furor," Snorkle asked. "You think you got a 'undred per cent, wot?"

"Silence, Snorkle!" the judge said. "Schickelgruber, what was your result?"

Adolph said eagerly, "Ten million, nine hundred and eighty-one thousand, seven hundred and two."

The judge looked in his little book. He shook his head. "Wrong, Schickelgruber. You didn't even get close. Start counting over again."

"*Nein!*" Adolph screamed. "It *ist* barbarous! Even to a Pole I wouldn't—" He threw himself down and tried to chew a rug that was not there.

"Snap out of it!" Judge Spinnaker ordered. "Or I'll have the temperature lowered, Fuehrer. Get back to your counting and no more of this damned nonsense!"

"*Jawohl, Ach du lieber,*" Adolf choked out and got up and gathered up his accounting equipment and hopped to his hard seat on the edge of the eminence.

"You know wot, 'Itler?" Herbert Snorkle called out. "I bet you fergot t' count us blokes."

"*Ach—ist* so. *Danke schoen.* This time I get the right answer. *Ein-zwei-drei—*"

"Coo," Herbert said rapturously. "This *is* 'Eaven, Orville. I wish we could send word t' our bureaved relatives 'ow 'appy we are 'ere."

When the judge and Orville and Herbert went down the steps. Adolf began his count again. He counted for twenty-one days and nights this time to make sure, until his head was filled with gremlins wearing hob-nailed boots, all swinging

heavy mauls or working pneumatic drills. He wore out three hundred crayons and the papers, filled with columns of figures, were stacked three feet high at his feet. His throat was raw from screaming at the little spirits, who seemed more restless than ever, and at the moment, if his soul were only his own, he would have given it along with the Reichstag to a Warsaw pawnbroker for one slice of a bratwurst sausage.

His fingers and toes and even the tip of his nose were frost-bitten and the taunting laughter from far below had taken up permanent residence in his tortured ears.

Then Schickelgruber suddenly felt a rise in temperature and heard the music of Herbert Snorkle's mouth-organ, and he jumped to his feet, hugging his precious papers to his bosom. Soon the judge and Orville and Herbert appeared on the rim of the mesa and Judge Spinnaker said without preamble:

"Well, Hitler, what is the result you have this time?"

"Eleven million, seventy-six thousand *und* three," Adolf said confidently.

Once more the judge peered into his little book, then snapped it shut. He looked at Orville and Herbert, and shook his head sadly. "Wrong again, as I was sure you would be, Fuehrer. Too bad, you've got to count them over again. We have brought fresh supplies."

Adolf Schickelgruber went into a rare tantrum and ran around in a tight circle like a high school horse and beat his fists against his head. *"Nein!* Send to hell! Always inside my head is numbers. Hundreds, thousands, millions yet. *Ein-zwei-drei—ein, zwei, drei—donnervetter!"*

"'Ark at the blighter," Herbert said. "Cheer up, 'Itler. Rome wa'n't took in a day, wot? Let's be orf, Orville. Ain't it Paradise, though? The girlies are never 'ungry up 'ere."

Alone, Adolf Schickelgruber began the long count once more, striving desperately to correctly tabulate the millions he had sent to this corner of Paradise. "Four thousand, nine hundred *und* one—*nein,* I counted the fifty Czechs twice—four thousand, eight hundred *und* fifty-one—"

Then, hours upon hours later—"Eleven thousand, six hundred *und* sixty-two—*dumkopfs! Schweinhunds!* Stand still yet! Stop running about like crazy, *ach!"* But when he reached thirty-seven thousand, the little figures down in the great bowl began converging into one great swirling mass, and the ones he had counted could not be isolated from the ones he had not and so he lost his head and forgot momentarily his miserable status in the scheme of things. He cursed them one and all, threatened them with the fury of the Luftwaffe, the Wehrmacht, the Elite Guards, the Gestapo and the rocket bombs, and then a vicious gust of icy wind tore his tally sheets loose from his fingers and swept them far out of reach and shocked him back to the sickening realization that he had to go back and start from scratch again.

"Ein-zwei, drei—" Adolf stopped counting and clamped his hands to his poor addled cranium when the horrible significance of his penance began to penetrate the compote of noises roaring and whistling therein. He would never leave this lofty perch, for a man, even if he had a dozen pair of eyes to see with, as many brains to figure with, and although he happened to be the greatest mathematician in the Universe, could never correctly count the millions of souls swirling about in that hallowed corner of *Himmel.* Yet he knew he had to keep on counting for his only chance of deliverance depended on the remote possibility that some day he would bring in a total that would check with The Master's.

Days later, Adolf was counting. "One million, nine hundred *und* forty-six thousand *und* one—one million, nine hundred *und* forty-six thousand *und* two—"

ON THE American airdrome near Nancy, Mustang pilots strove to placate Lieutenant Isidor Shapiro. "Of course they didn't find what was left of Hitler, Izzy," Wee Willie Sparkes argued. "Don't forget he dropped over thirty-thousand feet and straight down like an anvil. I'll bet the crows are salvagin' scraps of the Fuehrer outside Liverpool an' in the foothills of the Pyrenees."

"I guess so," Lieutenant Shapiro griped. "But he got off easier than the other Natzies. What he got was too good for him an' that's what bothers me. He don't have t' stand trial. See what I mean?"

Pilot Pete Korowski nodded. "Sure, but forgit it, Izzy." He spat against the little stove in the center of the hut to hear it sizzle. "I wonder how many people did get killed because of the stinker? I guess Heaven only knows."

"Yeah," Lieutenant Shapiro said, thinking of the welcome he would get when he got back to Brooklyn.

(Continued from page 6)

AWAITING "PHRA"

Enclosed is my check for $1.25 for a year's subscription to *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and the Lawrence Portfolio.

This subscription is my insurance that I will not miss the next issue of F.F.M., which will contain Arnold's "Phra the Phoenician." I first read this book some thirteen or fourteen years ago, in a library here in Evansville, but it has evidently been lost or destroyed somewhere in the years, for they don't have it now. For the past five or six years, I have been trying to locate a copy, but have been unsuccessful. I couldn't remember the author's name, which was a handicap. I even thought that perhaps I had forgotten the title, too, and searched under "Adventures of P. the P.," "Amazing Adventures of," etc., etc. and was still unsuccessful. So, perhaps, you can imagine my feelings when, in bold letters across half a page, I read it is to be featured in your next issue!

I have been reading your magazine a comparatively short time. I like fantastic and science fiction, and though the "Fantastic" part of your title had attracted me on the newsstands several times, the "Mysteries" scared me off, as I thought it must be just another detective magazine. When I finally did buy a copy, I very much regretted that I hadn't bought one sooner.

I should like to congratulate you on the quality of the letters which appear in your "Readers' Viewpoint." I read most of the fantasy and science fiction magazines that are still published; in fact, if there are any I don't read, it is because I don't see them on the newsstands! All of them have readers' letters; written so obviously for effect, and in hope of seeing the writer's name in print.

Maybe it's because I can't write a "clever" letter myself that I prefer the kind that appear in your magazine—honest criticisms and expression of opinion, without all the added attention-getting fol-de-rol. Some of your correspondents are very fine writers in their own right.

"The Boats of the *Glen Carrig*" gave the feeling that the author must have been a contemporary of Swift's; I was very much surprised to see that it had been copyrighted as late as 1907. The author is to be congratulated on maintaining a style like that so consistently throughout the story; although, in my opinion, a little conversation in quotation marks wouldn't have hurt the story. It certainly would have made it more readable.

"Even A Worm" left me with distinct shivers!

The Allan Quatermain stories very definitely belong in your magazine. Such as "Allan and the Ice Gods," or "Allan and the Holy Flower." Both are unobtainable here, and would, I am sure, be appreciated by your readers. Keep using Lord Dunsany.

If any of your readers have copies of books

by Burroughs, Haggard, or Merritt with which they are willing to part, I'd be glad to have them get in touch with me.

MRS. CARL WOLF.
2227 W. IOWA ST.,
EVANSVILLE, 12, INDIANA.

HE LIKES OUR CHOICE

Though, as you know, it is impossible to buy F.F.M. in England these days, I am pleased to say that I have been able to read every issue since your firm took over, through the library of the S-F Club to which I belong.

Speaking generally, I must say that I have nothing but praise for the new policy. I notice that several people have recently been screaming for magazine stories, especially those by Merritt. Personally, though I will not deny that I have enjoyed some of Merritt's work and that the man could undoubtedly write, I would not go out of my way to pick up a Merritt yarn; frequently I have found far more enjoyment in stories by so-called lesser authors.

Returning to the original subject, with your present policy you have a far greater range of book-fiction from which to select. It seems that in recent issues you have been concentrating your attention, when selecting the feature, on adventure novels having a fantasy background: for myself these have been a pleasant change, a relaxation, from some of the 'heavy' science-fiction I have found available.

With regard to illustrations, I can say with some emphasis that your present staff is well-nigh unsurpassable. I refer to Lawrence and Clyne, of course. I am not forgetting Finlay, by the way; those beautiful framed interiors of Lawrence's prove him to be as good an artist as Finlay—in fact I am almost tempted to say better, for Finlay, in black and white, relies on "special effects", as often as not.

I think Lawrence's best cover to date is that depicting Phorenice on the December 1944 issue; this is really a masterpiece, though I must confess that at first glimpse it reminded me of a magazine of the "true confessions" type! His most striking interiors those for "The Greatest Adventure" (The Warm Valley) and "The Lost Continent" (Mammoth scene). In Lawrence and Clyne you undoubtedly have the finest artists in the fantasy field.

Turning to the stories, I have just been trying to select what I consider your best novel, but find it almost impossible, for I can quite truthfully say that I have enjoyed, without a single exception, every one from "Ark of Fire" to the latest "Lost Continent". Perhaps those I enjoyed more than any others were "The Iron Star", "Three Go Back" and "The Lost Continent".

This last was a particularly brilliant piece of work; for me the characters really *lived* and somehow I could not find it possible to condemn the beautiful Phorenice for her acts. The last chapter cannot but be associated with the

Bible story of the Ark, and this subtle suggestion I considered particularly clever.

I was especially pleased to see the work of Lord Dunsany within your pages: as one of your correspondents remarked, their length is adequately compensated for by their quality. This author is a master craftsman in the art of assembling words; the bizarre atmosphere he creates with a few expressions is really amazing.

I should like to give a word of commendation on your choice of Chesterton's "The Man Who Was Thursday". Whilst this is certainly a fantastic mystery, I formed the opinion that, with its outdated, leisurely, meandering style it would not suit a modern pulp magazine's reading public. It pleased me to observe that I was wrong!

For future reprints may I suggest "When Worlds Collide" and "After Worlds Collide", by Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie; also, an investigation of Dennis Wheatley's works might provide something useful. I am thinking in particular of his novel, "The Devil Rides Out". By the way, how many pages in book form would one hundred of F.F.M.'s pages fill?

DENNIS TUCKER.

"WICKLOW",
87 OAKRIDGE ROAD,
HIGH WYCOMBE,
BUCKS.,
ENGLAND.

Editor's Note: F.F.M. has an average of 880 words to a page. Books differ, but you can figure it from one of your average books.

KEEP LONG STORIES

The June F.F.M. has been thoroughly digested and that peculiar urge common to most would-be critics has yours truly and his trusty Remington firmly in its grasp. Being no exception to the proverb of cause and effect, comes now a report on one individual's reactions to the fantasies presented by authors Hodgson and Bradford respectively.

Hard to know just what to say about "The Boats of the *Glen Carrig*." It read like a nightmare born of countless superstitions, and wandered ghoulishly about, going nowhere in particular. I found the opening chapters rather dull, but Hodgson slowly managed to build up a brooding mood, powerful and compelling despite the almost childish subject matter. All in all, it was a good yarn, with several superb moments, but certainly not the most praiseworthy novel F.F.M. has presented. Lawrence was excellent in his illustrations; Lawrence's best. I miss the black background—hint, hint.

I liked the idea behind Bradford's "Even A Worm" very much. His handling thereof was interesting and entertaining, although the frequent lapses into the realm of satire seemed somewhat out of place—unless the whole thing was a satire, in which case I missed the boat entirely. Summing up, it was an interesting story, almost casually written, and very enjoyable. I might add that it wasn't a classic, to me, in any sense of the word.

Kindly turn an extremely deaf ear upon those

who keep asking for a magazine of novelettes and short stories. The long novel is the very core of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, and what sets it above other magazines of its type. There are countless magazines running a twelve-page lead "novel" and numerous five page "short stories" for those who like that sort of thing.

I seem to be one of a select few, for I own a copy of the elusive "Etidorhpa" which I bought due to some really striking illustrations. Those fans who feel energetic might take the trouble to spell the title backwards and see what happens.

Here's to F.F.M.—long may she live!

CHAD OLIVER.

%MRS. C. L. COLEMAN,
CRYSTAL CITY, TEX.

HODGSON "TOPS"

I have gradually become convinced that gold can be found in pulp. I wanted to re-read "The Man Who Was Thursday" and so bought my first copy of F.F.M.—now I am looking through the second-hand stores for back copies. Hyne's "Atlantis" was another I had wanted to get for—lo, these many years. I failed to capture the thrill it gave me at 16, but I am grateful just the same. Hodgson of course is about tops not only in creative imagination, but also in workmanship.

Your artists are excellent for the most part but most uneven.

A suggestion or two for the future: Bram Stoker wrote "A Mystery of the Sea" some forty years ago. Then there was "The Frozen Pirate", I think by Russell, a real fantasy and thriller.

Also Wells' "When the Sleeper Wakes" is quite out of all circulation for many years. Doyle has some shorts that I believe were never published in magazine form—unless the *London Strand* did them.

More Natural and Supernatural Power to you.

C. S. LAMB.

30 S. 9TH ST., MPLS., MINN.

A NICE APPRECIATION

I am writing to tell you with what extreme pleasure I read Hodgson's "The Boats of the *Glen Carrig*". The story kept my interest from beginning to end, the author has such a leisurely manner in his style, which makes it the more effective in building up a suspenseful atmosphere, so that you can't help but go on to the last word! Halfway through the story, I made the interesting discovery that there actually isn't one word of conversation on any page, and yet one is conscious of the people talking throughout the narrative, and the silences in the strange lands are more evident by contrast. I wonder if anyone else noticed this? His description of the storm at sea and the helpless little boats was also another especially effective bit of writing.

I can understand now why Hodgson was a favorite of Lovecraft.

The illustrations by Lawrence seem reminiscent of those by Leo Morey in the old *Amazing*, so that it seems as if you're bringing back a bit of "The Good Old Times" with your magazine. I think Hannes Bok, though, is the artist especially suitable to do the weird fantasy illustrations.

I bought this copy of F.F.M. at our PX, and it's wonderful to think we can get it here, since the camp is located about 37 miles from the nearest railroad station, and 35 miles from the nearest town of any size.

PFC. LARRY FARSACI.

HODGSON "A-PLUS"

F.F.M. is first on my list of reading material. The stories, with an occasional exception, are swell. Lawrence is okay for illustrating, especially full-page jobs. The picture of the "Weed Men" on Page 51 of the June issue is perfect. Hodgson's story was A-plus.

The short was all right, but it could have been better.

Here is a short plea for help. Has anyone got the following F.F.M.'s and F.N.'s for me? F.F.M.: December '40; April and June '41; June, August, September, October and November '42; and March '43. F.N.: Volume I, Numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4.

FRED ROWLAND.

125 SHEPARD AVE.,
KENMORE, N. Y.

LIKED "EVEN A WORM"

The June issue of F.F.M. was perhaps no better than its predecessors, but certainly equal to them. The cover was, as usual, good. Slightly better than the last. Could be better, though.

"The Boats of the *Glen Carrig*" was Hodgson at his best, which is very good indeed. Its highly imaginative themes were handled with a dream-like indistinctness which left a good deal to the reader's own imagination. Parts of it were chilling enough to equal even M. R. James or Lovecraft in suspense and terror. Still, it had its faults. The beginning was bad, somewhat too abrupt. The action lagged in places; my interest waxed and waned as night fell and lifted upon the little group of castaways in the narrative. The language was archaic; so much so as to become annoying at times. Yet, in spite of these defects the tale gripped me to the very end, and was, on the whole, a complete success. More of Hodgson, please, especially "The Night Land," which, from what I have read of it, would seem to be even better than "Glen Carrig."

The second novel, "Even A Worm," was excellent. It varied from Dunsanyesque fantasy to stark, macabre physical horror. In places the author shows himself to be somewhat of a poet, and certainly a man with a deep understanding of nature.

Lawrence's interior art work seems to be degenerating. The illustrations of former issues, with their filagreed frames and decorations, have entirely disappeared. Let's have fewer but

better illustrations, especially full-page ones.

The Readers' Viewpoint: Some comments on the comments therein:

The battle royal concerning "TMWWT" still rages in full fury. The fans are inclined to place it either at the extreme top or bottom of the list. Personally, I think it was one of the best novels you have ever published, a tasteful blend of mystery, satire, and fantasy. I can see my opponents' point, though. However, no more of Chesterton's writings are very fantastic, save perhaps "The Perfect Game," a short which has probably appeared in magazine form before.

I join with the majority of readers in asking for more of Taine's work. As a next selection I would suggest "Before the Dawn," an imaginative account of prehistoric life *sans genus homo*. This piece would fill about half the magazine, so that you could make it a two-novel issue, similar to the present one. Other Taine selections: "The Gold Tooth," "The Purple Sapphire," and "Green Fire."

RICHARD LOVELACE.

309 So. DARTMOUTH AVE.,
ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEX.

Editor's Note: "Before the Dawn" will appear in a future issue of F.F.M.

FROM OVERSEAS, MAR. 7

It's been a long time since I've commented on my favorite magazine—since the first "Popular" issue, as a matter of fact. I was tempted to raise my voice in horror when you discarded your policy of reprinting from *Argosy*, but I decided to wait and watch the results. The results were far more than I expected. F.F.M. today is head and shoulders above anything I had hoped for. Congratulations.

Two days ago I received my first copy of F.F.M. since I have been overseas. I've already read it from cover to cover. Our outfit is well supplied with reading material, but science fiction and fantasy are at a premium in the Marianas. F.F.M. has filled that need better than any other magazine could have done. When I was a civilian in the States, the buying of a new issue of F.F.M. was a happy event. When I receive an issue, such as the March one, over here, it's almost a holiday.

The novel, "The Machine Stops," was excellent, although I was a bit disappointed to find that Mr. Smith did not give enough space to the conditions existing outside of the laboratory and Bradley Parva. I had expected something on the order of George Allan England's "Darkness and Dawn", with vivid description of the civilized world in chaos. However, that's a small complaint and the story as a whole was grand.

Mr. Kuttner's "Before I Wake" was a beautifully written tale and, to my way of thinking, overshadowed your feature story.

Lawrence's illustrations were uniformly good, although I thought some of them too dark to do his original work justice. Perhaps if he were to lighten the originals somewhat, the published drawings would not pull together quite as much.

Suggestions for future stories? My favorites are those based on the downfall-of-civilization

FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

theme. Among those you might use are Conan Doyle's lesser known work, "The Poison Belt"; Wright's "Deluge"; Best's "The Twenty-fifth Hour". A few of H. Rider Haggard's novels might be useable, namely "When the World Shook" and "People of the Mist". I don't recall ever seeing Wylie's "After Worlds Collide" in magazine form. It's one of the best of the interplanetaries.

Best wishes for a brilliant future for F.F.M.!

SGT. L. ROBERT TSCHIRKY.

PLEASED READER

Now I'm going to be nice, apart from me disagreeing with your policy. Our mag is tip-top. I like everything about it—the wonderful bright covers—the explosive background to the cover title. Whatever else you do, don't ever alter that. It won't seem like the same mag if you do.

The stories please me very much. The illustrations are excellent. Of course we all miss Virgil Finlay, but I'm sure he will be back again before very many more issues. Am not so pleased that it is quarterly—still in a way perhaps it is just as well, as I am working long hours in essential war industry at present and for the duration so do not get a great deal of time for reading.

In recent issues stories I liked immensely were "The Day of the Brown Horde" by R. Tooker and what a fine cover to go with it, too! In your last issue both stories were excellent. "The Lost Continent" by C. Hyne and "The Highwayman" by Lord Dunsany. I didn't like the cover so well, still I suppose others did. Talking of stories, there is one book that I would like to see in F.F.M. and I think it would go over well with the readers and this is "Out of the Silence" by Earle Cox. It came over the air here in NZ as a radio serial of twenty half-hour episodes and it went over well with the public in spite of the far-fetched and fantastic theme. Apart from Merritt's stories, I don't think there is a story I have enjoyed reading more.

Yes, I'm a Merritt fan, too. I'm absolutely nuts about his stories.

Before I close I'd like to say that I'd be pleased to hear from readers who can supply me with F.F.M.'s and F.N.'s containing Merritt's stories and I would also like to hear from anyone who can help me to obtain back issues of *Super Science, Astonishing Stories*, and other magazines of this type especially issues from 1939 to date, as very few have been coming to N.Z. since war broke out.

I have quite a number of duplicates of this type of magazine I could exchange or if any of your readers are stamp collectors, need I say more?

That's all from New Zealand this time, but I'll be writing again soon if you don't hurry up and produce some old Munsey stories. An idea has struck me perhaps you are holding them up till you can get Finlay to illustrate them; if this is so I'll forgive you for the delay. Cheerio.

JACK R. MURTAGH.

509 SELWOOD RD.,
HASTINGS, NEW ZEALAND.

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

FOR NEW ORLEANS FANS

"The Boats of the *Glen Carrig*" was quite a pleasant surprise after such stuff as "Ghost Pirates" and "The Derelict".

"Even A Worm" was, h-mmm, excellent, and one of the best animals-against-man stories I have ever come across.

If there is anyone in New Orleans who has a sincere interest in scientification or fantasy and would like to contact anyone with similar interests, kindly get in touch with me. Age or sex makes no difference; all that matters is that you be interested in science-fiction or fantasy. New Orleans is, for a city its size, the most poorly represented city in fandom. So, fans of the Crescent City, let's do something about it.

E. E. GREENLEAF, JR.

1303 MYSTERY STREET,
NEW ORLEANS 19, LA.

BY V-MAIL

Today I picked up my first copy of F.F.M. and was really surprised at the excellent stories between its two covers.

Mr. Smith's "The Machine Stops" is one of the best stories I have ever read. It is written in a way that makes you want to finish once you have started and I hope you will give the readers more of his stories.

The cover by Lawrence was a masterpiece. It told the whole story by way of illustration and I am ready to agree with other readers he is tops as an artist.

Being of a group overseas I just hope I may be able to read more of your books.

PVT. LEO R. FOCHT.

FROM THE AIR FORCE

In "The Reader's Viewpoint" there's quite a discussion on whose illustrations should be used in F.F.M. This fellow Lawrence gets a lot of credit, but the bulk of the comment says he's "second to Finlay", and there are a very great many who suggest you change to Bok, or Paul, or Matt Fox, or the Magarians, and have covers by Margaret Brundage. All in all it seems to me that in spite of a lot of favorable comment regarding Lawrence, he's not getting his due.

When I saw his first pictures some time ago in other magazines, I wasn't too highly impressed, because for the most part, he wasn't allowed much space or freedom of expression. Ditto the first F.F.M. or so. But since then he's really opened up with all guns, and turned out some stuff that doesn't have to rate second to anyone doing pen-line work. And I'll repeat that "anyone", too.

Get me right—this is no criticism of Finlay, because when he was right, he was excellent. But in all around work, not even Finlay has put out anything to surpass Lawrence's full-page bordered pictures. They can honestly be called pen-paintings. I will admit, his covers haven't equalled Finlay's—one reason being the monotony of tone. No—we don't want any garish, rainbow-hued stuff. But he could paint with a little more strength, don't you think?

Do you think you could have someone finish up the stories A. Merritt was supposed to have

been working on? It'll take a lot to duplicate the Merrit style, but if he left a plot outline of any sort, it should be possible. Why not ask your readers if it's worth a try?

Enclosed you'll find the request for a Lawrence Portfolio. I'll be looking for it. . . .

PFC. GEORGE EVANS.

Editor's Note: Up to the present time the Merritales have not been available.

GREATEST MAGAZINE EVER

I did not snatch the final copy of F.F.M. away from slavering customers, but I was a bit apprehensive about getting a copy. Neither did I conceal it from supercilious onlookers; what I read is my own concern and I prefer your magazine above all others.

Candidly I did not like "The Boats of the *Glen Carrig*." Of course Hodgson's sincere method of writing was a delight after the blasé style of certain authors; but—though I waited and hoped perfervidly—nothing, in my estimation, of any true value occurred. It's a writer's prerogative to write what he desires—yet I, in that particular novelette, was expecting more interesting contacts with the weed men. But it seems Hodgson was merely leading up to the culmination of a love story. The custom of having a love angle has been so prevalent that a story without it is an exquisite morsel. I could never get any analogy between the wailing tree-people and the weed men. Must have been something to fill space. The illustration on page 19 is Lawrence's best so far. He seems to be one of the unusual artists who reads the story he is to illustrate. The cover painting was excellent, but somehow reminds me of an "Adventure" cover.

A list of likes and dislikes: likes:

1. The Face in the Abyss—Merritt's best.
2. The Blind Spot—a paragon.
3. The Mouthpiece of Zitu—a ruler of space stories.
4. The Iron Star—professors can do something after all.
5. Burn, Witch, Burn!—better than Lovecraft for combined fantasy and horror.

Dislikes:

1. The Elixir Of Hate—Ponce de Leon could have done better.
2. The Lost Continent—is it the 1000th about Atlantis?
3. The Machine Stops—and I stopped halfway through!

How about the "Editor's Page" again?

Truly, yours is the greatest magazine ever published. Can such a condition continue until I'm too old to read? Will not all the classics of fantasy be exhausted? Forbid the thought!

One thing more. Hope you didn't have to read "Boats of the *Glen Carrig*." Hodgson seems to have all the forms of "continue" well in hand: continuous, continuity; and they recur so many times! But, then, you didn't write it.

Some of you readers write me, please.

CALVIN ERNEST MONROE BEARDEN.
GENERAL DELIVERY,
GADSDEN, ALABAMA.

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

CORRECTION

In the March 1945 issue a letter from K. M. Harman under the title "Compliment for Fox" was published with the wrong address. Mr. Harman's address is 627 Channing Ave., Palo Alto, California.

THE EDITORS.

ENTHUSIAST

Allow me to do the honors of introduction. Here you see a small, stout, but smiling figure holding the March ish of F.F.M. Blubbering and rolling his eyes idiotically in delight.

Yes at last a real justification of your policy. Why moan about Munsey's when here's something just as good?

Let's analyze the March ish of my favorite (no kiddin') mag.

Cover: Very symbolic, the way a cover should be. Not illustrating a single scene but the whole story. Lawrence is improving. I'm glad you got him. I don't think a story like this would be Finlay's type for a cover.

Interior pics: As usual, swell but not enuf.

"The Machine Stops": Classic! Classic! Comes the crowd yelling that phrase that warms every author's and editor's heart. All I can say is a well-developed story, every point brought out to its fullest degree. Characterization was swell.

"Before I Wake . .": A good, interesting story: plot not too new, but more often appears in a book like *Weird Tales*.

You've got one of the best readers' columns in the field. Keep it up.

HAROLD W. CHENEY, JR.

584 E. MONROE ST.,
LITTLE FALLS, N. Y.

"LAWRENCE IS SUPERB!"

I started reading your mag about eight months ago. Since then I've been buying up all the back issues that I could get my hands on. Not being a gifted orator I can only say that you've got the best mag in circulation. Keep it that way! ! !

Wayland Smith does a good story—though he writes with a typical English reserve. Kuttner is at his best in "Before I Wake ." When Kuttner is good he is super.

Lawrence is superb! By the way, enclosed find my 1.25 for my year's subscription and the Lawrence portfolio.

Clyne did a good job on Dunsany's story a couple of issues back—the story was tops too. "The Postman of Otford" wasn't very good.

A. JOHN NORDSTROM.

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AN OFFER

I would like to obtain books by Sir Rider Haggard such as "She," "Ayesha," etc. Also books by R. Cummings, John Taine, and G. England. Also some issues of F.F.M.

Will trade F.F.M. for them.

HAROLD DUNSTER, SR.

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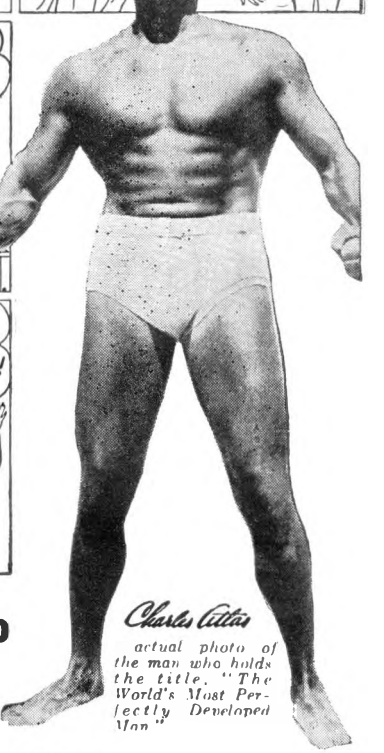

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