CHAPTER IX.

Sir Nigel, who had entered the room with a silvery-haired old lady upon his arm, stared aghast at this sudden burst of candor.

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"Maude, Maude!" said he, shaking his head, "it is more hard for me to gain obedience from you than from the tenscore drunken archers who followed me to Guinne. Yet, hush! little one, for your fair lady-mother will be here anon, and there is no need that she should know it. We will keep you from the provost-marshal this journey. Away to your chamber, sweeting, and keep a bilthe face, for she who confesses is shriven. And now, fair mother," he continued, when his daughter had gone, "sit you here by the fire, for your blood runs colder than it did. Alleyne Edricson, I would have a word with you, for I would fain that you should take service under me. And here in good time comes my lady, without whose counse! it is not my wont to decide aught to import; but, indeed, it was her own thought that you should come."

"For I have formed a good opinion."

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"For I have formed a good opinion of you, and can see that you are one who may be trusted," said the Lady Loring. "And in good sooth my dear lord hath need of such a one by his side, for he recks so little of himself that there should be one there to look to his needs and meet his wants. You have seen the cloister; it were well that you should see the world, too, ere you make choice for life between them."

"You can ride?" asked Sir Nigel, looking at the youth with puckered eyes.

"Yes, I have ridden much at the ab-"Yes, I have ridden much at the abbey."

"Yet there is a difference betwixt a friar's hack and a warrior's destrier. You can sing and play?"

"On citole, flute and rebeck."

"Good! You can read blazonry?"

"Indifferent well."

"I trust that you are lowly and serviceable?"

"They served all my life, my lord."

"I have served all my life, my lord."
"Canst carve too?"
"I have carved two days a week for a brethren." brethren."
A model truly! Wilt make a squire squires. But toll me, pray, canst l hair?"

"A model truly! Wilt make a squire of squires. But toll me, pray, canst curl hair?"

"No, my lord, but I could learn."

"It is of import," said he, "for I love to keep my hair well ordered, seeing that the weight of my helmet for thirty years hath in some degree frayed it upon the top."

"It is for you also to bear the purse," said the lady; "for my sweet lord is of so free and gracious a temper that he would give it gayly to the first who asked alms of him. All these things, with some knowledge of venerie, and hound, with the grace and hardihood and courtesy which are proper to your age, will make you a fit squire for Sir Nigel Loring."

"Alas, lady!" Alleyne answered, "I know well the great honor that you have done me in deeming me worthy to wait upon so renowned a knight, yet I am so conscious of my own weakness that I scarce dare incur duties which I might be so ill fitted to fulfil."

"Modesty and a humble mind," said she, "are the very first and rarest gifts in page or squire. Your words prove that you have these, and all the rest is but the work of use and of time."

"We can scarce hope," said Sir Nigel, "to have all ready for our start before the feast of St. Luke, for there is much to be done in the time. You will have leisure, therefore, if it please you to take service under me, in which to learn your devoir."

"And I have one favor to crave from you," added the lady of the castle, ar-Alleyne turned to leave their presence. "You have, as I understand, much

"And I have one favor to crave from you," added the lady of the castle, as Alleyne turned to leave their presence. "You have, as I understand, much learning, which you have acquired at Beaulieu. I would have you give an hour or two a day whist you are with us in discoursing with my daughter, the Lady Maude; for she is somewhat backward. I fear, and hath no love for letters, save for these poor fond romances, which do but fill her empty head with dreams of enchanted maidens and of errant cavalier. Father Christopher comes over after nones from the Priory, but he is stricken with years and slow of speech, so that she gets small profit from his teaching. I would have you do what you can with her, and with Agatha, my young tire woman, and with Dorothy Pierpont."

And so Alleyne found himself net only chosen as squire to a knight, but also as squire to three damozels, which he had thought to play in the world.

And now there came a time of stir and bustle, of furbishing of arms and clang of hammer from all the southland counties. Fast spread the tidings, from thorpe to thorpe and from castle to castle, that the old game was afoot once more, and the lions and lilies to be in the field with the early spring. Great news this for that fierce old country whose trade for a generation had been war, her exports archers and her imports prisoners. For six years her sons had chafed under an unwonted peace. Now they flew to their arms as to their birthright. The old soldiers of Creey, of Nogent, and of Poictiers were glad to think that they might hear the war-trumpet once more, and gladder still were the hot youth who had chaffed for years under the martial tales of their sires. To pierce the great mountains of the south, to fight the tamers of the flery Moors, to fol-

Sympasio preceding chapters at each of this issaliment.

fully and sagnaciously the veteran heroes, of gallant deeds and lofty aims, kight chose out his men from the is awarm of volunteers. Many an anxious the hidden several of the universe, and the two squires rade on a gain, the hidden several of the universe, and the two squires rade on a gain, the hidden several of the universe, and the two squires rade on a gain, the hidden several of the universe, and the two squires rade on a gain, the hidden several of the universe, and the two squires rade on a gain, the hidden several of the universe, and the two squires rade on a gain, the hidden several of the universe, and the two squires rade on a gain, the hidden several of the universe, and the two squires rade of the sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade on a gain, the hidden sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade of the sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade on a gain, the hidden sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade of the sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade of the two squires rade of the two squires rade of the two squires rade on a gain, the hidden sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade on a gain, the hidden sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade on a gain, the hidden sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade of the sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade of the sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade of the sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade of the sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade of the sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade of the sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade of the sawarm of volunteers and the two squires rade of the sawarm of volunteers and the sawarm



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right hip there jutted out the Jeathern quiver, with its bristle of goose, pigeon, and peacock feathers.

So we'll toast altogether
To the Gray Goose Feather,
And the land where the Gray Goose flew.

Behind the bowmen strode two trumpeters blowing upon nakirs, and two drummers in particcolored clothes. After them came twenty-seven sumpter-horses carrying tent poles, cloth, spare arms, spurs, wedges, cooking kettles, horseshoes, bags of nairs, and the hundred other things which experience had shown to be needful in a harried hostile country. A white mule with red trappings, led by a variet, carried Sir Nigel's own napery and table comforts. Then came two-score more archers, ten more men-at-arms, and, finally a rear-guard of twenty bowmen, with sbig John towering in the front rank and the veteran Aylward marching by his side, his battered harness and faded surcoat in strange contrast with the snow-white jupons and shining brigandines of his companions. A quick cross-fire of greetings and questions and rough West Saxon jests flew from rank to rank, or were bandied about betwixt the marching archers and the gazing crowd.

The Company had marched to the turn of the road ere Sir Nigel Loring rode out from the gazing crowd.

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The Company had marched to the turn of the road ere Sir Nigel Loring rode out from the gazing war-horse, whose ponderous footfall on the wooden drawbridge echoed loudly from the gloomy arch which spanned it. Sir Nigel was still in his velvet dress of peace, with flat velvet cap of maintenance, and curling ostrich feather clasped in a golden brooch. He bore no arms save the long and

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