

Beaulieu. At early dawn they passed across the broad, sluggish, reed-girt stream—men, horses, and baggage in the flat ferry barges—and so journeyed on through the fresh morning air past Exbury to Lepe. Topping the healthy down, they came to a sudden fall in sight of the old seaport. Some way out from the town a line of pinnacles, crevices, and other small craft were rolling lazily on the gentle swell. Further out still lay a great merchant ship, high-ended, deep-waisted, painted of a canary yellow, and towering above the fishing boats like a swan among ducklings.

"By St. Paul!" said the knight, "our good merchant of Southampton hath not played us false, for methinks I can see our ship down yonder. He said that she would be of great size and of a yellow shade."

"By my hill, yes!" muttered Aylward; "she is yellow as a kite's claw, and would carry as many men as there are pips in a pomegranate."

"It is well," remarked Terlake; "for methinks, my fair lord, that we are not the only ones who are waiting a passage to Gascony. Mine eye catches at times a flash and sparkle from among yonder houses which assuredly never came from shipman's jacket or the garberine of a burgher."

"I can also see it," said Alleyne, shading his eyes with his hand. "And I can see men-at-arms in yonder boats which ply betwixt the vessel and the shore. But methinks that we are very welcome here, for already they come forth to meet us."

A tumultuous crowd of fishermen, citizens, and women had indeed swarmed out from the northern gate, approached them up the side of the moor, waving their hands and dancing with joy, as though a great fear had been rolled back from their minds. At their head rode a very large and solemn man with a long chin and drooping lip. He wore a fur tippet round his neck and a heavy gold chain over it, with a medallion which dangled in front of him.

"Welcome, most puissant and noble lord!" he cried, doffing his bonnet. "You see in me the mayor and chief magistrate of the ancient and powerful town of Lepe. I bid you very heartily welcome, and the more so as you are come at a moment when we are sore put to it for defence."

"Ha!" cried Sir Nigel, pricking up his ears. "Yes, my lord, for the town being very ancient, and the walls as old as the town, it follows that they are very ancient too. But there is a certain villainous and blood-thirsty Norman pirate knight, Tete-noire, who, with a Genoese called Tito Caracci, a commonly known rascal, and a Frenchman, a mighty scourge upon these coasts. Indeed, my lord, they are very cruel and black-hearted men, graceless and ruthless. They have come in two great galleys, with two banks of oars on either side, and great stores of engines of war and of men-at-arms. At Weymouth and at Portland they have murdered and ravished. Yesterday morning they were at Cowes, and we saw the smoke from the burning forts. To-day they lie at their ease near Freshwater, and we fear much lest they come upon us and do us a mischief."

"We cannot tarry," said Sir Nigel, riding toward the town, with the mayor upon his left side; "the Prince awaits us at Bordeaux, and we may not be behind the general muster. Yet I will promise you that on our way we shall find time to pass Freshwater and to prevail upon these rascals to leave you in peace."

"We are much beholden to you," cried the mayor. "But I cannot see, my lord, how, without a warship, you may venture against these men. With your archers, however, you might well hold the town and do them great scath if they attempt to land."

"There is a very proper cog out yonder," said Sir Nigel; "it would be a very strange thing if any ship were not a warship when it had such men as these upon her decks. Besides, we shall do us a day's work and no later than this very day."

"My lord," said a rough-haired, dark-faced man, who walked by the knight's other stirrup, with his head sloped to catch all that he was saying, "by your leave, I have no doubt that you are skilled in fighting and the marshalling of lanes, but, by my soul! you will find it another thing upon the sea. I am master-shipman of this yellow cog, and my name is Goodwin Hawtayne. I have sailed since I was as high as this staff, and I have fought against these Normans and against the Genoese, as well as the Scotch, the Bretons, the Spanish, and the Moors. I tell you, sir, that my ship is over-light and over-fair for such work, and it will but end in our having our throats cut, or being sold as slaves to the Barbary heathen."

"I also have experienced one or two gentle and honorable ventures upon the sea," quoth Sir Nigel, "and I am tight blithe to have so fair a task before us. I think, good master-shipman, that you and I may win great honor in this matter, and I can see very readily that you are a brave and stout man."

"I like it not," said the other sturdily. "In God's name, I like it not! And yet Goodwin Hawtayne is not the man to stand back when his fellows are for pressing forward. By my soul! I shall turn my back into Freshwater Bay, and if good Master Withertown of Southampton like not my handling of his ship, then he may find another master."

The throng moved on, until at the very gate it was brought to a stand by a wondrously stout man, who came darting forth from the town with rage in every feature of his ruficuted face.

"How now, Sir Mayor?" he roared, in a voice like a bull. "How now, Sir Mayor? How of the elms and the scallops?"

"By our Lady, my sweet Sir Oliver," cried the mayor, "I have had so much to think of, with these wicked villains, so close upon us, that it had quite gone out of my head."

"Nay, Sir Oliver, Sir Oliver!" cried Sir Nigel, laughing. "Let your anger be appeased, since instead of this dish you come upon an old friend and comrade."

"By St. Martin of Tours!" shouted the fat knight, his wrath all changed in an instant to joy, "if it is not my dear little game rooster of the Garonne. Ah, my sweet coz, I am right glad to see you. What days we have seen together!"

"The elms and scallops shall be ready within the hour," the mayor answered. "I had asked Sir Oliver Buttethorn to do my humble board the honor to partake at it of the dainty upon which we take some little pride, but in sooth this alarm of pirates hath cast such shadow on my wits that I am like one who is blind."

"By St. Paul!" said Sir Nigel, "that you will I so partake of none-meat with me?"

"I have over-much to do," Sir Nigel answered, "for we must be aboard, horse and man, as early as we may. How many do you muster, Sir Oliver?"

"Three-and-forty," he shall have work for every man of them ere the sun set. It is my intention, if it seems good to you, to try a venture against these Norman and Genoese rovers."

CHAPTER XIX.

Leaving the lusty knight and the Mayor of Lepe, Sir Nigel led the Company straight down to the water's edge, where long lines of flat lights lay, and led them to the river. Horse after horse was slung by main force up from the barges, and after kicking and plunging in empty air was dropped into the deep waist of the yellow cog, where rows of stails stood ready for their safe keeping.

Englishmen in those days were skilled and prompt in such matters, for it was not long before that Edward had embarked as many as fifty thousand men in the port of Orwell, with their horses and their baggage, all in the space of four-and-twenty hours. So urgent was Sir Nigel on the shore, and so prompt was Goodwin Hawtayne on the cog, that Sir Oliver Buttethorn had scarce swallowed his last scallop ere the peal of trumpet and clang of naker announced that all was ready and the anchor drawn. The two command which left the shore the two commanders sat together in the sheets, a strange contrast to one another, while under the feet of the rowers was a litter of huge stones which Sir Nigel had ordered to be carried to the cog. These once aboard, the ship set her broad mainsail, the breeze blew, the sails bellied, over heeled the portly vessel, and away she plunged through the smooth, blue rollers.

"By St. Paul!" said Sir Nigel gayly, as he stood upon the poop and looked on either side of him. "It is a land which is very well worth fighting for, and it were pity to go to France for what may be had at home. You may bring my harness from below," he continued, to his squire, "and also, I pray you, bring up Sir Oliver's and we shall do it here. Ye may then see to your own gear; for this day you will, I hope, make a very honorable entrance into the field of chivalry and prove yourselves to be very worthy and valiant squires. And now, Sir Oliver, as to our dispositions: would it please you that I should order them or will you?"

"Nay, my cockered you! By Our Lady! am no chicken, but I cannot claim to know as much of war as the squire of Sir Walter Manny. Settle the matter to your own liking."

"You shall fly your pennon upon the fore-part, then, and I upon the poop. For forward I shall give you your own forty men, with two-score archers. Two-score men, with my own men-at-arms and squires, will serve as a poop-guard. Ten archers, with thirty shipmen, under the master, may hold the waist, while ten lie aloft with stones and arbalests."

"Meanwhile there had been bustle and preparation in all parts of the great vessel. The archers stood in groups about the decks, new-stringing their bows and testing that they were firm at the nocks. Among them moved Aylward and other of the older soldiers, with a few whispered words of precept and a warning there. "Stand to it, my hearts of gold!" said the old bowman, as he passed from knuck to knuck. "By my hill! we are in luck this journey. But it is time that we took our order, for methinks that between the Neelds rocks and the Alum cliffs yonder I can catch a glimpse of the topostasis of the galleys. Hewitt, Cook, Johnson, Cunningham, your men are of the poop-guard. Thornbury, Walters, Hackett, Haddlesmere, you are with Sir Oliver on the fore-castle. Simon, you bide with your lord's banner; but ten men must go forward."

Quietly and promptly the men took their places, lying flat upon their faces on the deck, for such was Sir Nigel's order. Near the prow was planted Sir Oliver's spear, with his arms—a boar's head gules upon a field of gold. Close by the stern stood Black Simon with the pennon of

goshawks on a heron. Is there not some symbol or device upon their sails?"

"That on the right," said Edricson, "appears to have the head of an Ethiope upon it."

"The badge of Tete-noire the Norman," cried a seaman-mariner. "I have seen it before, when he harried us at Winchelsea. He is a wondrous large and strong man, with no ruth for man, woman or beast. They say that he hath the strength of six; and, certes, he hath the ruse of six upon his wits."

"By St. Paul!" said Sir Nigel, "what is that upon the other galley?"

"It is the red cross of Genoa. This Spade-beard is a very noted captain, and it is his boast that there are no seamen and no archers in the world who can compare with those who serve the Doge Boccanegra."

"That we shall prove," said Goodwin Hawtayne. "They will lay us aboard on either quarter, my lord," cried the master. "See how they stretch out from each side! The Norman hath a mangled or crabbed upon the fore-castle. His wits bend to the levers! They are about to loose it."

"Aylward," cried the knight, "pluck your three trustiest archers, and see if you cannot do something to hinder their aim. Methinks they are within long arrow flight."

"Seventeen score paces," said the archer, running his eye backward and forward. "By my ten finger-bones! it would be a strange thing if we could not notch a mark at that distance. Here, Watkin, my cocked you! Long Williams, my cocked you! They have English bowmen to deal with."

The three archers named stood at the further end of the poop, balancing themselves with feet widely spread and bows drawn, until the heads of the cloth-yard arrows were level with the centre of the stern. "You are the surer, Watkin," said Aylward, standing by them with shaft upon string. "Do you take the rogue with the red coil. You two bring down the man with the head-piece, and I will hold myself ready if you miss. Ma foi! they are about to loose her. Shoot, my hearts, or you will be too late!"

The throng of pirates had cleared away from the great wooden catapult, leaving two of their number to discharge it. One in a scarlet cap bent over it, steadying the jagged rock which was balanced on the spoon-shaped end of the long wooden lever. The other held the loop of the rope which would release the catch and send the unwieldy missile hurtling through the air. So for an instant they stood, showing hard and clear against the white sail behind them. The next, redcap had fallen across the stone with an arrow between his ribs; and the other, struck in the leg and in the throat, was writhing and spluttering upon the ground. As he toppled backward he had loosed the spring, and the huge beam of wood, swinging round with tremendous force, cast the corpse of his comrade so close to the English ship that his mangled and distorted limbs grazed her very stern. As to the stone, it glanced off obliquely and fell midway between the vessels. A roar of cheering and of laughter broke from the rough archers and seamen at the sight, answered

by a blood-smeared shambles, with bodies piled three deep upon each other, the living cowering behind the dead to shelter themselves from that sudden storm-blast of death. On either side the Norman, whose Sir Nigel had chosen for the purpose had cast their anchors over the sides of the galleys.

Fore and aft the archers had cleared the galleys' decks, but from either side the rovers had poured down into the waist, where the seamen and bowmen were too thick and so mingled with their foes that it was impossible for their comrades above to draw string to help them. It was a wild chaos where axe and sword rose and fell, while Englishmen, Norman and Italian staggered and reeled on a deck which was cumbered with bodies and sopping with blood.

The giant Tete-noire, towering above his fellows and dim from head to foot in plate of proof, led on his boarders, swinging a huge mace with which he struck to the deck every man who opposed him. On the other side, Spade-beard, a dwarf in height, but of great breadth of chest, with a huge iron arm, had a road almost to the other side with three-score Genoese men-at-arms close at his heels.

But help was close at hand. Sir Oliver Buttethorn, with his men-at-arms had swarmed down from the fore-castle, while Sir Nigel, with his three squires, Black Simon, Aylward, Hordle John, and a score more, sprang down from the poop and hurled themselves into the thickest of the fight. Alleyne, as in duty bound, kept his eyes ever on his lord and pressed forward close at his heels. Often had he heard of Sir Nigel's prowess and skill with all his kindly weapons, but all the tales that had reached him of the far short of the real quickness and coolness of the man. It was as if the devil was in him, for he sprang here and sprang there, now thrusting and now cutting, catching blows on his shield, turning them with great ease, slipping under the swing of an axe, springing over the top of a sword, so swift and so erratic that the man who braced himself for a blow at him might find him six paces off ere he could bring it down. Three pirates had fallen before him, and he had wounded three more in the neck, when the Norman, bent at the waist, the gate of his sword raised high, came on him with a slashing blow from his deadly mace. Sir Nigel stooped to avoid it, and at the same instant turned a thrust from the Genoese swordsman, but his foot slipping in a pool of blood, he fell heavily on his back.

Alleyne sprang in front of the Norman, but his sword was too slow, and he himself beaten to the deck by a second blow from the ponderous weapon. Ere the pirate chief could repeat it, however, Hordle John's iron grip fell upon his wrist, and he found that for once he was the weaker. Then came a stronger man than himself. Then came a man who was a giant, such as is seldom witnessed. Fiercely the Norman strove to disengage his weapon, cursing angrily in French at being thwarted by such an unlovely antagonist. But Hordle John, with a will unsoftened by the loss of his sword, banded his great muscles to the unenvied task of forcing the pirate's sword arm slowly down and backward. Terribly the Norman struggled, hurling his whole weight against his opponent in an endeavor to break the vice-like grip which held him.

Back and forth they swung and surged, until, with a gasp, the Norman, who had put forth a fierce effort, twisting and forcing farther back the Norman's arm until with a sharp crack, like a breaking stave, it turned limp in his grasp and the mace dropped from the nerveless fingers. In vain he tried to pluck it with the other hand. Back and back it went, until Sazon bent him until, with a groan of pain and of fury, the giant clung his full length upon the boards, while the glimmer of a knife before the bars of his helmet warned him that short would be his shirt if he moved.

Cowed and disheartened by the loss of his leader, the Normans had given back and were now streaming over the bulwarks on to their own galley, dropping a dozen at a time, on to her deck.

But the fight had taken a new and a strange turn upon the other side. Spade-beard and his men had given slowly back, hard pressed by Sir Nigel, Aylward, Black Simon, and the poop-guard. Foot by foot the Italian had retreated, his armor running blood at every joint, his shield split, his crest shorn, his voice fallen away to a mere gasping and exclaiming. Yet he faced his enemies with dauntless courage, dashing in, springing back, sure-footed, steady-handed, with a shimmering point which seemed to menace three at once. Beaten back on to the deck of his own vessel, and closely followed by a dozen Englishmen, he discharged himself from them, ran swiftly down the deck, sprang back into the cog once more, cut the rope which held the anchor, and was back in an instant among his crossbowmen. At the same time the Genoese sailors thrust with their oars against the side of the cog, and a rapidly widening rift appeared between the two vessels.

"By St. George!" cried Ford, "we are cut off from Sir Nigel!"

"He is lost," gasped Terlake. "Come, let us spring for it." The two youths jumped with all their strength to reach the departing galley. Ford's feet reached the edge of the bulwarks, and he stood clutching a rope he swung himself on board. Terlake fell short, crashed in among the oars, and bounded off into the sea. Alleyne, staggering to the side, was about to hurl himself after him, but Hordle John's heavy hand dragged him back by the girdle.

The vessels were indeed so far apart now that the Genoese could use the full sweep of their oars and draw away rapidly from the cog.

"Look! Look! but it is a noble fight!" shouted big John, clapping his hands. "They have cleared the poop, and they spring to the waist. Well struck, my lord! Well struck, Aylward! See too, Black Simon, how he storms among the shipmen! But this Spade-beard is a gallant warrior."

"Ay Heaven, Sir Nigel is down!" cried the squire.

"Up!" roared John. "It was but a feint. He bears him back. He drives him to the side. By Our Lady, his sword is through him!"

The death of the Genoese leader did indeed bring the resistance to an end. Amid a thunder of cheering from cog and from galleys the forked pennon fluttered upon the fore-castle, and the galley, sweeping round, came slowly toward the cog, the shipman walked the deck, a peaceful master-mariner once more.

"There is sad scath done to the cog," Sir Nigel said. "Here is a hole in the side of two ells across, the sail split through the center, and the wood as bare as a friar's wall."

"By St. Paul! It would be a very sorry thing if we suffered you to be the worse for this day's work," said Sir Nigel. "But how fares it with you, Edricson?"

"It is nothing, my fair lord," said Alleyne, who had now loosened his belt, and with his sword raised in a salute to the Norman's bow. Even as he spoke, however, his head swirled round, and he fell to the deck with the blood gushing from his nose and mouth.

"He will come to anon," said the knight, stooping over him and passing his fingers over his forehead. He had lost one very valiant and gentle squire this day. How many men have fallen!"

"I have nicked off the tally," said Aylward. "There are seven of the Winchester men, eleven seamen, your squire young Master Terlake, and nine archers."

"And of the others?"

"They are all dead—save the Norman knight who stands behind you. What would you that we should do with him?"

"He must hang on his own yard," said Sir Nigel. "It was my vow and must be done."

"How, Sir Knight?" he cried in broken English. "What do you say?—to hang—the death of a dog. To hang?"

"It is my vow," said Sir Nigel shortly. "From what I hear, you thought little enough of hanging others?"

"Fessants, base roturers!" cried the other. "It is their fitting death. But to hang—the Seigneur—Andelys—a man with the blood of kings in his veins—it is incredible."

Sir Nigel turned upon his heel, while two seamen cast a noose over the pirate's neck with the touch of the cord he snapped the bonds which bound him, dashed one of the archers to the deck, and seizing the other round the waist, sprang with him into the sea.

"By my hill, he is gone!" cried Alleyne, rushing to the side. "They have snatched together his stone!"

"I am right glad of it," answered Sir Nigel; "for though it was against my vow to loose him, I deem that he has carried himself like a very gentle and debonnaire cavalier."

It was on the morning of Friday, the eight-and-twentieth day of November, two days before the feast of St. Andrew, that the cog and her two prisoners, after a running before a northerly wind, and a weary tacking up the Gironde and the Garonne, dropped anchor at last in front of the noble city of Bordeaux. With wonder and admiration, Alleyne, leaning over the bulwarks, gazed at the great masts, the swarm of boats darting hither and thither on the bosom of the broad, curving stream, and the gray, crescent-shaped city which stretched with many a tower and minaret along the western shore. Never had he in his quiet life seen so great a town, nor was there in the whole of England, save London alone, one which might match it in size or in wealth.

"I trust, Aylward," said Sir Nigel, coming upon deck, "that the men are ready for the land. Go tell them that the boats will be for them within the hour."

The anchor raised his hand in salute, and hastened forward. In the meantime, Sir Oliver had followed his brother knight, and the two paced the poop together.

"Once more, Sir Oliver," said Sir Nigel, looking shoreward with sparkling eyes, "do we find ourselves at the gate of honor, the door which hath so often led us to all that is knightly and worthy. There lies the prince's banner, and it would be well that we haste ashore and pay our obeisance to him."

The horses both of knights and squires were speedily lowered into a broad lighter, and reached the shore almost as soon as their masters. Sir Nigel bent his knee devoutly as he put foot on land, and taking a small black patch on his bosom he bound it tightly over his left eye.

"May the blessed George and the memory of my sweet lady-love raise high in my heart!" quoth he. "And as a token I vow that I will not take this patch from my eye until I have seen something of this country of Spain, and done such a small deed as it lies in me to do. And this I swear upon the cross of my sword and upon the glove of my lady."

War, which had wrought evil upon so many fair cities around, had brought thought but good to this one. As her French sisters decayed she increased, for here, from north, and from east, and from south, came the plunder to be sold and the ransom money to be spent.

In front of the minster and abbey of St. Andrew's was a large square with priests, soldiers, women, friars, and burghers, who made it their common center for sightseeing and gossiping. The knots of noisy and gesticulating townsfolk, many small parties of mounted knights and squires threaded their way toward the prince's quarters, where the huge iron-clamped doors were thrown back to show that he held audience within.

The two knights were deep in talk, when Alleyne became aware of a remarkable individual who was walking round the room in their direction. As he passed each knot of cavaliers every head turned to look after him, and it was evident, from the bows and respectful salutations which he met, that he was a man of some importance.

"By St. George!" cried Ford, "we are cut off from Sir Nigel!"

"He is lost," gasped Terlake. "Come, let us spring for it." The two youths jumped with all their strength to reach the departing galley. Ford's feet reached the edge of the bulwarks, and he stood clutching a rope he swung himself on board. Terlake fell short, crashed in among the oars, and bounded off into the sea. Alleyne, staggering to the side, was about to hurl himself after him, but Hordle John's heavy hand dragged him back by the girdle.

The vessels were indeed so far apart now that the Genoese could use the full sweep of their oars and draw away rapidly from the cog.

"Look! Look! but it is a noble fight!" shouted big John, clapping his hands. "They have cleared the poop, and they spring to the waist. Well struck, my lord! Well struck, Aylward! See too, Black Simon, how he storms among the shipmen! But this Spade-beard is a gallant warrior."

"Ay Heaven, Sir Nigel is down!" cried the squire.

"Up!" roared John. "It was but a feint. He bears him back. He drives him to the side. By Our Lady, his sword is through him!"

The death of the Genoese leader did indeed bring the resistance to an end. Amid a thunder of cheering from cog and from galleys the forked pennon fluttered upon the fore-castle, and the galley, sweeping round, came slowly toward the cog, the shipman walked the deck, a peaceful master-mariner once more.

"There is sad scath done to the cog," Sir Nigel said. "Here is a hole in the side of two ells across, the sail split through the center, and the wood as bare as a friar's wall."

"By St. Paul! It would be a very sorry thing if we suffered you to be the worse for this day's work," said Sir Nigel. "But how fares it with you, Edricson?"

"It is nothing, my fair lord," said Alleyne, who had now loosened his belt, and with his sword raised in a salute to the Norman's bow. Even as he spoke, however, his head swirled round, and he fell to the deck with the blood gushing from his nose and mouth.

"He will come to anon," said the knight, stooping over him and passing his fingers over his forehead. He had lost one very valiant and gentle squire this day. How many men have fallen!"

"I have nicked off the tally," said Aylward. "There are seven of the Winchester men, eleven seamen, your squire young Master Terlake, and nine archers."

"And of the others?"

"They are all dead—save the Norman knight who stands behind you. What would you that we should do with him?"

"He must hang on his own yard," said Sir Nigel. "It was my vow and must be done."

"How, Sir Knight?" he cried in broken English. "What do you say?—to hang—the death of a dog. To hang?"

"It is my vow," said Sir Nigel shortly. "From what I hear, you thought little enough of hanging others?"

"Fessants, base roturers!" cried the other. "It is their fitting death. But to hang—the Seigneur—Andelys—a man with the blood of kings in his veins—it is incredible."

Sir Nigel turned upon his heel, while two seamen cast a noose over the pirate's neck with the touch of the cord he snapped the bonds which bound him, dashed one of the archers to the deck, and seizing the other round the waist, sprang with him into the sea.

"By my hill, he is gone!" cried Alleyne, rushing to the side. "They have snatched together his stone!"

"I am right glad of it," answered Sir Nigel; "for though it was against my vow to loose him, I deem that he has carried himself like a very gentle and debonnaire cavalier."

It was on the morning of Friday, the eight-and-twentieth day of November, two days before the feast of St. Andrew, that the cog and her two prisoners, after a running before a northerly wind, and a weary tacking up the Gironde and the Garonne, dropped anchor at last in front of the noble city of Bordeaux. With wonder and admiration, Alleyne, leaning over the bulwarks, gazed at the great masts, the swarm of boats darting hither and thither on the bosom of the broad, curving stream, and the gray, crescent-shaped city which stretched with many a tower and minaret along the western shore. Never had he in his quiet life seen so great a town, nor was there in the whole of England, save London alone, one which might match it in size or in wealth.

"I trust, Aylward," said Sir Nigel, coming upon deck, "that the men are ready for the land. Go tell them that the boats will be for them within the hour."

The anchor raised his hand in salute, and hastened forward. In the meantime, Sir Oliver had followed his brother knight, and the two paced the poop together.

"Once more, Sir Oliver," said Sir Nigel, looking shoreward with sparkling eyes, "do we find ourselves at the gate of honor, the door which hath so often led us to all that is knightly and worthy. There lies the prince's banner, and it would be well that we haste ashore and pay our obeisance to him."

The horses both of knights and squires were speedily lowered into a broad lighter, and reached the shore almost as soon as their masters. Sir Nigel bent his knee devoutly as he put foot on land, and taking a small black patch on his bosom he bound it tightly over his left eye.

"May the blessed George and the memory of my sweet lady-love raise high in my heart!" quoth he. "And as a token I vow that I will not take this patch from my eye until I have seen something of this country of Spain, and done such a small deed as it lies in me to do. And this I swear upon the cross of my sword and upon the glove of my lady."

War, which had wrought evil upon so many fair cities around, had brought thought but good to this one. As her French sisters decayed she increased, for here, from north, and from east, and from south, came the plunder to be sold and the ransom money to be spent.

In front of the minster and abbey of St. Andrew's was a large square with priests, soldiers, women, friars, and burghers, who made it their common center for sightseeing and gossiping. The knots of noisy and gesticulating townsfolk, many small parties of mounted knights and squires threaded their way toward the prince's quarters, where the huge iron-clamped doors were thrown back to show that he held audience within.

The two knights were deep in talk, when Alleyne became aware of a remarkable individual who was walking round the room in their direction. As he passed each knot of cavaliers every head turned to look after him, and it was evident, from the bows and respectful salutations which he met, that he was a man of some importance.

"By St. George!" cried Ford, "we are cut off from Sir Nigel!"

"He is lost," gasped Terlake. "Come, let us spring for it." The two youths jumped with all their strength to reach the departing galley. Ford's feet reached the edge of the bulwarks, and he stood clutching a rope he swung himself on board. Terlake fell short, crashed in among the oars, and bounded off into the sea. Alleyne, staggering to the side, was about to hurl himself after him, but Hordle John's heavy hand dragged him back by the girdle.

The vessels were indeed so far apart now that the Genoese could use the full sweep of their oars and draw away rapidly from the cog.

"Look! Look! but it is a noble fight!" shouted big John, clapping his hands. "They have cleared the poop, and they spring to the waist. Well struck, my lord! Well struck, Aylward! See too, Black Simon, how he storms among the shipmen! But this Spade-beard is a gallant warrior."

"Ay Heaven, Sir Nigel is down!" cried the squire.

"Up!" roared John. "It was but a feint. He bears him back. He drives him to the side. By Our Lady, his sword is through him!"

The death of the Genoese leader did indeed bring the resistance to an end. Amid a thunder of cheering from cog and from galleys the forked pennon fluttered upon the fore-castle, and the galley, sweeping round, came slowly toward the cog, the shipman walked the deck, a peaceful master-mariner once more.

"There is sad scath done to the cog," Sir Nigel said. "Here is a hole in the side of two ells across, the sail split through the center, and the wood as bare as a friar's wall."

"By St. Paul! It would be a very sorry thing if we suffered you to be the worse for this day's work," said Sir Nigel. "But how fares it with you, Edricson?"

"It is nothing, my fair lord," said Alleyne, who had now loosened his belt, and with his sword raised in a salute to the Norman's bow. Even as he spoke, however, his head swirled round, and he fell to the deck with the blood gushing from his nose and mouth.

"He will come to anon," said the knight, stooping over him and passing his fingers over his forehead. He had lost one very valiant and gentle squire this day. How many men have fallen!"

"I have nicked off the tally," said Aylward. "There are seven of the Winchester men, eleven seamen, your squire young Master Terlake, and nine archers."

ations on all sides, that the interest which he excited was not due merely to his strange personal appearance. He was tall and as straight as a lance, though of a great age, for his hair, which curled from under his black velvet cap of maintenance, was as white as the new-fallen snow. Yet, from the swing of his stride and spring of his step, it was clear that he had not yet lost the fire and activity of his youth. His face, which lay face was clean shaven like that of a priest, save for a long thin wisp of white mustache. That he had been handsome might now be seen only in the features and scars of old wounds, and by the loss of one eye which had been torn from the socket, that there was little left to remind one of the dashing young knight who had been fifty years ago the fairest as well as the boldest of the English chivalry, the handsomest, the stainless knight, the wise councillor, the valiant warrior.

"Ha, my little heart of gold!" he cried, darting forward suddenly and throwing his arms round Sir Nigel. "I heard that you were here, and have been seeking you."

"My fair and dear lord," said the knight, returning the warrior's embrace. "I have indeed come back to you, for where else shall I go that I may learn to be a gentle and a hardy knight?"

"By my troth," said Chandos with a smile, "it is very fitting that we