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The Outlaw of Torn

by Edgar Rice Burroughs

December, 1995 [Etext #369]

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EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

THE OUTLAW OF TORN

To My Friend

JOSEPH E. BRAY

CHAPTER I



Here is a story that has lain dormant for seven hundred years. At first it was suppressed by one of the Plantagenet kings of England. Later it was forgotten. I happened to dig it up by accident. The accident being the relationship of my wife's cousin to a certain Father Superior in a very ancient monastery in Europe.

He let me pry about among a quantity of mildewed and musty manuscripts and I came across this. It is very interesting -- partially since it is a bit of hitherto unrecorded history, but principally from the fact that it records the story of a most remarkable revenge and the adventurous life of its innocent victim -- Richard, the lost prince of England.

In the retelling of it, I have left out most of the history. What interested me was the unique character about whom the tale revolves -- the visored horseman who -- but let us wait until we get to him.

It all happened in the thirteenth century, and while it was happening, it shook England from north to south and from east to west; and reached across the channel and shook France. It started, directly, in the London palace of Henry III, and was the result of a quarrel between the King and his powerful brother-in-law, Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester.

Never mind the quarrel, that's history, and you can read all about it at your leisure. But on this June day in the year of our Lord 1243, Henry so forgot himself as to very unjustly accuse De Montfort of treason in the presence of a number of the King's gentlemen.

De Montfort paled. He was a tall, handsome man, and when he drew himself to his full height and turned those gray eyes on the victim of his wrath, as he did that day, he was very imposing. A power in England, second only to the King himself, and with the heart of a lion in him, he answered the King as no other man in all England would have dared answer him.



"My Lord King," he cried, "that you be my Lord King alone prevents Simon de Montfort from demanding satisfaction for such a gross insult. That you take advantage of your kingship to say what you would never dare say were you not king, brands me not a traitor, though it does brand you a coward."

Tense silence fell upon the little company of lords and courtiers as these awful words fell from the lips of a subject, addressed to his king. They were horrified, for De Montfort's bold challenge was to them but little short of sacrilege.

Henry, flushing in mortification and anger, rose to advance upon De Montfort, but suddenly recollecting the power which he represented, he thought better of whatever action he contemplated and, with a haughty sneer, turned to his courtiers.

"Come, my gentlemen," he said, "methought that we were to have a turn with the foils this morning. Already it waxeth late. Come, DeFulm ! Come, Leybourn !" and the King left the apartment followed by his gentlemen, all of whom had drawn away from the Earl of Leicester when it became apparent that the royal displeasure was strong against him. As the arras fell behind the departing King, De Montfort shrugged his broad shoulders, and turning, left the apartment by another door.

When the King, with his gentlemen, entered the armory he was still smarting from the humiliation of De Montfort's reproaches, and as he laid aside his surcoat and plumed hat to take the foils with De Fulm, his eyes alighted on the master of fence, Sir Jules de Vac, who was advancing with the King's foil and helmet. Henry felt in no mood for fencing with De Fulm, who, like the other sycophants that surrounded him, always allowed the King easily to best him in every encounter.



De Vac he knew to be too jealous of his fame as a swordsman to permit himself to be overcome by aught but superior skill, and this day Henry felt that he could best the devil himself.

The armory was a great room on the main floor of the palace, off the guard room. It was built in a small wing of the building so that it had light from three sides. In charge of it was the lean, grizzled, leather-skinned Sir Jules de Vac, and it was he whom Henry commanded to face him in mimic combat with the foils, for the King wished to go with hammer and tongs at someone to vent his suppressed rage.

So he let De Vac assume to his mind's eye the person of the hated De Montfort, and it followed that De Vac was nearly surprised into an early and mortifying defeat by the King's sudden and clever attack.

Henry III had always been accounted a good swordsman, but that day he quite outdid himself and, in his imagination, was about to run the pseudo De Montfort through the heart, to the wild acclaim of his audience. For this fell purpose he had backed the astounded De Vac twice around the hall when, with a clever feint, and backward step, the master of fence drew the King into the position he wanted him, and with the suddenness of lightning, a little twist of his foil sent Henry's weapon clanging across the floor of the armory.

For an instant, the King stood as tense and white as though the hand of death had reached out and touched his heart with its icy fingers. The episode meant more to him than being bested in play by the best swordsman in England -- for that surely was no disgrace -- to Henry it seemed prophetic of the outcome of a future struggle when he should stand face to face with the real De Montfort; and then, seeing in De Vac only the



creature of his imagination with which he had vested the likeness of his powerful brother-in-law, Henry did what he should like to have done to the real Leicester. Drawing off his gauntlet he advanced close to De Vac.

"Dog !" he hissed, and struck the master of fence a stinging blow across the face, and spat upon him. Then he turned on his heel and strode from the armory.

De Vac had grown old in the service of the kings of England, but he hated all things English and all Englishmen. The dead King John, though hated by all others, he had loved, but with the dead King's bones De Vac's loyalty to the house he served had been buried in the Cathedral of Worcester.

During the years he had served as master of fence at the English Court, the sons of royalty had learned to thrust and parry and cut as only De Vac could teach the art, and he had been as conscientious in the discharge of his duties as he had been in his unswerving hatred and contempt for his pupils.

And now the English King had put upon him such an insult as might only be wiped out by blood.

As the blow fell, the wiry Frenchman clicked his heels together, and throwing down his foil, he stood erect and rigid as a marble statue before his master. White and livid was his tense drawn face, but he spoke no word.

He might have struck the King, but then there would have been left to him no alternative save death by his own hand; for a king may not fight with a lesser mortal, and he who strikes a king may not live -- the king's honor must be satisfied.



Had a French king struck him, De Vac would have struck back, and gloried in the fate which permitted him to die for the honor of France; but an English King -- pooh ! a dog; and who would die for a dog ? No, De Vac would find other means of satisfying his wounded pride. He would revel in revenge against this man for whom he felt no loyalty. If possible, he would harm the whole of England if he could, but he would bide his time. He could afford to wait for his opportunity if, by waiting, he could encompass a more terrible revenge.

De Vac had been born in Paris, the son of a French officer reputed the best swordsman in France. The son had followed closely in the footsteps of his father until, on the latter's death, he could easily claim the title of his sire. How he had left France and entered the service of John of England is not of this story. All the bearing that the life of Jules de Vac has upon the history of England hinges upon but two of his many attributes -- his wonderful swordsmanship and his fearful hatred for his adopted country.

CHAPTER II

South of the armory of Westminster Palace lay the gardens, and here, on the third day following the King's affront to De Vac, might have been a seen a black-haired woman gowned in a violet cyclas, richly embroidered with gold about the yoke and at the bottom of the loose-pointed sleeves, which reached almost to the similar bordering on the lower hem of the garment. A richly wrought leathern girdle, studded with precious stones, and held in place by a huge carved buckle of gold, clasped the garment about her waist so that the upper portion fell outward over the girdle after the manner of



a blouse. In the girdle was a long dagger of beautiful workmanship. Dainty sandals encased her feet, while a wimple of violet silk bordered in gold fringe, lay becomingly over her head and shoulders.

By her side walked a handsome boy of about three, clad, like his companion, in gay colors. His tiny surcoat of scarlet velvet was rich with embroidery, while beneath was a close-fitting tunic of white silk. His doublet was of scarlet, while his long hose of white were cross-gartered with scarlet from his tiny sandals to his knees. On the back of his brown curls sat a flat-brimmed, round-crowned hat in which a single plume of white waved and nodded bravely at each move of the proud little head.

The child's features were well molded, and his frank, bright eyes gave an expression of boyish generosity to a face which otherwise would have been too arrogant and haughty for such a mere baby. As he talked with his companion, little flashes of peremptory authority and dignity, which sat strangely upon one so tiny, caused the young woman at times to turn her head from him that he might not see the smiles which she could scarce repress.

Presently the boy took a ball from his tunic, and, pointing at a little bush near them, said, "Stand you there, Lady Maud, by yonder bush. I would play at toss."

The young woman did as she was bid, and when she had taken her place and turned to face him the boy threw the ball to her. Thus they played beneath the windows of the armory, the boy running blithely after the ball when he missed it, and laughing and shouting in happy glee when he made a particularly good catch.

In one of the windows of the armory overlooking the garden stood a grim,



gray, old man, leaning upon his folded arms, his brows drawn together in a malignant scowl, the corners of his mouth set in a stern, cold line.

He looked upon the garden and the playing child, and upon the lovely young woman beneath him, but with eyes which did not see, for De Vac was working out a great problem, the greatest of all his life.

For three days, the old man had brooded over his grievance, seeking for some means to be revenged upon the King for the insult which Henry had put upon him. Many schemes had presented themselves to his shrewd and cunning mind, but so far all had been rejected as unworthy of the terrible satisfaction which his wounded pride demanded.

His fancies had, for the most part, revolved about the unsettled political conditions of Henry's reign, for from these he felt he might wrest that opportunity which could be turned to his own personal uses and to the harm, and possibly the undoing, of the King.

For years an inmate of the palace, and often a listener in the armory when the King played at sword with his friends and favorites, De Vac had heard much which passed between Henry III and his intimates that could well be turned to the King's harm by a shrewd and resourceful enemy.

With all England, he knew the utter contempt in which Henry held the terms of the Magna Charta which he so often violated along with his kingly oath to maintain it. But what all England did not know, De Vac had gleaned from scraps of conversation dropped in the armory: that Henry was even now negotiating with the leaders of foreign mercenaries, and with Louis IX of France, for a sufficient force of knights and men-at-arms to wage a relentless war upon his own barons that he might effectively put a stop to



all future interference by them with the royal prerogative of the Plantagenets to misrule England.

If he could but learn the details of this plan, thought De Vac: the point of landing of the foreign troops; their numbers; the first point of attack. Ah, would it not be sweet revenge indeed to balk the King in this venture so dear to his heart !

A word to De Clare, or De Montfort would bring the barons and their retainers forty thousand strong to overwhelm the King's forces.

And he would let the King know to whom, and for what cause, he was beholden for his defeat and discomfiture. Possibly the barons would depose Henry, and place a new king upon England's throne, and then De Vac would mock the Plantagenet to his face. Sweet, kind, delectable vengeance, indeed ! And the old man licked his thin lips as though to taste the last sweet vestige of some dainty morsel.

And then Chance carried a little leather ball beneath the window where the old man stood; and as the child ran, laughing, to recover it, De Vac's eyes fell upon him, and his former plan for revenge melted as the fog before the noonday sun; and in its stead there opened to him the whole hideous plot of fearsome vengeance as clearly as it were writ upon the leaves of a great book that had been thrown wide before him. And, in so far as he could direct, he varied not one jot from the details of that vividly conceived masterpiece of hellishness during the twenty years which followed.

The little boy who so innocently played in the garden of his royal father was Prince Richard, the three-year-old son of Henry III of England. No published history mentions this little lost prince; only the secret archives of the kings of England tell the story of his strange and adventurous life. His name has been blotted from the records of men; and



the revenge of De Vac has passed from the eyes of the world; though in his time it was a real and terrible thing in the hearts of the English.

CHAPTER III

For nearly a month, the old man haunted the palace, and watched in the gardens for the little Prince until he knew the daily routine of his tiny life with his nurses and governesses.

He saw that when the Lady Maud accompanied him, they were wont to repair to the farthest extremities of the palace grounds where, by a little postern gate, she admitted a certain officer of the Guards to whom the Queen had forbidden the privilege of the court.

There, in a secluded bower, the two lovers whispered their hopes and plans, unmindful of the royal charge playing neglected among the flowers and shrubbery of the garden.

Toward the middle of July De Vac had his plans well laid. He had managed to coax old Brus, the gardener, into letting him have the key to the little postern gate on the plea that he wished to indulge in a midnight escapade, hinting broadly of a fair lady who was to be the partner of his adventure, and, what was more to the point with Brus, at the same time slipping a couple of golden zecchins into the gardener's palm.

Brus, like the other palace servants, considered De Vac a loyal retainer of the house of Plantagenet. Whatever else of mischief De Vac might be up to, Brus was quite sure that in so far as the King was concerned, the key to the postern gate was as safe in De Vac's hands as though Henry himself had it.



The old fellow wondered a little that the morose old master of fence should, at his time in life, indulge in frivolous escapades more befitting the younger sprigs of gentility, but, then, what concern was it of his? Did he not have enough to think about to keep the gardens so that his royal master and mistress might find pleasure in the shaded walks, the well-kept sward, and the gorgeous beds of foliage plants and blooming flowers which he set with such wondrous precision in the formal garden?

Further, two gold zecchins were not often come by so easily as this; and if the dear Lord Jesus saw fit, in his infinite wisdom, to take this means of rewarding his poor servant, it ill became such a worm as he to ignore the divine favor. So Brus took the gold zecchins and De Vac the key, and the little prince played happily among the flowers of his royal father's garden, and all were satisfied; which was as it should have been.

That night, De Vac took the key to a locksmith on the far side of London; one who could not possibly know him or recognize the key as belonging to the palace. Here he had a duplicate made, waiting impatiently while the old man fashioned it with the crude instruments of his time.

From this little shop, De Vac threaded his way through the dirty lanes and alleys of ancient London, lighted at far intervals by an occasional smoky lantern, until he came to a squalid tenement but a short distance from the palace.

A narrow alley ran past the building, ending abruptly at the bank of the Thames in a moldering wooden dock, beneath which the inky waters of the river rose and fell, lapping the decaying piles and surging far beneath the



dock to the remote fastnesses inhabited by the great fierce dock rats
and
their fiercer human antitypes.

Several times De Vac paced the length of this black alley in search of
the
little doorway of the building he sought. At length he came upon it,
and,
after repeated pounding with the pommel of his sword, it was opened
by a
slatternly old hag.

"What would ye of a decent woman at such an ungodly hour?" she
grumbled.

"Ah, 'tis ye, my lord?" she added, hastily, as the flickering rays of the
candle she bore lighted up De Vac's face. "Welcome, my Lord, thrice
welcome. The daughter of the devil welcomes her brother."

"Silence, old hag," cried De Vac. "Is it not enough that you leech me of
good marks of such a quantity that you may ever after wear mantles of
villosa and feast on simnel bread and malmsey, that you must needs
burden
me still further with the affliction of thy vile tongue?"

"Hast thou the clothes ready bundled and the key, also, to this gate to
perdition? And the room: didst set to rights the furnishings I had
delivered here, and sweep the century-old accumulation of filth and
cobwebs
from the floor and rafters? Why, the very air reeked of the dead
Romans
who builded London twelve hundred years ago. Methinks, too, from
the
stink, they must have been Roman swineherd who habited this sty
with their
herds, an' I venture that thou, old sow, hast never touched broom to
the
place for fear of disturbing the ancient relics of thy kin."

"Cease thy babbling, Lord Satan," cried the woman. "I would rather
hear
thy money talk than thou, for though it come accursed and tainted
from thy
rogue hand, yet it speaks with the same sweet and commanding voice
as it
were fresh from the coffers of the holy church."



"The bundle is ready," she continued, closing the door after De Vac, who had now entered, "and here be the key; but first let us have a payment. I know not what thy foul work may be, but foul it is I know from the secrecy which you have demanded, an' I dare say there will be some who would pay well to learn the whereabouts of the old woman and the child, thy sister and her son you tell me they be, who you are so anxious to hide away in old Til's garret. So it be well for you, my Lord, to pay old Til well and add a few guilders for the peace of her tongue if you would that your prisoner find peace in old Til's house."

"Fetch me the bundle, hag," replied De Vac, "and you shall have gold against a final settlement; more even than we bargained for if all goes well and thou holdest thy vile tongue."

But the old woman's threats had already caused De Vac a feeling of uneasiness, which would have been reflected to an exaggerated degree in the old woman had she known the determination her words had caused in the mind of the old master of fence.

His venture was far too serious, and the results of exposure too fraught with danger, to permit of his taking any chances with a disloyal fellow-conspirator. True, he had not even hinted at the enormity of the plot in which he was involving the old woman, but, as she had said, his stern commands for secrecy had told enough to arouse her suspicions, and with them her curiosity and cupidity. So it was that old Til might well have quailed in her tattered sandals had she but even vaguely guessed the thoughts which passed in De Vac's mind; but the extra gold pieces he dropped into her withered palm as she delivered the bundle to him, together with the promise of more, quite effectually won her loyalty and her silence for the time being.



Slipping the key into the pocket of his tunic and covering the bundle with his long surcoat, De Vac stepped out into the darkness of the alley and hastened toward the dock.

Beneath the planks. he found a skiff which he had moored there earlier in the evening, and underneath one of the thwarts he hid the bundle. Then, casting off, he rowed slowly up the Thames until, below the palace walls, he moored near to the little postern gate which let into the lower end of the garden.

Hiding the skiff as best he could in some tangled bushes which grew to the water's edge, set there by order of the King to add to the beauty of the aspect from the river side, De Vac crept warily to the postern and, unchallenged, entered and sought his apartments in the palace.

The next day, he returned the original key to Brus, telling the old man that he had not used it after all, since mature reflection had convinced him of the folly of his contemplated adventure, especially in one whose youth was past, and in whose joints the night damp of the Thames might find lodgement for rheumatism.

"Ha, Sir Jules," laughed the old gardener, "Virtue and Vice be twin sisters who come running to do the bidding of the same father, Desire. Were there no desire there would be no virtue, and because one man desires what another does not, who shall say whether the child of his desire be vice or virtue ? Or on the other hand if my friend desires his own wife and if that be virtue, then if I also desire his wife, is not that likewise virtue, since we desire the same thing ? But if to obtain our desire it be necessary to expose our joints to the Thames' fog, then it were virtue to remain at home."

"Right you sound, old mole," said De Vac, smiling, "would that I might learn to reason by your wondrous logic; methinks it might stand me in good



stead before I be much older."

"The best sword arm in all Christendom needs no other logic than the sword, I should think," said Brus, returning to his work.

That afternoon, De Vac stood in a window of the armory looking out upon the beautiful garden which spread before him to the river wall two hundred yards away. In the foreground were box-bordered walks, smooth, sleek lawns, and formal beds of gorgeous flowering plants, while here and there marble statues of wood nymph and satyr gleamed, sparkling in the brilliant sunlight, or, half shaded by an overhanging bush, took on a semblance of life from the riotous play of light and shadow as the leaves above them moved to and fro in the faint breeze. Farther in the distance, the river wall was hidden by more closely massed bushes, and the formal, geometric precision of the nearer view was relieved by a background of vine-colored bowers, and a profusion of small trees and flowering shrubs arranged in studied disorder.

Through this seeming jungle ran tortuous paths, and the carved stone benches of the open garden gave place to rustic seats, and swings suspended from the branches of fruit trees.

Toward this enchanting spot slowly were walking the Lady Maud and her little charge, Prince Richard; all ignorant of the malicious watcher in the window behind them.

A great peacock strutted proudly across the walk before them, and, as Richard ran, childlike, after it, Lady Maud hastened on to the little postern gate which she quickly unlocked, admitting her lover, who had been waiting without. Relocking the gate the two strolled arm in arm to the little bower which was their trysting place.

As the lovers talked, all self-engrossed, the little Prince played happily



about among the trees and flowers, and none saw the stern,
determined face
which peered through the foliage at a little distance from the playing
boy.

Richard was devoting his royal energies to chasing an elusive
butterfly
which fate led nearer and nearer to the cold, hard watcher in the
bushes.
Closer and closer came the little Prince, and in another moment, he
had
burst through the flowering shrubs, and stood facing the implacable
master
of fence.

"Your Highness," said De Vac, bowing to the little fellow, "let old
DeVac
help you catch the pretty insect."

Richard, having often seen De Vac, did not fear him, and so together
they
started in pursuit of the butterfly which by now had passed out of
sight.
De Vac turned their steps toward the little postern gate, but when he
would
have passed through with the tiny Prince, the latter rebelled.

"Come, My Lord Prince," urged De Vac, "methinks the butterfly did
but
alight without the wall, we can have it and return within the garden in
an
instant."

"Go thyself and fetch it," replied the Prince; "the King, my father, has
forbid me stepping without the palace grounds."

"Come," commanded De Vac, more sternly, "no harm can come to
you."

But the child hung back and would not go with him so that De Vac was
forced
to grasp him roughly by the arm. There was a cry of rage and alarm
from
the royal child.

"Unhand me, sirrah," screamed the boy. "How dare you lay hands on
a prince



of England ?"

De Vac clapped his hand over the child's mouth to still his cries, but it was too late. The Lady Maud and her lover had heard and, in an instant, they were rushing toward the postern gate, the officer drawing his sword as he ran.

When they reached the wall, De Vac and the Prince were upon the outside, and the Frenchman had closed and was endeavoring to lock the gate. But, handicapped by the struggling boy, he had not time to turn the key before the officer threw himself against the panels and burst out before the master of fence, closely followed by the Lady Maud.

De Vac dropped the key and, still grasping the now thoroughly affrightened Prince with his left hand, drew his sword and confronted the officer.

There were no words, there was no need of words; De Vac's intentions were too plain to necessitate any parley, so the two fell upon each other with grim fury; the brave officer facing the best swordsman that France had ever produced in a futile attempt to rescue his young prince.

In a moment, De Vac had disarmed him, but, contrary to the laws of chivalry, he did not lower his point until it had first plunged through the heart of his brave antagonist. Then, with a bound, he leaped between Lady Maud and the gate, so that she could not retreat into the garden and give the alarm.

Still grasping the trembling child in his iron grip, he stood facing the lady in waiting, his back against the door.

"Mon Dieu, Sir Jules," she cried, "hast thou gone mad ?"

"No, My Lady," he answered, "but I had not thought to do the work which now



lies before me. Why didst thou not keep a still tongue in thy head and let his patron saint look after the welfare of this princeling? Your rashness has brought you to a pretty pass, for it must be either you or I, My Lady, and it cannot be I. Say thy prayers and compose thyself for death."

Henry III, King of England, sat in his council chamber surrounded by the great lords and nobles who composed his suit. He awaited Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, whom he had summoned that he might heap still further indignities upon him with the intention of degrading and humiliating him that he might leave England forever. The King feared this mighty kinsman who so boldly advised him against the weak follies which were bringing his kingdom to a condition of revolution.

What the outcome of this audience would have been none may say, for Leicester had but just entered and saluted his sovereign when there came an interruption which drowned the petty wrangles of king and courtier in a common affliction that touched the hearts of all.

There was a commotion at one side of the room, the arras parted, and Eleanor, Queen of England, staggered toward the throne, tears streaming down her pale cheeks.

"Oh, My Lord! My Lord!" she cried, "Richard, our son, has been assassinated and thrown into the Thames."

In an instant, all was confusion and turmoil, and it was with the greatest difficulty that the King finally obtained a coherent statement from his queen.

It seemed that when the Lady Maud had not returned to the palace with Prince Richard at the proper time, the Queen had been notified and an immediate search had been instituted -- a search which did not end for over twenty years; but the first fruits of it turned the hearts of the court to



stone, for there beside the open postern gate lay the dead bodies of Lady Maud and a certain officer of the Guards, but nowhere was there a sign or trace of Prince Richard, second son of Henry III of England, and at that time the youngest prince of the realm.

It was two days before the absence of De Vac was noted, and then it was that one of the lords in waiting to the King reminded his majesty of the episode of the fencing bout, and a motive for the abduction of the King's little son became apparent.

An edict was issued requiring the examination of every child in England, for on the left breast of the little Prince was a birthmark which closely resembled a lily and, when after a year no child was found bearing such a mark and no trace of De Vac uncovered, the search was carried into France, nor was it ever wholly relinquished at any time for more than twenty years.

The first theory, of assassination, was quickly abandoned when it was subjected to the light of reason, for it was evident that an assassin could have dispatched the little Prince at the same time that he killed the Lady Maud and her lover, had such been his desire.

The most eager factor in the search for Prince Richard was Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, whose affection for his royal nephew had always been so marked as to have been commented upon by the members of the King's household.

Thus for a time the rupture between De Montfort and his king was healed, and although the great nobleman was divested of his authority in Gascony, he suffered little further oppression at the hands of his royal master.



CHAPTER IV

As De Vac drew his sword from the heart of the Lady Maud, he winced, for, merciless though he was, he had shrunk from this cruel task. Too far he had gone, however, to back down now, and, had he left the Lady Maud alive, the whole of the palace guard and all the city of London would have been on his heels in ten minutes; there would have been no escape.

The little Prince was now so terrified that he could but tremble and whimper in his fright. So fearful was he of the terrible De Vac that a threat of death easily stilled his tongue, and so the grim, old man led him to the boat hidden deep in the dense bushes.

De Vac did not dare remain in this retreat until dark, as he had first intended. Instead, he drew a dingy, ragged dress from the bundle beneath the thwart and in this disguised himself as an old woman, drawing a cotton wimple low over his head and forehead to hide his short hair. Concealing the child beneath the other articles of clothing, he pushed off from the bank, and, rowing close to the shore, hastened down the Thames toward the old dock where, the previous night, he had concealed his skiff. He reached his destination unnoticed, and, running in beneath the dock, worked the boat far into the dark recess of the cave-like retreat.

Here he determined to hide until darkness had fallen, for he knew that the search would be on for the little lost Prince at any moment, and that none might traverse the streets of London without being subject to the closest scrutiny.

Taking advantage of the forced wait, De Vac undressed the Prince and clothed him in other garments, which had been wrapped in the bundle hidden



beneath the thwart; a little red cotton tunic with hose to match, a black doublet and a tiny leather jerkin and leather cap.

The discarded clothing of the Prince he wrapped about a huge stone torn from the disintegrating masonry of the river wall, and consigned the bundle to the voiceless river.

The Prince had by now regained some of his former assurance and, finding that De Vac seemed not to intend harming him, the little fellow commenced questioning his grim companion, his childish wonder at this strange adventure getting the better of his former apprehension.

"What do we here, Sir Jules ?" he asked. "Take me back to the King's, my father's palace. I like not this dark hole nor the strange garments you have placed upon me."

"Silence, boy !" commanded the old man. "Sir Jules be dead, nor are you a king's son. Remember these two things well, nor ever again let me hear you speak the name Sir Jules, or call yourself a prince."

The boy went silent, again cowed by the fierce tone of his captor. Presently he began to whimper, for he was tired and hungry and frightened -- just a poor little baby, helpless and hopeless in the hands of this cruel enemy -- all his royalty as nothing, all gone with the silken finery which lay in the thick mud at the bottom of the Thames, and presently he dropped into a fitful sleep in the bottom of the skiff.

When darkness had settled, De Vac pushed the skiff outward to the side of the dock and, gathering the sleeping child in his arms, stood listening, preparatory to mounting to the alley which led to old Til's place.

As he stood thus, a faint sound of clanking armor came to his attentive ears; louder and louder it grew until there could be no doubt but that a number of men were approaching.



De Vac resumed his place in the skiff, and again drew it far beneath the dock. Scarcely had he done so ere a party of armored knights and men-at-arms clanked out upon the planks above him from the mouth of the dark alley. Here they stopped as though for consultation and plainly could the listener below hear every word of their conversation.

"De Montfort," said one, "what thinkest thou of it? Can it be that the Queen is right and that Richard lies dead beneath these black waters?"

"No, De Clare," replied a deep voice, which De Vac recognized as that of the Earl of Leicester. "The hand that could steal the Prince from out of the very gardens of his sire without the knowledge of Lady Maud or her companion, which must evidently have been the case, could more easily and safely have dispatched him within the gardens had that been the object of this strange attack. I think, My Lord, that presently we shall hear from some bold adventurer who holds the little Prince for ransom. God give that such may be the case, for of all the winsome and affectionate little fellows I have ever seen, not even excepting mine own dear son, the little Richard was the most to be beloved. Would that I might get my hands upon the foul devil who has done this horrid deed."

Beneath the planks, not four feet from where Leicester stood, lay the object of his search. The clanking armor, the heavy spurred feet, and the voices above him had awakened the little Prince and, with a startled cry, he sat upright in the bottom of the skiff. Instantly De Vac's iron band clapped over the tiny mouth, but not before a single faint wail had reached the ears of the men above.

"Hark! What was that, My Lord?" cried one of the men-at-arms.

In tense silence they listened for a repetition of the sound and then De



Montfort cried out:

"What ho, below there ! Who is it beneath the dock ? Answer, in the name of the King !"

Richard, recognizing the voice of his favorite uncle, struggled to free himself, but De Vac's ruthless hand crushed out the weak efforts of the babe, and all was quiet as the tomb, while those above stood listening for a repetition of the sound.

"Dock rats," said De Clare, and then as though the devil guided them to protect his own, two huge rats scurried upward from between the loose boards, and ran squealing up the dark alley.

"Right you are," said De Montfort, "but I could have sworn 'twas a child's feeble wail had I not seen the two filthy rodents with mine own eyes. Come, let us to the next vile alley. We have met with no success here, though that old hag who called herself Til seemed overanxious to bargain for the future information she seemed hopeful of being able to give us."

As they moved off, their voices grew fainter in the ears of the listeners beneath the dock and soon were lost in the distance.

"A close shave," thought De Vac, as he again took up the child and prepared to gain the dock. No further noises occurring to frighten him, he soon reached the door to Til's house and, inserting the key, crept noiselessly to the garret room which he had rented from his ill-favored hostess.

There were no stairs from the upper floor to the garret above, this ascent being made by means of a wooden ladder which De Vac pulled up after him, closing and securing the aperture, through which he climbed with his burden, by means of a heavy trapdoor equipped with thick bars.

The apartment which they now entered extended across the entire east end of



the building, and had windows upon three sides. These were heavily curtained. The apartment was lighted by a small cresset hanging from a rafter near the center of the room.

The walls were unplastered and the rafters unceiled; the whole bearing a most barnlike and unhospitable appearance.

In one corner was a huge bed, and across the room a smaller cot; a cupboard, a table, and two benches completed the furnishings. These articles De Vac had purchased for the room against the time when he should occupy it with his little prisoner.

On the table were a loaf of black bread, an earthenware jar containing honey, a pitcher of milk and two drinking horns. To these, De Vac immediately gave his attention, commanding the child to partake of what he wished.

Hunger for the moment overcame the little Prince's fears, and he set to with avidity upon the strange, rough fare, made doubly coarse by the rude utensils and the bare surroundings, so unlike the royal magnificence of his palace apartments.

While the child ate, De Vac hastened to the lower floor of the building in search of Til, whom he now thoroughly mistrusted and feared. The words of De Montfort, which he had overheard at the dock, convinced him that here was one more obstacle to the fulfillment of his revenge which must be removed as had the Lady Maud; but in this instance there was neither youth nor beauty to plead the cause of the intended victim, or to cause the grim executioner a pang of remorse.

When he found the old hag, she was already dressed to go upon the street, in fact he intercepted her at the very door of the building. Still clad as he was in the mantle and wimple of an old woman, Til did not, at first,



recognize him, and when he spoke, she burst into a nervous, cackling laugh,
as one caught in the perpetration of some questionable act, nor did her
manner escape the shrewd notice of the wily master of fence.

"Whither, old hag?" he asked.

"To visit Mag Tunk at the alley's end, by the river, My Lord," she replied,
with more respect than she had been wont to accord him.

"Then, I will accompany you part way, my friend, and, perchance, you can
give me a hand with some packages I left behind me in the skiff I have
moored there."

And so the two walked together through the dark alley to the end of
the
rickety, dismantled dock; the one thinking of the vast reward the King
would lavish upon her for the information she felt sure she alone
could
give; the other feeling beneath his mantle for the hilt of a long dagger
which nestled there.

As they reached the water's edge, De Vac was walking with his right
shoulder behind his companion's left, in his hand was gripped the
keen
blade and, as the woman halted on the dock, the point that hovered
just
below her left shoulder-blade plunged, soundless, into her heart at
the
same instant that De Vac's left hand swung up and grasped her throat
in a
grip of steel.

There was no sound, barely a struggle of the convulsively stiffening
old
muscles, and then, with a push from De Vac, the body lunged forward
into
the Thames, where a dull splash marked the end of the last hope that
Prince
Richard might be rescued from the clutches of his Nemesis.



CHAPTER V

For three years following the disappearance of Prince Richard, a bent old woman lived in the heart of London within a stone's throw of the King's palace. In a small back room she lived, high up in the attic of an old building, and with her was a little boy who never went abroad alone, nor by day. And upon his left breast was a strange mark which resembled a lily.

When the bent old woman was safely in her attic room, with bolted door behind her, she was wont to straighten up, and discard her dingy mantle for more comfortable and becoming doublet and hose.

For years, she worked assiduously with the little boy's education. There were three subjects in her curriculum; French, swordsmanship and hatred of all things English, especially the reigning house of England.

The old woman had had made a tiny foil and had commenced teaching the little boy the art of fence when he was but three years old.

"You will be the greatest swordsman in the world when you are twenty, my son," she was wont to say, "and then you shall go out and kill many Englishmen. Your name shall be hated and cursed the length and breadth of England, and when you finally stand with the halter about your neck, aha, then will I speak. Then shall they know."

The little boy did not understand it all, he only knew that he was comfortable, and had warm clothing, and all he required to eat, and that he would be a great man when he learned to fight with a real sword, and had grown large enough to wield one. He also knew that he hated Englishmen, but why, he did not know.

Way back in the uttermost recesses of his little, childish head, he seemed



to remember a time when his life and surroundings had been very different;
when, instead of this old woman, there had been many people around him, and
a sweet faced woman had held him in her arms and kissed him, before he was
taken off to bed at night; but he could not be sure, maybe it was only a dream he remembered, for he dreamed many strange and wonderful dreams.

When the little boy was about six years of age, a strange man came to their
attic home to visit the little old woman. It was in the dusk of the evening but the old woman did not light the cresset, and further, she whispered to the little boy to remain in the shadows of a far corner of the
bare chamber.

The stranger was old and bent and had a great beard which hid almost his
entire face except for two piercing eyes, a great nose and a bit of wrinkled forehead. When he spoke, he accompanied his words with many
shrugs of his narrow shoulders and with waving of his arms and other strange and amusing gesticulations. The child was fascinated. Here was
the first amusement of his little starved life. He listened intently to the conversation, which was in French.

"I have just the thing for madame," the stranger was saying. "It be a noble and stately hall far from the beaten way. It was built in the old days by Harold the Saxon, but in later times, death and poverty and the
disfavor of the King have wrested it from his descendants. A few years
since, Henry granted it to that spend-thrift favorite of his, Henri de Macy, who pledged it to me for a sum he hath been unable to repay. Today
it be my property, and as it be far from Paris, you may have it for the mere song I have named. It be a wondrous bargain, madame."

"And when I come upon it, I shall find that I have bought a crumbling
pile
of ruined masonry, unfit to house a family of foxes," replied the old woman
peevishly.



"One tower hath fallen, and the roof for half the length of one wing hath sagged and tumbled in," explained the old Frenchman. "But the three lower stories be intact and quite habitable. It be much grander even now than the castles of many of England's noble barons, and the price, madame --- ah, the price be so ridiculously low."

Still the old woman hesitated.

"Come," said the Frenchman, "I have it. Deposit the money with Isaac the Jew -- thou knowest him? -- and he shall hold it together with the deed for forty days, which will give thee ample time to travel to Derby and inspect thy purchase. If thou be not entirely satisfied, Isaac the Jew shall return thy money to thee and the deed to me, but if at the end of forty days thou hast not made demand for thy money, then shall Isaac send the deed to thee and the money to me. Be not this an easy and fair way out of the difficulty?"

The little old woman thought for a moment and at last conceded that it seemed quite a fair way to arrange the matter. And thus it was accomplished.

Several days later, the little old woman called the child to her.

"We start tonight upon a long journey to our new home. Thy face shall be wrapped in many rags, for thou hast a most grievous toothache. Dost understand?"

"But I have no toothache. My teeth do not pain me at all. I --" expostulated the child.

"Tut, tut," interrupted the little old woman. "Thou hast a toothache, and so thy face must be wrapped in many rags. And listen, should any ask thee upon the way why thy face be so wrapped, thou art to say that thou hast a



toothache. And thou do not do as I say, the King's men will take us and we shall be hanged, for the King hateth us. If thou hatest the English King and lovest thy life do as I command."

"I hate the King," replied the little boy. "For this reason I shall do as thou sayest."

So it was that they set out that night upon their long journey north toward the hills of Derby. For many days they travelled, riding upon two small donkeys. Strange sights filled the days for the little boy who remembered nothing outside the bare attic of his London home and the dirty London alleys that he had traversed only by night.

They wound across beautiful parklike meadows and through dark, forbidding forests, and now and again they passed tiny hamlets of thatched huts. Occasionally they saw armored knights upon the highway, alone or in small parties, but the child's companion always managed to hasten into cover at the road side until the grim riders had passed.

Once, as they lay in hiding in a dense wood beside a little open glade across which the road wound, the boy saw two knights enter the glade from either side. For a moment, they drew rein and eyed each other in silence, and then one, a great black mailed knight upon a black charger, cried out something to the other which the boy could not catch. The other knight made no response other than to rest his lance upon his thigh and with lowered point, ride toward his ebon adversary. For a dozen paces their great steeds trotted slowly toward one another, but presently the knights urged them into full gallop, and when the two iron men on their iron trapped chargers came together in the center of the glade, it was with all the terrific impact of full charge.



The lance of the black knight smote full upon the linden shield of his foeman, the staggering weight of the mighty black charger hurtled upon the gray, who went down with his rider into the dust of the highway. The momentum of the black carried him fifty paces beyond the fallen horseman before his rider could rein him in, then the black knight turned to view the havoc he had wrought. The gray horse was just staggering dizzily to his feet, but his mailed rider lay quiet and still where he had fallen.

With raised visor, the black knight rode back to the side of his vanquished foe. There was a cruel smile upon his lips as he leaned toward the prostrate form. He spoke tauntingly, but there was no response, then he prodded the fallen man with the point of his spear. Even this elicited no movement. With a shrug of his iron clad shoulders, the black knight wheeled and rode on down the road until he had disappeared from sight within the gloomy shadows of the encircling forest.

The little boy was spell-bound. Naught like this had he ever seen or dreamed.

"Some day thou shalt go and do likewise, my son," said the little old woman.

"Shall I be clothed in armor and ride upon a great black steed?" he asked.

"Yes, and thou shalt ride the highways of England with thy stout lance and mighty sword, and behind thee thou shalt leave a trail of blood and death, for every man shalt be thy enemy. But come, we must be on our way."

They rode on, leaving the dead knight where he had fallen, but always in his memory the child carried the thing that he had seen, longing for the day when he should be great and strong like the formidable black knight.

On another day, as they were biding in a deserted hovel to escape the



notice of a caravan of merchants journeying up-country with their wares,
they saw a band of ruffians rush out from the concealing shelter of some bushes at the far side of the highway and fall upon the surprised and defenseless tradesmen.

Ragged, bearded, uncouth villains they were, armed mostly with bludgeons and daggers, with here and there a cross-bow. Without mercy they attacked the old and the young, beating them down in cold blood even when they offered no resistance. Those of the caravan who could, escaped, the balance the highwaymen left dead or dying in the road, as they hurried away with their loot.

At first the child was horror-struck, but when he turned to the little old woman for sympathy he found a grim smile upon her thin lips. She noted his expression of dismay.

"It is naught, my son. But English curs setting upon English swine. Some day thou shalt set upon both -- they be only fit for killing."

The boy made no reply, but he thought a great deal about that which he had seen. Knights were cruel to knights -- the poor were cruel to the rich -
-
and every day of the journey had forced upon his childish mind that everyone must be very cruel and hard upon the poor. He had seen them in all their sorrow and misery and poverty -- stretching a long, scattering line all the way from London town. Their bent backs, their poor thin bodies and their hopeless, sorrowful faces attesting the weary wretchedness of their existence.

"Be no one happy in all the world?" he once broke out to the old woman.

"Only he who wields the mightiest sword," responded the old woman.
"You



have seen, my son, that all Englishmen are beasts. They set upon and kill one another for little provocation or for no provocation at all. When thou shalt be older, thou shalt go forth and kill them all for unless thou kill them, they will kill thee."

At length, after tiresome days upon the road, they came to a little hamlet in the hills. Here the donkeys were disposed of and a great horse purchased, upon which the two rode far up into a rough and uninviting country away from the beaten track, until late one evening they approached a ruined castle.

The frowning walls towered high against the moonlit sky beyond, and where a portion of the roof had fallen in, the cold moon, shining through the narrow unglazed windows, gave to the mighty pile the likeness of a huge, many-eyed ogre crouching upon the flank of a deserted world, for nowhere was there other sign of habitation.

Before this somber pile, the two dismounted. The little boy was filled with awe and his childish imagination ran riot as they approached the crumbling barbican on foot, leading the horse after them. From the dark shadows of the ballium, they passed into the moonlit inner court. At the far end the old woman found the ancient stables, and here, with decaying planks, she penned the horse for the night, pouring a measure of oats upon the floor for him from a bag which had bung across his rump.

Then she led the way into the dense shadows of the castle, lighting their advance with a flickering pine knot. The old planking of the floors, long unused, groaned and rattled beneath their approach. There was a sudden scamper of clawed feet before them, and a red fox dashed by in a frenzy of alarm toward the freedom of the outer night.



Presently they came to the great hall. The old woman pushed open the great doors upon their creaking hinges and lit up dimly the mighty, cavernous interior with the puny rays of their feeble torch. As they stepped cautiously within, an impalpable dust arose in little spurts from the long-rotted rushes that crumbled beneath their feet. A huge bat circled wildly with loud fluttering wings in evident remonstrance at this rude intrusion. Strange creatures of the night scurried or wriggled across wall and floor.

But the child was unafraid. Fear had not been a part of the old woman's curriculum. The boy did not know the meaning of the word, nor was he ever in his after-life to experience the sensation. With childish eagerness, he followed his companion as she inspected the interior of the chamber. It was still an imposing room. The boy clapped his hands in delight at the beauties of the carved and panelled walls and the oak beamed ceiling, stained almost black from the smoke of torches and oil cressets that had lighted it in bygone days, aided, no doubt, by the wood fires which had burned in its two immense fireplaces to cheer the merry throng of noble revellers that had so often sat about the great table into the morning hours.

Here they took up their abode. But the bent, old woman was no longer an old woman -- she had become a straight, wiry, active old man.

The little boy's education went on -- French, swordsmanship and hatred of the English -- the same thing year after year with the addition of horsemanship after he was ten years old. At this time the old man commenced teaching him to speak English, but with a studied and very marked French accent. During all his life now, he could not remember of having spoken to any living being other than his guardian, whom he had been taught



to address as father. Nor did the boy have any name -- he was just "my son."

His life in the Derby hills was so filled with the hard, exacting duties of his education that he had little time to think of the strange loneliness of his existence; nor is it probable that he missed that companionship of others of his own age of which, never having had experience in it, he could scarce be expected to regret or yearn for.

At fifteen, the youth was a magnificent swordsman and horseman, and with an utter contempt for pain or danger -- a contempt which was the result of the heroic methods adopted by the little old man in the training of him. Often the two practiced with razor-sharp swords, and without armor or other protection of any description.

"Thus only," the old man was wont to say, "mayst thou become the absolute master of thy blade. Of such a nicety must be thy handling of the weapon that thou mayst touch an antagonist at will and so lightly, shouldst thou desire, that thy point, wholly under the control of a master hand, mayst be stopped before it inflicts so much as a scratch."

But in practice, there were many accidents, and then one or both of them would nurse a punctured skin for a few days. So, while blood was often let on both sides, the training produced a fearless swordsman who was so truly the master of his point that he could stop a thrust within a fraction of an inch of the spot he sought.

At fifteen, he was a very strong and straight and handsome lad. Bronzed and hardy from his outdoor life; of few words, for there was none that he



might talk with save the taciturn old man; hating the English, for that he was taught as thoroughly as swordsmanship; speaking French fluently and English poorly -- and waiting impatiently for the day when the old man should send him out into the world with clanking armor and lance and shield to do battle with the knights of England.

It was about this time that there occurred the first important break in the monotony of his existence. Far down the rocky trail that led from the valley below through the Derby hills to the ruined castle, three armored knights urged their tired horses late one afternoon of a chill autumn day. Off the main road and far from any habitation, they had espied the castle's towers through a rift in the hills, and now they spurred toward it in search of food and shelter.

As the road led them winding higher into the hills, they suddenly emerged upon the downs below the castle where a sight met their eyes which caused them to draw rein and watch in admiration. There, before them upon the downs, a boy battled with a lunging, rearing horse -- a perfect demon of a black horse. Striking and biting in a frenzy of rage, it sought ever to escape or injure the lithe figure which clung leech-like to its shoulder.

The boy was on the ground. His left hand grasped the heavy mane; his right arm lay across the beast's withers and his right hand drew steadily in upon a halter rope with which he had taken a half hitch about the horse's muzzle. Now the black reared and wheeled, striking and biting, full upon the youth, but the active figure swung with him -- always just behind the giant shoulder -- and ever and ever he drew the great arched neck farther and farther to the right.



As the animal plunged hither and thither in great leaps, he dragged the boy with him, but all his mighty efforts were unavailing to loosen the grip upon mane and withers. Suddenly, he reared straight into the air carrying the youth with him, then with a vicious lunge he threw himself backward upon the ground.

"It's death !" exclaimed one of the knights, "he will kill the youth yet, Beauchamp."

"No !" cried he addressed. "Look ! He is up again and the boy still clings as tightly to him as his own black hide."

"'Tis true," exclaimed another, "but he hath lost what he had gained upon the halter -- he must needs fight it all out again from the beginning."

And so the battle went on again as before, the boy again drawing the iron neck slowly to the right -- the beast fighting and squealing as though possessed of a thousand devils. A dozen times, as the head bent farther and farther toward him, the boy loosed his hold upon the mane and reached quickly down to grasp the near fore pastern. A dozen times the horse shook off the new hold, but at length the boy was successful, and the knee was bent and the hoof drawn up to the elbow.

Now the black fought at a disadvantage, for he was on but three feet and his neck was drawn about in an awkward and unnatural position. His efforts became weaker and weaker. The boy talked incessantly to him in a quiet voice, and there was a shadow of a smile upon his lips. Now he bore heavily upon the black withers, pulling the horse toward him. Slowly the beast sank upon his bent knee -- pulling backward until his off fore leg was stretched straight before him. Then, with a final surge, the youth pulled him over upon his side, and, as he fell, slipped prone beside him.

One sinewy hand shot to the rope just beneath the black chin -- the other



grasped a slim, pointed ear.

For a few minutes the horse fought and kicked to gain his liberty, but with his head held to the earth, he was as powerless in the hands of the boy as a baby would have been. Then he sank panting and exhausted into mute surrender.

"Well done !" cried one of the knights. "Simon de Montfort himself never mastered a horse in better order, my boy. Who be thou ?"

In an instant, the lad was upon his feet his eyes searching for the speaker. The horse, released, sprang up also, and the two stood -- the handsome boy and the beautiful black -- gazing with startled eyes, like two wild things, at the strange intruder who confronted them.

"Come, Sir Mortimer !" cried the boy, and turning he led the prancing but subdued animal toward the castle and through the ruined barbican into the court beyond.

"What ho, there, lad !" shouted Paul of Merely. "We wouldst not harm thee -- come, we but ask the way to the castle of De Stutevill."

The three knights listened but there was no answer.

"Come, Sir Knights," spoke Paul of Merely, "we will ride within and learn what manner of churls inhabit this ancient rookery."

As they entered the great courtyard, magnificent even in its ruined grandeur, they were met by a little, grim old man who asked them in no gentle tones what they would of them there.

"We have lost our way in these devilish Derby hills of thine, old man," replied Paul of Merely. "We seek the castle of Sir John de Stutevill."

"Ride down straight to the river road, keeping the first trail to the right, and when thou hast come there, turn again to thy right and ride



north beside the river -- thou canst not miss the way -- it be plain as the nose before thy face," and with that the old man turned to enter the castle.

"Hold, old fellow !" cried the spokesman. "It be nigh onto sunset now, and we care not to sleep out again this night as we did the last. We will tarry with you then till morn that we may take up our journey refreshed, upon rested steeds."

The old man grumbled, and it was with poor grace that he took them in to feed and house them over night. But there was nothing else for it, since they would have taken his hospitality by force had he refused to give it voluntarily.

From their guests, the two learned something of the conditions outside their Derby hills. The old man showed less interest than he felt, but to the boy, notwithstanding that the names he heard meant nothing to him, it was like unto a fairy tale to hear of the wondrous doings of earl and baron, bishop and king.

"If the King does not mend his ways," said one of the knights, "we will drive his whole accursed pack of foreign blood-suckers into the sea."

"De Montfort has told him as much a dozen times, and now that all of us, both Norman and Saxon barons, have already met together and formed a pact for our mutual protection, the King must surely realize that the time for temporizing be past, and that unless he would have a civil war upon his hands, he must keep the promises he so glibly makes, instead of breaking them the moment De Montfort's back be turned."

"He fears his brother-in-law," interrupted another of the knights, "even more than the devil fears holy water. I was in attendance on his majesty



some weeks since when he was going down the Thames upon the royal barge.

We were overtaken by as severe a thunder storm as I have ever seen, of

which the King was in such abject fear that he commanded that we land at

the Bishop of Durham's palace opposite which we then were. De Montfort,

who was residing there, came to meet Henry, with all due respect, observing, 'What do you fear, now, Sire, the tempest has passed ?'

And what

thinkest thou old 'waxen heart' replied ? Why, still trembling, he said, 'I do indeed fear thunder and lightning much, but, by the hand of God,

I

tremble before you more than for all the thunder in Heaven !"

"I surmise," interjected the grim, old man, "that De Montfort has in some

manner gained an ascendancy over the King. Think you he looks so high as

the throne itself ?"

"Not so," cried the oldest of the knights. "Simon de Montfort works for

England's weal alone -- and methinks, nay knowest, that he would be first

to spring to arms to save the throne for Henry. He but fights the King's

rank and covetous advisers, and though he must needs seem to defy the King

himself, it be but to save his tottering power from utter collapse. But, gad, how the King hates him. For a time it seemed that there might be a

permanent reconciliation when, for years after the disappearance of the

little Prince Richard, De Montfort devoted much of his time and private

fortune to prosecuting a search through all the world for the little fellow, of whom he was inordinately fond. This self-sacrificing

interest

on his part won over the King and Queen for many years, but of late his

unremitting hostility to their continued extravagant waste of the national

resources has again hardened them toward him."



The old man, growing uneasy at the turn the conversation threatened, sent the youth from the room on some pretext, and himself left to prepare supper.

As they were sitting at the evening meal, one of the nobles eyed the boy intently, for he was indeed good to look upon; his bright handsome face, clear, intelligent gray eyes, and square strong jaw framed in a mass of brown waving hair banged at the forehead and falling about his ears, where it was again cut square at the sides and back, after the fashion of the times.

His upper body was clothed in a rough under tunic of wool, stained red, over which he wore a short leathern jerkin, while his doublet was also of leather, a soft and finely tanned piece of undressed doeskin. His long hose, fitting his shapely legs as closely as another layer of skin, were of the same red wool as his tunic, while his strong leather sandals were cross-gartered halfway to his knees with narrow bands of leather.

A leathern girdle about his waist supported a sword and a dagger and a round skull cap of the same material, to which was fastened a falcon's wing, completed his picturesque and becoming costume.

"Your son ?" he asked, turning to the old man.

"Yes," was the growling response.

"He favors you but little, old fellow, except in his cursed French accent.

"S blood, Beauchamp," he continued, turning to one of his companions, "an' were he set down in court, I wager our gracious Queen would he hard put to it to tell him from the young Prince Edward. Dids't ever see so strange a likeness ?"

"Now that you speak of it, My Lord, I see it plainly. It is indeed a marvel," answered Beauchamp.



Had they glanced at the old man during this colloquy, they would have seen a blanched face, drawn with inward fear and rage.

Presently the oldest member of the party of three knights spoke in a grave quiet tone.

"And how old might you be, my son ?" he asked the boy.

"I do not know."

"And your name ?"

"I do not know what you mean. I have no name. My father calls me son and no other ever before addressed me."

At this juncture, the old man arose and left the room, saving he would fetch more food from the kitchen, but he turned immediately he had passed the doorway and listened from without.

"The lad appears about fifteen," said Paul of Merely, lowering his voice, "and so would be the little lost Prince Richard, if he lives. This one does not know his name, or his age, yet he looks enough like Prince Edward to be his twin."

"Come, my son," he continued aloud, "open your jerkin and let us have a look at your left breast, we shall read a true answer there."

"Are you Englishmen ?" asked the boy without making a move to comply with their demand.

"That we be, my son," said Beauchamp.

"Then it were better that I die than do your bidding, for all Englishmen are pigs and I loathe them as becomes a gentleman of France. I do not uncover my body to the eyes of swine."



The knights, at first taken back by this unexpected outbreak, finally burst into uproarious laughter.

"Indeed," cried Paul of Merely, "spoken as one of the King's foreign favorites might speak, and they ever told the good God's truth. But come lad, we would not harm you -- do as I bid."

"No man lives who can harm me while a blade hangs at my side," answered the boy, "and as for doing as you bid, I take orders from no man other than my father."

Beauchamp and Greystoke laughed aloud at the discomfiture of Paul of Merely, but the latter's face hardened in anger, and without further words he strode forward with outstretched hand to tear open the boy's leathern jerkin, but met with the gleaming point of a sword and a quick sharp, "En garde !" from the boy.

There was naught for Paul of Merely to do but draw his own weapon, in self-defense, for the sharp point of the boy's sword was flashing in and out against his unprotected body, inflicting painful little jabs, and the boy's tongue was murmuring low-toned taunts and insults as it invited him to draw and defend himself or be stuck "like the English pig you are."

Paul of Merely was a brave man and he liked not the idea of drawing against this stripling, but he argued that he could quickly disarm him without harming the lad, and he certainly did not care to be further humiliated before his comrades.

But when he had drawn and engaged his youthful antagonist, he discovered that, far from disarming him, he would have the devil's own job of it to keep from being killed.



Never in all his long years of fighting had he faced such an agile and dexterous enemy, and as they backed this way and that about the room, great beads of sweat stood upon the brow of Paul of Merely, for he realized that he was fighting for his life against a superior swordsman.

The loud laughter of Beauchamp and Greystoke soon subsided to grim smiles, and presently they looked on with startled faces in which fear and apprehension were dominant.

The boy was fighting as a cat might play with a mouse. No sign of exertion was apparent, and his haughty confident smile told louder than words that he had in no sense let himself out to his full capacity.

Around and around the room they circled, the boy always advancing, Paul of Merely always retreating. The din of their clashing swords and the heavy breathing of the older man were the only sounds, except as they brushed against a bench or a table.

Paul of Merely was a brave man, but he shuddered at the thought of dying uselessly at the hands of a mere boy. He would not call upon his friends for aid, but presently, to his relief, Beauchamp sprang between them with drawn sword, crying "Enough, gentlemen, enough! You have no quarrel. Sheathe your swords."

But the boy's only response was, "En garde, cochon," and Beauchamp found himself taking the center of the stage in the place of his friend. Nor did the boy neglect Paul of Merely, but engaged them both in swordplay that caused the eyes of Greystoke to bulge from their sockets.

So swiftly moved his flying blade that half the time it was a sheet of gleaming light, and now he was driving home his thrusts and the smile had



frozen upon his lips -- grim and stern.

Paul of Merely and Beauchamp were wounded in a dozen places when Greystoke rushed to their aid, and then it was that a little, wiry, gray man leaped agilely from the kitchen doorway, and with drawn sword took his place beside the boy. It was now two against three and the three may have guessed, though they never knew, that they were pitted against the two greatest swordsmen in the world.

"To the death," cried the little gray man, "a mort, mon fils." Scarcely had the words left his lips ere, as though it had but waited permission, the boy's sword flashed into the heart of Paul of Merely, and a Saxon gentleman was gathered to his fathers.

The old man engaged Greystoke now, and the boy turned his undivided attention to Beauchamp. Both these men were considered excellent swordsmen, but when Beauchamp heard again the little gray man's "a mort, mon fils," he shuddered, and the little hairs at the nape of his neck rose up, and his spine froze, for he knew that he had heard the sentence of death passed upon him; for no mortal had yet lived who could vanquish such a swordsman as he who now faced him.

As Beauchamp pitched forward across a bench, dead, the little old man led Greystoke to where the boy awaited him.

"They are thy enemies, my son, and to thee belongs the pleasure of revenge; a mort, mon fils."

Greystoke was determined to sell his life dearly, and he rushed the lad as a great bull might rush a teasing dog, but the boy gave back not an inch and, when Greystoke stopped, there was a foot of cold steel protruding from his back.



Together they buried the knights at the bottom of the dry moat at the back of the ruined castle. First they had stripped them and, when they took account of the spoils of the combat, they found themselves richer by three horses with full trappings, many pieces of gold and silver money, ornaments and jewels, as well as the lances, swords and chain mail armor of their erstwhile guests.

But the greatest gain, the old man thought to himself, was that the knowledge of the remarkable resemblance between his ward and Prince Edward of England had come to him in time to prevent the undoing of his life's work.

The boy, while young, was tall and broad shouldered, and so the old man had little difficulty in fitting one of the suits of armor to him, obliterating the devices so that none might guess to whom it had belonged. This he did, and from then on the boy never rode abroad except in armor, and when he met others upon the high road, his visor was always lowered that none might see his face.

The day following the episode of the three knights the old man called the boy to him, saying,

"It is time, my son, that thou learned an answer to such questions as were put to thee yestereve by the pigs of Henry. Thou art fifteen years of age, and thy name be Norman, and so, as this be the ancient castle of Torn, thou mayst answer those whom thou desire to know it that thou art Norman of Torn; that thou be a French gentleman whose father purchased Torn and brought thee hither from France on the death of thy mother, when thou wert six years old.



"But remember, Norman of Torn, that the best answer for an Englishman is the sword; naught else may penetrate his thick wit."

And so was born that Norman of Torn, whose name in a few short years was to strike terror to the hearts of Englishmen, and whose power in the vicinity of Torn was greater than that of the King or the barons.

CHAPTER VI

From now on, the old man devoted himself to the training of the boy in the handling of his lance and battle-axe, but each day also, a period was allotted to the sword, until, by the time the youth had turned sixteen, even the old man himself was as but a novice by comparison with the marvelous skill of his pupil.

During these days, the boy rode Sir Mortimer abroad in many directions until he knew every bypath within a radius of fifty miles of Torn. Sometimes the old man accompanied him, but more often he rode alone.

On one occasion, he chanced upon a hut at the outskirts of a small hamlet not far from Torn and, with the curiosity of boyhood, determined to enter and have speech with the inmates, for by this time the natural desire for companionship was commencing to assert itself. In all his life, he remembered only the company of the old man, who never spoke except when necessity required.

The hut was occupied by an old priest, and as the boy in armor pushed in, without the usual formality of knocking, the old man looked up with an expression of annoyance and disapproval.

"What now," he said, "have the King's men respect neither for piety nor age



that they burst in upon the seclusion of a holy man without so much as a
'by your leave' ?"

"I am no king's man," replied the boy quietly, "I am Norman of Torn, who has neither a king nor a god, and who says 'by your leave' to no man. But I have come in peace because I wish to talk to another than my father. Therefore you may talk to me, priest," he concluded with haughty peremptoriness.

"By the nose of John, but it must be a king has deigned to honor me with his commands," laughed the priest. "Raise your visor, My Lord, I would fain look upon the countenance from which issue the commands of royalty."

The priest was a large man with beaming, kindly eyes, and a round jovial face. There was no bite in the tones of his good-natured retort, and so, smiling, the boy raised his visor.

"By the ear of Gabriel," cried the good father, "a child in armor !"

"A child in years, mayhap," replied the boy, "but a good child to own as a friend, if one has enemies who wear swords."

"Then we shall be friends, Norman of Torn, for albeit I have few enemies, no man has too many friends, and I like your face and your manner, though there be much to wish for in your manners. Sit down and eat with me, and I will talk to your heart's content, for be there one other thing I more love than eating, it is talking."

With the priest's aid, the boy laid aside his armor, for it was heavy and uncomfortable, and together the two sat down to the meal that was already partially on the board.

Thus began a friendship which lasted during the lifetime of the good



priest. Whenever he could do so, Norman of Torn visited his friend, Father Claude. It was he who taught the boy to read and write in French, English and Latin at a time when but few of the nobles could sign their own names.

French was spoken almost exclusively at court and among the higher classes of society, and all public documents were inscribed either in French or Latin, although about this time the first proclamation written in the English tongue was issued by an English king to his subjects.

Father Claude taught the boy to respect the rights of others, to espouse the cause of the poor and weak, to revere God and to believe that the principal reason for man's existence was to protect woman. All of virtue and chivalry and true manhood which his old guardian had neglected to inculcate in the boy's mind, the good priest planted there, but he could not eradicate his deep-seated hatred for the English or his belief that the real test of manhood lay in a desire to fight to the death with a sword.

An occurrence which befell during one of the boy's earlier visits to his new friend rather decided the latter that no arguments he could bring to bear could ever overcome the bald fact that to this very belief of the boy's, and his ability to back it up with acts, the good father owed a great deal, possibly his life.

As they were seated in the priest's hut one afternoon, a rough knock fell upon the door which was immediately pushed open to admit as disreputable a band of ruffians as ever polluted the sight of man. Six of them there were, clothed in dirty leather, and wearing swords and daggers at their sides.

The leader was a mighty fellow with a great shock of coarse black hair and a red, bloated face almost concealed by a huge matted black beard. Behind



him pushed another giant with red hair and a bristling mustache;
while the
third was marked by a terrible scar across his left cheek and forehead
and
from a blow which had evidently put out his left eye, for that socket
was
empty, and the sunken eyelid but partly covered the inflamed red of
the
hollow where his eye had been.

"A ha, my hearties," roared the leader, turning to his motley crew,
"fine
pickings here indeed. A swine of God fattened upon the sweat of such
poor,
honest devils as we, and a young shoat who, by his looks, must have
pieces
of gold in his belt.

"Say your prayers, my pigeons," he continued, with a vile oath, "for
The
Black Wolf leaves no evidence behind him to tie his neck with a halter
later, and dead men talk the least."

"If it be The Black Wolf," whispered Father Claude to the boy, "no
worse
fate could befall us for he preys ever upon the clergy, and when
drunk, as
he now is, he murders his victims. I will throw myself before them
while
you hasten through the rear doorway to your horse, and make good
your
escape." He spoke in French, and held his hands in the attitude of
prayer,
so that he quite entirely misled the ruffians, who had no idea that he
was
communicating with the boy.

Norman of Torn could scarce repress a smile at this clever ruse of the
old
priest, and, assuming a similar attitude, he replied in French:

"The good Father Claude does not know Norman of Torn if he thinks
he runs
out the back door like an old woman because a sword looks in at the
front
door."



Then rising he addressed the ruffians.

"I do not know what manner of grievance you hold against my good friend here, nor neither do I care. It is sufficient that he is the friend of Norman of Torn, and that Norman of Torn be here in person to acknowledge the debt of friendship. Have at you, sir knights of the great filth and the mighty stink !" and with drawn sword he vaulted over the table and fell upon the surprised leader.

In the little room, but two could engage him at once, but so fiercely did his blade swing and so surely did he thrust that, in a bare moment, The Black Wolf lay dead upon the floor and the red giant, Shandy, was badly, though not fatally wounded. The four remaining ruffians backed quickly from the hut, and a more cautious fighter would have let them go their way in peace, for in the open, four against one are odds no man may pit himself against with impunity. But Norman of Torn saw red when he fought and the red lured him ever on into the thickest of the fray. Only once before had he fought to the death, but that once had taught him the love of it, and ever after until his death, it marked his manner of fighting; so that men who loathed and hated and feared him were as one with those who loved him in acknowledging that never before had God joined in the human frame absolute supremacy with the sword and such utter fearlessness.

So it was, now, that instead of being satisfied with his victory, he rushed out after the four knaves. Once in the open, they turned upon him, but he sprang into their midst with his seething blade, and it was as though they faced four men rather than one, so quickly did he parry a thrust here and return a cut there. In a moment one was disarmed, another down, and the



remaining two fleeing for their lives toward the high road with
Norman of
Torn close at their heels.

Young, agile and perfect in health, he outclassed them in running as
well
as in swordsmanship, and ere they had made fifty paces, both had
thrown
away their swords and were on their knees pleading for their lives.

"Come back to the good priest's hut, and we shall see what he may
say,"
replied Norman of Torn.

On the way back, they found the man who had been disarmed bending
over his
wounded comrade. They were brothers, named Flory, and one would
not desert
the other. It was evident that the wounded man was in no danger, so
Norman
of Torn ordered the others to assist him into the hut, where they
found Red
Shandy sitting propped against the wall while the good father poured
the
contents of a flagon down his eager throat.

The villain's eyes fairly popped from his head when he saw his four
comrades coming, unarmed and prisoners, back to the little room.

"The Black Wolf dead, Red Shandy and John Flory wounded, James
Flory, One
Eye Kanty and Peter the Hermit prisoners !" he ejaculated.

"Man or devil ! By the Pope's hind leg, who and what be ye ?" he said,
turning to Norman of Torn.

"I be your master and ye be my men," said Norman of Torn. "Me ye
shall
serve in fairer work than ye have selected for yourselves, but with
fighting a-plenty and good reward."

The sight of this gang of ruffians banded together to prey upon the
clergy
had given rise to an idea in the boy's mind, which had been revolving
in a
nebulous way within the innermost recesses of his subconsciousness
since



his vanquishing of the three knights had brought him, so easily, such riches in the form of horses, arms, armor and gold. As was always his wont in his after life, to think was to act.

"With The Black Wolf dead, and may the devil pull out his eyes with red hot tongs, we might look farther and fare worse, mates, in search of a chief," spoke Red Shandy, eyeing his fellows, "for verily any man, be he but a stripling, who can vanquish six such as we, be fit to command us."

"But what be the duties ?" said he whom they called Peter the Hermit.

"To follow Norman of Torn where he may lead, to protect the poor and the weak, to lay down your lives in defence of woman, and to prey upon rich Englishmen and harass the King of England."

The last two clauses of these articles of faith appealed to the ruffians so strongly that they would have subscribed to anything, even daily mass, and a bath, had that been necessary to admit them to the service of Norman of Torn.

"Aye, aye !" they cried. "We be your men, indeed."

"Wait," said Norman of Torn, "there is more. You are to obey my every command on pain of instant death, and one-half of all your gains are to be mine. On my side, I will clothe and feed you, furnish you with mounts and armor and weapons and a roof to sleep under, and fight for and with you with a sword arm which you know to be no mean protector. Are you satisfied ?"

"That we are," and "Long live Norman of Torn," and "Here's to the chief of the Torns" signified the ready assent of the burly cut-throats.

"Then swear it as ye kiss the hilt of my sword and this token," pursued Norman of Torn catching up a crucifix from the priest's table.



With these formalities was born the Clan Torn, which grew in a few years to number a thousand men, and which defied a king's army and helped to make Simon de Montfort virtual ruler of England.

Almost immediately commenced that series of outlaw acts upon neighboring barons, and chance members of the gentry who happened to be caught in the open by the outlaws, that filled the coffers of Norman of Torn with many pieces of gold and silver, and placed a price upon his head ere he had scarce turned eighteen.

That he had no fear of or desire to avoid responsibility for his acts, he grimly evidenced by marking with a dagger's point upon the foreheads of those who fell before his own sword the initials NT.

As his following and wealth increased, he rebuilt and enlarged the grim Castle of Torn, and again dammed the little stream which had furnished the moat with water in bygone days.

Through all the length and breadth of the country that witnessed his activities, his very name was worshipped by poor and lowly and oppressed. The money he took from the King's tax gatherers, he returned to the miserable peasants of the district, and once when Henry III sent a little expedition against him, he surrounded and captured the entire force, and, stripping them, gave their clothing to the poor, and escorted them, naked, back to the very gates of London.

By the time he was twenty, Norman the Devil, as the King himself had dubbed him, was known by reputation throughout all England, though no man had seen his face and lived other than his friends and followers. He had become a power to reckon with in the fast culminating quarrel between King Henry and



his foreign favorites on one side, and the Saxon and Norman barons on the other.

Neither side knew which way his power might be turned, for Norman of Torn had preyed almost equally upon royalist and insurgent. Personally, he had decided to join neither party, but to take advantage of the turmoil of the times to prey without partiality upon both.

As Norman of Torn approached his grim castle home with his five filthy, ragged cut-throats on the day of his first meeting with them, the old man of Torn stood watching the little party from one of the small towers of the barbican.

Halting beneath this outer gate, the youth winded the horn which hung at his side in mimicry of the custom of the times.

"What ho, without there !" challenged the old man entering grimly into the spirit of the play.

"'Tis Sir Norman of Torn," spoke up Red Shandy, "with his great host of noble knights and men-at-arms and squires and lackeys and sumpter beasts. Open in the name of the good right arm of Sir Norman of Torn."

"What means this, my son ?" said the old man as Norman of Torn dismounted within the ballium.

The youth narrated the events of the morning, concluding with, "These, then, be my men, father; and together we shall fare forth upon the highways and into the byways of England, to collect from the rich English pigs that living which you have ever taught me was owing us."



"'Tis well, my son, and even as I myself would have it; together we shall ride out, and where we ride, a trail of blood shall mark our way.

"From now, henceforth, the name and fame of Norman of Torn shall grow in the land, until even the King shall tremble when he hears it, and shall hate and loathe ye as I have even taught ye to hate and loathe him.

"All England shall curse ye and the blood of Saxon and Norman shall never dry upon your blade."

As the old man walked away toward the great gate of the castle after this outbreak, Shandy, turning to Norman of Torn, with a wide grin, said:

"By the Pope's hind leg, but thy amiable father loveth the English. There should be great riding after such as he."

"Ye ride after ME, varlet," cried Norman of Torn, "an' lest ye should forget again so soon who be thy master, take that, as a reminder," and he struck the red giant full upon the mouth with his clenched fist -- so that the fellow tumbled heavily to the earth.

He was on his feet in an instant, spitting blood, and in a towering rage. As he rushed, bull-like, toward Norman of Torn, the latter made no move to draw; he but stood with folded arms, eyeing Shandy with cold, level gaze; his head held high, haughty face marked by an arrogant sneer of contempt.

The great ruffian paused, then stopped, slowly a sheepish smile overspread his countenance and, going upon one knee, he took the hand of Norman of Torn and kissed it, as some great and loyal noble knight might have kissed his king's hand in proof of his love and fealty. There was a certain rude, though chivalrous grandeur in the act; and it marked not only the beginning



of a lifelong devotion and loyalty on the part of Shandy toward his young master, but was prophetic of the attitude which Norman of Torn was to inspire in all the men who served him during the long years that saw thousands pass the barbicans of Torn to crave a position beneath his grim banner.

As Shandy rose, one by one, John Flory, James, his brother, One Eye Kanty, and Peter the Hermit knelt before their young lord and kissed his hand. From the Great Court beyond, a little, grim, gray, old man had watched this scene, a slight smile upon his old, malicious face.

"'Tis to transcend even my dearest dreams," he muttered. "'S death, but he be more a king than Henry himself. God speed the day of his coronation, when, before the very eyes of the Plantagenet hound, a black cap shall be placed upon his head for a crown; beneath his feet the platform of a wooden gibbet for a throne."

CHAPTER VII

It was a beautiful spring day in May, 1262, that Norman of Torn rode alone down the narrow trail that led to the pretty cottage with which he had replaced the hut of his old friend, Father Claude.

As was his custom, he rode with lowered visor, and nowhere upon his person or upon the trappings of his horse were sign or insignia of rank or house. More powerful and richer than many nobles of the court, he was without rank or other title than that of outlaw and he seemed to assume what in reality he held in little esteem.



He wore armor because his old guardian had urged him to do so, and not because he craved the protection it afforded. And, for the same cause, he rode always with lowered visor, though he could never prevail upon the old man to explain the reason which necessitated this precaution.

"It is enough that I tell you, my son," the old fellow was wont to say, "that for your own good as well as mine, you must not show your face to your enemies until I so direct. The time will come and soon now, I hope, when you shall uncover your countenance to all England."

The young man gave the matter but little thought, usually passing it off as the foolish whim of an old dotard; but he humored it nevertheless.

Behind him, as he rode down the steep declivity that day, loomed a very different Torn from that which he had approached sixteen years before, when, as a little boy he had ridden through the darkening shadows of the night, perched upon a great horse behind the little old woman, whose metamorphosis to the little grim, gray, old man of Torn their advent to the castle had marked.

Today the great, frowning pile loomed larger and more imposing than ever in the most resplendent days of its past grandeur. The original keep was there with its huge, buttressed Saxon towers whose mighty fifteen foot walls were pierced with stairways and vaulted chambers, lighted by embrasures which, mere slits in the outer periphery of the walls, spread to larger dimensions within, some even attaining the area of small triangular chambers.

The moat, widened and deepened, completely encircled three sides of the castle, running between the inner and outer walls, which were set at intervals with small projecting towers so pierced that a flanking fire from



long bows, cross bows and javelins might be directed against a scaling party.

The fourth side of the walled enclosure overhung a high precipice, which natural protection rendered towers unnecessary upon this side.

The main gateway of the castle looked toward the west and from it ran the tortuous and rocky trail, down through the mountains toward the valley below. The aspect from the great gate was one of quiet and rugged beauty. A short stretch of barren downs in the foreground only sparsely studded with an occasional gnarled oak gave an unobstructed view of broad and lovely meadowland through which wound a sparkling tributary of the Trent.

Two more gateways let into the great fortress, one piercing the north wall and one the east. All three gates were strongly fortified with towered and buttressed barbicans which must be taken before the main gates could be reached. Each barbican was portcullised, while the inner gates were similarly safeguarded in addition to the drawbridges which, spanning the moat when lowered, could be drawn up at the approach of an enemy, effectually stopping his advance.

The new towers and buildings added to the ancient keep under the direction of Norman of Torn and the grim, old man whom he called father, were of the Norman type of architecture, the windows were larger, the carving more elaborate, the rooms lighter and more spacious.

Within the great enclosure thrived a fair sized town, for, with his ten hundred fighting-men, the Outlaw of Torn required many squires, lackeys, cooks, scullions, armorers, smithies, farriers, hostlers and the like to care for the wants of his little army.



Fifteen hundred war horses, beside five hundred sumpter beasts,
were
quartered in the great stables, while the east court was alive with
cows,
oxen, goats, sheep, pigs, rabbits and chickens.

Great wooden carts drawn by slow, plodding oxen were daily visitors
to the
grim pile, fetching provender for man and beast from the neighboring
farm
lands of the poor Saxon peasants, to whom Norman of Torn paid good
gold for
their crops.

These poor serfs, who were worse than slaves to the proud barons
who owned
the land they tilled, were forbidden by royal edict to sell or give a
pennysworth of provisions to the Outlaw of Torn, upon pain of death,
but
nevertheless his great carts made their trips regularly and always
returned
full laden, and though the husbandmen told sad tales to their
overlords of
the awful raids of the Devil of Torn in which he seized upon their stuff
by
force, their tongues were in their cheeks as they spoke and the Devil's
gold in their pockets.

And so, while the barons learned to hate him the more, the peasants'
love
for him increased. Them he never injured; their fences, their stock,
their
crops, their wives and daughters were safe from molestation even
though the
neighboring castle of their lord might be sacked from the wine cellar
to
the ramparts of the loftiest tower. Nor did anyone dare ride rough
shod
over the territory which Norman of Torn patrolled. A dozen bands of
cut-throats he had driven from the Derby hills, and though the barons
would
much rather have had all the rest than he, the peasants worshipped
him as a
deliverer from the lowborn murderers who had been wont to despoil
the weak
and lowly and on whose account the women of the huts and cottages
had never



been safe.

Few of them had seen his face and fewer still had spoken with him,
but they
loved his name and his prowess and in secret they prayed for him to
their
ancient god, Wodin, and the lesser gods of the forest and the meadow
and
the chase, for though they were confessed Christians, still in the
hearts
of many beat a faint echo of the old superstitions of their ancestors;
and
while they prayed also to the Lord Jesus and to Mary, yet they felt it
could do no harm to be on the safe side with the others, in case they
did
happen to exist.

A poor, degraded, downtrodden, ignorant, superstitious people, they
were;
accustomed for generations to the heel of first one invader and then
another and in the interims, when there were any, the heels of their
feudal
lords and their rapacious monarchs.

No wonder then that such as these worshipped the Outlaw of Torn,
for since
their fierce Saxon ancestors had come, themselves as conquerors, to
England, no other hand had ever been raised to shield them from
oppression.

On this policy of his toward the serfs and freedmen, Norman of Torn
and the
grim, old man whom he called father had never agreed. The latter
was for
carrying his war of hate against all Englishmen, but the young man
would
neither listen to it, nor allow any who rode out from Torn to molest
the
lowly. A ragged tunic was a surer defence against this wild horde than
a
stout lance or an emblazoned shield.

So, as Norman of Torn rode down from his mighty castle to visit
Father
Claude, the sunlight playing on his clanking armor and glancing from
the



copper boss of his shield, the sight of a little group of woodmen kneeling uncovered by the roadside as he passed was not so remarkable after all.

Entering the priest's study, Norman of Torn removed his armor and lay back moodily upon a bench with his back against a wall and his strong, lithe legs stretched out before him.

"What ails you, my son ?" asked the priest, "that you look so disconsolate on this beautiful day ?"

"I do not know, Father," replied Norman of Torn, "unless it be that I am asking myself the question, 'What it is all for ?' Why did my father train me ever to prey upon my fellows ? I like to fight, but there is plenty of fighting which is legitimate, and what good may all my stolen wealth avail me if I may not enter the haunts of men to spend it ? Should I stick my head into London town, it would doubtless stay there, held by a hempen necklace.

"What quarrel have I with the King or the gentry ? They have quarrel enough with me it is true, but, nathless, I do not know why I should have hated them so before I was old enough to know how rotten they really are. So it seems to me that I am but the instrument of an old man's spite, not even knowing the grievance to the avenging of which my life has been dedicated by another.

"And at times, Father Claude, as I grow older, I doubt much that the nameless old man of Torn is my father, so little do I favor him, and never in all my life have I heard a word of fatherly endearment or felt a caress, even as a little child. What think you, Father Claude ?"

"I have thought much of it, my son," answered the priest. "It has ever



been a sore puzzle to me, and I have my suspicions, which I have held for years, but which even the thought of so frightens me that I shudder to speculate upon the consequences of voicing them aloud. Norman of Torn, if you are not the son of the old man you call father, may God forbend that England ever guesses your true parentage. More than this, I dare not say except that, as you value your peace of mind and your life, keep your visor down and keep out of the clutches of your enemies."

"Then you know why I should keep my visor down?"

"I can only guess, Norman of Torn, because I have seen another whom you resemble."

The conversation was interrupted by a commotion from without; the sound of horses' hoofs, the cries of men and the clash of arms. In an instant, both men were at the tiny unglazed window. Before them, on the highroad, five knights in armor were now engaged in furious battle with a party of ten or a dozen other steel-clad warriors, while crouching breathless on her palfrey, a young woman sat a little apart from the contestants.

Presently, one of the knights detached himself from the melee and rode to her side with some word of command, at the same time grasping roughly at her bridle rein. The girl raised her riding whip and struck repeatedly but futilely against the iron headgear of her assailant while he swung his horse up the road, and, dragging her palfrey after him, galloped rapidly out of sight.

Norman of Torn sprang to the door, and, reckless of his unarmored condition, leaped to Sir Mortimer's back and spurred swiftly in the direction taken by the girl and her abductor.

The great black was fleet, and, unencumbered by the usual heavy armor of



his rider, soon brought the fugitives to view. Scarce a mile had been covered ere the knight, turning to look for pursuers, saw the face of Norman of Torn not ten paces behind him.

With a look of mingled surprise, chagrin and incredulity the knight reined in his horse, exclaiming as he did so, "Mon Dieu, Edward !"

"Draw and defend yourself," cried Norman of Torn.

"But, Your Highness," stammered the knight.

"Draw, or I stick you as I have stuck an hundred other English pigs," cried Norman of Torn.

The charging steed was almost upon him and the knight looked to see the rider draw rein, but, like a black bolt, the mighty Sir Mortimer struck the other horse full upon the shoulder, and man and steed rolled in the dust of the roadway.

The knight arose, unhurt, and Norman of Torn dismounted to give fair battle upon even terms. Though handicapped by the weight of his armor, the knight also had the advantage of its protection, so that the two fought furiously for several minutes without either gaining an advantage.

The girl sat motionless and wide-eyed at the side of the road watching every move of the two contestants. She made no effort to escape, but seemed riveted to the spot by the very fierceness of the battle she was beholding, as well, possibly, as by the fascination of the handsome giant who had espoused her cause. As she looked upon her champion, she saw a lithe, muscular, brown-haired youth whose clear eyes and perfect figure, unconcealed by either bassinet or hauberk, reflected the clean, athletic life of the trained fighting man.

Upon his face hovered a faint, cold smile of haughty pride as the sword



arm, displaying its mighty strength and skill in every move, played with the sweating, puffing, steel-clad enemy who hacked and hewed so futilely before him. For all the din of clashing blades and rattling armor, neither of the contestants had inflicted much damage, for the knight could neither force nor insinuate his point beyond the perfect guard of his unarmored foe, who, for his part, found difficulty in penetrating the other's armor.

Finally, by dint of his mighty strength, Norman of Torn drove his blade through the meshes of his adversary's mail, and the fellow, with a cry of anguish, sank limply to the ground.

"Quick, Sir Knight !" cried the girl. "Mount and flee; yonder come his fellows."

And surely, as Norman of Torn turned in the direction from which he had just come, there, racing toward him at full tilt, rode three steel-armored men on their mighty horses.

"Ride, madam," cried Norman of Torn, "for fly I shall not, nor may I, alone, unarmored, and on foot hope more than to momentarily delay these three fellows, but in that time you should easily make your escape. Their heavy-burdened animals could never o'ertake your fleet palfrey."

As he spoke, he took note for the first time of the young woman. That she was a lady of quality was evidenced not alone by the richness of her riding apparel and the trappings of her palfrey, but as well in her noble and haughty demeanor and the proud expression of her beautiful face.

Although at this time nearly twenty years had passed over the head of Norman of Torn, he was without knowledge or experience in the ways of women, nor had he ever spoken with a female of quality or position. No



woman graced the castle of Torn nor had the boy, within his memory,
ever
known a mother.

His attitude therefore was much the same toward women as it was
toward men,
except that he had sworn always to protect them. Possibly, in a way,
he
looked up to womankind, if it could be said that Norman of Torn
looked up
to anything: God, man or devil -- it being more his way to look down
upon
all creatures whom he took the trouble to notice at all.

As his glance rested upon this woman, whom fate had destined to
alter the
entire course of his life, Norman of Torn saw that she was beautiful,
and
that she was of that class against whom he had preyed for years with
his
band of outlaw cut-throats. Then he turned once more to face her
enemies
with the strange inconsistency which had ever marked his methods.

Tomorrow he might be assaulting the ramparts of her father's castle,
but
today he was joyously offering to sacrifice his life for her -- had she
been the daughter of a charcoal burner he would have done no less. It
was
enough that she was a woman and in need of protection.

The three knights were now fairly upon him, and with fine disregard
for
fair play, charged with couched spears the unarmored man on foot.
But as
the leading knight came close enough to behold his face, he cried out
in
surprise and consternation:

"Mon Dieu, le Prince !" He wheeled his charging horse to one side.
His
fellows, hearing his cry, followed his example, and the three of them
dashed on down the high road in as evident anxiety to escape as they
had
been keen to attack.



"One would think they had met the devil," muttered Norman of Torn, looking after them in unfeigned astonishment.

"What means it, lady?" he asked turning to the damsel, who had made no move to escape.

"It means that your face is well known in your father's realm, my Lord Prince," she replied. "And the King's men have no desire to antagonize you, even though they may understand as little as I why you should espouse the cause of a daughter of Simon de Montfort."

"Am I then taken for Prince Edward of England?" he asked.

"An' who else should you be taken for, my Lord?"

"I am not the Prince," said Norman of Torn. "It is said that Edward is in France."

"Right you are, sir," exclaimed the girl. "I had not thought on that; but you be enough of his likeness that you might well deceive the Queen herself. And you be of a bravery fit for a king's son. Who are you then, Sir Knight, who has bared your steel and faced death for Bertrade, daughter of Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester?"

"Be you De Montfort's daughter, niece of King Henry?" queried Norman of Torn, his eyes narrowing to mere slits and face hardening.

"That I be," replied the girl, "an' from your face I take it you have little love for a De Montfort," she added, smiling.

"An' whither may you be bound, Lady Bertrade de Montfort? Be you niece or daughter of the devil, yet still you be a woman, and I do not war against women. Wheresoever you would go will I accompany you to safety."

"I was but now bound, under escort of five of my father's knights, to visit



Mary, daughter of John de Stutevill of Derby."

"I know the castle well," answered Norman of Torn, and the shadow of a grim smile played about his lips, for scarce sixty days had elapsed since he had reduced the stronghold, and levied tribute on the great baron. "Come, you have not far to travel now, and if we make haste you shall sup with your friend before dark."

So saying, he mounted his horse and was turning to retrace their steps down the road when he noticed the body of the dead knight lying where it had fallen.

"Ride on," he called to Bertrade de Montfort, "I will join you in an instant."

Again dismounting, he returned to the side of his late adversary, and lifting the dead knight's visor, drew upon the forehead with the point of his dagger the letters NT.

The girl turned to see what detained him, but his back was toward her and he knelt beside his fallen foeman, and she did not see his act. Brave daughter of a brave sire though she was, had she seen what he did, her heart would have quailed within her and she would have fled in terror from the clutches of this scourge of England, whose mark she had seen on the dead foreheads of a dozen of her father's knights and kinsmen.

Their way to Stutevill lay past the cottage of Father Claude, and here Norman of Torn stopped to don his armor. Now he rode once more with lowered visor, and in silence, a little to the rear of Bertrade de Montfort that he might watch her face, which, of a sudden, had excited his interest.

Never before, within the scope of his memory, had he been so close to a



young and beautiful woman for so long a period of time, although he had often seen women in the castles that had fallen before his vicious and terrible attacks. While stories were abroad of his vile treatment of women captives, there was no truth in them. They were merely spread by his enemies to incite the people against him. Never had Norman of Torn laid violent hand upon a woman, and his cut-throat band were under oath to respect and protect the sex, on penalty of death.

As he watched the semi-profile of the lovely face before him, something stirred in his heart which had been struggling for expression for years. It was not love, nor was it allied to love, but a deep longing for companionship of such as she, and such as she represented. Norman of Torn could not have translated this feeling into words for he did not know, but it was the far faint cry of blood for blood and with it, mayhap, was mixed not alone the longing of the lion among jackals for other lions, but for his lioness.

They rode for many miles in silence when suddenly she turned, saying:

"You take your time, Sir Knight, in answering my query. Who be ye?"

"I am Nor -- " and then he stopped. Always before he had answered that question with haughty pride. Why should he hesitate, he thought. Was it because he feared the loathing that name would inspire in the breast of this daughter of the aristocracy he despised? Did Norman of Torn fear to face the look of seem and repugnance that was sure to be mirrored in that lovely face?

"I am from Normandy," he went on quietly. "A gentleman of France."

"But your name?" she said peremptorily. "Are you ashamed of your name?"



"You may call me Roger," he answered. "Roger de Conde."

"Raise your visor, Roger de Conde," she commanded. "I do not take pleasure in riding with a suit of armor; I would see that there is a man within."

Norman of Torn smiled as he did her bidding, and when he smiled thus, as he rarely did, he was good to look upon.

"It is the first command I have obeyed since I turned sixteen, Bertrade de Montfort," he said.

The girl was about nineteen, full of the vigor and gaiety of youth and health; and so the two rode on their journey talking and laughing as they might have been friends of long standing.

She told him of the reason for the attack upon her earlier in the day, attributing it to an attempt on the part of a certain baron, Peter of Colfax, to abduct her, his suit for her hand having been peremptorily and roughly denied by her father.

Simon de Montfort was no man to mince words, and it is doubtless that the old reprobate who sued for his daughter's hand heard some unsavory truths from the man who had twice scandalized England's nobility by his rude and discourteous, though true and candid, speeches to the King.

"This Peter of Colfax shall be looked to," growled Norman of Torn. "And, as you have refused his heart and hand, his head shall be yours for the asking. You have but to command, Bertrade de Montfort."

"Very well," she laughed, thinking it but the idle boasting so much indulged in in those days. "You may bring me his head upon a golden dish, Roger de Conde."

"And what reward does the knight earn who brings to the feet of his princess the head of her enemy?" he asked lightly.



"What boon would the knight ask ?"

"That whatsoever a bad report you hear of your knight, of whatsoever calumnies may be heaped upon him, you shall yet ever be his friend, and believe in his honor and his loyalty."

The girl laughed gaily as she answered, though something seemed to tell her that this was more than play.

"It shall be as you say, Sir Knight," she replied. "And the boon once granted shall be always kept."

Quick to reach decisions and as quick to act, Norman of Torn decided that he liked this girl and that he wished her friendship more than any other thing he knew of. And wishing it, he determined to win it by any means that accorded with his standard of honor; an honor which in many respects was higher than that of the nobles of his time.

They reached the castle of De Stutevill late in the afternoon, and there, Norman of Torn was graciously welcomed and urged to accept the Baron's hospitality overnight.

The grim humor of the situation was too much for the outlaw, and, when added to his new desire to be in the company of Bertrade de Montfort, he made no effort to resist, but hastened to accept the warm welcome.

At the long table upon which the evening meal was spread sat the entire household of the Baron, and here and there among the men were evidences of painful wounds but barely healed, while the host himself still wore his sword arm in a sling.

"We have been through grievous times," said Sir John, noticing that his guest was glancing at the various evidences of conflict. "That fiend,



Norman the Devil, with his filthy pack of cut-throats, besieged us for ten days, and then took the castle by storm and sacked it. Life is no longer safe in England with the King spending his time and money with foreign favorites and buying alien soldiery to fight against his own barons, instead of insuring the peace and protection which is the right of every Englishman at home.

"But," he continued, "this outlaw devil will come to the end of a short halter when once our civil strife is settled, for the barons themselves have decided upon an expedition against him, if the King will not subdue him."

"An' he may send the barons naked home as he did the King's soldiers," laughed Bertrade de Montfort. "I should like to see this fellow; what may he look like -- from the appearance of yourself, Sir John, and many of your men-at-arms, there should be no few here but have met him."

"Not once did he raise his visor while he was among us," replied the Baron, "but there are those who claim they had a brief glimpse of him and that he is of horrid countenance, wearing a great yellow beard and having one eye gone, and a mighty red scar from his forehead to his chin."

"A fearful apparition," murmured Norman of Torn. "No wonder he keeps his helm closed."

"But such a swordsman," spoke up a son of De Stutevill. "Never in all the world was there such swordplay as I saw that day in the courtyard."

"I, too, have seen some wonderful swordplay," said Bertrade de Montfort, "and that today. O he !" she cried, laughing gleefully, "verily do I believe I have captured the wild Norman of Torn, for this very knight, who styles himself Roger de Conde, fights as I ne'er saw man fight before, and



he rode with his visor down until I chide him for it."

Norman of Torn led in the laugh which followed, and of all the company he most enjoyed the joke.

"An' speaking of the Devil," said the Baron, "how think you he will side should the King eventually force war upon the barons ? With his thousand hell-hounds, the fate of England might well be in the palm of his bloody hand."

"He loves neither King nor baron," spoke Mary de Stutevill, "and I rather lean to the thought that he will serve neither, but rather plunder the castles of both rebel and royalist whilst their masters be absent at war."

"It be more to his liking to come while the master be home to welcome him," said De Stutevill, ruthfully. "But yet I am always in fear for the safety of my wife and daughters when I be away from Derby for any time. May the good God soon deliver England from this Devil of Torn."

"I think you may have no need of fear on that score," spoke Mary, "for Norman of Torn offered no violence to any woman within the wall of Stutevill, and when one of his men laid a heavy hand upon me, it was the great outlaw himself who struck the fellow such a blow with his mailed hand as to crack the ruffian's helm, saying at the time, 'Know you, fellow, Norman of Torn does not war upon women ?'"

Presently the conversation turned to other subjects and Norman of Torn heard no more of himself during that evening.

His stay at the castle of Stutevill was drawn out to three days, and then, on the third day, as he sat with Bertrade de Montfort in an embrasure of the south tower of the old castle, he spoke once more of the necessity for leaving and once more she urged him to remain.



"To be with you, Bertrade of Montfort," he said boldly, "I would forego any other pleasure, and endure any privation, or face any danger, but there are others who look to me for guidance and my duty calls me away from you. You shall see me again, and at the castle of your father, Simon de Montfort, in Leicester. Provided," he added, "that you will welcome me there."

"I shall always welcome you, wherever I may be, Roger de Conde," replied the girl.

"Remember that promise," he said smiling. "Some day you may be glad to repudiate it."

"Never," she insisted, and a light that shone in her eyes as she said it would have meant much to a man better versed in the ways of women than was Norman of Torn.

"I hope not," he said gravely. "I cannot tell you, being but poorly trained in courtly ways, what I should like to tell you, that you might know how much your friendship means to me. Goodbye, Bertrade de Montfort," and he bent to one knee, as he raised her fingers to his lips.

As he passed over the drawbridge and down toward the highroad a few minutes later on his way back to Torn, he turned for one last look at the castle and there, in an embrasure in the south tower, stood a young woman who raised her hand to wave, and then, as though by sudden impulse, threw a kiss after the departing knight, only to disappear from the embrasure with the act.

As Norman of Torn rode back to his grim castle in the hills of Derby, he had much food for thought upon the way. Never till now had he realized what might lie in another manner of life, and he felt a twinge of



bitterness toward the hard, old man whom he called father, and whose teachings from the boy's earliest childhood had guided him in the ways that had out him off completely from the society of other men, except the wild horde of outlaws, ruffians and adventurers that rode beneath the grisly banner of the young chief of Torn.

Only in an ill-defined, nebulous way did he feel that it was the girl who had come into his life that caused him for the first time to feel shame for his past deeds. He did not know the meaning of love, and so he could not know that he loved Bertrade de Montfort.

And another thought which now filled his mind was the fact of his strange likeness to the Crown Prince of England. This, together with the words of Father Claude, puzzled him sorely. What might it mean? Was it a heinous offence to own an accidental likeness to a king's son?

But now that he felt he had solved the reason that he rode always with closed helm, he was for the first time anxious himself to hide his face from the sight of men. Not from fear, for he knew not fear, but from some inward impulse which he did not attempt to fathom.

CHAPTER VIII

As Norman of Torn rode out from the castle of De Stutevill, Father Claude dismounted from his sleek donkey within the ballium of Torn. The austere stronghold, notwithstanding its repellent exterior and unsavory reputation, always extended a warm welcome to the kindly, genial priest; not alone because of the deep friendship which the master of Torn felt for the good



father, but through the personal charm, and loveliness of the holy man's nature, which shone alike on saint and sinner.

It was doubtless due to his unremitting labors with the youthful Norman, during the period that the boy's character was most amenable to strong impressions, that the policy of the mighty outlaw was in many respects pure and lofty. It was this same influence, though, which won for Father Claude his only enemy in Torn; the little, grim, gray, old man whose sole aim in life seemed to have been to smother every finer instinct of chivalry and manhood in the boy, to whose training he had devoted the past nineteen years of his life.

As Father Claude climbed down from his donkey -- fat people do not "dismount" -- a half dozen young squires ran forward to assist him, and to lead the animal to the stables.

The good priest called each of his willing helpers by name, asking a question here, passing a merry joke there with the ease and familiarity that bespoke mutual affection and old acquaintance.

As he passed in through the great gate, the men-at-arms threw him laughing, though respectful, welcomes and within the great court, beautified with smooth lawn, beds of gorgeous plants, fountains, statues and small shrubs and bushes, he came upon the giant, Red Shandy, now the principal lieutenant of Norman of Torn.

"Good morrow, Saint Claude !" cried the burly ruffian. "Hast come to save our souls, or damn us ? What manner of sacrilege have we committed now, or have we merited the blessings of Holy Church ? Dost come to scold, or praise ?"



"Neither, thou unregenerate villain," cried the priest, laughing.
"Though
methinks ye merit chiding for the grievous poor courtesy with which
thou
didst treat the great Bishop of Norwich the past week."

"Tut, tut, Father," replied Red Shandy. "We did but aid him to adhere
more
closely to the injunctions and precepts of Him whose servant and
disciple
he claims to be. Were it not better for an Archbishop of His Church to
walk in humility and poverty among His people, than to be ever
surrounded
with the temptations of fine clothing, jewels and much gold, to say
nothing
of two sumpter beasts heavy laden with runlets of wine?"

"I warrant his temptations were less by at least as many runlets of
wine as
may be borne by two sumpter beasts when thou, red robber, had
finished with
him," exclaimed Father Claude.

"Yes, Father," laughed the great fellow, "for the sake of Holy Church, I
did indeed confiscate that temptation completely, and if you must
needs
have proof in order to absolve me from my sins, come with me now
and you
shall sample the excellent discrimination which the Bishop of
Norwich
displays in the selection of his temptations."

"They tell me you left the great man quite destitute of finery, Red
Shandy," continued Father Claude, as he locked his arm in that of the
outlaw and proceeded toward the castle.

"One garment was all that Norman of Torn would permit him, and as
the sun
was hot overhead, he selected for the Bishop a bassinet for that single
article of apparel, to protect his tonsured pate from the rays of old sol.
Then, fearing that it might be stolen from him by some vandals of the
road,
he had One Eye Kanty rivet it at each side of the gorget so that it could
not be removed by other than a smithy, and thus, strapped face to tail
upon
a donkey, he sent the great Bishop of Norwich rattling down the dusty
road



with his head, at least, protected from the idle gaze of whomsoever he might chance to meet. Forty stripes he gave to each of the Bishop's retinue for being abroad in bad company; but come, here we are where you shall have the wine as proof of my tale."

As the two sat sipping the Bishop's good Canary, the little old man of Torn entered. He spoke to Father Claude in a surly tone, asking him if he knew aught of the whereabouts of Norman of Torn.

"We have seen nothing of him since, some three days gone, he rode out in the direction of your cottage," he concluded.

"Why, yes," said the priest, "I saw him that day. He had an adventure with several knights from the castle of Peter of Colfax, from whom he rescued a damsel whom I suspect from the trappings of her palfrey to be of the house of Montfort. Together they rode north, but thy son did not say whither or for what purpose. His only remark, as he donned his armor, while the girl waited without, was that I should now behold the falcon guarding the dove. Hast he not returned?"

"No," said the old man, "and doubtless his adventure is of a nature in line with thy puerile and effeminate teachings. Had he followed my training, without thy accurst priestly interference, he had made an iron-barred nest in Torn for many of the doves of thy damned English nobility. An' thou leave him not alone, he will soon be seeking service in the household of the King."

"Where, perchance, he might be more at home than here," said the priest quietly.

"Why say you that?" snapped the little old man, eyeing Father Claude



narrowly.

"Oh," laughed the priest, "because he whose power and mien be even more kingly than the King's would rightly grace the royal palace," but he had not failed to note the perturbation his remark had caused, nor did his off-hand reply entirely deceive the old man.

At this juncture, a squire entered to say that Shandy's presence was required at the gates, and that worthy, with a sorrowing and regretful glance at the unemptied flagon, left the room.

For a few moments, the two men sat in meditative silence, which was presently broken by the old man of Torn.

"Priest," he said, "thy ways with my son are, as you know, not to my liking. It were needless that he should have wasted so much precious time from swordplay to learn the useless art of letters. Of what benefit may a knowledge of Latin be to one whose doom looms large before him. It may be years and again it may be but months, but as sure as there be a devil in hell, Norman of Torn will swing from a king's gibbet. And thou knowst it, and he too, as well as I. The things which thou hast taught him be above his station, and the hopes and ambitions they inspire will but make his end the bitterer for him. Of late I have noted that he rides upon the highway with less enthusiasm than was his wont, but he has gone too far ever to go back now; nor is there where to go back to. What has he ever been other than outcast and outlaw? What hopes could you have engendered in his breast greater than to be hated and feared among his blood enemies?"

"I knowst not thy reasons, old man," replied the priest, "for devoting thy life to the ruining of his, and what I guess at be such as I dare not voice; but let us understand each other once and for all. For all thou



dost and hast done to blight and curse the nobleness of his nature, I have done and shall continue to do all in my power to controvert. As thou hast been his bad angel, so shall I try to be his good angel, and when all is said and done and Norman of Torn swings from the King's gibbet, as I only too well fear he must, there will be more to mourn his loss than there be to curse him.

"His friends are from the ranks of the lowly, but so too were the friends and followers of our Dear Lord Jesus; so that shall be more greatly to his honor than had he preyed upon the already unfortunate.

"Women have never been his prey; that also will be spoken of to his honor when he is gone, and that he has been cruel to men will be forgotten in the greater glory of his mercy to the weak.

"Whatever be thy object: whether revenge or the natural bent of a cruel and degraded mind, I know not; but if any be curst because of the Outlaw of Torn, it will be thou -- I had almost said, unnatural father; but I do not believe a single drop of thy debased blood flows in the veins of him thou callest son."

The grim old man of Torn had sat motionless throughout this indictment, his face, somewhat pale, was drawn into lines of malevolent hatred and rage, but he permitted Father Claude to finish without interruption.

"Thou hast made thyself and thy opinions quite clear," he said bitterly, "but I be glad to know just how thou standeth. In the past there has been peace between us, though no love; now let us both understand that it be war and hate. My life work is cut out for me. Others, like thyself, have stood in my path, yet today I am here, but where are they? Dost



understand me, priest ?" And the old man leaned far across the table
so
that his eyes, burning with an insane fire of venom, blazed but a few
inches from those of the priest.

Father Claude returned the look with calm level gaze.

"I understand," he said, and, rising, left the castle.

Shortly after he had reached his cottage, a loud knock sounded at the
door,
which immediately swung open without waiting the formality of
permission.
Father Claude looked up to see the tall figure of Norman of Torn, and
his
face lighted with a pleased smile of welcome.

"Greetings, my son," said the priest.

"And to thee, Father," replied the outlaw, "And what may be the news
of
Torn. I have been absent for several days. Is all well at the castle ?"

"All be well at the castle," replied Father Claude, "if by that you mean
have none been captured or hanged for their murders. Ah, my boy,
why wilt
thou not give up this wicked life of thine ? It has never been my way to
scold or chide thee, yet always hath my heart ached for each crime
laid at
the door of Norman of Torn."

"Come, come, Father," replied the outlaw, "what dost I that I have not
good
example for from the barons, and the King, and Holy Church.
Murder, theft,
rapine ! Passeth a day over England which sees not one or all
perpetrated
in the name of some of these ?

"Be it wicked for Norman of Torn to prey upon the wolf, yet righteous
for
the wolf to tear the sheep ? Methinks not. Only do I collect from
those
who have more than they need, from my natural enemies; while they
prey upon
those who have naught.



"Yet," and his manner suddenly changed, "I do not love it, Father. That thou know. I would that there might be some way out of it, but there is none.

"If I told you why I wished it, you would be surprised indeed, nor can I myself understand; but, of a verity, my greatest wish to be out of this life is due to the fact that I crave the association of those very enemies I have been taught to hate. But it is too late, Father, there can be but one end and that the lower end of a hempen rope."

"No, my son, there is another way, an honorable way," replied the good Father. "In some foreign clime there be opportunities abundant for such as thee. France offers a magnificent future to such a soldier as Norman of Torn. In the court of Louis, you would take your place among the highest of the land. You be rich and brave and handsome. Nay do not raise your hand. You be all these and more, for you have learning far beyond the majority of nobles, and you have a good heart and a true chivalry of character. With such wondrous gifts, naught could bar your way to the highest pinnacles of power and glory, while here you have no future beyond the halter. Canst thou hesitate, Norman of Torn?"

The young man stood silent for a moment, then he drew his hand across his eyes as though to brush away a vision.

"There be a reason, Father, why I must remain in England for a time at least, though the picture you put is indeed wondrous alluring."

And the reason was Bertrade de Montfort.

CHAPTER IX



The visit of Bertrade de Montfort with her friend Mary de Stutevill was drawing to a close. Three weeks had passed since Roger de Conde had ridden out from the portals of Stutevill and many times the handsome young knight's name had been on the lips of his fair hostess and her fairer friend.

Today the two girls roamed slowly through the gardens of the great court, their arms about each other's waists, pouring the last confidences into each other's ears, for tomorrow Bertrade had elected to return to Leicester.

"Methinks thou be very rash indeed, my Bertrade," said Mary. "Wert my father here he would, I am sure, not permit thee to leave with only the small escort which we be able to give."

"Fear not, Mary," replied Bertrade. "Five of thy father's knights be ample protection for so short a journey. By evening it will have been accomplished; and, as the only one I fear in these parts received such a sound set back from Roger de Conde recently, I do not think he will venture again to molest me."

"But what about the Devil of Torn, Bertrade?" urged Mary. "Only yestereve, you wot, one of Lord de Grey's men-at-arms came limping to us with the news of the awful carnage the foul fiend had wrought on his master's household. He be abroad, Bertrade, and I canst think of naught more horrible than to fall into his hands."

"Why, Mary, thou didst but recently say thy very self that Norman of Torn was most courteous to thee when he sacked this, thy father's castle. How be it thou so soon has changed thy mind?"

"Yes, Bertrade, he was indeed respectful then, but who knows what horrid freak his mind may take, and they do say that he be cruel beyond compare."



Again, forget not that thou be Leicester's daughter and Henry's niece;
against both of whom the Outlaw of Torn openly swears his hatred
and his
vengeance. Oh, Bertrade, wait but for a day or so, I be sure my father
must return ere then, and fifty knights shall accompany thee instead
of
five."

"What be fifty knights against Norman of Torn, Mary? Thy reasoning
is on
a parity with thy fears, both have flown wide of the mark.

"If I am to meet with this wild ruffian, it were better that five knights
were sacrificed than fifty, for either number would be but a mouthful
to
that horrid horde of unhung murderers. No, Mary, I shall start
tomorrow
and your good knights shall return the following day with the best of
word
from me."

"If thou wilt, thou wilt," cried Mary petulantly. "Indeed it were
plain
that thou be a De Montfort; that race whose historic bravery be
second only
to their historic stubbornness."

Bertrade de Montfort laughed, and kissed her friend upon the cheek.

"Mayhap I shall find the brave Roger de Conde again upon the
highroad to
protect me. Then indeed shall I send back your five knights, for of a
truth, his blade is more powerful than that of any ten men I ere saw
fight
before."

"Methinks," said Mary, still peeved at her friend's determination to
leave
on the morrow, "that should you meet the doughty Sir Roger all
unarmed,
that still would you send back my father's knights."

Bertrade flushed, and then bit her lip as she felt the warm blood
mount to
her cheek.

"Thou be a fool, Mary," she said.



Mary broke into a joyful, teasing laugh; hugely enjoying the discomfiture of the admission the tell-tale flush proclaimed.

"Ah, I did but guess how thy heart and thy mind tended, Bertrade; but now I seest that I divined all too truly. He be indeed good to look upon, but what knowest thou of him?"

"Hush, Mary!" commanded Bertrade. "Thou know not what thou sayest. I would not wipe my feet upon him, I care naught whatever for him, and then -- it has been three weeks since he rode out from Stutevill and no word hath he sent."

"Oh, ho," cried the little plague, "so there lies the wind? My Lady would not wipe her feet upon him, but she be sore vexed that he has sent her no word. Mon Dieu, but thou hast strange notions, Bertrade."

"I will not talk with you, Mary," cried Bertrade, stamping her sandaled foot, and with a toss of her pretty head she turned abruptly toward the castle.

In a small chamber in the castle of Colfax two men sat at opposite sides of a little table. The one, Peter of Colfax, was short and very stout. His red, bloated face, bleary eyes and bulbous nose bespoke the manner of his life; while his thick lips, the lower hanging large and flabby over his receding chin, indicated the base passions to which his life and been given. His companion was a little, grim, gray man but his suit of armor and closed helm gave no hint to his host of whom his guest might be. It was the little armored man who was speaking.

"Is it not enough that I offer to aid you, Sir Peter," he said, "that you must have my reasons? Let it go that my hate of Leicester be the passion which moves me. Thou failed in thy attempt to capture the maiden; give me



ten knights and I will bring her to you."

"How knowest thou she rides out tomorrow for her father's castle ?"
asked
Peter of Colfax.

"That again be no concern of thine, my friend, but I do know it, and, if thou wouldst have her, be quick, for we should ride out tonight that we may take our positions by the highway in ample time tomorrow."

Still Peter of Colfax hesitated, he feared this might be a ruse of Leicester's to catch him in some trap. He did not know his guest -- the fellow might want the girl for himself and be taking this method of obtaining the necessary assistance to capture her.

"Come," said the little, armored man irritably. "I cannot bide here forever. Make up thy mind; it be nothing to me other than my revenge, and if thou wilt not do it, I shall hire the necessary ruffians and then not even thou shalt see Bertrade de Montfort more."

This last threat decided the Baron.

"It is agreed," he said. "The men shall ride out with you in half an hour. Wait below in the courtyard."

When the little man had left the apartment, Peter of Colfax summoned his squire whom he had send to him at once one of his faithful henchmen.

"Guy," said Peter of Colfax, as the man entered, "ye made a rare fizzle of a piece of business some weeks ago. Ye wot of which I speak ?"

"Yes, My Lord."

"It chanches that on the morrow ye may have opportunity to retrieve thy blunder. Ride out with ten men where the stranger who waits in the courtyard below shall lead ye, and come not back without that which ye lost to a handful of men before. You understand ?"

"Yes, My Lord !"

"And, Guy, I half mistrust this fellow who hath offered to assist us. At



the first sign of treachery, fall upon him with all thy men and slay him.
Tell the others that these be my orders."

"Yes, My Lord. When do we ride ?"

"At once. You may go."

The morning that Bertrade de Montfort had chosen to return to her father's castle dawned gray and threatening. In vain did Mary de Stutevill plead with her friend to give up the idea of setting out upon such a dismal day and without sufficient escort, but Bertrade de Montfort was firm.

"Already have I overstayed my time three days, and it is not lightly that even I, his daughter, fail in obedience to Simon de Montfort. I shall have enough to account for as it be. Do not urge me to add even one more day to my excuses. And again, perchance, my mother and my father may be sore distressed by my continued absence. No, Mary, I must ride today." And so she did, with the five knights that could be spared from the castle's defence.

Scarcely half an hour had elapsed before a cold drizzle set in, so that they were indeed a sorry company that splashed along the muddy road, wrapped in mantle and surcoat. As they proceeded, the rain and wind increased in volume, until it was being driven into their faces in such blinding gusts that they must needs keep their eyes closed and trust to the instincts of their mounts.

Less than half the journey had been accomplished. They were winding across a little hollow toward a low ridge covered with dense forest, into the somber shadows of which the road wound. There was a glint of armor among the drenched foliage, but the rain-buffeted eyes of the riders saw it not. On they came, their patient horses plodding slowly through the sticky road



and hurtling storm.

Now they were half way up the ridge's side. There was a movement in the dark shadows of the grim wood, and then, without cry or warning, a band of steel-clad horsemen broke forth with couched spears. Charging at full run down upon them, they overthrew three of the girl's escort before a blow could be struck in her defense. Her two remaining guardians wheeled to meet the return attack, and nobly did they acquit themselves, for it took the entire eleven who were pitted against them to overcome and slay the two.

In the melee, none had noticed the girl, but presently one of her assailants, a little, grim, gray man, discovered that she had put spurs to her palfrey and escaped. Calling to his companions he set out at a rapid pace in pursuit.

Reckless of the slippery road and the blinding rain, Bertrade de Montfort urged her mount into a wild run, for she had recognized the arms of Peter of Colfax on the shields of several of the attacking party.

Nobly, the beautiful Arab bent to her call for speed. The great beasts of her pursuers, bred in Normandy and Flanders, might have been tethered in their stalls for all the chance they had of overtaking the flying white steed that fairly split the gray rain as lightning flies through the clouds.

But for the fiendish cunning of the little grim, gray man's foresight, Bertrade de Montfort would have made good her escape that day. As it was, however, her fleet mount had carried her but two hundred yards ere, in the midst of the dark wood, she ran full upon a rope stretched across the roadway between two trees.



As the horse fell, with a terrible lunge, tripped by the stout rope,
Bertrade de Montfort was thrown far before him, where she lay, a
little,
limp bedraggled figure, in the mud of the road.

There they found her. The little, grim, gray man did not even
dismount, so
indifferent was he to her fate; dead or in the hands of Peter of Colfax,
it
was all the same to him. In either event, his purpose would be
accomplished, and Bertrade de Montfort would no longer lure
Norman of Torn
from the path he had laid out for him.

That such an eventuality threatened, he knew from one Spizo the
Spaniard,
the single traitor in the service of Norman of Torn, whose mean aid
the
little grim, gray man had purchased since many months to spy upon
the
comings and goings of the great outlaw.

The men of Peter of Colfax gathered up the lifeless form of Bertrade
de
Montfort and placed it across the saddle before one of their number.

"Come," said the man called Guy, "if there be life left in her, we must
hasten to Sir Peter before it be extinct."

"I leave ye here," said the little old man. "My part of the business is
done."

And so he sat watching them until they had disappeared in the forest
toward
the castle of Colfax.

Then he rode back to the scene of the encounter where lay the five
knights
of Sir John de Stutevill. Three were already dead, the other two,
sorely
but not mortally wounded, lay groaning by the roadside.

The little grim, gray man dismounted as he came abreast of them and,
with
his long sword, silently finished the two wounded men. Then,
drawing his



daggers, he made a mark upon the dead foreheads of each of the five, and mounting, rode rapidly toward Torn.

"And if one fact be not enough," he muttered, "that mark upon the dead will quite effectually stop further intercourse between the houses of Torn and Leicester."

Henry de Montfort, son of Simon, rode fast and furious at the head of a dozen of his father's knights on the road to Stutevill.

Bertrade de Montfort was so long overdue that the Earl and Princess Eleanor, his wife, filled with grave apprehensions, had posted their oldest son off to the castle of John de Stutevill to fetch her home.

With the wind and rain at their backs, the little party rode rapidly along the muddy road, until late in the afternoon they came upon a white palfrey standing huddled beneath a great oak, his arched back toward the driving storm.

"By God," cried De Montfort, "tis my sister's own Abdul. There be something wrong here indeed." But a rapid search of the vicinity, and loud calls brought no further evidence of the girl's whereabouts, so they pressed on toward Stutevill.

Some two miles beyond the spot where the white palfrey had been found, they came upon the dead bodies of the five knights who had accompanied Bertrade from Stutevill.

Dismounting, Henry de Montfort examined the bodies of the fallen men. The arms upon shield and helm confirmed his first fear that these had been Bertrade's escort from Stutevill.

As he bent over them to see if he recognized any of the knights, there



stared up into his face from the foreheads of the dead men the
dreaded
sign, NT, scratched there with a dagger's point.

"The curse of God be on him !" cried De Montfort. "It be the work of
the
Devil of Torn, my gentlemen," he said to his followers. "Come, we
need no
further guide to our destination." And, remounting, the little party
spurred back toward Torn.

When Bertrade de Montfort regained her senses, she was in bed in a
strange
room, and above her bent an old woman; a repulsive, toothless old
woman,
whose smile was but a fangless snarl.

"Ho, ho !" she croaked. "The bride waketh. I told My Lord that it
would
take more than a tumble in the mud to kill a De Montfort. Come,
come, now,
arise and clothe thyself, for the handsome bridegroom canst scarce
restrain
his eager desire to fold thee in his arms. Below in the great hall he
paces to and fro, the red blood mantling his beauteous countenance."

"Who be ye ?" cried Bertrade de Montfort, her mind still dazed from
the
effects of her fall. "Where am I ?" and then, "O, Mon Dieu !" as she
remembered the events of the afternoon; and the arms of Colfax upon
the
shields of the attacking party. In an instant she realized the horror of
her predicament; its utter hopelessness.

Beast though he was, Peter of Colfax stood high in the favor of the
King;
and the fact that she was his niece would scarce aid her cause with
Henry,
for it was more than counter-balanced by the fact that she was the
daughter
of Simon de Montfort, whom he feared and hated.

In the corridor without, she heard the heavy tramp of approaching
feet, and
presently a man's voice at the door.

"Within there, Coll ! Hast the damsel awakened from her swoon ?"



"Yes, Sir Peter," replied the old woman, "I was but just urging her to arise and clothe herself, saying that you awaited her below."

"Haste then, My Lady Bertrade," called the man, "no harm will be done thee if thou showest the good sense I give thee credit for. I will await thee in the great hall, or, if thou prefer, wilt come to thee here."

The girl paled, more in loathing and contempt than in fear, but the tones of her answer were calm and level.

"I will see thee below, Sir Peter, anon," and rising, she hastened to dress, while the receding footsteps of the Baron diminished down the stairway which led from the tower room in which she was imprisoned.

The old woman attempted to draw her into conversation, but the girl would not talk. Her whole mind was devoted to weighing each possible means of escape.

A half hour later, she entered the great hall of the castle of Peter of Colfax. The room was empty. Little change had been wrought in the apartment since the days of Ethelwolf. As the girl's glance ranged the hall in search of her jailer it rested upon the narrow, unglazed windows beyond which lay freedom. Would she ever again breathe God's pure air outside these stifling walls? These grimy hateful walls! Black as the inky rafters and wainscot except for occasional splotches a few shades less begrimed, where repairs had been made. As her eyes fell upon the trophies of war and chase which hung there her lips curled in scorn, for she knew that they were acquisitions by inheritance rather than by the personal prowess of the present master of Colfax.

A single cresset lighted the chamber, while the flickering light from a small wood fire upon one of the two great hearths seemed rather to accentuate the dim shadows of the place.

Bertrade crossed the room and leaned against a massive oak table, blackened



by age and hard usage to the color of the beams above, dented and nicked by the pounding of huge drinking horns and heavy swords when wild and lusty brawlers had been moved to applause by the lay of some wandering minstrel, or the sterner call of their mighty chieftains for the oath of fealty.

Her wandering eyes took in the dozen benches and the few rude, heavy chairs which completed the rough furnishings of this rough room, and she shuddered. One little foot tapped sullenly upon the disordered floor which was littered with a miscellany of rushes interspread with such bones and scraps of food as the dogs had rejected or overlooked.

But to none of these surroundings did Bertrade de Montfort give but passing heed; she looked for the man she sought that she might quickly have the encounter over and learn what fate the future held in store for her.

Her quick glance had shown her that the room was quite empty, and that in addition to the main doorway at the lower end of the apartment, where she had entered, there was but one other door leading from the hall. This was at one side, and as it stood ajar she could see that it led into a small room, apparently a bedchamber.

As she stood facing the main doorway, a panel opened quietly behind her and directly back of where the thrones had stood in past times. From the black mouth of the aperture stepped Peter of Colfax. Silently, he closed the panel after him, and with soundless steps, advanced toward the girl. At the edge of the raised dais he halted, rattling his sword to attract her attention.

If his aim had been to unnerve her by the suddenness and mystery of his appearance, he failed signally, for she did not even turn her head as she said:



"What explanation hast thou to make, Sir Peter, for this base treachery against thy neighbor's daughter and thy sovereign's niece ?"

"When fond hearts be thwarted by a cruel parent," replied the pot-bellied old beast in a soft and fawning tone, "love must still find its way; and so thy gallant swain hath dared the wrath of thy great father and majestic uncle, and lays his heart at thy feet, O beauteous Bertrade, knowing full well that thine hath been hungering after it since we didst first avow our love to thy hard-hearted sire. See, I kneel to thee, my dove !" And with cracking joints the fat baron plumped down upon his marrow bones.

Bertrade turned and as she saw him her haughty countenance relaxed into a sneering smile.

"Thou art a fool, Sir Peter," she said, "and, at that, the worst species of fool -- an ancient fool. It is useless to pursue thy cause, for I will have none of thee. Let me hence, if thou be a gentleman, and no word of what hath transpired shall ever pass my lips. But let me go, 'tis all I ask, and it is useless to detain me for I cannot give what you would have. I do not love you, nor ever can I."

Her first words had caused the red of humiliation to mottle his already ruby visage to a semblance of purple, and now, as he attempted to rise with dignity, he was still further covered with confusion by the fact that his huge stomach made it necessary for him to go upon all fours before he could rise, so that he got up much after the manner of a cow, raising his stern high in air in a most ludicrous fashion. As he gained his feet he saw the girl turn her head from him to hide the laughter on her face.

"Return to thy chamber," he thundered. "I will give thee until tomorrow to



decide whether thou wilt accept Peter of Colfax as thy husband, or take another position in his household which will bar thee for all time from the society of thy kind."

The girl turned toward him, the laugh still playing on her lips.

"I will be wife to no buffoon; to no clumsy old clown; to no debauched, degraded parody of a man. And as for thy other rash threat, thou hast not the guts to put thy wishes into deeds, thou craven coward, for well ye know that Simon de Montfort would cut out thy foul heart with his own hand if he ever suspected thou wert guilty of speaking of such to me, his daughter." And Bertrade de Montfort swept from the great hall, and mounted to her tower chamber in the ancient Saxon stronghold of Colfax.

The old woman kept watch over her during the night and until late the following afternoon, when Peter of Colfax summoned his prisoner before him once more. So terribly had the old hag played upon the girl's fears that she felt fully certain that the Baron was quite equal to his dire threat, and so she had again been casting about for some means of escape or delay.

The room in which she was imprisoned was in the west tower of the castle, fully a hundred feet above the moat, which the single embrasure overlooked. There was, therefore, no avenue of escape in this direction. The solitary door was furnished with huge oaken bars, and itself composed of mighty planks of the same wood, cross barred with iron.

If she could but get the old woman out, thought Bertrade, she could barricade herself within and thus delay, at least, her impending fate in the hope that succor might come from some source. But her most subtle wiles proved ineffectual in ridding her, even for a moment, of her harpy



jailer; and now that the final summons had come, she was beside herself for a lack of means to thwart her captor.

Her dagger had been taken from her, but one hung from the girdle of the old woman and this Bertrade determined to have.

Feigning trouble with the buckle of her own girdle, she called upon the old woman to aid her, and as the hag bent her head close to the girl's body to see what was wrong with the girdle clasp, Bertrade reached quickly to her side and snatched the weapon from its sheath. Quickly she sprang back from the old woman who, with a cry of anger and alarm, rushed upon her.

"Back !" cried the girl. "Stand back, old hag, or thou shalt feel the length of thine own blade."

The woman hesitated and then fell to cursing and blaspheming in a most horrible manner, at the same time calling for help.

Bertrade backed to the door, commanding the old woman to remain where she was, on pain of death, and quickly drop