

HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

A MARCH ON LONDON:
BEING A STORY OF WAT
TYLER'S INSURRECTION

George Henty

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Story of Wat Tyler's Insurrection**

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CHAPTER I TROUBLED TIMES

"And what do you think of it all, good Father?"

"'Tis a difficult question, my son, and I am glad that it is one that wiser heads than mine will have to solve."

"But they don't seem to try to solve it; things get worse and worse. The king is but a lad, no older than myself, and he is in the hands of others. It seems to me a sin and a shame that things should go on as they are at present. My father also thinks so."

The speaker was a boy of some sixteen years old. He was walking with the prior in the garden of the little convent of St. Alwyth, four miles from the town of Dartford. Edgar Ormskirk was the son of a scholar. The latter, a man of independent means, who had always had a preference for study and investigation rather than for taking part in active pursuits, had, since the death of his young wife, a year after the birth of his son, retired altogether from the world and devoted himself to study. He had given up his comfortable home, standing on the heights of Highgate—that being in too close proximity to London to enable him to enjoy the seclusion that he desired—and had retired to a small estate near Dartford.

Educated at Oxford, he had gone to Padua at his father's death, which happened just as he left the university, and had remained at that seat of learning for five years. There he had spent the whole of his income in the purchase of manuscripts. The next two years were passed at Bologna and Pisa, and he there collected a library such as few gentlemen of his time possessed. Then Mr. Ormskirk had returned to England and settled at Highgate, and two years later married the daughter of a neighbouring gentleman, choosing her rather because he felt that he needed someone to keep his house in order, than from any of the feeling that usually accompanies such unions. In time, however, he had come to love her, and her loss was a very heavy blow to him. It was the void that he felt in his home as much as his desire for solitude, that induced him to leave Highgate and settle in the country.

Here, at least, he had no fear of intrusive neighbours, or other interruptions to his studies. The news from London seldom reached his ears, and he was enabled to devote himself entirely to his experiments. Like many other learned men of his age, it was to chemistry that he chiefly turned his attention. His library comprised the works of almost every known writer on the subject, and he hoped that he might gain an immortal reputation by discovering one or both of the great secrets then sought for—the elixir of life, or the philosopher's stone that would convert all things into gold. It was not that he himself had any desire for a long life, still less did he yearn for more wealth than he possessed, but he fondly believed that these discoveries would ameliorate the condition of mankind.

He did not see that if gold was as plentiful as the commonest metal it would cease to be more valuable than others, or that the boon of a long life would not add to the happiness of mankind. For some years he gave little thought to his son, who was left to such care as the old housekeeper and the still older man-servant chose to bestow upon him, and who, in consequence, was left altogether to follow the dictates of his own fancy. The child, therefore, lived almost entirely in the open air, played, tussled, and fought with boys of his own age in the village, and grew up healthy, sturdy, and active. His father scarcely took any heed of his existence until the prior of the Convent of St. Alwyth one day called upon him.

"What are you going to do with your boy, Mr. Ormskirk?" he asked.

"My boy?" the student repeated in tones of surprise. "Oh, yes; Edgar, of course. What am I going to do with him? Well, I have never thought about it. Does he want anything? My housekeeper always sees to that. Do you think that he wants a nurse?"

"A nurse, Mr. Ormskirk!" the Prior said with a smile. "A nurse would have a hard time with him. Do you know what his age is?"

"Four or five years old, I suppose."

"Nearly double that. He is nine."

"Impossible!" Mr. Ormskirk said. "Why, it is only the other day that he was a baby."

"It is eight years since that time; he is now a sturdy lad, and if there is any mischief in the village he is sure to be in it. Why, it was but three days ago that Friar Anselmo caught him, soon after daybreak, fishing in the Convent pool with two of the village lads. The friar gave them a sound trouncing, and would have given one to your son, too, had it not been for the respect that we all feel for you. It is high time, Mr. Ormskirk, that he was broken of his wild ways and received an education suited to his station."

"Quite so, quite so. I own that I have thought but little about him, for indeed 'tis rarely that I see him, and save that at times his racket in the house sorely disturbs my studies, I have well-nigh forgotten all about him. Yes, yes; it is, of course, high time that he began his education, so that if I should die before I have completed my discoveries he may take up my work."

The Prior smiled quietly at the thought of the sturdy, dirty-faced boy working among crucibles and retorts. However, he only said:

"Do you think of undertaking his education yourself?"

"By no means," Mr. Ormskirk said, hastily. "It would be impossible for me to find time at present, but when he has completed his studies I should then take him in hand myself, make him my companion and assistant, and teach him all that is known of science."

"But in the meantime?"

"In the meantime? Yes, I suppose something must be done. I might get him a tutor, but that would be a great disturbance to me. I might send him up to the monastery at Westminster, where the sons of many gentlemen are taught."

"I doubt whether the training, or rather want of training, that he has had would fit him for Westminster," the Prior said, quietly. "There is another plan that perhaps might be more suitable for him. One of our brethren is a scholar, and already three or four of the sons of the gentry in the neighbourhood come to him for three hours or so a day. Our convent is a poor one, and the fees he receives are a welcome addition to our means."

"Excellent!" Mr. Ormskirk said, delighted at the difficulty being taken off his shoulders, "It would be the very thing."

"Then perhaps you will speak to the boy, and lay your orders upon him," the Prior said. "He was in the village as I passed by, and I brought him up here, very much against his will I admit. Then I gave him in charge on arrival to your servitor, knowing that otherwise the young varlet would slip off again as soon as my back was turned. Perhaps you will send for him."

Mr. Ormskirk rang a bell. The housekeeper entered.

"Where is Andrew?" he asked.

"He is looking after Master Edgar, sir. His reverence told him to do so, and he dare not leave him for a moment or he would be off again."

"Tell Andrew to bring him in here."

A minute later the old servant entered with the boy. Edgar was in a dishevelled condition, the result of several struggles with Andrew. His face was begrimed with dirt, his clothes were torn and untidy. His father looked at him in grave surprise. It was not that he had not seen him before, for occasionally he had noticed him going across the garden, but though his eyes had observed him, his

mental vision had not in any way taken him in, his thoughts being intent upon the work that he had reluctantly left to take a hurried meal.

"Tut, tut, tut!" he murmured to himself, "and this is my son. Well, well, I suppose he is not to be blamed; it is my own fault for being so heedless of him. This is bad, Edgar," he said, "and yet it is my own fault rather than thine, and I am thankful that the good prior has brought your condition before me before it is too late. There must be no more of this. Your appearance is disgraceful both to yourself and me—to me because you are in rags, to yourself because you are dirty. I had never dreamt of this. Henceforth all must be changed. You must be clothed as befits the son of a gentleman, you must be taught as it is right for the son of a scholar to be, and you must bear in mind that some day you will become a gentleman yourself, and I trust a learned one. I have arranged with the good prior here that you shall go every day to the monastery to be instructed for three hours by one of his monks. In future you will take your meals with me, and I will see that your attire is in order, and that you go decent as befits your station. What hours is he to attend, Prior?"

"From nine till twelve."

"You hear—from nine to twelve. In the afternoon I will procure a teacher for you in arms. In these days every gentleman must learn the use of his weapons. I, myself, although most peacefully inclined, have more than once been forced, when abroad, to use them. A man who cannot do so becomes the butt of fools, and loses his self-respect."

"I shall like that, sir," Edgar said, eagerly. "I can play at quarter-staff now with any boy of my size in the village."

"Well, there must be no more of that," his father said. "Up to the present you have been but a child, but it is time now that you should cease to consort with village boys and prepare for another station in life. They may be good boys—I know naught about them—but they are not fit associates for you. I am not blaming you," he said more kindly as he saw the boy's face fall. "It was natural that you, having no associates of your own rank, should make friends where you could find them. I trust that it has done you no harm. Well, Prior, this day week the boy shall come to you. I must get befitting clothes for him, or the other pupils will think that he is the son of a hedge tinker."

An hour later Andrew was despatched to Dartford in a cart hired in the village, with orders to bring back with him a tailor, also to inquire as to who was considered the best teacher of arms in the town, and to engage him to come up for an hour every afternoon to instruct Edgar.

Seven years had passed since that time, and the rough and unkempt boy had grown into a tall young fellow, who had done fair credit to his teacher at the convent, and had profited to the full by the teaching of the old soldier who had been his instructor in arms. His father had, unconsciously, been also a good teacher to him. He had, with a great effort, broken through the habits to which he had been so long wedded. A young waiting-maid now assisted the housekeeper. The meals were no longer hastily snatched and often eaten standing, but were decently served in order, and occupied a considerable time, the greater portion of which was spent in pleasant chat either upon the scenes which Mr. Ormskirk had witnessed abroad, or in talk on the subjects the boy was studying; sometimes also upon Mr. Ormskirk's researches and the hopes he entertained from them; and as Edgar grew older, upon the ordinary topics of the day, the grievances caused by the heavy taxation, the troubles of the time and the course of events that had led to them; for, although very ignorant of contemporary matters, Mr. Ormskirk was well acquainted with the history of the country up to the time when he had first gone abroad.

The recluse was surprised at the interest he himself came to feel in these conversations. While endeavouring to open his son's mind he opened his own, and although when Edgar was not present he pursued his researches as assiduously as before, he was no longer lost in fits of abstraction, and would even occasionally walk down to the village when Edgar went to school in order to continue the conversation upon which they were engaged. Edgar on his part soon ceased to regard his father as

a stranger, and his admiration for his store of information and learning served as a stimulant to his studies, for which his previous life had given him but little liking.

For the last two years, however, his father had seen with regret that there was but little hope of making a profound scholar of him, and that unless he himself could discover the solution of the problems that still eluded him, there was little chance of it being found by his successor.

Once roused, he had the good sense to see that it was not in such a life that Edgar was likely to find success, and he wisely abandoned the idea of pressing a task upon him that he saw was unfitted to the boy's nature. The energy with which Edgar worked with his instructors in arms—who had been already twice changed, so as to give him a greater opportunity of attaining skill with his weapons—and the interest with which the lad listened to tales of adventure, showed the direction in which his bent lay. For the last two years his father had frequently read to him the records of Sir Walter Manny and other chroniclers of war and warlike adventure, and impressed upon him the virtues necessary to render a man at once a great soldier and a great man.

"If, my boy," he said, "you should some day go to Court and mingle in public affairs, above all things keep yourself clear of any party. Those who cling to a party may rise with its success, but such rises are ever followed by reverses; then comes great suffering to those upon the fallen side. The duty of an English gentleman is simple: he must work for his country, regardless altogether of personal interest. Such a man may never rise to high rank, but he will be respected. Personal honours are little to be desired; it is upon those who stand higher than their neighbours that the blow falls the heaviest; while the rank and file may escape unscathed, it is the nobles and the leaders whose heads fall upon the block. I think that there are troubles in store for England. The Duke of Gloucester overshadows the boy king, but as the latter grows older he will probably shake off his tutelage, though it may be at the cost of a civil war.

"Then, too, there are the exactions of the tax-gatherers. Some day the people will rise against them as they did in France at the time of the Jacquerie, and as they have done again and again in Flanders. At present the condition of the common people, who are but villeins and serfs, is well-nigh unbearable. Altogether the future seems to me to be dark. I confess that, being a student, the storm when it bursts will affect me but slightly, but as it is clear to me that this is not the life that you will choose it may affect you greatly; for, however little you may wish it, if civil strife comes, you, like everyone else, may be involved in it. In such an event, Edgar, act as your conscience dictates. There is always much to be said for both sides of any question, and it cannot but be so in this. I wish to lay no stress on you in any way. You cannot make a good monk out of a man who longs to be a man-at-arms, nor a warrior of a weakling who longs for the shelter of a cloister.

"Let, however, each man strive to do his best in the line he has chosen for himself. A good monk is as worthy of admiration as a good man-at-arms. I would fain have seen you a great scholar, but as it is clear that this is out of the question, seeing that your nature does not incline to study, I would that you should become a brave knight. It was with that view when I sent you to be instructed at the convent I also gave you an instructor in arms, so that, whichever way your inclinations might finally point, you should be properly fitted for it."

At fifteen all lessons were given up, Edgar having by that time learnt as much as was considered necessary in those days. He continued his exercises with his weapons, but without any strong idea that beyond defence against personal attacks they would be of any use to him. The army was not in those days a career. When the king had need of a force to fight in France or to carry fire and sword into Scotland, the levies were called out, the nobles and barons supplied their contingent, and archers and men-at-arms were enrolled and paid by the king. The levies, however, were only liable to service for a restricted time, and beyond their personal retainers the barons in time followed the royal example of hiring men-at-arms and archers for the campaign; these being partly paid from the royal treasury, and partly from their own revenue.

At the end of the campaign, however, the army speedily dispersed, each man returning to his former avocation; save therefore for the retainers, who formed the garrisons of the castles of the nobles, there was no military career such as that which came into existence with the formation of standing armies. Nevertheless, there was honour and rank to be won in the foreign wars, and it was to these the young men of gentle blood looked to make their way. But since the death of the Black Prince matters had been quiet abroad, and unless for those who were attached to the households of powerful nobles there was, for the present, no avenue towards distinction.

Edgar had been talking these matters over with the Prior of St. Alwyth, who had taken a great fancy to him, and with whom he had, since he had given up his work at the convent, frequently had long conversations. They were engaged in one of these when this narrative begins:

"I quite agree with your father," the Prior continued. "Were there a just and strong government, the mass of the people might bear their present position. It seems to us as natural that the serfs should be transferred with the land as if they were herds of cattle, for such is the rule throughout Europe as well as here, and one sees that there are great difficulties in the way of making any alteration in this state of things. See you, were men free to wander as they chose over the land instead of working at their vocations, the country would be full of vagrants who, for want of other means for a living, would soon become robbers. Then, too, very many would flock to the towns, and so far from bettering their condition, would find themselves worse off than before, for there would be more people than work could be found for.

"So long as each was called upon only to pay his fifteenth to the king's treasury they were contented enough, but now they are called upon for a tenth as well as a fifteenth, and often this is greatly exceeded by the rapacity of the tax-collectors. Other burdens are put upon them, and altogether men are becoming desperate. Then, too, the cessation of the wars with France has brought back to the country numbers of disbanded soldiers who, having got out of the way of honest work and lost the habits of labour, are discontented and restless. All this adds to the danger. We who live in the country see these things, but the king and nobles either know nothing of them or treat them with contempt, well knowing that a few hundred men-at-arms can scatter a multitude of unarmed serfs."

"And would you give freedom to the serfs, good Father?"

"I say not that I would give them absolute freedom, but I would grant them a charter giving them far greater rights than at present. A fifteenth of their labour is as much as they should be called upon to pay, and when the king's necessities render it needful that further money should be raised, the burden should only be laid upon the backs of those who can afford to pay it. I hear that there is much wild talk, and that the doctrines of Wickliffe have done grievous harm. I say not, my son, that there are not abuses in the Church as well as elsewhere; but these pestilent doctrines lead men to disregard all authority, and to view their natural masters as oppressors. I hear that seditious talk is uttered openly in the villages throughout the country; that there are men who would fain persuade the ignorant that all above them are drones who live on the proceeds of their labour—as if indeed every man, however high in rank, had not his share of labour and care—I fear, then, that if there should be a rising of the peasantry we may have such scenes as those that took place during the Jacquerie in France, and that many who would, were things different, be in favour of giving more extended rights to the people, will be forced to take a side against them."

"I can hardly think that they would take up arms, Father. They must know that they could not withstand a charge of armour-clad knights and men-at-arms."

"Unhappily, my son, the masses do not think. They believe what it pleases them to believe, and what the men who go about stirring up sedition tell them. I foresee that in the end they will suffer horribly, but before the end comes they may commit every sort of outrage. They may sack monasteries and murder the monks, for we are also looked upon as drones. They may attack and destroy the houses of the better class, and even the castles of the smaller nobles. They may even capture London and lay it in ashes, but the thought that after they had done these things a terrible

vengeance would be taken, and their lot would be harder than before, would never occur to them. Take your own house for instance—what resistance could it offer to a fierce mob of peasants?"

"None," Edgar admitted. "But why should they attack it?"

The Prior was silent.

"I know what you mean, good Father," Edgar said, after a pause. "They say that my father is a magician, because he stirs not abroad, but spends his time on his researches. I remember when I was a small boy, and the lads of the village wished to anger me, they would shout out, 'Here is the magician's son,' and I had many a fight in consequence."

"Just so, Edgar; the ignorant always hate that which they cannot understand; so Friar Bacon was persecuted, and accused of dabbling in magic when he was making discoveries useful to mankind. I say not that they will do any great harm when they first rise, for it cannot be said that the serfs here are so hardly treated as they were in France, where their lords had power of life and death over them, and could slay them like cattle if they chose, none interfering. Hence the hatred was so deep that in the very first outbreak the peasants fell upon the nobles and massacred them and their families.

"Here there is no such feeling. It is against the government that taxes them so heavily that their anger is directed, and I fear that this new poll-tax that has been ordered will drive them to extremities. I have news that across the river in Essex the people of some places have not only refused to pay, but have forcibly driven away the tax-gatherers, and when these things once begin, there is no saying how they are going to end. However, if there is trouble, I think not that at first we shall be in any danger here, but if they have success at first their pretensions will grow. They will inflame themselves. The love of plunder will take the place of their reasonable objections to over-taxation, and seeing that they have but to stretch out their hands to take what they desire, plunder and rapine will become general."

As Edgar walked back home he felt that there was much truth in the Prior's remarks. He himself had heard many things said among the villagers which showed that their patience was well-nigh at an end. Although, since he began his studies, he had no time to keep up his former close connection with the village, he had always been on friendly terms with his old playmates, and they talked far more freely with him than they would do to anyone else of gentle blood. Once or twice he had, from a spirit of adventure, gone with them to meetings that were held after dark in a quiet spot near Dartford, and listened to the talk of strangers from Gravesend and other places. He knew himself how heavily the taxation pressed upon the people, and his sympathies were wholly with them. There had been nothing said even by the most violent of the speakers to offend him. The protests were against the exactions of the tax-gatherers, the extravagance of the court, and the hardship that men should be serfs on the land.

Once they had been addressed by a secular priest from the other side of the river, who had asserted that all men were born equal and had equal rights. This sentiment had been loudly applauded, but he himself had sense enough to see that it was contrary to fact, and that men were not born equal. One was the son of a noble, the other of a serf. One child was a cripple and a weakling from its birth, another strong and lusty. One was well-nigh a fool, and another clear-headed. It seemed to him that there were and must be differences.

Many of the secular clergy were among the foremost in stirring up the people. They themselves smarted under their disabilities. For the most part they were what were called hedge priests, men of but little or no education, looked down upon by the regular clergy, and almost wholly dependant on the contributions of their hearers. They resented the difference between themselves and the richly endowed clergy and religious houses, and denounced the priests and monks as drones who sucked the life-blood of the country.

This was the last gathering at which Edgar had been present. He had been both shocked and offended at the preaching. What was the name of the priest he knew not, nor did the villagers, but he went by the name of Jack Straw, and was, Edgar thought, a dangerous fellow. The lad had no objection to his abuse of the tax-gatherers, or to his complaints of the extravagance of the court, but this man's denunciation of the monks and clergy at once shocked and angered him. Edgar's intercourse with

the villagers had removed some of the prejudices generally felt by his class, but in other respects he naturally felt as did others of his station, and he resolved to go to no more meetings.

After taking his meal with his father, Edgar mounted the horse that the latter had bought for him, and rode over to the house of one of his friends.

The number of those who had, like himself, been taught by the monk of St. Alwyth had increased somewhat, and there were, when he left, six other lads there. Three of these were intended for the Church. All were sons of neighbouring landowners, and it was to visit Albert de Courcy, the son of Sir Ralph de Courcy, that Edgar was now riding. Albert and he had been special friends. They were about the same age, but of very different dispositions. The difference between their characters was perhaps the chief attraction that had drawn them to each other. Albert was gentle in disposition, his health was not good, and he had been a weakly child. His father, who was a stout knight, regarded him with slight favour, and had acceded willingly to his desire to enter the Church, feeling that he would never make a good fighter.

Edgar, on the contrary, was tall and strongly built, and had never known a day's illness. He was somewhat grave in manner, for the companionship of his father and the character of their conversations had made him older and more thoughtful than most lads of his age. He was eager for adventure, and burned for an opportunity to distinguish himself, while his enthusiasm for noble exploits and great commanders interested his quiet friend, who had the power of admiring things that he could not hope to imitate. In him, alone of his school-fellows, did Edgar find any sympathy with his own feelings as to the condition of the people. Henry Nevil laughed to scorn Edgar's advocacy of their cause. Richard Clairvaux more than once quarrelled with him seriously, and on one or two occasions they almost betook themselves to their swords. The other three, who were of less spirit, took no part in these arguments, saying that these things did not concern them, being matters for the king and his ministers, and of no interest whatever to them.

In other respects Edgar was popular with them all. His strength and his skill in arms gave him an authority that even Richard Clairvaux acknowledged in his cooler moments. Edgar visited at the houses of all their fathers, his father encouraging him to do so, as he thought that association with his equals would be a great advantage to him. As far as manners were concerned, however, the others, with the exception of Albert de Courcy, who did not need it, gained more than he did, for Mr. Ormskirk had, during his long residence at foreign universities and his close connection with professors, acquired a certain foreign courtliness of bearing that was in strong contrast to the rough bluntness of speech and manner that characterized the English of that period, and had some share in rendering them so unpopular upon the Continent, where, although their strength and fighting power made them respected, they were regarded as island bears, and their manners were a standing jest among the frivolous nobles of the Court of France.

At the house of Sir Ralph de Courcy Edgar was a special favourite. Lady de Courcy was fond of him because her son was never tired of singing his praises, and because she saw that his friendship was really a benefit to the somewhat dreamy boy. Aline, a girl of fourteen, regarded him with admiration; she was deeply attached to her brother, and believed implicitly his assertion that Edgar would some day become a valiant knight; while Sir Ralph himself liked him both for the courtesy of his bearing and the firmness and steadiness of his character, which had, he saw, a very beneficial influence over that of Albert. Sir Ralph was now content that the latter should enter the Church, but he was unwilling that his son should become what he called a mere shaveling, and desired that he should attain power and position in his profession.

The lack of ambition and energy in his son were a grievance to him almost as great as his lack of physical powers, and he saw that although, so far there was still an absence of ambition, yet the boy had gained firmness and decision from the influence of his friend, and that he was far more likely to attain eminence in the Church than he had been before. He was himself surprised that the son of a man whose pursuits he despised should have attained such proficiency with his weapons—a matter

which he had learned, when one day he had tried his skill with Edgar in a bout with swords—and he recognized that with his gifts of manner, strength and enthusiasm for deeds of arms, he was likely one day to make a name for himself.

Whenever, therefore, Edgar rode over to Sir Ralph's he was certain of a hearty welcome from all. As to the lad's opinions as to the condition of the peasantry—opinions which he would have scouted as monstrous on the part of a gentleman—Sir Ralph knew nothing, Albert having been wise enough to remain silent on the subject, the custom of the times being wholly opposed to anything like a free expression of opinion on any subject from a lad to his elders.

"It is quite a time since you were here last, Master Ormskirk," Lady De Courcy said when he entered. "Albert so often goes up for a talk with you when he has finished his studies at the monastery that you are forgetting us here."

"I crave your pardon, Mistress De Courcy," Edgar said; "but, indeed, I have been working hard, for my father has obtained for me a good master for the sword—a Frenchman skilled in many devices of which my English teachers were wholly ignorant. He has been teaching some of the young nobles in London, and my father, hearing of his skill, has had him down here, at a heavy cost, for the last month, as he was for the moment without engagements in London. It was but yesterday that he returned. Naturally, I have desired to make the utmost of the opportunity, and most of my time has been spent in the fencing-room."

"And have you gained much by his instruction?" Sir Ralph asked.

"I hope so, Sir Ralph. I have tried my best, and he has been good enough to commend me warmly, and even told my father that I was the aptest pupil that he had."

"I will try a bout with you presently," the knight said. "It is nigh two years since we had one together, and my arm is growing stiff for want of practice, though every day I endeavour to keep myself in order for any opportunity or chance that may occur, by practising against an imaginary foe by hammering with a mace at a corn-sack swinging from a beam. Methinks I hit it as hard as of old, but in truth I know but little of the tricks of these Frenchmen. They availed nothing at Poitiers against our crushing downright blows. Still, I would gladly see what their tricks are like."

CHAPTER II

A FENCING BOUT

After he had talked for a short time with Mistress De Courcy, Edgar went to the fencing-room with Sir Ralph, and they there put on helmets and quilted leather jerkins, with chains sewn on at the shoulders.

"Now, you are to do your best," Sir Ralph said, as he handed a sword to Edgar, and took one himself.

So long as they played gently Edgar had all the advantage.

"You have learned your tricks well," Sir Ralph said, good-temperedly, "and, in truth, your quick returns puzzle me greatly, and I admit that were we both unprotected I should have no chance with you, but let us see what you could do were we fighting in earnest," and he took down a couple of suits of complete body armour from the wall.

Albert, who was looking on, fastened the buckles for both of them.

"Ah, you know how the straps go," Sir Ralph said, in a tone of satisfaction. "Well, it is something to know that, even if you don't know what to do with it when you have got it on. Now, Master Edgar, have at you."

Edgar stood on the defence, but, strong as his arm was from constant exercise, he had some difficulty to save his head from the sweeping blows that Sir Ralph rained upon it.

"By my faith, young fellow," Sir Ralph said as, after three or four minutes, he drew back breathless from his exertions, "your muscles seem to be made of iron, and you are fit to hold your own in a serious *mêlée*. You were wrong not to strike, for I know that more than once there was an opening had you been quick."

Edgar was well aware of the fact, but he had not taken advantage of it, for he felt that at his age it was best to abstain from trying to gain a success that could not be pleasant for the good knight.

"Well, well, we will fight no more," the latter said.

When Albert had unbuckled his father's armour and hung it up, Edgar said: "Now, Albert, let us have a bout."

The lad coloured hotly, and the knight burst into a hearty laugh.

"You might as soon challenge my daughter Aline. Well, put on the jerkin, Albert; it were well that you should feel what a poor creature a man is who has never had a sword in his hand."

Albert silently obeyed his father's orders and stood up facing Edgar. They were about the same height, though Albert looked slim and delicate by the side of his friend.

"By St. George!" his father exclaimed, "you do not take up a bad posture, Albert. You have looked at Edgar often enough at his exercises to see how you ought to place yourself. I have never seen you look so manly since the day you were born. Now, strike in."

Sir Ralph's surprise at his son's attitude grew to amazement as the swords clashed together, and he saw that, although Edgar was not putting out his full strength and skill, his son, instead of being scarce able, as he had expected, to raise the heavy sword, not only showed considerable skill, but even managed to parry some of the tricks of the weapon to which he himself had fallen a victim.

"Stop, stop!" he said, at last. "Am I dreaming, or has someone else taken the place of my son? Take off your helmet. It is indeed Albert!" he said, as they uncovered. "What magic is this?"

"It is a little surprise that we have prepared for you, Sir Ralph," Edgar said, "and I trust that you will not be displeased. Two years ago I persuaded Albert that there was no reason why even a priest should not have a firm hand and a steady eye, and that this would help him to overcome his nervousness, and would make him strong in body as well as in arm. Since that time he has practised with me almost daily after he had finished his studies at St. Alwyth, and my masters have done their

best for him. Though, of course, he has not my strength, as he lacks the practice I have had, he has gained wonderfully of late, and would in a few years match me in skill, for what he wants in strength he makes up in activity."

"Master Ormskirk," the knight said, "I am beholden to you more than I can express. His mother and I have observed during the last two years that he has gained greatly in health and has widened out in the shoulders. I understand now how it has come about. We have never questioned him about it; indeed, I should as soon have thought of asking him whether he had made up his mind to become king, as whether he had begun to use a sword. Why, I see that you have taught him already some of the tricks that you have just learnt."

"I have not had time to instruct him in many of them, Sir Ralph, but I showed him one or two, and he acquired them so quickly that in another month I have no doubt he will know them as well as I do."

"By St. George, you have done wonders, Edgar. As for you, Albert, I am as pleased as if I had heard that the king had made me an earl. Truly, indeed, did Master Ormskirk tell you that it would do you good to learn to use a sword. 'Tis not a priest's weapon—although many a priest and bishop have ridden to battle before now—but it has improved your health and given you ten years more life than you would be likely to have had without it. It seemed to me strange that any son of my house should be ignorant as to how to use a sword, and now I consider that that which seemed to me almost a disgrace is removed. Knows your mother aught of this?"

"No, sir. When I began I feared that my resolution would soon fade; and indeed it would have done so had not Edgar constantly encouraged me and held me to it, though indeed at first it so fatigued me that I could scarce walk home."

"That I can well understand, my lad. Now you shall come and tell your mother. I have news for you, dame, that will in no small degree astonish you," he said, as, followed by the two lads, he returned to the room where she was sitting. "In the first place, young Master Ormskirk has proved himself a better man than I with the sword."

"Say not so, I pray you, Sir Ralph," Edgar said. "In skill with the French tricks I may have had the better of you, but with a mace you would have dashed my brains out, as I could not have guarded my head against the blows that you could have struck with it."

"Not just yet, perhaps," the knight said; "but when you get your full strength you could assuredly do so. He will be a famous knight some day, dame. But that is not the most surprising piece of news. What would you say were I to tell you that this weakling of ours, although far from approaching the skill and strength of his friend, is yet able to wield a heavy sword manfully and skilfully?"

"I should say that either you were dreaming, or that I was, Sir Ralph."

"Well, I do say so in wide-awake earnest. Master Ormskirk has been his instructor, and for the last two years the lad has been learning of him and of his masters. That accounts for the change that we have noticed in his health and bearing. Faith, he used to go along with stooping neck, like a girl who has outgrown her strength. Now he carries himself well, and his health of late has left naught to be desired. It was for that that his friend invited him to exercise himself with the sword; and indeed his recipe has done wonders. His voice has gained strength, and though it still has a girlish ring about it, he speaks more firmly and assuredly than he used to do."

"That is indeed wonderful news, Sir Ralph, and I rejoice to hear it. Master Ormskirk, we are indeed beholden to you. For at one time I doubted whether Albert would ever live to grow into a man; and of late I have been gladdened at seeing so great a change in him, though I dreamed not of the cause."

Aline had stood open-mouthed while her father was speaking, and now stole up to Albert's side.

"I am pleased, brother," she said. "May I tell them now what happened the other day with the black bull, you charged me to say nothing about?"

"What is this about the black bull, Aline?" her father said, as he caught the words.

"It was naught, sir," Albert replied, colouring, "save that the black bull in the lower meadow ran at us, and I frightened him away."

"No, no, father," the girl broke in, "it was not that at all. We were walking through the meadow together when the black bull ran at us. Albert said to me, 'Run, run, Aline!' and I did run as hard as I could; but I looked back for some time as I ran, being greatly terrified as to what would come to Albert. He stood still. The bull lowered his head and rushed at him. Then he sprang aside just as I expected to see him tossed into the air, caught hold of the bull's tail as it went past him and held on till the bull was close to the fence, and then he let go and scrambled over, while the bull went bellowing down the field."

"Well done, well done!" Sir Ralph said. "Why, Albert, it seems marvellous that you should be doing such things; that black bull is a formidable beast, and the strongest man, if unarmed, might well feel discomposed if he saw him coming rushing at him. I will wager that if you had not had that practice with the sword, you would not have had the quickness of thought that enabled you to get out of the scrape. You might have stood between the bull and your sister, but if you had done so you would only have been tossed, and perhaps gored or trampled to death afterwards. I will have the beast killed, or otherwise he will be doing mischief. There are not many who pass through the field, still I don't want to have any of my tenants killed."

"Well, Master Ormskirk, both my wife and I feel grateful to you for what you have done for Albert. There are the makings of a man in him now, let him take up what trade he will. I don't say much, boy, it is not my way; but if you ever want a friend, whether it be at court or camp, you can rely upon me to do as much for you as I would for one of my own; maybe more, for I deem that a man cannot well ask for favours for those of his own blood, but he can speak a good word, and even urge his suit for one who is no kin to him. So far as I understand, you have not made up your mind in what path you will embark."

"No, Sir Ralph, for at present, although we can scarce be said to be at peace with the French, we are not fighting with them. Had it been so I would willingly have joined the train of some brave knight raising a force for service there. There is ever fighting in the North, but with the Scots it is but a war of skirmishes, and not as it was in Edward's reign. Moreover, by what my father says, there seems no reason for harrying Scotland far and near, and the fighting at present is scarce of a nature in which much credit is to be gained."

"You might enter the household of some powerful noble, lad."

"My father spoke to me of that, Sir Ralph, but told me that he would rather that I were with some simple knight than with a great noble, for that in the rivalries between these there might be troubles come upon the land, and maybe even civil strife; that one who might hold his head highest of all one day might on the morrow have it struck off with the executioner's axe, and that at any rate it were best at present to live quietly and see how matters went before taking any step that would bind me to the fortunes of one man more than another."

"Your father speaks wisely. 'Tis not often that men who live in books, and spend their time in pouring over mouldy parchments, and in well-nigh suffocating themselves with stinking fumes have common sense in worldly matters. But when I have conversed with your father, I have always found that, although he takes not much interest in public affairs at present, he is marvellously well versed in our history, and can give illustrations in support of what he says. Well, whenever the time comes that he thinks it good for you to leave his fireside and venture out into the world, you have but to come to me, and I will, so far as is in my power, further your designs."

"I thank you most heartily, Sir Ralph, and glad am I to have been of service to Albert, who has been almost as a brother to me since we first met at St. Alwyth."

"I would go over and see your father, and have a talk with him about you, but I ride to London to-morrow, and may be forced to tarry there for some time. When I return I will wait upon him and

have a talk as to his plans for you. Now, I doubt not, you would all rather be wandering about the garden than sitting here with us, so we will detain you no longer."

"Albert, I am very angry with you and Master Ormskirk that you did not take me into your counsel and tell me about your learning to use the sword," Aline said, later on, as they watched Edgar ride away through the gateway of the castle. "I call it very unkind of you both."

"We had not thought of being unkind, Aline," Albert said, quietly. "When we began I did not feel sure that either my strength or my resolution would suffice to carry me through, and indeed it was at first very painful work for me, having never before taken any strong exercise, and often I would have given it up from the pain and fatigue that it caused me, had not Edgar urged me to persevere, saying that in time I should feel neither pain nor weariness. Therefore, at first I said nothing to you, knowing that it would disappoint you did I give it up, and then when my arm gained strength, and Edgar encouraged me by praising my progress, and I began to hope that I might yet come to be strong and gain skill with the weapon, I kept it back in order that I might, as I have done to-day, have the pleasure of surprising you, as well as my father, by showing that I was not so great a milksop as you had rightly deemed me."

"I never thought that you were a milksop, Albert," his sister said, indignantly. "I knew that you were not strong, and was sorry for it, but it was much nicer for me that you should be content to walk and ride with me, and to take interest in things that I like, instead of being like Henry Nevil or Richard Clairvaux, who are always talking and thinking of nothing but how they would go to the wars, and what they would do there."

"There was no need that I should do that, Aline. Edgar is a much better swordsman than either of them, and knows much more, and is much more likely to be a famous knight some day than either Nevil or Clairvaux, but I am certain that you do not hear him talk about it."

"No, Edgar is nice, too," the girl said, frankly, "and very strong. Do you not remember how he carried me home more than two miles, when a year ago I fell down when I was out with you, and sprained my ankle. And now, Albert, perhaps some day you will get so strong that you may not think of going into the Church and shutting yourself up all your life in a cloister, but may come to be famous too."

"I have not thought of that, Aline," he said, gravely. "If ever I did change my mind, it would be that I might always be with Edgar and be great friends with him, all through our lives, just as we are now."

Sir Ralph and his wife were at the time discussing the same topic. "It may yet be, Agatha, that, after all, the boy may give up this thought of being a churchman. I have never said a word against it hitherto, because it seemed to me that he was fit for nothing else, but now that one sees that he has spirit, and has, thanks to his friend, acquired a taste for arms, and has a strength I never dreamt he possessed, the matter is changed. I say not yet that he is like to become a famous knight, but it needs not that every one should be able to swing a heavy mace and hold his own in a *mêlée*. There are many posts at court where one who is discreet and long-headed may hold his own, and gain honour, so that he be not a mere feeble weakling who can be roughly pushed to the wall by every blusterer."

"I would ask him no question concerning it, Sir Ralph," his wife said. "It may be as you say, but methinks that it will be more likely that he will turn to it if you ask him no questions, but leave him to think it out for himself. The lad Edgar has great influence over him, and will assuredly use it for good. As for myself, it would be no such great grief were Albert to enter the Church as it would be to you, though I, too, would prefer that he should not be lost to us, and would rather that he went to Court and played his part there. I believe that he has talent. The prior of St. Alwyth said that he and young Ormskirk were by far his most promising pupils; of course, the latter has now ceased to study with him, having learned as much as is necessary for a gentleman to know if he be not intended for the Church. Albert is well aware what your wishes are, and that if you have said naught against his taking up that profession, it was but because you deemed him fit for no other. Now, you will see

that, having done so much, he may well do more, and it may be that in time he may himself speak to you and tell you that he has changed his mind on the matter."

"Perhaps it would be best so, dame, and I have good hope that it will be as you say. I care not much for the Court, where Lancaster and Gloucester overshadow the king. Still, a man can play his part there; though I would not that he should attach himself to Lancaster's faction or to Gloucester's, for both are ambitious, and it will be a struggle between them for supremacy. If he goes he shall go as a king's man. Richard, as he grows up, will resent the tutelage in which he is held, but will not be able to shake it off, and he will need men he can rely upon—prudent and good advisers, the nearer to his own age the better, and it may well be that Albert would be like to gain rank and honour more quickly in this way than by doughty deeds in the field. It is good that each man should stick to his last. As for me, I would rather delve as a peasant than mix in the intrigues of a Court. But there must be courtiers as well as fighters, and I say not aught against them.

"The boy with his quiet voice, and his habit of going about making little more noise than a cat, is far better suited for such a life than I with my rough speech and fiery temper. For his manner he has also much to thank young Ormskirk. Edgar caught it from his father, who, though a strange man according to my thinking, is yet a singularly courteous gentleman, and Albert has taken it from his friend. Well, wife, I shall put this down as one of my fortunate days, for never have I heard better news than that which Albert gave me this afternoon."

When Edgar returned home he told his father what had taken place.

"I thought that Sir Ralph would be mightily pleased some day when he heard that his son had been so zealously working here with you, and I too was glad to see it. I am altogether without influence to push your fortunes. Learning I can give you, but I scarce know a man at Court, for while I lived at Highgate I seldom went abroad, and save for a visit now and then from some scholar anxious to consult me, scarce a being entered my house. Therefore, beyond relating to you such matters of history as it were well for you to know, and by telling you of the deeds of Caesar and other great commanders, I could do naught for you."

"You have done a great deal for me, father. You have taught me more of military matters, and of the history of this country, and of France and Italy, than can be known to most people, and will assuredly be of much advantage to me in the future."

"That may be so, Edgar, but the great thing is to make the first start, and here I could in no way aid you. I have often wondered how this matter could be brought about, and now you have obtained a powerful friend; for although Sir Ralph De Courcy is but a simple knight, with no great heritage, his wife is a daughter of Lord Talbot, and he himself is one of the most valiant of the nobles and knights who fought so stoutly in France and Spain, and as such is known to, and respected by, all those who bore a part in those wars. He therefore can do for you the service that of all others is the most necessary.

"The king himself is well aware that he was one of the knights in whom the Black Prince, his father, had the fullest confidence, and to whom he owed his life more than once in the thick of a *mêlée*. Thus, then, when the time comes, he will be able to secure for you a post in the following of some brave leader. I would rather that it were so than in the household of any great noble, who would assuredly take one side or other in the factions of the Court. You are too young for this as yet, being too old to be a page, too young for an esquire, and must therefore wait until you are old enough to enter service either as an esquire or as one of the retinue of a military leader."

"I would rather be an esquire and ride to battle to win my spurs. I should not care to become a knight simply because I was the owner of so many acres of land, but should wish to be knighted for service in the field."

"So would I also, Edgar. My holding here is large enough to entitle me to the rank of knight did I choose to take it up, but indeed it would be with me as it is with many others, an empty title. Holding land enough for a knight's fee, I should of course be bound to send so many men into the

field were I called upon to do so, and should send you as my substitute if the call should not come until you are two or three years older; but in this way you would be less likely to gain opportunities for winning honour than if you formed part of the following of some well-known knight. Were a call to come you could go with few better than Sir Ralph, who would be sure to be in the thick of it. But if it comes not ere long, he may think himself too old to take the field, and his contingent would doubtless be led by some knight as his substitute."

"I think not, father, that Sir Ralph is likely to regard himself as lying on the shelf for some time to come; he is still a very strong man, and he would chafe like a caged eagle were there blows to be struck in France, and he unable to share in them."

Four days later a man who had been down to the town returned with a budget of news. Edgar happened to be at the door when he rode past.

"What is the news, Master Clement?" he said, for he saw that the man looked excited and alarmed.

"There be bad news, young master, mighty bad news. Thou knowest how in Essex men have refused to pay the poll-tax, but there has been naught of that on this side of the river as yet, though there is sore grumbling, seeing that the tax-collectors are not content with drawing the tax from those of proper age, but often demand payments for boys and girls, who, as they might see, are still under fourteen. It happened so to-day at Dartford. One of the tax-collectors went to the house of Wat the Tyler. His wife had the money for his tax and hers, but the man insolently demanded tax for the daughter, who is but a girl of twelve; and when her mother protested that the child was two years short of the age, he offered so gross an insult to the girl that she and her mother screamed out. A neighbour ran with the news to Wat, who was at his work on the roof of a house near, and he, being full of wrath thereat, ran hastily home, and entering smote the man so heavily on the head with a hammer he carried, that he killed him on the spot.

"The collectors' knaves would have seized Wat, but the neighbours ran in and drove them from the town with blows. The whole place is in a ferment. Many have arms in their hands, and are declaring that they will submit no more to the exactions, and will fight rather than pay, for that their lives are of little value to them if they are to be ground to the earth by these leeches. The Fleming traders in the town have hidden away, for in their present humour the mob might well fall upon them and kill them."

It was against the Flemings indeed that the feelings of the country people ran highest. This tax was not, as usual, collected by the royal officers, but by men hired by the Flemish traders settled in England. The proceeds of it had been bestowed upon several young nobles, intimates of the king. These had borrowed money from the Flemings on the security of the tax; the amount that it was likely to produce had been considerably overrated, and the result was that the Flemings, finding that they would be heavy losers by the transaction, ordered their collectors to gather in as much as possible. These obeyed the instructions, rendering by their conduct the exaction of the poll-tax even more unpopular than it would have been had it been collected by the royal officers, who would have been content with the sum that could be legally demanded.

"This is serious news," Edgar said, gravely, "and I fear that much trouble may come of it. Doubtless the tax-collector misbehaved himself grossly, but his employers will take no heed of that, and will lay complaints before the king of the slaying of one of their servants and of the assault upon others by a mob of Dartford, so that ere long we shall be having a troop of men-at-arms sent hither to punish the town."

"Ay, young master, but not being of Dartford I should not care so much for that; but there are hot spirits elsewhere, and there are many who would be like to take up arms as well as the men at Dartford, and to resist all attacks; then the trouble would spread, and there is no saying how far it may grow."

"True enough, Clement; well, we may hope that when men's minds become calmer the people of Dartford will think it best to offer to pay a fine in order to escape bloodshed."

"It may be so," the man said, shaking his head, "though I doubt it. There has been too much preaching of sedition. I say not that the people have not many and real grievances, but the way to right them is not by the taking up of arms, but by petition to the crown and parliament."

He rode on, and Edgar, going in to his father, told him what he had heard from Clement.

"'Tis what I feared," Mr. Ormskirk said. "The English are a patient race, and not given, as are those of foreign nations, to sudden bursts of rage. So long as the taxation was legal they would pay, however hardly it pressed them, but when it comes to demanding money for children under the age, and to insulting them, it is pushing matters too far, and I fear with you, Edgar, that the trouble will spread. I am sorry for these people, for however loudly they may talk and however valiant they may be, they can assuredly offer but a weak resistance to a strong body of men-at-arms, and they will but make their case worse by taking up arms."

"History shows that mobs are seldom able to maintain a struggle against authority. Just at first success may attend them, but as soon as those who govern recover from their first surprise they are not long before they put down the movement. I am sorry, not only for the men themselves, but for others who, like myself, altogether disapprove of any rising. Just at first the mob may obey its leaders and act with moderation; but they are like wild beasts—the sight of blood maddens them—and if this rising should become a serious one, you will see that there will be burnings and ravagings. Heads will be smitten off, and after slaying those they consider the chief culprits, they will turn against all in a better condition than themselves."

"The last time Sir Ralph De Courcy was over here he told me that the priest they called Jack Straw and many others were, he heard, not only preaching sedition against the government, but the seizure of the goods of the wealthy, the confiscation of the estates of the monasteries, and the division of the wealth of the rich. A nice programme, and just the one that would be acceptable to men without a penny in their pockets. Sir Ralph said that he would give much if he, with half a dozen men-at-arms, could light upon a meeting of these people, when he would give them a lesson that would silence their saucy tongues for a long time to come. I told him I was glad that he had not the opportunity, for that methought it would do more harm than good. 'You won't think so,' he said, 'when there is a mob of these rascals thundering at your door, and resolved to make a bonfire of your precious manuscripts and to throw you into the midst of it.' 'I have no doubt,' I replied, 'that at such a time I should welcome the news of the arrival of you and the men-at-arms, but I have no store of goods that would attract their cupidity.' 'No,' the knight said, 'but you know that among the common people you are accounted a magician, because you are wiser than they are.'

"'I know that,' I replied; 'it is the same in all countries. The credulous mob think that a scholar, although he may spend his life in trying to make a discovery that will be of inestimable value to them, is a magician and in league with the devil. However, although not a fighting man, I may possess means of defence that are to the full as serviceable as swords and battle-axes. I have long foreseen that should trouble arise, the villagers of St. Alwyth would be like enough to raise the cry of magician, and to take that opportunity of ridding themselves of one they vaguely fear, and many months ago I made some preparations to meet such a storm and to show them that a magician is not altogether defenceless, and that the compounds in his power are well-nigh as dangerous as they believe, only not in the same way.'

"'Well, I hope that you will find it so if there is any trouble; but I recommend you, if you hear that there is any talk in the village of making an assault upon you that you send a messenger to me straightway, and you may be sure that ere an hour has passed I will be here with half a dozen stout fellows who will drive this rabble before them like sheep.'

"'I thank you much for the offer, Sir Ralph, and will bear it in mind should there be an occasion, but I think that I may be able to manage without need for bloodshed. You are a vastly more formidable enemy than I am, but I imagine that they have a greater respect for my supposed magical powers than they have for the weight of your arm, heavy though it be.'

"Perhaps it is so, my friend,' Sir Ralph said, grimly, 'for they have not felt its full weight yet, though I own that I myself would rather meet the bravest knight in battle than raise my hand against a man whom I believed to be possessed of magical powers.'

"I laughed, and said that so far as I knew no such powers existed. 'Your magicians are but chemists,' I said. 'Their object of search is the Elixir of Life or the Philosopher's Stone; they may be powerful for good, but they are assuredly powerless for evil.'

"But surely you believe in the power of sorcery?' he said. 'All men know that there are sorcerers who can command the powers of the air and bring terrible misfortunes down on those that oppose them.'

"I do not believe that there are men who possess such powers,' I said. 'There are knaves who may pretend to have such powers, but it is only to gain money from the credulous. In all my reading I have never come upon a single instance of any man who has really exercised such powers, nor do I believe that such powers exist. Men have at all times believed in portents, and even a Roman army would turn back were it on the march against an enemy, if a hare ran across the road they were following; I say not that there may not be something in such portents, though even of this I have doubts. Still, like dreams, they may be sent to warn us, but assuredly man has naught to do with their occurrence, and I would, were I not a peaceful man, draw my sword as readily against the most famous enchanter as against any other man of the same strength and skill, with his weapon.'

"I could see that the good knight was shocked at the light way in which I spoke of magicians; and, indeed, the power of superstition over men, otherwise sensible, is wonderful. However, he took his leave without saying more than that he and the men-at-arms would be ready if I sent for them."

CHAPTER III

WAT TYLER

That evening Mr. Ormskirk continued the subject of his talk of the afternoon.

"You looked surprised, Edgar, when I said that I told Sir Ralph I had made some preparations for defence, and that some of the compounds in my laboratory are as dangerous as the common people regard them, although that danger has naught to do with any magical property. You must know that many substances, while wholly innocent in themselves, are capable of dealing wide destruction when they are mixed together; for example, saltpetre, charcoal, and sulphur, which, as Friar Bacon discovered, make, when mixed together, a powder whose explosive power is well-nigh beyond belief, and which is now coming into use as a destructive agent in war. Many other compounds can be produced of explosive nature, some indeed of such powerful and sudden action that we dare not even make experiments with them.

"Many other strange things have been discovered, some of which may seem useless at present, but may, upon further experiments on their properties, turn out of value to man. Such a substance I discovered two years ago. I was experimenting upon bones, and endeavouring to ascertain whether a powder might not be procured which, when mixed with other substances, would produce unexpected results. After calcining the bones, I treated the white ash with various acids and alkaloids, and with fire and water, returning again and again to the trials when I had time. While conducting these experiments, I found that there was certainly some substance present with whose nature I was altogether unacquainted.

"One evening, going into the laboratory after dark, I observed with astonishment what looked like a lambent flame upon the table. In my alarm I ran forward to put it out, but found that there was no heat in it; lighting my lamp I could no longer see it, but on the table I found a few grains of the stuff I had been experimenting on. Turning out the lamp the light was again visible, and after much thought I concluded that it was similar to the light given by the little creatures called glowworms, and which in its turn somewhat resembles the light that can be seen at times in a pile of decaying fish. I tried many experiments, but as nothing came of them I gave them up, not seeing that any use could come of a fire that gave out no heat. I produced a powder, however, that when rubbed on any substance, became luminous in the dark, presenting an appearance strange and sufficiently alarming to the ignorant.

"Thinking the matter over some time ago, I took a little of this powder from the phial in which I had stored it away, and, moistening it, rubbed it on the wall in the form of circles, triangles, and other signs. I did this just before it became dark. As the moisture dried, these figures gradually assumed a luminous appearance. I saw the use to which this could be put in awing a mob, and, setting to work, made a large supply of this powder."

"How long does it retain its light, father?"

"That is uncertain. For some hours in a darkened room, the light gradually growing fainter, but if a bright day follows, the figures stand out on the following night as brightly as before; while if the day is dull they show up but faintly at night. I see not that any use can come of such a thing, for the light is at all times too faint to be used for reading unless the page is held quite close to it. Come downstairs with me and I will show you the head of one of the old Roman statues that was dug up near Rochester, and which I bought for a few pence last year."

They went down into the laboratory. The light was burning. "There you see, Edgar, I have painted this head with the stuff, and now you can see nothing more unusual than if it had been daubed with whitewash. Now I will extinguish the lamp."

Prepared as he was, Edgar nevertheless stepped back with an exclamation of surprise and almost awe. The head stood out in the darkness with startling distinctness. It had the effect of being bathed

in moonlight, although much more brilliant than even the light of the full moon. It seemed to him, indeed, almost as if a faint wavering light played around it, giving the stern face of the old Roman a sardonic and evil expression.

"You can touch it, Edgar, but you will see that there is not the slightest warmth."

"It is wonderful, father."

"Yes, it is a strange thing; but is, so far as I can see, of no use save as a wonder, and it is just one of those wonders that to most people would seem to be magical. I showed it a short time ago to the prior, having explained to him beforehand how I had discovered it. He is above the superstitions of folks in general, and knowing that I could have no motive in deceiving him, was much interested; but he said to me, 'This is one of the things that were best concealed. I can quite understand that there are many things in nature of which we are ignorant. I know that what you say of decayed fish sometimes giving out light like this is perfectly true, and everyone knows that the glowworms, when the weather is damp, light up the banks and fields, although no heat can be felt. Doubtless in your researches on bones you have discovered some substance akin to that which causes the light in those cases, but you would never persuade the vulgar of this.'

"Nay, there are even churchmen and prelates who would view it as magic. Therefore, my friend, seeing that, as you say, the powder is not likely to be of any use to man, I should say that it were best that you destroy it, for if whispers of it got abroad you might well be accused of dealing in magic. All knowledge of things beyond them is magic to the ignorant. Roger Bacon was treated as a magician, and I doubt not that this will ever be the case with all those who are more learned than their fellow-men. Therefore my advice to you is, burn the stuff and say naught about it.'

"I did not take his advice, Edgar, for it seemed to me that it might well be used to awe any unruly mob that might come hither at night to attack me. I have made an experiment that, though I believe not in the supernatural, would have frightened me had I seen it without knowing anything of its nature. You know that old skull that was dug up out of the garden last month, I have hung the lower jaw on wires so that it can be moved, and have to-day painted it, and now I will blow out the light again, and then take it from the cupboard."

A moment later the room was in darkness, and then an exclamation of surprise and almost terror rose from Edgar. In front of him there was a gibbering skull, the lower jaw wagging up and down, as if engaging in noiseless laughter, It was much more brilliant than the stone head had been, and a lambent flame played round it.

"What think ye of that, Edgar?"

"It is ghastly, sir, horrible!"

"It is not a pleasant object," his father said, quietly, as he struck the tinder and again lighted the lamp. "I fancy, Edgar, that if a mob of people were to break down the door and find themselves confronted by that object they would fly in terror."

"Assuredly they would, father; they would not stop running this side of Dartford. Even though I expected it, the sight sent a shiver through me, and my teeth well-nigh chattered. But this would only avail in case of a night attack."

"It would avail something even in daylight, Edgar. These downstairs rooms have but little light, and that little I intend to block up by nailing boards inside, and by hanging sacks over them outside. Then if I place the skull in the passage, those who sought me in my laboratory would be brought to a standstill. But there are other means. I have buried jars filled with Friar Bacon's powder round the house, with trains by which they can be fired. At present the common people know little of guns, and methinks that the explosion of two or three of these jars would send them about their business, I have other devices which it is not necessary to enter upon, but which would be effective, therefore you need have little fear that any mob will gain entrance here, and you may be sure that after a repulse they would be very loath to touch the place again."

"Yes, father, but they might bring accusation against you of witchcraft."

"I admit that there is that danger, but the prior here has long taken an interest in my investigations, and can testify for me that these are but scientific products, and have naught to do with magic. Besides, if there is a rising of the common people, the king and nobles will be in no mood to listen to complaints against those who have thwarted the attacks of the rioters."

"No doubt that would be so, father; still, for myself, I would rather charge them, sword in hand, with a band of stout fellows behind me."

"But we have not got the stout fellows, Edgar; and for myself, even if we had them, I would prefer to set these poor knaves running without doing harm to them rather than to slay and maim, for their attack would be made in their ignorance, and in their hatred of those above them. They have been goaded by oppression into taking up arms, and the fault rests upon others rather than upon the poor people."

The next morning, however, Edgar went round to the tenants, of whom there were fifteen. They had heard of the affair at Dartford, which was, of course, in everyone's mouth, and their sympathies were wholly with the rioters.

"I think as you do," Edgar said to one of them. "The exactions of the tax-gatherers are indeed beyond all bearing, and if the people do but rise to demand fair treatment and their just rights as men, I should wish them success; but I fear that evil counsels will carry them far beyond this, and that they may attack the houses and castles of the gentry, although these may be in no way the authors of their troubles. I am sure that my father has oppressed no one."

"That he has not, Master Edgar. He is as good a lord as one could desire. He exacts no dues beyond his rights; and indeed if there be trouble or sickness he presses no one beyond his means. We have not been called upon for service for many years, and if the Dartford men should come hither to attack him they will find that they have to reckon with us."

"That is what I have come for," Edgar said. "Should you hear of any intention to attack the well-to-do, I would have you hold yourselves in readiness to gather at the house, and to aid in its defence. My father has means of his own for discomfiting any that may come against him; but as these may fail, it would be well that there should be a body of men ready to repel an attack."

"You can rely upon us, master, but I say not that you can do so on our men. These are serfs, and their sympathies will be all with the rioters. I do not think they would fight against us, but I fear they would not venture their lives against those of their own class."

"That is more than could be expected; but if you yourselves come, it will, I think, be sufficient. I have no fear that these men will in the first place interfere with the gentry. Their first impulse will be to obtain redress for their wrongs; but they have bad advisers, and many will join them for the sake of plunder. When this once begins others will take part with them in the matter, and there is no saying what may come of it."

"Well, you can depend upon us, at any rate, master. You will have but to ring the bell and all within hearing will run, arms in hand, to defend the house, and we shall, I hope, have time enough to gather there before the mob arrives."

"I doubt not that you will. I shall engage a trusty man to go down to the town and watch what is going on, and we are sure to have notice of any such movement. But as I have said, I think not that there is any chance of their beginning in such a way; it will be only after they have encountered the troops, and blood has been shed."

Having gone the round of the tenants, Edgar rode down to Dartford. On the way he passed many men going in the same direction. Almost all of them were armed with staves, pikes, axes, or bows, and he saw that the country people had only been waiting for some act that would serve as a signal for revolt, in order to gather as their fellows in Essex had already begun to do. He found the streets of the town crowded with people; some were excited and noisy, but the mass had a serious and determined air that showed they were resolved upon going through with the work that had been

begun. In many places groups of men were assembled in open spaces, listening to the talk of others standing on tables or barrels that had been brought for the purpose.

Their speeches were all to the same point, and Edgar saw that they were the result of a previous agreement.

"Men of Kent!" one exclaimed, "the day has come when you have to prove that you are men, and not mere beasts of burden, to be trodden under foot. You all know how we are oppressed, how illegal exactions are demanded of us, and how, as soon as one is paid, some fresh tax is heaped on us. What are we? Men without a voice, men whom the government regard as merely beings from whom money is to be wrung. Nor is this all. 'Tis not enough that we must starve in order that our oppressors may roll in wealth, may scatter it lavishly as they choose, and indulge in every luxury and in every pleasure. No. The hounds sent among us to wring the last penny from us now take to insulting our wives and daughters, and at last our patience is at an end.

"We have news this morning from all the country round that the people are with us, and before long tens of thousands of the men of Kent will be in arms. Our course is resolved upon. We and the men of Essex will march on London, and woe be to those who try to bar our way. All shall be done orderly and with discretion. We war only against the government, and to obtain our rights. Already our demands have been drawn up, and unless these are granted we will not be content. These are what we ask: *first*, the total abolition of slavery for ourselves and our children for ever; *second*, the reduction of the rent of good land to 4_d. the acre; *third*, the full liberty of buying and selling like other men in fairs and markets; *fourth*, a general pardon for all past offences."

The recital of these demands was received with a shout of approval.

"This and nothing less will we be content with," he went on. "There are some of the king's advisers who had best not fall into our hands, for if they do their lives will pay the penalty for their evil deeds. But upon one thing we are determined: there shall be no plundering. Our cause is a just one, and for that we are ready to fight. But should any join us with the intention of turning this movement to their private advantage, and of plunder and robbery, we warn them that such will not be permitted, and any man caught plundering will at once be hung. They may call us rioters; they may try and persuade the king that we are disloyal subjects, though this is not the case. One thing they shall not say of us, that we are a band of robbers and thieves. By to-night we shall be joined by all true men of the neighbourhood, and will then march to Gravesend, where our fellows have already risen and are in arms; thence we go to Rochester and deliver those of our brethren who have been thrown into prison because they could not pay the unjust taxes. That done, we will go straight to London and demand from the king himself a charter granting the four points we demand. Wat the Tyler has been chosen our leader. He has struck the first blow, and as a man of courage and energy there is no fear of his betraying us, seeing that he has already put his head into a noose. Now shout for the charter, for the king, and for the commons of England."

Such was the tenor of all the speeches, and they were everywhere received with loud cheers. As Edgar rode down the main street on his way home he heard shouting, and a brawny, powerful man came along, surrounded by a mob of cheering men. He looked at Edgar steadily, and stepped in front of his horse.

"You are the son of the man at St. Alwyth," he said. "I have seen you in the streets before. What think you of what we are doing? I have heard of you attending meetings there."

"I think that you have been cruelly wronged," Edgar answered, quietly, "and that the four points that you demand are just and right. I wish you good fortune in obtaining them, and I trust that it will be done peacefully and without opposition."

"Whether peacefully or not, we are determined that they shall be obtained. If it be needful, we will burn down London and kill every man of rank who falls into our hands, and force our way into the king's presence. We will have justice!"

"If you do so you will be wrong," Edgar said, calmly; "and moreover, instead of benefiting your cause you will damage it. Your demands are just, and it will be to the interest of no man to gainsay them. Even the nobles must see that the land will gain strength were all men free and ready to bear arms in its defence; and save for the article about the price of land, as to which I am in no way a judge, I see not that any man will be a penny the poorer; but if, on the other hand, such deeds as those you speak of were committed, you would set the nobles throughout the land against you, you would defeat your own good objects, and would in the end bring destruction upon yourselves; so that instead of bettering your position you would be worse than before."

"And do you doubt," the man exclaimed, with a scowling brow, "that the commons of England could, if they wished, sweep away these accursed nobles and their followers?"

"Were the commons of England united, well armed, and disciplined, they could doubtless do so," Edgar replied, quietly. "I know not whether you are united, but certainly you are neither armed nor disciplined. We saw how little an undisciplined mass, even if well armed, can do against trained troops, when a few thousands of English soldiers defeated nigh twenty times their number at Poitiers. And I say that against a force of steel-clad knights and men-at-arms any number of men, however brave, if armed as these are, could make no stand. It would not be a battle—it would be a slaughter; therefore, while wishing you well, and admitting the full justice of your demands, I would say that it were best for your own sakes, and for the sakes of those who love you, that you should conduct yourselves peaceably, so as to show all men that no harm can arise from granting you the charter you ask for, and in giving you all the rights and privileges of free men."

There was a murmur of approval from many of those standing round. The Tyler, who had made a step forward, looked back angrily and would have spoken, but the man next to him whispered something in his ear. Without saying more he walked on, while Edgar touched his horse with his heel and proceeded on his way.

Although his father no doubt heard him ride up to the house, he did not ascend from his laboratory until his usual time, for although, since the prior had called his attention to his son's condition, he had, when not at work, done all in his power to make the boy happy, and had even given up two hours every evening to him, at all other times he was absorbed in his work to the exclusion of aught else.

"You have been down into the town?" he asked Edgar, as they seated themselves at the table.

"Yes, father; and whatever may happen afterwards, there is no fear of any trouble at present. The speeches of almost all the men were quiet and reasonable. They urged that serfdom should be abolished, free right of markets given, the price of good land to be not over four pennies an acre, that all past offences should be pardoned; beyond this they did not go. Indeed, they declared that everything must be done peacefully and in order, and that any man caught plundering should be hung forthwith. By the applause that followed, these are evidently the sentiments of the great mass of the peasants, but I fear there are some of them—Wat the Tyler at their head—who will go much farther. At present, however, they will disguise their real sentiments, but it seems to me the march on London that they threaten will be far from peaceable. In the first place, they are going to Gravesend, and, joining those gathered there, will then march to Rochester, free all those who have been thrown in prison for non-payment of the tax, and then march on London."

"It must end in disaster, Edgar; for if they obtain what they desire from the king—which they may do, seeing that his uncles are all away, and it will be difficult to raise any force of a sudden that would suffice to defeat them—what will they gain by it? Doubtless, as soon as Gloucester and Lancaster arrive in London, the charter will be annulled, and possibly the leaders of the malcontents punished for their share in the matter. Still, I say not that even so, the movement will not have done good. The nobles have enough on their hands with their own quarrels and jealousies, and seeing that the continuance of serfdom is likely to give rise to troubles that may be more serious than this hasty and ill-considered movement, they may be content to grant whatever is asked, in order to make an

end to troubles of this kind. The English are not like the peasants of other countries—so far, at least, as I have seen them. The feeling of independence is very strong among them, and there is none of the obsequious deference that the serfs in Italy and France pay to their masters."

The next morning Albert De Courcy rode into St. Alwyth.

"Why, Albert," Edgar said, as he went out to the door, on seeing him approach, "have you got a holiday to-day?"

"I have a holiday for some time, Edgar. I have received a message from my father saying that he deems it well that I should at once escort my mother and Aline to London, for he has heard of this trouble at Dartford, and as the king has asked him to remain at Court at present, he would fain have mother, Aline, and me with him. Old Hubert is to take command of the castle, and to bid the tenantry be ready to come in for its defence should trouble threaten. But this is not all; he has spoken to the king of you, praising both your swordsmanship and the benefit that I have derived from your teaching, and Richard desired him to send for you and to present you to him."

"It is kind indeed of Sir Ralph," Edgar exclaimed, warmly, "and I will assuredly take advantage of his goodness, although undeserved. This is indeed a splendid opportunity for me. When do you start?"

"We shall leave at ten. I heard as I came along that the peasants marched at daybreak this morning to Gravesend, therefore there is no fear of our crossing their path."

"I must run down and speak to my father. It is no small thing that he will allow to disturb him at his work, but methinks that he will not mind upon such an occasion."

In five minutes Mr. Ormskirk came up into the hall with Edgar.

"My son has told me, Master De Courcy, of the great kindness that your father has done to him. I would, indeed, say no word to hinder his going with you. 'Tis an opportunity the like of which may never occur to him again. It is only on account of the troubles with the peasants that he dislikes to go away at this moment, but I deem not that any trouble will come of it here; and I can myself, as he knows, cope with them should they attempt aught against this house, therefore I bade him not to let that matter enter his mind, but to prepare himself at once to ride with you up to town, so that you can rely upon his being at the castle at the hour appointed."

"Then, with your permission, I will ride off at once, Mr. Ormskirk, for I also have preparations to make, having started at once on the arrival of my father's messenger."

As soon as he had gone, Mr. Ormskirk went up to his chamber and returned in a minute or two. "Here, Edgar, is a purse with money for your needs. The first thing you must do when you reach London is to procure suitable garments for your presentation to the king. Your clothes are well enough for a country gentleman, but are in no way fit for Court. I need not say to you, do not choose over-gay colours, for I know that your tastes do not lie in that direction. I don't wish you to become a courtier, Edgar; for, though it is an excellent thing to be introduced at Court and to be known to high personages there, that is an altogether different thing from being a hanger-on of the Court. Those who do naught but bask in a king's favour are seldom men of real merit. They have to play their part and curry favour. They are looked down upon by the really great; while, should they attain a marked place in the king's favour they are regarded with jealousy and enmity, and sooner or later are sure to fall.

"You cannot but remember the fate that befell the queen's favourites when Edward threw off his tutelage and took the reins of power into his own hands. Such is ever the fate of favourites; neither nobles nor the commonalty love upstarts, and more than one will, I foresee, ere long draw upon themselves the enmity of the king's uncles and other nobles for the influence they have gained over the mind of the young king. I should wish you, then, to make as many acquaintances as you can, for none can say who may be of use to you at one time or another; but keep yourself aloof from all close intimacies. It may be that, in after years, you may find it well-nigh impossible to keep aloof from all parties in the state, but do so as long as you are able, until you can discern clearly who are true patriots and who are actuated only by their own selfish ambition, bearing in mind always that you are a simple

gentleman, desirous when an English army enters the field against a foreign foe, to play your part manfully and with honour, and to gain your reputation as a soldier and not as a frequenter of Courts."

"I will bear your instructions in mind, father, and indeed they accord with what you before said to me, and which I determined to make a guide to my conduct."

"Now you had better see to the packing of your valise. It will not be necessary for you to take many things, as you can equip yourself in London."

An hour later, Edgar, after bidding farewell to his father, mounted his horse. "I shall look to see you back again in two or three weeks at the longest," Mr. Ormskirk said; "it is better to come home, even if you go again shortly, though it may be that you will have no occasion for another visit to town for some time to come. If Sir Ralph would keep you longer it were best to make some excuse to return. I know that there are many at Court but little older than yourself, for the king, being as yet scarcely fifteen, naturally likes to surround himself with those who are not greatly older, and who have the same love for pleasure and gaiety, but such associates will do you no good, though I say not that a little of it might not be of advantage, seeing that you are somewhat more grave than is natural at your age, owing to the life that you have led here with me. Young De Courcy—although I have greatly encouraged your companionship with him, for he is a very pleasant and agreeable young gentleman—is too gentle, and lacking in high spirits, which has increased, rather than diminished, your tendency to silence, and a little companionship with more ardour would not be amiss. You must remember that a cheerful spirit that enables a man to support hardship and fatigue lightly, and to animate his soldiers by his example, is one of the most important characteristics of a leader of men."

Edgar arrived at the castle of the De Courcys a few minutes before ten. Some horses were already standing at the door. He did not go in, deeming that he might be in the way, but sent in word to Lady De Courcy that he was there and at her service. In a few minutes she came out, accompanied by her son and Aline.

"I am glad to have so good an escort, Master Ormskirk," she said, smiling; "for after what Sir Ralph told me I feel that I can safely entrust myself to your care."

"I will assuredly do my best, lady," he said, "but I trust that there will be no occasion to draw a sword. I deem that most of those who make the roads unsafe will have gone off to join the Tyler and his band, thinking that opportunities for plunder are sure to present themselves; but, at any rate, as you take, I see, two men-at-arms with you, it is unlikely that anyone will venture to molest us."

He assisted Lady De Courcy and her daughter to their saddles, and the party soon rode off, followed by the two men-at-arms.

"Do you purpose to make the journey in a single day?" Edgar asked.

"Assuredly. Aline and I are both accustomed to ride on horseback, and the journey is not too far to be done before the evening falls, especially as it will be for one day's journey only; the roads are good, the day fine, and there will be no occasion to ride at speed. Why, it is but some seventeen or eighteen miles, and you must think but poorly of our horsemanship if you think we cannot traverse such a distance."

So they travelled on, the horses sometimes going at an amble, sometimes dropping into a walk. As they proceeded they met several little parties of men hurrying along, armed with pikes, clubs, or farming implements. These passed without speaking, and seemed to be much more fearful that they might be interfered with than desirous of interfering with others.

"They are miserable-looking varlets," Dame De Courcy said, disdainfully. "Our two men-at-arms would be a match for a score of them."

"I doubt not that they would," Albert agreed, "though methinks that a blow with one of those flails would make a head ring even under a steel casque."

"I doubt whether they would think of anything but running away, Albert," Edgar said. "I am sorry for the poor fellows; they have great grievances, but I fear they are not setting about the righting of them the best way. I hope that no great ill may befall them."

"But surely these people have not your sympathy, Master Ormskirk?" Lady De Courcy said, in some surprise.

"I have seen enough of them to be sorry for them," Edgar said. "Their life is of the hardest. They live mostly on black bread, and are thankful enough when they can get enough of it. To heavily tax men such as these is to drive them to despair, and that without producing the gain expected, for it is in most cases simply impossible for them to pay the taxes demanded. It seems to me that a poll-tax is, of all others, the worst, since it takes into no account the differences of station and wealth—to the rich the impost is trifling, to the poor it is crushing. It seems to me too that it is not only wrong, but stupid, to maintain serfdom. The men and their families must be fed, and a small money payment would not add greatly to the cost of their services, and indeed would be gained in the additional value of their labour.

"When men are kept as serfs, they work as serfs—I mean to say they work unwillingly and slowly, while, had they the sense of being free, and of having the same rights as others, they would labour more cheerfully. Moreover, it would double the strength of the force that the king and his nobles could place in the field. I am not speaking upon my own judgment, but from what I have learned from my father."

They had no sudden attack to fear from lurking foes, for an act of Edward the First was still in force, by which every highway leading from one market-town to another was always to be kept clear, for two hundred feet on each side, of every ditch, tree, or bush in which a man might lurk to do harm; while, as any ill that happened to travellers was made payable by the township in which it occurred, there was a strong personal interest on the part of the inhabitants to suppress plundering bands in their neighbourhood. Both Edgar and Albert rode in partial armour, with steel caps and breast-pieces, it being an ordinance that all of gentle blood when travelling should do so, and they carried swords by their sides, and light axes at their saddle-bows.

It was but a little past three o'clock when they crossed London Bridge and then made for the Tower, near which Sir Ralph was lodged.

CHAPTER IV IN LONDON

"I am glad indeed to see you, my young swordsman," Sir Ralph, who was waiting at the door to receive them, said to Edgar after he had greeted his wife and children. "This affair at Dartford threatens to be more serious than I expected. I was on the point of starting for home when I heard of the trouble, and should have done so had not the king asked me to remain here, seeing that at present his uncles and many other nobles are absent, and that, as he was pleased to say, my advice and sword might be useful to him should the trouble grow serious. When, therefore, we received news that all that part of Kent was in a blaze, I sent out a messenger to you, dame, to come hither to me. What is the latest news?"

"Master Ormskirk can best tell you, Sir Ralph, seeing that he was himself yesterday in Dartford and learned something of their intentions."

Edgar then recounted what he had seen and heard in the streets of Dartford.

"Your account tallies with the news that came here but an hour since, namely, that a crowd of men were marching towards Rochester; a panic prevails in that town, and the wise heads have sent off this messenger, as if, forsooth, an army could be got together and sent down to their aid before these rioters reach the place."

"I am glad to come up, husband," Lady De Courcy said. "'Tis some time since I was in town, and I would fain see what people are wearing, for the fashions change so rapidly that if one is away from town six months one finds that everyone stares, as if one had come from a barbarous country."

"I was afraid of that when I wrote to you," Sir Ralph laughed, "and felt that your coming up would cause me to open my purse widely; but, indeed, in this case you are not far wrong, for there has been a great change in the fashions both of men and women in the last year. The young king is fond of brave attire, and loves to see those around him brightly arrayed, and indeed it seems to me that money is spent over-lavishly, and that it were cheaper for a man to build him a new castle than to buy him suits of new raiment for himself and his wife. The men at Court all dress in such tightly fitting garments, that, for my part, I wonder how they get into them."

"And the women, husband?"

"Oh, as to that I say nothing; you must use your own eyes in that matter. However, just at present men's thoughts are too much occupied by these troubles in Essex and Kent to think much of feasting and entertainments, and it will be well to wait to see what comes of it before deciding on making new purchases."

"Is there any chance of trouble in the city, father?" Albert asked.

"I know not, lad. The better class of citizens are assuredly opposed to those who make these troubles, although they have often shown that they can make troubles themselves when they think that their privileges are assailed; still, as they know that their booths are likely to be ransacked, were bands of rioters to obtain possession of the town, they will doubtless give us any aid in their power. But the matter does not depend upon them; there are ever in great towns a majority composed of the craftsmen, the butchers, and others, together with all the lower rabble, who are ready to join in tumults and seditions; and like enough, if the rioters come here, they will take part with them, while the burgesses will be only too glad to put up their shutters and do or say naught that would give the mob an excuse for breaking into their magazines.

"Would that Lancaster were here with a thousand or so of men-at-arms," he went on, gloomily; "there is no one at the Court who can take command. The king this morning asked me if I would undertake the defence of the palace; but I said to him: 'I am but a simple knight, your Majesty, and neither the young lords of the Court nor the citizens would pay any heed to my orders; moreover, I

am not one of those whose head is good to plan matters. I would die in your Majesty's service, and would warrant that many of your enemies would go down before I did. I could set a host in battle array, were there a host here; but as to what course to follow, or how it were best to behave at such a pinch, are matters beyond me. As to these, it were best that your Majesty took counsel with those whom the Duke of Lancaster has appointed, and to whom such business appertains.

"If you will give me orders I will carry them out, even if I am bade to defend London Bridge with but half a dozen men-at-arms, and at such work I might do as well as another; but as to counsel I have none to give, save that were I in your place I would issue a proclamation to these knaves saying that you would hold no parley with men having arms in their hands, but that if they would peacefully disperse you would order that a commission be appointed to examine into their complaints, and that any ills that proved to be justified should be righted, but that if forced you will give nothing, and that if they advance against London their blood must be on their own heads.

"Should they still come on I would shut myself up in the Tower, which has a good garrison, and where you may well hold out against all the rascaldom of the country until your barons can raise their levies and come to your assistance. Still, it may well be, your Majesty, that these fellows will think better of it, and may, after all, disperse again to their homes. I pray you, take no heed of my words, but refer the matter to those accustomed to deal with affairs of state. The noble prince, your father, knew that he could lay his orders on me, and that I would carry them out to the utmost of my strength. If he said to me, "Lead a party, Sir Ralph, to attack that bridge," I gave no thought as to whether the defences were too strong to be carried or not; or if he entrusted the command of a post to me, and said, "Defend it against all odds until I come to your assistance," he knew that it would be done, but more than that I never pretended to; and I deem not that, as I have grown older, I know more of such matters than I did when I was in the prime of my strength."

"And what said his Majesty, Sir Ralph?"

"He laughed and said that I was the first he had known who was not ready to give him advice, and that he would that all were as chary of so doing as I was. When I told him this morning that I had sent for you and my son and daughter, as I misliked leaving you in the centre of these troubles, he offered apartments in the Tower, but I said that, with his permission, I would remain lodged here, for that, seeing his lady mother was away, I thought that you would prefer this lodging, as there is here a fair garden where you and Aline can walk undisturbed, to the Tower, which is full of armed men, young gallants, and others."

"It will indeed be more pleasant, Sir Ralph, for in the Tower Aline could never venture from my side, and there would be neither peace nor quietness."

The city had already stretched beyond the walls, and on the rising ground between it and the Tower, and on the rise behind the latter, extending to some distance east, many houses had been built. Some of these were the property of nobles and officials of the Court, while others had been built by citizens who let them to persons of degree, who only came occasionally to Court on business or pleasure. The house in which Sir Ralph had taken up his lodging was the property of a trader who, when the house was not let to one needing it all, resided there himself as a protection to the property it contained against robbers or ill-doers, often letting one or more rooms to those who needed not the whole house. Thus Sir Ralph was enabled to obtain good accommodation for his family.

"The first thing to be done," he went on, "is to take the lads to a tailor's to obtain clothes more suitable than those they wear."

"I was going to ask you if you would be good enough to do so, Sir Ralph," Edgar said. "My father has furnished me with money for the purpose."

"That is well," the knight said, "though indeed it would have mattered not if he had not done so, for I had intended that you and Albert should have garments of similar fashion at my cost, seeing how much I owe to you."

"Indeed, Sir Ralph, such obligation as there is, is far more than discharged by your kindness in speaking of me to the king and offering to present me to him; indeed, I am ashamed that what was a pleasure to me, and was done from the love I bear your son, should be regarded as worthy of thanks, much less as an obligation."

"Cannot we come with you also?" Lady De Courcy said. "From what you say we must need garments to the full as much as the boys; besides, this is Aline's first visit to town. We saw but little as we rode through, and we would fain look at the shops and see the finery before I make my choice."

"So be it, wife; indeed, I had not intended that you should stay behind."

It was but a quarter of a mile's walk to Aldersgate, and as they reached East Chepe, the young people found infinite amusement in gazing at the goods in the traders' booths, and in watching the throng in the street. It was late in the afternoon now, and many of the citizens' wives and daughters were abroad. These were dressed for the most part in costly materials of sober hues, and Dame Matilda noted that a great change had taken place since she had last been in London, not only in the fashion, but in the costliness of the material; for with the death of the old king and the accession of a young one fond of gaiety and rich dresses, the spirit of extravagance had spread rapidly among all classes. With these were citizens, of whom the elder ones clung to the older fashions, while even the young men still displayed a sobriety in their costumes that contrasted strongly with the brilliancy of several groups of young courtiers. These sauntered along the streets, passing remarks upon all who passed, and casting looks of admiration at some of the pretty daughters of the citizens.

Among all these moved craftsmen and apprentices, the former taking to their employers work they had finished at home, the latter carrying messages, hurrying nimbly through the crowd, or exchanging saucy remarks with each other, for which they were sometimes sharply rebuked by their elders. From East Chepe the party passed on through Chepe to St. Paul's, and then having chosen the shop at which they could make their purchases the ladies entered a trader's booth, while Sir Ralph went in with the two lads to another hard by.

"What can I serve you with, sir knight?"

"I require two suits for my son and this gentleman, his friend," Sir Ralph said. "I desire clothes befitting a presentation to the king, and wish them to be of the fashion, but not extravagantly so."

At the trader's orders his apprentices showed numerous samples, most of them light and bright in colour.

"I want something more sober in hue," the knight said. "These are well enough for men with long purses, and who can afford ample provision of garments, but they would show every spot and stain, and would soon be past wearing; besides, although doubtless such as are mostly used at Court, they would be useful for that only, for in the country they would be far too conspicuous for wear."

Other goods were brought down, and Edgar's eye at once fixed upon a rich maroon. Sir Ralph took longer before he made his choice for Albert, but finally fixed upon a somewhat light blue, which well suited the lad's fair complexion and light golden hair. While they were choosing, the mercer had sent into his neighbour, a tailor, who now measured them. The goods were of satin, and both suits were to be made in precisely similar fashion, namely, a close-fitting tunic reaching down only to the hips. They had loose hanging sleeves, lined with white silk, which was turned over and scolloped; the hose, which were of the same colour as the doublets, were tight fitting.

The caps were to match the dresses in colour. They were turned up at the brim, resembling in shape those still worn in Spain. As the matter was pressing, the tailor promised that both suits should be ready by the following evening.

It took the ladies longer to make their purchases, and it was some time before they issued out from the mantua makers, when the dame informed her husband that she had chosen white satin for Aline's bodice, which was to be tight fitting, in the fashion, and trimmed round the bottom and neck with white fur, while the skirt was of lilac and of the same material. For herself, she had chosen a

purple robe reaching below the knees, with white skirt, both being of satin. The caps, which were closely fitting to the head, were of the same material, and of light yellow for herself and lilac for Aline.

"We shall have to economize, my lady," Sir Ralph laughed. "'Tis well that I am too old for foppery."

"That is all very well, Sir Ralph, but you must remember that you had a new suit the last time you were in London, and have not worn it from then till now, and I will warrant me that it cost well-nigh as much as Aline's garments or mine."

While waiting for the ladies, two sword-belts had been bought for the lads, Edgar's being embroidered with gold thread, Albert's with silver.

"Now, boys, I think that you will do," Sir Ralph said. "You may not be able to compete with some of those young peacocks of the Court, but you will make a sufficiently brave show, and need not feel envious of the best of them."

When the shopping was completed they returned to their lodgings. Here they partook of a meal, after which Sir Ralph went to the Tower, while his wife and daughter, fatigued by their day's journey, speedily betook themselves to their beds. The lads sat talking for some time over the events of the day.

"I fear, Edgar," Albert said, presently, "that from my father choosing for me so light a coloured suit, instead of a graver hue like that which you selected, he has hopes that I shall not go into the Church after all."

"Well, why should you, Albert? You are gaining in strength, and I doubt not that you will yet grow into a strong man. Of course as long as you were weak and delicate, and, as it seemed, would never be able to bear the weight of armour, it was but natural that he should regard a life in the Church as one that was best fitted for you, and that you yourself would be perfectly willing to follow that profession, but now it is wholly different; besides, even if at present you may not wish, as I do, to be a soldier, you may well become a wise councillor, and hold high position at Court. There are few young nobles, indeed, who have so much education as you, and surely such a life would be better than burying yourself in a cloister."

Albert was silent for some time. "Do you really think, Edgar," he said, at last, "that I shall be ever able to bear arms with credit? To become a councillor, one must needs be a courtier, and I am sure that a life at Court would suit me no better than it would suit you, therefore that thought I must put aside. My tastes are all for a quiet life in the country, and you know I could be very happy living at home as I have done from my childhood. But if I am to be in the world I must bear my part, and if needs be follow the king to battle, and unless I could do my duty manfully I would rather follow out the life I thought must be mine, and enter the Church. I should like, most of all, to be able to be always with you, Edgar, and to fight by your side. We have long been like brothers. I know that you will win rank and fame, and though I have no ambition for myself I should glory in your success, and be well content with your friendship as my share in it."

"That, you may be sure, you will always have, Albert, and as to your plan, I see not why you should not carry it out. In war time you and I could ride together, and in peace you could live at the castle, which is so close to St. Alwyth that we can ride over and visit each other daily when I am there, which mayhap would not be very often, for when England and France are at peace, and there is no trouble between us and Scotland, I may join some noble leader of free-lances in the service of an Italian or German prince. Such, when there is peace at home, is the best avenue for fame and distinction."

"I cannot say yet what I may feel as I gain strength and skill in arms, but it may be that even there I may be your companion should strength and health permit it."

"That indeed would be good—so good that I can scarce yet believe that it can be so, although there is no reason to the contrary. It has for years been a grief to me to know that our paths lay so far apart, and that the time must soon be coming when we should be separated, and for ever. It was with some faint hope that exercise might bring more colour to your cheeks, and that with strength and skill

in arms might come thoughts of another life than that of the cloister, that I first urged you to let me teach you the use of arms. That hope has grown gradually since I found how much you benefited by the exercise, and acquired a strength of arm that I had hardly hoped for.

"Moreover, Albert, you cannot but be proud of the name your father and those before him have won by their gallant deeds, but if you went into the Church it would no longer appear in the roll of the knights of England. It would be ill indeed that a line of knights, who have so well played their part on every battle-field since your ancestor came over with the Conqueror, should become extinct."

"I had never thought of that before, Edgar," Albert said, after a long pause. "You see, for years I have looked forward to entering the Church as a matter settled for me by nature. I had no enthusiasm for it, but it seemed there was no other place for me. Of late, since I have gained health and strength, I have seen that possibly it might be otherwise. At first I struggled against the idea and deemed it the suggestion of the Evil One, but it has grown in spite of me, although I never allowed myself fully to entertain it, until I saw the joy with which my father perceived that I was not altogether the weakling that he had deemed me.

"Since then I have thought of it incessantly, but until now have been unable to come to any decision. On the one hand I should please my father, and at the same time satisfy the desire that has of late sprung up for a more stirring life than that of the Church, and should be able to remain your comrade. On the other hand, I have always regarded the Church as my vocation, and did not like to go back from it, and moreover, although stronger than of old, I thought that I might never attain such health and strength as might render me a worthy knight, and feared that when tried I should be found wanting. Thus I have wavered, and knew not which way my inclinations drew me most strongly, but I never thought of what you have just said, that if I were to enter the Church our line would come to an end. However, there is no occasion definitely to settle for another year yet, but I will tell my father to-morrow that if at the end of that time he deems that I have so far continued to gain in strength that he may consider me not unworthy to represent our name in the field, I shall be ready to submit myself to his wishes, while, upon the other hand, should he think me, as before, better fitted for the Church. I will enter it at once."

"I am glad, indeed, to hear you say so, Albert. I think that there is no reason to doubt that you will continue to gain strength, and will prove worthy of your name."

Accordingly, the next morning Albert asked his father to accompany him into the garden, and there detailed to him the conversation that he had had with Edgar, and its result.

"Glad indeed am I, Albert, that this should have come about," the knight said, laying his hand on the lad's shoulder. "What your friend said to you has often been in my mind. It was a sore thought, my son. There have ever been De Courcys on the battle-roll of England since our ancestor fought at Hastings; and I might well feel grieved at the thought that it might possibly appear there no more, and the pleasure that you have given me is more than I can express. I will not allow myself to fear that, now you have made so fair a start, you will fail to gather fresh strength and vigour, and I will wager that you will bear our banner as forward in the fight as those who have gone before you.

"I blame myself deeply that I have misjudged you so long. Had I encouraged, instead of slighting, you, you might long since have begun to gain strength, and might early have commenced the exercises that are so essential to form a good knight. In future, I will do all I can to make up for lost time. As far as swordsmanship goes, you can have no better instructor than your friend. I myself will train you in knightly exercises on horseback—to vault into the saddle and to throw yourself off when a horse is going at full speed, to use your lance and carry off a ring; but I will take care not to press you beyond your strength, and not to weary you with over-long work. My effort will be to increase your store of strength and not to draw unduly upon it; and I will warrant me that if you improve as rapidly under my tuition as you have under that of Master Edgar, before a year is up I shall be able to place you in the train of some noble knight without a fear that you will prove yourself inferior to others of your own age."

Going into the house again when the morning meal was served, Sir Ralph said:

"There is bad news as to the rioters in Kent, lads. Last night I heard that a message had arrived, saying that they had entered Rochester, broken open the jail, and released not only those held there for non-payment of taxes, but malefactors; that they had been joined by the rabble of the town, had slain several notaries and lawyers, and torn up all parchments, deeds, and registers; had maltreated some of the clergy, broken open cellars and drunk the wine, and that from thence they intended to march to Maidstone and then to Canterbury, raising the country as they went."

"This should at least give us time for preparations, Sir Ralph."

"So I pointed out last night," the knight replied; "but who is to make the preparations? A proclamation was drawn up by the council, warning all to return to their homes on pain of punishment, and promising an inquiry into grievances. It is to be scattered broadcast through Kent and Essex, but it is likely to have no effect. The men know well enough that they have rendered themselves liable to punishment, and as they were ready to run that risk when they first took up arms, it is not likely that they will be frightened at the threat now when they find none to oppose them, and that their numbers grow from day to day. Seeing that time is likely to do little for us, I would rather they had marched straight on to London; they would then have arrived here in more sober mood; but now that they have begun to slay and to drink, they will get fiercer and more lawless every day, and as their numbers increase so will their demands."

Day by day more and more serious news came in. Canterbury was occupied by the rebels, and they declared their intention of slaying the archbishop, but he had left before they had arrived. There they committed many excesses, executed three rich citizens, opened the prisons, killed all lawyers, and burned all deeds and registers as they had done at Rochester, and kept the whole place in a state of terror while they remained, which they did while the stores of wine remained unexhausted.

"Why should they be so bitter against lawyers, and why should they destroy deeds and registers, father?" Albert asked.

"It can be but for one reason, Albert. The great part of them have small plots of land, an acre or two, or perhaps more, on terms of villeinage, paying so much in kind or money, and their desire is to destroy all deeds and documents in order that they may henceforth pay no rent, claiming the land for themselves, and defying those from whom they hold it to show their titles as lords of the soil. There must be some shrewd knaves among them. This Wat the Tyler and the men of the towns can care naught for such matters; but they suffer those who have an interest in the matter to do as they choose. They know that their deeds have so far committed them that they will not dare to draw back, and must follow Wat's leadership implicitly. You will see ere long that from murdering lawyers they will take to murdering lords."

"If the council here is taking no steps to summon the knights of the shire and the feudal lords to hasten hither with their levies and retainers, how do they think to arrest the course of the ill-doers?" Edgar asked.

"Their opinion is that the king has but to ride out and meet the rebels, and that they will all, on seeing him, fall on their knees and crave pardon, whereupon he will promise to redress their grievances, and they will disperse to their homes. I have no such hope. Is it likely that they will quietly go home, having once worked themselves up to fight for what they call their rights, and with the thought of taking vengeance on those they consider their enemies, and of unlimited drinking and feasting, and, on the part of some, of rich plunder in London, when they see that there is no one to prevent their taking this satisfaction? Nothing but force will avail, and though something might be done that way, it is more difficult than it looks."

"The knights of the shire could hardly raise their levies, for most of those who would be called out are already with the mob, and of the others few would venture to answer to the summons. When they returned they might find their houses burned and their families slain. You see we know not how far this fire may spread. We hear that both in Suffolk and Hertfordshire men are assembling and

parties marching away to join those of Essex. In truth, lads, the thing is far more formidable than I deemed it at first, for they say that two hundred thousand men will march on London."

"But in the French Jacquerie there were as many as that, Sir Ralph, and yet they were put down."

"They were so, but only after they had done vast damage. Besides, lad, your English villein differs from your French serf. An Englishman, of whatever rank, holds by what he considers his rights, and is ready to fight for them. Our archers have proved that the commonalty are as brave as the knights, and though badly armed, this rascaldom may fight sturdily. The French peasant has no rights, and is a chattel, that his lord may dispose of as he chooses. As long as they met with no opposition all who fell into their hands were destroyed, and the castles ravaged and plundered, the peasants behaving like a pack of mad wolves. Our fellows are of sterner stuff, and they will have a mind to fight, if it be but to show that they can fight as well as their betters. Plunder is certainly not their first object, and it is probable that whatever may be done that way will be the work of the scum of the towns, who will join them solely with that object.

"I doubt whether less than five thousand men-at-arms and archers would be able to show face to such an array as is said to be approaching, especially as there will be many archers among them who, although not to compare with those who fought at Poitiers, are yet capable of using their weapons with effect. I see no prospect of gathering such a force, and the matter is all the worse, as the rascaldom of London will be with them, and we shall have these to keep in order, as well as cope with those in the field. Besides, one must remember that in a matter like this we cannot fully depend on any force that we may gather. The archers and men-at-arms would be drawn largely from the same class as the better portion of these rioters, and would be slack in fighting against them. Certainly, those of the home counties could not be depended upon, and possibly even in the garrison of the Tower itself there may be many who cannot be trusted. The place, if well held, should stand out for months, but I am by no means sure that it will do so when the time comes. I shall certainly raise my voice against the king abiding here. He with his friends could ride away without difficulty, if he leaves before the place is beleaguered."

"I suppose you will take my mother and sister into the Tower, father, should the mob come hither?"

"That I know not, nor can I say until I see the temper of the garrison when these rioters approach."

On the day after the new clothes arrived, Sir Ralph took his son and Edgar to the castle and presented them to the king.

"This is my son, your Majesty, of whom I spoke to you. I am happy to say that I think he will some day be able to follow you to battle as I followed the noble prince your father; for he has now resolved, should his health remain good, to take up the profession of arms."

"I am glad to hear it," the young king said, "for indeed 'tis more suited to the son of a valiant knight like yourself, Sir Ralph, than that of the Church, excellent though that may be for those who have inclinations for it. He seems to me a fair young gentleman, and one whom it would please me to see often at Court."

"This, your Majesty, is Master Edgar Ormskirk, a young gentleman of good family, but his father has not, although holding more than a knight's feu, taken up that rank, his tastes being wholly turned towards learning, he being a distinguished scholar, having passed through our own university at Oxford, and those of Padua and Pisa. He is one of my most esteemed friends. Master Edgar, as I told you, is greatly skilled for his years in the use of the sword, to which he has long devoted himself with great ardour. It is to him my son is indebted for having gained health and strength, together with more skill in the sword than I had ever looked for from him. I beg to recommend him highly to your Majesty's favour, and can answer for his worth, as well as for his strength and skill."

"You could have no better recommendation, Master Ormskirk," the young king said, pleasantly, "and I trust that although your father cares not for knighthood, you will have an opportunity of gaining that honour for yourself."

"I should value it, if won fairly, your Majesty, as the greatest honour I could gain. It is not that my father holds the honour more lightly than I do, but I know that 'tis his opinion that if given merely for possession of land 'tis but an accident of birth, but that if the reward of bravery, 'tis an honour that is of the highest, and one that, were it not that his thoughts are wholly turned towards scholarship and to discovering the secrets of nature, he himself would gladly have attained."

"Methinks that he is right," the king said. "In the time when every landowner held his feu on condition of knightly service rendered whenever called upon, it was well that he should be called a knight, such being the term of military command; but now that many are allowed to provide substitutes, methinks that it is an error to give the title to stay-at-homes. I shall be glad, young sir, to see you also at Court, though, methinks," he added, with a smile, "that you have inherited some of your father's sobriety of nature, and will hold our pleasures at small price."

"I thank your Majesty for your kindness," Edgar said, bowing; "but indeed I should not presume to judge amusements as frivolous because I myself might be unused to them; but in truth two years ago I studied at the convent of St. Alwyth, and my spare time then and most of my time since has been so occupied by my exercises in arms that I have had but small opportunity for learning the ways of Courts, but I hope to do so, seeing that a good knight should bear himself as well at Court as in the field."

"You will have small opportunity now," the king said, rather dolefully. "Our royal mother is absent, and our talk is all of riots and troubles, and none seem even to think of pleasure."

After leaving the king Sir Ralph presented his son and Edgar to Sir Michael de la Pole, who held high office; Robert de Vere, one of the king's special favourites; and several other young nobles, who all received them kindly for the sake of Sir Ralph.

CHAPTER V

A RESCUE

"Perhaps, boys, you could hardly have been introduced at Court better than by myself," the knight said, as they returned to the lodgings. "There are men much more highly placed, many more influential than I am, but for that very reason I can be friends with all. The king's mother is always most courteous to me, because I was the friend of the Black Prince, her husband; and she has taught her son that, whatever might come, he could rely upon my fidelity to his person. On the other hand, no one has reason either to dislike or fear me. I am a simple knight, longing most to be at home, and at the Court as seldom as may be; besides, I hold myself aloof from both parties in the state, for you must know that the Court is composed of two factions.

"The one is that of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, uncle of the king. He is greatly ambitious; some men even say that he would fain himself be king, but this I believe not; yet I am sure that he would like to rule in the name of the king. He has a powerful party, having with him the Duke of Gloucester, his brother, and other great nobles. On the other hand, he is ill-liked by the people, and they say at Canterbury the rioters made every man they met swear to obey the king and commons—by which they meant themselves—never to accept a king bearing the name of John, and to oppose Lancaster and Gloucester.

"The king's mother has surrounded him with a number of men who, being for the most part of obscure birth, have no sympathy with John of Gaunt's faction, and oppose it in every way.

"Doubtless the majority of these are well fitted for the office that they hold, but unfortunately there are some amongst them, for the most part young and with pleasant manners and handsome faces, whom the king makes his favourites. This again is well-nigh as bad as that John of Gaunt should have all the power in his own hands, for the people love not king's favourites, and although the rabble at present talk much of all men being equal, and rail against the nobles, yet at bottom the English people are inclined towards those of good birth, and a king's favourite is all the more detested if he lacks this quality. England, however, would not fare badly were John of Gaunt its master; he is a great warrior, and well-nigh equal in bravery to the Black Prince. It is true that he is haughty and arrogant; but upon the other hand, he is prudent and sagacious, and although he might rule England harshly, he would rule it wisely.

"However, I hold myself aloof altogether from state matters, and I trust that you will strive to do so. I would fain see the king take all power into his own hands as soon as he gets somewhat older; but if he must be ruled, I would prefer that it was by a great Englishman of royal blood rather than by favourites, whose only merits are a fair face, a gallant manner, and a smooth tongue, and who are sure not only to become unpopular themselves, but to render the king himself unpopular. It is for this reason that I journey so seldom to London, and desire that you should also hold yourself aloof from the Court. I could not be here without taking one side or the other. It cannot be long, however, before the king becomes impatient of his tutelage by the dukes, and we shall then see how matters go.

"It will be time enough then for you to frequent the Court, though it were better even then that you should do as I did, and leave such matters to those whom it concerns and content yourself with doing service to England in the field. From my friendship for the Black Prince I, of course, know John of Gaunt well, and should there be, as seems likely, fierce fighting in France or in Spain—for, as you know, the duke has a claim to the crown of Castile—I will cross the water with you and present you to the duke, and place you in the train of some of his knights, comrades of mine, but who are still young enough to keep the field, while I shall only take up arms again in the event of the king leading another great army into France."

The two friends spent much of their time in wandering about the streets of London. To them all seemed peaceable and orderly; indeed, they kept in the main thoroughfares where the better class of citizens were to be seen, and knew little of those who lived in the lower haunts, issuing out seldom in the daylight, but making the streets a danger for peaceable folks after nightfall.

Upon one occasion, however, they took boat at Westminster and were rowed to Richmond. They had ill-chosen the occasion, knowing nothing of the hours of the tide, and so returned against it. It was therefore eight o'clock when they reached the Stairs, and already growing dark. They knew that orders had been given that the gates were to be closed to all at eight, lest some of the great bodies of rioters should approach suddenly and enter the city.

The watermen, wearied by their long row, refused to carry them any further. There was nothing for it but to walk round the walls and so return to their lodging. The moon was shining brightly, and it seemed to them as they started that it would be a pleasant walk. They followed the Strand, where on the right stood many houses of the nobles, and the great palace of John of Gaunt at the Savoy, in which, after the battle of Poitiers, the captive king of France had been lodged.

Turning off to the left some short distance before they reached the city wall, they held their way round the north side of the city. London had already overflowed its boundary, and although in some places fields still stretched up to the foot of the walls, in others, especially where the roads led from the gates, a large population had established themselves. These were principally of a poorer class, who not only saved rent from being outside the boundary of the city, but were free from the somewhat strict surveillance exercised by its authorities.

They were just crossing the road leading north from Aldersgate when they heard a scream and a clashing of swords a short distance away.

"Come, Albert, some evil deed is being done!" Edgar exclaimed, and, drawing his sword, ran at the top of his speed in the direction of the sound, accompanied by Albert. They soon arrived at the top of a street leading off the main road. A short distance down it a number of men were engaged in conflict; two of these, hearing the footsteps, turned round, and with a savage oath, seeing that the new-comers were but lads, fell upon them, thinking to cut them down without difficulty. Their over-confidence proved their ruin. Edgar caught the descending blow on his sword, close up to the hilt, and as his opponent raised his arm to repeat the stroke, ran him through the body.

"Do you want help, Albert?" Edgar cried, as the man fell.

"No, I think that I can manage him," Albert said, quietly, and a moment later slashed his opponent deeply across the cheek. The fellow turned and took to his heels, roaring lustily. One of the other men, who was stooping over a prostrate figure, with his dagger raised, paused for a moment to look round on hearing the howl of his comrade, and as he did so Edgar's sword fell on his wrist with such force that hand and dagger both fell to the ground. The remaining ruffian, who was roughly endeavouring to stifle the shrieks of a young girl, seeing himself alone with two adversaries, also darted off and plunged into a narrow alley a few yards away.

Edgar paid no more attention to them, but exclaimed to the girl: "Cease your cries, I pray you, maiden, and help me to see what has happened to your companion. I trust that he is unharmed, and that we have arrived in time to prevent those villains from carrying out their intentions." He stooped over the fallen man. "Are you hurt badly, sir?" he asked. The answer was an effort on the part of the person he addressed to rise.

"I am hurt, but I think not sorely." He was unable for the moment to rise, for the man whom Edgar last struck lay across him. Edgar at once hauled the moaning wretch off him, and held out his hand to the other, who grasped it with more heartiness than he had expected, and rose without difficulty to his feet.

"Where is my daughter?" he exclaimed.

"She is here and unhurt, I trust," Albert replied. "The villain released her and ran off, and I saw her figure sway, and ran forward just in time to save her from falling. I think she has but swooned."

"Thanks be to the saints!" the stranger exclaimed. "Gentlemen, I cannot thank you at present for the service that you have rendered me, but of that I will speak later. Know you any place where you can take my child?"

"We are strangers, sir; but there should surely be some hostelry near where travellers could put up outside the walls."

The noise of the combat had aroused some of the neighbours, and on inquiry Edgar ascertained that there was an inn but a short distance away.

"Let me carry the maid, Albert. Her weight would be naught to me."

Albert gladly relinquished his charge, whose dead weight hanging on his arms was already trying him. Edgar raised her across his shoulder.

"Albert," he said, "I know you have a piece of thin cord in your pocket. I pray you twist it round that man's arm as hard as you can pull it, and fasten it tightly. I have shorn off his hand, and he would very speedily bleed to death. If you staunch the wound he may last till his comrades come back, as they doubtless will after we have left; they will carry him away and maybe save his life. He is a villainous ruffian, no doubt, but 'tis enough for me that I have one death on my hands to-night."

"He is dead already," Albert said, as he leant over the man and placed his hand on his heart. "He must have been wounded by the traveller before we came up."

"Well, it cannot be helped," Edgar replied, as he walked on with his burden.

"Did you see aught, kind sirs," their companion said, "of a servitor with three horses?"

"Nothing whatever," Albert answered, "though methought I heard horses' hoofs going down the road as we ran along; but I paid small attention to them, thinking only of arriving in time to save someone from being maltreated."

"I believe that he was in league with the robbers," the man said. "But," and his voice faltered, "give me your arm, I pray you. My wound is deeper than I thought, and my head swims."

Albert with difficulty assisted the man to the entrance of the hostelry, for at each step he leant more heavily upon him. The door was shut, but the light from the casement showed that those within had not yet retired to bed. Edgar struck on the door loudly with the handle of his dagger.

"Who is it that knocks?"

"Gentlemen, with a wounded man, who, with his daughter, have been beset by knaves within a hundred yards of your door."

Some bolts were undrawn after some little delay, and a man appeared, having a sword in his hand, with two servitors behind him similarly armed.

"We are quiet people, my host," Edgar said. "Stand not on questioning. Suffice that there is a wounded man who is spent from loss of blood, and a young maid who has swooned from terror."

There was a tone of command in Edgar's voice, and the host, seeing that he had to do with persons of quality, murmured excuses on the ground that the neighbourhood was a rough one.

"You need hardly have told us that," Edgar said. "Our plight speaks for itself. Call your wife, I pray you, or female servants; they will know what to do to bring the young maid to herself. But tell her to let the girl know as soon as she opens her eyes that her father is alive, and is, I trust, not seriously wounded."

The landlord called, and a buxom woman came out from a room behind. Her husband hastily told her what was required.

"Carry her in here, sir, I pray you," the woman said. "I will speedily bring her round."

Edgar followed her into the room that she had left, which was a kitchen, and laid her down on a settle. Two maids who were standing there uttered exclamations of surprise and pity as the girl was carried in.

"Hold your tongues, wenches, and do not make a noise! Margaret, fetch me cold water, and do you, Elizabeth, help me to unlace the young lady's bodice," for the light in the kitchen enabled her to see at once that the girl was well dressed.

As soon as Edgar had laid her down, he hurried out of the kitchen, moving his arm uneasily as he did so, having discovered to his surprise that the weight of an insensible girl, though but some fourteen years old, was much more than he had dreamt of. In a parlour in front he found Albert and the landlord cutting off the doublet of the wounded man, so as to get at his shoulder, where a great patch of blood showed the location of the wound. He was some forty years old; his dress was quiet but of good quality, and Edgar judged him to be a London trader. His face was very white, but he was perfectly sensible. One of the servitors ran in with a cup of wine. The wounded man was able to lift it to his lips and to empty it at a draught.

"That is better!" he murmured, and then he did not speak again until the landlord, with considerable skill, bandaged up the shoulder.

"You have had a narrow escape," he said. "There is a sword-thrust just below your collar-bone. An inch or two lower and it would have gone hard with you; a little more to the left and it would have pierced your throat."

"It was a dagger wound," the man said. "I was knocked down by a blow from a sword which fell full on my head, but luckily I had iron hoops in my cap. One man knelt upon me, and endeavoured to strike me through the throat. I fought so hard that one of his comrades came to his assistance, and I thought that the end had come, when he sprung suddenly up. The other attempted more furiously than before to finish me, but striking almost blindly he twice missed me altogether, and the third time, by a sudden twist, I took a blow on my shoulder that would otherwise have pierced my throat. When he raised his dagger again something flashed. I saw his hand with the dagger he held in it drop off, and then the man himself fell on me, and I was like to be stifled with his weight, when my preserver hauled him off me."

"It were best not to talk further," the landlord said. "I have rooms fortunately vacant, and it were well that you retired at once."

"I will do that as soon as you have given me something to eat, landlord. Anything will do, but I am grievously hungry."

"I have a cold capon in the house," the landlord said.

"You will have to cater for three, for doubtless these gentlemen need supper as much as I do."

"I thank you, sir, but we are very late already, and our friends will have become alarmed; therefore, with your leave, we will, as soon as we hear that your daughter has recovered, go on our way."

"That I can tell you at once," the landlady said, entering. "Your daughter has recovered, sir, and would come to you, but I begged her to wait until my husband had done dressing your wound."

"Then we will say good-night, sir. We will call to-morrow morning to see how you are getting on," and without waiting for further words, they at once went out and continued their way at a brisk pace.

"Let me congratulate you, Albert," Edgar said, warmly. "In good faith no old soldier could have been cooler than you were. You spoke as quietly as if it were a lesson that you had to finish before starting for home, instead of a villainous cut-throat to put an end to. What did you do to him?"

"I but laid his cheek open, Edgar, and that at once let out his blood and his courage, and he ran off bellowing like a bull. He knew naught of swordsmanship, as I felt directly our blades crossed. I knew that I had but to guard a sweeping blow or two, and that I should then find an opening; but you of course did much better, for you killed two of the villains."

"I did it hastily and with scarce a thought," Edgar said. "My eye caught the flash of the dagger, and I knew that if the man was to be saved at all there was not a moment to lose; I therefore parried the first blow he dealt me, and ran him through with my return. Then I had just time to chop the other villain's hand off as he was about to repeat his stroke. The ruffian you wounded caused the other to look round and pause for a moment. Had it been otherwise the traveller would have been a dead man

before I had time to strike. I wonder who the wounded man is? He looked like a London trader. I wonder how he got into so sore a plight? But, doubtless, we shall hear in the morning."

The episode had taken only a few minutes, but it was nigh half-past nine before they reached home.

"What freak is this?" Sir Ralph said, angrily, when they entered. "Your mother has been anxious about you for the last two hours, and I myself was beginning to think that some ill must have befallen you. Why, what has happened to you, Albert, there is blood on your doublet?"

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