HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

AT AGINCOURT

George Henty
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Содержание

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PREFACE

The long and bloody feud between the houses of Orleans and Burgundy—which for many years devastated France, caused a prodigious destruction of life and property, and was not even relaxed in the presence of a common enemy—is very fully recorded in the pages of Monstrellet and other contemporary historians. I have here only attempted to relate the events of the early portion of the struggle—from its commencement up to the astonishing victory of Agincourt, won by a handful of Englishmen over the chivalry of France. Here the two factions, with the exception of the Duke of Burgundy himself, laid aside their differences for the moment, only to renew them while France still lay prostrate at the feet of the English conqueror.

At this distance of time, even with all the records at one's disposal, it is difficult to say which party was most to blame in this disastrous civil war, a war which did more to cripple the power of France than was ever accomplished by English arms. Unquestionably Burgundy was the first to enter upon the struggle, but the terrible vengeance taken by the Armagnacs,—as the Orleanists came to be called,—for the murders committed by

the mob of Paris in alliance with him, was of almost unexampled atrocity in civil war, and was mainly responsible for the terrible acts of cruelty afterwards perpetrated upon each other by both parties. I hope some day to devote another volume to the story of this desperate and unnatural struggle.

G. A. HENTY.

CHAPTER I – A FEUDAL CASTLE

"And is it true that our lord and lady sail next week for their estate in France?"

"Ay, it is true enough, and more is the pity; it was a sad day for us all when the king gave the hand of his ward, our lady, to this baron of Artois."

"They say she was willing enough, Peter."

"Ay, ay, all say she loved him, and, being a favourite with the queen, she got her to ask the king to accede to the knight's suit; and no wonder, he is as proper a man as eyes can want to look on—tall and stately, and they say brave. His father and grandfather both were Edward's men, and held their castle for us; his father was a great friend of the Black Prince, and he, too, took a wife from England. Since then things have not gone well with us in France, and they say that our lord has had difficulty in keeping clear of the quarrels that are always going on out there between the great French lords; and, seeing that we have but little power in Artois, he has to hold himself discreetly, and to keep aloof as far as he can from the strife there, and bide his time until the king sends an army to win back his own again. But I doubt not that, although our lady's wishes and the queen's favour may have gone some way with him, the king thought more of the advantage of keeping this French noble,—whose fathers have always been faithful vassals of the crown, and who was himself English on his

mother's side,—faithful to us, ready for the time when the royal banner will flutter in the wind again, and blood will flow as it did at Cressy and Poitiers.

"The example of a good knight like Sir Eustace taking the field for us with his retainers might lead others to follow his example; besides, there were several suitors for our lady's hand, and, by giving her to this French baron, there would be less offence and heart-burning than if he had chosen one among her English suitors. And, indeed, I know not that we have suffered much from its being so; it is true that our lord and lady live much on their estates abroad, but at least they are here part of their time, and their castellan does not press us more heavily during their absence than does our lord when at home."

"He is a goodly knight, is Sir Aylmer, a just man and kindly, and, being a cousin of our lady's, they do wisely and well in placing all things in his hands during their absence."

"Ay, we have nought to grumble at, for we might have done worse if we had had an English lord for our master, who might have called us into the field when he chose, and have pressed us to the utmost of his rights whenever he needed money."

The speakers were a man and woman, who were standing looking on at a party of men practising at the butts on the village green at Summerley, one of the hamlets on the estates of Sir Eustace de Villeroy, in Hampshire.

"Well shot!" the man exclaimed, as an archer pierced a white wand at a distance of eighty yards. "They are good shots all, and

if our lord and lady have fears of troubles in France, they do right well in taking a band of rare archers with them. There are but five-and-twenty of them, but they are all of the best. When they offered prizes here a month since for the bowmen of Hants and Sussex and Dorset, methought they had some good reason why they should give such high prizes as to bring hither the best men from all three counties, and we were all proud that four of our own men should have held their own so well in such company, and especially that Tom, the miller's son, should have beaten the best of them. He is captain of the band, you know, but almost all the others shoot nigh as well; there is not one of them who cannot send an arrow straight into the face of a foe at a hundred and twenty yards. There were some others as good who would fain have been of the party, but our lady said she would take no married men, and she was right. They go for five years certain, and methinks a man fights all the better when he knows there is no one in England praying for his return, and that if he falls, there is no widow or children to bewail his loss. There are as many stout men-at-arms going too; so the Castle of Villeroy will be a hard nut for anyone to crack, for I hear they can put a hundred and fifty of their vassals there in the field."

"We shall miss Sir Aylmer's son Guy," the woman said; "he is ever down at the village green when there are sports going on. There is not one of his age who can send an arrow so straight to the mark, and not many of the men; and he can hold his own with a quarter-staff too."

"Ay, dame; he is a stout lad, and a hearty one. They say that at the castle he is ever practising with arms, and that though scarce sixteen he can wield a sword and heavy battle-axe as well as any man-at-arms there."

"He is gentle too," the woman said. "Since his mother's death he often comes down with wine and other goodies if anyone is ill, and he speaks as softly as a girl. There is not one on the estate but has a good word for him, nor doubts that he will grow up as worthy a knight as his father, though gentler perhaps in his manner, and less grave in face, for he was ever a merry lad. Since the death of his lady mother two years ago he has gone about sadly, still of late he has gotten over his loss somewhat, and he can laugh heartily again. I wonder his father can bear to part with him."

"Sir Eustace knows well enough that he cannot always keep the boy by his side, dame; and that if a falcon is to soar well, he must try his wings early. He goes as page, does he not?"

"Ay, but more, methinks, as companion to young Henry, who has, they say, been sickly from a child, and, though better now, has scarce the making of a stalwart knight in him. His young brother Charles is a sturdy little chap, and bids fair to take after his father; and little Lady Agnes, who comes between them, is full of fire and spirit.

"Yes; methinks Guy will have a pleasant time of it out there; that is, if there are no fresh troubles. I doubt not that in two or three years he will be one of our lord's esquires, and if he has a

chance of displaying his courage and skill, may be back among us a dubbed knight before many years have passed over our heads. France is a rare place for gaining honours, and so it may well be, for I see not that we gain much else by our king's possessions there."

"There was plenty of spoil brought over, dame, after Cressy and Poitiers."

"Ay, but it soon goes; easy come, easy go, you know; and though they say that each man that fought there brought home a goodly share of spoil, I will warrant me the best part went down their throats ere many months had passed."

"'Tis ever so, dame; but I agree with you, and deem that it would be better for England if we did not hold a foot of ground in France, and if English kings and nobles were content to live quietly among their people. We have spent more money than ever we made in these wars, and even were our kings to become indeed, as they claim, kings of France as well as England, the ill would be much greater, as far as I can see, for us all. Still there may be things, dame, that we country folks don't understand, and I suppose that it must be so, else Parliament would not be so willing to vote money always when the kings want it for wars with France. The wars in France don't affect us as much as those with Scotland and Wales. When our kings go to France to fight they take with them only such as are willing to go, men-at-arms and archers; but when we have troubles such as took place but five or six years ago, when Douglas and Percy and the Welsh all joined

against us, then the lords call out their vassals and the sheriffs the militia of the county, and we have to go to fight willy-nilly. Our lord had a hundred of us with him to fight for the king at Shrewsbury. Nigh thirty never came back again. That is worse than the French wars, dame."

"Don't I know it, for wasn't my second boy one of those who never came back. Ay, ay, they had better be fighting in France, perhaps, for that lets out the hot blood that might otherwise bring on fighting at home."

"That is so, dame, things are all for the best, though one does not always see it."

A week later all the tenantry gathered in front of the castle to wish God-speed to their lord and lady, and to watch the following by which they were accompanied. First there passed half a dozen mounted men-at-arms, who were to accompany the party but half a day's march and then to return with Sir Aylmer. Next to these rode Sir Eustace and Lady Margaret, still a beautiful woman, a worthy mate of her noble-looking husband. On her other side rode Sir Aylmer; then came John Harpen, Sir Eustace's esquire; beside whom trotted Agnes, a bright, merry-faced girl of twelve. Guy rode with the two boys; then came twenty-four men-at-arms, many of whom had fought well and stoutly at Shrewsbury; while Tom, the miller's son, or, as he was generally called, Long Tom, strode along at the head of twenty-four bowmen, each of whom carried the long English bow and quiver full of cloth-yard arrows, and, in addition, a heavy axe at

his leathern girdle.

Behind these were some servitors leading horses carrying provisions for the journey, and valises with the clothes of Sir Eustace, his wife, and children, and a heavy cart drawn by four strong horses with the bundles of extra garments for the men-at-arms and archers, and several large sheaves of spare arrows. The men-at-arms wore iron caps, as also breast and back pieces. On the shoulders and arms of their leathern jerkins iron rings were sewn thickly, forming a sort of chain armour, while permitting perfect freedom of the limbs. The archers also wore steel caps, which, like those of the men-at-arms, came low down on the neck and temples. They had on tough leathern frocks, girded in at the waist, and falling to the knee; some of them had also iron rings sewn on the shoulders. English archers were often clad in green cloth, but Sir Eustace had furnished the garments, and had chosen leather, both as being far more durable, and as offering a certain amount of defence.

The frocks were sleeveless, and each man wore cloth sleeves of a colour according to his fancy. The band was in all respects a well-appointed one. As Sir Eustace wished to avoid exciting comment among his neighbours, he had abstained from taking a larger body of men; and it was partly for this reason that he had decided not to dress the archers in green. But every man had been carefully picked; the men-at-arms were all powerful fellows who had seen service; the archers were little inferior in physique, for strength as well as skill was required in archery, and in choosing

the men Sir Eustace had, when there was no great difference in point of skill, selected the most powerful among those who were willing to take service with him.

Guy enjoyed the two days' ride to Southampton greatly. It was the first time that he had been away from home, and his spirits were high at thus starting on a career that would, he hoped, bring him fame and honour. Henry and his brother and sister were also in good glee, although the journey was no novelty to them, for they had made it twice previously. Beyond liking change, as was natural at their age, they cared not whether they were at their English or at their French home, as they spoke both languages with equal fluency, and their life at one castle differed but little from that at the other.

Embarking at Portsmouth in a ship that was carrying military stores to Calais, they coasted along the shores of Sussex and of Kent as far as Dungeness, and then made across to Calais. It was early in April, the weather was exceptionally favourable, and they encountered no rough seas whatever. On the way Sir Eustace related to Guy and his sons the events that had taken place in France, and had led up to the civil war that was raging so furiously there.

"In 1392, the King of France being seized with madness, the Dukes of Burgundy and Orleans in a very short time wrested the power of the state from the hands of his faithful councillors, the Constable de Clisson, La Riviere, and others. De Clisson retired to his estate and castle at Montelhery, the two others were

seized and thrown into prison. De Clisson was prosecuted before Parliament as a false and wicked traitor; but the king, acting on the advice of Orleans, who had not then broken with the Dukes of Burgundy and Berri, had, after La Riviere and another had been in prison for a year, stopped the prosecution, and restored their estates to them. Until 1402 the Dukes of Burgundy and Berri were all-powerful, and in 1396 a great number of knights and nobles, led by John, Count of Nevers, the eldest son of the Duke of Burgundy, went to the assistance of the King of Hungary, which country was being invaded by the Turks. They were, however, on the 28th of September, utterly defeated. The greater portion of them were killed; Nevers and the rest were ransomed and brought home.

"In 1402 the king, influenced by his wife, Isobel, and his brother, the Duke of Orleans, who were on terms of the closest alliance, placed the entire government in the hands of the latter, who at once began to abuse it to such an extent, by imposing enormous taxes upon the clergy and the people, that he paved the way for the return of his uncle of Burgundy to power. On the 27th of April, 1404, Philip the Bold of Burgundy died. He was undoubtedly ambitious, but he was also valiant and able, and he had the good of France at heart. He was succeeded by his son John, called the Fearless, from the bravery that he had displayed in the unfortunate Hungarian campaign. The change was disastrous for France. John was violent and utterly unscrupulous, and capable of any deed to gratify either his

passions, jealousies, or hatreds. At first he cloaked his designs against Orleans by an appearance of friendship, paid him a visit at his castle near Vincennes, where he was at the time lying ill. When he recovered, the two princes went to mass together, dined at their uncle's, the Duke of Berri, and together entered Paris; and the Parisians fondly hoped that there was an end of the rivalry that had done so much harm. It was, however, but a very short time afterwards that, on the 23d of November, 1407, as the Duke of Orleans was returning from having dined with the queen, and was riding with only two esquires and four or five men on foot carrying torches, twenty armed men sprang out from behind a house and rushed upon him.

"'I am the Duke of Orleans,' the prince cried; but they hurled him from his mule, and as he tried to rise to his feet one blow struck off the hand he raised to protect his head, other blows rained down upon him from axe and sword, and in less than a minute the duke lay dead. The Duke of Burgundy at first affected grief and indignation, but at the council the next day he boldly avowed that Orleans had been killed by his orders. He at once took horse and rode to the frontier of Flanders, which he reached safely, though hotly chased by a party of the Duke of Orleans' knights. The duke's widow, who was in the country at the time, hastened up to Paris with her children, and appealed for justice to the king, who declared that he regarded the deed done to his brother as done to himself. The Dukes of Berri and Bourbon, the Constable and Chancellor, all assured her that she should have

justice; but there was no force that could hope to cope with that which Burgundy could bring into the field, and when, two months later, Burgundy entered Paris at the head of a thousand men-at-arms, no attempt was made at resistance, and the murderer was received with acclamations by the fickle populace.

"The king at the time was suffering from one of his terrible fits of insanity, but a great assembly was held, at which princes, councillors, lords, doctors of law, and prominent citizens were present. A monk of the Cordeliers, named John Petit, then spoke for five hours in justification of the duke, and the result was that the poor insane king was induced to sign letters cancelling the penalty of the crime. For four months the duke remained absolute master of Paris, disposing of all posts and honours, and sparing no efforts to render himself popular with the burghers. A serious rebellion breaking out at Liege, and the troops sent against the town being repulsed, he was obliged to leave Paris to put down the revolt. As soon as he had left, the queen and the partisans of Orleans prepared to take advantage of his absence, and two months later Queen Isobel marched with the dauphin, now some thirteen years old, from Melun with three thousand men.

"The Parisians received her with applause, and as soon as she had taken up her quarters at the Louvre, the Dukes of Berri, Bourbon, and Brittany, the Constable, and all the great officers of the court rallied round her. Two days later the Duchess of Orleans arrived with a long train of mourning coaches. A great

assembly was held, and the king's advocate announced to them the intention of the king to confer the government upon the queen during his illness, and produced a document signed by the king to that effect. The Duchess of Orleans then came forward, and kneeling before the dauphin, begged for justice for the death of her husband, and that she might be granted an opportunity of refuting the calumnies that John Petit had heaped on the memory of her husband. A week later another great assembly was held, and the justification of the duke was read, refuting all these imputations, and the duchess's advocate demanded that the duke should be forced to make public reparation, and then to be exiled for twenty years. The dauphin replied that he and all the princes of blood royal present held that the charges against the Duke of Orleans had been amply refuted, and that the demands with reference to the Duke of Burgundy should be provided for in course of justice.

"Scarcely had the assembly broken up when it became known that Burgundy and his army was on the way back to Paris. Resistance was out of the question; therefore, taking the young dauphin with her, and accompanied by all the members of the royal family, the queen retired to Tours. Burgundy, unscrupulous as he was, finding that although he might remain master of Paris, he could not hope to rule France, except when acting under the pretence of the king's authority, soon sent an embassy to Tours to endeavour to arrange matters. He was able to effect this with the less difficulty, that the Duchess of Orleans had just died from

grief at her husband's death, and at the hopelessness of obtaining vengeance on his murderer. The queen was won to the cause of Burgundy by secret proposals submitted to her for a close league between them, and in March a treaty was concluded, and a meeting took place at Chartres, at which the duke, the king, the queen, the royal princes, and the young Duke of Orleans and his adherents were present.

"The king declared that he pardoned the duke, and the princes of Orleans consented to obey his orders and to lay aside all hatred and thoughts of vengeance, and shortly afterwards Paris welcomed with shouts of joy the return of the king and queen and the apparent reconciliation of all parties. But the truce was a brief one; for the princes and adherents of Orleans might bend before circumstances at the moment, but their feelings were unchanged.

"A head of the party was needed, and the young duke married the daughter of Count Bernard d'Armagnac, one of the most powerful and ambitious nobles of the south of France, who at once,—in concert with the Dukes of Berri and Brittany and other lords,—put himself at the head of the Orleans party. On the 10th of July, 1411, the three princes of Orleans sent a long letter to the king, complaining that no reparation whatever had been made for the murder of their father, and begging him that, as what was done at Chartres was contrary to every principle of law, equity, reason, and justice, the case should be reopened again. They also made complaints against the Duke of Burgundy for his conduct and abuse of power.

"As the king was surrounded by Burgundy's creatures no favourable reply was returned, and a formal challenge or declaration of war was, on the 18th of July, sent by the princes to the Duke of Burgundy, and both parties began at once to make preparation for war.

"Now for my own view of this quarrel. King Henry sent for me a year since, and asked for whom I should hold my castle if Orleans and Burgundy came to blows, adding that Burgundy would be viewed by him with most favour.

"'My father and grandfather ever fought faithfully in the service of England,' I said; 'but for years past now, the line betwixt your majesty's possessions and those of France has been drawn in, and my estates and Castle of Villeroy now lie beyond the line, and I am therefore a vassal of France as well as of your majesty. It being known to all men that even before I became Lord of Summerley, on my marriage with your majesty's ward, Mistress Margaret, I, like my father, held myself to be the liege man of the King of England. I am therefore viewed with much hostility by my neighbours, and right gladly would they seize upon any excuse to lay complaint against me before the king, in order that I might be deprived of my fief and castle.

"'This I would fain hold always for your majesty; and, seeing how it is situated but a few miles across the frontier, it is, I would humbly submit to you, of importance to your majesty that it should be held by one faithful to you—since its possession in the hands of an enemy would greatly hinder any English army

marching out from Calais to the invasion of France. It is a place of some strength now; but were it in French hands it might be made very much stronger, and would cost much time and loss of men to besiege. At present your majesty is in alliance with Burgundy, but none can say how the war will go, or what changes will take place; and should the Orleanists gain the upper hand, they will be quick to take advantage of my having fought for Burgundy, and would confiscate my estates and hand them over to one who might be hostile to England, and pledged to make the castle a stronghold that would greatly hinder and bar the advance of an English army upon Paris. Therefore, Sire, I would, not for my own sake but for the sake of your majesty's self and your successors, pray you to let me for a while remain quietly at Summerley until the course of events in France is determined.'

"The king was pleased to see the force of what I urged. As far as I had inclinations in the case, they were towards the cause, not of Burgundy himself, whose murder of Orleans was alike treacherous and indefensible, but of his cause, seeing that Flanders is wholly under his authority, and that in Artois he is well-nigh paramount at present. On the other hand, Amiens and Ponthieu, which lie but a short distance to the south of me, are strongly Orleanist, and I have therefore every motive for standing aloof. So far the fortune of war has been so changeable that one cannot say that the chances incline towards one faction more than the other. Even the Church has failed to bring about the end of the troubles. The Orleanists have been formally placed

under interdicts, and cursed by book, bell, and candle. The king's commands have been laid upon all to put aside their quarrels, but both the ban of the Church and the king's commands have been ineffectual. I am as anxious as ever to abstain from taking any part in the trouble, the more so as the alliance between our king and Burgundy has cooled somewhat. But I have received such urgent prayers from my vassals at Villeroy to come among them, since they are now being plundered by both parties, that I feel it is time for me to take up my abode there. When the king stayed at Winchester, a month since, I laid the matter before him. He was pleased to say that what I had urged a year ago had turned out to be as I foretold, and that he would give me leave to go over and establish myself at Villeroy, and to hold myself aloof from both parties until the matter should further ripen. What will come of it I cannot say. The English king seemed to me to be ailing, and I fear that it may not be long before young Henry comes to the throne. He is a wild young prince, but has already shown himself in the Northern war to be full of spirit and courage, and methinks that when he comes to the throne he will not long observe the peaceful policy of his father, but that we shall see the royal standard once again spread to the winds of France."

"But, Sir Eustace," Guy said, when he had concluded, "how do these matters affect you? I thought that by the treaty the west part of Artois was English."

"Ay, lad, it was so settled; but at that time the strength of France had been broken at Poitiers, and the Black Prince and

his army were so feared that his terms were willingly accepted in order to secure peace. Much has happened since then: war has been constantly going on, sometimes hotly, sometimes sluggishly; France has had her own troubles, and as the English kings have been more pacific, and England has become weary of bearing the heavy expenses of the war, the treaty has become a dead letter. Gascony, in which province Armagnac is the greatest lord, is altogether lost to England, as is the greater part of Guienne. A great proportion of the people there were always bitterly opposed to the change, and, as you know, even in the time of the Black Prince himself there were great rebellions and troubles; since then town after town and castle after castle has declared for France, and no real efforts have ever been made by the English to win them back again. I, who in England am an English baron, and—so long as things go on as at present—a French noble while in France, am in a perilous position between my two Suzerains. Were an English army to land, I should join them, for I still hold myself to be a vassal of the king of England, as we have been for three generations. As to the French disputes, I fear that sooner or later I shall have to declare in favour of one party or the other, for it will be difficult to stand altogether aloof from these conflicts, because all men, at least all men of condition, are well-nigh forced to take one side or the other. The plea that I am a baron of England will be of no avail, for both sides would turn against me and be glad of an excuse for pillaging and confiscating my estate. At present, then, I must regard myself

solely as a French noble, for Villeroy has passed into the hands of France, just as for a while it passed into the hands of England, and if this war goes on we shall have to take a side."

"And to which side do your thoughts incline, Sir Eustace, if I may ask you?"

"I love not either side, Guy, and would fain, if it could be so, that my sword should remain in its sheath. I fear that I shall have to go with Burgundy, for he is all-powerful in Artois; but had I been altogether free to choose, I should have sided with Orleans. In the first place, it is certain that the last duke was foully murdered by Burgundy, who thereby laid the foundation for the present troubles. There were jealousies before, as there have always been between the great nobles, but that act forced almost all to take sides. The Dukes of Berri and Brittany, who had been of the party of the late Duke of Burgundy, were driven by this foul act of his son to range themselves with Orleans. Armagnac is very powerful in the south, Berri's dukedom is in the north, that of Orleans to the north-east. Burgundy's strength lies in his own dukedom,—which has ever been all but independent of France,—in Flanders, in Artois, and in Paris; thus, generally, it is the north and east of France against the south and west. This is broadly the case, but in a civil war provinces and countships, neighbours, ay, and families, become split up into factions, as interest, or family ties, or the desire to increase an estate by annexing another next to it, may influence the minds of men.

"So long as it is but a war between the great dukes and princes

of France we smaller men may hope to hold aloof, but, as it goes on, and evil deeds are done on both sides, men's passions become heated, the spirit spreads until every man's hand is against his neighbour, and he who joins not against one or the other finds both ready to oppress and rob him. I should not have cared to bring out an English following with me had we been forced to march any distance through France; but as Villeroy is but a few miles from the frontier, and of that distance well-nigh half is through my own estates, we can reach the castle almost unnoticed. Once there, the fact that I have strengthened my garrison will keep me from attack, for either party would be chary in attacking one who can defend himself stoutly. I was minded to leave your lady and the two younger children in England, but in truth she begged so hard to accompany me that I could not say her nay."

The Castle of Villeroy was somewhat larger than the one in which Guy had been born and brought up. The plan, however, was very similar: there was the central keep, but, whereas at home this was the dwelling-house of the family, it was here used as a storehouse, and the apartments of the count and countess were in the range of buildings that formed an inner court round the keep. In point of luxury the French were in advance of the English, and they had already begun to combine comfort with strength in their buildings. The apartments struck Guy as being wonderfully spacious in comparison to those with which he was accustomed. On the ground floor of one side of the square

was the banqueting-hall. Its walls were decorated with arms and armour, the joists that supported the floor above were carved, the windows large and spacious, for, looking as they did into the inner court, there was no occasion for their being mere loopholes. Above the banqueting-hall was a room where Lady Margaret sat with her maids engaged in working at tapestry; here the priest gave such slight instruction as was then considered necessary to Agnes and Charles; Henry had already passed out of his hands.

Next to this room was the knight's sleeping apartment, or closet as it was then called, a room which would now be considered of ridiculously straitened dimensions; and close to it were the still smaller closets of the children. Beyond were a series of guest-chambers. Another side of the court-yard contained the apartments of the castellan, Jean Bouvard, a sturdy soldier of long experience, and those of the other officers of the household; the other two sides were occupied by the chapel, the kitchens, and the offices of the servants and retainers. All these rooms were loopholed on the side looking into the outer court. This was considerably wider and more extensive than the one surrounding the keep. Here were the stables, storehouses for grain and forage, and a building, just erected, for the lodging of the English garrison. All these buildings stood against the outer wall, so that they would afford no shelter to an enemy who had obtained possession of the first defences and was making an attack against the second line. The outer wall was twelve feet in thickness, and thirty feet above the court; outside the height was considerably

greater, as there was a moat faced with stone fifteen feet deep entirely surrounding it, and containing seven or eight feet of water.

Walls ran half across the outer court, and, from the end of these, light wooden bridges formed a communication with the wall of the inner court, so that in the event of the outer wall being stormed or the gates being carried by assault, the defenders could retire to the inner defences. The ends of these bridges rested upon irons projecting from the wall, and so arranged that they could be instantly withdrawn when the last of the defenders had crossed over, when the bridges would at once fall into the court-yard below. The inner wall was twelve feet higher than the outer one, and, like it, was provided with a crenellated battlement four feet high; there were projecting turrets at each corner, and one in the middle of each side.

The keep rose twenty feet higher than the wall of the inner court. The lower portions of the cross walls of the outer court were carried on as far as the inner wall, thereby dividing the space into four; strong gates gave communication from one to the other. Into these could be driven the cattle of the tenantry, and one of them contained a number of huts in which the tenants themselves would be lodged. The court-yard facing the entrance was the largest of the areas into which the space between the outer and inner walls was divided, extending the whole width between the outer walls. Here the military exercises were carried on. Along the wall, at each side of the gate, were a range of stables for the

use of the horses of guests, with rooms over them for the use of their retainers. There was a strong exterior work defending the approach to the drawbridge on the other side of the moat, and in all respects the castle was well appointed, and to Guy it seemed almost impossible that it could be carried by assault, however numerous the foe.

CHAPTER II – TROUBLES IN FRANCE

As soon as it was heard that the lord and lady had returned, the vassals of Villeroy came in to pay their respects, and presents of fowls, game, and provisions of all kinds poured in. The table in the banqueting-hall was bountifully spread, casks of wine broached, and all who came received entertainment. As French was still spoken a good deal at the English court and among the nobles and barons, and was considered part of the necessary education of all persons of gentle blood, Guy, who had always used it in his conversation with his father, had no difficulty in performing his duty of seeing that the wants of all who came were well attended to. In a few days guests of higher degree came in, the knights and barons of that part of the province; a few of these expressed surprise at the height of the sturdy men-at-arms and archers loitering about the court-yard. Sir Eustace always answered any remarks made on the subject by saying, "Yes, Dame Margaret and I thought that instead of keeping all our retainers doing nothing in our castle in England, where there is at present no use whatever for their services, we might as well bring a couple of score of them over here. I have no wish to take part in any of the troubles that seem likely to disturb France, but there is never any saying what may happen, and at any rate it

costs no more to feed these men here than in England."

The English archers and men-at-arms were well satisfied with their quarters and food, and were soon on good terms with their French associates. The garrison, before their arrival, had consisted of fifty men-at-arms, and although these had no means of communicating verbally with the new arrivals, they were not long in striking up such acquaintance as could be gained by friendly gestures and the clinking of wine-cups. Their quarters were beside those of the English, and the whole of the men-at-arms daily performed their exercises in the court-yard together, under the command of the castellan, while the archers marched out across the drawbridge and practised shooting at some butts pitched there. To the French men-at-arms their performances appeared astounding. The French had never taken to archery, but the cross-bow was in use among them, and half of the French men-at-arms had been trained in the use of this weapon, which was considered more valuable in the case of sieges than of warfare in the field. While they were able to send their bolts as far as the bowmen could shoot their arrows, there was no comparison whatever in point of accuracy, and the archers could discharge a score of arrows while the cross-bowmen were winding up their weapons.

"*Pardieu*, master page," Jean Bouvard said one day as he stood with Guy watching the shooting of the archers, "I no longer wonder at the way in which you English defeated us at Cressy and Poitiers. I have heard from my father, who fought at Poitiers, how

terrible was the rain of arrows that was poured upon our knights when they charged up the hill against the English, but I had never thought that men could shoot with such skill and strength. It was but yesterday that I set my men-at-arms to try and bend one of these English bows, and not one of them could draw an arrow anywhere near the head with all their efforts; while these men seem to do so with the greatest ease, and the speed with which they can shoot off arrow after arrow well-nigh passes belief. That tall fellow, who is their chief, but now sent twenty arrows into a space no greater than a hand's-breadth, at a hundred and twenty yards, and that so quickly that he scarce seemed to take time to aim at all, and the others are well-nigh as skilful. Yesterday I put up a breastplate such as is worn by our men-at-arms and asked them to shoot at it at eighty yards. They fired a volley together at it. It was riddled like a colander; not one of the five-and-twenty arrows had failed to pierce it."

"Ay, at that distance, Captain, an English archer of fair skill could not miss it, and it needs Milan armour, and that of the best, to keep out their arrows."

"By our Lady," the captain remarked, "I should be sorry to attack a castle defended by them, and our lord has done well indeed to bring them over with him. Your men-at-arms are stalwart fellows. My own men feel well-nigh abashed when they see how these men take up a stone that they themselves can with difficulty lift from the ground, and hurl it twenty yards away; and they whirl their heavy axes round their heads as if they were

reeds."

"They are all picked men," Guy said with a laugh. "You must not take it that all Englishmen are of equal strength, though no doubt Sir Eustace could have gathered five hundred as strong had he wished it."

"If that be so," the captain said, "I can well believe that if France and England meet again on a field of battle France shall be beaten as she was before. However, there is one comfort, we shall not be among the defeated; for our lord, and his father and his grandfather before, him, have ever been with England, and Sir Eustace, having an English wife and mother, and being a vassal of the English crown for his estates in England, will assuredly take their part in case of a quarrel. Of course, at present we hold ourselves to be neutrals, and though our lord's leanings towards England give some umbrage to his neighbours, their enmity finds no expression, since for years now there has been no righting to speak of between the two nations. How it will be if Orleans and Burgundy come to blows I know not; but if they do so, methinks our lord will have to declare for one or the other, or he may have both upon him. A man with broad estates, on which many cast covetous eyes, can scarce stand altogether aloof. However, if Villeroy is attacked, methinks that with the following Sir Eustace has brought with him across the sea even Burgundy himself will find that it would cost him so dearly to capture the castle that it were best left alone."

"How about the vassals?"

"They will fight for their lord," Jean Bouvard answered confidently. "You see their fathers and grandfathers fought under the Black Prince, and it is natural that their leanings should be on that side. Then they know that there is no better lord in all Artois than Sir Eustace, and his dame has made herself much beloved among them all. There is no fear that they will disobey our lord's orders whatever they be, and will fight as he bids them, for Orleans or Burgundy, England or France. He has never exercised to the full his rights of seigneur; he has never called upon them for their full quota of work; no man has even been hung on his estate for two generations save for crime committed; no vassal's daughter has ever been carried into the castle. I tell you there is not a man for over fifty miles round who does not envy the vassals of Villeroy, and this would be a happy land indeed were all lords like ours. Were we to hoist the flag on the keep and fire a gun, every man on the estate would muster here before sunset, and would march against the King of France himself did Sir Eustace order them to do so."

"In that case what force could we put on the walls, Captain?"

"Two hundred men besides the garrison, and we have provisions stored away in the keep sufficient for them and their women and children for a three months' siege. Sir Eustace gave me orders yesterday to procure wood of the kind used for arrows, and to lay in a great store of it; also to set the smiths to work to make arrow-heads. I asked him how many, and he said, 'Let them go on at it until further orders. I should like a store sufficient at

least for a hundred rounds for each of these English archers, and if we had double that it would be all the better. They can make their own arrows if they have suitable wood.' It seemed to me that two hundred rounds was beyond all necessity, but now when I see that these men can shoot nigh twenty rounds a minute, I can well understand that a great supply for them is needful."

The time passed very pleasantly at Villeroy. Sometimes Guy rode with his lord and lady when they went out hawking or paid visits to neighbouring castles. Regularly every day they practised for two hours in arms, and although well instructed before, Guy gained much additional skill from the teaching of Jean Bouvard, who was a famous swordsman. The latter was surprised at finding that the page was able to draw the English bows as well as the archers, and that, although inferior to Long Tom and three or four of the best shots, he was quite as good a marksman as the majority. Moreover, though of gentle blood he would join with the men in their bouts of quarter-staff, and took no more heed of a broken head than they did.

"*Pardieu*, master page," he said one day when Guy came in from the court-yard to have his head, which was streaming with blood, bound up, "our French pages would marvel indeed if they saw you. They all practise in arms as you do, save with the shooting; but they would consider it would demean them sorely to join in such rough sports with their inferiors, or to run the risk of getting their beauty spoiled by a rough blow. No wonder your knights strike so mightily in battle when they are accustomed

to strike so heavily in sport. I saw one of your men-at-arms yesterday bury his axe to the very head in a block of oak; he wagered a stoup of wine that no two of my men-at-arms would get the axe out, and he won fairly, for indeed it took four of the knaves at the handle to tug it out, and then indeed it needed all their strength. No armour ever forged could have withstood such a blow; it-would have cracked both the casque and the skull inside like egg-shells. It seemed to me that a thousand such men, with as many archers, could march through France from end to end, if they kept well together, and were well supplied with meat and drink by the way—they would need that, for they are as good trenchermen as they are fighters, and indeed each man amongst them eats as much as three of my fellows."

"Yes, they want to be well fed," Guy laughed, "and they are rarely pleased with the provision that you make for them; surely not one of them ever fed so well before."

"Food does not cost much," the captain said; "we have herds of our own which run half wild on the low ground near the river, which our lords always keep in hand for their own uses, and they multiply so fast that they are all the better for thinning; we sell a few occasionally, but they are so wild that it scarce pays the trouble of driving them to the nearest market, and we are always ready to grant permission to any of the vassals, whose cattle have not done as well as usual, to go out and kill one or two for meat."

"I hear from the Governor of Calais," Sir Eustace said, when he returned from a visit to that town, "that a truce has been

agreed upon between England and France for a year; it is France who asked for it, I suppose. Both parties here wanted to be able to fight it out without interference. Here, in Artois, where the Burgundians are most numerous, they will profit, as they will have no fear of England trying to regain some of her lost territory, while in the south it will leave Armagnac and his friends equally free from English incursions from Guienne."

"And how will it affect us, Eustace?" his wife asked.

"That I have not been able fully to determine. At any rate they will have no excuse for attacking us upon the ground that we are partly English, and wholly so in feeling; but upon the other hand, if we are attacked either by Burgundians or Orleanists, we cannot hope, as we should have done before, for aid from Calais, lying as we do some fifteen miles beyond the frontier. Amiens has already declared for Burgundy, in spite of the fact that a royal proclamation has been issued, and sent to every town and bailiwick through France, strictly commanding all persons whatsoever not to interfere, or in any manner to assist the Dukes of Orleans or Burgundy in their quarrels with each other. I hear that the Duke of Burgundy has seized Roye, Nesle, and Ham, and a number of other places, and that both parties are fortifying all their towns. They say, too, that there is news that the king has again been seized with one of his fits of madness. However, that matters little. He has of late been a tool in the hands of Burgundy, and the royal signature has no weight one way or the other. However, now that hostilities have begun, we must lose

no time, for at any moment one party or the other may make a sudden attack upon us. Burgundy and Orleans may quarrel, but it is not for love of one or the other that most of the nobles will join in the fray, but merely because it offers them an opportunity for pillaging and plundering, and for paying off old scores against neighbours. Guy, bid John Harpen come hither."

When the esquire entered, Sir Eustace went on:

"Take two men-at-arms, John, and ride round to all the tenants. Warn them that there are plundering bands about, and that either the Burgundians or the Orleanists may swoop down upon us any day. Tell them that they had better send in here all their valuables, and at any rate the best of their cattle and horses, and to have everything prepared for bringing in their wives and families and the rest of their herds at a moment's notice. You can say that if they like they can at once send their wives and families in, with such store of grain and forage as they can transport; the more the better. If the plunderers come, so much the more is saved from destruction; if we are besieged, so much the more food have we here. Those who do not send in their families would do well to keep a cart with two strong horses ready day and night, so that no time would be lost when they get the signal. We shall fire a gun, hoist the flag, and light a bonfire on the keep, so that they may see the smoke by day or the fire by night. Tell Jean Bouvard to come to me."

"There is trouble afoot, Jean, and at any moment we may be attacked. Place two men-at-arms on each of the roads to St.

Omer, St. Pol, and Bethune. Post them yourself at the highest points you can find near our boundary. By each have a pile of faggots, well smeared with pitch, and have another pile ready on the keep, and a watch always stationed there. He is to light it at once when he sees smoke or fire from either of the three points. Let the men at the outposts be relieved every four hours. They must, of course, be mounted. Let one of the two remain by the faggots, and let the other ride three or four miles in advance, and so post himself as to see a long distance down the road.

"If he sees a force advancing he must gallop back at full speed to his comrade, and light the fire. Have a gun always loaded on the keep, and have a brazier burning hard by, with an iron in it, so that the piece may be fired the instant smoke is seen. It might be two or three minutes before the beacon would give out smoke enough to be noticed, and every minute may be of the greatest importance to the vassals. As soon as you return from setting the posts see that everything is in readiness here. I myself will make sure that the drawbridge works easily and the portcullis runs freely in its groove. I have already sent off John Harpen to warn the tenants, and doubtless many of them will be in this afternoon. Send Pierre with four men, and tell them to drive up a number of the cattle from the marshes. They need not trouble to hunt them all up today. Let them bring the principal herd, the others we will fetch in to-morrow, or let them range where they are until we have further news."

In a few minutes the castle resounded with the din of

preparations under the superintendence of Sir Eustace. The men-at-arms and archers carried up stones from the great pile that had been collected in the court-yard in readiness, to the various points on the walls that would be most exposed to assault. Others were employed in fixing barricades in the court-yard at the rear for the reception of the herd of half-wild cattle. The water was turned from the little rivulet running down to the Somme into the moat. Two or three bullocks were killed to furnish food for the fugitives who might come in, and straw was laid down thickly in the sheds that would be occupied by them. Machines for casting heavy stones were taken from the storehouse and carried up to the walls, and set up there. Large stone troughs placed in the court-yard were filled with water, and before nightfall everything was in readiness.

As Sir Eustace had anticipated, most of the vassals whose farms lay at a distance from the castle came in with their wives and families in the course of the afternoon, bringing carts laden with their household goods, and a considerable number of horses and cattle. Lady Margaret herself saw that they were established as comfortably as possible in the sheds, which were large enough to contain all the women and children on the estate. As for the men, no such provision was necessary, as at this time of the year they could sleep in the open air. Guy was busy all day seeing that the orders of his lord were carried out, and especially watching the operations of putting the ballistas and catapults together on the walls. Cannon, though now in use, had by no means

superseded these machines, for they were cumbrous and clumsy, and could only be fired at considerable intervals, and their aim was by no means accurate or their range extensive, as the charge of powder that could be used in them was comparatively small, and the powder itself ill-made and defective in strength.

Guy was struck with the difference of demeanour between the men-at-arms and archers, especially among the English contingent, and that of the fugitives who poured in. What was a terrible blow to the latter was the cause of a scarce concealed gratification among the former. The two months that had been spent at the castle had, to the English, been a somewhat monotonous time, and the prospect of active service and of the giving and taking of blows made their blood course more rapidly through their veins. It was the prospect of fighting rather than of pay that had attracted them to the service of Sir Eustace. Then, as for a century previous and until quite modern days, Frenchmen were regarded as the natural foes of England, and however large a force an English king wished to collect for service in France, he had never any difficulty whatever in obtaining the number he asked for, and they were ready cheerfully to give battle whatever the odds against them. The English archer's confidence in himself and his skill was indeed supreme. Before the shafts of his forefathers the flower of the French chivalry had gone down like rushes before a scythe, and from being a mere accessory to a battle the English archers had become the backbone of the force. Their skill, in fact, had revolutionized warfare, had broken

the power of cavalry, and had added to the dignity and value of infantry, who had become, as they have ever since continued to be, the prime factor in warfare. Consequently the English archers and men-at-arms went about their work of preparation with a zest and cheerfulness that showed their satisfaction in it.

"Why, Tom," Guy said to the tall leader of the archers, "you look as pleased as if it were a feast rather than a fray for which you were preparing."

"And so I feel, Master Guy. For what have I been practising with the bow since I was eight years old but that I might, when the time came, send an arrow straight through the bars of a French vizor? In faith, I began to think that I should never have an opportunity of exercising my skill on anything more worthy than a target or peeled wand. Since our kings have given up leading armies across the sea, there was no way but to take service with our lord when I heard that he wanted a small company of archers for the defence of his castle over here, and since we have come it has seemed to us all that we were taking pay and food under false pretences, and that we might as well have stopped at home where, at least, we can compete in all honour and good temper against men as good as ourselves, and with the certainty of winning a few silver pennies, to say nothing of plaudits from the onlookers. 'Tis with our people as with the knights of old; if they win in a tournament they take the armour of the vanquished, the prize from the Queen of Beauty, and many a glance of admiration from bright eyes. It is the same with us; for there is not an English

maid but would choose an archer who stands straight and firm, and can carry off a prize when in good company, to a hind who thinks of naught but delving the soil and tending the herd."

Guy laughed. "I suppose it is the same, when you put it so, Long Tom; but there will be none of your English maids to watch your prowess here."

"No, Master Guy; but here we shall fight for our own satisfaction, and prove to ourselves that we are as good men as our fathers were. I know naught of this quarrel. Had Sir Eustace taken us into the field to fight for one or other of these factions concerning which we know nothing, we should doubtless have done our duty and fought manfully. But we are all glad that here we are doing what we came for; we are going to defend the castle against Frenchmen of some sort or other who would do ill to our lord and lady, and we shall fight right heartily and joyfully, and should still do so were it the mad king of France himself who marched against us. Besides, master, we should be less than men if we did not feel for the frightened women and children who, having done no wrong, and caring naught for these factions, are forced to flee from their homes for their lives; so we shall strike in just as we should strike in were we to come upon a band of robbers ill-treating a woman at home…. Think you that they will come, master?" he added eagerly.

"That I cannot say surely, Tom; but Sir Eustace has news that the Burgundians have already seized several towns and placed garrisons there, and that armed bands are traversing the country,

burning and pillaging. Whether they will feel strong enough to make an attack on this castle I know not, but belike they will do so, for Sir Eustace, belonging as he does, and as his fathers have done before him, to the English party, neither of the others will feel any good-will towards him, and some of his neighbours may well be glad to take advantage of this troubled time to endeavour to despoil him of his castle and possessions."

"They will want to have good teeth to crack this nut, Master Guy—good teeth and strong; and methinks that those who come to pluck the feathers may well go back without their own. We have a rare store of shafts ready, and they will find that their cross-bowmen are of little use against picked English archers, even though there be but twenty-five of us in all."

"You know very well, Long Tom, that you would have come over here whether there was any chance of your drawing your bow on a Frenchman or not."

"That is true enough, Master Guy. Our lady wanted some bowmen, and I, who have been born and bred on the estate, was of course bound to go with her. Then you see, Master Guy, haven't I taught you to use the bow and the quarter-staff, and carried you on my shoulder many a score of times when you were a little lad and I was a big boy? It would not have been natural for you to have gone out with a chance of getting into a fight without my being there to draw a shaft when you needed it. Why, Ruth Gregory, whose sworn bachelor you know I am, would have cried shame on me if I had lingered behind. I told her that if I

stayed it would be for her sake, and you should have seen how she flouted me, saying that she would have no tall lout hiding behind her petticoats, and that if I stayed, it should not be as her man. And now I must be off to my supper, or I shall find that there is not a morsel left for me."

The gates of the castle were closed that night, but it was not considered necessary to lower the drawbridge. Two sentries were posted at the work beyond the moat, and one above the gate, besides the watcher at the top of the keep. The next day things were got into better order. More barricades were erected for the separation of the cattle; a portion was set aside for horses. The provisions brought in from the farms were stored away in the magazines. The women and children began to settle down more comfortably in their sheds. The best of the horses and cattle were removed into the inner court-yard. The boys were set drawing water and filling the troughs, while some of the farm men were told off to carry the fodder to the animals, most of which, however, were for the time turned out to graze near the castle. Many of the men who had come in had returned to their work on the farms. During the day waggons continued to arrive with stores of grain and forage; boys and girls drove in flocks of geese and turkeys and large numbers of ducks and hens, until the yard in which the sheds were was crowded with them. By nightfall every preparation was complete, and even Jean Bouvard himself could find nothing further to suggest.

"If they are coming," he said to Sir Eustace, "the sooner they

come the better, my lord; we have done all that we can do, and had best get it over without more ado."

"I still hope that no one will come, Bouvard, but I agree with you, that if it is to come the sooner the better. But there is no saying, it may be to-morrow, it may be months before we are disturbed. Still, in a war like this, it is likely that all will try and get as much as they can as quickly as possible, for at any moment it may suit Burgundy and Orleans to patch up their quarrel again. Burgundy is astute and cunning, and if he sees that the Orleans princes with Armagnac and the Duke of Bourbon are likely to get the best of it, he will use the king and queen to intervene and stop the fighting. Seeing that this may be so, the rogues who have their eye on their neighbours' goods and possessions will, you may be sure, lose no time in stretching out their hands for them."

A week later came the news that Sir Clugnet de Brabant, who styled himself Admiral of France, had gathered two thousand men from the Orleanist garrisons and, with scaling-ladders and other warlike machines, had attacked the town of Rethel. The inhabitants had, however, notice of their coming, and resisted so stoutly that the Orleanists had been forced to retreat, and had then divided into two parties, each of whom had scoured the country, making prisoners all whom they met, firing the villages and driving off the cattle, and then returned to the town of Ham and to the various garrisons from which they had been drawn. Some of the tenants had returned to their farms, but when the news spread they again took refuge in the castle. It was

probable that Artois, where almost all the towns were held by the Burgundian party, would be the next object of attack. The Orleanists remained quiet for eight days only, then the news came that they had moved out again from Ham eight thousand strong, and were marching west.

Two days later several fugitives from the country round arrived at the castle with news that the Orleanists were advancing against Bapaume, and the next morning they heard that they had, after a fierce fight, won their way to the gate of the town. The Burgundian garrison had then sallied out and at first met with success, but had been obliged to retreat within the walls again. The Orleanists, however, considering the place too strong to be captured without a long siege, which might be interrupted by a Burgundian force from Flanders, had drawn off from the place, but were still marching north burning and plundering.

"It is likely enough that they will come this way," Sir Eustace said as he and Jean Bouvard talked the matter over. "Assuredly Arras will be too strong for them to attempt. The straight line would take them to St. Pol, but the castle there is a very strong one also. They may sack and burn Avesne and Auvigni, and then, avoiding both St. Pol and Arras, march between them to Pernes, which is large enough to give them much plunder, but has no force that could resist them. As Pernes is but four miles away, their next call may be here."

"But why should they attack us, Sir Eustace? for here, too, they might reckon upon more hard blows than plunder."

"It will depend upon whom they have with them," Sir Eustace replied. "They say that our neighbour Hugh de Fruges went south ten days ago to join the Duke of Bourbon; his castle is but a small place, and as most of Artois is Burgundian he might be afraid he might be captured. He has never borne me good-will, and might well persuade the duke that were my castle and estates in his possession he might do good service to the cause; and that, moreover, standing as we do within twelve miles of the English frontier, its possession might be very valuable to him should the Orleanists ever have occasion to call in the aid of England, or to oppose their advance should the Burgundians take that step."

"Surely neither of these factions will do that, Sir Eustace."

"Why not, Bouvard? Every time that English armies have passed into France they have done it at the invitation of French nobles who have embroiled themselves with their kings. Burgundy and Orleans, Bourbon and Brittany, each fights for his own hand, and cares little for France as a whole. They may be vassals of the Valois, but they regard themselves as being nearly, if not altogether, their equals, and are always ready to league themselves with each other, or if it needs be with the English, against the throne."

At nine o'clock on the following evening Sir Eustace and his family were startled by the report of the gun on the keep, and, running out, saw the signal-fire beginning to blaze up.

"Above there!" Sir Eustace shouted, "where is the alarm?"

"A fire has just blazed up on the road to St. Pol," the warder

replied.

"Blow your horn, then, loudly and urgently."

The news that the Orleanists were marching north from Bapaume had caused the greater portion of the farmers to come in on the previous day, and in a short time those who were nearest to the castle, and who had consequently delayed as long as possible, began to arrive. The garrison were already under arms, and had taken the places assigned to them on the walls. All the tenants had brought their arms in with them, and were now drawn up in the court-yard, where a large bonfire, that had been for some days in readiness, was now blazing. The new-comers, after turning their horses into the inclosure with those already there, joined them. All had been acquainted with the share they were to bear should the place be besieged. They were to be divided into two parties, one of which was to be on duty on the walls with the garrison, the other to be held in reserve, and was—every six hours when matters were quiet—to relieve the party on the walls, or, when an attack took place, to be under arms and ready to hasten to any spot where its aid was required. The men were now inspected by Sir Eustace, additional arms were served out from the armoury to those whose equipment was insufficient, and they were then dismissed to join their wives and families until called to the walls.

CHAPTER III – A SIEGE

The two men who had lit the alarm fires had already ridden in. They reported that they had, just as it became dark, seen flames rising from a village three miles from them, and that the man in advance had ridden forward until near enough to see that a great body of men were issuing from the village in the direction of the castle.

Ten of the English men-at-arms, and as many French, were now posted in the outwork at the head of the drawbridge under the command of Jean Bouvard. Sir Eustace placed himself with his squire on the wall above the gate, and four men were stationed at the chains of the drawbridge in readiness to hoist it should the order be given. The English archers were on the wall beside Sir Eustace, as their arrows commanded the ground beyond the outwork. Half an hour after the first alarm was given the tale of the tenants was found to be complete, and the guards on the other two roads had also ridden in. Guy, to his great satisfaction, had been ordered by Sir Eustace to don his armour and to take his place beside him.

It was upwards of an hour before a body of horsemen could be heard approaching. They came at a leisurely pace, for the bonfire on the road and that on the keep had apprised them that their hope of taking the castle by surprise had been frustrated by the disobedience of some of their men, who, in defiance

of the strictest orders to the contrary, had set fire to several houses in the village after having plundered them. Sir Eustace, accompanied by his esquire and Guy, descended from the wall and crossed the drawbridge to the outwork. As soon as the horsemen came within bow-shot of the castle they lighted some torches, and three knights, preceded by a trooper carrying a white flag, and two others with torches, came towards the work. When within fifty yards of the postern they halted.

"Is Sieur Eustace de Villeroy present?"

"I am here," Sir Eustace replied, and at his order two men with torches took their place one on each side of him. "Who are you that approach my castle in armed force?"

"I am Sir Clugnet de Brabant, Admiral of France. These are Sir Manessier Guieret and Sir Hugh de Fruges, and we come in the name of the Duke of Orleans to summon you to admit a garrison of his highness's troops."

"I am neither for Orleans nor for Burgundy," Sir Eustace replied. "I am a simple knight, holding my castle and estate as a vassal of the crown, and am ready to obey the orders of the king,—and of him only when he is in a condition of mind to give such orders. Until then I shall hold my castle, and will admit no garrison whether of Orleans or of Burgundy."

"We hold you to be but a false vassal of the crown, and we are told that at heart you are an enemy to France and devoted to England."

"I am a vassal of England for the estates of my wife in that

country," Sir Eustace said; "and as at present there is a truce between the two nations, I can serve here the King of France as faithfully as if, in England, I should serve the King of England."

"Nevertheless, Sir Eustace, you will have to receive a garrison of Orleans. I have at my back eight thousand men, and if you compel me to storm this hold of yours I warn you that all within its walls will be put to the sword."

"Thanks for your warning, Sir Knight; and I on my part warn you that, eight thousand though you be, I shall resist you to the death, and that you will not carry eight thousand away. As for Sir Hugh de Fruges, I give him my open defiance. I know it is to him that I owe this raid; and if he be man enough, I challenge him to meet me in the morning on fair ground outside this postern, with lance and battle-axe, to fight to the death. If he conquers, my castle shall be surrendered to him, upon promise of good treatment and a safe-conduct to depart where they will for all within it; but if I slay him, you must give me your knightly oath that you and your following will depart forthwith."

"The conditions would be hardly fair, Sir Eustace," Sir Clugnet said; "and though I doubt not that Sir Hugh would gladly accept them, I cannot permit him to do so. I have brought some eight thousand men here to capture this castle, and hold it for the Duke of Orleans, and I see not why I should march away with them because you may perchance prove a better fighter than Sir Hugh. I am ready, however, to give a safe-conduct to all within the walls if you will surrender."

"That will I not do, Sir Clugnet. I hold this castle neither for Burgundy nor Orleans, and am ready to give pledge that I will not draw sword for either of these princes; but if that will not content you, you must even take my castle if you can, and I give you fair warning that it will cost you dear."

"Then adieu, Sir Knight, until to-morrow morning, when we will talk in other fashion."

"So be it," Sir Eustace replied, "you will not find me backward in returning any courtesies you may pay me."

The knights turned away with their torch-bearers.

"Keep a close watch to-night, Bouvard," Sir Eustace said. "Mark you what the knight said,—adieu till the morning. Had I to deal with a loyal gentleman I could have slept soundly, but with these adventurers it is different. It may be that he truly does not intend to attack till morning, but it is more likely that he used the words in order to throw us off our guard."

"We will keep close ward, Sir Eustace. All the men-at-arms have their cross-bows, and though I say not that they can shoot like these English archers, they can shoot straight enough to do good work should those fellows attempt in force to cross the small moat and attack the gate. But if they come, methinks it will be but to try if we are wakeful; 'tis no light thing to attack even an outwork like this, with this loop from the moat surrounding it, without previous examination of the ground and reconnoitring of the castle."

"They would not attempt to attack the fortress itself," Sir

Eustace said; "but if they could seize this outwork by surprise it would mightily aid them in their attack on the fortress; at any rate I will send down five archers, and if any of the enemy crawl up to see how wide the water is here, and how the attempt had best be made, I warrant that they will not return if the archers can but get a sight of them. Post half your men on the wall, and let the others sleep; change them every two hours—we want no sleepy heads in the morning."

By this time the confused sound of a large number of men marching could be made out, and a quarter of an hour later three or four cottages, some five hundred yards away, were fired, and an angry murmur broke from the men as the flames shot up. After sending down the five archers, Sir Eustace returned to his post over the main gate.

"Get cressets and torches in readiness to light if they attack the postern," Sir Eustace said; "we must have light to see how things go, so that we may hoist the drawbridge as soon as our men are upon it, should the enemy get the better of them. Be sure that one is not left behind; it were better that half a dozen of the enemy set foot on the drawbridge than that one of our brave fellows should be sacrificed."

"I should think that there is no fear of their attacking until those flames have burnt down; we should see them against the light," John Harpen said.

"No, there is no fear of their attacking; but the fire would be of advantage if any men were crawling up to spy. Of course they

would not cross the slope in a line with the fire, but would work along on either side, reckoning, and with reason, that as our men would have the light in their eyes they would be all the less likely to make out objects crawling along in the shade by the side of the moat. Plant half a dozen bowmen at intervals on the wall, Tom, and tell them to keep a shrewd eye on the ground near the moat, and if they see aught moving there to try it with an arrow."

There was shouting and noise up by the burning cottages, where the enemy were feasting on the spoils they had taken, and drinking from the wine-barrels that had been brought with them in carts from the last village that they had plundered.

"I wish we were somewhat stronger, or they somewhat weaker," Sir Eustace said; "were it so, we would make a sally, and give the knaves a sharp lesson, but with only two hundred men against their eight thousand it would be madness to try it; we might slay a good many, but might lose a score before we were back in the castle, and it would be a heavy loss to us."

"I was thinking that myself, Sir Eustace," his esquire said. "That is the worst of being on the defence; one sees such chances but cannot avail one's self of them."

In the castle everything was quiet, and all those not on duty were already asleep. Along the wall watchers stood at short intervals peering into the darkness, but the main body there were also stretched on the wall with their arms by their side until required to be up and doing. Now that Sir Eustace was himself at the gate his esquire went round the walls at short intervals to

be sure that the men on watch were vigilant. Presently a loud cry was heard from the corner of the moat away to the right.

"Go and see what is doing, Guy," Sir Eustace said, "and bring me news."

Guy ran along to the angle of the wall. Here one of the archers was posted.

"What is it, Dickon?"

"A man crept up to that corner opposite, Master Guy. I could not have sworn to him, it is so pesky dark, but I thought there was something moving there and shot almost at a venture, for I could scarce see the end of my arrow; but it hit there or thereabouts, for I heard him shout. A moment later he was on his feet and running. I could see him more plainly then, so I shot again, and over he went. I fancy that in the morning you will see my arrow sticking up somewhere between his shoulder-blades, though there is no saying precisely, for a nicety of shooting is not to be looked for in the dark."

"You have done very well, Dickon. Keep your eyes open; we may be sure there are more than one of these fellows about."

Guy hurried back with the news.

"That is good," said Sir Eustace, "and it was just as well that the archer did not kill him outright with his first arrow, the cry will show any of his comrades who may be about that they had best keep their distance from the walls."

A minute's silence followed, and then Long Tom said, "There is another has had his lesson, Sir Eustace. I heard a bow twang

across there, and as there was no cry you may be sure that the shaft sped straight, and that the man had no time to utter one."

"He may have been missed altogether, Tom."

"Missed altogether! no indeed, Sir Eustace, there is no fear of that. There is not one of the men on the wall who would miss a man whose figure he could make out at fifty yards' distance, and they would scarce see them until they were as close as that. No, my lord, I would wager a month's pay that when morning dawns there is a dead man lying somewhere in front of the outwork."

"Now, Guy, you had best go up to your room and lie down until daylight," Sir Eustace said. "There will be naught doing to-night, and unless I am mistaken, we shall be busy from sunrise till sunset. I shall myself lie down for a couple of hours presently, and then send John Harpen to rest till daylight. Long Tom, see that you yourself and all your men take a short sleep by turns; we shall need your eyes to be open above all others to-morrow."

Guy promptly obeyed the order. Dame Margaret was still up.

"Is everything quiet, Guy?" she asked as she entered,

"So quiet, my lady, that Sir Eustace has ordered me to bed, and he said that he himself should come down for a short sleep presently. Two spies who crawled up have been slain by the archers. Sir Eustace is sure that no attack will be made before morning."

Then he went into his little room and threw himself onto his pallet. During the first few minutes he lifted his head several times fancying that he heard noises; then he fell into a sound sleep

and did not awake until the day dawned.

In a few minutes Guy was on the wall. The night had passed quietly; so far as was known no fresh attempt at reconnoitring the works had been made, and as the moon had risen soon after he had gone to bed there was reason to believe that the fact that the two spies had not returned was so strong a proof of the vigilance of the garrison, that the enemy had been content to wait until morning. Just as the sun rose the three knights who had summoned the castle on the preceding evening appeared on the brow of the opposite slope, accompanied by a body of men-at-arms, and rode slowly round the castle. From time to time they halted, and were evidently engaged in a discussion as to the point at which it could be best attacked.

"Shall I shoot, my lord?" Long Tom asked. "They are some two hundred and fifty yards away, but from this height methinks that I could reach them."

"It would be useless," Sir Eustace said; "you could hit them, I doubt not, but you would not pierce their armour at this distance, and it is as well that they should not know how far our bows will carry until we are sure of doing execution when we shoot; besides I would rather that they began the fight. The quarrel is not one of my seeking, and I will leave it to them to open the ball. It is true that they did so last night by sending their spies here, but we have balanced that account. Moreover, if they are to attack, the sooner the better. They may have gained news from Sir Hugh of the coming here of the English archers and the men-at-arms,

but if they have not done so we shall have a rare surprise in store for them."

After the knights had made a circuit of the castle they retired, and presently a dense mass of men appeared from behind the brow on which the cottages they had burned had stood.

"They have bundles of faggots, Sir Eustace!" Guy exclaimed.

"So they have, Guy! Your eye is a good one. It seemed to me that the outline was a strange one, but doubtless it is as you say—that each man has a faggot on his shoulder. It is evident that they intend, in the first place, to assault the postern, and have brought the faggots to fill up the ditch."

Then he turned to the gunners at the cannon.

"Lay your pieces so as to bear on them when they come half-way down the hill," he said, "and shoot when they are fairly in the line of fire. Take the same orders, Guy, to the men working the ballistas and mangonels on the wall. Tell them not to loose their machines until after the guns are fired. If the fellows take to flight, tell them not to waste their missiles; if they advance, let them be sure that they are well within range before they shoot."

With loud shouts the enemy came down the slope. When they were half-way down the two guns roared out, and their shot ploughed two lanes in the crowded body. There was a movement of retreat, but the three knights and several others threw themselves in front, waving their swords and shouting, and the Orleanists rallied and moved forward, but at a much slower pace than before. They had gone but a short distance when the

arrows of the archers in the outwork and the bolts of the cross-bows worked by the men-at-arms there, began to fall among them. So true was the aim of the archers that scarce a shaft was wasted. At the distance at which they were shooting they did not aim at the knights, whose vizors and coats of mail could not have been pierced, but shot at the commonalty, whose faces and throats were for the most part unprotected. Man after man fell, and the cross-bow bolts also told heavily upon the crowd. They had come down but a short distance farther when Long Tom, and the archers with him on the wall, began to send their arrows thick and fast, and the machines hurled heavy stones with tremendous force among them. A moment later the French broke and fled up the slope again, leaving some fifty of their number stretched on the ground. The knights followed more slowly. When they reached the crest a group of them gathered around Sir Clugnet de Brabant.

"By my faith," the latter said bitterly, "we have reckoned without our host, Sir Knights. We came to shear, but in good sooth we seem more likely to go back shorn. Truly those knaves shoot marvellously; scarce an arrow went astray."

"As I mentioned to you, Sir Clugnet," Sir Hugh de Fruges said, "Sir Eustace brought with him from England five-and-twenty bowmen, and I heard tell from men who had seen them trying their skill at targets that they were in no wise inferior to those with whom we have before had to deal to our cost."

"Truly ye did so, Sir Hugh; but the matter made no impression

upon my mind, except as a proof that the knight's inclinations were still with England, and that it were well that his castle were placed in better keeping; but in truth these fellows shoot marvellously, both for strength and trueness of aim. I marked as we came back that of the men we passed lying there, nigh all those who had been struck with arrows were hit in the face or throat, and yet the distance must have been over a hundred and fifty yards."

"I can answer for the force," one of the others said, "for a shaft struck me fairly on the chest, and hurled me to the ground as if it had been the shock of a lance, and it is well my mail was of the best work of Milan; but nevertheless the arrow broke two of the links; if the distance had been shorter, I doubt not that it would have slain me. Well, what shall we do next, gentlemen? For very shame we cannot with eight thousand men march away having accomplished nothing. The question is, where shall our next attack be delivered?"

"Methinks," another knight said, "we delivered our attack too rashly. Had I known that there were English archers there I should have advised waiting until nightfall, and I think that it would be best to do so now. If we take our fellows up while there is light they will suffer so much from the stings of these wasps that they will soon lose heart. The knaves shoot not only straight and strong, but they shoot so fast that though, as you say, there may be but twenty-five of them, the air seemed full of arrows, and had you told us that there were two hundred archers shooting,

I should have thought the estimate a reasonable one."

They stood for some time discussing the best method of attack, and as soon as they had settled upon it the men were told to scatter. Some were to go to the farmhouses, and bring up any hides that might be stored there, and to fetch all the hurdles they could lay hands upon; a portion were to go to the woods and cut timber for making mantlets and cover, while two thousand were to remain under arms in case the garrison should make a sortie.

Within the castle all were in high spirits at the easy repulse of the first attack.

"Sir Clugnet must have learned from Sir Hugh of my having English archers and men-at-arms here," Sir Eustace said to his lieutenant, "and yet he advanced as carelessly and confidently as if he had been attacking a place defended only by fat Flemish burghers; however, he has had his lesson, and as it is said he is a good knight, he will doubtless profit by it, and we shall hear no more of him till after the sun has set. Run up to the top of the keep, Guy, and bring me back news what they are doing."

In a few minutes the lad returned. "There are two or three thousand of them, my lord, drawn up in a body beyond the crest; the rest of them are scattering in various directions."

"That is as I expected," Sir Eustace remarked; "they have gone to prepare materials for a regular attack. It may be delivered to-night, or may be delayed for a day or two; however, we shall be ready for them. Jean Bouvard, do you go round the walls and tell all, save a few as sentries, to retire until the watchman blows his

horn to warn us if they seem to be gathering for an attack; and do you, Long Tom, give the same orders to your archers. There is no use wasting the men's strength till the work begins in earnest. If Sir Clugnet is wise he will march away at once. He would need heavy machines and cannon to make a breach in our walls, and even had he an abundance of them it would take him some time to do so. If he tries again, you may be sure that it will be the work of Sir Hugh de Fruges, who has no doubt a lively interest in the matter. He is a clever fellow, and will no doubt do his best to work on the feelings of the other knights by representing that it would be disgraceful for so large a force to abandon the enterprise merely because a first hasty attack, delivered without preparation, had been repulsed. The fact that they have made so careful an examination of the castle would seem in itself to show that they intended to renew the attempt in another form if the first onset failed, and, moreover, the scattering of the force afterwards while the knights still remained with a large body here points in the same direction."

Guy on descending from the keep joined Sir Eustace and his wife in their apartments.

"The lad has borne himself bravely," Sir Eustace said approvingly to his wife; "he was standing beside me when their shot was bringing down the dust round our ears, and he neither started nor flinched, though in truth it was far from pleasant, especially as we had nothing to do but to look on. It may be next time we shall have sterner fighting, and I doubt not that he will

bear himself well."

"Could I not come up and carry your messages, father?" Henry asked; "I am not strong like Guy, but I could do that."

"He is too young for it yet, Eustace," Dame Margaret broke in.

"Nay, wife," the knight said gently, "the lad is not too young for such service. There will be little danger in it, for his head will not show over the battlements, and it is well that he should learn to hear without fear the whizz of an arrow or the shock of a great stone from a ballista, the clash of arms, and the shouting of men. As he says, he is not yet strong enough to bear arms, but he will learn to brace his nerves and show a bold front in danger; that is a lesson that cannot be learned too young. Yes, Henry, you shall be my messenger. If they try an assault to-night, you shall put on for the first time the steel cap and breastpiece I had made for you in England; there will be no danger of your being hit by crossbow bolt or arrow, but there may be splinters of stone flying when a missile hits the battlement. Take no arms with you, only your dagger; they would be useless to you, and would hamper your movements in getting past the men on the wall, or in running up and down the steps leading to it. Now you had better lie down; both Guy and myself are going to do so. At sunset, if no alarm comes before, you will be called."

"We must not coddle the boy, Margaret," he said as Guy and Henry went off. "I know that he is not physically strong as yet, and sorry I am that it should be so, but he might exert himself more than he does, and he is apt to think too much of his

ailments. I was glad when he volunteered to do something, for it is at least as well that he should be able to stand fire even if he cannot learn the use of arms; moreover, it may be that after once bearing a part in a fray he may incline more warmly to warlike exercises than he has hitherto done; it may rouse in him a spirit which has so far been wanting. I have often thought that it would have been better if Agnes had been the boy and he the girl; she has far more courage and fire than he has. You remember when that savage bull chased them, how she saw him first over the stile and got tossed over after him for her pains?"

Dame Margaret nodded. "I am not likely to forget it, Eustace, seeing that her arm was broken and I had to nurse her for six weeks. Do you know that she was up on the top of the keep while the fighting was going on? Of course I was there myself, and she begged so hard to be allowed to remain with me that I had not the heart to say her nay."

"Was Henry there too?"

"Oh, yes; and shouted with the best of them when the enemy fled over the hill. Even Charlie was there, and as excited as either of them. Of course, I had to hold him up sometimes for him to be able to see what was going on; and he looked rather pale at first, when they opened fire, but he soon plucked up when he saw that their shot did no damage near us. You see he is a strong healthy boy; while Henry has always been weak, although I do not think that he lacks courage."

"He ought not, wife; he comes from a fighting stock on either

side. But I fear that unless he changes greatly he is cut out rather for a monk than a man-at-arms. And now I will lie down, for you may be sure that I shall not close an eye to-night. Did you note the banner of Hugh de Fruges with the others?"

"Yes, and I felt more uncomfortable after seeing it. He is a crafty man,

Eustace."

"He is not a brave one," the knight said scornfully. "I challenged him to meet me outside in a fair field, and the craven did not answer me, and Sir Clugnet had to make speech for him and decline the offer."

"You will need all your vigilance, Eustace. I trust that every man within the walls is faithful to us; but if there be a traitor, be sure that Sir Hugh will endeavour to plot with him, nay, he may already have done so."

"They would have no chance of making communication with him were there a dozen of them, wife. Long Tom and his comrades will take good care that none come near enough for speech."

The day passed away in perfect quiet. From time to time word came down from the look-out that the scattered soldiers were returning laden with a great quantity of young trees, wattles, and doors. Dame Margaret kept watch in her room, and allowed no messengers to enter her husband's apartments.

"If there be need, I will wake him," she said; "but he knows well enough what the French have gone for, and there is naught

to do until they advance to the attack."

Guy slept but a short time, and as he frequently started up under the impression that the horn was sounding an alarm, in the afternoon he got up and went down into the courtyard. For some time he wandered about in the quarters occupied by the tenants. These had now settled down; the children were playing about as unconcernedly as if they had been on their fathers' farms; women were washing clothes or preparing the evening meal over little charcoal fires. A certain quantity of meat had been served out to each family, and they were therefore doing better than in their own houses, for meat was a luxury seldom touched by the French peasantry.

Almost all who had entered the castle had brought with them a supply of herbs and vegetables; these, with a handful or two of coarsely-ground meal boiled into broth, constituted their usual fare, and the addition of a portion of meat afforded them great satisfaction. Some of the men were still asleep, in preparation for a long night's work; others were standing about talking in little groups; some were on the walls watching with gloomy faces the smoke wreaths that still rose from what had been their homes. Ducks, geese, and hens walked about unconcernedly looking for any stray grains that had passed unnoticed when they had last been fed, and a chorus of dissatisfied grunting arose from the pigs that had a large pen in the yard next to the huts. These were still smarting under a sense of injury excited not only by their removal from their familiar haunts, but by the fact that most of

them had been hastily marked by a clipping of some kind in the ear in order to enable their owners to distinguish them from the others. Boys were carrying buckets of water from a well in the court-yard to the troughs for the cattle and horses, and the men-at-arms were cleaning their armour and polishing their steel caps.

"Well, Tom, I hope we shall get on as well to-night as we did this morning," Guy said to the leader of the archers.

"I hope so, Master Guy, but I would rather fight by day than by night; it is random work when you can neither see your mark nor look straight along your arrow. If we had a moon we should do well enough, but on these dark nights skill does not go for much; still, I doubt not that we shall give a good account of ourselves, for at any rate we shall be able to make them out before they come to close work. The women have been making a great store of torches to-day, and that will help us a bit, though I would that they could be planted fifty yards beyond the moat instead of on the walls, for although they will be of some use to us they will be of even more to the enemy. What think you that their plan will be?"

"I should say that they are intending to march forward covered by mantlets of wattles and hides. They will plant them near the edge of the moat, and throw up some earthworks to shelter them and their machines; no doubt they will use the doors they have fetched from all the farmhouses for the same purpose."

"The doors will be more to the point, certainly," the bowman said. "As to their hides and wattles, at fifty yards I will warrant

our arrows go through them as if they were paper; but I cannot say as much about stout oaken doors—that is a target that I have never shot against; I fear that the shock would shiver the shafts. The mantlets too would serve them to some purpose, for we should not know exactly where they were standing behind them. As for their machines, they cannot have many of them."

"They had something like a score of waggons with them, Tom; these would carry the beams for half a dozen big ballistas; besides, they have their cannon."

"I don't make much account of the cannon," the archer said; "they take pretty nearly an hour to load and fire them, and at that rate, however hard a shot may hit, it would be some time before they wrought much damage on the walls. It is the sound more than the danger that makes men afraid of the things, and, for my part, I would not take the trouble of dragging them about. They are all very well on the walls of a castle, though I see not that even there they are of great advantage over the old machines. It is true that they shoot further, but that is of no great use. It is when the enemy come to attack that you want to kill them, and at fifty yards I would kill more men with my shafts in ten minutes than a cannon would do with a week's firing. I wonder they trouble to carry them about with them, save that folks are not accustomed to their noise yet, and might open their gates when they see them, while they would make a stout defence if they had only ballistas and mangonels to deal with. I suppose when they have got the shelters close to the moat they will bring up planks

to throw across."

"Yes, no doubt they will try that, Tom; but the moat is over wide for planks, and I think it more likely that they will have provided themselves with sacks, and filled them with earth, so as to make a passage across with them."

"As to the planks not being long enough, Master Guy, they could get over that easy enough. They would only have to send three or four swimmers across the moat, then thrust long beams over for those who had crossed to fix firmly, and then lay short planks across them."

"So they would, Tom; I did not think of that. Well, at any rate, I expect they will manage to get across the moat somehow and plant ladders against the wall."

"And we shall chuck them down again," Tom said.

"They won't care much for that. But as long as they cannot knock a breach in the walls I warrant that we can hold them."

CHAPTER IV – A FATAL ACCIDENT

As soon as the sun had set, the defenders gathered on the walls. Fires had already been lighted there and cauldrons of water and pitch suspended over them, and sacks of quicklime placed in readiness to be emptied; great piles of stone were placed at short intervals.

"As long as they attack at only one or two places," Sir Eustace said to his wife, "I am quite confident that we shall repulse them. If they attack at a dozen they may succeed, as we should only have a couple of archers and six or seven men-at-arms at each point, besides a score or so of the vassals. I have no doubt that these will fight stoutly, for the sight of their burning homes has roused them, and each man is longing to get a blow at those who have wrought them so much damage. Still, thirty men are but a small party to beat back an assault by hundreds. However, if they carry the outside wall they will have the second to deal with, and there we shall stand much thicker together, and they cannot attack from many points, while if we are driven into the keep, we shall be stronger still. Have you seen that the women and children are ready to retire into the keep as soon as the assault begins?"

"I have been round myself and given orders," Dame Margaret said. "I have told them that the inner gate will be closed as soon

as fighting begins, and that those who do not come in before that must remain outside, or else mount to the walls and cross the bridges, for that on no account will the gates be opened again."

"That is well, Margaret. I am now about to station two men-at-arms on the inner wall at the end of each of the three bridges, so that they may be ready on the instant to turn the catches and let the bridges fall behind our men as they rush across. The tenants have already driven as many more of their best horses and cattle into the inner court as can find standing room, so that their loss may be as small as possible. If the outer wall is carried, I have no great fear that the second wall will be taken; the plunderers who form the mass of Sir Clugnet's force will have had enough and more than enough of fighting by the time that they capture the outer one. Whatever happens, do not show yourself on the walls to-night, and see that the children do not leave their beds; you can do naught, and will see but little in the dark. To-morrow morning, wife, I will leave you free to go among the soldiers and give them encouragement as may be needed, but for to-night, I pray you stir not out. I will send Henry from time to time to let you know how matters go."

Rapidly the men gathered on the walls; each had had his post assigned to him, and when Sir Eustace made a tour of inspection he was glad to see how confidently each man bore himself, and how well prepared to give the enemy a warm reception. As soon as it became dark, the outwork on the other side of the moat was abandoned, the defenders called into the castle, and the

drawbridge raised, for it was evident to Sir Eustace that although it might be maintained in daylight, by the aid of the archers on the wall, it could not resist an attack by overwhelming numbers when deprived of that assistance. Sir Eustace, after inspecting the men's arms, ordered all those on the walls, with the exception of a few who were to remain on watch, to sit down with their backs against the battlement, and to maintain an absolute silence.

"It is by sound rather than sight that we shall be able to judge of their movements," he said. "All sitting down may sleep, if it so pleases them, till they are roused."

The sentries were ten in number, and were all taken from among the archers. Most of these men had been accustomed to the chase, were skilled in woodcraft, and accustomed to listen to the slightest noises that might tell of the movement of a stag and enable them to judge his position. Sir Eustace, for the present, posted himself in his old position over the gate. Jean Bouvard and Guy were with him, while Long Tom moved round and round the walls to gather news from his sentries. Sometimes Guy accompanied him.

"They are moving," Tom the archer said as he stood listening intently on the wall at the rear of the castle. "It is an hour past sundown, and about the time the knaves will be mustering if they intend to make a regular attack on us. If it had been only an escalade there would have been no sound until nearly morning. I thought I heard them on the other side, but I am sure of it now."

"I can hear singing up at their camp," Guy said, "but I don't

hear anything else."

"They are keeping that up to deceive us, I expect. But besides the singing there is a sort of rustle. I don't think that they are coming this way at present, or we should hear it plainer. It seems to me that it is spreading all round."

"I will go back and tell Sir Eustace what you think, Tom."

Guy hurried back to the other side of the castle.

"Long Tom thinks, Sir Eustace, that he can hear a stir all round."

"We have noticed it too—at least, all round this side. Tell him not to call the men to their feet until the enemy approaches more closely. I believe that it is the march of a large number of men, and that they are probably moving to the positions assigned to them, but it may be another hour or two before they close in."

In a short time the sound became more distinct; from a rustle it rose to a deep confused murmur, then an occasional clink as of arms striking armour became audible. Most of the men on the walls were now on their feet gazing into the darkness. Presently the sound ceased, first on one side and then on another.

"I fancy they are all at their stations now, Jean Bouvard; we shall soon hear more of them. Do not let your archers shoot, Tom, until they can make them out very distinctly. We may be sure that they will come up with their mantlets, and it would be a waste of arrows to loose at them until they are close to the moat; but of course if separate figures can be distinguished your men will draw on them."

In a quarter of an hour messengers came from various points on the wall saying that there was something moving within sight, and to those at the post over the gate a dark confused mass like a shadow seemed to be slowly coming down towards their outwork.

"Touch off the guns, Jean," Sir Eustace said; "we shall get no further chance of catching them in a body."

The captain stooped, lit two touchfires at the lantern standing in readiness, gave one to a man-at-arms, and went with the other to a cannon. Both the guns had been filled to the muzzle with bits of iron and nails, and had been laid to bear on the slope beyond the outwork. They were fired almost simultaneously, and the sound was followed by yells of pain and dismay. The besiegers, seeing that there was nothing further to gain by concealment, burst into a shout that ran all round the castle, and were answered by one of defiance from the walls. The sound was succeeded by loud orders from the leaders of the various assaulting parties, and the objects before but dimly seen, now approached the walls rapidly. Jean Bouvard hurried away to superintend the defence at other parts.

"You may as well go the other way, Guy, and let me know from time to time how things are getting on. Henry, run down to your mother and tell her that the enemy are moving up to the moat, and that it will be some time before there is any hard fighting; then come back here again."

It was easier to see from the side walls than it had been in front, for in front there was a glow in the sky from the number of fires

burning beyond the crest of the slope, and Guy was able to make out what seemed to him a wall extending some fifteen yards, near the edge of the moat. The archers and crossbow-men gathered opposite to it had just begun to shoot. Behind this wall there were other dark masses irregularly placed, and extending back as far as he could see. An occasional cry told that the arrows were doing execution upon the unseen assailants behind the mantlets, and soon the blows of cross-bow bolts against the wall and the sharp tap of arrows told that the enemy had also betaken themselves to their arms. A number of giant torches had been prepared, consisting of sheafs of straw soaked with pitch, and one of these was now lighted and elevated on a pole some fifteen feet above the battlement. Its light was sufficient to enable the scene beyond to be clearly made out. A row of mantlets some eight feet high had been placed by the moat, and others of the same height, and seven or eight feet long, elevated at short intervals behind these, were so placed as to afford shelter to the men coming down to the mantlets in front. They stood in two lines; they were some twenty feet apart, but those in one line alternated with those in the other. Guy soon saw the object of this arrangement. Men were darting to and fro across the interval some six feet wide between the two lines. Thus they had but ten feet to run from the shelter on one side to that on the other, and exposed themselves but for an instant to the aim of the archers. Some of the men carried great bundles of faggots, others had sacks on their shoulders.

"Do not heed the mantlets in front," said Dickon, who was in

command of the six archers near Guy, "but pick off those fellows as they come down. Shoot in turn; it is no use wasting two arrows on one man. Don't loose your shaft until a man is within three mantlets from the end; then if one misses, the next can take him when he runs across next time. That is right, Hal," he broke off, as an arrow sped and a man with a sack on his shoulder rolled over. "Now, lads, we ought not to miss them by this light."

Eleven men fell, out of the next twelve who attempted to carry their burdens down. Guy went back to Sir Eustace with the news of the manner in which the attack was being carried on, and of the effect of the archers' defence.

"I have just heard the same from the other side; there is one attack on each side and two behind; Jean Bouvard has posted himself there. I am going round myself now; I do not think there will be any attack made in front. I have sent the archers here to the rear, where they will be more useful; the fellows in the outwork across there have enough to do to shelter themselves."

This Guy could well understand, for although the guns could not be depressed sufficiently to fire down into the *tête du pont*, the mangonels were hurling stones into it, and the men-at-arms shooting cross-bow quarrels whenever a man showed himself. The rear of the outwork was open and afforded no shelter to those who had taken possession of it, and already the greater portion had retired to the other side of the small moat surrounding it, where they lay sheltered by the outwork itself. It was not long before the assailants at the other points, finding that the plan

they had formed was defeated by the skill of the archers, poured down in a mass between the two lines of mantlets, each man carrying his burden before him, thus sheltering him to a great extent. Against this method of attack the archers could do little, and now confined themselves to shooting at the men who, having thrown down the fascines or sacks by the edge of the moat, stood for a moment and hesitated before running back to the shelter of the mantlets, and not one in three got off scot-free. Guy on going round the wall found the same state of things at each of the other three points of assault. Numbers of the enemy were falling, but great piles of materials were accumulating at the edge of the moat. After a time a number of knights and men-at-arms, fully protected by armour, came down and began to hurl the sacks and bags into the moat, their operations being covered as much as possible by a storm of missiles shot through holes in the mantlets. In a short time Sir Eustace ordered the archers to desist shooting, for they were obliged, in order to aim at those so much below them, to expose a considerable portion of their bodies, and three were killed by the enemy's missiles.

"We can't prevent them from filling up the moat," he said, "and it is but throwing away life to try to do so."

The archers were accordingly placed in the projecting turrets, where, without being themselves exposed, they could shoot through the loopholes at any point on the face of the walls. It was not long before the moat was bridged at all four points of attack. Ladders were then brought down. This the assailants were able

to accomplish without loss, as, instead of carrying them, they were pushed backwards and forwards by men stationed behind the mantlets, and were so zigzagged down to the moat without the defenders being able to offer any opposition. Then rushes were made by parties of knights, the ladders were placed, and the fight began in earnest.

In the great court-yard the leader of the English men-at-arms was placed with twelve of his men as a reserve. They were to be summoned by one, two, three, or four blasts of a horn to the point at which their services were most required. The assaults were obstinate, but the walls were as stoutly defended. Sometimes the ladders were hurled back by poles with an iron fork at the end; buckets of boiling water and tar were poured over on to the assailants as they clambered up, and lime cast over on those waiting to take their turns to ascend; while with spear, axe, and mace the men-at-arms and tenants met the assailants as they endeavoured to get a footing on the wall.

Guy had placed himself with the party to which he had first gone, and, taking a pike from a fallen man, was fighting stoutly. The archers from their turrets kept up a constant flight of arrows on the crowd below. Only once was the horn sounded for the aid of the reserve. Sir Eustace had taken the command at the rear, while Jean Bouvard headed the defence on the side opposite to that at which Guy was fighting. The defenders under Sir Eustace had the hardest work to hold their own, being assaulted at two points. This was evidently the main place of attack, for here Sir

Clugnet himself and several of his knights led the assault, and at one time succeeded in gaining a footing on the wall at one point, while Sir Eustace was at the other. Then the knight blew his horn, and at the same time called the archers from the turret nearest to him, while some of the other party on the wall rushed to aid him of their own accord and, pressing through the tenants, opposed themselves to the knights and men-at-arms who had obtained a footing on the wall.

Their strength, and the power with which they wielded their heavy axes, so held the assailants in check that they could not gain space sufficient for others to join them, and when the reserve ran up, so fierce an attack was made upon the knights that several were beaten down and the rest forced to spring over the wall at the risk of life and limb. Sir Clugnet himself was the last to do this, and was carried away insensible. Two or three of his companions were killed by the fall, but the rest, leaping far enough out to alight beyond the solid ground at the foot of the walls, had their fall broken by the yielding mass of materials by which they had crossed the moat. A loud shout of triumph rose from the defenders, and was re-echoed by shouts from the other walls. As soon as the news of the repulse at the rear reached the other parties, and that Sir Clugnet was badly hurt, while several of the knights were killed, the assault ceased at once, and the Orleanists withdrew, followed by derisive cries from the defenders.

"Thanks be to the saints that it is all over," Sir Eustace said,

as he opened his vizor; "it was a close thing here, and for a time I feared that the outer wall was lost. However, I think that there is an end of it now, and by the morning we shall find that they have moved off. They must have suffered very heavily; certainly three or four hundred must have fallen, for we must admit that they fought stoutly. You have all done well, my friends, and I thank you heartily. Now, the first thing is to fetch the wounded down to the hall prepared for them. Father Gregory has all in readiness for them there. Guy, go round and find who have fallen, and see them carried reverently down to the court-yard, send me a list of their names, and place two men-at-arms at each point where the assault took place. Tom, do you similarly dispose eight of your archers so that should they send a spy up to see if we sleep, a message can be sent back in the shape of a cloth-yard shaft. Bid all the tenants and retainers leave the wall; a horn will recall them should there be need. I will myself visit them shortly, and thank them for their stout defence. I will send round a cup of spiced wine to each man on the wall as soon as it can be prepared, to that all may slake their thirst after their efforts."

Sir Eustace then made his way down from the wall to his Apartments, where

Dame Margaret was awaiting him. She hurried to meet him.

"Wait, wife, till I have removed my helmet, and even then you must be careful how you embrace me, for methinks there is more than one blood-stain on my armour, though happily not of mine own. All has gone well, love, and methinks that we shall hear

no more of them; but they fought more stoutly than I had given them credit for, seeing that they were but a mixed rabble, with a small proportion of real men-at-arms among them. I suppose Henry brought you my message to close the inner gates, as they had gained a footing on the walls."

"No, I received no message since the one he brought me half an hour ago, saying that all was going well, and I thought that he was with you. Where can he be, Eustace?" she asked anxiously.

"I know not indeed, Margaret, but will search at once. While I do so will you go to the hall that you have prepared for the wounded, and give what aid you can there? Do not fear for the boy; he turned and ran off when I spoke to him, and as his head reaches not to the top of the battlements no harm can have befallen him, though in truth I cannot think what can have delayed him."

He called to two or three of the men below to take torches, and to accompany him at once, and sent others to the sheds to ask if he had been seen there, then went up to the top of the inner wall and crossed the bridge at the back.

"Have any of you seen aught of my son Henry?" he asked the men there.

"No, my lord," one said in reply. "I marked him by our side just before the French got a footing at the other end of the wall, but I saw him not afterwards."

"He ran towards the steps at the corner there," Sir Eustace said, "with a message from me that the inner doors were to be

closed. Come along, men," he said to those with torches, and going to the corner of the wall descended the steps, which were steep and narrow. He took a torch from one of the men and held it over his head. As he neared the bottom he gave a low cry and ran down the last few steps, where, lying at the bottom, was the form of his son. He was stretched at full length, and there was a terrible gash on his forehead. The knight knelt beside him and raised his head, from which the steel cap had fallen; there was a deep stain of blood on the pavement beneath. He placed his hand on the boy's heart and his ear to his lips, and the men with the torches stood silently round. It was but too evident what had happened. In his haste to carry the message Henry's foot had slipped, and he had fallen headforemost down the steep steps, his head coming in contact with the edge of one of them. Without a word Sir Eustace raised the boy gently in his arms. His face was sufficient to tell the men the news; their young lord was dead.

Sir Eustace carried him through the inner gate and up to the boy's own room, and laid him down on his bed, then silently he went out again and crossed the court to the keep. Dame Margaret was seeing to the wounded being laid on the straw in the lower room, and did not notice him until he touched her. She turned sharply round, his face was sufficient to tell her the truth. She gave a low cry and stepped back a pace, and he moved forwards and drew her to him.

"Love," he said tenderly, "God has taken him. He was fitter for heaven than any of us; he was too gentle for this rough world

of ours. We shall mourn for him, but with him it is well."

Dame Margaret laid her head on his shoulder, and burst into a passion of tears. Sir Eustace let her weep for a time, then he whispered:

"You must be brave, my love. There will be other mourners here for their dear ones who have died fighting for us; they will need your comfort. A Villeroy could not die better than doing his duty. It was not by man's hand that he fell, but God took him. His foot slipped in running down the stair from the wall, and he must assuredly have died without a pang. Take the priest with you; I will see to the wounded here. Father Gregory," he went on, raising his voice, "Dame Margaret has more need of you at the present moment than have these brave fellows. A grievous misfortune has befallen us. My son is dead; he fell while doing his duty. Do you take her to his room; I give her to your charge for the present. I have my work to do, and will see that your patients are well cared for."

There was a murmur of surprise and regret from the wounded and those who had brought them in. The poor lad had been a general favourite in the castle for his gentle and pleasant ways with all, though many a time the rough soldiers had said among themselves, "'Tis a pity that he was not a girl, and the Lady Agnes a boy. He is more fit for a priest than for a baron in times like these, for assuredly he will never grow into a stout man-at-arms like his father." That a soldier should have been killed in such a fight was to be expected, but that a gentle boy like this should

have fallen seemed strange and unnatural, and all sorrowed for him as well as for their lord and lady, and the men forgot for a time the smart of their wounds in their regret at his untimely death.

Sir Eustace went about his work quietly and earnestly, bound up the soldiers' wounds, and saw as far as might be to their comfort. Their number was not large, as it was only in the fight on the wall that aught save their heads had been exposed, and those struck by cross-bow bolts had for the most part fallen as they stood. The eight men brought in had without exception received wounds from the swords of the French knights, and though some of the gashes were broad and deep, none of them were likely to prove fatal. Just as the knight had finished, Guy entered. He had heard the news, which had spread like wildfire through the castle. The lad's eyes were red, for he had been greatly attached to Henry, whose constant companion he had been whenever the family had been at their English home.

"It is a strange fate, lad," Sir Eustace said, laying his hand upon Guy's shoulder. "You who have exposed yourself freely—for I marked you in the fight—have come through scatheless, while Henry, whom I thought to keep out of danger, has fallen. And what is your news?"

"There have been seventeen killed, my lord, besides Jean Bouvard, who was struck in the face by one of the last crossbow bolts shot before they drew off."

"This is bad news indeed. I wondered why he came not to me

as soon as we had beaten them off, but I thought not of this. He was a good and trustworthy fellow, and I shall miss him sorely. Seventeen, say you? It is too many; and yet there might have been more. Who are they?"

"Four of our archers, Sir Eustace, one of our English men-at-arms, and six of your French men-at-arms. These were all killed by cross-bow bolts and arrows, Two of your tenants, Pierre Leroix and Jules Beaune, and four of their men fell on the wall when the French gained a footing there; three were, I hear, unmarried men, the other has left a wife and three children."

"They shall be my care," the knight said. "The wives of Leroix and Beaune shall hold their farms free of dues until their eldest sons come of age. Does all seem quiet without?"

"All is quiet, my lord; but as I left the wall but now a knight with a white flag and four torch-bearers was coming down the slope towards the outwork."

"I will go there myself," Sir Eustace said; "'tis likely they do but come to ask for leave to carry off the dead and wounded, which we will gladly let them do, for it will save us much trouble to-morrow."

It was as the knight had supposed, and he at once gave the permission asked for, and in a short time a great number of men with torches came down the slope and for the next two hours were occupied in carrying off their dead and wounded comrades. A close watch was maintained all night, though there was small fear of a renewal of the attack. At daybreak the rear-guard of the

enemy could be seen retiring, and a party of men-at-arms, under Sir Eustace himself, on going out to reconnoitre, found that none had remained behind. A mound marked the place where their dead had been buried in one great grave. Many of the mantlets had been removed, and they doubted not that these had been used as litters for the conveyance of the wounded. They afterwards heard that some four hundred and fifty men had been killed, and that over a hundred, too sorely wounded to be able to walk, had been carried away.

In the afternoon Henry was buried beneath the chapel in the castle, while the men-at-arms and others were laid in the inner court-yard. Having learned that the Orleanists, greatly disheartened at their heavy repulse, had marched away to the south, the gates of the castle were opened. A small number of the garrison were retained in the castle, and the rest were sent out to aid the tenants in felling trees and getting up temporary shelters near their former homes until these could be rebuilt as before. For the time their wives and families were to remain in the castle.

All fear of another attack by the Orleanists speedily passed away. Artois was, upon the whole, strongly Burgundian, and an army marching from Flanders speedily brought the whole province over to that side. Nothing was done towards commencing the work of rebuilding the farmhouses, for it was evident that the castle might at any moment be again beleaguered.

Two months passed quietly. Sir Eustace busied himself in seeing that the tenants were comfortably re-established in their

temporary homes. The Burgundians had again obtained several advantages, and as Sir Clugnet was known to have marched away with his following to the assistance of the Orleanists, who had of late fared badly, there was no fear of any fresh attack being made upon the castle. One day a messenger rode in from the Governor of Calais, who was personally known to Sir Eustace. The letter that he carried was an important one. After the usual greeting it read:—

For the love I bear you, Sir Eustace, I write to let you know that there is a change in affairs. It seems that the Duke of Burgundy has but been playing with our King Henry, and that the offer of a marriage was made only in order to obtain assistance and the countenance of the king. Being now, as it would seem, powerful enough to hold his own against his enemies without such aid, the matter has fallen through. I have received a royal order, which has also been sent to the governors of other English towns, and it has been proclaimed everywhere by sound of trumpets, that none of Henry's subjects of whatever rank should in any way interfere between the two factions in France, nor go into France to serve either of them by arms or otherwise under pain of death and confiscation of fortune. But I would tell you for your private ear, that I have news that our king is in correspondence with the Dukes of Berri, Orleans, and Bourbon, and that it is like that he will shortly declare for that party, being grievously offended at the treatment that he has received at the hands of the Duke of Burgundy after having given him loyal help and assistance which

had, in no slight degree, assisted him in making good his cause against his enemies.

In a short time, indeed, the English from Calais, and from other places held by them in France, began to make sorties and to carry off much plunder from the country round, and especially took by storm the Castle of Banelinghen near Ardres, notwithstanding the truce that prevailed. The intentions of the King of England were made still more manifest by his writing a letter to the Flemish towns, saying that, having heard that the Duke of Burgundy was gathering an army of Flemings to march into Aquitaine to wage war upon and destroy his subjects, and particularly his very dear and well-beloved cousins the Dukes of Berri, Orleans, and Bourbon, and the Counts of Alençon and Armagnac, and the Lord d'Albreth, he therefore begged them to inform him whether they were willing to conform to the truce concluded between them and England without in any way assisting their lord in his wicked purpose.

The Flemish towns replied that they desired in no way to infringe the truce between the two countries, but that they would serve and assist the King of France, their sovereign lord, and their Count the Duke of Burgundy, as heretofore, to the utmost of their power.

In a short time, indeed, it became known that a solemn treaty had been concluded between the King of England and the Orleanist nobles, they engaging to aid him to recover Guienne and the parts of Aquitaine he had lost, while he promised to put

an army in the field to assist them.

The position of Sir Eustace was now very difficult. It was uncertain when the English would move, and it was likely enough that if an army set sail it would land in Guienne, and that Calais would be able to render no assistance, so that he would be exposed to the attacks of the Burgundians. Nor was his position improved when he learned that on the 15th of July the two French factions, urged by the Count of Savoy, the Grand Master of Rhodes, and many others, had agreed to terms of peace between them, and that the Orleanists had formally renounced the English alliance.

At the meeting of the leaders of the party, the Duke of Aquitaine, the king's son, presided. For a time all the differences were patched up. The news, however, came too late to arrest the embarkation of the English. Eight thousand men landed at La Hogue, under the Duke of Clarence, overran a wide extent of country, being reinforced by 800 Gascons, who had, according to the agreement with the Orleanists, been raised to join them. They advanced towards Paris, declaring, however, that they would retire if the Duke of Berri and his party kept their engagement with them, and paid them the two hundred thousand crowns he had agreed to do. The Duke had not, however, the means to pay this amount, and the English therefore continued to ravage the country, while a large force from Calais, under the Earl of Warwick, captured the town of Saumer-au-Bois and the Castle of Ruissault. This, however, was scarcely an invasion, and Sir

Eustace, being doubtful whether Henry meditated operations upon a large scale now that he had no longer allies in France, took no part in the matter, but remained quietly in his castle.

Towards the end of March, 1413, a royal herald appeared before the gate. He was at once admitted, and was received with all honour in the great hall by Sir Eustace.

"Sir Eustace de Villeroy." he said, "I come to you in the name of the King of France, your lord and suzerain. He bids me to say that he has heard with satisfaction that you refused entry to your castle to those who demanded it altogether without authority from him; but that, seeing the importance of the castle in case of trouble with England, and that you are a vassal of England for estates in that country, he deems it necessary that its safety should be assured, and therefore calls upon you to send, in proof of your loyalty to and affection for him, your wife and children to Paris, where they shall be cared for in all honour and as becomes their condition; or to receive a garrison of royal troops of such strength as to defend it from any fresh assault that may be made upon it, either on the part of those who before attacked it, or of England. He charges you on your fealty to accept one or other of these conditions, or to be deemed a false vassal, which he cannot believe you are, knowing you to be a brave and worthy knight. Here is a document with the king's signature and seal to the effect which I have delivered to you."

"His Majesty's demands come upon me as a surprise," the knight said gravely, "and I pray you to abide with me till to-

morrow, by which time I shall have had leisure to consider the alternative and be ready to give you answer."

"Your request is a reasonable one, Sir Eustace," the herald replied, "and

I will await the answer for twenty-four hours."

The herald was then conducted to the guest-chamber, and Sir Eustace went out into the court-yard and for some time busied himself with the usual affairs of his estate and talked to the tenants as to their plans; then he went up on to the wall and there paced moodily backwards and forwards thinking over the summons that he had received. He knew that Margaret had been in the gallery in the hall and had heard the message the herald had delivered, and he wished to think it well over before seeing her. His position was, he felt, a perilous one. The last treaty of peace between France and England had drawn the frontier line more straitly in. After Cressy was fought, but a few miles away, Villeroy had stood within the English line as far as it now stood without it. That Henry, who although now old and averse to war, must yet ere long again renew the war that had so long languished he had little doubt; but he had no hope of succour at present, and felt that though able to withstand any sudden attack like that he had recently repulsed, he could not hope to make a successful defence against a great force provided with battering machines.

The message from the king was indeed but a message from Burgundy, but if Burgundy was all-powerful just at present it had the same effect as if it were the king and not he who had

sent the summons. He could see no way of temporizing save that Margaret and the children should go as hostages, and the idea of this was wholly repugnant to him. Were he to admit a French garrison the castle would be virtually lost to him; for once powerless, he could easily be set aside in favour of one of Burgundy's followers. The only alternative then seemed to be that he should altogether forsake the castle and estate so long held by his ancestors, and retire to England, until maybe some day Henry might again place him in possession of it. He regretted now that he had not told Margaret that she had best keep her chamber, for she then would have known nothing of the alternative that she should go as a hostage—an alternative, he foresaw, that she was likely to favour, as by so doing the necessity for making an absolute decision and choosing between France and England would be postponed. At length, still undecided in his mind, he descended from the wall and went up to his wife's apartments.

CHAPTER V – HOSTAGES

Margaret rose to meet her husband when he entered. She had looked pale in her dress of deep mourning before, but he thought that she looked paler now. She, too, had evidently been thinking over the summons that he had received, and there was an expression of firmness and resolution in her face that seemed to say that she had arrived at a more definite conclusion than he had done.

"'Tis a knotty question, wife," Sir Eustace said. "In the first place, it is clear we cannot hope to defend the castle successfully against an attack by Burgundy. The last was but of the character of a raid, the next would be a serious siege by experienced soldiers provided with all proper means and appliances. Before, it was certain that Sir Clugnet would, if he tarried here, be shortly attacked by the Burgundians, whereas now there would be no prospect of assistance. There is no hope of help from England, for there is no force in Calais that could contend with that which would probably be sent against me; therefore I take it that if attacked the castle must in the end fall, in which case probably its defenders would all be put to the sword. I myself should most likely be killed, the estates forfeited, and you and the children taken prisoners to Paris. Now it seems to me that that is not to be thought of. It remains to decide, therefore, whether we shall abandon the castle and journey to England, or whether we will

admit a Burgundian garrison, which will in fact, we may be sure, be the first step towards losing the castle and estate altogether. It seems to me that the first will be the best plan. I see no chance of it at present, but in time Henry may invade France; and as we lie only some seven or eight miles from the frontier he would doubtless recapture Villeroy, and we should again become its masters."

"You have not mentioned the other alternative, Eustace, namely, that I and the children should go to Paris as hostages; and this, it seems to me, is the best of the three to follow. If there were indeed a chance of an English invasion I should not say so, but I think not that there is any such prospect. It is many years since England has done aught in earnest, and during all that time her power in France has been waning. I would not that our children should lose this fair estate when it can well be preserved by some slight sacrifice on my part. Were I and the children to go to Paris it would put an end to all doubts as to your loyalty, and you would hold the castle and estates. The peace now patched up between the parties will not last, and as soon as they are engaged with each other, and have no time to spare to think of attacking you here, I will endeavour to escape with the children and rejoin you. I shall assuredly have no cause for complaint. I shall, of course, have honourable treatment, and apartments fitting to our rank assigned to me. It would be no great hardship, and even were it so it would be worth enduring in order that our son Charles should inherit his father's estate."

"I could not part from you, love."

"Nay, Eustace, as I have said, it cannot be for long; and you must remember that twice when the children were infants I remained in England with them while you were some months here. It would be no worse now. I would take Guy with me; the lad has sense and courage, the children are both fond of him, and I myself could, if occasion arose, take counsel with him. Then I could have two or three stout men-at-arms who might ride in my train in peaceful garb as retainers. As to a maid I can, if I need one, hire her in Paris. Surely, husband, it would be far better so than that we should lose castle and land. There could be little danger to one in Paris at any time, still less to the wife of a vassal of the crown, least of all to a hostage. I shall be but staying at the court. If you peril life and limb, Eustace, in defence of your castle, surely it is not much that I should put myself to the slight inconvenience of a stay in Paris for a while."

"I like it not," the knight said moodily. "I see well enough that what you say is true, and that you should be safe at Charles's court, indeed safer than here. The citizens of Paris are indeed turbulent, whether they shout for Orleans or Burgundy, but what if Henry of England should again lead an army here?"

"But why imagine what is not likely to happen? Long ere Henry comes I may have joined you again; should it be otherwise I might perhaps escape, or at the very worst of all they could but keep me in duress in my chamber. Who ever heard of a woman being ill-treated for the disobedience of her lord? All that they

could do would be to make you pay ransom for my return."

"I would rather go as a hostage myself."

"Nay, husband, that could hardly be. Who would then take care of your castle? It is not a hard thing that the king asks, merely that I and the children shall for a time live at his court as a proof that you, his vassal, hold your castle for him. Even if the worst comes to the worst we can but lose castle and land, as we must lose it now if I do not go. Nay, my dear lord, do not wrinkle your brow, we cannot strive against the might of France; and at present we must bow our heads and wait until the storm has passed, and hope for better times. There may be an English war; ere long Henry may again extend his frontiers, and you might again become a vassal of England for these possessions of yours even as your fathers were."

"I see that reason is on your side, Margaret, and yet I cannot bring myself to like the plan."

"Nor do I like it, husband; yet I feel that it were a thousand times better that I should be separated from you for a time than that we should risk another siege. The last has cost us dear enough, another might take you from me."

"Well, well, dear, I suppose you must have your way; indeed I do not see that harm can possibly come to you, and it will at any rate ensure peace for a time and enable us to repair our tenants' losses. I shall send over a message at once to Sir Aylmer, and beg him to choose and send me another fifty archers—with that reinforcement I could make head against any attack save in the

greatest force—for there is no saying how things may go. The five-and-twenty did wonders, and with thrice that force I should feel confident that Villeroy could withstand any attack save by an army with an abundance of great machines.

"Well, Margaret, since you have decided for me that you are to go—and indeed I myself plainly see that that alternative is really the best—let us talk over who you had best take with you. I quite approve of your choice of Guy; he is a good lad, and will make a brave knight some day. I shall now make him one of my esquires, and as such he will always be in attendance on you; and assuredly Agnes and Charlie will, as well as yourself, benefit by his presence. He will be able to take them out and look after them, and as he talks French as well as English the lad will be useful to you in many ways. Have you any preference as to the four men-at-arms?"

"Could you spare Tom, the leader of the archers? I should like to have another Englishman with me, and he is very good-tempered and obliging. He is shrewd too, and with his strength and courage I should feel that I could wholly rely upon him in any strait, though indeed I see not that there is any probability of such occurring."

"Certainly you can have him, Margaret, and I shall be glad to know that he is with you. Dickon, who is next under him, can act as captain of the archers while he is away. I have noticed that Tom is picking up the language fast. He is always ready to do little kindnesses to the women and children, and I have often heard

him talking with them. He will soon get to speak the language fairly. As to the others have you any choice?"

"No, I think you had better choose them for me, Eustace."

"They had better be French," he said; "it would not do for you to surround yourself entirely by English, although of course it is natural enough that you should have an English squire and servant. I think that you could not do better than take Jules Varey and Albert Bongarde. They are both stout men-at-arms, prudent fellows, and not given to the wine-cup. As a fourth I would say Jean Picard's son; he is a stout fellow too, and I know that, but for his father's hopes that he will one day succeed him as butler, he would have taken service regularly as a man-at-arms. He fought stoutly when the French gained the wall, and I marked him exchanging blows with Sir Clugnet himself, and bearing himself as well as any man there. You could choose no better."

"So be it," she said. "I think, Eustace, that with four such defenders, to say nothing of young Guy, you need not feel uneasy about us."

"I don't think that I shall feel uneasy, Margaret; but I know that I can ill spare you. You have ever been at my side since we were married, save when, after the birth of Agnes and Charles, you were forced to stay in England when I came over here. I felt it a dreary time then, and shall feel it so now; but I doubt not that all will go well with you, though it will be a very different life to that to which you have been accustomed."

"I shall do well enough," Margaret said cheerfully, "and maybe

I shall get so fond of court that you will have to take me to that of Henry when we return to England."

"Now you had best begin to make your preparations. I will speak to Guy and the others myself."

Sir Eustace went into the court-yard, where Guy was superintending the issue of provisions for the women.

"This can go on without you," he said; "Gervaise will see to it. I would speak to you. You were at the meeting this morning, Guy, and you heard what the herald of France said. The position is a hard one. I cannot hold the castle against the strength of France, while if we take a Burgundian garrison I should cease to be its master, and it would doubtless soon pass into other hands. Again, if I go to England, it would equally be lost to us. Therefore my wife has resolved, in order to gain time until these disorders are over, to go to Paris with the children as a hostage for me. In no case, as it seems to me, are Dame Margaret and the children likely to be in danger; nevertheless, I am greatly loth for them to go. However, seeing no other way out of the business, I have consented, and we have arranged that you shall accompany her. You will go as my esquire, and I shall install you as such this afternoon. You will take Long Tom, two of the men-at-arms, and Robert Picard, all good men and true; but at the same time the burden and responsibility must rest upon your shoulders. You are young yet for so grave a charge, and yet I feel that I can confide it to you. You will have to be the stay and support of your mistress, you will have to be the companion and friend of my children, and

I shall charge the four men-at-arms to take orders from you as from me. Tom will be a valuable fellow. In the first place, he is, I know, much attached to you, besides being shrewd, and a very giant in strength. The other three are all honest varlets, and you can rely upon them in any pinch."

"I will do my best, my lord," Guy said quietly; "and I am grateful to you indeed for the confidence that you show in me, and I shall, I hope, prove worthy of it, and of my father."

The news soon spread through the castle that Dame Margaret was going to Paris. The maids wept at the thought, as did many of the tenants' wives, for since the siege began, her kindness and the pains that she had taken to make them comfortable had endeared her greatly to them. On her previous visits they had seen comparatively little of her; she had been to them simply their lord's English wife, now they knew her as a friend. Nevertheless, their regret at her leaving was softened by the thought that her going to be near the king insured peace for them, and that they would now be able to venture out to the houses that were fast rising on the ruins of their former homes, and to take up their life again as they had left it.

Early next morning the little cortege mustered in the court-yard in readiness for a start. Sir Eustace and his wife had said good-bye to each other in their chamber, and she looked calm and tranquil as she mounted her horse; for, having been accustomed from a child to ride with her father hunting and hawking, she could sit a horse well, and scorned to ride, as did so many ladies,

on a pillion. Guy rode by her side, with Agnes on a pillion behind him. Long Tom, with Charlie perched in front of him, followed them, and the three men-at-arms brought up the rear. Charlie was in high spirits; he regarded the trip as a sort of holiday, and had been talking, ever since he got up, of the wonders that he should see in Paris. Agnes better understood the situation, and nothing but the feeling that she ought to emulate the calmness of her mother restrained her from bursting into tears when her father lifted her on to her seat. The herald led the way, followed by his two pursuivants. Dame Margaret checked her horse in the middle of the court-yard, and said in a loud clear voice to the tenants and men-at-arms round: "Adieu, good friends; I trust that I shall not be long away from you. I go to stay for a time at the court in Paris, and I leave you with the surety that you will have peace and rest until I return, and be able to repair the damages you suffered from the attack made upon us by men who regard not the law." She turned and waved her hand to Sir Eustace, who was standing immovable on the steps, and then, touching the horse with her heel, they moved on after the herald.

"Do not fear to speak, Tom," Dame Margaret said, after they had left the castle behind them; "the journey is a long one, and it will go all the quicker for honest talk. What think you of this expedition to Paris?"

"I would as lief go there as anywhere else, my lady. Indeed, men say that it is a fine city, and as I have never seen a bigger town than Southampton, I doubt not that I shall find plenty to

interest me at times when you may not require our services."

"I see that you have brought your bow with you."

"Ay, my lady, I could not bring myself to part with it. Sir Eustace told me that I could not carry it, as its length would be a matter of remark, and point me out at once as being an Englishman, seeing that the French archers carry no bows of such length; so I have, even as you see, wrapped it round with straw, and fastened it to the saddle beneath my leg. I have also put fourscore arrows among the valises on the pack-horses."

"There is no chance of your needing them, Tom."

"I trust that it is so," the archer replied; "but, indeed, there is never any saying, and an archer without his bow is but a poor creature,—though, indeed, I trust that I can swing an axe as well as another."

"And much better than most, Tom; still, I hope that neither axe nor bow will be required."

"To that I say amen also; for, although a fray may sometimes be to my taste, I have no desire to be mixed up in a mêlée without some of my own stout comrades with me."

"Shall we get to Paris to-night, Lady Mother?" Charlie asked.

"No, indeed; it will be five days, if not six, for I see by the way that we are travelling we are bearing east, and shall sleep at Lille or may be at Tournay; then, doubtless, we shall bear south, and may stop the next night at Cambrai, and make to Noyon on the following day, and thence to Compiègne or to Senlis, and the next day will take us to Paris. It all depends how far and how

fast we ride each day. But these matters will be arranged by the herald. Were we to go by the shortest route we should get there more quickly; but Amiens is held by the party to whom the men who attacked our castle belong, and by the way we are travelling we shall keep for some time in Artois, and so escape all risk of trouble on the road."

"I don't care for trouble," Charlie said stoutly; "we have got Long Tom and Robert Picard and the other two, and Guy can fight also."

"That would be all very well, my son," his mother said smiling, "if we were only attacked by half a dozen vagrants, but brave as they all are they could do naught if a large body surprised us; but be assured that there is no fear of that—by the way we are travelling we shall meet with none but friends."

"I should like to be attacked by the vagrants, mother. The last time you made us stay with you when there was fighting going on, except just at the first, but here we should see it all."

"Well, I don't want to see it, Charlie, and I am glad that we are not likely to do so; and you must remember that you and I and Agnes would sorely hamper our friends."

Nevertheless whenever a party of peasants was met upon the road Charlie looked out hopefully and heaved a sigh of disappointment when, after doffing their caps in respect, they passed on quietly. Several times they encountered bodies of knights and men-at-arms, but the presence of the royal herald saved them from all question. At each halting-place Dame

Margaret, her children and maid, were lodged in the house of one of the principal citizens, while Guy and the men-at-arms lay at an inn. The troubled state of the times was only manifest by the number of men-at-arms in the streets, and the strict watch kept at the gates of the towns. Many of these were kept shut, and were only opened once an hour to let people pass in and out. This, however, did not affect the travellers, for the gates were opened the moment the emblazonings on the surcoat of the herald could be made out.

"We have assuredly nothing to complain of so far, Guy," Dame Margaret said, as they set out on their last day's journey; "had we been the king's special guests we could not have been more honourably treated, and I have no doubt that although we shall be much less important personages at Paris than as travellers under the royal protection, we shall yet be made comfortable enough, and shall have naught to grieve over save the separation from our lord."

"I cannot doubt that it will be so, lady," Guy replied; "and that at any rate there will be no trouble, unless the Armagnacs lay siege to Paris or there are riots in the city. I heard last night at the inn from some travellers who had just left it, that although the majority of the people there are in favour of Burgundy, yet that much discontent exists on account of the harsh measures of the officers he has appointed, and especially of the conduct of the guild of butchers, who, as it seems, are high in favour with the duke, and rule the city as if it belonged to them."

"It matters little to us, Guy, though it seems strange that the nobles of France and the respectable citizens of Paris should allow themselves to be ruled over by such a scum as that; but it was the same in Flanders, where Von Artevelde, our ally, a great man and the chief among them, was murdered by the butchers who at the time held sway in Ghent, and who were conspicuous for many years in all the tumults in the great towns there."

"I hear, madam, that the king is ill, and can see no one."

"Yes, I have heard the same from the herald. It will be John of Burgundy who will, for the time, be our master."

"I could desire a better," Guy said bluntly; "but we shall at any rate know that his fair words are not to be trusted. For my part, however, I wonder that after the (agreement with) the Duke of Orleans, with whom he had sworn a solemn peace, any man should hold converse with him."

"Unfortunately, Guy, men's interests count for more than their feelings, and a great noble, who has it in his power to grant favours and dispense honours, will find adherents though he has waded through blood. Burgundy, too, as I hear, has winning manners and a soft tongue, and can, when it pleases him, play the part of a frank and honest man. At least it must be owned that the title of 'Fearless' does not misbecome him, for, had it been otherwise, he would have denied all part in the murder of Orleans, instead of openly avowing that it was done by his orders."

They had started at an earlier hour than usual that morning, as

the herald had pointed out to Dame Margaret, that it were best to arrive in Paris as early as possible, in order that the question of their lodging might be settled at once. Accordingly, they had been up at daybreak, and arrived in Paris at noon.

"How long will it be, I wonder," Dame Margaret said, as they rode through the gates, "before we shall pass through here again?"

"Not very long I hope, my lady," Guy said; "but be sure that if at any time you wish to leave we shall be able to procure disguises for you all, and to make our way out without difficulty."

"Nay, Guy, you forget that it is only so long as we are here that Villeroy is safe from attack. Whatever happens, nothing, save the news that an English army has landed at Calais, and is about to invade France, would leave me free to attempt an escape. If not released before that, I must then, at all hazards, try to escape, for Sir Eustace, knowing that I am here, would be placed in a sore strait indeed; both by his own inclinations and as a vassal of England, for he would want to join the English as soon as they advanced, and yet would be hindered by the knowledge that I was a hostage here. It would be for me to relieve him of that fear; and the same feeling that induced me to come hither would then take me back to Villeroy."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.