

CHAPTER XXI
HOW AGOSTINO PISANO RISKED HIS HEAD

Even the squires' table at the Abbey of St. Andrew's at Bordeaux was on a very sumptuous scale while the prince held his court there. Here first, after the meagre fare of Beaulieu and the stinted board of the Lady Loring, Alleyne learned the lengths to which luxury and refinement might be pushed. Roasted peacocks, with the feathers all carefully replaced, so that the bird lay upon the dish even as it had strutted in life, boars' heads with the tusks gilded and the mouth lined with silver foil, jellies in the shape of the Twelve Apostles, and a great pasty which formed an exact model of the king's new castle at Windsor — these were a few of the strange dishes which faced him. An archer had brought him a change of clothes from the cog, and he had already, with the elasticity of youth, shaken off the troubles and fatigues of the morning. A page from the inner banqueting hall had come with word that their master intended to drink wine at the lodgings of the Lord Chandos that night, and that he desired his squires to sleep at the hotel of the "Half Moon" on the Rue des Apotres. Thither then they both set out in the twilight after the long course of juggling tricks and glee singing with which the principal meal was concluded.

A thin rain was falling as the two youths, with their cloaks over their heads, made their way on foot through the streets of the old town, leaving their horses in the royal stables. An occasional oil lamp at the corner of a street, or in the portico of some wealthy burgher, threw a faint glimmer over the shining cobblestones, and the varied motley crowd who, in spite of the weather, ebbed and flowed along every highway. In those scattered circles of dim radiance might be seen the whole busy panorama of life in a wealthy and martial city. Here passed the round faced burgher, swollen with prosperity, his sweeping dark-clothed gaberdine, flat velvet cap, broad leather belt and dangling pouch all speaking of comfort and of wealth. Behind him his serving wench, her blue wimple over her head, and one hand thrust forth to bear the lanthorn which threw a golden bar of light along her master's path. Behind them a group of swaggering, half-drunken Yorkshire dalesmen, speaking a dialect which their own southland countrymen could scarce comprehend, their jerkins marked with the pelican, which showed that they had come over in the train of the north country Stapletons. The burgher glanced back at their fierce faces and quickened his step, while the girl pulled her wimple closer round her, for there was a meaning in their wild eyes, as they stared at the purse and the maiden, which men of all tongues could understand. Then came archers of the guard, shrill voiced women of the camp, English pages with their fair skins and blue wondering eyes, dark-robed friars, lounging men-at-arms, swarthy loud-tongued Gascon serving men, seamen from the river, rude peasants of the Medoc, and becloaked and befeathered squires of the court, all jostling and pushing in an everchanging, many coloured stream, while English, French, Welsh, Basque, and the varied dialects of Gascony and Guienne filled the air with their babel. From time to time the throng would be burst asunder and a lady's horse litter would trot past towards the abbey, or there would come a knot of torchbearing archers walking in front of Gascon baron or English

knight, as he sought his lodgings after the palace revels. Clatter of hoofs, clinking of weapons, shouts from the drunken brawlers, and high laughter of women, they all rose up, like the mist from a marsh, out of the crowded streets of the dim-lit city.

One couple out of the moving throng especially engaged the attention of the two young squires, the more so as they were going in their own direction and immediately in front of them. They consisted of a man and a girl, the former very tall with rounded shoulders, a limp of one foot, and a large flat object covered with dark cloth under his arm. His companion was young and straight, with a quick, elastic step and graceful bearing, though so swathed in a black mantle that little could be seen of her face save a flash of dark eyes and a curve of raven hair. The tall man leaned heavily upon her to take the weight off his tender foot, while he held his burden betwixt himself and the wall, cuddling it jealously to his side, and thrusting forward his young companion to act as a buttress whenever the pressure of the crowd threatened to bear him away. The evident anxiety of the man, the appearance of his attendant, and the joint care with which they defended their concealed possession, excited the interest of the two young Englishmen who walked within hand touch of them.

“Courage, child!” they heard the tall man exclaim in strange hybrid French. “If we can win another sixty paces we are safe.”

“Hold it safe, father” the other answered, in the same soft, mincing dialect. “We have no cause for fear.”

“Verily, they are heathens and barbarians” cried the man; “mad, howling, drunken barbarians! Forty more paces, Tita mia, and I swear to the holy Eloi, patron of all learned craftsmen, that I will never set foot over my door again until the whole swarm are safely hived in their camp of Dax, or wherever else they curse with their presence. Twenty more paces, my treasure! Ah, my God! how they push and brawl! Get in their way, Tita mia! Put your little elbow bravely out! Set your shoulders squarely against them, girl! Why should you give way to these mad islanders? Ah, cospetto! We are ruined and destroyed!”

The crowd had thickened in front, so that the lame man and the girl had come to a stand. Several half-drunken English archers, attracted, as the squires had been, by their singular appearance, were facing towards them, and peering at them through the dim light.

“By the three kings!” cried one “Here is an old dotard shrew to have so goodly a crutch! Use the leg that God hath given you, man, and do not bear so heavily upon the wench.”

“Twenty devils fly away with him!” shouted another. “What, how, man! Are brave archers to go maidless while an old man uses one as a walking staff?”

“Come with me, my honey bird!” cried a third, plucking at the girl’s mantle.

“Nay, with me, my heart’s desire!” said the first. “By St. George! Our life is short, and we should be merry while we may. May I never see Chester Bridge again, if she is not a right winsome lass!”

“What hath the old toad under his arm?” cried one of the others. “He hugs it to him as the devil hugged the pardoner.”

“Let us see, old bag of bones; let us see what it is that you have under your arm!” They crowded in upon him, while he, ignorant of their language, could but clutch the girl with one hand and the parcel with the other, looking wildly about in search of help.

“Nay, lads, nay!” cried Ford, pushing back the nearest archer. “This is but scurvy conduct. Keep your hands off, or it will be the worse for you.”

“Keep your tongue still, or it will be the worse for you” shouted the most drunken of the archers. “Who are you to spoil sport?”

“A raw squire, new landed” said another. “By St. Thomas of Kent! we are at the beck of our master, but we are not to be ordered by every babe whose mother hath sent him as far as Aquitaine.”

“Oh, gentlemen” cried the girl in broken French, “for dear Christ’s sake stand by us, and do not let these terrible men do us an injury.”

“Have no fears, lady” Alleyne answered. “We shall see that all is well with you. Take your hand from the girl’s wrist, you north country rogue!”

“Hold to her, Wat!” said a great black-bearded man-at-arms, whose steel breastplate glimmered in the dusk. “Keep your hands from your bodkins, you two, for that was my trade before you were born, and, by God’s soul! I will drive a handful of steel through you if you move a finger.”

“Thank God!” said Alleyne suddenly, as he spied in the lamplight a shock of blazing red hair which fringed a steel cap high above the heads of the crowd. “Here is John, and Aylward, too! Help us, comrades, for there is wrong being done to this maid and to the old man.”

“Hola, mon petit” said the old bowman, pushing his way through the crowd, with the huge forester at his heels. “What is all this, then? By the twang of string! I think that you will have some work upon your hands if you are to right all the wrongs that you may see upon this side of the water. It is not to be thought that a troop of bowmen, with the wine buzzing in their ears, will be as soft spoken as so many young clerks in an orchard. When you have been a year with the Company you will think less of such matters. But what is amiss here? The provost-marshal with his archers is coming this way, and some of you may find yourselves in the stretch-neck, if you take not heed.”

“Why, it is old Sam Aylward of the White Company!” shouted the man-at-arms. “Why, Samkin, what hath come upon thee? I can call to mind the day when you were as roaring a blade as ever called himself a free companion. By my soul! from Limoges to Navarre, who was there who would kiss a wench or cut a throat as readily as bowman Aylward of Hawkwood’s company?”

“Like enough, Peter” said Aylward “and, by my hilt! I may not have changed so much. But it was ever a fair loose and a clear mark with me. The wench must be willing, or the man must be standing up against me, else, by these ten finger bones! Either were safe enough for me.”

A glance at Aylward’s resolute face, and at the huge shoulders of Hordle John, had convinced the archers that there was little to be got by violence. The girl and the old man began to shuffle on in the crowd without their tormentors venturing to stop them. Ford and Alleyne followed slowly behind them, but Aylward caught the latter by the shoulder.

“By my hilt! camarade” said he “I hear that you have done great things at the Abbey today, but I pray you to have a care, for it was I who brought you into the Company, and it would be a black day for me if aught were to befall you.”

“Nay, Aylward, I will have a care.”

“Thrust not forward into danger too much, mon petit. In a little time your wrist will be stronger and your cut more shrewd. There will be some of us at the ‘Rose de Guienne’ tonight, which is two doors from the hotel of the ‘Half Moon,’ so if you would drain a cup with a few simple archers you will be right welcome.”

Alleyne promised to be there if his duties would allow, and then, slipping through the crowd, he rejoined Ford, who was standing in talk with the two strangers, who had now reached their own doorstep.

“Brave young signor” cried the tall man, throwing his arms round Alleyne, “how can we thank you enough for taking our parts against those horrible drunken barbarians. What should we have done without you? My Tita would have been dragged away, and my head would have been shivered into a thousand fragments.”

“Nay, I scarce think that they would have mishandled you so” said Alleyne in surprise.

“Ho, ho!” cried he with a high crowing laugh, “it is not the head upon my shoulders that I think of. Cospetto! No. It is the head under my arm which you have preserved.”

“Perhaps the signori would deign to come under our roof, father” said the maiden. “If we bide here, who knows that some fresh tumult may not break out.”

“Well said, Tita! Well said, my girl! I pray you, sirs, to honour my unworthy roof so far. A light, Giacomo! There are five steps up. Now two more. So! Here we are at last in safety. Corpo di Bacco! I would not have given ten maravedi for my head when those children of the devil were pushing us against the wall. Tita mia, you have been a brave girl, and it was better that you should be pulled and pushed than that my head should be broken.”

“Yes indeed, father” said she earnestly.

“But those English! Ach! Take a Goth, a Hun, and a Vandal, mix them together and add a Barbary rover; then take this creature and make him drunk — and you have an Englishman. My God! Were ever such people upon earth! What place is free from them? I hear that they swarm in Italy even as they swarm here. Everywhere you will find them, except in heaven.”

“Dear father” cried Tita, still supporting the angry old man, as he limped up the curved oaken stair. “You must not forget that these good signori who have preserved us are also English.”

“Ah, yes. My pardon, sirs! Come into my rooms here. There are some who might find some pleasure in these paintings, but I learn the art of war is the only art which is held in honour in your island.”

The low roofed, oak panelled room into which he conducted them was brilliantly lit by four scented oil lamps. Against the walls, upon the table, on the floor, and in every part of the chamber were great sheets of glass painted in the most brilliant colours. Ford and Edricson gazed around them in amazement, for never had they seen such magnificent works of art.

“You like them then” the lame artist cried, in answer to the look of pleasure and of surprise in their faces. “There are then some of you who have a taste for such trifling.”

“I could not have believed it” exclaimed Alleyne. “What colour! What outlines! See to this martyrdom of the holy Stephen, Ford. Could you not yourself pick up one of these stones which lie to the hand of the wicked murderers?”

“And see this stag, Alleyne, with the cross betwixt its horns. By my faith! I have never seen a better one at the Forest of Bere.”

“And the green of this grass — how bright and clear! Why all the painting that I have seen is but child’s play beside this. This worthy gentleman must be one of those great painters of whom I have oft heard brother Bartholomew speak in the old days at Beaulieu.”

The dark mobile face of the artist shone with pleasure at the unaffected delight of the two young Englishmen. His daughter had thrown off her mantle and disclosed a face of the finest and most delicate Italian beauty, which soon drew Ford’s eyes from the pictures in front of him.

Alleyne, however, continued with little cries of admiration and of wonderment to turn from the walls to the table and yet again to the walls.

“What think you of this, young sir?” asked the painter, tearing off the cloth which concealed the flat object which he had borne beneath his arm. It was a leaf shaped sheet of glass bearing upon it a face with a halo round it, so delicately outlined, and of so perfect a tint, that it might have been indeed a human face which gazed with sad and thoughtful eyes upon the young squire. He clapped his hands, with that thrill of joy which true art will ever give to a true artist.

“It is great!” he cried. “It is wonderful! But I marvel, sir, that you should have risked a work of such beauty and value by bearing it at night through so unruly a crowd.”

“I have indeed been rash” said the artist. “Some wine, Tita, from the Florence flask! Had it not been for you, I tremble to think of what might have come of it. See to the skin tint: it is not to be replaced, for paint as you will, it is not once in a hundred times that it is not either burned too brown in the furnace or else the colour will not hold, and you get but a sickly white. There you can see the very veins and the throb of the blood. Yes, diavolo! If it had broken, my heart would have broken too. It is for the choir window in the church of St. Remi, and we had gone, my little helper and I, to see if it was indeed of the size for the stonework. Night had fallen ere we finished, and what could we do save carry it home as best we might? But you, young sir, you speak as if you too knew something of the art.”

“So little that I scarce dare speak of it in your presence” Alleyne answered. “I have been cloister-bred, and it was no very great matter to handle the brush better than my brother novices.”

“There are pigments, brush, and paper” said the old artist. “I do not give you glass, for that is another matter, and takes much skill in the mixing of colours. Now I pray you to show me a touch of your art. I thank you, Tita! The Venetian glasses, cara mia, and fill them to the brim. A seat, signor!”

While Ford, in his English-French, was conversing with Tita in her Italian-French, the old man was carefully examining his precious head to see that no scratch had been left upon its surface. When he glanced up again, Alleyne had, with a few bold strokes of the brush, tinted in a woman’s face and neck upon the white sheet in front of him.

“Diavolo!” exclaimed the old artist, standing with his head on one side, “you have power; yes, cospetto! you have power, it is the face of an angel!”

“It is the face of the Lady Maude Loring!” cried Ford, even more astonished.

“Why, on my faith, it is not unlike her!” said Alleyne, in some confusion.

“Ah! a portrait! So much the better. Young man, I am Agostino Pisano, the son of Andrea Pisano, and I say again that you have power. Further, I say, that, if you will stay with me, I will teach you all the secrets of the glass-stainers’ mystery: the pigments and their thickening, which will fuse into the glass and which will not, the furnace and the glazing — every trick and method you shall know.”

“I would be right glad to study under such a master” said Alleyne; “but I am sworn to follow my lord whilst this war lasts.”

“War! war!” cried the old Italian. “Ever this talk of war. And the men that you hold to be great — what are they? Have I not heard their names? Soldiers, butchers, destroyers! Ah, per Bacco! We have men in Italy who are in very truth great. You pull down, you despoil; but they build up, they restore. Ah, if you could but see my own dear Pisa, the Duomo, the cloisters of Campo Santo, the high Campanile, with the mellow throb of her bells upon the warm Italian air! Those are the works of great men. And I have seen them with my own eyes, these very eyes which look upon you. I have seen Andrea Orcagna, Taddeo Gaddi, Giotto, Stefano, Simone Memmi — men whose very colours I am not worthy to mix. And I have seen the aged Giotto, and he in turn was pupil to Cimabue, before whom there was no art in Italy, for the Greeks were brought to paint the chapel of the Gondi at Florence. Ah, signori, there are the real great men whose names will be held in honour when your soldiers are shown to have been the enemies of humankind.”

“Faith, sir” said Ford, “there is something to say for the soldiers also, for, unless they be defended, how are all these gentlemen whom you have mentioned to preserve the pictures which they have painted?”

“And all these!” said Alleyne. “Have you indeed done them all? — and where are they to go?”

“Yes, signor, they are all from my hand. Some are, as you see, upon one sheet, and some are in many pieces which may fasten together. There are some who do but paint upon the glass, and then, by placing another sheet of glass upon the top and fastening it, they keep the air from their painting. Yet I hold that the true art of my craft lies as much in the furnace as in the brush. See this rose window, which is from the model of the Church of the Holy Trinity at Vendome, and this other of the ‘Finding of the Grail,’ which is for the apse of the Abbey church. Time was when none but my countrymen could do these things; but there is Clement of Chartres and others in France who are very worthy workmen. But, ah! There is that ever shrieking brazen tongue which will not let us forget for one short hour that it is the arm of the savage, and not the hand of the master, which rules over the world.”

A stern, clear bugle call had sounded close at hand to summon some following together for the night.

“It is a sign to us as well” said Ford. “I would fain stay here forever amid all these beautiful things —” staring hard at the blushing Tita as he spoke — “but we must be back at our lord’s hostel ere he reach it.” Amid renewed thanks and with promises to come again, the two squires bade their leave of the old Italian glass stainer and his daughter. The streets were clearer now, and the rain had stopped, so they made their way quickly from the Rue du Roi, in which their new friends dwelt, to the Rue des Apotres, where the hostel of the “Half Moon” was situated.

CHAPTER XXII
HOW THE BOWMEN HELD WASSAIL AT THE "ROSE DE GUIENNE"

"Mon Dieu! Alleyne, saw you ever so lovely a face?" cried Ford as they hurried along together. "So pure, so peaceful, and so beautiful!"

"In sooth, yes. And the hue of the skin the most perfect that ever I saw. Marked you also how the hair curled round the brow? It was wonder fine."

"Those eyes, too!" cried Ford. "How clear and how tender — simple, and yet so full of thought!"

"If there was a weakness it was in the chin" said Alleyne.

"Nay. I saw none."

"It was well curved, it is true."

"Most daintily so."

"And yet —"

"What then, Alleyne? Wouldst find flaw in the sun?"

"Well, bethink you, Ford, would not more power and expression have been put into the face by a long and noble beard?"

"Holy Virgin!" cried Ford, "the man is mad. A beard on the face of little Tita!"

"Tita! Who spoke of Tita?"

"Who spoke of aught else?"

"It was the picture of St. Remi, man, of which I have been discoursing."

"You are indeed" cried Ford, laughing, "a Goth, Hun, and Vandal, with all the other hard names which the old man called us. How could you think so much of a smear of pigments, when there was such a picture painted by the good God himself in the very room with you? But who is this?"

"If it please you, sirs" said an archer, running across to them, "Aylward and others would be right glad to see you. They are within here. He bade me say to you that the Lord Loring will not need your service tonight, as he sleeps with the Lord Chandos."

"By my faith!" said Ford "We do not need a guide to lead us to their presence." As he spoke there came a roar of singing from the tavern upon the right, with shouts of laughter and stamping of feet. Passing under a low door, and down a

stone-flagged passage, they found themselves in a long narrow hall lit up by a pair of blazing torches, one at either end. Trusses of straw had been thrown down along the walls, and reclining on them were some twenty or thirty archers, all of the Company, their steel caps and jacks thrown off, their tunics open and their great limbs sprawling upon the clay floor. At every man's elbow stood his leathern blackjack of beer, while at the further end a hogshead with its end knocked in promised an abundant supply for the future. Behind the hogshead, on a half circle of kegs, boxes, and rude settles, sat Aylward, John, Black Simon and three or four other leading men of the archers, together with Goodwin Hawtayne, the master shipman, who had left his yellow cog in the river to have a last rouse with his friends of the Company. Ford and Alleyne took their seats between Aylward and Black Simon, without their entrance checking in any degree the hubbub which was going on.

“Ale, mes camarades?” cried the bowman “Or shall it be wine? Nay, but ye must have the one or the other. Here, Jacques, thou limb of the devil, bring a bottrine of the oldest vernage, and see that you do not shake it. Hast heard the news?”

“Nay” cried both the squires.

“That we are to have a brave tourney.”

“A tourney?”

“Aye, lads. For the Captal du Buch hath sworn that he will find five knights from this side of the water who will ride over any five Englishmen who ever threw leg over saddle; and Chandos hath taken up the challenge, and the prince hath promised a golden vase for the man who carries himself best, and all the court is in a buzz over it.”

“Why should the knights have all the sport?” growled Hordle John. “Could they not set up five archers for the honour of Aquitaine and of Gascony?”

“Or five men-at-arms” said Black Simon.

“But who are the English knights?” asked Hawtayne.

“There are three hundred and forty one in the town” said Aylward, “and I hear that three hundred and forty cartels and defiances have already been sent in, the only one missing being Sir John Ravensholme, who is in his bed with the sweating sickness, and cannot set foot to ground.”

“I have heard of it from one of the archers of the guard” cried a bowman from among the straw; “I hear that the prince wished to break a lance, but that Chandos would not hear of it, for the game is likely to be a rough one.”

“Then there is Chandos.”

“Nay, the prince would not permit it. He is to be marshal of the lists, with Sir William Felton and the Duc d’Armagnac. The English will be the Lord Audley, Sir Thomas Percy, Sir Thomas Wake, Sir William Beauchamp, and our own very good lord and leader.”

“Hurrah for him, and God be with him!” cried several. “It is honour to draw string in his service.”

“So you may well say” said Aylward. “By my ten finger bones! if you march behind the pennon of the five roses you are like to see all that a good bowman would wish to see. Ha! Yes, mes garçons, you laugh, but, by my hilt! You may not laugh when you find yourselves where he will take you, for you can never tell what strange vow he may not have sworn to. I see that he has a patch over his eye, even as he had at Poitiers. There will come bloodshed of that patch, or I am the more mistaken.”

“How chanced it at Poitiers, good Master Aylward?” asked one of the young archers, leaning upon his elbows, with his eyes fixed respectfully upon the old bowman’s rugged face.

“Aye, Aylward, tell us of it” cried Hordle John.

“Here is to old Samkin Aylward!” shouted several at the further end of the room, waving their blackjacks in the air.

“Ask him!” said Aylward modestly, nodding towards Black Simon. “He saw more than I did. And yet, by the holy nails! There was not very much that I did not see either.”

“Ah, yes” said Simon, shaking his head, “it was a great day. I never hope to see such another. There were some fine archers who drew their last shaft that day. We shall never see better men, Aylward.”

“By my hilt! No. There was little Robby Withstaff, and Andrew Salblaster, and Wat Alspaye, who broke the neck of the German. Mon Dieu! What men they were! Take them how you would, at long butts or short, hoyles, rounds, or rovers, better bowmen never twirled a shaft over their thumbnails.”

“But the fight, Aylward, the fight!” cried several impatiently.

“Let me fill my jack first, boys, for it is a thirsty tale. It was at the first fall of the leaf that the prince set forth, and he passed through Auvergne, and Berry, and Anjou, and Touraine. In Auvergne the maids are kind, but the wines are sour. In Berry it is the women that are sour, but the wines are rich. Anjou, however, is a very good land for bowmen, for wine and women are all that heart could wish. In Touraine I got nothing save a broken pate, but at Vierzon I had a great good fortune, for I had a golden pyx from the minster, for which I afterwards got nine Genoan janes from the goldsmith in the Rue Mont Olive.

From thence we went to Bourges, where I had a tunic of flame-coloured silk and a very fine pair of shoes with tassels of silk and drops of silver.”

“From a stall, Aylward?” asked one of the young archers.

“Nay, from a man’s feet, lad. I had reason to think that he might not need them again, seeing that a thirty inch shaft had feathered in his back.”

“And what then, Aylward?”

“On we went, coz, some six thousand of us, until we came to Issodun, and there again a very great thing befell.”

“A battle, Aylward?”

“Nay, nay; a greater thing than that. There is little to be gained out of a battle, unless one have the fortune to win a ransom. At Issodun I and three Welshmen came upon a house which all others had passed, and we had the profit of it to ourselves. For myself, I had a fine feather bed — a thing which you will not see in a long day’s journey in England. You have seen it, Alleyne, and you, John. You will bear me out that it is a noble bed. We put it on a sutler’s mule, and bore it after the army. It was on my mind that I would lay it by until I came to start house of mine own, and I have it now in a very safe place near Lyndhurst.”

“And what then, master bowman?” asked Hawtayne. “By St. Christopher! It is indeed a fair and goodly life which you have chosen, for you gather up the spoil as a Warsash man gathers lobsters, without grace or favour from any man.”

“You are right, master shipman” said another of the older archers. “It is an old bowyer’s rede that the second feather of a fenny goose is better than the pinion of a tame one. Draw on old lad, for I have come between you and the clout.”

“On we went then” said Aylward, after a long pull at his blackjack. “There were some six thousand of us, with the prince and his knights, and the feather bed upon a sutler’s mule in the centre. We made great havoc in Touraine, until we came into Romorantin, where I chanced upon a gold chain and two bracelets of jasper, which were stolen from me the same day by a black-eyed wench from the Ardennes. Mon Dieu! There are some folk who have no fear of Domesday in them, and no sign of grace in their souls, for ever clutching and clawing at another man’s chattels.”

“But the battle, Aylward, the battle!” cried several, amid a burst of laughter.

“I come to it, my young war pups. Well, then, the King of France had followed us with fifty thousand men, and he made great haste to catch us, but when he had us he scarce knew what to do with us, for we were so drawn up among hedges and vineyards that they could not come nigh us, save by one lane. On

both sides were archers, men-at-arms and knights behind, and in the centre the baggage, with my feather bed upon a sutler's mule. Three hundred chosen knights came straight for it, and, indeed, they were very brave men, but such a drift of arrows met them that few came back. Then came the Germans, and they also fought very bravely, so that one or two broke through the archers and came as far as the feather bed, but all to no purpose. Then out rides our own little hothead with the patch over his eye, and my Lord Audley with his four Cheshire squires, and a few others of like kidney, and after them went the prince and Chandos, and then the whole throng of us, with axe and sword, for we had shot away our arrows. Ma foi! It was a foolish thing, for we came forth from the hedges, and there was naught to guard the baggage had they ridden round behind us. But all went well with us, and the king was taken, and little Robby Withstaff and I fell in with a wain with twelve firkins of wine for the king's own table, and, by my hilt! If you ask me what happened after that, I cannot answer you, nor can little Robby Withstaff either."

"And next day?"

"By my faith! we did not tarry long, but we hied back to Bordeaux, where we came in safety with the King of France and also the feather bed. I sold my spoil, mes garçons, for as many gold pieces as I could hold in my hufken, and for seven days I lit twelve wax candles upon the altar of St. Andrew; for if you forget the blessed when things are well with you, they are very likely to forget you when you have need of them. I have a score of one hundred and nineteen pounds of wax against the holy Andrew, and, as he was a very just man, I doubt not that I shall have full weigh and measure when I have most need of it."

"Tell me, master Aylward" cried a young fresh-faced archer at the further end of the room, "what was this great battle about?"

"Why, you jack fool, what would it be about save who should wear the crown of France?"

"I thought that mayhap it might be as to who should have this feather bed of thine."

"If I come down to you, Silas, I may lay my belt across your shoulders" Aylward answered, amid a general shout of laughter. "But it is time young chickens went to roost when they dare cackle against their elders. It is late, Simon."

"Nay, let us have another song."

"Here is Arnold of Sowley will troll as good a stave as any man in the Company."

"Nay, we have one here who is second to none" said Hawtayne, laying his hand upon big John's shoulder. "I have heard him on the cog with a voice like

the wave upon the shore. I pray you, friend, to give us 'The Bells of Milton' or, if you will, 'The Franklin's Maid.' ”

Hordle John drew the back of his hand across his mouth, fixed his eyes upon the corner of the ceiling, and bellowed forth, in a voice which made the torches flicker, the southland ballad for which he had been asked: —

The franklin he hath gone to roam,
The franklin's maid she bides at home,
But she is cold and coy and staid,
And who may win the franklin's maid?

There came a knight of high renown
In bassinet and ciclatoun;
On bended knee full long he prayed,
He might not win the franklin's maid.

There came a squire so debonair
His dress was rich, his words were fair,
He sweetly sang, he deftly played:
He could not win the franklin's maid.

There came a mercer wonder-fine
With velvet cap and gaberdine;
For all his ships, for all his trade
He could not buy the franklin's maid.

There came an archer bold and true,
With bracer guard and stave of yew;
His purse was light, his jerkin frayed;
Haro, alas! The franklin's maid!

Oh, some have laughed and some have cried
And some have scoured the countryside!
But off they ride through wood and glade,
The bowman and the franklin's maid.

A roar of delight from his audience, with stamping of feet and beating of blackjacks against the ground, showed how thoroughly the song was to their taste, while John modestly retired into a quart pot, which he drained in four giant gulps. "I sang that ditty in Hordle alehouse ere I ever thought to be an archer myself" quoth he.

"Fill up your stoups!" cried Black Simon, thrusting his own goblet into the open hogshead in front of him. "Here is a last cup to the White Company, and every brave boy who walks behind the roses of Loring!"

"To the wood, the flax, and the gander's wing!" said an old grey-headed archer on the right.

“To a gentle loose, and the King of Spain for a mark at fourteen score!” cried another.

“To a bloody war!” shouted a fourth. “Many to go and few to come!”

“With the most gold to the best steel!” added a fifth.

“And a last cup to the maids of our heart!” cried Aylward. “A steady hand and a true eye, boys; so let two quarts be a bowman’s portion.” With shout and jest and snatch of song they streamed from the room, and all was peaceful once more in the “Rose de Guienne.”

CHAPTER XXIII
HOW ENGLAND HELD THE LISTS AT BORDEAUX

So used were the good burghers of Bordeaux to martial display and knightly sport, that an ordinary joust or tournament was an everyday matter with them. The fame and brilliancy of the prince's court had drawn the knights errant and pursuivants-of-arms from every part of Europe. In the long lists by the Garonne on the landward side of the northern gate there had been many a strange combat, when the Teutonic knight, fresh from the conquest of the Prussian heathen, ran a course against the knight of Calatrava, hardened by continual struggle against the Moors, or cavaliers from Portugal broke a lance with Scandinavian warriors from the further shore of the great Northern Ocean. Here fluttered many an outland pennon, bearing symbol and blazonry from the banks of the Danube, the wilds of Lithuania and the mountain strongholds of Hungary; for chivalry was of no clime and of no race, nor was any land so wild that the fame and name of the prince had not sounded through it from border to border.

Great, however, was the excitement through town and district when it was learned that on the third Wednesday in Advent there would be held a passage-at-arms in which five knights of England would hold the lists against all comers. The great concourse of noblemen and famous soldiers, the national character of the contest, and the fact that this was a last trial of arms before what promised to be an arduous and bloody war, all united to make the event one of the most notable and brilliant that Bordeaux had ever seen. On the eve of the contest the peasants flocked in from the whole district of the Medoc, and the fields beyond the walls were whitened with the tents of those who could find no warmer lodging. From the distant camp of Dax, too, and from Blaye, Bourge, Libourne, St. Emilion, Castillon, St. Macaire, Cardillac, Ryons, and all the cluster of flourishing towns which look upon Bordeaux as their mother, there thronged an unceasing stream of horsemen and of footmen, all converging upon the great city. By the morning of the day on which the courses were to be run, not less than eighty people had assembled round the lists and along the low grassy ridge which looks down upon the scene of the encounter.

It was, as may well be imagined, no easy matter among so many noted cavaliers to choose out five on either side who should have precedence over their fellows. A score of secondary combats had nearly arisen from the rivalries and bad blood created by the selection, and it was only the influence of the prince and the efforts of the older barons which kept the peace among so many eager and fiery soldiers. Not till the day before the courses were the shields finally hung out for the inspection of the ladies and the heralds, so that all men might know the names of the champions and have the opportunity to prefer any charge against them, should there be stain upon them which should disqualify them from taking part in so noble and honourable a ceremony.

Sir Hugh Calverley and Sir Robert Knolles had not yet returned from their raid into the marches of the Navarre, so that the English party were deprived of

two of their most famous lances. Yet there remained so many good names that Chandos and Felton, to whom the selection had been referred, had many an earnest consultation, in which every feat of arms and failure or success of each candidate was weighed and balanced against the rival claims of his companions. Lord Audley of Cheshire, the hero of Poitiers, and Loring of Hampshire, who was held to be the second lance in the army, were easily fixed upon. Then, of the younger men, Sir Thomas Percy of Northumberland, Sir Thomas Wake of Yorkshire, and Sir William Beauchamp of Gloucestershire, were finally selected to uphold the honour of England. On the other side were the veteran Captal de Buch and the brawny Olivier de Clisson, with the free companion Sir Perducas d'Albret, the valiant Lord of Mucidant, and Sigismund von Altenstadt, of the Teutonic Order. The older soldiers among the English shook their heads as they looked upon the escutcheons of these famous warriors, for they were all men who had spent their lives upon the saddle, and bravery and strength can avail little against experience and wisdom of war.

“By my faith! Sir John” said the prince as he rode through the winding streets on his way to the list, “I should have been glad to have splintered a lance today. You have seen me hold a spear since I had strength to lift one, and should know best whether I do not merit a place among this honourable company.”

“There is no better seat and no truer lance, sire” said Chandos; “but, if I may say so without fear of offence, it were not fitting that you should join in this debate.”

“And why, Sir John?”

“Because, sire, it is not for you to take part with Gascons against English, or with English against Gascons, seeing that you are lord of both. We are not too well loved by the Gascons now, and it is but the golden link of your princely coronet which holds us together. If that be snapped I know not what would follow.”

“Snapped, Sir John!” cried the prince, with an angry sparkle in his dark eyes. “What manner of talk is this? You speak as though the allegiance of our people were a thing which might be thrown off or on like a falcon’s jessel.”

“With a sorry hack one uses whip and spur, sire” said Chandos; “but with a horse of blood and spirit a good cavalier is gentle and soothing, coaxing rather than forcing. These folk are strange people, and you must hold their love, even as you have it now, for you will get from their kindness what all the pennons in your army could not wring from them.”

“You are over-grave today, John” the prince answered. “We may keep such questions for our council chamber. But how now, my brothers of Spain, and of Majorca, what think you of this challenge?”

“I look to see some handsome joisting” said Don Pedro, who rode with the King of Majorca upon the right of the prince, while Chandos was on the left. “By

St. James of Compostella! But these burghers would bear some taxing. See to the broadcloth and velvet that the rogues bear upon their backs! By my troth! If they were my subjects they would be glad enough to wear falding and leather ere I had done with them. But mayhap it is best to let the wool grow long ere you clip it.”

“It is our pride” the prince answered coldly, “that we rule over freemen and not slaves.”

“Every man to his own humour” said Pedro carelessly. “Carajo! There is a sweet face at yonder window! Don Fernando, I pray you to mark the house, and to have the maid brought to us at the abbey.”

“Nay, brother, nay!” cried the prince impatiently. “I have had occasion to tell you more than once that things are not ordered in this way in Aquitaine.”

“A thousand pardons, dear friend” the Spaniard answered quickly, for a flush of anger had sprung to the dark cheek of the English prince. “You make my exile so like a home that I forget at times that I am not in very truth back in Castile. Every land hath indeed its ways and manners; but I promise you, Edward, that when you are my guest in Toledo or Madrid you shall not yearn in vain for any commoner’s daughter on whom you may deign to cast your eye.”

“Your talk, sire” said the prince still more coldly “is not such as I love to hear from your lips. I have no taste for such amours as you speak of, and I have sworn that my name shall be coupled with that of no woman save my ever dear wife.”

“Ever the mirror of true chivalry!” exclaimed Pedro, while James of Majorca, frightened at the stern countenance of their all-powerful protector, plucked hard at the mantle of his brother exile.

“Have a care, cousin” he whispered; “for the sake of the Virgin have a care, for you have angered him.”

“Pshaw! fear not” the other answered in the same low tone. “If I miss one stoop I will strike him on the next. Mark me else. Fair cousin” he continued, turning to the prince, “these be rare men-at-arms and lusty bowmen. It would be hard indeed to match them.”

“They have journeyed far, sire, but they have never yet found their match.”

“Nor ever will, I doubt not. I feel myself to be back upon my throne when I look at them. But tell me, dear coz, what shall we do next, when we have driven this bastard Henry from the kingdom which he hath filched?”

“We shall then compel the King of Aragon to place our good friend and brother James of Majorca upon the throne.”

“Noble and generous prince!” cried the little monarch.

“That done” said King Pedro, glancing out of the corners of his eyes at the young conqueror, “we shall unite the forces of England, of Aquitaine, of Spain and of Majorca. It would be shame to us if we did not do some great deed with such forces ready to our hand.”

“You say truly, brother” cried the prince, his eyes kindling at the thought. “Methinks that we could not do anything more pleasing to Our Lady than to drive the heathen Moors out of the country.”

“I am with you, Edward, as true as hilt to blade. But, by St. James! We shall not let these Moors make mock at us from over the sea. We must take ship and thrust them from Africa.”

“By heaven, yes!” cried the prince. “And it is the dream of my heart that our English pennons shall wave upon the Mount of Olives, and the lions and lilies float over the holy city.”

“And why not, dear coz? Your bowmen have cleared a path to Paris, and why not to Jerusalem? Once there, your arms might rest.”

“Nay, there is more to be done” cried the prince, carried away by the ambitious dream. “There is still the city of Constantine to be taken, and war to be waged against the Soldan of Damascus. And beyond him again there is tribute to be levied from the Cham of Tartary and from the kingdom of Cathay. Ha! John, what say you? Can we not go as far eastward as Richard of the Lion Heart?”

“Old John will bide at home, sire” said the rugged soldier. “By my soul! As long as I am seneschal of Aquitaine I will find enough to do in guarding the marches which you have entrusted to me. It would be a blithe day for the King of France when he heard that the seas lay between him and us.”

“By my soul! John” said the prince “I have never known you turn laggard before.”

“The babbling hound, sire, is not always the first at the mort” the old knight answered.

“Nay, my true heart! I have tried you too often not to know. But, by my soul! I have not seen so dense a throng since the day that we brought King John down Cheapside.”

It was indeed an enormous crowd which covered the whole vast plain from the line of vineyards to the river bank. From the northern gate the prince and his companions looked down at a dark sea of heads, brightened here and there by the coloured hoods of the women, or by the sparkling head-pieces of archers and men-at-arms. In the centre of this vast assemblage the lists seemed but a

narrow strip of green marked out with banners and streamers, while a gleam of white with a flutter of pennons at either end showed where the marquees were pitched which served as the dressing rooms of the combatants. A path had been staked off from the city gate to the stands which had been erected for the court and the nobility. Down this, amid the shouts of the enormous multitude, the prince cantered with his two attendant kings, his high officers of state, and his long train of lords and ladies, courtiers, counsellors, and soldiers, with toss of plume and flash of jewel, sheen of silk and glint of gold — as rich and gallant a show as heart could wish. The head of the cavalcade had reached the lists ere the rear had come clear of the city gate, for the fairest and the bravest had assembled from all the broad lands which are watered by the Dordogne and the Garonne. Here rode dark-browed cavaliers from the sunny south, fiery soldiers from Gascony, graceful courtiers of Limousin or Saintonge, and gallant young Englishmen from beyond the seas. Here too were the beautiful brunettes of the Gironde, with eyes which outflashed their jewels, while beside them rode their blonde sisters of England, clear cut and aquiline, swathed in swans'-down and in ermine, for the air was biting though the sun was bright. Slowly the long and glittering train wound into the lists, until every horse had been tethered by the varlets in waiting, and every lord and lady seated in the long stands which stretched, rich in tapestry and velvet and blazoned arms, on either side of the centre of the arena.

The holders of the lists occupied the end which was nearest to the city gate. There, in front of their respective pavilions, flew the martlets of Audley, the roses of Loring, the scarlet bars of Wake, the lion of the Percies and the silver wings of the Beauchamps, each supported by a squire clad in hanging green stuff to represent so many Tritons, and bearing a huge conch-shell in their left hands. Behind the tents the great warhorses, armed at all points, champed and reared, while their masters sat at the doors of their pavilions, with their helmets upon their knees, chatting as to the order of the day's doings. The English archers and men-at-arms had mustered at that end of the lists, but the vast majority of the spectators were in favour of the attacking party, for the English had declined in popularity ever since the bitter dispute as to the disposal of the royal captive after the battle of Poitiers. Hence the applause was by no means general when the herald-at-arms proclaimed, after a flourish of trumpets, the names and styles of the knights who were prepared, for the honour of their country and for the love of their ladies, to hold the field against all who might do them the favour to run a course with them. On the other hand, a deafening burst of cheering greeted the rival herald, who, advancing from the other end of the lists, rolled forth the well known titles of the five famous warriors who had accepted the defiance.

“Faith, John” said the prince “it sounds as though you were right. Ha! My grace D’Armagnac, it seems that our friends on this side will not grieve if our English champions lose the day.”

“It may be so, sire” the Gascon nobleman answered. “I have little doubt that in Smithfield or at Windsor an English crowd would favour their own countrymen.”

“By my faith! that’s easily seen” said the prince, laughing, “for a few score English archers at yonder end are bellowing as though they would outshout the mighty multitude. I fear that they will have little to shout over this tourney, for my gold vase has small prospect of crossing the water. What are the conditions, John?”

“They are to tilt singly not less than three courses, sire, and the victory to rest with that party which shall have won the greater number of courses, each pair continuing till one or other have the vantage. He who carries himself best of the victors hath the prize, and he who is judged best of the other party hath a jewelled clasp. Shall I order that the nakirs sound, sire?”

The prince nodded, and the trumpets rang out, while the champions rode forth one after the other, each meeting his opponent in the centre of the lists. Sir William Beauchamp went down before the practiced lance of the Captal de Buch. Sir Thomas Percy won the vantage over the Lord of Mucident, and the Lord Audley struck Sir Perducas d’Albret from the saddle. The burly De Clisson, however, restored the hopes of the attackers by beating to the ground Sir Thomas Wake of Yorkshire. So far, there was little to choose betwixt challengers and challenged.

“By Saint James of Santiago!” cried Don Pedro, with a tinge of colour upon his pale cheeks, “win who will, this has been a most notable contest.”

“Who comes next for England, John?” asked the prince in a voice which quivered with excitement.

“Sir Nigel Loring of Hampshire, sire.”

“Ha! he is a man of good courage, and skilled in the use of all weapons.”

“He is indeed, sire. But his eyes, like my own, are the worse for wars. Yet he can tilt or play his part at handstrokes as merrily as ever. It was he, sire, who won the golden crown which Queen Philippa, your royal mother, gave to be jousted for by all the knights of England after the harrying of Calais. I have heard that at Twynham Castle there is a buffet which groans beneath the weight of his prizes.”

“I pray that my vase may join them” said the prince. “But here is the cavalier of Germany, and by my soul! He looks like a man of great valour and hardiness. Let them run their full three courses, for the issue is overgreat to hang upon one.”

As the prince spoke, amid a loud flourish of trumpets and the shouting of the Gascon party, the last of the assailants rode gallantly into the lists. He was a man of great size, clad in black armour without blazonry or ornament of any kind, for all worldly display was forbidden by the rules of the military brotherhood to which he belonged. No plume or nobloy fluttered from his plain

tilting salade, and even his lance was devoid of the customary banderole. A white mantle fluttered behind him, upon the left side of which was marked the broad black cross picked out with silver which was the well-known badge of the Teutonic Order. Mounted upon a horse as large, as black, and as forbidding as himself, he cantered slowly forward, with none of those prancings and gambades with which a cavalier was accustomed to show his command over his charger. Gravely and sternly he inclined his head to the prince, and took his place at the further end of the arena.

He had scarce done so before Sir Nigel rode out from the holders' enclosure, and galloping at full speed down the lists, drew his charger up before the prince's stand with a jerk which threw it back upon its haunches. With white armour, blazoned shield, and plume of ostrich feathers from his helmet, he carried himself in so jaunty and joyous a fashion, with tossing pennon and curveting charger, that a shout of applause ran the full circle of the arena. With the air of a man who hastes to a joyous festival, he waved his lance in salute, and reining the pawing horse round without permitting its forefeet to touch the ground, he hastened back to his station.

A great hush fell over the huge multitude as the two last champions faced each other. A double issue seemed to rest upon their contest, for their personal fame was at stake as well as their party's honour. Both were famous warriors, but as their exploits had been performed in widely sundered countries, they had never before been able to cross lances. A course between such men would have been enough in itself to cause the keenest interest, apart from its being the crisis which would decide who should be the victors of the day. For a moment they waited — the German sombre and collected, Sir Nigel quivering in every fibre with eagerness and fiery resolution. Then, amid a long-drawn breath from the spectators, the glove fell from the marshal's hand, and the two steel clad horsemen met like a thunderclap in front of the royal stand. The German, though he reeled for an instant before the thrust of the Englishman, struck his opponent so fairly upon the vizor that the laces burst, the plumed helmet flew to pieces, and Sir Nigel galloped on down the lists with his bald head shimmering in the sunshine. A thousand waving scarves and tossing caps announced that the first bout had fallen to the popular party.

The Hampshire knight was not a man to be disheartened by a reverse. He spurred back to the pavilion, and was out in a few instants with another helmet. The second course was so equal that the keenest judges could not discern any vantage. Each struck fire from the other's shield, and each endured the jarring shock as though welded to the horse beneath him. In the final bout, however, Sir Nigel struck his opponent with so true an aim that the point of the lance caught between the bars of his vizor and tore the front of his helmet out, while the German, aiming somewhat low, and half stunned by the shock, had the misfortune to strike his adversary upon the thigh, a breach of the rules of the tilting yard, by which he not only sacrificed his chances of success, but would also have forfeited his horse and his armour, had the English knight chosen to claim them. A roar of applause from the English soldiers, with an ominous silence from the vast crowd who pressed round the barriers, announced that

the balance of victory lay with the holders. Already the ten champions had assembled in front of the prince to receive his award, when a harsh bugle call from the further end of the lists drew all eyes to a new and unexpected arrival.