

digious title. "I had no right to take you to the wars," said he; "for by Saint Paul! it is very clear that I have widowed half the parish. But I saw your aged father the franklin. Bethink you of the joy that will fill his heart when he hears that you have done some small deed in France, and so won honor in the eyes of all."

"I fear that honor will not help him to pay his arrears of rent to the sacrist of Waverley," said Aylward. "Out he will go on the roadside, honor and all, if he does not find ten nobles by next Epiphany. But if I could win a ransom or be at the storming of a rich city, then indeed the old man would be proud of me. 'Thy sword must help my spade, Samkin,' said he as he kissed me good-by. Ah! it would indeed be a happy day for him and for all if I could ride back with a saddle-bag full of gold pieces, and please God, I shall dip my hand in somebody's pocket before I see Crooksbury Hill once more!"

Nigel shook his head, for indeed it seemed hopeless to try to bridge the gulf between them. Already they had made such good progress along the bridle-path through the heather that the little hill of Saint Catharine and the ancient shrine upon its summit loomed up before them. Here they crossed the road from the south to London, and at the crossing two wayfarers were waiting who waved their hands in greeting, the one a tall, slender, dark woman upon a white jennet, the other a very thick and red-faced old man, whose weight seemed to curve the back of the stout gray cob which he bestrode.

"What how, Nigel!" he cried. "Mary has told me that you make a start this morning, and we have waited here this hour and more on the chance of seeing you pass. Come, lad, and have a last stoup of English ale, for many a time amid the sour French wines you will long for the white foam under your nose, and the good homely twang of it."

Nigel had to decline the draft, for it meant riding into Guildford town, a mile out of his course, but very gladly he agreed with Mary that they should climb the path to the old shrine and offer a last orison together. The knight and Aylward waited below with the horses; and so it came about that Nigel and Mary found themselves alone under the solemn old Gothic arches, in front of the dark shadowed recess in which gleamed the golden reliquary of the saint. In silence they knelt side by side in prayer, and then came forth once more out of the gloom and the shadow into the fresh sunlit summer morning. They stopped ere they descended the path, and looked to right and left at the fair meadows and the blue Wey curling down the valley.

"What have you prayed for, Nigel?" said she. "I have prayed that God and His saints will hold my spirit high and will send me back from France in such a fashion that I may dare to come to you and to claim you for my own."

"Bethink you well what it is that you say, Nigel," said she. "What you are to me only my own heart can tell; but I would never set eyes upon your face again rather than abate by one inch that height of honor and worshipful achievement to which you may attain."

"Nay, my dear and most sweet lady, how should

winning of honor? May it not be that I shall be a drag upon you, that your heart may shrink from some honorable task, lest it should bring risk and pain to me? Think well before you answer, my fair lord, for indeed my very heart would break if it should ever happen that through love of me your high hopes and great promise should miss fulfilment."

Nigel looked at her with sparkling eyes. The soul which shone through her dark face had transformed it into a beauty more lofty and more rare than that of her shallow sister. He bowed before the majesty of the woman, and pressed his lips to her hand. "You are like a star upon my path which guides me on the upward way," said he. "Our souls are set together upon the finding of honor, and how shall we hold each other back when our purpose is the same?"

She shook her proud head. "So it seems to you now, fair lord, but it may be otherwise as the years pass. How shall you prove that I am indeed a help and not a hindrance?"

"I will prove it by my deeds, fair and dear lady," said Nigel. "Here at the shrine of the holy Catharine, on this, the Feast of Saint Margaret, I take my oath that I will do three deeds in your honor as a proof of my high love before I set eyes upon your face again, and these three deeds shall stand as a proof to you that if I love you dearly, still I will not let the thought of you stand betwixt me and honorable achievement!"

Her face shone with her love and her pride. "I also make my oath," said she, "and I do it in the name of the holy Catharine whose shrine is hard by. I swear that I will hold myself for you until these three deeds be done and we meet once more; also that if—which may dear Christ forbid!—you fall in doing them then I shall take the veil in Shalford nunnery and look upon no man's face again! Give me your hand, Nigel."

She had taken a little bangle of gold filigree work from her arm and fastened it upon his sunburnt wrist, reading aloud to him the engraved motto in old French: "*Fais ce que dois, adviegné que pourra—c'est commande au chevalier.*" Then for one moment they fell into each other's arms and with kiss upon kiss, a loving man and a tender woman, they swore their troth to each other. But the old knight was calling impatiently from below and together they hurried down the winding path to where the horses waited under the sandy bluff.

As far as the Shalford crossing Sir John rode by Nigel's arm, and many were the last injunctions which he gave him concerning woodcraft, and great his anx-

ity lest he confuse a spay with a brocket, or either with a hind. At last when they came to the reedy edge of the Wey the old knight and his daughter reined up their horses. Nigel looked back at them ere he entered the dark Chantry woods, and saw them still gazing after him and waving their hands. Then the path wound amongst the trees and they were lost to sight; but long afterward when a clearing exposed once more the Shalford meadows Nigel saw that the old man upon the bay cob was riding slowly toward Saint Catharine's Hill, but that the girl was still where he had seen her last, leaning forward in her saddle and straining her eyes to pierce the dark forest which screened her lover from her view. It was but a fleeting glance through a break in the foliage, and yet in after days of stress and toil in far distant lands it was that one little picture—the green meadow, the reeds, the slow blue-winding river, and the eager bending graceful figure upon the

white horse—which was the clearest and the dearest image of that England which he had left behind him.

But if Nigel's friends had learned that this was the morning of his leaving, his enemies too were on the alert. The two comrades had just emerged from the Chantry woods and were beginning the ascent of that curving path which leads upward to the old Chapel of the Martyr when with a hiss like an angry snake a long white arrow streaked under Pommers and struck quivering in the grassy turf. A second whizzed past Nigel's ear, as he tried to turn; but Aylward struck the great war-horse a sharp blow over the haunches, and it had galloped some hundreds of yards before its rider could pull it up. Aylward followed as hard as he could ride, bending low over his horse's neck, while arrows whizzed all around him.

"By Saint Paul!" said Nigel, tugging at his bridle and white with anger, "they shall not chase me across the country as though I was a frightened doe. Archer, how dare you to lash my horse when I would have turned and ridden in upon them?"

"It is well that I did so," said Aylward, "or by these ten finger-bones! our journey would have begun and ended on the same day. As I glanced round I saw a dozen of them at the least amongst the brushwood. See now how the light glimmers upon their steel caps yonder in the bracken under the great beech-tree. Nay, I pray you, my fair lord, do not ride forward. What chance has a man in the open against all these who lie at their ease in the underwood? If you will not think of yourself, then consider your horse, which would have a cloth-yard shaft feathered in its hide ere it could reach the wood."

Nigel chafed in impotent anger. "Am I to be shot at like a popinjay at a fair, by any reaver or outlaw that seeks a mark for his bow?" he cried. "By Saint Paul! Aylward, I will put on my harness and go further into the matter. Help me to untruss, I pray you!"

"Nay, my fair lord, I will not help you to your own downfall. It is a match with cogged dice betwixt a horseman on the moor and archers amid the forest. But these men are no outlaws, or they would not dare to draw their bows within a league of the sheriff of Guildford."

"Indeed, Aylward, I think that you speak truth," said Nigel. "It may be that these are the men of Paul de la Fosse of Shalford, whom I have given little cause to love me. Ah! there is indeed the very man himself."

They sat their horses with their backs to the



Swore their troth to each other.



Aylward's second shaft passed through the shoulder of his drawing arm.



you abate it, since it is the thought of you which will nerve my arm and uphold my heart?"

"Think once more, my fair lord, and hold yourself bound by no word which you have said. Let it be as the breeze which blows past our faces and is heard of no more. Your soul yearns for honor. To that has it ever turned. Is there room in it for love also? or is it possible that both shall live at their highest in one mind? Do you not call to mind that Galahad and other great knights of old have put women out of their lives that they might ever give their whole soul and strength to the

long slope which leads up to the old chapel on the hill. In front of them was the dark ragged edge of the wood, with a sharp twinkle of steel here and there in its shadows which spoke of these lurking foes. But now there was a long moot upon a horn, and at once a score of russet-clad bowmen ran forward from amid the trees, spreading out into a scattered line and closing swiftly in upon the travelers. In the midst of them, upon a great gray horse, sat a small misshapen man, waving and cheering as one sets hounds on a badger, turning his head this way and that as he whooped and pointed, urging his bowmen onward up the slope.

"Draw them on, my fair lord! Draw them on until we have them out on the down!" cried Aylward, his eyes shining with joy. "Five hundred paces more, and then we may be on terms with them. Nay, linger not, but keep them always just clear of arrow-shot until our turn has come."

Nigel shook and trembled with eagerness, as with his hand on his sword-hilt he looked at the line of eager hurrying men. But it flashed through his mind what Chandos had said of the cool head which is better for the warrior than the hot heart. Aylward's words were true and wise. He turned