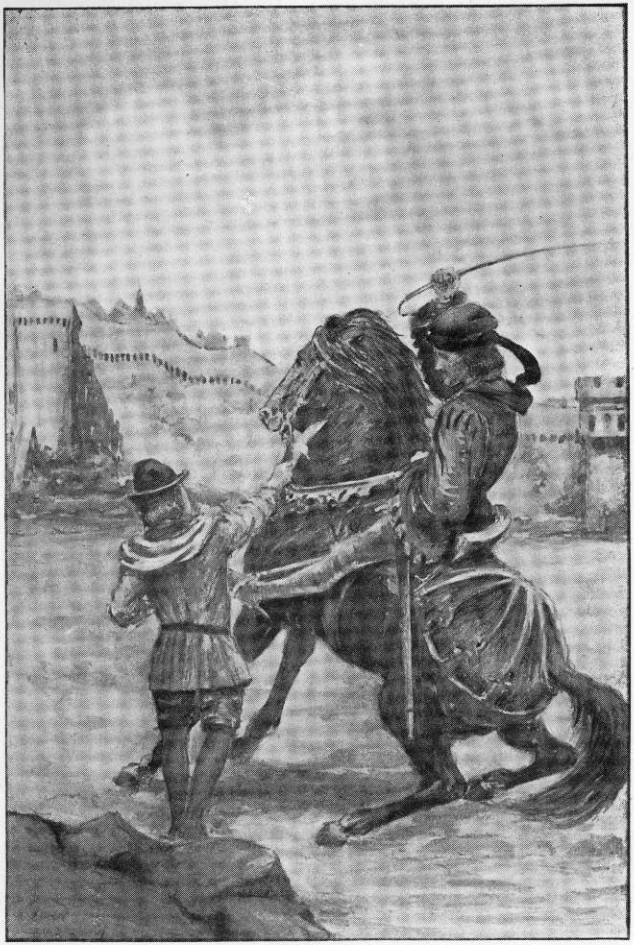
The Little Count of Normandy

or

The Story of Raoul



"'BEGONE, LITTLE RASCAL!'" (*See page* 223.)

The Little Count of Normandy

Or

The Story of Raoul

BY

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TO

ALL THE GOOD FRIENDS

WHO MADE

MY DREAMS COME TRUE

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The Little Count of Normandy

or:

The Story of Raoul

CHAPTER I

FLYING THE FALCON

AMID a great clattering of hoofs and happy shouts of childish laughter, two riders dashed across the drawbridge of the Norman castle of Bellaire, and cantering down the steep road beyond the castle moat, frisked off along a narrow bridle path leading across some open fields.

One of the horsemen was a tall, graceful youth who wore the doublet of a young squire. On his right wrist perched a beautiful falcon, the little bells fastened to its

feet jingling merrily and its head covered with a tiny hood tipped with a tassel of scarlet silk that bobbed to and fro with the lively movements of the horse.

As the youth rode along he kept a watchful eye on his companion, a fair-haired boy of about ten years. The boy wore a suit of black mourning; and on his sleeve a silver embroidery of a little shield displaying a leopard, a turreted tower, and other heraldic devices, bore witness that he came of noble blood.

It was less than a year since the lad's father, the brave Count Raymond, had fallen fighting for the king, and left his only child, Raoul, to inherit the castle and bear his title. Raoul and his mother, the Lady Alix, had lived very quietly after the death of Count Raymond, whom they both had devotedly loved. It was many hundred

years ago, in the reign of King Charles VI of France (who ruled Normandy also, where stood the castle of Bellaire); and as the times were troubled and lawless, making the roads and country oftentimes unsafe, poor Lady Alix, feeling her helplessness, had scarce allowed Raoul from out her sight.

But as the months went on, and no one molested them, at last she began to feel that she had been more timid than needful; and though the castle grounds were large and beautiful, she saw that Raoul was growing pale and fragile for lack of more life in the fields and woods. And so she had not had the heart to refuse her consent when he had begged that he might go out for a morning's sport with his falcon.

"Yes, dear heart," she had said fondly, "a canter over the meadows will do thee

good, and bring back the colour to thy cheeks." And then choosing from her household the young squire Sidney to go with the lad, she had watched them start off, and as she waved them good-bye from the end of the drawbridge, she had cautioned them both not to go far beyond sight of the castle.

Raoul was overjoyed at the prospect of flying the falcon, for at that time this was the favourite way of hunting. While the noble lords were very fond of now and then chasing wild boars and deer through the forests, yet they thought no sport quite so fine as the chase of swift-winged birds through the sky. For this purpose they took great pains to train falcons for the hunt, for the falcon is a natural bird of prey. Every castle had a regular place set apart, which was called the "mew"; and here great num-

bers of the birds were kept and carefully educated.

When a hunter started out for his sport, he carried the falcon perched on his wrist; the bird being secured by means of a pair of slender leathern thongs, called "jesses," which were fastened around each of its legs and then looped in a small hook on the back of the hunter's glove; and these jesses the falcon always wore. Always, too, he had music wherever he went, for, like the old lady in the nursery rhyme, if he did not have rings on his fingers, at least he had bells on his toes; for strapped above each foot by a narrow silken band he carried a small round bell that made a pretty, silvery tinkling whenever he moved.

The bird's outfit was completed by an odd little hood, often elaborately embroidered, and which he was obliged to wear

over his head, quite covering his eyes, so that he could see nothing to distract his attention until it was time to loose him for flight. The hunter then drew off the little hood and slipped the jesses from out the hook on his glove, and away would go the bird, soaring in chase of whatever prey was in sight.

Indeed, it was considered part of the education of everyone of gentle birth to know how to fly the falcon; and so as our two young horsemen rode along Raoul kept an eager eye on the bird on Sidney's wrist.

He would have very much liked to carry it himself, but his own wrist was too childish as yet to bear so heavy a weight. He was very happy, though, hearing the little bells jingle and watching the scarlet tassel bobbing above the falcon's hood; and as their two ponies cantered along across the

sunny fields, the lad's eyes sparkled and he fairly shouted with delight.

It was a bright morning in June, and over all the Norman meadows the dandelions were yellow as gold. The sky was deep blue, and presently as Raoul's companion looked up, "Ho!" he exclaimed quickly to the boy, who was close beside him, "dost thou see yonder black speck floating northward?"

As Raoul looked, the bird, for such it was, sailing in graceful circles dropped somewhat from the clear azure height, and coming nearer to them, they saw the flashing white breast of a young heron.

At this, Sidney plucked the tiny tasseled hood from off the falcon's eyes, and deftly loosing the little leathern jesses that held its feet, with a shrill, encouraging cry of "Haw! Haw! Ho now!" to which all

falcons were trained to fly, he launched the beautiful bird into the bright sparkling air.

Up, up the falcon soared, rising swiftly in great sweeping curves, ever drawing closer and closer to his prey. In an instant the heron spied him, and then began the excitement of the chase!

Sidney and Raoul spurred their ponies and galloped along the path, now and then dashing out over the fresh green turf.

"Haw! Haw!" they shouted as the falcon neared the quarry, — "Haw! Haw!"

Just then the heron, his strength almost spent in his desperate flight, led his pursuer toward a group of tangled willows that skirted a dense woodland. Here hovering a moment above the topmost boughs, he poised, and then dropped; and the falcon, pouncing at the same instant, relentlessly clutched him in his talons.

Raoul in his eagerness to see the end of the struggle, plied his little riding whip, and the pony, tossing his heels, set out at a run toward the thicket.

Sidney did his best to keep up with him, but in a brief while the little boy had plunged into the wood. And then, in another moment, before the young squire could reach his side, he heard his name shrieked, "Sidney! Sidney! *Sidney!*"

Thinking Raoul was only shouting from excitement over the falcon, he hastened gaily on; but on reaching the cover of the trees he found to his dismay that he had entered the midst of a group of rough looking horsemen. There were three of them, all booted and spurred. They had evil faces and quick, stealthy motions, and one of them had already seized the bridle of

Raoul's pony while another was preparing to strap the boy to the saddle.

Sidney could do nothing to help Raoul, for he had no weapon; yet in his desperation he struck manfully out with one fist as with the other he clung to the bridle of his pony.

But he was at once met by one of the robber band who unsheathed a wicked looking knife with a jeering "Ho, youngster! Falconing is fine sport in sooth, but hunting young nobles is more to our taste than chasing herons, sirrah! Come on!" And with this, helped by one of the others who had already secured Raoul, they seized Sidney also and bound his hands and strapped him to the saddle.

They had scarcely finished this when there came a tinkle of bells, and the men, startled, quickly drew the horses and their

prisoners into the shelter of some tall bushes.

But the bells belonged to nothing but the falcon, which presently flew from out the willow thicket where he had slain the heron.

As the bird instinctively came toward them, Raoul, who had sat white and silent, too angry and terrified to speak, gave an involuntary cry, "See, Sidney! Our falcon!"

Just then the bird in trying to reach the young squire caught his jesses for a moment on the twig of a hazel bush, and one of the men instantly seized him exclaiming, "Marry! thou art too fine a bird to leave dangling from a hazel twig. I trow thou wilt fetch a good gold noble if a farthing!"

Then he added, with a mocking look at Raoul, "We will take thy falcon along,

young sir, for safe keeping in case thou wishest to hunt with him another day!"

As the man placed the bird on the pommel of his saddle he clumsily fastened its legs to the latter by means of a piece of frayed lacer drawn from his doublet, and with his knife cut the little bells from its feet lest their jingling betray the whereabouts of the party.

Then, spying the tasseled hood which Sidney had thrust into his belt, he jerked it out and dropped it over the head of the falcon, for it annoyed him by its restless peering about.

This done, he grasped in one hand the bridle of Sidney's pony, while one of his companions took charge of Raoul, and all started off at a brisk pace, threading their way deftly along a lonely path that wound in and out among the ancient forest trees.

On and on they went, always keeping in the densest part of the forest, which was very large and wild. Sometimes the leaves so thickly overhung the path that the sunlight barely came through, and everything looked strange and unreal in the still, green gloom. Sometimes they heard the stealthy step of a wild animal in the undergrowth.

And all the while neither Raoul nor Sidney could utter a word, even to each other; for they had been forbidden to speak, on pain of death. Though both were brave lads, they were greatly frightened, and wondered over and over what the robbers meant to do with them.

Sidney suffered especially, for he not only feared the robbers on his own account, but more because of Raoul; for he was intensely grieved and mortified to think the boy had been taken while in his charge.

To be sure, he was barely fifteen years old himself for all he bore the title of "squire"; for in those days it was the custom for lads of good birth to begin to serve as pages at seven years old, which they continued to do for seven years; then they became squires for the same length of time, after which they received knighthood.

So Sidney, proud of having lately passed from being a page to a squire, felt that he was growing up and should have been able to defend Raoul better. But, of course, he was not to blame; for even if he had been a grown man, without weapons he could have done nothing against the robber band that had attacked them, and that no one had dreamed was lurking so near the castle.

Poor Sidney looked desperately from one to the other of the three ruffians, trying all the while to think of some plan of escape.

But nothing seemed possible to attempt. The best he could do was to keep his eyes and ears open for any chance that might turn up as they rode along. For the men steadily kept up their march, although their pace had become slower because of the density of the forest through which their way led; for they had chosen, for greater safety, the more untravelled bridle paths.

Hour after hour passed, till the afternoon was more than half gone. Meanwhile the falcon, perched on the saddle of the man leading Sidney's pony, had for some time been shifting uneasily to and fro; till at last the lacer that held him broke, and, feeling his freedom, he darted off like a flash, before the robber who had taken him could fairly wink.

The latter looked after the flying bird

and muttered an oath; but knowing that it was useless to try to recapture it, he worked off his feelings by giving his horse such a vicious cut with his whip that it pranced up suddenly and all but tumbled him off. At that he drew rein and rode on, looking very cross and sulky.

CHAPTER II

IN THE HANDS OF THE ROBBERS

WHEN the day was far spent, and it was drawing toward sunset, the shady bridle path, through which the men were leading their two captives, began to grow lighter; for the trees were smaller and farther apart and the edge of the forest was not far away. Beyond the forest was a wide reach of open country where stood the huts of a few peasant folk, and beyond these a little village.

Now the robbers did not wish to take Raoul and Sidney, strapped as they were to their ponies, through this more open country where they might meet people who would be suspicious of them and ask ques-

tions. For even in those lawless times such a party as theirs could not pass without attracting notice. So, after talking it over among themselves, they decided to stay under cover of the forest until nightfall, when they would ride through the dark and then trust to finding some other good hiding place when daylight broke.

They thought it best to stop where they were; and so they got off of their horses and leading them into a thicket of underwood tied them securely. Two of the men dragged Raoul and Sidney from their saddles, when the third robber, who had been looking about, discovered the opening of a cavern among some rocks near by.

"See," he whispered to his companions, "here is a fine place to stow this pair of youngsters while we rest. Not so grand as the hall of Castle Bellaire, but better lodg-

ing than they may find by and by." And here he made a knowing grimace.

So after seeing that the hands of their captives were still tightly tied, they thrust them into the cavern so as to be out of the way in case anyone came past. Then two of the men lay down to sleep while the other kept watch. They meant to take turns in sleeping while daylight lasted so that they might be wide awake for their journey by night.

Raoul and Sidney, helpless because of the binding of their hands and their orders not to stir, were obliged to stay in the cavern where they had been placed. They were near its mouth and the man who watched while the others slept kept close guard over them also.

After staring around them and being unable to see anything plainly in the darkness

of the cavern, they eagerly gazed out beyond the bushes that partly hid its entrance and fixed their eyes on the forest, vainly hoping that someone might come to save them. But nothing did they see but the ever lengthening shadows of the great trees and now and then a ray of sunlight that flickered faintly between the boughs. They heard no sound save the rustling of the leaves or the snapping of a twig in the light summer wind; for the spot was very lonely.

At last the two lads from sheer weariness, for they were unused to such long hours of riding, leaned back against the rocks, and, in spite of their fears, soon fell asleep.

Perhaps half an hour had passed, and then Raoul, who was a light sleeper and who had been dreaming uneasily of what was to befall them, suddenly awakened. Perhaps, too, he opened his eyes because of

the strange force that oftentimes draws our gaze toward someone looking at us even though we did not know them to be so doing. Thus, without knowing why, he turned his eyes toward the darkness that filled the cavern behind them and there saw two bright points of light that gleamed like little coals of fire burning through the shadows. As he looked, these little coals stealthily moved nearer; and in another instant, as a ray of late sunlight filtered into the opening of the cavern, he gave a sharp cry. For he could see that the points of light he had been watching were really the eyes of some wild animal seemingly ready to spring upon him.

Now the animal was a wolf whose den was in the cavern, though it had been prowling in the forest when the party halted there. A short time before Raoul

awakened, it had crept into its den through a small vine-covered opening in the rocks at the back of the cavern, and angry at finding Raoul and Sidney there, it had been crouching in the shadows watching its chance, and at last had begun to creep along toward them, no doubt meaning to attack them.

At Raoul's cry, however, the wolf was startled, and with a swift leap it rose to its feet and sprang through the mouth of the cavern, perhaps trying to escape; but on seeing the robber who was on guard without it turned savagely upon him and, feeling itself at bay, began to fight viciously.

The man would surely have been killed, had not his two companions asleep near by roused up and hurried to his rescue. One of them seized a heavy billet of wood that was lying on the ground and the other his

long knife, and with these they struck at the wolf till at last, after a hard tussle, they succeeded in killing it.

When the struggle was over they were all bleeding from wounds made by the sharp claws of the beast, though the man on whom it had first sprung of course had fared the worst of all. He was so badly hurt that he was scarcely able to rise from the ground where he had fallen when first attacked. He begged his companions, whom he called Pierre and Gaspard, to help him; and though very cross and bad-tempered with the pain of the deep scratches they themselves had received, they did their best to help Diccon, as the injured man was named.

Looking about for something with which to bind up his wounds, as their own pockets held nothing, they bethought them of Sidney and Raoul. Dragging them out of the

cavern, "Come, young sirs," they said mockingly, "we would fain finger the quality of castle kerchiefs and see if they be of noble size. Our own are too small and dainty to waste on this brawny ruffian!" And, roughly pulling the kerchiefs from the pockets of their two captives, they hastily bound them over Diccon's wounds.

But the wounds were many; and having need of more bandages, "Ho!" said Pierre, "doublets of velvet are no doubt lined with blouses of linen." At this the two between them forced Raoul and Sidney to take off their doublets and the linen blouses they wore beneath; these the robbers cast aside until their captives were again clad in their doublets and their hands securely bound. Then taking up the blouses they tore them into strips, one of them saying as they did so, "Diccon here hath a fancy for fine

blouses, and we would rather furnish him out with yours than to take off our own broidered linen," and he made a wry face as he looked down at his own ragged doublet, where his brown skin showed through many a rent.

By the time Diccon's bandages were finished, dusk was falling; and so after letting him rest a little while longer, Pierre and Gaspard looked in the saddle-bags of the three horses and got out the remains of some bread and cheese that had been stored there. These they portioned out, being obliged to unbind the hands of their captives long enough for them to eat. As the robbers handed them the coarse fare they made many jeering speeches to them; and though Raoul and Sidney sat with blazing eyes and did not deign to answer, they took the hard bread and cheese, for they were

both so faint from hunger that they were glad to share even the uninviting supper of the robbers.

Then his two companions helped Diccon to mount his horse, and again placing their prisoners on the ponies, Pierre and Gaspard took the bridle reins of each and cautiously they set forth toward the edge of the forest.

Still skirting along as far as they could in the deepening shadows of the outermost trees, they came to the wide reach of open country. Here they spurred their horses and the ponies of their captives to a brisk canter, as they wanted to get into another woodland as soon as possible; for folk on evil business such as theirs do not like to leave the covert of trees where they may hide in case of trouble.

In this way they rode several miles, and

at last in the distance they could see the faint twinkling of a few lights. These were the tallow candles of the peasants who tilled the soil and whose thatched huts clustered together formed the tiny village of Fontreil.

As they drew nearer, the two captives anxiously watched for any chance of help; but even as they looked, the lights they had seen were blown out and all became dark; for candles were something few of the poor peasants could afford to burn for long;—though indeed most of them were so weary with their hard day's toil that they were glad to go to their straw beds as early as they could. Moreover the three robbers had no notion of risking passing through the village, even though everyone was in bed and asleep.

They halted, however, before coming

near enough to any of the huts for the hoof-beats of the horses to be heard; and as the three men talked together in low tones, Raoul and Sidney gathered from a few chance words they overheard that they had quite a journey ahead of them and that the robbers wished greatly to restock their saddle-bags with food. At last they decided that the rest of the party should stand where they were, while Pierre went over to the nearest of the peasant homes to see if he could buy some bread.

As Pierre looked ahead he saw that in one of the better of the thatched huts a faint light was still twinkling; and so riding slowly toward it, he knocked at the door, and when an old woman opened it, "Ah, Mother," he said, "I am a lonely traveller overtaken by night and famishing with hunger." And then showing her a piece of

money, "But I am no beggar," he added, "and I would fain buy of thee some of thy good loaves or of whatever else thou hast in store."

The old woman, who did not like Pierre's looks, had at first listened in sour silence; but when she found he was not a beggar and had money to spend, she nodded her head and bidding him wait, she presently came out with an armful of black loaves; — for the peasant folk do not bake often, but try to keep in store as large a supply as they are able. The old woman brought also some cheese of goat's milk and a few turnips.

Pierre was pleased with his luck in getting these supplies, and stowing them away in his bags, he paid the old woman and rode off. To be sure he would rather have got the things without parting with his coin, but as he and his comrades had other busi-

ness on hand with their captives they had no time to waste in small thefts by the way.

As for the old peasant woman, she hastened to shut and double bar the door the moment Pierre turned his back; for she mistrusted his story and was glad to be rid of him. Muttering to herself, she looked at the coin he had given her, and hoped it was good, though she was by no means sure.

Meantime, Pierre rejoined his companions, and after boasting of the success of his errand, he took the young squire's bridle rein from Diccon, who had been holding it while they waited, and again they started off. Leaving the highroad they made their way slowly around the village, sometimes riding over turnip fields or growing barley and little caring how much harm they did to the scanty crops of the poor country folk.

After a while in the starlight they could

glimpse a moving line of silver gleaming, not far distant, through thickets of poplar and willow trees; and presently their road wound along close to the great river Seine. But all was dark and quiet, and no living soul did they see.

All the while Raoul and Sidney were growing more and more hopelessly weary with their long riding, and more and more terrified over what might be in store for them. By and by Raoul, quite worn out from the long strain, despite his pride, which had kept him up for hours, could no longer sit upright in his saddle. His head drooped, and he fell forward upon his pony's neck. Seeing this, Gaspard, who held his bridle, leaned over and, lifting him from his saddle, placed the little boy in front on his own horse, grasping him tightly as they rode.

CHAPTER III

AT THE "SAUCY CASTLE"

TO the two weary lads it seemed they would never come to a halt. On and on they went, still winding along close to the glistening river. After a while the country became more hilly and broken and now and then, rising steeply above them, tall cliffs of white chalk glimmered in the starlight like drifts of snow.

Presently leaving the road, they began to climb one of the steepest of these, following a zigzag bridle path that led to the top of the cliff.

Here stood a ruined castle which had been built long before by the brave Richard-the-Lion-Heart, then Duke of Nor-

mandy. He had called it the Chateau Gaillard, which means the "Saucy Castle," because in building it there at the edge of the river Seine which bounds that part of Normandy, he had boldly defied the French king, whose rule did not then extend beyond the river and who did not wish to have this castle, which was strong as a fortress, perched up there on its high cliff and saucily mocking his power. But it was scarcely finished before the bold Lion-Heart was slain; and when he could no longer defend it, the French king had captured the place and with it the whole of Normandy. Then, long after that, the proud old pile had been deserted and slowly fallen into ruin. And though that was all long, long ago, still one may see the gray ruins topping the white cliff, and still people call it the Saucy Castle.

As Raoul and Sidney first saw it in the gray light of early dawn, for the night was almost gone, it looked very ghostly and forlorn. One great round tower, though roofless and broken, still rose above the battered and crumbling walls of stone. Beautiful little blue-bells and wild pinks had spread a tangled mass of bloom over these walls, and green mosses and silvery grasses tufted the forsaken fireplaces and carpeted the sunken flagstones of the floors. But the flowery clusters that thus softened the bareness of the ruin, could not be distinctly seen in the gray light; though the two captives could breathe the fragrance of the wild roses that filled the old moat as the little party wound its way along its edge toward the farthest angle of the castle courtyard. The three men who had the lads in charge seemed to know the spot well. Indeed, it

was but too well known to all the robbers and evil-doers of the region, who made the ruins a hiding place.

As Pierre and Gaspard, who were leading the way, — for Diccon was in too much pain from the wounds the wolf had given him to care greatly as to whither they were going, — came to an open space opposite the round tower, the path suddenly led steeply downward and they stopped abruptly at what seemed to be the broad, low opening of another cavern.

At the sight of this Raoul, who had revived a little after Gaspard had lifted him to his saddle-bow, gave a shudder, and feeling it, Gaspard said teasingly, "Thou art thinking mayhap 'tis another den of wolves; — and so, in sooth, we are like to find it."

At this poor Raoul turned pale and trembled violently. He did not know that the

"wolves" of which Gaspard spoke were possible robbers they might find hiding there; though indeed, such would perhaps be almost as dangerous as the beasts of the forest.

Pierre and Gaspard dismounted and tied their horses to a near-by tree, and with them Sidney's pony still bearing its helpless rider.

Then placing Raoul in front of Diccon, "Here, comrade," said Gaspard, "thine arm is somewhat stiff, yet at least thou canst keep this lad from giving us the slip while we look for quarters in yonder stable."

The cavern, which was not a natural one like that in the forest, was hewn by hand from the heart of the soft chalky hillside, as to this day are the homes of the poorer people in certain parts of France where the chalk cliffs are found. Though no one knew just what had been its original use

when the castle was first built, the cavern had many times served as stable for the robber bands who later infested the country. It was a strange place, reaching far into the hill; and it is still there, its low roof upheld on rude pillars all cut from the chalky rock, and its rough walls still gray with moss and lichens and misty with cobwebs. There is a low stone seat along one side of the chamber, and as Pierre and Gaspard peered cautiously within, they saw in front of this the blackened embers of a fire left by the last wanderers who had taken shelter there. But no one was about; for luckily for them the place chanced to be empty, save for a few bats which clung tightly to the walls and an owl dozing behind a heap of mossy stones.

So the pair, going back to where they had left the others, untied the horses and ponies

from the trees and led them all into the farthermost corner of the cavern. Here they made them fast to a couple of the rough hewn pillars; and then returning to the courtyard, they gathered for them great armfuls of the tall feathery grass to serve in place of hay or oats, of which their saddle-bags were empty.

As all were hungry from their long ride, Pierre next got out some of the food he had brought from Fontreil and gave a scanty allowance to each; looking cross enough at being obliged to share any with the two prisoners, who were almost ready to faint from weariness and lack of their accustomed fare.

And for all Pierre's boasting the night before, the things he had bought from the old woman proved far from tempting. The cheese was not so bad, but the turnips

they had no way to cook, and the bread was so hard and dry that they could scarcely swallow it. Even Pierre as he choked it down made a wry face; — then drawing from his pocket a leathern cup, he filled it from a bottle of wine which Gaspard had found in one of the saddle-bags, and "Faugh!" he growled as he sipped a draught, "my throat is parched as a barley field in August, but I would as lief fill my cup from a vinegar vat!" and pushing the bottle disdainfully away, "I would give the price of yonder youngster for a flask of good Burgundy!"

"Hold, braggart, not so fast!" muttered Gaspard crossly, "I have as much share as thou in "yonder youngster," and as for the other young popinjay," and he glanced back in the direction of Sidney, "'twas I and Diccon caught *him!*"

"And much good it will do thee!" snarled Pierre. "Thou hadst much better take my advice and toss him over yonder cliff! We were well rid of the troublesome baggage."

"Nay," said Gaspard, "there are other cliffs, if need be. He hath rich kinsmen; — we mean to take him along and when we have delivered up our prize at our journey's end," and here his glance was toward Raoul, "mayhap we can find a way to those kinsmen's purses. He should bring a pretty ransom!"

While this talk was going on, Raoul, who was too worn out to pay much attention to anything, had heard nothing, and Sidney only a few words; for they had been thrust far back in the cavern, and the robbers even in their disputes had learned to curb their voices, for oftentimes they were in hiding

where loud tones would betray them. So though Sidney listened with all his might, he could learn nothing of their possible fate.

By this time it was broad daylight without, and the men wishing to rest and to keep under safe cover, one of them plucked some blades of the grass that tufted the crumbling stones, and they drew lots as to which must take his turn to watch first while the others slept. As Gaspard drew the longest blade, it fell to him to place himself near the entrance of the cavern and give the alarm if any danger threatened.

So Pierre and Diccon, forcing their helpless prisoners to the farthest and darkest corner they could find, threw themselves down in front of them so as to bar any possible attempt to escape; and very soon Pierre and the two lads fell into a heavy

sleep, for they were very tired from their long hours in the saddle. Diccon, too, slept, though with restless tossings and sometimes an unconscious moan of pain.

Gaspard kept watch the greater part of the morning and then rousing Pierre, who had drawn the next lot, they exchanged places; thus the day wore quietly on until midafternoon, when it came Diccon's turn to stand guard. Now, Diccon was really not able to do this, as he was very weak because of the hurts he had received from the wolf.

But they were all rough men used to wounds and hardships, and so he said nothing and his companions did not know how ill he felt.

He kept his post, however, for almost an hour; but all the while he was growing more and more feverish from the effects of

the wounds, which the long jolting ride had not helped any. At last, parching with thirst, he felt that he could stand it no longer; — he *must* have a drink of water! If it had not been that the fever had gone to his head and made his thoughts wander, he would have known that it would be unsafe to leave the cavern to go in search of the longed-for water unless he called one of the others to watch in his stead. For a moment the idea dimly came to him that he must not leave the place unguarded; but then he paid no attention to it, for he knew, even in the bewilderment of fever, that Pierre and Gaspard would be very cross if he aroused them before their turns to watch. At any rate, he could think of nothing clearly save that he was burning with thirst and must find a drink as quickly as possible.

Now Diccon had hidden in the castle

ruins several times before, and he knew that the ancient well in the courtyard had long been choked up with fallen stones; and, when he had his wits about him, he knew, too, that somewhere not far off was a spring. But now in the confusion of his thoughts, he tried vainly to remember where it was; — till at last, looking vaguely around, some tufts of tall wild iris waving in the wind at no great distance away reminded him that there was the spot.

Eagerly he crept toward it, but when he reached the place he found, to his great disappointment, that the spring had shrunken so small that only a tiny trickle of water filtered among the roots of the grasses. So little that he could not possibly dip it up. He laid his face to the ground, but the spring scarcely more than moistened his parching lips.

Dizzily staggering to his feet, suddenly he saw the shining water of the river Seine flowing far down at the foot of the cliff, and instantly he started toward it. He did not wait to hunt the zigzag path by which they had mounted the hillside, but plunging down the steepest slope, sometimes tripping over vines or falling against the sharp rocks, at length, half fainting, he reached the river's edge and stooping over scooped up the water in his hands and greedily drank of it.

CHAPTER IV

THE FALCON FINDS A FRIEND

MEANTIME, while Diccon at the edge of the river Seine is vainly trying to quench his thirst, and at the top of the cliff above, the others are asleep not knowing that no one is keeping guard over them, let us go back a little while and see what became of the falcon which had been captured along with Raoul and Sidney, but which, you remember, had broken away from the saddle-bow of Pierre; for it was he who had tried to fasten it with a bit of frayed lacer drawn from his doublet.

For quite a while after it had darted away from Pierre, the falcon flew on and

on. But though flying swiftly, he did so in a very aimless manner; for he was blinded by the little hood which Pierre had dropped over his head and which, when he broke away, of course still covered his eyes.

Now and then, as his wings brushed the leaves of some tall tree, he would manage to cling a few moments to one of its boughs, and would shake and jerk his head to and fro trying in vain to get rid of the hood. He could not understand why it still covered his eyes; for always, when taken hunting, he knew someone lifted it from his head before he was sent into the sky. But try as he might, he could not shake it off. Then desperately he would fly on again, blindly seeking to soar into the sky, but ever and again stopped by the thickly overhanging trees.

Nevertheless, though flying low and uncertainly, as his wings were very swift he managed to go a long distance from the spot where he had broken away from Pierre's saddle.

At last, after several hours had passed, he reached quite another part of the forest, which was very large. Here as he clung, bewildered and helpless, to the bough of a tall beech tree, he heard the sound of voices and horses' hoofs; and as they drew near, he vaguely fluttered down and without a struggle allowed himself to be taken by one of a party of horsemen.

"How now!" exclaimed the rider, in surprise; "Whence comes this?"

Then looking more closely at the little tasseled hood on which was worked in silk a tiny leopard and tower like that on Raoul's sleeve, "By my faith!" he cried,

"I trow this bird is from the mews of some of thy family, Sir Count!"

"What sayest thou?" said the horseman thus addressed, and who was the noble Count Robert of Villharne, "What is it?" And then as he drew near the first rider, "See," said the latter, "here is the device of the house of Bellaire broidered on the falcon's hood!"

As the count closely examined the little hood, he looked puzzled. "Whence came the bird?" he asked.

As the other told him of its chance finding, he knitted his brows. "It could not have flown from the mews," he said.

"Nay," agreed his companion, "see, 'tis fitted for the hunt; — and look at this! The bells are hacked from their straps as if by a sharp knife!"

"'Tis my opinion," replied the count,

"an accident, or, more likely, some evil deed hath befallen someone of my kinswoman's household!" — for Count Robert was no other than the brother of Raoul's mother, the Lady Alix.

"Ho!" he cried, raising his voice to summon his followers who were lagging somewhat behind; for the count was returning from a journey, and as the roads were none too safe had been obliged to take a body-guard with him. As the men now rode up, he directed them to separate, two going together and one with him, and to beat through the forest, and, if possible, discover if anyone was in trouble.

In this way they searched through the underwood for some time, now and then signalling to each other with the small bugles which Count Robert and each of his guard always carried when on a journey.

But no trace could they find to account for the stray falcon with the cut bell-straps still dangling from his toes. Count Robert had fastened the bird, more securely than Pierre had done, by tying it to his saddle with a piece of stout cord that happened to be in his saddle-bag. Though indeed, the falcon sat very quietly, for the count had still left the little hood on its head, and it no longer had any wish to fly until its eyes were uncovered.

On and on they rode; and though they had not as yet succeeded in finding any clue, both the count and the men with him were unwilling to give up the quest.

Now it chanced that having left the bridle path, which they had been following through the forest on their way home, in order that they might search among the

trees, all the while, without knowing it, by thus weaving their way through the undergrowth they were coming by a much shorter cut than the path would have taken them toward the spot where Raoul and Sidney had been captured. But as they rode on looking quickly to right and left, it seemed a hopeless task to discover anyone hiding in that thick greenery.

By and by, however, the man who was with Count Robert, and who had very sharp eyes, in his peering about discovered some little, shining objects twinkling from the ground in front of him. Quickly dismounting, he stooped and picked them up, and after looking at them, "Ho, Sir Count!" he called to Count Robert, who was searching the woods near by, "See! these are the silver bells which I trow our falcon here hath worn many a day! No doubt their

jingling did not suit the robber who took him."

As Count Robert came near to him, between them they held up the tiny bells, to which still clung the bits of the silken straps which Pierre had hacked in two; and they fitted perfectly together. "Yes," said the count, "these are plainly the bells belonging to this falcon, and we must look carefully about this spot. Perhaps we can find some trace of where the robber has gone."

They examined closely the ground around them, and soon could see the prints of horses' hoofs in the soft moss.

"Ah," said the count, as he looked more and more troubled at this discovery, "so there was more than one, and on horseback!"

As they looked again at the hoof-prints,

they found that some of them were smaller, as of ponies; and then Count Robert, remembering that his little nephew Raoul rode a pony, at once began to guess the truth and to fear that it was Raoul to whom harm had fallen.

As the count and his guard once more examined the undergrowth about the spot very carefully, they were not long in finding by the broken twigs, that still hung limp and withered on the low growing spice-bushes, the direction in which the horses and ponies had gone.

Hereupon they blew loudly on their bugles to summon the other two men of the count's guard, who were beating the forest in another direction. At first they got no answer, as these men were quite far away; but after blowing, as loudly as they could, a number of times, they heard the answer-

ing signals; and presently the other guardsmen rode up and then the party of four set out together to try to follow the trail of the robbers.

Sometimes they could find the way rather easily; but here and there, where the robbers had straggled farther apart, it was harder to trace them. But both Count Robert and his men kept sharp watch constantly, and if now and then they wandered away from the trail, presently one or the other of them would find some clue to point them back. Fortunately the robbers did not have greatly the start of their pursuers, and so the marks of their path were still fresh enough to be found by close watching for them.

Step by step the little party of riders picked out the way; but at last dusk overtook them before they reached the cavern

where the fight with the wolf had taken place, and from which the robbers were starting away at just about the time Count Robert and his men decided they would have to camp for the night. They had thought to be home from their journey before dark, and so had not expected to pass the night in the forest, which was by no means a safe place, as it sheltered many wild beasts. But the count had no thought of giving up the search for his little nephew; for he felt more and more sure that it was he who was in trouble.

So they all made the best of the plight in which they found themselves; and after tying the horses securely to some small trees, the guardsmen gathered together a heap of dry wood and with the aid of a flint-stone and some tinder they had with them they soon had a good fire. To be sure, they did

not need it for warmth nor had they anything to cook, for their saddle-bags held only bread and meat; but they wanted the fire to keep away any prowling wolves or other animals.

Count Robert then directed the men to take turns in watching and keeping up the fire; and though a number of times they heard soft foot-falls creeping stealthily about them, the bright flames warded off danger and they passed the night in safety. Then when morning broke, as soon as it was light enough for them to look for the path, they again set out in quest of the robbers.

CHAPTER V

ON THE TRAIL OF THE ROBBERS

IN a little while they came to the place where the wolf had attacked Diccon. Here they saw blood spattered about and the grass torn as from a struggle.

"Look!" said one of the guardsmen, who was on the side of the path nearest the place, "here has been a hard fight of either men or beasts!"

As Count Robert got down from his horse and examined the spot, his heart sank; for he feared some deadly harm had befallen Raoul. And as he looked at the marks of blood, more and more he determined to pursue the robbers relentlessly until he found them.

Meantime, one of his men, who had been searching the undergrowth near by to find any possible clues, all at once called out to Count Robert, "Come hither, Master! Here is the one slain in the struggle!"

And he dragged out the stiff body of the wolf, which, after Pierre had stabbed it with his knife, had crept into a thicket to die.

As they all looked at the dead animal, one of the guardsmen noticed still clinging to the cruel claws of one of its paws a piece of brown cloth. "Ah," he said, as he pulled it loose and thrust it into his pocket, "perhaps this will help us to know one of the men we are hunting." For the bit of cloth was indeed torn from Diccon's doublet when the wolf sprang upon him.

After satisfying themselves that no other clues were to be found there, they hastily

mounted their horses and set off again; for they thought the robbers could not be far away.

When they came to the edge of the forest and saw across the reach of open country the huts of the little peasant village, they rightly decided that the men they were hunting would probably have avoided the village and taken a round-about way past it. But they had much difficulty in finding which way the trail led; for after leaving the forest, there was no undergrowth with broken twigs to mark the path, and the grass grew so short and close it was hard to see the trace of horses' hoofs.

At last they found some blood stains, where Diccon's wounds had bled afresh, and after that it was not so hard; for by and by they came to the fields through which the robbers had gone, and here on

the bare ground the hoof marks could be plainly seen.

On and on the little party followed. Now and again they would all have to dismount from their horses and search long before they could be sure which way to go; and at last, when the trail came to the foot of the chalky cliff on whose top stood the ruined Saucy Castle, they were quite unable to find any trace to guide them.

Count Robert gazed up at the crumbling walls above them, and seeing that all was roofless and open to wind and rain, he did not think it likely anyone would try to hide there, as the place seemed to offer little chance for so doing. He had never before seen the old castle, and did not know of the underground chamber cut into the hillside.

"'Tis scarcely worth our while," he said, "to climb yonder steep cliff. Our horses

are growing weary and the afternoon is passing. We had best push on around the cliff, and search the forest beyond."

With this they began to pick their way along the edge of the river Seine that flowed at the foot of the cliff; and by and by Count Robert and one of the guardsmen, who were riding ahead, spied a man crouching at the river's brink dipping up the water in his palms and drinking eagerly.

At once they passed the word back to the rest of the party and all rode cautiously toward him; for they were suspicious of everyone they met, and did not want the man to get away until they could satisfy themselves whether or not he was one of the robbers they were seeking. As they drew nearer to him they saw that his arm and head were bandaged as if hurt; and Count Robert and his man, getting down

from their horses, led them to the river's edge, and while the horses were drinking long, cool draughts, they spoke to the man, who was so intent on quenching his own thirst that he had not before noticed them.

"How now!" said the count, pointing to his bandages, "Thou seemest to have met with hard usage somewhere. Hast thou fallen in with robbers or wild beasts?"

For as he looked at the man, the count was uncertain whether he might be one of the robbers, or perhaps an innocent person who had fallen in with them and been beaten.

The man, however (who was none other than Diccon, who, you remember, had crept away to the river while the others slept), as Count Robert spoke to him looked up startled, but with a blank, wandering glance; for the fever was still upon him,

and he was light-headed and dazed. Not knowing what he said, he babbled some senseless words that meant nothing, and Count Robert grew more and more perplexed.

Meantime, the guardsman, drawing from his pocket the bit of cloth he had taken from the wolf's claws, saw that it was precisely the same as the torn doublet of the man in front of them; — and then he noticed that the bandages the latter wore were of very fine linen, much finer than any of his other coarse garments. Seeing this, the guardsman spoke quietly to Count Robert, "Look," he said, "this bit of cloth is plainly torn from his doublet, which is tattered enough, but 'twould seem he has chosen his bandages with a daintier taste."

Count Robert, as he listened, felt sure

that the man was the one who had fought with the wolf they had found, and so more than likely one of the robbers; for it seemed almost certain that it was they whom the wolf had attacked, as the marks of the struggle were right on the path they had taken. And as the count looked again, the fineness of the linen bound about the man's arm added to his suspicions that he had perhaps made way with Raoul and used some of the lad's clothing to staunch his own wounds.

But though he thus half guessed the truth, he could learn nothing more from questioning the man, whose mind was still wandering. But presently happening to glance at Count Robert's horse, a gleam of remembrance flashed into his eyes as he saw the falcon still perched on the count's saddle-bow. "Ho!" he cried, pointing to it,

"Pierre said yonder bird would fetch a good rose noble! But it flew away! Ha! Ha!" and the man laughed foolishly.

At this, Count Robert instantly questioned him in a stern tone, "What meanest thou, fellow? Who is Pierre? And what knowest thou of this bird?"

But the man only cast a frightened look up toward the old ruins above them, and muttered to himself "No, no, — Pierre is sleeping. You must not wake him! Water — water, — I must have water!" Then bending to the river again, he paid no further attention to them.

Count Robert, seeing nothing more was to be learned from him, and by this time quite sure that the robbers were hidden somewhere in the ruins above, felt that they must now lose no more time in reaching the

top of the cliff which they had not thought worth while to attempt.

He left one of the guardsmen to see that the man at the river bank did not escape, and then taking the others with him, they looked around till they found the steep zig-zag path leading up to the castle, and this they began cautiously to mount. Every moment they kept a sharp lookout for any signs of the robbers. But nothing did they see.

At last they reached the top of the cliff and saw the ruined walls in front of them. Dismounting from their horses, they led them carefully along as they explored every nook and corner of the once proud old castle. Everything was bare and weather-beaten and deserted. The fireplace in the great banqueting hall was overgrown with grass; and as they looked within the roofless

donjon tower, they saw nothing but the green vines that mantled the crumbling stones.

Search carefully as they might, they could find no trace of anyone.

At last, discouraged, they again mounted their horses and were about to ride away, when suddenly, seemingly from the hillside beyond the donjon tower, they heard the low whinny of a horse.

"Hark!" whispered Count Robert, and pausing, they all listened breathlessly; but heard nothing more save the sighing of the wind, that moaned through the old tower close by with a sound curiously like some ghostly wail.

As they still listened, they all began to think it was this wind which they had mistaken for the call of a horse, and were slowly pacing on again, when all at once

they heard a second time a low, distinct whinny.

Now at this, Count Robert and his men were very much perplexed indeed. They felt certain this time that the sound was not the wind, but that a horse *must* be somewhere near about. But where? There were dense clusters of bushes scattered over the hillside, but all of them were too low of growth to conceal a horse; — and the whinny sounded quite near; indeed, it seemed to the listeners to come out of the very ground beneath their feet.

One of the guardsmen, who was a superstitious fellow, crossed himself and his eyes grew very round, for he thought the place surely was enchanted. Nevertheless he joined the others in a thorough search around them; and at last, on riding down a steep, slippery little path, they saw the

opening of the dark cavern-like chamber in the chalky rock.

Count Robert and his men dismounted here; and ordering one of them to watch at the entrance that no one escaped, the count and the other guard, after making their horses fast, drew their swords, and, keeping their wits about them, quietly entered the place.

CHAPTER VI

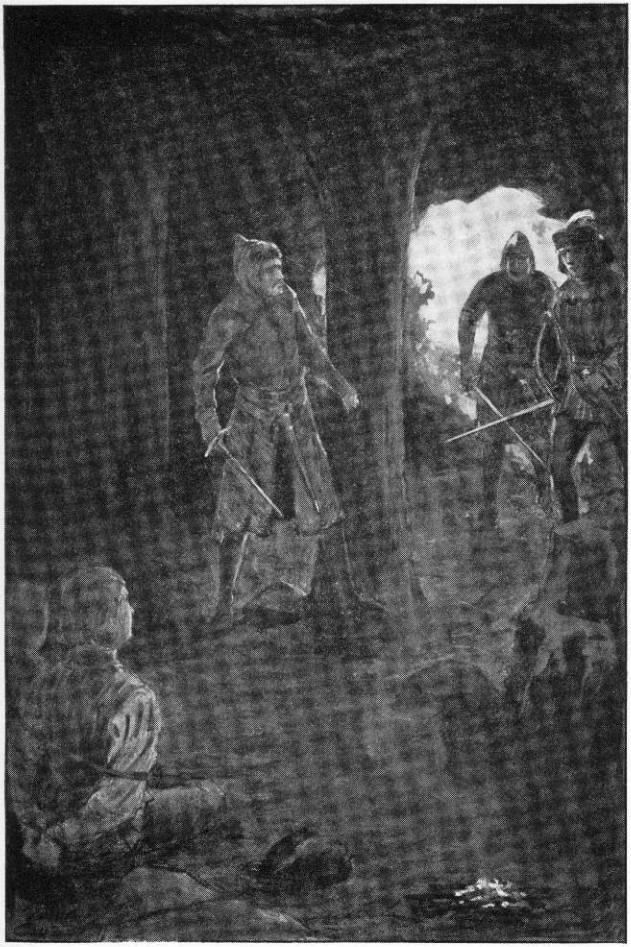
COUNT ROBERT TAKES SOME PRISONERS

NOW up to this time, all within the cavern had been asleep. As they supposed Diccon was watching the entrance to the place, and as they were very tired, they slept heavily; — that is, all but Gaspard. He was not quite so sound asleep as the others, and as he was nearest the front, suddenly he awakened just as Count Robert and his man were coming toward him between the rough hewn pillars that upheld the roof of the cavern.

For a moment he blinked his eyes in bewilderment; and then realizing that he and Pierre were caught as in a trap, he drew his knife and, with an ugly scowl, waited.

Count Robert and the man with him peered about them, and as soon as their eyes became used to the darkness of the place, they made out the crouching figure of Gaspard. They were not long in attacking him, and though he fought desperately and gave both the count and the guardsman several painful cuts with his long knife, yet they soon overpowered him and had him at their mercy.

Meantime, the other robber, Pierre, and Raoul and Sidney had been aroused by the sound of the fight. Pierre, seeing that he and his comrade were outnumbered, hurriedly crept back, keeping in the shadows, and managed to reach a far corner of the cavern, where he crawled into a small, winding passage which led to a tiny hiding place barely large enough for him to squeeze into it. The entrance to this pas-



"THEY WERE NOT LONG IN ATTACKING HIM."

sage was cleverly concealed behind the farthermost pillars, and both it and the hiding place at its end having been made by one of the many robbers who infested the region, had soon become known to all of them as a last refuge when hard pressed.

Pierre was helped in thus hiding himself, because Count Robert and his man had their attention taken up by the struggle with Gaspard, and by the fact that Raoul and Sidney meanwhile had begun to shout loudly for help.

The two lads did not know who they were that had entered and were fighting with the robbers, for they could not see the faces of the new-comers. Indeed, for all they could tell, it might have been another band of robbers. But they thought that in any case matters could not be worse than they al-

ready were, so they cried out at the tops of their voices for help.

Count Robert, on hearing them, looked quickly around, and calling in the other guardsman to help pinion Gaspard, who was still able to do them hurt if he could free himself, he hurried over to the corner where Raoul and Sidney lay. He was overjoyed to find that though it was indeed his nephew, as he had guessed, who had been captured, yet, aside from being bound and helpless, both the little boy and the young squire were unharmed.

"Ah, Raoul," said the count, "thank God thou art still alive! I feared much that yonder ruffian had slain thee!" and he looked again at the two lads, hardly believing his good fortune in finding them unhurt.

As for the captives, they were so delighted with their rescue, that they fairly

jumped for joy when Count Robert with the blade of his sword dexterously cut the cords that bound them. As he examined these cords, "Good!" he exclaimed, "the very things with which to tie fast yonder troublesome cut-throat!"

And at once he and the guardsmen set to work and securely bound Gaspard, who made a sour face and scowled blacker than before at thus finding himself helpless by reason of the same cords which he and his companions had used on their two captives.

Having finished their task, the count looked around. "Were there more than the pair of them?" he asked of the young squire. "We have the mate of this villain safely guarded down by the brink of the river, and I wish none to get away."

"Yes, Sir Count," answered Sidney, "there were three of them." Here he

looked around bewildered. "But I do not see how the other one could have escaped without passing us!"

Both Sidney and Raoul had been so eagerly watching Count Robert and his man in their encounter with Gaspard, that they had given no thought to Pierre as he crept off into his hiding place.

"Three of them?" repeated Count Robert, puzzled; and they all began to search the place again. But the back part of the cavern was so deeply in shadow, and the entrance to the little passage so well hidden, that they could not find it.

And so at last they gave up the search; thinking it probable that the third robber must have escaped by some secret way.

They did not guess that all the while Pierre was crouching in his little hiding place, close by, and fairly quaking in his

boots for fear he would be found out. He breathed a sigh of relief when he knew the party was leaving the cavern; though he was very angry at hearing Count Robert direct that all the horses be brought out along with the ponies of Raoul and Sidney; for, of course, they would need two of these for their prisoners Gaspard and Diccon. The other horse, which was Pierre's, — and the loss of which now made him so angry though he did not dare to make himself known — the count told one of the guardsmen to turn loose, for he did not wish to be bothered leading it away with them, and neither did he wish to leave it in the cavern to die for want of food and water.

The horse soon galloped away, so when Pierre stiffly crept out of his hiding place after everyone had gone, he was obliged to

go off on foot; which served him quite right.

Meantime, while Pierre's horse was galloping off, Count Robert and his party had all mounted. Raoul and Sidney were on their own ponies, and Gaspard strapped to one of the horses the guardsmen led; and in this way they started off down the zigzag path to the foot of the cliff where they had left the other man guarding Diccon.

The latter by this time had come more to his senses, and had tried to get away; but when the guardsman chased and overtook him, he turned upon him, and had it not been that his arm was still helpless from the claws of the wolf, he might have made a good deal of trouble.

Fortunately just at this time, the count and his party came up, and they soon had

Diccon as securely fastened on the horse they had brought as was Gaspard on his.

As again the party started off, Raoul and Sidney laughed to think that the two robbers were now in the same plight they themselves had been the day before, and that as prisoners they were obliged to go wherever Count Robert chose to take them.

By and by, when it was drawing near to dusk, Count Robert decided that they had best direct their way to the little village of Fontreil, which they had passed on the road to the ruined castle. "We will spend the night at the inn," he said; and then turning to his little nephew Raoul, "I would we might push on at once to Bellaire and relieve thy mother's anxiety; for she must be well nigh distraught with fear as to what has befallen thee. But thou must have

a good rest to-night, little one!" and the count leaned over and affectionately patted Raoul, who rode close beside him.

"But, Uncle Robert," said Raoul, whose eyes were big with excitement, "how, *how* did you find us?"

For in all that had happened after Count Robert discovered the cavern, no one had had time for many questions. Sidney, too, was burning with curiosity to know how they had tracked the robbers; and so, as they rode along, the count told them in snatches the main part of the story. He did not try to tell them all until they halted for the night; for many times the path they followed was so narrow that they had to pick their way single file.

But when Raoul heard that it was their falcon which had unwittingly brought them help, "Didst thou hear that, Sidney?" he

cried, " 'Twas the *falcon* that found Uncle Robert! I shall always keep him, and he shall have some new silver bells for his toes, the prettiest that are made!"

The poor falcon, though, did not seem to care a straw about the whole matter, but sat huddled up on Count Robert's saddle-bow, his wings folded and his head drooping; for he was tired out with the long ride and the jogging of Count Robert's horse. He would much rather have used his wings, but they did not dare to loose him for fear he would fly away and never come back again.

Meantime the dusk had fallen, and they were all glad to see not far ahead of them the scattered lights of the little village of Fontreil.

A mile or two further riding brought them to the one straggling street of the place; and a smoky lantern above a creak-

ing sign showed them the village inn, a small, low building with a thatched roof. They rode through a wooden archway into a courtyard paved with cobble-stones; and when the inn-keeper came bustling out, he made many low bows to Count Robert, whom he knew by his dress to be a nobleman.

"Get us the best supper thou canst, and as quickly as may be!" said the count, "for we are well nigh famished."

At this, the inn-keeper hurried in and began stirring up the embers in the kitchen fireplace, and into the still hot ashes he hastily popped a handful of big chestnuts; for though it was yet early in the evening, the inn supper was over, and as few travellers passed through the village the inn-keeper had little provision for late comers. However, he soon managed to set out on a

rough deal table a dish of cold boiled hare, some black bread and cheese and the hot roasted chestnuts. Then fetching a jug of sour cider, which is the favourite village drink of Normandy, he summoned the count, who was still outside giving orders for the night.

The guards had stabled the horses in a small thatched shed near by; and then carrying some bundles of straw out into the courtyard they prepared to pass the night on these, taking turns in guarding their two prisoners.

When all was arranged, the count called Raoul and Sidney, the latter carrying the falcon, which he and Raoul had loosed from Count Robert's saddle-bow, and they went into the inn and had a merry supper together. Still keeping the cord fastened to the falcon's leg, Sidney tied him to the back

of one of the rude chairs by the table, and here he perched, while Raoul, laughing happily, plucked the little hood from off his head and gave him water from his own cup and fed him bits of hare's meat, so that he fared quite as well as anybody and seemed to enjoy the supper as much as they. Indeed, they were all so hungry that they thought the daintiest castle feast they had ever tasted was not half so good as the homely food with which the inn-keeper served them.

Nor had Count Robert forgotten the guardsmen and their prisoners in the courtyard; for before beginning their own supper, he had ordered a bountiful supply of the same fare to be taken out to them; so that no one went to bed hungry.

When the count and his nephew and the young squire had finished, the inn-keeper,

lighting a candle, showed his guests to the only two rooms the inn boasted. After their long hours in the saddle, they were all delighted with the sight of the high, Normandy feather-beds; the bedsteads so tall and the feathers so thick that they were obliged to climb into them by means of little ladders. But once curled up atop of those feathers, they all sank into a dreamless sleep; and robbers and all were quite forgotten until the next morning.

CHAPTER VII

DICCON GAINS HIS FREEDOM

"WAKE up, lads!" called Count Robert at sunrise the next day, "Wake up! We have a long ride ahead of us, and mine host of the inn is at this moment playing battledoor and shuttlecock with the best omelette in the village!"

The inn-keeper, very red in the face, was indeed standing in front of the fireplace in the kitchen, which was also dining room and living room. He held in one hand a long-handled frying-pan in which an omelette was nicely browning; and now and then, to turn it, he deftly tossed it into the

air, catching it again in the pan with the skill of long practice.

Raoul and Sidney were not long in answering Count Robert's call; and the omelette disappeared so quickly that the inn-keeper had to make another one exactly like it before they would be satisfied.

After all had finished their breakfast, the horses and ponies were got out of the shed and made ready for the day's ride. At the count's command, the inn-keeper emptied all the rest of his larder into their different saddle-bags, for they did not expect to reach Bellaire until late in the day.

Then when all was ready, they again began their march. The horses which carried the two prisoners were led, as before; the front guard taking charge of Gaspard while Diccon was placed between Count Robert and the second guardsman. Raoul and

Sidney followed on their ponies with the third guard bringing up the rear.

It was a lovely summer morning, and through the sunny fields around the village the scarlet poppies and blue flax-flowers were gayly breaking into bloom, and all the country looked very bright and beautiful as the little party set forth. Count Robert was so pleased to think he had had the good fortune to rescue his little nephew and the young squire from the hands of the three ruffianly adventurers, and Raoul and Sidney were so glad to have escaped, that all were brimming over with happiness; and the ponies, after their night's rest, felt so frisky and full of life that they fairly danced along the road. Even the falcon felt better, riding on Count Robert's saddle-bow with his hood off and his bright eyes peering curiously around.

The two prisoners, however, did not share the pleasure of the others. They were anything but happy. For they very well knew that all castles, such as Bellaire, whither they were bound, had somewhere about them dark and oftentimes terrible underground dungeons in which it was the custom to place evil-doers, such as themselves, when they happened to be caught. So the two captives felt very wretched and miserable as they rode along.

Gaspard, whose horse was led by the front guard, put on an air of sullen bravado. But Diccon, who was a cowardly fellow, as he rode between Count Robert and the second guard, was growing more and more terrified as, mile by mile, they drew nearer to Castle Bellaire. He kept furtively watching Count Robert, and by and by, in the desperate hope of moving

him, he gave a deep sigh to attract his attention; and turning his small, cunning eyes toward the count, presently he began to whine, "O, Sir Count, my noble master will be most angry when he hears we be in the dungeon of the Castle Bellaire, and —"

"Hold thy tongue! thou miserable varlet!" said the count, "and thou canst talk of thy 'noble master' to the bats of Bellaire!

"Faugh!" he added, scornfully, "he must be noble indeed to maintain in his household so rascally a kidnapper as thou!"

"Noble or not," snapped Diccon, "he is none the less one of thine own kinsmen, Sir Count!"

This was craftily said; for, as Diccon expected, Count Robert, for all his wrath, pricked up his ears at this. "One of mine own kinsmen!" he exclaimed, "thou lying

caitiff! No kinsman of mine hath a following of cut-throats and stealers of lads!"

"But, hear me!" said Diccon; and leaning as far toward Count Robert as he could, strapped as he was, he repeated in a whisper, "But, hear me!" And then, looking cautiously about to be sure Gaspard was not near, he added, "I will tell thee all, if thou wilt swear on thy knightly honour to let me go when I have finished."

"Now, by my faith, that I will not!" cried the count, who hated cowards.

"Nay," said Diccon, "but when the boy is at last taken, as he surely will be, thou mayest wish I had not held my peace."

At this the fiery Count Robert began to chafe; for he loved his little nephew and his gentle sister, the Lady Alix. He thought to himself, "What if this villain does know of some plot to harm the child?"

He rode on, however, still thinking; till, by and by, though sorely against his will, he decided to speak again to the man.

"Ho, knave!" he said, "if thou speakest truth, upon mine honour thou shalt go free; — but mark, I will keep thee prisoner till I can prove whether or not thou liest. And mark further, if I let thee go, and ever thou showest thine evil face within forty leagues of Castle Bellaire, I will cut off thine ears and hang thee for the base scoundrel thou art!"

Despite this fierce threat, Diccon was much relieved by the count's speech; for he knew him to be an honourable and noble lord, and that he could rely on his word if he himself told the truth; and though as a rule little given to truth telling, he meant to do so in this case. For he was very sure

that if caught in a lie, Count Robert would deal summarily with him.

So, in a low tone, as they rode along, he told Count Robert how he and his two companions had been hired by the Baron D'Arcour to watch the castle, and, at the first chance they had, to seize Raoul; the boy was then to be taken to a certain house in the city of Rouen. Beyond that, Diccon declared he knew nothing.

Count Robert listened attentively to his story, and when he mentioned the name of the Baron D'Arcour the count made a startled exclamation. For the baron was half-brother of Raoul's father, and so the lad's uncle; although neither he nor Raoul had ever seen one another.

Now, the Baron D'Arcour had led a wild and reckless life, and for a number of years had roamed about France fighting in the

quarrels of first one noble and then another. He had but lately returned to Normandy, his fortune all spent; and, as Count Robert thought over that which Diccon had told him, he saw that if the latter spoke the truth, the baron was probably trying to gain possession of his little nephew, Raoul, who was the only heir to the beautiful castle and estates of Bellaire. If he once gained control of the boy, he no doubt meant to kill or imprison him somewhere, and then as next heir seize the castle and make himself master of Raoul's title and inheritance. For such things were not unknown in those days. King Charles, who ruled the country, was weak and ill, and many of the nobles were turbulent and ungovernable and did pretty much as they pleased, without fear of punishment.

The more Count Robert thought it all

over, the more alarmed he felt for the safety of Raoul. And all the rest of the way to Castle Bellaire he was in a brown study trying to lay some plan for the future.

Meantime, the little party reached the castle gate, and halting there, summoned the keeper of the draw-bridge to let them in so that they might restore Raoul and the young squire to their home. The old keeper hastened to open the gate and welcome them back, for affairs at Bellaire were in a state of sad confusion over the disappearance of the young master. When he and Sidney had failed to return at the expected time the morning they had gone out with the falcon, Lady Alix, distracted with anxiety, had sent all the castle folk out to search in every direction. But though they had been looking day and night, they had been scattered

about and had not been able to find any trace of the missing lads.

Poor Lady Alix, whose distress had almost broken her heart, was crying bitterly, in complete despair, and did not see the count and his party ride into the courtyard. But in another moment one of the pages came bounding up the castle stair, crying out joyfully, "My lady! my lady! Master Raoul is home again! Count Robert has brought him!"

Lady Alix, scarcely believing her ears, sprang up at this, and hastening down the stair, hurried out to the courtyard; there finding that her boy was indeed safe, she hugged and kissed him again and again, sobbing and laughing all at the same time, till Count Robert, taking her by the hand, gently led her into the castle. And there, still keeping Raoul close to her side and ask-

ing many eager questions, she learned the story of the three days that had passed.

Then Count Robert, bidding them all a cheery good-bye, went back to the courtyard, and again mounting his horse, set out for his home, taking his two prisoners with him. For he had decided, instead of placing them in the Bellaire dungeons, to take them on to his own castle of Villharne, where he could keep a close eye on them himself.

CHAPTER VIII

PLANNING A HIDING PLACE

AFTER Raoul's adventure the day of his falcon hunt, poor Lady Alix was afraid to let him stir even so far as the meadows beyond the castle walls, unless attended by a strong guard.

Count Robert had warned her to be watchful of the schemes of the Baron D'Arcour, who, although thwarted once, would probably try his best to get possession of the boy. For the count had sent two of his trusty men to Rouen, and they had found out that Diccon had spoken the truth, and that it had really been at the baron's order and promise of reward that they had captured the lad.

As day by day Lady Alix brooded over her little son's danger, the more she realized that they could not go on living as they had done. She could not keep the boy always within their own walls; and, in truth, she greatly feared an attack upon the castle itself.

The baron was an inveterate fighter, and in those lawless times it was far from improbable that he might muster a force of adventurers and boldly attack the castle. And with her few retainers (for their household had been much reduced after the death of Raoul's father) she doubted whether they would be able successfully to defend themselves.

Meanwhile, Raoul was told nothing of his mother's fears, for she did not wish to make the child unhappy. He knew, however, that Count Robert had ridden to the

castle every day for almost a week, and that he and Lady Alix had been shut up talking together for hours at a time.

But this did not greatly trouble Raoul, for he was a bright, happy-hearted lad, and the castle enclosure was large and, like all such places in those days, contained many interesting things. The castle itself was a charming place for frolics; and up and down its great halls and long galleries Raoul would play hide and seek with the pages until sometimes, tiring of games, he would steal away by himself, and, clambering up the winding stair of the old tower, would reach its very top; and there, leaning on the lofty parapet, he would gaze far away over the beautiful Norman hills and valleys, and long for the time when as a noble knight he would ride forth with banners and music to some glorious battle-field.

Then when the little boy wearied of these day-dreams, he would perhaps descend the staircase and wander out into the rose garden.

This was a very beautiful one; the rose stalks were trimmed like little trees, their flat spreading tops solidly covered in those warm June days with a fragrant mass of rich pink blossoms.

And all along the gravelled walks he could race and play ball to his heart's content; while in the midst of the garden a silvery fountain tinkled all day long and in its basin of mossy stones bright gold fishes swam about and glittered through the green water.

Beyond the rose garden were the falcon mews whither he went many times a day to watch the care and training of the young birds; while in the centre of the grass plot

near by, there stood a carved wooden pole and on top of it the most wonderful pigeon house. It had turrets and gables and quaint little doors and windows, and looked for all the world like a toy chateau. And when the pigeons gathered about it, flashing their white wings and preening their rainbow feathers in the sunlight, Raoul thought there was no prettier sight in all the castle grounds.

Indeed, in those days the dove-cote was a very important part of every noble establishment; for as there was then no regular post for letters and no telegraph, carrier pigeons were very much depended upon.

When the lord of a castle went away on a long journey he very often took with him a basket of pigeons from the home cote; and no matter how far distant his way led him, if he wished greatly to send word home

he had but to fasten a slip of written paper somewhere about one of his pigeons and then loose the bird, certain that, if no harm befell it, it would find its way back and deliver the message to his lady or followers. For always while the lord of the castle was away, the dove-cote would be searched every morning to see if any wanderer had flown thither in the night.

Raoul had his own particular pets among the pigeons of Bellaire; and they were so tame that they would come and eat from out his hands and perch upon his head or shoulders quite as unafraid as on the gables of their own little house.

Then, too, across the courtyard, there was the armory, which the lad liked best of all to visit; for here the old armorer busied himself hour after hour polishing the helmets and shields and swords that had seen

service under Raoul's father, but that were seldom used now. Sometimes he would let Raoul help him at his work, explaining to him the use of the different things and telling him brave stories of the days of his dead father.

Next to the armory were the great stone stables where the horses lived; and here, also, was a favourite place for the boy to loiter. Though fewer in number than when Count Raymond lived, yet the horses were beautiful and high spirited, and always neighed when Raoul came in sight; for he often brought them red apples, or bits of barley sugar, which they especially liked. In one of the long, low rooms of the stables were kept the trappings for them; for when a horse went forth bearing his noble master to battle or tournament, he too was always arrayed in armour, and over this he

wore besides the gayest of harness and embroidered saddle-cloths.

Raoul used often to think how grand it would be to ride on a horse thus decked out instead of his little pony, and he had long ago picked out the trappings he meant to use when he set out on his first adventure as a knight.

And yet though there were innumerable things within the castle grounds to amuse and entertain him all day long, and though part of his time went to his lessons with Father Augustine, who had been chaplain of the castle for many years and of whom Raoul was very fond, — nevertheless he wearied with the confinement of it all, and often deeply longed for the freedom of the fields and woods.

At last, one day as he was playing in the rose garden, Lady Alix came out of the

castle and walking slowly along the gravelled path, presently seated herself on a carved stone bench and beckoned Raoul to join her.

As the boy came and sat down beside her, she put her arm about him and drew him close to her side as she pressed a long kiss upon his soft fair hair. They sat a little while in silence; and then Lady Alix said, "Child, thou art weary with being shut within these castle walls; how wouldst thou like to go away for a while, — till thou art older and stronger?"

At this Raoul looked up with bright eyes and a quick smile of delight. "Ah," he cried, with childish pleasure at the thought of new things, "that I would, most dearly! But whither will we go, Mother?"

As Lady Alix did not at once reply, he looked closer at her face and saw that her

eyes were full of tears; and it was with an effort she answered him as she put both arms about him and hugged him to her.

"Alas, dear one," she said, "thou hast been my sweetheart for ten years; but thou art a man-child, and since thy dear father is gone, thou needest to be taught many things that thou canst not learn here. Thou knowest most noble lads of thine age, even though their fathers live, yet are they sent out as pages in the households of other nobles, where they may be taught all knightly things."

Indeed, this was the custom in feudal times; the little sons of the lords of the land received their education, such as it was, in the castle of some friend rather than under their own roof. Perhaps for the reason that it was thought they would thus be

brought up more strictly than they might if indulged in their own homes.

As Raoul listened, the smile faded from his face; for he loved his mother dearly, and if the change she had suggested meant to part from her, he no longer felt any pleasure in the thought.

At last he said, very simply and with a brave effort to be manly, "*Must* I go, Mother?"

"Yes, dear," answered Lady Alix, "I am afraid I have already kept thee with me longer than I ought; — but I could not bear to send thee away. And, Raoul, there are other reasons, too, why it is best for thee to go away for a time; reasons which thou shalt learn by and by, when thou art somewhat older. I can only tell thee now that thine Uncle Robert and I have planned to send thee to a stronghold where thou canst

stay in safety for a few years, until thou shalt grow into thy strength."

Raoul was listening in deep attention; though he had never been told the real reason back of his capture on the day of the falcon hunt, he now vaguely guessed that for some cause his mother feared that he might again be taken from her.

Lady Alix then explained to the little boy how he was to be sent to the great Abbey-fortress of Saint Michael's Mount, which is a steep, island rock off the coast of Normandy, and of which I will tell you more by and by.

As Raoul's mother and his Uncle Robert greatly feared the persistence of the Baron D'Arcour, by whose men they knew the castle was constantly watched, they had taken much pains to plan some way by which Raoul might make the journey to Saint

Michael in such secrecy that no one but their own trusty serving-folk would know where he had taken refuge.

And this was the plan they had hit upon: the following week peasant Jacques Choinard, one of the tenants on the domain of Castle Bellaire, was to come thither in a cart and was to bring with him his little son Carlé, who was nearly the same age as Raoul.

Then Carlé was to stay at the castle where he was to be trained for service, while Raoul was to be dressed in some of Carlé's homespun clothes and wooden shoes and a cap like Carlé's, and then peasant Jacques was to take him in the cart to the village of Pontorson, and thence to the island of Saint Michael's Mount, a few miles beyond. Lady Alix and Count Robert thought that if Raoul were thus disguised, in case he

were seen by Baron D'Arcour's men, who watched all who came and went from the castle, they would not suppose but that he was the same little Carlé Choinard who had come there with his father.

When his mother had finished explaining this plan, Raoul's face wore an expression of rebellious dismay. He did not at all fancy the idea of leaving his home in disguise. He was high-spirited and courageous, and it seemed to him humiliating to go away as if he were in hiding for some wrong act.

But when Lady Alix showed him the importance of his reaching Saint Michael's Mount in secrecy, and when she seemed distressed at his unwillingness to carry out their plan, he kissed her and declared that rather than make her unhappy he would

cheerfully pretend he was Carlé or anyone else she might wish.

And then, the more they talked it over, the more interested he grew; till at last it seemed that the trip to Saint Michael's Mount in the rôle of a peasant boy would really be quite an agreeable little masquerade.

CHAPTER IX

OFF FOR SAINT MICHAEL'S MOUNT

A WEEK after Lady Alix had told Raoul of their plans, he happened to be down in the courtyard when, about the middle of the morning, in through the gateway came a shaggy Normandy horse, and clattering at his heels a high cart painted blue and with broad, heavy wheels. Around the neck of the horse was a wooden collar, and on top of it rose a little arch of wood in which hung a small bell which tinkled gaily as the horse stepped across the paving stones.

Raoul, however, noticed nothing but the people in the cart; these were a sturdy peasant wearing a suit of homespun with a

blue blouse and a broad hat, and by his side a little boy dressed much like his father.

As the cart stopped in the middle of the courtyard, the little boy gazed wonderingly around; for he had never before been within castle walls. And then, when they had climbed down to the ground, he made an awkward little bow as Lady Alix came toward them; for she had been expecting and watching for them. She greeted them kindly, and as Raoul came up, " My son," she said, " this is little Carlé, of whom I told thee."

Then as Lady Alix bade peasant Jacques come with her into the castle where she might talk with him, Raoul directed Carlé to the stables, where he was to put the horse and cart.

As Raoul watched the peasant boy patter across the courtyard in his wooden shoes, he

wondered how he himself would be able to manage such strange foot-wear for the next two days. And when Carlé came back from the stables and stood bashfully looking up at the pigeon house, Raoul greatly astonished him by suddenly asking to try on his shoes.

Carlé, who knew nothing of the plan of Lady Alix, looked at Raoul's fine velvet shoes and could not understand why his young lord should wish to put on wooden ones; and, thinking he was being laughed at, his face turned very red as he obediently stooped down and drew off his sabots. But when he saw Raoul's earnest attempts to put them on and his awkward efforts to walk in them, he laughed merrily and showed him as best he could how to manage them. After several tumbles Raoul contrived to walk tolerably well, and really

began to take quite an interest in the disguise he was to wear.

Presently, after a few more trials of his skill in walking, he sat down to rest, and taking off the sabots looked curiously at them.

Then noticing that Carlé, who was standing by in his bare feet, was gazing with equal curiosity at the pointed velvet shoes which were lying on the grass beside him, "Carlé," said Raoul, "I have tried thy sabots, how wouldst thou like to put on my velvet shoes?"

At this, Carlé looked very embarrassed; he really wanted very much to try on the fine foot-wear of his young master, but he was too shy to do so. So he only shook his head. But when Raoul insisted, he finally squeezed on one of the shoes, and then sat looking at it with such an expres-

sion of awe that Raoul burst out laughing.

"How dost thou like them?" he asked.

"Oh," said Carlé, drawing a long breath of admiration, "do you wear them every day, or is this your fête-day?"

"Why, I wear them every day," said Raoul. "Wouldst thou like to have them?"

Carlé blushed and looked so amazed at the offer, that Raoul laughed again, and called to him a page who had been loitering about the castle doorway. "Henri," said Raoul, as the page came up, "I wish thou wouldst run upstairs and bring me my new velvet shoes; I am going to give this pair here to Carlé."

The page looked surprised at this, but he was used to his young master's impulsive ways and, anyhow, it was his business to

obey Raoul; so, disappearing into the castle, presently he came back bringing the new shoes, which Raoul put on. As he handed the sabots back to Carlé, it was on the tip of his tongue to say that as he himself was to take a pair of these the next day and be a peasant boy for a while, turn about was fair play, and Carlé should have the velvet shoes he so admired. But just in the nick of time he remembered that his mother had specially warned him to say nothing to Carlé or anyone else about their plan for his disguise, as she wished nobody save those who *must* to know of it.

So Raoul contented himself with saying, " Keep the velvet shoes, Carlé. Thou canst wear them for sport some day just as I have played with thy sabots."

Carlé was delighted with his gift, and

managed to stammer out an embarrassed "Thank you, sir."

The shoes were really too small for his brown feet and he had to tug hard to get them on; and, to be sure, they looked entirely out of place with his blouse of coarse blue homespun. Nevertheless, Carlé was absurdly pleased with them and fairly bursting with pride to own them.

He felt their softness and admired them to his heart's content, thinking with delight of how he would wear them on great days, perhaps Sundays or the fête-day of some saint; for such times were the only ones when the peasant folk had any merriment. Indeed, Carlé considered his gift so fine that presently, still delightedly stroking them, he went off to hunt the brown wicker basket in which he had brought his few clothes, — for he was to stay at the castle —

and in this he safely stowed away the precious shoes.

Meantime, Raoul had gone into the castle, and the rest of the day was spent in arranging the details of the journey and in finishing the packing of his belongings.

The next morning, before sunrise, peasant Jacques brought his horse and cart out into the courtyard; and when a little boy, dressed in blue homespun and wearing sabots, clambered up to the seat beside him, if any of the castle folk had seen them (but then, except Lady Alix, none of the castle folk, not even the pages, were blinking yet, but were all sound asleep) they would never have guessed but that it was little Carlé going off with his father.

As they passed through the gate, the sleepy porter, as he grumblingly let down

the draw-bridge, paid little heed to them; only noticing that it was the same peasant and cart which he had let in the day before.

As peasant Jacques roused the big Normandy horse to a trot and they jogged along the open road, Lady Alix, who had climbed to the top of the highest castle tower to keep sight of her boy as long as possible, quite broke down and cried as if her heart would break.

Raoul, too, felt very sad and unhappy at leaving his home. But there were so many things along the road to divert his thoughts that he could not for long brood over his unhappiness as did poor Lady Alix left alone in her quiet castle.

On either side, along the way, were rows of tall poplar trees; and beneath them tufts of blue periwinkle and purple phlox were

just opening for the white butterflies that hovered about in shining swarms.

Sometimes they passed gray farm-houses with roofs of thatch and apple and pear trees clustered close around, and perhaps a blaze of scarlet poppies in the fields beyond. Now and then, as other high, two-wheeled carts went trundling by, their drivers would call out a pleasant "Good morning!" To which peasant Jacques always replied in friendly manner, though he really knew none of the passers by, as Lady Alix had chosen him for the journey especially because his home lay in that part of her estate most remote from Saint Michael's Mount; for she thought that if he had not to pass through his own region he would be troubled with fewer questions about Raoul.

As they jogged along the little boy asked about many things, which peasant Jacques

answered as best he could; and, after a while, when Raoul wanted to know how far they were going, he said that they would journey all that day and as far the next day before they reached Pontorson, the village by the sea coast nearest Saint Michael's Mount, which, you remember, is an island.

This seemed to both of them quite a journey, as in those days, when there were no railroads, it took a long time to travel even fifty or sixty miles.

After a while they reached a little village of thatched cottages; here the houses stood close to the road, and children played and women were spinning out of doors.

A little farther on, in an open space before the church, there were a number of two-wheeled blue carts like the one in which Raoul was perched, for it was market day. Opposite, the church rose, beautiful in its

lace-like carvings of stone; while the sunlight streamed through the wonderful painted windows and out again upon the stone flagging in front till it gleamed like a mosaic of jewels.

Here peasant Jacques stopped for a few minutes, and climbing down from the cart went over to some of the market folks to ask directions about the road. Left alone, Raoul looked around with interest; for he had never been far from Bellaire, and so everything was new to him.

Presently along came a little girl leading a goat by a cord; her father, a little way ahead, was busy selling some vegetables, after which he meant to try and sell the goat also, which meantime the little girl was tending so that it might not stray away.

As she passed peasant Jacques' cart, Raoul called down a friendly "Good day!"

"Good day!" said the little girl; and then, pausing a moment, "Do you come often to market?"

"Nay," answered Raoul, "'tis my first time."

"Oh!" said the little girl in surprise, "I have been a great many times. I always carry the basket of eggs to sell, — and I am very careful not to break them," she added with a little air of pride.

Just then a faint sound came from a brown wicker basket under the seat in the blue cart, and noticing it, "What is that?" asked the little girl, coming nearer.

"Why," answered Raoul, "those are my pigeons." For, unknown to anyone at Bellaire, before starting away he had happened to think how lonely he would be, off in the strange Abbey without any pets; so he had chosen three of his favourites from the castle

dove-cote and had brought them along in the wicker basket. He had brought also a small bag of grain to feed them on the way. The pigeons had been dozing most of the time since they had set out, but had just roused up and were beginning to coo plaintively at finding themselves shut in so small a space.

Raoul raised a little crack in the lid and spoke to them. Then turning to the little girl, "Would you like to have a peep at them?" he asked.

"Oh yes!" she said, and standing on tiptoe, looked in as Raoul held the basket toward her.

"How pretty they are!" she exclaimed. "May I touch them?"

"Yes," said Raoul, "they are very tame."

So slipping the cord, that held the goat,

into one hand (she had been grasping it tightly with both), with the other she timidly reached into the basket and softly stroked the shining feathered heads within. But at that moment the goat, which had been tugging impatiently at the cord, gave an extra hard pull, jerking it loose from the chubby palm that held it, and away he went frisking off down the road.

The little girl gave a cry of dismay, and started after it; while Raoul, seeing her distress, sprang from the cart and tried to run along to help.

But he quite forgot the wooden shoes he wore, and, after a wild plunge or two, fell sprawling in the street. When he tried to rise, for all his lesson from Carlé the day before, the sabots were still so much in his way that he could not get to his feet, but over he tumbled again, rolling about and

by this time laughing heartily at his own plight.

At this, the market folks near by began to notice with surprise the little peasant boy who could not manage his wooden shoes and to speak of him curiously.

But, fortunately, at this point, peasant Jacques caught sight of him, and in great alarm hurried up, and dragging Raoul to his feet, got him back as quickly as possible and placed him in the cart. Indeed, peasant Jacques was so much frightened over the notice the lad had attracted that he did not stop for anything else, but made haste to drive away from the village as soon as he could.

When they were well out in the country again, he begged Raoul that, the next time they stopped, he would keep quietly in the cart and avoid the notice of anyone. Poor

peasant Jacques was beginning to feel that he had a much more difficult task than he had bargained for; and he heartily wished that the lad by his side was really little Carlé whom he could command to do his bidding. For all his peasant blouse and wooden shoes, he could not forget that Raoul was his young master and therefore not to be treated disrespectfully. It was very hard, especially as, despite his entreaties, Raoul only poked out his feet and laughed again as he looked at the clumsy shoes that had come so near to betraying him.

After this, peasant Jacques, who was not nearly so dull as he looked, began to inquire about the less travelled ways; and, leaving the highroad, he drove along quiet lanes, sometimes through woods and fields, though always going toward the sea-shore. In this way they met almost no one, and so Raoul

was much less care to him. Indeed, so lonely were the ways they travelled that when night overtook them they found themselves in a green woodland far from any village. The loneliness of the spot might have made it a dangerous place for anyone to pass the night if he carried gold-pieces in his pocket, for there were many robbers through the country; yet peasant Jacques knew that poor folks like himself (and with his blue blouse and sabots, no one would have known that Raoul was other than a peasant, too,) need fear no disturbance. And so he was very well satisfied as he made ready to camp for the night.

Lady Alix had seen to it that stowed away in the cart was a generous basket of bread and cheese and pasties of meat and little knick-knacks that Raoul liked. So they supped very finely sitting on a grassy bank

by the roadside, and a little stream near by furnished them a cool drink and water in which to bathe their dusty faces.

Then Raoul attended to his pigeons, while peasant Jacques unharnessed Jacco, the horse, and fed him with some hay they had brought along.

When all was done, peasant Jacques stretched out on the soft green grass close by, and the little boy curled up in the cart on the hay that was left; and never in all his life had he had a sweeter sleep than that night under the bright stars of June.

CHAPTER X

PEASANT JACQUES' TROUBLESOME CHARGE

SOON after daybreak the next morning they again set out on their journey. Peasant Jacques still chose the little travelled roads and quiet lanes where the dew twinkled brightly in grass-grown tracks. Now and again, as they drove along, brown hares would scurry across the way and then pause in the shelter of the tall hedge-rows and peer out at them, with bright eyes and long ears pricked up straight. Two or three times they passed through sleepy villages; and once a gayly mounted party of noble folk swept by them on their way to a hunt, with horns blowing and silken garments and bright feathers

fluttering in the wind. But to peasant Jacques' great relief, no one spoke to them or asked them any questions.

And all the while the birds sang so sweetly and the country looked so beautiful, that the second day passed very quickly; and it was quite dark when they drew near the little village of Pontorson, where they were to spend the night. This had been the plan of Lady Alix, who had not realized how hard it would be to keep Raoul from being noticed in spite of his disguise.

Peasant Jacques, after his experience with his young charge in the first village where they had stopped, had been much perplexed all day as to whether strictly to obey the commands of Lady Alix, which of course he wished to do if possible, or to act as he thought safer and not try to enter Pontorson, but again to camp in some quiet

place and pass the night beneath the stars.

But as the dusk fell, the matter was settled by a bank of heavy clouds, that had lain low on the horizon all day, beginning to float up and threaten a down-pour of rain.

Now, peasant Jacques, had he had sturdy Carlé with him instead of his young master, would not have minded the rain in the least. He would have taken Carlé and crept under the shelter of the cart, and let the falling drops beat in on them if it so chanced. But with Raoul in his care, it was different. The lad was of delicate build and not overstrong; and as peasant Jacques looked at him with troubled eyes, he decided he must not risk a wetting lest the child fall ill.

It probably would not have hurt Raoul, but, of course, peasant Jacques felt responsible for him and did not wish to take the

chances of having him pass the night out of doors. So he directed Jacco toward Pontorson.

As they entered the village and drove along the one roughly paved street of the place, here and there a candle twinkled from some open window; and very soon they saw a flickering lantern which partly lighted up a swinging wooden sign on which was painted a strange looking animal in bright blue.

Raoul, who had never before been to an inn, except the one at Fontreil, was much interested. "Is that an inn?" he asked.

"Yes," answered peasant Jacques, "that is the inn of the 'Blue Lion,' where we are going to stop to-night."

Raoul was greatly amused at the queer looking lion on the sign, and remembering that the one at Fontreil had borne a hedge-

hog painted green, he asked peasant Jacques if all inns had queer animals for signs.

But Jacques did not know; neither could he tell why a bough of green mistletoe was fastened beside the inn door. He only knew that every inn of which he had ever heard did the same. And, indeed, to this day, though the Blue Lion has long since passed away, still one may see a cluster of green mistletoe hanging by the door of every Pontorson inn; for so the old custom has been handed down for centuries.

But peasant Jacques did not allow Raoul much time for looking at the outside of the inn, for he was anxious to get under shelter ahead of the rain. So urging on Jacco, in another moment they clattered along through a stone arched gateway and entered a paved courtyard.

At this, the landlord, who had heard

them drive in, came bustling out. But when he saw his new guests were only a peasant and a little boy, he did not waste any of his fine bows upon them; but with a friendly nod to Jacques, called out "Welcome, travellers! Thou canst stable thy horse in the stall across the yard."

So peasant Jacques drove over to a long shed with a row of stalls and, getting out of the cart, unharnessed Jacco and pulled down some hay for him from a rack on the wall.

While he was busy with this, Raoul, hearing his pigeons cooing hungrily, lifted the cover of their basket and sprinkled in a few handfuls of grain which he had brought in a little bag. Then drawing from the same bag a beautiful silver drinking cup that belonged to himself and that he had tucked in with the grain, he looked around the

courtyard to find some water for his pets. Soon spying an old-fashioned well, he went over to it and began tugging at its heavy windlass.

As he was working at it, two maids belonging to the inn, who were gossiping near by, noticed the silver cup which Raoul had set on the curb of the well.

"Oh ho!" said one of them, "how comes it thou hast silver to drink from, like a young lord?"

"Yes," echoed the other, suspiciously, "boys such as thou had best be content with pewter mugs, like the rest of us!"

Raoul turned around in surprise, and "Pewter is for peasants!" he said haughtily. As he was about to say more, up came peasant Jacques, and seeing the dispute and the rich looking cup, which he did not know Raoul had brought, he was again dread-

fully frightened for fear the boy's disguise would be found out and he himself would be blamed by Lady Alix.

But Lady Alix would not have blamed him without good reason; for she had specially chosen him to conduct Raoul because she knew him to be quicker of wit and with more presence of mind than most of the peasant folk.

So now, gathering his wits together, "Carlé," he said roughly, "put up thy cup, else we be taken for thieves." Then turning to the maids, "He is an honest lad, and 'tis his own cup. My lord that died gave it to him; for he and the young master are playfellows and the young master sets great store by my little Carlé."

Raoul opened his eyes wide at this speech, which, though it sounded to him decidedly mixed up, was yet entirely true, all but the

calling of himself "Carlé;" for the cup had indeed been given to him by his dead father, and it was also true that he played with himself a great deal and that he liked Carlé. And it was thus hearing the little peasant boy's name that reminded him of his disguise, which he had for a moment forgotten. So he said no more, but with a smile of amusement handed the cup to peasant Jacques, who took it and placed it for safe keeping in the loose front of his own blouse.

The maids turned away, only half satisfied and still eying Raoul curiously; and as they walked off shaking their heads, he heard them saying to each other "A likely story, indeed!"

Poor peasant Jacques, wondering what Raoul would do next, hurried him away from the well; and when he took him into

the inn for the night he thanked his lucky stars that he had managed to travel as much of the way as he had without meeting people; and he devoutly wished his troublesome charge was safely off his hands.

Jacques would have wished still more ardently to be safely through the journey, had he known that the kitchen maids were not the only ones who had noticed the silver cup. A rough looking man, who had been loitering in the shadows of the courtyard, had seen it also; and when Jacques took Raoul into the inn, he slowly followed, seeming not to be watching the two, but all the while keeping a close eye on them.

In the great kitchen in which they found themselves, was a party of pilgrims bound for the Mount. Some had their knapsacks open in front of them and were eating the last remnants of the food they had brought

with them on the journey, while the innkeeper was supplying the wants of others. But though it was yet early in the evening, the most of the pilgrims, many of whom had come a long distance and were very weary, were already finding themselves places to sleep on the floor and the long wooden benches that ran around the wall. Peasant Jacques chose for Raoul an empty bench which he found in one corner, and stretched himself on the floor in front of it. He would much rather have taken the boy to a room where they might be alone, but did not dare to ask for one for fear that the innkeeper and the others would be suspicious of Raoul's disguise. For in those days, it was only nobles or folk of some means who had beds to themselves when they went on journeys. Travellers of the poorer class were obliged to find such comfort as they

could in the shelter of the kitchen, which was general living room as well.

But even though they thus had to mingle with the others, peasant Jacques was thankful they were under a good thatched roof; for the wind had risen and a summer storm was sending down its first pattering drops.

He was very tired and sleepy as he lay on the floor, and he hoped Raoul would soon fall asleep, too; for as long as the lad was awake he was continually afraid he might say or do something to betray them.

But Raoul was by no means ready for sleep. With bright, wide-open eyes, he sat up very straight, watching everything that went on. He looked at the pilgrims, with much curiosity. "See," he said to Jacques, "they are eating hard black bread, like the robbers had and like they gave us at the inn in Fontreil!" Until the journey with the

robbers, Raoul had never before tasted black bread, which was the daily fare of the peasant folk.

"O young sir, hush!" begged Jacques under his breath to the little boy; he was all in a tremor, for he knew that if overheard, the pilgrims would stare at the supposed peasant boy to whom black bread was a strange food. "Oh, please be quiet," he implored, "for if you talk so they will find out you are no peasant, and we may be watched, and Lady Alix's plan will be spoiled and she will be angry with me!"

As poor peasant Jacques sat up and drew closer to the lad, Raoul, seeing how worried he looked, nodded his head and tried to remember that he was to say nothing. But he was a bright, impulsive boy, interested in all about him, and before long he forgot himself again. He was looking this time at a

group of women in the pilgrim party; they wore dark dresses with white kerchiefs over their shoulders, and on their heads wonderful tall white caps with wide fluted ruffles that flared back from their faces.

"Oh," exclaimed Raoul to peasant Jacques, "those caps are not at all like the serving-women wear in the castle, and once one of our pages told me that he could tell from what part of Normandy peasant folk come just by the different kinds of caps the women wear. Now where dost thou suppose yonder people live?"

Again peasant Jacques, in despair, plead with his young charge to be careful, and above all to keep quiet. He looked anxiously around to see if anyone had overheard Raoul's speech, and to his great relief decided that no one had noticed them. He did not know that the rough looking man,

who had followed them in and was seated near them seemingly absorbed in re-arranging the things in his knapsack, had heard the last part of Raoul's chatter. At the words "one of our pages," he had pricked up his ears; "Ah," he said to himself, "so thou hast pages in thy household, and drinkest from silver! A rare 'peasant' indeed! Perhaps, too, though thy guardian has thy cup in safe keeping, something else of value may be tucked away under that make-believe costume of thine!"

He kept his thoughts to himself, however; and presently, yawning, he lay down on the floor not far distant from the corner Jacques had chosen, and arranging his knapsack for a pillow, he was soon snoring loudly.

Meantime Raoul was feeling the effects of being out of doors all day, and was growing sleepy. He began to lose interest in the

doings of the people around him, and, stretching himself out on the bench, for a little while, blinking drowsily, he watched the firelight flickering over the faces about him; and then, by and by, his eyes closed and he was in the land of dreams.

Peasant Jacques, whose anxiety had kept him wide awake, as he saw Raoul's even breathing and knew that he slept, gave a sigh of relief as he shut his own eyes.

In a little while, all the pilgrims having arranged themselves for the night, the tallow candles that had partly lighted the room were blown out and all became quiet.

CHAPTER XI

THE NIGHT IN THE VILLAGE INN

ALL went well in the inn kitchen, until about midnight; and then the rough looking man, who had been pretending to snore as he lay on the floor near Raoul and Jacques, turned over, and, stealthily rising to his hands and knees, began to creep toward them.

Peasant Jacques, sleeping soundly, did not know that some one very, very softly thrust a hand within his blouse and drew out Raoul's silver cup. The man next rose to his feet, and carefully stepping over peasant Jacques, leant above Raoul, evidently considering. He thought if the lad were sound enough asleep, perhaps he could

carry him outside the inn and there force him to be quiet while he searched to find if he had any money or anything of value hidden beneath his blouse.

But the man had not realized that Raoul was a light sleeper, and easily awakened. So no sooner had he bent over him, than the lad's eyes suddenly flew open.

The room was quite dark, save for the flickering embers of the great kitchen fireplace where a billet of wood still smouldered from the supper time. But though Raoul could only vaguely see that a man was bending over him, yet as he was a sensitive child, he felt at once that it was not peasant Jacques but some one with evil intent. He uttered a quick, startled cry, and sat bolt upright on his bench.

The man drew back, and at the same moment peasant Jacques, rousing up, caught

at his foot, so tripping him over, and the man pitched heavily to the floor, the silver cup dropping from his hands as he fell. Peasant Jacques, seeing the gleam of it as it rolled near the fireplace, with a quick movement snatched it up and hid it again in his blouse; he was about to cry "Thieves!" when he very wisely remembered that it was best not to attract any notice to themselves, and so he held his tongue.

But in another moment the room was in a hubbub. The pilgrims who had been asleep on the floor were rousing up and asking in a bewildered way what was the matter. And what was peasant Jacques' astonishment, when the man, scrambling to his feet, cried out "Thieves! I have been robbed by yonder peasant churl, who has already stolen a silver cup and no doubt the

lad with him, who is no peasant, for all his blue blouse and wooden shoes!"

When peasant Jacques heard this speech, he was terrified; but as we have seen before, Lady Alix had made a wise choice in selecting Raoul's guardian for the journey; and again Jacques' nimbleness of wit and clear judgment served them in good stead.

He now instantly seized Raoul, who, for all his recklessness, seemed also to realize the importance of being quiet; and while everyone was still confused with the sudden excitement and before anyone had managed to find a candle to light, he quickly reached the door, and, slipping back the heavy bolt, stepped out and hurriedly picked his way across the courtyard, making his plans as he went.

He remembered the thatched shed where

he had left Jacco, and quietly creeping into it he felt along the wall till he found the stout rack in which the hay was kept; for, being a peasant, he knew just where to look for such things. He next thrust Raoul into it, and then climbing in himself, he crouched down and pulled the hay loosely in front of them so as to hide them.

Fortunately, all the while the rain, which had begun to fall early in the evening, was still coming stormily down; and peasant Jacques, though he had not wanted it before, was now thankful enough as he heard it; for he knew it would make the inn people less apt to search thoroughly for them.

And sure enough, after they had got one or two candles lighted and looked about a little and had all examined their belongings and found nothing missing, the pilgrims,

who were still weary and wanted to finish their sleep, were not greatly interested in what became of Jacques and Raoul; and the real thief, meantime, had quietly slipped out and made his escape.

The inn-keeper, who felt that he must make some show of protecting his guests, took a lantern and searched the courtyard; but the rain soon drenched him, and as he saw no traces of anyone, he went back into the house and bolted the door with a great deal of blustering. And by and by everything was quiet again; for in those days people were used to all kinds of lawlessness, and felt lucky if nothing befell themselves; and they did not greatly trouble to go out of their way to capture evil doers for the public good.

Meanwhile, Jacques, crouching there in the hay with Raoul, knew that they must

get away before daybreak; and he wondered if he could safely manage it.

He waited till all had been dark and quiet for some time in the inn. Then slipping from the rack, he hurriedly found Jacco's harness and deftly buckled it in place; and then he took some wisps of hay and twisted them around the two heavy wheels of the cart so as to try to deaden the sound of its clatter over the stones of the courtyard. The hay did not stay on very well, but it helped some; and luckily the shed was near the arched entrance which led to the street.

Jacques felt his way to this, and unbarred the broad wooden gate and set it wide open.

Then remembering that Jacco's iron shoes might make a noise on the paving stones, he carried some armfuls of straw from the floor of the shed and strewed it

along, as well as he could in the dark, so as to make a little path on which Jacco could walk. He thought of fastening some hay over Jacco's shoes also, but could not as he had nothing with which to bind it on. However, Jacques had really managed things very well; and when all was ready, he told Raoul to climb into the cart.

Then, taking Jacco's bridle, he carefully led him along, and as his eyes by this time had grown used to the dark, he succeeded in guiding the cart squarely through the gateway; and then mounting himself to the seat beside Raoul, he urged Jacco to a brisk trot until they had left the inn well behind them.

Jacques was anxious to reach the sea-shore, which was only a few miles away, by early dawn, so that he might find someone to guide them across to the Mount before

the coming of the party of pilgrims, who would recognize them, and, thinking them thieves, would of course make trouble for them. For though the other travellers at the inn had not bothered themselves to search for them that night, peasant Jacques knew they would be eager enough to take the supposed thieves should they happen to fall in their way. So he drove steadily on; and though the rain was still falling in fitful showers, both Jacques and Raoul were so glad to have got away that they did not mind the wetting.

The man who had caused the trouble at the inn was really only a common thief who wanted the silver cup or whatever else he might be able to steal, and knew nothing about Raoul except that he suspected the lad wore a disguise. But Jacques of course thought he was trying to get possession of

Raoul as the robbers had done the day of the falcon hunt, of which Lady Alix had told him; — and Raoul thought so, too; and though he knew nothing of the real reason why they had tried to capture him, he had too lively a recollection of the time spent in their hands to want to repeat the experience. So he was as anxious as peasant Jacques to reach the safe shelter of the Mount without anything else befalling them.

After a while the rain ceased; and before long a light dawn wind sprang up, drying their garments and chasing away the last wracks of cloud; and soon they could see a few pale stars and the little white moon glimmering down the west; for it was almost time for the early summer daybreak.

Presently, as the sky grew lighter and

lighter, a low sweet twittering began to steal through the air; and in another moment all the birds were wide awake; and from all the tall poplar trees along the roadside came the cheeping and chirping of the nestlings and the joyous rippling songs of robins and wrens, of thrushes and meadowlarks, so lovely that Raoul, with glistening eyes, fairly held his breath to listen, and even peasant Jacques forgot his cares for a moment as he lifted his head and drank in that happy music.

And then a wonderful rose coloured glow crept up the eastern sky, and in a burst of radiant golden glory the morning broke.

Still sparkling with raindrops, the country looked especially beautiful in the bright early sunbeams. From many young locust trees there swept down gusts of honey-sweet fragrance, and on the hedge-rows of soft

green tamarisks that bordered the way, sprays of feathery pink bloom swayed to and fro like fairy wands. Between these they could glimpse fields of barley, and sometimes the silvery sheen of growing oats.

Then by and by, the green fields ended and they came to the little river Couesnon, and saw, beyond, a great expanse of gray sand. Tufting it for quite a way were clumps of bronze-coloured grasses; and here and there flocks of sheep were browsing, the sunlight glinting through their fleeces and making them shine like spun silver.

A rude wooden bridge crossed the river, and as Jacco slowly trod over it, Raoul, looking out toward the west, suddenly opened his eyes wide with wonder and a long, marvelling "Oh!" broke from his

lips, and peasant Jacques reined in Jacco and gazed too.

It was their first glimpse of Saint Michael's Mount, whither they were bound.

A pearly morning mist lay over the distant sands, looking like a soft white cloud; and shimmering above, faintly seen through gold and violet vapours that trailed airily about it, the Mount seemed to float and hover in the sky like some heavenly vision.

The steep rocky isle, its sharp edges softened by the misty distance, tapered gradually to its summit crowned by the ancient Abbey, which carried on the marvellously picturesque lines, lifting them up and up, till at last they ended in the beautiful spire of the Abbey church. The figure of the great archangel, for whom the rock and the Abbey were named, tipped this spire, poising aloft with outspread wings; and

though neither Raoul nor Jacques could make it out clearly, they saw a bright sparkle of light glittering like a star where the sunbeams touched those hovering angelic wings.

It was all so lovely, that neither spoke as they gazed and gazed; and it was only when Jacco, becoming restless, began to trudge on, that they roused from their dreams and peasant Jacques remembered that his first care must be to find someone to guide them toward the Mount. For he had been carefully told and knew that the way thither, beautiful as it looked in the glamour of early morning, was none the less beset with many dangerous quicksands.

CHAPTER XII

THE JOURNEY'S END

PEASANT JACQUES reined in Jacco, and standing up and shading his eyes with his hand, he looked about. Not far away an old fisherman was stooping over a pile of nets which he was mending, and when Jacques called him over and showed him a piece of money — which Lady Alix had given him for this purpose — he agreed to guide them safely across the sands. As he led the way, carefully selecting his steps, peasant Jacques followed on foot, leading Jacco by the bridle.

Raoul, still perched on the high seat of the cart, looked eagerly around. It was

not at all such a place as he had expected to find. Everyone had called Saint Michael's Mount an island; but he saw no shining waves around it, as he had supposed would be there. So, standing up in the cart, he leaned over, and "Where is the sea? I want to see the water!" he demanded of their guide.

"Not so fast, little one!" answered the fisherman, "I would first fain be safe on yonder Mount. The tide is out now, but soon enough thou shalt see the salt waters rushing over these sands swifter than running horses!"

Raoul looked incredulous at this; he strained his eyes toward the horizon, but nowhere could he see a sign of the ocean. On all sides, instead of its tumbling waves, spread a great reach of wet earth and sand, dotted with tiny pools gleaming in the

morning light, and bright trickling streams that seemed to begin and end nowhere.

Near by, the little river Couesnon flowed lazily along, presently losing itself in the gray sand; and, scattered about everywhere, were small, fluted shells, glistening white, and clusters of curious sea-weeds, brown and green and rose-colour; and sprawling among them were great, flat jelly-fishes looking like disks of pale amber.

It was a strange region, neither land nor sea. But that was because the tide was out. By and by, when the time came for it to rise, all the sand through which Jacco was tugging the blue cart would be overswept by a great flood of salt water. Rushing, tumbling, foaming into white spray, it would beat against the rocky sides of the Mount, and, surging over the sands, carry

away any luckless travellers found in its path.

Indeed, nowhere on the coast of France does the tide rush in with such resistless force; and pilgrims to the Mount had always to be most careful to choose a time when the ocean was sleeping and the sands were bare. And even then the way was perilous because of the many quicksands into which, if one incautiously set foot, he was in danger of sinking forever. And so, for this reason, pilgrims usually went in parties and followed the lead of some trusty fisherman who knew the safe paths.

Before long, peasant Jacques, walking behind their guide and following closely in his footsteps, had led Jacco almost to the foot of the Mount. It was a steep, rocky hill; around its base, protecting it from the daily surging of the ocean and also from the

attack of any foes, — for the Abbey was very rich and powerful, — ran a strong wall of stone with battlements and watch-towers. Above the wall might be seen the quaint, peaked roofs of the village of Saint Michael. It had but one street, steep and crooked; and, on either side, the brown houses were piled one above another in the oddest places, wherever the rocks gave room enough to build.

And then, last of all, towering above the village and on the very top of the rocky Mount, rose the wonderful Abbey, lifting its picturesque walls and towers and pinnacles high against the Norman sky and seeming to have sprung from out the living rock itself.

Indeed, it looked so strong, so great and massive, that to Raoul, as he gazed thus at closer range, it seemed that it must have

been built by giants, and he could hardly believe that those lofty gray walls were a part of the airy vision he had seen from the little bridge over the Couesnon; a vision seemingly so fragile and unreal, that he had thought the Mount was the work of some great enchanter from fairy-land.

He rubbed his eyes, and looked again; but there it stood, solid and strong. And some day perhaps you, too, may see it; for though broken and worn by the passing of almost a thousand years, the Norman Abbey of Saint Michael's Mount is still one of the most truly beautiful buildings in all the world, and many of the famous artists and builders of to-day still make the pilgrimage thither solely to study the wonderful work of that old time brotherhood.

And the Abbey was old even in Raoul's time; for more than six hundred years be-

fore that, a certain good bishop of Normandy had had a dream, so legend says, and in his dream the archangel Michael had commanded him to build on the summit of the rocky Mount an Abbey; that is, a church and a monastery where a brotherhood of monks might live.

So the bishop began the work; and, toiling at it through all his life, slowly it had grown in size and beauty. It was named, for the archangel, the Abbey of Saint Michael; and in the centuries after the good bishop who began it, gradually more and more parts were added to it until it became a vast pile. There was a house for the abbot who ruled the brotherhood, there were cells for all the monks, a lovely cloister for them to walk in, a lofty dining room, places for writing and painting parchment books, and splendid great halls where visit-

ors might be received and entertained. And the visitors were many; for the Abbey contained a holy shrine which soon became so famous that hosts of people made pilgrimages there. They came from all over France; and oftentimes among them were powerful kings and princes who gave rich gifts to the Abbey, so that all the while it grew more wonderful and beautiful. And the wise part of it all was that instead of smoothing down and levelling the great rocks that made the heart of the isle, the artist builders built around and on top of them, fitting their plans to the rugged outlines of the Mount, till, year after year, the living rock seemed to grow into beautiful lines and noble shapes. From the great, solid pillars of the lowest crypts, rising in lofty walls and towers, up, up, to the slender, delicately carved columns of the

cloister, and soaring at last into the wonderful church and the topmost pinnacle of its graceful spire, the whole Abbey seemed a part of the very Mount itself.

Raoul, gazing at it with absorbed interest, almost forgot to climb down when at length the cart stopped just outside the great wall, and peasant Jacques made fast Jacco's bridle to an iron ring set in one of the stones. Then, loading himself with the two large baskets in which were packed Raoul's belongings, and giving to the little boy the smaller basket where his pigeons were stowed, he paid their fisherman guide with a piece of the money Lady Alix had provided, and taking Raoul by the hand led him up a steep, rocky stair and through the arched gateway that guarded the little village of Saint Michael.

It was a strange street in which they

found themselves; very narrow, paved with square stones, and with old brown houses crowding close on either side, it wound up the side of the rocky hill and at last ended in a flight of stone steps that led to the top of the great wall surrounding the Mount on three sides.

Raoul and peasant Jacques trudged slowly along, now and then stopping to glance within some open doorway or up some odd bypath. In many of the old houses were tiny shops where pilgrims might buy little keepsakes to carry away with them; rosaries of brown seeds, pottery and baskets made by the peasant folk, and all manner of trinkets fashioned from cockle-shells like those little, fluted ones strewn over the outer sands so thickly that the cockle-shell had become known as the emblem of the Mount and the Abbey coat

of arms showed, as it still does, a shield covered with these little white shells.

Raoul was eager to look at all these things, but peasant Jacques being anxious to reach their journey's end, begged him not to linger too long by the way. So steadily following the crooked street, at last they reached a landing on the parapet of the wall that guarded the Mount, and here they both had to stop a little while to catch their breath; for it had been a steep climb and a still steeper one was ahead of them.

"Oh," said Raoul, "now I can see the ocean!"

And, sure enough, as he stood on tip-toe and looked over the parapet, far off in the distance gleamed the bright edge of the sea which would by and by sweep in over the sands. Up above them rose the lofty walls of the Abbey, and Raoul could see the

entrance door defended by two round towers.

When presently they started on, they climbed up more flights of steps and steep paths, till at last they came to the great door guarded by men in armour. When the guardsmen saw them to be only a harmless peasant and a little boy, they were allowed to pass without questions, and were taken into a large reception hall.

Then peasant Jacques, setting down his basket, felt carefully within his blouse and brought out a slip of parchment which Lady Alix had given him. This he handed to one of the brothers who had come to meet them. He read the writing, and then turning to Raoul said kindly, "So this is the lad from Bellaire. We have expected thee, Raoul, and hope thou wilt be happy up here in this rocky nest."

Then he took charge of the baskets which peasant Jacques had set down, and the latter, bidding good-bye to the little boy, made his way to the shrine of Saint Michael, and soon after started on his homeward journey, much relieved to have gotten his charge safely off his hands.

As soon as Jacques had taken his leave, the young monk bade Raoul follow him, and after leading him through a number of vaulted rooms and winding passages, at length they reached a sort of dormitory where there were several beds. "Here," said the monk, "is where thou art to sleep; this bed next to mine is for thee, and here is a shelf where thou canst keep thy things."

As Raoul looked curiously around, the monk arranged the baskets, and then remembering the lad's long journey, he said with a smile, "Come, child, the noon meal

must be ready by now, and thou must be very hungry."

Descending a winding stair, they entered a beautiful, wide hall which the brotherhood used for a dining room. It was lighted by narrow, pointed windows filled with delicately coloured glass through which the sunbeams fell softly. At one side was a gracefully carved little reading desk reached by a small spiral stair, all of white stone, and here one of the monks stood and read aloud while the others ate.

Raoul was given a seat on the long bench on which the brothers sat. As he looked about, he saw that there were several who did not wear the brown robe and hood of the brotherhood; for there were usually a number of persons staying at the Abbey for different reasons. Sometimes there would be boys who had been sent to the place, per-

haps to be trained for the brotherhood, or for some other cause; though when Raoul came it happened that no others so young as himself were there.

But Brother Benedict, the monk who had him in charge, was happy-hearted and boyish spirited, and, by the time that first dinner was over, the lad from Bellaire already felt quite at home.

CHAPTER XIII

SAINT MICHAEL'S MOUNT

RAOUL soon grew very fond of his life there at Saint Michael; it was so novel and different from anything he had ever before known.

The Abbey itself was a marvellous place to him, and he would wander for hours through its vast halls and great vaulted chambers.

One part of the buildings, which rose from the northern face of the rocky isle, was so wonderful that when it was finished people called it the "Marvel;" and to this day the name still clings to it. In the Marvel is the noble hall known as the "Hall of the Chevaliers," because in it the abbots were

accustomed to receive their noble and kingly guests. Though to-day this hall is bare and desolate and the last embers have vanished from its huge, hooded fireplaces, when Raoul saw it its walls were hung with rich tapestries and on its stone floor were carpets of violet velvet sown with stars of gold; while at one side, on a dais covered with crimson, stood the abbot's chair of state carved with such fairy-like skill that when the little boy first looked at it he thought that the canopy which rose over it was made of fine brown lace, till he came nearer and saw that it was all of wood.

Raoul delighted in wandering through this Hall of the Chevaliers and admiring its princely splendour; but the place he loved best of all was the beautiful cloister which was built on the roof directly over the hall, from which it was reached by a

winding stone stair. This cloister, where the brotherhood used to walk and meditate, was one of the loveliest parts of the whole Abbey. Indeed, nowhere in the world is there another one just like it; for nowhere else is there a cloister so lifted aloft between the earth and sky, and nowhere else are there more exquisite carvings than on the clusters of slender pillars bounding its arcaded walks. The square open space in its centre the monks had filled in with earth so they might plant it with grass and flowers; and as of course they could not have trees there, perhaps it was to make up for the lack of these that they lavished their utmost skill in fashioning the miraculously lovely carvings of the stone pillars around it.

Here to-day may still be seen such wealth of fruits and foliage, of roses and lilies and all manner of beautiful blossoming boughs,

all wreathed and intertwined with such incredible grace and delicacy of touch, that it does not seem possible that the whole is wrought from solid stone! It is no wonder that when it first shone forth fresh from the carvers' hands, people thought it so lovely that, just as they had christened the whole range of buildings the "Marvel," so they called this cloister "The Palace of the Angels." And by and by, long before Raoul's time, the legend had come to be handed down that sometimes, at midnight, the white wings of angels really had been seen hovering over this lovely cloister, and that more than once they had even come down and walked within it.

People declared, too, that at times a strange light had been seen within the great church close by, while ghostly figures flitted about and angel voices could be heard softly

singing. The peasant folk said further that on no account must anyone venture to pass the night within the church or cloister; for some dreadful misfortune would surely overtake the person who tried to spy upon the angels if they chanced to come thither. So firmly did everyone believe this, that none of the monks who lived in the Abbey, nor any of the village folk, would have thought of such a thing as passing a night in the forbidden bounds.

These old tales, which the brothers from time to time told Raoul, fascinated him much; and then the cloister was so pleasant, too; high in the air as it was, there was always blowing through it a fresh salt breeze from the sea, and the little boy liked to linger in its grassy courtyard by day, or to wander in the early moonlight up and down its long, arcaded aisles. There he would

dream all manner of dreams; for he was sensitive to beauty, and the loveliness of the spot always soothed him if he was homesick or unhappy. Often he longed to watch for the ghostly visitors of the old legends, and wondered if ever they really came. But as Brother Benedict had specially warned him of the dreadful calamity that had overtaken all who had dared do so, he never tried, but obeyed the bell that every evening summoned the brotherhood to their beds.

But though he dared not wander too late beneath the moon and stars, through the long summer days he had plenty of time for exploring the place. In the great church, for quite a while after Raoul's coming, the brothers were busy repairing a part of the roof and one of the walls where a thunderbolt had fallen; for the lofty Abbey, crowning its solitary rock, had many times been a

target for the lightning. Raoul thought it very interesting to watch the brothers at this work; and sometimes one of them would take the lad with him up to the roof, and there let him stand upon the amazing little outside stairway airily poised among the pinnacles and so daintily carved that still people call it the "Stairway of Lace." Though it had been contrived for the uses of the Abbey, it was so beautiful that Raoul was quite certain that it was meant for no other purpose than to entice the angels down from heaven.

Through its delicate balustrade he could look down on the quaint peaked roofs of the village of Saint Michael; a picture all in soft grays and browns, for there was only here and there room enough on the face of the rock for a little space of grass. Trees there were none, save on one of the steep

slopes beneath the Abbey walls. Here was a little group of gnarled and weather-beaten oaks clambering up the rock and all leaning toward the Abbey, as if imploring it to protect them from the mighty sea whose tides twice a day swept the sands beneath them.

Raoul's eyes always grew big with wonder as he looked at this curious bit of woodland; for everyone on the Mount knew that it was all that was left of the ancient Forest of Broceliande, where the arch-enchanter Merlin had long ago lived and ruled over fairyland, until, once upon a time, the sea had swept over the land, swallowing up the forest and making an island of the Mount, which had been, before, a rocky hill on the Norman coast. Gazing down with awe on the strange, frightened looking old trees of Merlin's wood, Raoul would often wish that he could understand

the whispering of their gray leaves, for he was sure they told of many marvellous things.

Then, as he turned his eyes in the other direction, he could look far out over the sea. He could make out, in the distance, the Chausey Isles glimmering through the haze, and knew that, farther still, was England, that oftentimes made war on France, and that now and then sent a shipful of armed men toward the Norman coast. Indeed, it was to guard against this possible attack of any foes from oversea, that always, day and night, men in armour holding in their hands long bows and arrows, watched from the little round towers that studded the Abbey walls. And through peace or war, never did they relax their watch. For the Mount was a natural point of attack in case of war, and so the kings of France had made

it a military fortress as well as an Abbey; and the monks who dwelt there were obliged to be warriors also, and to know how to fight as well as to pray. And that they fought to good purpose when needful, was proven by the fact that though the old Abbey had many times been besieged by enemies, never once had it been taken.

And because the place was thus part fortress, and prisoners were sometimes captured in time of war, down in the heart of the rock terrible dungeons had been delved. Though of course every castle in those days had its dungeons, those of the Abbey were so especially black and fearful that Raoul could never bear to visit that part of the place; and he was glad when Brother Benedict told him that for a long while no prisoners had been shut within them.

Thus, as the days passed, the lad gradu-

ally learned more and more about his new home. The brothers were all very good to him; and as there were no other children there at the time, they indulged Raoul in many ways, letting him follow them about at their daily tasks, and now and then take a hand in whatever they were doing. And though of course he was less help than hindrance, it gave him constant entertainment. Often he would go down to the village with one of the brothers, and its quaint sights were a never ending delight to him.

Of course, too, he went to school. It was a queer little school, in one of the lower rooms of the Abbey, and its door opened on a small courtyard overgrown with phlox and marigolds. A monk was the teacher and the pupils children from the village. For though at that time in France peasant children were seldom taught anything,

nevertheless the brotherhood of the Mount, shut up on their rocky little isle, regarded the village folk as their family and strove to do the best they could to teach the little ones. So they learned to read and cipher a little; and for geography they studied the strangest maps with queer beasts and monsters painted on the places then unknown, as much of the world was in those days.

As Raoul went every day to this school, Brother Benedict thought it best to have him dress just like the village children so he would not attract notice among them; for he had been instructed that Raoul was in hiding and that no one must find out that he was there. The brother thought, too, that it was best to give the boy another name while at the Mount; so always he spoke to him as "Henri," which, though

no one at his home ever called him by it, was really one of his many middle names; for all noble children were christened with a number of such. So everyone both in the village and the Abbey, except those few of the brotherhood who knew better, supposed that Henri was the lad's usual name.

Every day "Henri" put on a plain blouse of black and white checks such as the boys of the fisher folk wore, and soon the warm sun and pure air of the Mount tanned his white skin and gave him such health and vigour, that, save for his high bred features and noble bearing, he could scarcely be distinguished from his sturdy little comrades of Saint Michael.

And the lad, for all his impulsiveness, soon learned to speak but little of his home to the children with whom he played. They knew, of course, that he was not a vil-

lage boy; but as they had only vague ideas of other places than the Mount, beyond which they had never been, they were quite ignorant of their new playmate's full name and of where he lived.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CARRIER PIGEON

RAOUL had been at the Abbey for many weeks and the time had passed happily enough; though now and then a great wave of homesickness would sweep over him when he thought of his mother and the castle of Bellaire and how long it had been since he had heard any word from home. For people in those days wrote few letters, and even then were seldom sure that such reached their friends, as there was no regular way to send them.

One day as Raoul was feeling particularly homesick, all at once he remembered his pigeons, and thought to himself that even if he could get no message from his

mother, at least he could send one to her, and then he would not feel quite so lonesome.

He ran off at once to get Fifi, one of the three pigeons he had brought with him and which had made themselves at home in the Abbey cote. Fifi was standing at the door of the cote, preening her feathers, and came directly when Raoul held out his hand; for all the pigeons were very tame.

But in his hurry to get Fifi, he had forgotten that he did not have any message ready, and that even if he had, he would need some help to fasten it on. So scampering down the steep flight of steps from the Abbey, "Gilles! Gilles!" he called.

"Ho!" answered Gilles, a little fisher lad who lived in one of the old houses near by, and who was Raoul's favourite playmate.

In a moment the boys had their heads to-

gether and Raoul was explaining what he wanted to do. "Do thou hold her, Gilles," he said, "and I will find something to send."

But, as he looked about, he scarcely knew where to go to get anything on which to write; though indeed, he knew how to write but little even if he had had a scrap of paper, — which was unheard of in those days, — or a bit of parchment, which was always so precious that Raoul hated to ask for it at the Abbey, where they used it in the making of books and were very particular about it. Then an idea struck him as he felt in his blouse pocket and discovered a handful of the pretty cockle-shells he had one day picked up on the sands.

"O," he said, taking them out, "See, Gilles! I will send one of these!" And, as he looked them over, "here is one with a

little hole in it, all ready to put a string through!"

Gilles thought that would be fine; and as Raoul was wondering how he could make some mark on the shell, Gilles hunted about until he found a sharp bit of stone and brought it to Raoul. And then he petted Fifi, who was growing impatient, while Raoul, taking the stone, managed hurriedly to scratch the initials of his name on the white inside curve of the shell. He tried to write something more; but the space was small and it was hard to make the marks plain enough to be read; so he had to be content with his initials. But he felt sure that if even these reached the eyes of his mother, as he hoped, she would know that he was thinking of her.

The next thing was to find a piece of cord with which to fasten the shell. Neither of

"'FLY AWAY, FIFI, . . . AND CARRY MY MESSAGE STRAIGHT TO BELLAIRE!"

the children had any about them; but Raoul remembered the silk lacers of his best velvet doublet. So, running back to the Abbey and up to where his clothes were kept, he hastily cut a bit of the cord and coming back to where he had left Gilles, the two between them tied the shell securely to one of Fifi's legs.

Then the boys climbed to the highest point they could reach on the parapet of the wall opposite the Norman coast, and Raoul, raising Fifi, held her poised for a moment, and then launched her into the bright air.

"Fly away, Fifi," he called after her, "and carry my message straight to Bellaire!"

Then as she soared upward and away, he watched her longingly till the tears blinded his eyes; for he was very homesick that day.

Away, away flew Fifi, her white wings gleaming against the blue sky and the little shell twinkling in the sunlight. It seemed but a moment till her swift flight had carried her over and beyond the gray sands around the Mount, and far across the open country of the coast.

Turning her rose-coloured eyes this way and that, soon she saw below her the green summer fields of Normandy, and had left far behind the little village of Pontorson.

On she sped, heading straight for the distant castle of Bellaire; for, by means of some strange knowledge hidden away in her shining, feathery head, she knew exactly the straightest and shortest path through the air to the dove-cote at her home.

But though Fifi flew very swiftly, she saw beneath her many pretty and interesting things as she floated along. There were

ancient villages of gray houses with red tiled roofs; and, beyond these, green fields where peasants in blue blouses and wooden shoes worked amid ripening grain. And farther still, there were bright splashes of golden broom blossoms between orchards where the red apples were already mellowing for the cider press. Sometimes a knight-at-arms went pricking past mounted on a tall horse with embroidered trappings. Sometimes a troop of soldiers with glittering spears wound along the road beneath her or heedlessly trampled down the yellow grain; — and many were the beggars who crept along the waysides, clad in rags and asking alms of every passer-by.

But as if to make up for any unhappy sights, everywhere the summer flowers were gay with bloom. Over garden walls roses trailed long sprays of velvety petals and

grapes hung in slowly purpling clusters. While through all the fallow lands wild poppies fluttered in scarlet splendour and queen's - lace - handkerchief covered the feathery grasses with a filmy loveliness. Now and then a stately castle, with lofty turrets and guarded by moat and drawbridge, swept into view; and perhaps in the meadows near by high born ladies strolled about or amused themselves weaving dainty garlands of flowers.

Then there would come wide reaches of open country threaded by silvery streams fringed with poplar trees; and, here and there, tiny thatched cottages where peasant women were spinning in the doorways while little children played among white ducks and noisy chickens.

On and on she flew, till it seemed those fanning wings must be so weary they could

carry her no further. Yet only once did she pause, and that was when she saw below her a little meadow pool that looked so cool and inviting that she stopped her flight and slowly drifted down to drink.

Fifi let the sparkling water trickle down her fluffy throat, and then preened her wings; and after that she felt so refreshed that when again she mounted the air it was not long till in the distance she saw the green hills and towers of Bellaire.

The dusk was falling when she reached the dove-cote; and, as her tired wings drooped and her little feet brushed against one of the carved pinnacles of its roof, all at once off came the little shell and dropped down to the green grass beneath. Perhaps the hole in the shell had sharp edges and had gradually cut through the slender silk cord.

At any rate, there lay the little white cockle-shell; and Fifi, paying no attention to it, slid into her own well known corner of the cote and, cooing happily, shut her pink eyes and in a moment was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XV

CARLÉ AND THE COCKLE - SHELL

NOW, just about sunrise the next morning after Fifi's return to the cote, little Carlé Choinard came out into the courtyard of Bellaire; — you remember it was he who had brought his wooden shoes and blue blouse for Raoul, and who, when Raoul went away, had stayed at the castle for a serving boy.

Carlé carried in his hand a basket of grain; for it was one of his duties every morning to feed the pigeons and see that all was well with them.

As he came up to the little circle of grass under the dove-cote, something white caught his attention; and stooping down

he picked up Raoul's cockle-shell. Carlé was delighted with it. He had never touched a shell before, for he had never been so far as the sea; but he knew what it was, for he had often seen pilgrims passing along the road by his home, and knew that when returning from the Mount they always wore a cockle-shell fastened either to hat or cloak. Carlé did not know why, but it was because the cockle-shell was the emblem of Saint Michael's Mount, and as it was considered quite a fine thing to have made a pilgrimage there, those who had done so were rather proud to fasten a shell somewhere about their garments as a token of their journey to the holy shrine.

Carlé, after admiring his new found treasure, — as he could not read, he thought nothing about the letters which Raoul had scratched upon it, — decided that he would

fasten it to his cap. He had some trouble doing this, but, at last, with the help of a long thorn from an acacia tree that grew in the castle courtyard, he managed to pin it quite securely to his blue peasant cap.

Soon after this it happened that Carlé's work took him out into one of the fields belonging to Lady Alix and outside the castle walls.

The summer rains had made the weeds spring up among the turnips, and Carlé was to go and help pull them out.

As presently he took his way along the road, he saw a rough looking man loitering along and carrying in one hand a rabbit which he had caught in some snare. As the man came up to Carlé, his quick eyes at once noticed the cockle-shell shining against the blue of his homespun cap.

"Ho! lad," he said, "since when hast thou turned pilgrim?"

"Nay, sir," said Carlé, "I am no pilgrim, but I found this pretty shell under our dove-cote this morning."

"And where may be 'our dove-cote' that drops sea-shells over night, little man?" asked the other as he continued to eye the shell.

"Why, at Bellaire," answered Carlé innocently, "I work there for the Lady Alix."

At this the man seemed so interested in the shell that he asked Carlé if he might not take it in his hand. Carlé, who was a good natured boy, took off his cap and, unpinning the shell, handed it to the man.

As the latter noticed the scratches on it, he became more and more interested. "Ah," he said, "it is really a pretty thing.

I would like such a one myself. What sayest thou, lad, give me the shell and thou shalt have this rabbit? See, 'tis not even scratched from the snare; 'twill make thee a fine pet!"

Carlé looked at the rabbit, and half yielded; but on second thought decided that he would rather keep his shell, which had gained in value in his eyes since this strange man so greatly admired it; besides, he was in no particular need of a rabbit as there were a number of them at Bellaire. So he said, "Nay, sir, please give me back my shell. I do not wish your rabbit."

Here the stranger felt in his pockets, but as they held no money he had nothing more to offer Carlé. Of course he could easily have kept the shell, as Carlé was only a little boy; but for reasons of his own he preferred not to take it from him by force,

so that the lad would perhaps tell about it at the castle; for he did not want anyone there to know that he had noticed the shell.

While the man was searching his pockets, Carlé had been standing restlessly first on one bare foot and then the other, wishing the man would give him back his shell and let him go; — then all at once, while stooping over to pick up his cap which had fallen from his hand, the loose front of his blouse gaped open and out tumbled a pair of velvet shoes.

The way Carlé happened to have the shoes about him was this: it seems it was the feast day of his patron saint, and Lady Alix, who was very kind and talked often to the little boy who was so near her dear Raoul's age, had learned this the day before; so she had told Carlé that when his task was done in the field, he might go on

to a little village which was down the road some two miles off, and see the procession which the parish folk would have in honour of the saint, and so enjoy a little holiday. Carlé had been very pleased looking forward to this, and had ventured to get out the precious velvet shoes which Raoul had given him and which, much as he wanted to, he had not yet had the courage to wear or indeed to show to anyone; for he was very shy. He did not know, nor did Raoul, that he would not be allowed to wear them anyway, as the laws of the land forbade the peasant folk from ever wearing velvet or fine clothes even if through any miracle they came into possession of them; for the nobles who made the laws did not like others than themselves to have such things.

So ignorant little Carlé had set his heart on wearing his pretty shoes to the village.

He had tucked them into his blouse, meaning to finish his weeding and then to trudge bare-footed till he came to a little brook near the village, when he would freshen himself up and put them on.

As he now saw them tumbling out before the man, he was greatly annoyed; especially as the man, opening his eyes in surprise, said "Oh ho, youngster! Whence came these?" And with a mocking air he added, "Does 'our dove-cote' drop velvet shoes overnight as well as cockle-shells?"

"Nay, sir," stammered Carlé, turning very red, "they are some Master Raoul gave me — before he went away — and — and — I was going to wear them because it is the feast day —" here he broke off, quite covered with confusion.

Though at this speech the man had pricked up his ears and was listening with

"'OH, HO, YOUNGSTER! WHENCE CAME THESE?'"

all his might, when Carlé stopped he said indifferently, "So Master Raoul has gone away, has he; when was that?"

"Oh," said Carlé vaguely, "I do not know; — quite a while ago." For the little boy had no accurate way of counting time.

And then the man asked in a tone as if he really did not care much to know, though all the while his eyes were fixed eagerly on Carlé, "And where was it, lad, that Master Raoul went?"

But again Carlé answered, "I do not know, sir."

"Come, come," said the man, "surely thou must remember!"

"Nay, sir," replied Carlé once more, "I have no idea where he is."

At this the man looked sharply at Carlé's honest face, and plainly seeing that he spoke the truth, and that it was no use to question

him further, he again turned his attention to the little shell, which he still held in his hand. Before giving it back to Carlé, he thought a moment, and then, handing it to him, said carelessly, "Well, well, keep thy trinket, child, if thou wishest." And then, as he turned as if to go, he added meaningly, "I dare say, though, that thou knowest 'tis a sin to wear a cockle-shell on thy cap if thou hast not visited the holy shrine at the Mount."

On hearing this, Carlé stopped stock still and opened his eyes till they grew very round. "What, sir," he gasped (for he was a good child and had been taught by the village priest that a sin was a very terrible thing), "a sin!" And then helplessly he asked, "O sir, what shall I do?"

"Oh," answered the strange man, "'tis easy enough. All thou hast to do is to lay

thy shell on the first shrine by the roadside and offer up an Ave to our Blessed Lady."

Now, all along the roads of Normandy, as in many other old-world countries, one may see to this day carved stone crosses and images of the Virgin and Christ-Child; and at these shrines for centuries it has been the beautiful custom for travellers to stop and offer up their prayers, and often, too, they lay a flower or some other little offering there.

It chanced that one of these stone crosses was to be seen not far from where Carlé and the strange man stood. It was a very old one, so old and weather-worn that no one knew just when it had been first set up. To this Carlé at once hastened, and, having repeated his Ave, he carefully laid the shell in front of the shrine. Then with his simple heart full of gratitude to the man

who he thought had saved him from punishment for his unwitting sin, he hurried off to his task in the turnip field.

The man, however, who was not nearly so good as Carlé supposed him, was still slowly strolling along the road in the other direction.

But no sooner had the boy passed from sight, than he turned quickly about and, slipping quietly along, crept up to the shrine and with a swift movement gathered the shell into his palm and dropped it into his pocket. Then with a malicious smile he walked briskly on. When he had reached a safe distance, he took the shell from his pocket and carefully examined the scratches on it. "R. de B.," he spelled out to himself after much effort (for he could read but little); "R. de B.?" he repeated, questioningly; and then, as he was not dull witted,

"Now for what else could that stand but *Raoul de Bellaire!* By all the saints, if this is not rare luck! Raoul de Bellaire, — cockle-shell, — Saint Michael's Mount!" (For, as I have told you, a cockle-shell was known as the emblem of the Mount.) "So there's where thou hast found thy covert, my pretty partridge! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Indeed, the man was so pleased with the knowledge he had gained, that it was well for him there was no one else on the road at the time; for he surely would have attracted attention by his loud shout of laughter and the wild way in which he waved the poor rabbit in the air and pinched its long ears in the effort to work off his feelings.

It really is most strange how things oftentimes happen in this world. This very man into whose hands Raoul's cockle-shell had fallen, was the very one of all people who

should never have seen it! For the Baron D'Arcour, though his men had been thwarted in their plan of carrying Raoul off the day of the falcon hunt, nevertheless, as Lady Alix and her brother had feared, had by no means given up the intention of getting possession of the boy if it were in any way possible. And so he had still one or two ruffians in his pay, whose business it was to watch the castle of Bellaire and try and find some other way to take Raoul.

These men, however, had finally begun to think that Raoul was hidden somewhere else, though they could not discover where. One of them had grown discouraged and had gone away, but the other had still lingered, vaguely hoping to get some clue. And this man it was who had aimlessly gone out that morning with his hunting bag, and who had unexpectedly cap-

tured so much better game than he had dreamed of; for Carlé's answers when he had questioned him about the velvet shoes had betrayed the fact that Raoul had indeed left Castle Bellaire; while the cockle-shell in his hand told him the story of where the lad had taken refuge.

And so he had but to carry the tale, and take the little shell for proof, to Baron D'Arcour, and receive the promised reward. Which he promptly set about doing as quickly as he could.

CHAPTER XVI

THE QUICKSAND

ONE morning, a few weeks after Raoul had sent Fifi off with the cockle-shell, he was down on the sands around the Mount playing with some boys of the fisher folk.

The people of the Abbey in whose charge the lad had been placed had taken good care of him; but as time went on and no harm came to him and as he grew to know the ways of the village, the brothers, as even the best watchers will sometimes do, became a little less careful, and now and then he enjoyed a romp on the sands with his village playmates. The good brothers considered that his tanned skin and his dress, exactly

like the other children, was his best protection, as indeed it was; and even Lady Alix, could she have glanced at the merry group of bare-footed boys racing to and fro beneath the walls of the Mount, would have been perplexed to know which one was Raoul.

The tide had just gone out; and now and then the children would stop to watch the fishermen unloading the great nets stretched in long lines over the sands. And such strange things as came out of them! There were fishes of many kinds, with bright glistening scales and round eyes, all of them feebly struggling in the hands of their captors and gasping and frightened to find that the life-giving water had deserted them. Then there were great masses of curious sea-weeds; long branches of kelp, brown and crimson; trailing, tangled grasses,

water-plants with lush green leaves spangled all over with flecks of silver; now and then a star-fish with gleaming purple or orange rays, or a round sea-urchin bristling with angry spines.

It was all so interesting that the children lingered till the last net gave up its yield; and then they began chasing each other over the sand, wading in the little pools and streams the sea had left behind it, scrambling over the rocks after the sprawling jelly-fishes, and all the while laughing and shouting as if they themselves had chased away the sea in order to have so fine a playground.

Presently, in the midst of their play, Raoul and Gilles, who were wading together in a rock pool, happened to glance over toward the mainland and noticed some people on foot and two horsemen coming

across the sands to the Mount. The boys did not pay much attention to this, however, as pilgrims journeyed thither almost every day; though as men on horseback came more rarely, they looked once or twice rather curiously at the riders.

Just then "Oh see!" cried one of the fisher-boys near by, "what a lot of mussel-shells!"

"Wait! Wait!" shouted Raoul and Gilles, "Wait till we come before you dig them out!"

And, scrambling from their pool, they rushed over to where the others were poking in the wet sand in the midst of a colony of dark, tightly closed shells. Every now and then, as the children tried to pry them out, one of the shells would open a tiny crack and the angry little fish within would suddenly send up a jet of salt water

straight in their faces, and then how they laughed!

Indeed, they had so merry a time, that for a little while they forgot all about the pilgrims.

When next they looked in that direction, they saw that one of the men on horseback seemed to have strayed quite a distance from the others and that his head was bent as if in deep thought; he rode heedlessly, seeming to pay no particular attention to just where he was going.

Now, as I have told you, scattered about in the great reach of gray sand that surrounded the Mount, were many dangerous quicksands.

The people who lived thereabout, and especially the folk of Saint Michael, knew where these places were, so they could avoid them. But every year many pilgrims, com-

ing from a distance and ignorant or careless of the region, lost their lives in those treacherous sands.

The fisher-boys with Raoul had been taught from babyhood just where were the places that they must not go near lest they be drawn down to their death; and they had taken pains to show Raoul also.

So presently they all turned with a start when one of the boys cried out, " See yonder horseman! He is going toward the Tombelaine quicksand!"

As the Tombelaine quicksand was the very worst of all, the fisher-boys were so frightened that they fairly held their breaths as, with wide eyes, they watched the rider. Raoul, however, who had his wits alertly about him, instantly shouted at the top of his voice, " Ho! Ho! Sir horseman! The *quicksand!*"

But the rider, though by this time quite within earshot, gave no heed to him. The boys had been shouting in their play, and the horseman, lost in some perplexing thought, if he noticed them at all no doubt supposed that they were still only playing and did not realize that anyone was calling to him.

Then without another word, Raoul, darting from the group of boys, sped like a deer across the sand and coming up to the rider seized the loose bridle of his horse and, tugging with all his might, pulled it back just on the edge of the deadly quicksand into which in another moment it must surely have plunged.

At this, the rider, suddenly roused up, and still not understanding the reason but merely seeing a bare-footed boy, seemingly a fisher-lad, pulling at his bridle, an angry

fire leaped into his eyes, — for he was a quick, hot-tempered man, — and on the spur of the moment raising the small whip he held in his right hand, with a sharp "Begone, little rascal!" he dealt Raoul a stinging blow, cutting across his cheek and upraised hand.

Raoul was so amazed he scarcely knew what had happened to him. But when he realized that he had been deliberately struck by the man he had saved from death, he dropped back and stood for a full minute eying the horseman, his own eyes fairly blazing with wrath and indignation; the more so as he felt his utter helplessness to do anything. His face, except for the red mark of the whip, was deadly white as he turned away saying fiercely to himself, "When I am a grown man I will fight him for that, if he is at the end of the world!"

By this time one or two of the other boys had come up, excitedly talking of the quicksand, and then Baron D'Arcour (for the rider was no other than he, although he had no idea it was Raoul who stood before him, for neither knew the other), when he realized the danger from which the lad had saved him and what he had done in return, began to feel a trifle ashamed of himself. However, he soon dismissed the matter by giving his head a haughty lift and taking from his purse a gold piece which he flung toward Raoul saying, "There, lad, is some yellow salve for thy wounds!" And then he rode on in the direction of the other pilgrims.

But no sooner had the coin touched the sand than Raoul, who was speechless with rage, gave it so scornful a kick that it went spinning far over the ground and finally

dropped in a little pool among the rocks. And then he turned about and stalked off so haughtily that none of the fisher-lads dared follow him, but stared after him with open mouths.

CHAPTER XVII

PIERRE TRIES HIS PLAN

MEANTIME, Baron D'Arcour, having rejoined the party of pilgrims from whom he had strayed, rode close up to the other horseman who lagged somewhat behind the foot-travellers, and, leaning toward him, he said in a low tone, " Pierre, I trust the lodging thou hast found for us is quiet and away from the inns, and this herd." And he looked at the pilgrims with a contemptuous glance.

The man the baron addressed was the same Pierre who had escaped when his two companions were caught at the Saucy Castle. He had made his way back to Baron D'Arcour, and, by telling the latter

a number of lies and making him believe that it was entirely owing to himself that Raoul had been captured the day of the falcon hunt, and entirely the fault of the other two robbers that the lad had escaped their clutches, he had got Baron D'Arcour to again take him into his service.

Though this time the baron, still intent on his schemes to gain possession of Raoul, had determined to visit the Mount and see for himself how their plans turned out.

As he now inquired about the lodging he had ordered Pierre to secure, "Yes, my lord," answered the latter, "the place is full quiet; 'tis the house of a basket weaver back of the parish church. He thinks you a pious soul come to study in the great books of the Abbey." And here Pierre gave a wicked little laugh.

Baron D'Arcour nodded his head as if

satisfied; for, as his only reason for coming to the Mount was to try and get possession of Raoul, he wished no one to know him and to go about his plans as quietly as possible.

Presently they entered the walls of the queer little village, and left their horses at a stable near the gateway; and a strange place it was. Merely a small, irregularly shaped room that served for smithy as well, and all burrowed between the crevices of the solid rock that towered high above. It was the only stable on the Mount, for except for the few horses that occasionally bore pilgrims thither, none were to be seen there; indeed, there was no need or place for them in that steep little island village with its one hilly street and narrow by-lanes of rocky steps.

So Baron D'Arcour, after engaging that

their horses should be cared for till they wished to leave, dismounted and, with Pierre, went on foot up to the basket weaver's where they were to lodge. It was an old stone house with a tall tower and a tiny square garden enclosed on two sides by the strong wall that defended the Mount, for the house was near the edge of the rock; in this garden a few flowers bloomed, and a sea-gull with clipped wings wandered sadly about.

The place suited the baron very well, for the basket weaver was an old man who was busy with his own work and not disposed to meddle with their affairs. And the basket weaver was equally well pleased with his lodgers, who gave him little trouble. They went about quietly, slipping in and out of the house and disturbing no one. The baron left it to Pierre to discover the

whereabouts of Raoul; he himself seldom going out except after dusk or to wander in the rocky by-lanes of the place; for many visitors came to the Mount, and he wanted to keep his movements secret and did not wish to risk being seen by anyone he knew.

By the time the baron and Pierre had been in the village for several days, Pierre, who was a crafty fellow, had managed to find out a number of things. Pretending to be a pilgrim, he had gone often to the Abbey and had made friends with the humbler brothers who served in the kitchen. From them he learned that there was indeed a fair haired boy staying at the Abbey; and though they spoke of him as "Henri," that did not deceive Pierre in the least, for he had quite expected that Raoul would be given a different name while at the Mount.

The brothers from whom Pierre heard

of "Henri" had no idea they were betraying any secrets; indeed, they knew very little about the lad.

Pierre did not seem particularly interested in him, though he slyly asked as many questions as he dared without making the brothers suspicious; and once, during one of his visits to the Abbey, when Raoul happened to pass through the kitchen and someone called to him "Good day, Henri!" Pierre turned quietly, and eying him intently, at once recognized him; for in spite of the lad's plumper cheeks and tanned skin, Pierre very well remembered the face of the captive of the falcon hunt.

But though Pierre had thus learned positively that the boy was at the Abbey, he had discovered also that to find him alone was no easy matter; for he saw that while Raoul had seemingly the liberty of the village and

the sands, yet he was almost always in sight of one or the other of the brothers, or more or less under the eye of some one older, so that it was difficult to get near enough to capture him.

He turned over in his mind various plans for seizing the boy, but none of them seemed quite safe to work out. He became daily more discouraged, and his master, the baron, was growing more and more impatient because he had not yet succeeded in getting possession of the lad as he had been ordered to do. But Pierre continued to visit the Abbey as often as he dared; all the while keeping his ears and eyes open for the coveted chance to seize Raoul. In this way he by and by learned that Raoul's favourite place in the Abbey was the cloister; and that often in the early evening he would take a book there, and when the light

failed so he could no longer read, that he would often walk up and down the cloister aisles enjoying the pleasant sea air and watching the stars come out; and that at such times he was frequently alone while the monks were at their evening tasks.

When Pierre found out this, he thought things over, and finally made a plan; he decided that he would watch his chance and hide in the great church near the cloister, and then if he could catch Raoul alone, he would hurry him into the church; once there, he counted on being able to take the lad and make his escape by sliding down the scaffolding that the workmen repairing the church had built against the outer wall.

He hoped thus to reach the shelter of Merlin's wood, and then the rest would be easy.

Of course this was rather a reckless plan, for, even if he succeeded in capturing the boy, it would have been a perilous undertaking to attempt safely to descend the sheer face of the outer wall by means of the light scaffolding, which did not reach all the way to the ground.

But then Pierre could think of no other way to do, and he was growing desperate.

Anxious to put his plan to the test, the very next afternoon he went up to the Abbey; and, pretending that he was going into the church to worship at the shrine there, he followed some pilgrims in; and when they had finished their prayers, their thoughts were so taken up with looking around at the many beautiful carvings and paintings that nobody noticed that Pierre did not come out with the party.

He had crept back behind a group of

pillars, and keeping in the shadows, managed to hide so well that no one saw him or supposed that he was there.

After a while, twilight began to fall; and, slipping to the door of the church, sure enough, he saw Raoul loitering along one of the arcaded walks. He had a parchment book in his hands, and though it was growing too dark to see to read, he still kept his finger between the leaves where he had left off. Pierre was vexed to see that the boy was not alone; for the monks were still passing to and fro, and now and then one of them would stop and speak to Raoul, for all were fond of him.

Pierre, however, bided his time; and by and by, at the sound of a bell, the brothers all went off for evening prayers in one of the many chapels that were a part of the

church. Pierre impatiently waited for them to finish, as he did not dare to seize Raoul until the church was empty.

It seemed to him that they would never have done with their service; but at length the last chant died away, and one by one the brothers paced out, leaving Pierre alone in the church.

About this time, Raoul had seated himself on a stone bench that stood on the grass of the cloister court and just outside one of the covered aisles. He laid the book open on his lap, and now and then glanced idly at the paintings that bordered the pages and which in the starlight gleamed faintly, a blur of gold and rainbow colours.

Soon a new moon rode up among the stars and hung directly over the cloister court. Though its light was faint, it was yet strong enough for Raoul suddenly to

notice that a shadow fell across the open page on his knee.

Startled, he quickly looked behind him, and vaguely seeing something dark moving toward him, swift as a flash he sprang from the seat and scampered off, as fast as his legs would carry him, to the farther side of the cloister; and there, sheltered under cover of a doorway leading to a place of safety, he stopped and peered back into the courtyard. But though he looked very hard, he could see nothing at all unusual.

Now it had chanced that as Raoul sat on the bench, the book he had just been reading was full of old legends about the Abbey; and when it grew too dark to read he had been sitting thinking over the strange stories, and remembering also the tales Brother Benedict had told him, his mind was so filled with it all, that when he saw the

shadow and the vague, dark something behind him he supposed of course it was some supernatural being. And though Raoul was brave as anybody when he knew what he was facing, when it came to ghostly visitors, he was like most other people, and had no notion of getting too close to them. Nevertheless, he had much curiosity about such things, and when at a safe distance he was really quite disappointed that nothing more happened in the cloister.

When presently he went into the Abbey, he said nothing to any of the brothers about it; for he thought they would laugh at him and perhaps think him a coward; — though if he had dreamed what it really was that had made the shadow, he would have thanked his lucky stars for the fears that had made him scamper away.

Pierre, for of course it was he who had

attempted stealthily to creep up behind Raoul, was greatly provoked to find the boy escape him just as he thought he could almost put his hand upon him. But he saw that it was no use trying any more for that time at least; and so there was nothing left for him to do but to creep back into the church for the night; since he knew that the entrance to the Abbey was guarded and he could not slip out unseen. So, curling up in a dark corner, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII

PIERRE AN EAVESDROPPER

WHEN Pierre had gone to sleep in his corner, he had intended to keep hidden until the next day, when he meant to join some of the many pilgrims, who were always coming and going, and so leave the church without anyone noticing him. But he slept so soundly that when, at daybreak, the sacristan came in, he did not hear him.

Now one of the pilgrims the day before had complained that he had lost his wallet in the church and could not find it; and so the sacristan had come in early in order that he might search carefully all around and try to discover it. Presently, on look-

ing behind the group of pillars, he found Pierre.

"Ho, man!" he said, poking him with his foot, "What in Saint Michael's name art thou doing here?"

At this Pierre, rousing up, began to yawn and rub his eyes; and blinking at the sacristan, "Ah," he muttered, with ready deceit, "I am a poor pilgrim; and yesterday I was so weary with the long journey I have made hither, that I sat down here to rest, and I must have slept all the night."

Here the sacristan, who had been looking suspiciously at him, gave an exclamation of horror. "What!" he cried, "Dost thou mean to say thou hast passed the night here? Is it possible, fellow, thou dost not know that dreadful misfortune overtakes anyone who offends our blessed Saint Michael and the holy angels by staying here through the

night?" And the sacristan hastily crossed himself and drew back from Pierre.

"Nay," answered the latter, bewildered, "I knew naught of that! I meant no offence to the blessed saint nor the angels!"

But the sacristan, muttering an Ave, turned away. He had intended to search Pierre for the lost wallet, for he did not like his looks; but he now let him go, as he feared to bring evil upon himself by even laying hold of so impious a man.

Meantime, Pierre, feeling very uncomfortable and not a little frightened, slunk out and made haste to get away from the Abbey, whose frowning walls now held for him a nameless terror. For Pierre was very superstitious, and if he had ever heard the old tradition about the church, nothing could have induced him to pass the night within its portals.

Back in his room at the basket weaver's, the more Pierre thought about it, the more oppressed he became with fear of what unknown calamity might befall him because of his unwitting act of sleeping all night in the Abbey church. Moreover, the longer he had stayed in the village the more he had learned about affairs at the Mount, of which he had really known but little. For though Pierre was a shrewd fellow, he was very ignorant. He now knew that the brothers up in the Abbey were known not only as monks but also as brave fighters. He had heard, too, of the terrible dungeons hewn in the mighty rock; and the more he learned, the more he began to realize that the Abbey of Saint Michael was a far more formidable place than he had supposed. To be sure, he had made friends with the humble brothers in the kitchen; but that

was all. And when he recalled how suspiciously the sacristan had looked at him, the more and more unwilling he felt to risk meeting the latter and perhaps be recognized by him. In truth, he came to have a great dread of visiting any part of the Abbey again.

At last he made up his mind that he would even rather give up the chance of getting the reward which Baron D'Arcour had promised him, than try again to capture Raoul within the walls of the Abbey.

He still cherished a lingering hope, however, that something would turn up to help him get the boy elsewhere. And so he kept putting off telling the baron that he would no longer go near the Abbey.

But at last, one day just as he was about to give it all up and tell Baron D'Arcour, who was growing very angry with him, that

he could no longer serve him, chance helped him out in a most unexpected way.

It happened that he was in his room at the basket weaver's furbishing up a doublet for himself, when all at once through the open window he heard boys' voices. He glanced out and saw, leaning over the parapet of the great wall of the Mount, two lads, one of whom he at once recognized as Raoul. They were bending over the basket weaver's garden watching the sea gull, which was making unavailing efforts to fly with its poor, clipped wings.

Presently the village lad, who was Raoul's friend Gilles, said, "Henri, dost thou know there is to be a puppet-show tonight?"

"Is there?" cried Raoul, "Whereabouts?"

"Out on the sands not far from the gate-

way," said Gilles, "that is where the puppet-shows always go. Thou knowest it is so steep and rocky, and the street is so narrow here inside the wall, that there is no room for the people to stand."

Gilles was quite right about this; for he had often seen these travelling puppet-shows which came at intervals to Saint Michael, and which were always obliged to take place out on the level sands where an audience might stand around and see them. But though they came more or less often, this was the first to visit the village since Raoul's arrival at the Abbey; and as the little boy had never before had a chance to see anything of the kind, he listened to Gilles with wide open eyes.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "I wish I could see it! I wonder if Brother Benedict will go!" For he well knew that his guardians

at the Abbey would not allow him to go alone with Gilles.

"Oh dear no," answered Gilles, "the brothers never go to such things. But canst thou not get him to let thee go with us? Father and mother will be there too."

Raoul, whose face had fallen at the first of Gilles' answer, brightened up when he heard that the fisher-boy's parents were going, also. For though the lad chafed at being so constantly watched, he knew it was no use to rebel against the care the Abbey folks had been instructed to take of him.

"Yes," he said eagerly, "surely Brother Benedict will think it is all right when he hears that thy father and mother will be with us! I will run up and ask him now!"

And at once he went hurrying up the long flight of steps leading to the Abbey.

As Pierre, who had all the while been

watching and listening to the talk of the two boys, now saw Raoul racing off toward the Abbey, he turned away from the window and, "Ah, ha!" he said to himself, "I shall watch for thee, my pretty bird! And if thy wings are not clipped to-night like yonder gull's, may I never taste boar's meat or red wine again!"

Indeed, so sure was he that he would manage to take the boy that evening, that he told Baron D'Arcour to be in readiness and to order their horses saddled so that they might ride at a moment's notice.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PUPPET SHOW

THE long, bright afternoon passed; and then, when dusk fell, in through the gate of the village came a man dressed in motley, with a puppet in a scarlet suit bobbing from the top of his high pointed cap.

From a leathern strap slung over his shoulders hung a small drum, and this he kept beating as he slowly walked along the narrow street and up and down the rocky stairs of all the steep little lanes, calling out, the while, the hour of the show. At his heels followed a troop of eager Saint Michael children and more than one grown person, for all delighted in the puppet-shows.

When Raoul had hurried back to the Abbey that afternoon and asked Brother Benedict's permission to go, the latter at first had been unwilling; but the lad had begged so hard, and as the brother knew that Gilles's father and mother were honest people who would take the best possible care of him, at last he had given his consent.

Now hearing the drum, Raoul, in his eagerness to get off, could hardly wait to eat his supper or for Brother Benedict to finish his; for the young monk was to go with him to the home of Gilles. By and by, however, they started; Raoul scampering down the steep steps two at a time, so that Brother Benedict had almost to run to keep up with him.

The brother enjoyed it though, and looked a little wistful as, after leaving Raoul with his friends, he parted from the

merry group around the fisherman's door; for, to tell the truth, he too would right well have liked to go out on the sands with the others. But as puppet-shows were not for those of his order, he smothered a little sigh and, turning away, toiled back up the Abbey steps.

It was a soft evening of early autumn. Soon, over the Mount, the moon came riding up and seemed to poise in the heavens almost directly above the topmost pinnacle of the wondrous Abbey church. A fitful wind was blowing, and now and then a drifting cloud would float over the bright face of the moon, leaving a wake of velvety shadows that trailed off the next moment in a sheen of silver light.

Out around the Mount the white radiance flooded the sands till they shone and glimmered and twinkled almost as if the sea al-

ready covered them; the sea, that was still sleeping far off on the dim horizon, but that by and by, before the hush of midnight, would suddenly awaken and sweep around the rocky isle in a wild riot of gleaming, foam-capped waves.

But the people of Saint Michael were used to planning their actions to suit the sea, and knew there was plenty of time for the play on the sands.

On an open space, not far from the gateway, was set up the mimic theatre; it was made of a large box with green curtains and raised on a stout table so as to be more easily seen. Behind it, his head covered with another curtain, stood the man who had beaten the drum and who would presently manage the puppets on the tiny stage; pulling them about by means of wires, talking for them, and in all ways making them per-

form as nearly as possible like real people in a play.

A lighted torch flared in front of the stage and lit up the faces of the Saint Michael folk, who had gathered about, watching with eager expectancy for the curtain to be drawn aside and the show to begin. For the villagers had few amusements, and the man who brought the puppets was always sure of an audience.

And they had not long to wait; for soon all was ready, there came another lively beating of the drum, and then the green curtains were drawn apart and the show began.

It was really astonishing what antics the little, jointed wooden puppets could be made to play; and all the people clapped their hands with delight as out came a clown dressed in white with red buttons

and a white cap with a little red tassel.

"Pierrot! Pierrot!" cried several voices; for so French folk always call this prankish little figure.

Then another puppet, dressed in motley, came stiffly striding out, holding up a little wooden hoop; and, in another moment, plump went Pierrot through it, turning a funny little somersault before alighting on his feet.

"Bravo, Pierrot! Bravo!" shouted the people, again clapping their hands loudly at this. For the peasant folk and villagers and pilgrims who helped swell the crowd, were as excitable and pleased as the children, and it all seemed just as real to them as to the smallest of the boys and girls.

After Pierrot, came a juggler wearing a green suit and parti-coloured hose, one leg

red and one yellow, and standing in the middle of the stage, he began tossing up two tiny gilded balls; by a clever arrangement of threads the balls each time dropping back into his hands.

The juggler was always a favourite performer and everybody knew he would catch the balls; but none the less, the people held their breaths and " See, he has caught them! There! There! They are going to fall! No, no, he has them now! " came from excited lips, and when he had finished, he was loudly applauded.

The next puppet to appear was a dancer in fluffy pink skirts, a blue bodice and little white slippers. She bobbed and courtesied, and everyone laughed with pleasure as she danced up and down and whirled round and round on the very tips of her toes. Then she went bobbing off the stage, and

the curtains were drawn for a few minutes so that the man behind might make ready for the last scene. For this he had a boy to help him, as there were to be several figures in it, and he could not manage them all with his two hands.

Raoul and Gilles, who with the latter's father and mother were standing side by side in the midst of the crowd, had been absorbed in the performance; and now they were delighted as everyone else when the showman announced that the last scene would be the combat between Roland and Oliver. There was a great clapping of hands at this; for Roland and Oliver were the two darling heroes of the French people and everybody, even the poorest peasant folk, knew their story.

And no doubt you, too, have read something of Roland, the famous and beloved

nephew of the great King Charlemagne, and Oliver, his dear boyhood friend and sworn comrade-in-arms. Perhaps, too, you know the story of the combat before the walls of the old town of Viana, of which Oliver's grandsire was the ruler and which, because of a foolish quarrel, Charlemagne was besieging; — for it was a scene from this story that the puppets were to act out before the Saint Michael villagers.

Everyone waited eagerly, and when the green curtains were again drawn, the stage showed a little scene rudely painted on stout pasteboard. There was a gray wall at the back, meant to be the wall of Viana; and in about the middle of the stage was spread a strip of bright blue cloth to represent the river Rhone; and a bit of frayed green velvet laid on top of it everyone knew was the island where the combat would

take place. At the front of the stage the brown pasteboard did very well for ground.

Then four puppets came strutting out from a tiny gate in the town wall, and seated themselves on the far side of the river. These were to represent the nobles who were to watch the fight; for the men of both Viana and Charlemagne's army having grown tired of the long siege, it had been decided to settle the matter, as was often done in those days, by choosing by lot two brave knights, one from each side, and these were to fight together. If the knight from Viana won, then the army of King Charlemagne was to withdraw and leave the town in peace; whereas if Charlemagne's champion was victor, Viana was pledged to surrender. The story says that the lot for the champion of Viana had fallen to a certain knight wearing a red plume;

while on the other side Roland was the chosen one; though neither Roland nor the Knight of the Red Plume knew the other, for of course both wore helmets and visors that entirely covered their faces.

And now we come to the puppets again. When a figure dressed in armour, with a small red feather waving from his helmet, came riding in on a little wooden horse, everyone shouted "Long live the Viana knight!"

And when at the front of the stage three more puppets appeared escorting two figures on horseback, there was even a wilder shouting, "Charlemagne! Roland! Long live Charlemagne and Roland!"

Indeed, there was no mistaking these last two puppets, for they were ever so much taller than any of the others; for was it not common knowledge that Charlemagne was

a mighty king and that Roland was no less than eight feet high? And so when the little wooden horses, bearing their famous riders, paused a moment, again there burst forth cries of "Long live Charlemagne and Roland!" For all these heroes were very real and dear to everyone and lived on forever in the hearts of the people.

When the great king and his attendants had seated themselves as had done the nobles of Viana, the two champions on their horses were placed in toy boats and drawn over the blue river to the island in its centre. Then stiffly raising their small lances, they charged each other so furiously that they almost plunged off the tiny scrap of green velvet, and everybody cheered loudly. Then presently getting down from their little wooden horses, the two puppets stood facing each other, breathing dire

threats; — for all the while, the showman and his assistant, who were pulling the threads and wires that moved the puppets, were also talking for them, which mightily pleased the audience.

Then the two champions drew their swords, and as Roland's tiny blade flashed out, "Durandal!" cried the delighted folk looking on. For, of course, the little, mimic sword represented the magic blade, Durandal, which had been forged by the fairies and which the hero Roland had won from the giant Jatmund. The fighting figures on the stage now raised their arms and struck at each other many times, while the audience, breathlessly watching, cried out "A Roland for an Oliver!" an old phrase dear to the hearts of the French people, and which means tit for tat and that each champion was giving the

other as good as he got in the way of blows.

Presently, however, Roland's sword Durandal broke the blade of the knight of Viana, and then, generously unwilling to take advantage of him, Roland proposed that they rest awhile until another sword might be found. So they seated themselves a moment, and then the three nobles with King Charlemagne, admiring the bravery of the Knight of the Red Plume, courteously placed their own swords in one of the little boats and they were drawn over to the island for the weaponless knight to choose one of them.

When he had done so, he and Roland again rose to their feet and rushed at each other so fiercely that each thrust the helmet from off the head of the other.

At this there was a moment's pause; and

then, "I yield me, Roland!" joyously cried the knight from Viana, while with equal ardour Roland shouted at the same instant, "I yield me, Oliver!"

For, of course, as everyone had known from the first, the Knight of the Red Plume was no other than Roland's dear friend and comrade-in-arms; though of course, too, everybody knew that the two had not seen each other for a long time and that neither guessed, until the helmets came off, that he had been fighting his best friend.

As the two puppets fell on each other's neck and hugged one another, there was a wild cheering from the audience; for everyone liked the happy ending of the combat, so different from most in those warlike times. There is more in the old story of how Oliver's grandsire, the lord of Viana, and King Charlemagne made friends and

peace with one another, but the combat on the island was meant to be the end of the puppet-show.

Yet the people still lingered, clamouring for more; and as everything had gone so well and many pennies had fallen into the wooden box which had been passed around, the showman was in a good humour, and when someone called out "The dancer! Give us the dancer once more!" he promised that he would, and began hunting among his puppets for the little figure which had already been put away.

Now among the people looking on, it happened that there were many pilgrims; for a large number had come to the Mount that day, and so the crowd was greater than usual. And as the stage was small and not easily seen at a distance, all the time the audience kept surging about trying to

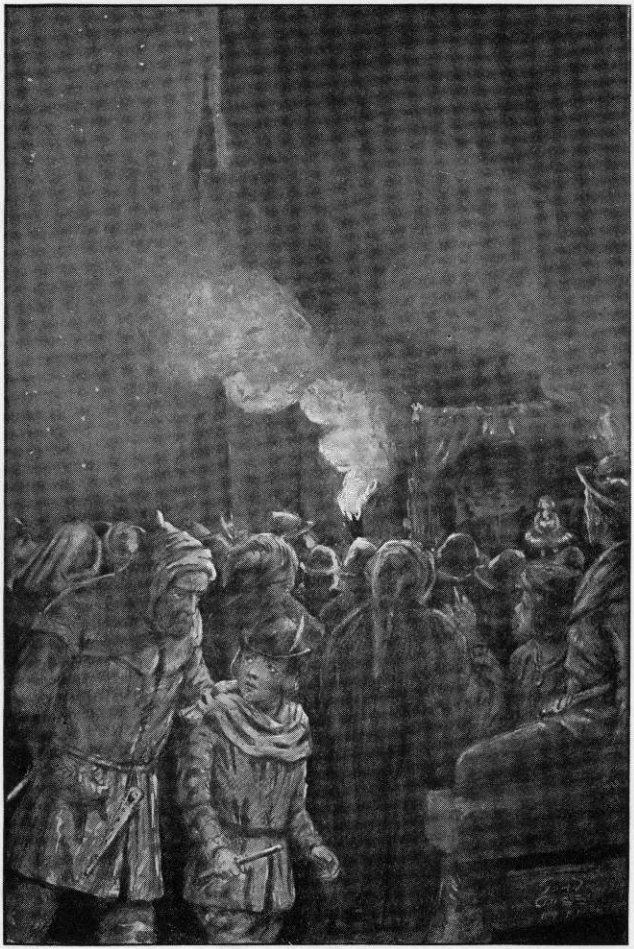
squeeze up as close as possible to the front.

In this crowding up of the people for a last sight of the puppet dancer, for which the showman was still hunting, presently Raoul, who with his party had been in about the middle of the audience, found himself pushed apart from Gilles and his friends. Though it seemed accidental, it really was because a man in the midst of the throng had been for a long time crowding those in front of him and skilfully thrusting the mass of people about, in the effort to get near the lad and at the same time separate him from his party. Many times he had been foiled in the attempt by some sudden movement of the people; but at last he had succeeded, and Raoul was apart from Gilles and the others and directly in front of him.

In another moment, while the delighted

village folk were all clapping their hands as the little puppet dancer again appeared twirling about on her toes, quick as a flash he seized Raoul's arm, and at the same instant saying to him in a low, threatening tone, "Hold thy tongue, or I will kill thee!" he dragged him quickly outside the group of people and hurried toward the gate of the town.

As ill luck would have it, the man, who was Pierre, was helped in his plans by the fact that the clouds still blowing about the sky now quite darkened the moonlight, so no one noticed the two. Indeed, it was all done so quickly that almost before Raoul knew it he found himself thrust into a dark corner of the stable, which, you remember, was burrowed into the rocks near the town gateway; there someone bound his hands and tied a kerchief over his mouth. And



"HE DRAGGED HIM QUICKLY OUTSIDE THE GROUP OF PEOPLE."

then in a brief while two horses were led out by the murky light of a small lantern, and Raoul saw the man he had saved from the quicksand hastily slip a gold-piece into the hand of the stable boy as he threatened him with dire punishment if he told what he had seen; — all the other stable folk were out on the sands where the puppets were.

The next thing, Pierre lifted Raoul to the saddle-bow of his master's, the Baron D'Arcour's, horse, and the baron mounted behind, holding Raoul tightly in his left arm while he grasped the bridle in his right hand.

Then Pierre himself mounting the other horse and leading the way, off they started, cautiously pricking through the ancient gateway and out across the gray sands on their way to the Norman coast.

CHAPTER XX

THE RACE WITH THE TIDE

AS they went, Raoul saw in the distance the torch still flaring and heard the crowd still shouting and clapping at the last act of the puppets. Had Gilles and his friends missed him? He could not tell, but it was more than likely that they were all too absorbed in the dancer on the little stage to have noticed his absence.

And then, as more and more he realized what had happened to him, a great despair came over the boy as he dumbly wondered what was to be his fate. He did not know who it was that held him captive, nor why, but he felt instinctively that it was this man

from whom his mother and Count Robert had tried to save him. As again he wondered what it was the man meant to do to him, his blood chilled and, despite his anger and his brave effort not to give way, he could not help two large tears filling his eyes and rolling down his cheeks.

They rode slowly; the baron letting Darrell, his horse, follow Pierre, who was cautiously searching out the path as it wound among the dangerous quicksands.

Baron D'Arcour, as he held Raoul with one arm, though he did not trouble himself to think much about what the lad was suffering, yet he now and then looked curiously at his captive; but at first the darkness prevented him from seeing him clearly. Then presently the scud of clouds passed from over the moon, and

a broad ray of light struck full across Raoul's face.

The lad kept his eyes fixed angrily in front of him, not once looking at the baron who held him; but the latter bent over and looked at Raoul. He started slightly when he saw the fine manly face of the child; and then, as all at once he noticed the red scar running across Raoul's cheek (for the mark made by the cut of the baron's whip that day on the sands had not yet quite gone away), a feeling of vague uneasiness crept over him. He realized that he had seen the lad's face before, — but where? Then in a moment it came to his memory that this was the boy who had caught his bridle and saved him from the quicksands, — and whom he had thoughtlessly struck with his whip!

Now Baron D'Arcour, bad as he was, was

yet not entirely lost to a sense of shame as he remembered his act; and he felt his own cheeks grow hot as he looked at the handsome little face in front of him still bearing the proof of his cruelty.

He was silent for some time; and then at last he said, "Raoul, dost thou know who I am?"

Raoul struggled to answer, but the kerchief bound over his lips prevented him; seeing which, Baron D'Arcour quickly slipped it loose.

Then the lad said fiercely, "Nay, I do not know your name, but I know you are the man I pulled away from the quicksands and who struck me with a whip!" And the baron felt the boy's body fairly quiver with anger as he said it.

After another pause the baron asked, with an odd note in his voice, "Art thou not

very sorry, little one, that thou didst not let me sink in the sands that day, seeing how hardly I have used thee?"

To this Raoul did not at once answer, but seemed to be thinking it over. Then, by and by, turning, he looked the baron squarely in the face and, child though he was, all the instincts of his knightly blood rose strong within him; "Nay," he said slowly, "I am not sorry I did not let you die in the sands that day, for that would have been cowardly." And here the lad's lip curled with a haughty scorn. "But," he added quickly, still looking into the baron's face with wide open blazing eyes, "I *hate* you! You are a coward to steal me in this way! And when I am a man I will fight you with a sword and I hope I may kill you!" For in those days when people felt themselves wronged, the only way they

knew to settle the matter was to fight each other with swords.

The Baron D'Arcour had straightened up in his saddle as he listened to the boy's answer; and as the latter finished, he turned pale.

He did not laugh at the threats of the captive child in front of him, because he began to feel within him a great, overwhelming sense of shame.

This child, then, had called him a coward! Never in his life had anyone dared to breathe so insulting a thing to him. His ready sword had silenced more than one hardy knight for a thousand times less reason. But this child, helpless though he was in his hands, had not feared him but had boldly accused him.

And the curious part of it all was that deep down in Baron D'Arcour's heart,

which his wicked life had made blacker than it really was in the beginning, there woke the shamed conviction that the boy was right.

As he felt Raoul's warm body within his arm and the quick, angry throbbing of the lad's heart, a strange tenderness rose within him.

A bewildering tumult of feelings swept over him, such as he had never known in all his wild, reckless life.

A child was not a familiar thing to Baron D'Arcour; he had never before held one close in his arms, and the better nature within him began to awaken at the touch of his little prisoner. Until that moment, for more than a year his one cherished wish had been to capture this child whose life stood between himself and fortune. But now that he had Raoul wholly in his power, he was

amazed to find that he felt a strange reluctance to use that power. It was one thing to hire ruffianly cut-throats to steal a lad for him, but he found it quite another thing when he really held the boy in his own arms. And the boy had called him a coward!

As the cutting word sank deeper and deeper into his heart, more and more clearly he began to see the truth of it; to realize how cowardly he had treated this child whom he should have loved and protected.

And as the full force of all he had done, and, worse still, all he had meant to do to the little boy before him, as all this overwhelmed him, he bowed his head and began to think of things in a way he had never thought before.

Meantime the baron's horse had lagged behind Pierre, and it was only by sheer

good fortune and its own instinct that it had managed to follow the path and escape stepping into the quicksands. For though Pierre had once or twice called back directions as to the way, his voice had not reached them because of a gusty wind that had sprung up; and besides, Baron D'Arcour, just as on that day he came to the Mount, was too reckless and too much taken up with his own thoughts to pay much attention to anything.

Now, had Pierre, and especially the baron, known more about the Mount and the habits of the sea in that region, they would have been riding far more swiftly than they were. Indeed, they had been much wiser not to have been riding the sands at all at that hour. Pierre thought he knew a great deal more of the ways of the sea than he really did; and though

before they started from the Mount he had hurriedly asked about the coming of the tide, he had misunderstood the answer given him, and had supposed there would be plenty of time to cross the sands before the water swept over them. As he rode on now, ahead of the baron, he did not know that far away on the dim horizon a crest of moving white had begun to show and was steadily advancing.

On they rode, unconscious of danger. Three-fourths of the way was passed, and the Normandy coast was beginning to loom plainer and plainer through the velvety shadows, when Pierre happened to turn in his saddle and, glancing toward the west, he saw the gleam of the long, white line of the ocean.

It was the great September tide, drawing nearer and nearer; soon to sweep over

the sands in a wild fury of swirling waters.

Though Pierre had miscalculated the time of its coming, he knew the tide when he saw it; and he had heard many tales of its incredible swiftness when it made the Mount its goal. In an instant he realized their danger. Turning his head for but a moment with a wild cry of "*Master! Master! Look! The tide!*" he put spurs to his horse and fled for dear life, speeding across the gray stretch of sand and little caring what befell the others. Pierre well knew that faster than a galloping horse that wall of green water was surging in from the sea.

As the wind was then blowing toward him Baron D'Arcour heard, though faintly, Pierre's warning call, and seeing his sudden flight he, too, looked around and glimpsed

the coming flood; and, rousing from his reverie, at once he realized its meaning.

Seizing Raoul tighter in his grasp, he dug the spurs deep into Darrell's flanks and with a sudden startled bound the race began.

On and on they flew, and all the while, surging, roaring, hissing, with a resistless power the great waves came rolling and tumbling in from the deep. Like some wild living thing the sea seemed to take a fierce joy in the ever growing tumult of its waters. On and on they rolled, at madder and madder pace, swirling over the sands, swallowing up all the little streams that had twinkled over them, gathering up the masses of kelp and the stranded star-fishes and jelly-fishes in sweeping eddies of foam, rushing over the pathways and beating with thunderous roar against the rocky walls of the Mount.

Darrell, with a frightened neigh, sniffed the air and seemed to understand that the race he ran was between life and death. Pantingly he galloped over the wet slippery sands, the white foam flecking his dilated nostrils like the white spume driving in from the sea. The terrible sea, that came faster and faster, swirling in between the riders and the longed for land and already beginning to curl in frothy rings over Darrell's flying hoofs as he sped terror-stricken before it.

In another instant Baron D'Arcour and Raoul, straining their eyes toward the coast, now almost won, saw the dark figure of Pierre, who was far ahead of them, suddenly swerve, throw up both hands, and then sink from sight; drawn down in what deadly quicksand, they never knew. For at the same time, with a deafening

roar, the wall of water that had been pursuing them was upon them. With an almost human cry brave Darrell was swept into the flood, and the baron and Raoul with him.

It seemed that the sea itself was helping Baron D'Arcour to rid himself of the lad; — if it did not drown them both in its mad fury of destruction.

As Raoul, after a helpless struggle with the water, slowly sank beneath it, the baron, who had been swept some distance from him, was making a desperate effort to reach the top of a rock that projected a little above the water. At last he succeeded, and, scrambling up its slippery surface, managed for a breathing space to find a foothold, though every moment the tide was rising higher.

This rock was not a great distance

from the coast, and the baron, who was a good swimmer, burdened though he was with his heavy clothes, could probably have reached land without great trouble.

But, strangely enough, in that brief moment's rest on the rock, he did not even once glance toward the coveted coast. Instead, with a look of intense, agonized anxiety, he eagerly scanned the deeper water beyond, shining silvery bright beneath the moon. For a moment nothing showed above that gleaming flood, save the drifts of churning foam; — then suddenly, white as these, he caught sight of the ghastly face of Raoul, who, after going down, had again risen to the surface.

That white face seemed to be the one thing for which the Baron D'Arcour was searching; for instantly plunging again

into the rushing waters, he swam desperately toward it.

Raoul, who by this time had lost consciousness, did not know that just as he was sinking for the last time, a hand seized him with a grip of iron, lifting his head above the suffocating waters. He did not know how fiercely the baron fought with the all-powerful sea, battling with it as never in all his wildest wars had he battled with living enemies; how desperately, madly, he struggled against it; how grimly he bore its blows and buffetings, sometimes almost sinking beneath his nearly lifeless burden, now and again flung pitilessly against the sharp edge of some hidden rock, but all the while with his own body striving to protect the lad from harm, and with unconquerable purpose fighting to gain the land, — till at last, bruised, bleeding, breathless, with

straining nerves and muscles exhausted to the limit of endurance, with a last supreme effort he dragged Raoul from the clutch of the tide and stumbled blindly up the tangled salt grasses of the Norman coast.

The baron, though on the verge of fainting from sheer exhaustion, yet by a mighty effort of will fought off the numbing swoon; for he had work to do. Raoul was still unconscious and needed his aid. Bending over the boy, he rubbed and chafed the cold little body; — and suddenly a flush of scarlet covered his forehead as he noticed that still the lad's slender wrists were bound together, the wet cord cutting cruelly into them. With a feverish haste he searched his doublet pockets till he drew out a knife and with trembling fingers managed to cut the knot and free those helpless hands. And then, with white lips, and burning eyes scanning

the face before him for the first sign of returning life, he wildly redoubled his efforts to revive the boy. He worked unceasingly, — and the baron was not unskilful in his knowledge of what to do — till at last he brought back warmth to the blood, and Raoul's heart again beat with gathering power as he opened his eyes with a vague, bewildered look.

When Baron D'Arcour knew that life had returned to the lad, he sank down beside him on the soft, tufted grasses. But it was only a few minutes that he allowed himself to catch his breath; for the night was chill and they were drenched with the sea. For his own plight Baron D'Arcour did not care a straw; he was used to exposure; but there was Raoul, and for the first time in his life he found himself thinking about the welfare of somebody else.

He rose up, and looking about them by the waning light of the moon he saw in the distance the hut of a peasant farmer, its thatched roof looming darkly against the sky. Eagerly, too, he scanned the wide grassy plain to see if by any chance brave Darrell had won his way to the shore. But nowhere was he to be seen. Indeed, at that very moment poor Darrell, who had made an heroic struggle with the flood, was lying lifeless beneath it; he had been unable to withstand the first shock of the tide that had swept him from his feet and flung him into the deepest and angriest surge of waters. Baron D'Arcour felt a real pang of regret as he thought of his lost horse. For he was fond of Darrell and though he had been none too tender-hearted toward his fellow beings, he was always good to his horse.

However, there was no time for vain regrets, and so he determined to make the best of the plight in which they found themselves. Raoul by this time was half asleep from sheer weariness, and scarcely knew when the Baron D'Arcour carefully picked him up and, clasping him in his arms, made his way on foot over the rough fields towards the hut.

When he reached it, he pounded lustily till he roused the folk within; and presently a blinking peasant face, topped by a cotton night-cap, peered out from a crack in the door.

"Open, and take us in!" commanded the baron. "We have been caught by the tide, and want dry clothes and shelter." And with that, feeling in his doublet pocket for some coins, he handed them to the peasant, who then quickly roused up and opened

the door wide. He found a tallow candle and lighted it; and, though very curious as to who his visitors were, he held his tongue; for he knew better than to ask questions of a nobleman, as he was sure the baron was because of his velvet doublet and haughty manner; — though it seemed odd to the man with the night-cap that the lad his noble guest was carrying was dressed in a blouse like those of his own little children who had been roused from sleep in the great bed by the fireplace.

Indeed, the children and the mother looked on, round-eyed and wondering, while the father bustled about and found dry things for his guests and stirred the fire and laid on it a fresh handful of fagots. As these blazed up, by their light the baron caught sight of a horse stabled in a shed which opened from the family living room,

and at once he began to bargain for it. He wanted something to take Darrell's place until he could get another horse to his liking. But as this in the stable was the only one the peasant had, he did not wish to part with it; though when the baron offered him a good price for the hire of it for a few days, at last he consented to let it go. It was only a poor old work horse, but it was a great deal better than walking; and the baron was glad to strike the bargain as he had a journey ahead of him.

After this matter was settled, the peasant led his guests up a ladder to a loft above the living room, and there spread a coverlid over some straw on the floor, which was the best he could furnish in the way of a bed. When the two had exchanged their wet clothes for the coarse garments the peasant had found for them, the latter took

their own things down and placed them by the fire, and then he blew out the candle and crept back to bed: — and before long everyone in the hut was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXI

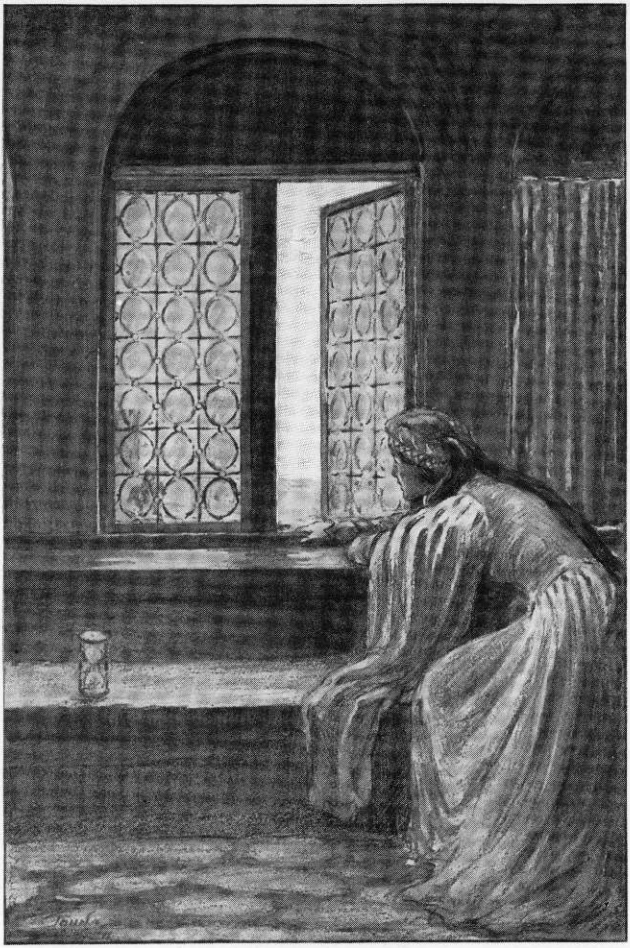
THE RETURN TO CASTLE BELLAIRE

IT was the third day after the Baron D'Arcour and Raoul had taken refuge in the peasant's hut; and in the castle of Bellaire Lady Alix sat in front of her tapestry frame, trying vainly to fix her thoughts on the silken embroidery before her. Presently the needle dropped from her fingers, and her eyes filled with tears, as she gazed out of her tower window and thought how empty the house seemed and how long the days since Raoul had gone away. She anxiously wondered, over and over, if all was well with the boy; and more tears came as she vainly longed for some message from him. For, when Lady

Alix lived, it was very hard for those who loved one another to be separated for long, as they seldom had the comfort of receiving letters as we do to-day.

By and by, still thinking of Raoul, she arose and went to the window, and, pressing her forehead against the casement, looked sadly out in the direction of far-away Saint Michael's Mount. For a little while she looked and dreamed; and then dropping her eyes from the blue distance that she felt sure hid Raoul from her, suddenly she started with surprise as she noticed a horseman coming into view around a bend in the road that wound up to the castle gateway.

As he drew nearer, she was sure that though of noble bearing it was not her brother Count Robert; and as few other knights ever found their way to solitary



"SHE NOTICED A HORSEMAN COMING INTO VIEW AROUND A BEND IN THE ROAD."

Bellaire, she watched the rider with growing interest. She saw, too, that seated in front of him in the saddle was a child, a little boy, and her heart gave a great leap. "But no," she said to herself, "it cannot possibly be Raoul, who, I trust, is at this moment safely guarded within the walls of the Abbey."

While she bathed the tears from her eyes and made ready to go down and greet her visitors, the latter had passed over the drawbridge and had already dismounted in the castle courtyard. They had just come into the great hall when Lady Alix entered, and in another moment, with the glad cry "Mother!" Raoul sprang into her arms.

After they had hugged and kissed each other to their hearts' content, Lady Alix remembered that Raoul was not alone. She

looked up with an embarrassed smile, and said, "Your pardon, Sir Knight, if I seem lacking in courtesy. My little boy has taken me by surprise, and I have been very lonely." Then, holding out her hand, she asked, "I would fain know, whom have I the honour to greet?"

The stranger, who had been standing by with bared head, now took her hand almost timidly, as, bowing low over it, he said, "Your Ladyship, I am the Baron D'Arcour."

Lady Alix had never until then seen the baron; and as she now realized that their long-time enemy stood before her, she turned very pale and began to tremble.

Seeing this, Baron D'Arcour hastened to add, "I beg you, my lady sister, do not be alarmed. 'Tis true, I have given you more

cause for fear than friendship; but now I swear to you " (here he spoke very eagerly) " I come on no evil errand, but only to restore this lad to his own."

And then, looking her in the eyes, he went on manfully, " I have grievously distressed you, Lady Alix, for which I crave your gracious pardon." As he looked anxiously at her, Lady Alix on her part was so amazed that perhaps she did not realize how hard it was for Baron D'Arcour to make that speech. Indeed, it was one of the very hardest things he had ever done; for he was very proud, and in all his life before had never asked anyone to forgive him for wrongdoing.

As she inclined her head, still looking at him gravely and in a bewildered way, he continued, " I have brought the lad from yonder Mount that he may be educated as

befits his rank, and not in company with fisher-lads. And especially because, — always with your Ladyship's gracious permission, — I would fain myself teach him the use of the sword. Yonder monks are fair warriors, but they are not bred to it like knights-at-arms."

Lady Alix was still more dumbfounded to hear the baron make this offer to teach Raoul, as everyone knew that his skill with the sword was famous.

The baron, seeing her surprise, turned to Raoul and with a curious expression said very gravely, "When he is man grown, he wishes to fight me with a sword and hopes he may kill me; — and, faith, I deserve it! And, on my word, when he is ready to do it, the lad shall have fair play! Meantime," he added, again bowing to Lady Alix, "I offer to my lady sister my loyal hom-

age and the protection of my own right arm."

Lady Alix was so moved she scarcely knew what to say. But looking earnestly into the baron's face, she saw that whatever he might have been in the past, he nevertheless was speaking truth to her.

So after a brief silence, in which she strove to collect herself, slowly and distinctly she said to him, "Baron D'Arcour, you have indeed grievously wronged this lad here, and, I think, planned more deadly hurt to him; but I grant you my pardon in so far as earthly forgiveness goes. God alone can truly pardon." And then again extending her hand to him, she said, with a gracious smile, "I thank you for your homage and offer of fealty and protection, and I accept it and trust you, my brother."

And Baron D'Arcour did not betray her trust. Never again did he plan the least harm to Raoul, but gave to him a warm and tender love.

He came often to Bellaire, and took great pains to teach the boy in the practice of the sword and also in many other knightly things. For ever since that wild night on the sands of Saint Michael, when he had first held in his arms the lad who had called him a coward, he had been as a different man. He seemed to have left behind him in the great cleansing waters of the sea, all his old, wicked self. And in this new life he won honour and distinction, and fortune besides.

He and Count Robert of Villharne became the best of friends also; and through the years his loyalty and devotion to Lady Alix never wavered. Indeed, more than

once his strong arm and cool judgment saved her castle from attack in troublous times of war.

As for Raoul, he gave to his uncle, the baron, a great and devoted love. He became the lad's hero; and when sometimes the baron would playfully remind him of how he had said he hated him, and of the promised duel when he was grown up, Raoul would flush scarlet and, throwing his arms around the baron's neck, would exclaim, "No, no, I do *not* hate you! I *love* you! And I will never, *never* fight you with my sword, for I want you to live forever!"

And then the baron would smile whimsically, and patting the boy on the head, would say, "Little braggart, I really believe thou thinkest that thy skill surpasses my own! Let us have a fencing bout now, so

I can teach thee a new thrust or two; for I have not yet shown thee all, and when thou fightest me I would not have thee handicapped by lack of knowledge."

And then, laughing merrily, they would start a fencing match that always ended in such a riotously happy romp, that to hear their shouts anyone would have supposed that it was a pair of boisterous pages playing together; — and no one would have dreamed it possible that the two could ever have been the reckless man, intent on wicked plans, and the captive child who had once upon a time set out together to cross the moonlit sands of Saint Michael's Mount.

THE END.

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