

CHAPTER V

For three years following the disappearance of Prince Richard, a bent old woman lived in the heart of London within a stone's throw of the King's palace. In a small back room she lived, high up in the attic of an old building, and with her was a little boy who never went abroad alone, nor by day. And upon his left breast was a strange mark which resembled a lily. When the bent old woman was safely in her attic room, with bolted door behind her, she was wont to straighten up, and discard her dingy mantle for more comfortable and becoming doublet and hose.

For years, she worked assiduously with the little boy's education. There were three subjects in her curriculum; French, swordsmanship and hatred of all things English, especially the reigning house of England.

The old woman had had made a tiny foil and had commenced teaching the little boy the art of fence when he was but three years old.

"You will be the greatest swordsman in the world when you are twenty, my son," she was wont to say, "and then you shall go out and kill many Englishmen. Your name shall be hated and cursed the length and breadth of England, and when you finally stand with the halter about your neck, aha, then will I speak. Then shall they know."

The little boy did not understand it all, he only knew that he was comfortable, and had warm clothing, and all he required to eat, and that he would be a great man when he learned to fight with a real sword, and had grown large enough to wield one. He also knew that he hated Englishmen, but why, he did not know.

Way back in the uttermost recesses of his little, childish head, he seemed to remember a time when his life and surroundings had been very different; when, instead of this old woman, there had been many people around him, and a sweet faced woman had held him in her arms and kissed him, before he was taken off to bed at night; but he could not be sure, maybe it was only a dream he remembered, for he dreamed many strange and wonderful dreams.

When the little boy was about six years of age, a strange man came to their attic home to visit the little old woman. It was in the dusk of the evening but the old woman did not light the cresset, and further, she whispered to the little boy to remain in the shadows of a far corner of the bare chamber.

The stranger was old and bent and had a great beard which hid almost his entire face except for two piercing eyes, a great nose and a bit of wrinkled forehead. When he spoke, he accompanied his words with many shrugs of his narrow shoulders and with waving of his arms and other strange and amusing gesticulations. The child was fascinated. Here was the first amusement of his little starved life. He listened intently to the conversation, which was in French.

"I have just the thing for madame," the stranger was saying. "It be a noble and stately hall far from the beaten way. It was built in the old days by Harold the Saxon, but in later times, death and poverty and the disfavor of the King have wrested it from his descendants. A few years since, Henry granted it to that spend-thrift favorite of his, Henri de Macy, who pledged it to me for a sum he hath been unable to repay. Today it be my property, and as it be far from Paris, you may have it for the mere song I have named. It be a wondrous bargain, madame."

"And when I come upon it, I shall find that I have bought a crumbling pile of ruined masonry, unfit to house a family of foxes," replied the old woman peevishly.

"One tower hath fallen, and the roof for half the length of one wing hath sagged and tumbled in," explained the old Frenchman. "But the three lower stories be intact and quite habitable. It be much grander even now than the castles of many of England's noble barons, and the price, madame--ah, the price be so ridiculously low."

Still the old woman hesitated.

"Come," said the Frenchman, "I have it. Deposit the money with Isaac the Jew--thou knowest him?--and he shall hold it together with the deed for forty days, which will give thee ample time to travel to Derby and inspect thy purchase. If thou be not entirely satisfied, Isaac the Jew shall return thy money to thee and the deed to me, but if at the end of forty days thou hast not made demand for thy money, then shall Isaac send the deed to thee and the money to me. Be not this an easy and fair way out of the difficulty?"

The little old woman thought for a moment and at last conceded that it seemed quite a fair way to arrange the matter. And thus it was accomplished.

Several days later, the little old woman called the child to her.

"We start tonight upon a long journey to our new home. Thy face shall be wrapped in many rags, for thou hast a most grievous toothache. Dost understand?"

"But I have no toothache. My teeth do not pain me at all. I--" expostulated the child.

"Tut, tut," interrupted the little old woman. "Thou hast a toothache, and so thy face must be wrapped in many rags. And listen, should any ask thee upon the way why thy face be so wrapped, thou art to say that thou hast a toothache. And thou do not do as I say, the King's men will take us and we shall be hanged, for the King hateth us. If thou hatest the English King and lovest thy life do as I command."

"I hate the King," replied the little boy. "For this reason I shall do as thou sayest."

So it was that they set out that night upon their long journey north toward the hills of Derby. For many days they travelled, riding upon two small donkeys. Strange sights filled the days for the little boy who remembered nothing outside the bare attic of his London home and the dirty London alleys that he had traversed only by night.

They wound across beautiful parklike meadows and through dark, forbidding forests, and now and again they passed tiny hamlets of thatched huts. Occasionally they saw armored knights upon the highway, alone or in small parties, but the child's companion always managed to hasten into cover at the road side until the grim riders had passed.

Once, as they lay in hiding in a dense wood beside a little open glade across which the road wound, the boy saw two knights enter the glade from either side. For a moment, they drew rein and eyed each other in silence, and then one, a great black mailed knight upon a black charger, cried out something to the other which the boy could not catch. The other knight made no response other than to rest his lance upon his thigh and with lowered point, ride toward his ebon adversary. For a dozen paces their great steeds trotted slowly toward one another, but presently the knights urged them into full gallop, and when the two iron men on their iron trapped chargers came together in the center of the glade, it was with all the terrific impact of full charge.

The lance of the black knight smote full upon the linden shield of his foeman, the staggering weight of the mighty black charger hurtled upon the gray, who went down with his rider into the dust of the highway. The

momentum of the black carried him fifty paces beyond the fallen horseman before his rider could rein him in, then the black knight turned to view the havoc he had wrought. The gray horse was just staggering dizzily to his feet, but his mailed rider lay quiet and still where he had fallen.

With raised visor, the black knight rode back to the side of his vanquished foe. There was a cruel smile upon his lips as he leaned toward the prostrate form. He spoke tauntingly, but there was no response, then he prodded the fallen man with the point of his spear. Even this elicited no movement. With a shrug of his iron clad shoulders, the black knight wheeled and rode on down the road until he had disappeared from sight within the gloomy shadows of the encircling forest.

The little boy was spell-bound. Naught like this had he ever seen or dreamed.

"Some day thou shalt go and do likewise, my son," said the little old woman.

"Shall I be clothed in armor and ride upon a great black steed?" he asked.

"Yes, and thou shalt ride the highways of England with thy stout lance and mighty sword, and behind thee thou shalt leave a trail of blood and death, for every man shalt be thy enemy. But come, we must be on our way."

They rode on, leaving the dead knight where he had fallen, but always in his memory the child carried the thing that he had seen, longing for the day when he should be great and strong like the formidable black knight.

On another day, as they were biding in a deserted hovel to escape the notice of a caravan of merchants journeying up-country with their wares, they saw a band of ruffians rush out from the concealing shelter of some bushes at the far side of the highway and fall upon the surprised and defenseless tradesmen.

Ragged, bearded, uncouth villains they were, armed mostly with bludgeons and daggers, with here and there a cross-bow. Without mercy they attacked the old and the young, beating them down in cold blood even when they offered no resistance. Those of the caravan who could, escaped, the balance the highwaymen left dead or dying in the road, as they hurried away with their loot.

At first the child was horror-struck, but when he turned to the little old woman for sympathy he found a grim smile upon her thin lips. She noted his expression of dismay.

"It is naught, my son. But English curs setting upon English swine. Some day thou shalt set upon both--they be only fit for killing."

The boy made no reply, but he thought a great deal about that which he had seen. Knights were cruel to knights--the poor were cruel to the rich--and every day of the journey had forced upon his childish mind that everyone must be very cruel and hard upon the poor. He had seen them in all their sorrow and misery and poverty--stretching a long, scattering line all the way from London town. Their bent backs, their poor thin bodies and their hopeless, sorrowful faces attesting the weary wretchedness of their existence.

"Be no one happy in all the world?" he once broke out to the old woman.

"Only he who wields the mightiest sword," responded the old woman. "You have seen, my son, that all Englishmen are beasts. They set upon and kill one another for little provocation or for no provocation at all. When thou shalt be older, thou shalt go forth and kill them all for unless thou kill them, they will kill thee."

At length, after tiresome days upon the road, they came to a little hamlet in the hills. Here the donkeys were disposed of and a great horse purchased, upon which the two rode far up into a rough and uninviting country away from the beaten track, until late one evening they approached a ruined castle.

The frowning walls towered high against the moonlit sky beyond, and where a portion of the roof had fallen in, the cold moon, shining through the narrow unglazed windows, gave to the mighty pile the likeness of a huge, many-eyed ogre crouching upon the flank of a deserted world, for nowhere was there other sign of habitation.

Before this somber pile, the two dismounted. The little boy was filled with awe and his childish imagination ran riot as they approached the crumbling barbican on foot, leading the horse after them. From the dark shadows of the ballium, they passed into the moonlit inner court. At the far end the old woman found the ancient stables, and here, with decaying planks, she penned the horse for the night, pouring a measure of oats upon the floor for him from a bag which had bung across his rump.

Then she led the way into the dense shadows of the castle, lighting their advance with a flickering pine knot. The old planking of the floors, long unused, groaned and rattled beneath their approach. There was a sudden

scamper of clawed feet before them, and a red fox dashed by in a frenzy of alarm toward the freedom of the outer night.

Presently they came to the great hall. The old woman pushed open the great doors upon their creaking hinges and lit up dimly the mighty, cavernous interior with the puny rays of their feeble torch. As they stepped cautiously within, an impalpable dust arose in little spurts from the long-rotted rushes that crumbled beneath their feet. A huge bat circled wildly with loud fluttering wings in evident remonstrance at this rude intrusion. Strange creatures of the night scurried or wriggled across wall and floor.

But the child was unafraid. Fear had not been a part of the old woman's curriculum. The boy did not know the meaning of the word, nor was he ever in his after-life to experience the sensation. With childish eagerness, he followed his companion as she inspected the interior of the chamber. It was still an imposing room. The boy clapped his hands in delight at the beauties of the carved and panelled walls and the oak beamed ceiling, stained almost black from the smoke of torches and oil cressets that had lighted it in bygone days, aided, no doubt, by the wood fires which had burned in its two immense fireplaces to cheer the merry throng of noble revellers that had so often sat about the great table into the morning hours.

Here they took up their abode. But the bent, old woman was no longer an old woman--she had become a straight, wiry, active old man.

The little boy's education went on--French, swordsmanship and hatred of the English--the same thing year after year with the addition of horsemanship after he was ten years old. At this time the old man commenced teaching him to speak English, but with a studied and very marked French accent. During all his life now, he could not remember of having spoken to any living being other than his guardian, whom he had been taught to address as father. Nor did the boy have any name--he was just "my son."

His life in the Derby hills was so filled with the hard, exacting duties of his education that he had little time to think of the strange loneliness of his existence; nor is it probable that he missed that companionship of others of his own age of which, never having had experience in it, he could scarce be expected to regret or yearn for.

At fifteen, the youth was a magnificent swordsman and horseman, and with an utter contempt for pain or danger--a contempt which was the result of the heroic methods adopted by the little old man in the training of him.

Often the two practiced with razor-sharp swords, and without armor or other protection of any description.

"Thus only," the old man was wont to say, "mayst thou become the absolute master of thy blade. Of such a nicety must be thy handling of the weapon that thou mayst touch an antagonist at will and so lightly, shouldst thou desire, that thy point, wholly under the control of a master hand, mayst be stopped before it inflicts so much as a scratch."

But in practice, there were many accidents, and then one or both of them would nurse a punctured skin for a few days. So, while blood was often let on both sides, the training produced a fearless swordsman who was so truly the master of his point that he could stop a thrust within a fraction of an inch of the spot he sought.

At fifteen, he was a very strong and straight and handsome lad. Bronzed and hardy from his outdoor life; of few words, for there was none that he might talk with save the taciturn old man; hating the English, for that he was taught as thoroughly as swordsmanship; speaking French fluently and English poorly--and waiting impatiently for the day when the old man should send him out into the world with clanking armor and lance and shield to do battle with the knights of England.

It was about this time that there occurred the first important break in the monotony of his existence. Far down the rocky trail that led from the valley below through the Derby hills to the ruined castle, three armored knights urged their tired horses late one afternoon of a chill autumn day. Off the main road and far from any habitation, they had espied the castle's towers through a rift in the hills, and now they spurred toward it in search of food and shelter.

As the road led them winding higher into the hills, they suddenly emerged upon the downs below the castle where a sight met their eyes which caused them to draw rein and watch in admiration. There, before them upon the downs, a boy battled with a lunging, rearing horse--a perfect demon of a black horse. Striking and biting in a frenzy of rage, it sought ever to escape or injure the lithe figure which clung leech-like to its shoulder.

The boy was on the ground. His left hand grasped the heavy mane; his right arm lay across the beast's withers and his right hand drew steadily in upon a halter rope with which he had taken a half hitch about the horse's muzzle. Now the black reared and wheeled, striking and biting, full upon the youth, but the active figure swung with him--always just behind the giant

shoulder--and ever and ever he drew the great arched neck farther and farther to the right.

As the animal plunged hither and thither in great leaps, he dragged the boy with him, but all his mighty efforts were unavailing to loosen the grip upon mane and withers. Suddenly, he reared straight into the air carrying the youth with him, then with a vicious lunge he threw himself backward upon the ground.

"It's death!" exclaimed one of the knights, "he will kill the youth yet, Beauchamp."

"No!" cried he addressed. "Look! He is up again and the boy still clings as tightly to him as his own black hide."

"'Tis true," exclaimed another, "but he hath lost what he had gained upon the halter--he must needs fight it all out again from the beginning."

And so the battle went on again as before, the boy again drawing the iron neck slowly to the right--the beast fighting and squealing as though possessed of a thousand devils. A dozen times, as the head bent farther and farther toward him, the boy loosed his hold upon the mane and reached quickly down to grasp the near fore pastern. A dozen times the horse shook off the new hold, but at length the boy was successful, and the knee was bent and the hoof drawn up to the elbow.

Now the black fought at a disadvantage, for he was on but three feet and his neck was drawn about in an awkward and unnatural position. His efforts became weaker and weaker. The boy talked incessantly to him in a quiet voice, and there was a shadow of a smile upon his lips. Now he bore heavily upon the black withers, pulling the horse toward him. Slowly the beast sank upon his bent knee--pulling backward until his off fore leg was stretched straight before him. Then, with a final surge, the youth pulled him over upon his side, and, as he fell, slipped prone beside him. One sinewy hand shot to the rope just beneath the black chin--the other grasped a slim, pointed ear.

For a few minutes the horse fought and kicked to gain his liberty, but with his head held to the earth, he was as powerless in the hands of the boy as a baby would have been. Then he sank panting and exhausted into mute surrender.

"Well done!" cried one of the knights. "Simon de Montfort himself never mastered a horse in better order, my boy. Who be thou?"

In an instant, the lad was upon his feet his eyes searching for the speaker. The horse, released, sprang up also, and the two stood--the handsome boy and the beautiful black--gazing with startled eyes, like two wild things, at the strange intruder who confronted them.

"Come, Sir Mortimer!" cried the boy, and turning he led the prancing but subdued animal toward the castle and through the ruined barbican into the court beyond.

"What ho, there, lad!" shouted Paul of Merely. "We wouldst not harm thee--come, we but ask the way to the castle of De Stutevill."

The three knights listened but there was no answer.

"Come, Sir Knights," spoke Paul of Merely, "we will ride within and learn what manner of churls inhabit this ancient rookery."

As they entered the great courtyard, magnificent even in its ruined grandeur, they were met by a little, grim old man who asked them in no gentle tones what they would of them there.

"We have lost our way in these devilish Derby hills of thine, old man," replied Paul of Merely. "We seek the castle of Sir John de Stutevill."

"Ride down straight to the river road, keeping the first trail to the right, and when thou hast come there, turn again to thy right and ride north beside the river--thou canst not miss the way--it be plain as the nose before thy face," and with that the old man turned to enter the castle.

"Hold, old fellow!" cried the spokesman. "It be nigh onto sunset now, and we care not to sleep out again this night as we did the last. We will tarry with you then till morn that we may take up our journey refreshed, upon rested steeds."

The old man grumbled, and it was with poor grace that he took them in to feed and house them over night. But there was nothing else for it, since they would have taken his hospitality by force had he refused to give it voluntarily.

From their guests, the two learned something of the conditions outside their Derby hills. The old man showed less interest than he felt, but to the boy, notwithstanding that the names he heard meant nothing to him, it was like unto a fairy tale to hear of the wondrous doings of earl and baron, bishop and king.

"If the King does not mend his ways," said one of the knights, "we will drive his whole accursed pack of foreign blood-suckers into the sea."

"De Montfort has told him as much a dozen times, and now that all of us, both Norman and Saxon barons, have already met together and formed a pact for our mutual protection, the King must surely realize that the time for temporizing be past, and that unless he would have a civil war upon his hands, he must keep the promises he so glibly makes, instead of breaking them the moment De Montfort's back be turned."

"He fears his brother-in-law," interrupted another of the knights, "even more than the devil fears holy water. I was in attendance on his majesty some weeks since when he was going down the Thames upon the royal barge. We were overtaken by as severe a thunder storm as I have ever seen, of which the King was in such abject fear that he commanded that we land at the Bishop of Durham's palace opposite which we then were. De Montfort, who was residing there, came to meet Henry, with all due respect, observing, 'What do you fear, now, Sire, the tempest has passed?' And what thinkest thou old 'waxen heart' replied? Why, still trembling, he said, 'I do indeed fear thunder and lightning much, but, by the hand of God, I tremble before you more than for all the thunder in Heaven!'"

"I surmise," interjected the grim, old man, "that De Montfort has in some manner gained an ascendancy over the King. Think you he looks so high as the throne itself?"

"Not so," cried the oldest of the knights. "Simon de Montfort works for England's weal alone--and methinks, nay knowest, that he would be first to spring to arms to save the throne for Henry. He but fights the King's rank and covetous advisers, and though he must needs seem to defy the King himself, it be but to save his tottering power from utter collapse. But, gad, how the King hates him. For a time it seemed that there might be a permanent reconciliation when, for years after the disappearance of the little Prince Richard, De Montfort devoted much of his time and private fortune to prosecuting a search through all the world for the little fellow, of whom he was inordinately fond. This self-sacrificing interest on his part won over the King and Queen for many years, but of late his unremitting hostility to their continued extravagant waste of the national resources has again hardened them toward him."

The old man, growing uneasy at the turn the conversation threatened, sent the youth from the room on some pretext, and himself left to prepare supper.

As they were sitting at the evening meal, one of the nobles eyed the boy intently, for he was indeed good to look upon; his bright handsome face, clear, intelligent gray eyes, and square strong jaw framed in a mass of brown waving hair banded at the forehead and falling about his ears, where it was again cut square at the sides and back, after the fashion of the times.

His upper body was clothed in a rough under tunic of wool, stained red, over which he wore a short leathern jerkin, while his doublet was also of leather, a soft and finely tanned piece of undressed doeskin. His long hose, fitting his shapely legs as closely as another layer of skin, were of the same red wool as his tunic, while his strong leather sandals were cross-gartered halfway to his knees with narrow bands of leather.

A leathern girdle about his waist supported a sword and a dagger and a round skull cap of the same material, to which was fastened a falcon's wing, completed his picturesque and becoming costume.

"Your son?" he asked, turning to the old man.

"Yes," was the growling response.

"He favors you but little, old fellow, except in his cursed French accent.

"S blood, Beauchamp," he continued, turning to one of his companions, "an' were he set down in court, I wager our gracious Queen would he hard put to it to tell him from the young Prince Edward. Dids't ever see so strange a likeness?"

"Now that you speak of it, My Lord, I see it plainly. It is indeed a marvel," answered Beauchamp.

Had they glanced at the old man during this colloquy, they would have seen a blanched face, drawn with inward fear and rage.

Presently the oldest member of the party of three knights spoke in a grave quiet tone.

"And how old might you be, my son?" he asked the boy.

"I do not know."

"And your name?"

"I do not know what you mean. I have no name. My father calls me son and no other ever before addressed me."

At this juncture, the old man arose and left the room, saying he would fetch more food from the kitchen, but he turned immediately he had passed the doorway and listened from without.

"The lad appears about fifteen," said Paul of Merely, lowering his voice, "and so would be the little lost Prince Richard, if he lives. This one does not know his name, or his age, yet he looks enough like Prince Edward to be his twin."

"Come, my son," he continued aloud, "open your jerkin and let us have a look at your left breast, we shall read a true answer there."

"Are you Englishmen?" asked the boy without making a move to comply with their demand.

"That we be, my son," said Beauchamp.

"Then it were better that I die than do your bidding, for all Englishmen are pigs and I loathe them as becomes a gentleman of France. I do not uncover my body to the eyes of swine."

The knights, at first taken back by this unexpected outbreak, finally burst into uproarious laughter.

"Indeed," cried Paul of Merely, "spoken as one of the King's foreign favorites might speak, and they ever told the good God's truth. But come lad, we would not harm you--do as I bid."

"No man lives who can harm me while a blade hangs at my side," answered the boy, "and as for doing as you bid, I take orders from no man other than my father."

Beauchamp and Greystoke laughed aloud at the discomfiture of Paul of Merely, but the latter's face hardened in anger, and without further words he strode forward with outstretched hand to tear open the boy's leathern jerkin, but met with the gleaming point of a sword and a quick sharp, "En garde!" from the boy.

There was naught for Paul of Merely to do but draw his own weapon, in self-defense, for the sharp point of the boy's sword was flashing in and out against his unprotected body, inflicting painful little jabs, and the boy's tongue was murmuring low-toned taunts and insults as it invited him to draw and defend himself or be stuck "like the English pig you are."

Paul of Merely was a brave man and he liked not the idea of drawing against this stripling, but he argued that he could quickly disarm him without

harming the lad, and he certainly did not care to be further humiliated before his comrades.

But when he had drawn and engaged his youthful antagonist, he discovered that, far from disarming him, he would have the devil's own job of it to keep from being killed.

Never in all his long years of fighting had he faced such an agile and dexterous enemy, and as they backed this way and that about the room, great beads of sweat stood upon the brow of Paul of Merely, for he realized that he was fighting for his life against a superior swordsman.

The loud laughter of Beauchamp and Greystoke soon subsided to grim smiles, and presently they looked on with startled faces in which fear and apprehension were dominant.

The boy was fighting as a cat might play with a mouse. No sign of exertion was apparent, and his haughty confident smile told louder than words that he had in no sense let himself out to his full capacity.

Around and around the room they circled, the boy always advancing, Paul of Merely always retreating. The din of their clashing swords and the heavy breathing of the older man were the only sounds, except as they brushed against a bench or a table.

Paul of Merely was a brave man, but he shuddered at the thought of dying uselessly at the hands of a mere boy. He would not call upon his friends for aid, but presently, to his relief, Beauchamp sprang between them with drawn sword, crying "Enough, gentlemen, enough! You have no quarrel. Sheathe your swords."

But the boy's only response was, "En garde, cochon," and Beauchamp found himself taking the center of the stage in the place of his friend. Nor did the boy neglect Paul of Merely, but engaged them both in swordplay that caused the eyes of Greystoke to bulge from their sockets.

So swiftly moved his flying blade that half the time it was a sheet of gleaming light, and now he was driving home his thrusts and the smile had frozen upon his lips--grim and stern.

Paul of Merely and Beauchamp were wounded in a dozen places when Greystoke rushed to their aid, and then it was that a little, wiry, gray man leaped agilely from the kitchen doorway, and with drawn sword took his place beside the boy. It was now two against three and the three may have

guessed, though they never knew, that they were pitted against the two greatest swordsmen in the world.

"To the death," cried the little gray man, "a mort, mon fils." Scarcely had the words left his lips ere, as though it had but waited permission, the boy's sword flashed into the heart of Paul of Merely, and a Saxon gentleman was gathered to his fathers.

The old man engaged Greystoke now, and the boy turned his undivided attention to Beauchamp. Both these men were considered excellent swordsmen, but when Beauchamp heard again the little gray man's "a mort, mon fils," he shuddered, and the little hairs at the nape of his neck rose up, and his spine froze, for he knew that he had heard the sentence of death passed upon him; for no mortal had yet lived who could vanquish such a swordsman as he who now faced him.

As Beauchamp pitched forward across a bench, dead, the little old man led Greystoke to where the boy awaited him.

"They are thy enemies, my son, and to thee belongs the pleasure of revenge; a mort, mon fils."

Greystoke was determined to sell his life dearly, and he rushed the lad as a great bull might rush a teasing dog, but the boy gave back not an inch and, when Greystoke stopped, there was a foot of cold steel protruding from his back.

Together they buried the knights at the bottom of the dry moat at the back of the ruined castle. First they had stripped them and, when they took account of the spoils of the combat, they found themselves richer by three horses with full trappings, many pieces of gold and silver money, ornaments and jewels, as well as the lances, swords and chain mail armor of their erstwhile guests.

But the greatest gain, the old man thought to himself, was that the knowledge of the remarkable resemblance between his ward and Prince Edward of England had come to him in time to prevent the undoing of his life's work.

The boy, while young, was tall and broad shouldered, and so the old man had little difficulty in fitting one of the suits of armor to him, obliterating the devices so that none might guess to whom it had belonged. This he did, and from then on the boy never rode abroad except in armor, and when he met

others upon the high road, his visor was always lowered that none might see his face.

The day following the episode of the three knights the old man called the boy to him, saying,

"It is time, my son, that thou learned an answer to such questions as were put to thee yestereve by the pigs of Henry. Thou art fifteen years of age, and thy name be Norman, and so, as this be the ancient castle of Torn, thou mayst answer those whom thou desire to know it that thou art Norman of Torn; that thou be a French gentleman whose father purchased Torn and brought thee hither from France on the death of thy mother, when thou wert six years old.

"But remember, Norman of Torn, that the best answer for an Englishman is the sword; naught else may penetrate his thick wit."

And so was born that Norman of Torn, whose name in a few short years was to strike terror to the hearts of Englishmen, and whose power in the vicinity of Torn was greater than that of the King or the barons.