

Of his past, thou know nearly as much as I, though thou may not know the wondrous chivalry and true nobility of character of him men call!!!!

Here the letter stopped, evidently cut short by the dagger of the assassin.

"Mon Dieu! The damnable luck!" cried De Montfort, "but a second more and the name we have sought for twenty years would have been writ. Didst ever see such hellish chance as plays into the hand of the fiend incarnate since that long gone day when his sword pierced the heart of Lady Maud by the postern gate beside the Thames? The Devil himself must watch o'er him.

"There be naught more we can do here," he continued. "I should have been on my way to Fletching hours since. Come, my gentlemen, we will ride south by way of Leicester and have the good Fathers there look to the decent burial of this holy man."

The party mounted and rode rapidly away. Noon found them at Leicester, and three days later, they rode into the baronial camp at Fletching.

At almost the same hour, the monks of the Abbey of Leicester performed the last rites of Holy Church for the peace of the soul of Father Claude and consigned his clay to the churchyard.

And thus another innocent victim of an insatiable hate and vengeance which had been born in the King's armory twenty years before passed from the eyes of men.

CHAPTER XVI

While Norman of Torn and his thousand fighting men marched slowly south on the road toward Dover, the army of Simon de Montfort was preparing for its advance upon Lewes, where King Henry, with his son Prince Edward, and his brother, Prince Richard, King of the Romans, together with the latter's son, were entrenched with their forces, sixty thousand strong.

Before sunrise on a May morning in the year 1264, the barons' army set out from its camp at Fletching, nine miles from Lewes and, marching through dense forests, reached a point two miles from the city, unobserved.

From here, they ascended the great ridge of the hills up the valley Combe, the projecting shoulder of the Downs covering their march from the town. The King's party, however, had no suspicion that an attack was imminent and, in direct contrast to the methods of the baronial troops, had spent the

preceding night in drunken revelry, so that they were quite taken by surprise.

It is true that Henry had stationed an outpost upon the summit of the hill in advance of Lewes, but so lax was discipline in his army that the soldiers, growing tired of the duty, had abandoned the post toward morning, and returned to town, leaving but a single man on watch. He, left alone, had promptly fallen asleep, and thus De Montfort's men found and captured him within sight of the bell-tower of the Priory of Lewes, where the King and his royal allies lay peacefully asleep, after their night of wine and dancing and song.

Had it not been for an incident which now befell, the baronial army would doubtless have reached the city without being detected, but it happened that, the evening before, Henry had ordered a foraging party to ride forth at daybreak, as provisions for both men and beasts were low.

This party had scarcely left the city behind them ere they fell into the hands of the baronial troops. Though some few were killed or captured, those who escaped were sufficient to arouse the sleeping army of the royalists to the close proximity and gravity of their danger.

By this time, the four divisions of De Montfort's army were in full view of the town. On the left were the Londoners under Nicholas de Segrave; in the center rode De Clare, with John Fitz-John and William de Monchensy, at the head of a large division which occupied that branch of the hill which descended a gentle, unbroken slope to the town. The right wing was commanded by Henry de Montfort, the oldest son of Simon de Montfort, and with him was the third son, Guy, as well as John de Burgh and Humphrey de Bohun. The reserves were under Simon de Montfort himself.

Thus was the flower of English chivalry pitted against the King and his party, which included many nobles whose kinsmen were with De Montfort; so that brother faced brother, and father fought against son, on that bloody Wednesday, before the old town of Lewes.

Prince Edward was the first of the royal party to take the field and, as he issued from the castle with his gallant company, banners and pennons streaming in the breeze and burnished armor and flashing blade scintillating in the morning sunlight, he made a gorgeous and impressive spectacle as he hurled himself upon the Londoners, whom he had selected for attack because of the affront they had put upon his mother that day at London on the preceding July.

So vicious was his onslaught that the poorly armed and unprotected burghers, unused to the stern game of war, fell like sheep before the iron men on their iron shod horses. The long lances, the heavy maces, the six-bladed battle axes, and the well-tempered swords of the knights played havoc among them, so that the rout was complete; but, not content with victory, Prince Edward must glut his vengeance, and so he pursued the citizens for miles, butchering great numbers of them, while many more were drowned in attempting to escape across the Ouse.

The left wing of the royalist army, under the King of the Romans and his gallant son, was not so fortunate, for they met a determined resistance at the hands of Henry de Montfort.

The central divisions of the two armies seemed well matched also, and thus the battle continued throughout the day, the greatest advantage appearing to lie with the King's troops. Had Edward not gone so far afield in pursuit of the Londoners, the victory might easily have been on the side of the royalists early in the day, but by thus eliminating his division after defeating a part of De Montfort's army, it was as though neither of these two forces had been engaged.

The wily Simon de Montfort had attempted a little ruse which centered the fighting for a time upon the crest of one of the hills. He had caused his car to be placed there, with the tents and luggage of many of his leaders, under a small guard, so that the banners there displayed, together with the car, led the King of the Romans to believe that the Earl himself lay there, for Simon de Montfort had but a month or so before suffered an injury to his hip when his horse fell with him, and the royalists were not aware that he had recovered sufficiently to again mount a horse.

And so it was that the forces under the King of the Romans pushed back the men of Henry de Montfort, and ever and ever closer to the car came the royalists until they were able to fall upon it, crying out insults against the old Earl and commanding him to come forth. And when they had killed the occupants of the car, they found that Simon de Montfort was not among them, but instead he had fastened there three important citizens of London, old men and influential, who had opposed him, and aided and abetted the King.

So great was the wrath of Prince Richard, King of the Romans, that he fell upon the baronial troops with renewed vigor, and slowly but steadily beat them back from the town.

This sight, together with the routing of the enemy's left wing by Prince Edward, so cheered and inspired the royalists that the two remaining divisions took up the attack with refreshed spirits so that, what a moment before had hung in the balance, now seemed an assured victory for King Henry.

Both De Montfort and the King had thrown themselves into the melee with all their reserves. No longer was there semblance of organization. Division was inextricably bemingled with division; friend and foe formed a jumbled confusion of fighting, cursing chaos, over which whipped the angry pennons and banners of England's noblest houses.

That the mass seemed moving ever away from Lewes indicated that the King's arms were winning toward victory, and so it might have been had not a new element been infused into the battle; for now upon the brow of the hill to the north of them appeared a great horde of armored knights, and as they came into position where they could view the battle, the leader raised his sword on high, and, as one man, the thousand broke into a mad charge.

Both De Montfort and the King ceased fighting as they gazed upon this body of fresh, well armored, well mounted reinforcements. Whom might they be? To which side owned they allegiance? And, then, as the black falcon wing on the banners of the advancing horsemen became distinguishable, they saw that it was the Outlaw of Torn.

Now he was close upon them, and had there been any doubt before, the wild battle cry which rang from a thousand fierce throats turned the hopes of the royalists cold within their breasts.

"For De Montfort! For De Montfort!" and "Down with Henry!" rang loud and clear above the din of battle.

Instantly the tide turned, and it was by only the barest chance that the King himself escaped capture, and regained the temporary safety of Lewes.

The King of the Romans took refuge within an old mill, and here it was that Norman of Torn found him barricaded. When the door was broken down, the outlaw entered and dragged the monarch forth with his own hand to the feet of De Montfort, and would have put him to death had not the Earl intervened.

"I have yet to see my mark upon the forehead of a King," said Norman of Torn, "and the temptation be great; but, an you ask it, My Lord Earl, his life shall be yours to do with as you see fit."

"You have fought well this day, Norman of Torn," replied De Montfort. "Verily do I believe we owe our victory to you alone; so do not mar the record of a noble deed by wanton acts of atrocity."

"It is but what they had done to me, were I the prisoner instead," retorted the outlaw.

And Simon de Montfort could not answer that, for it was but the simple truth.

"How comes it, Norman of Torn," asked De Montfort as they rode together toward Lewes, "that you threw the weight of your sword upon the side of the barons? Be it because you hate the King more?"

"I do not know that I hate either, My Lord Earl," replied the outlaw. "I have been taught since birth to hate you all, but why I should hate was never told me. Possibly it be but a bad habit that will yield to my maturer years.

"As for why I fought as I did today," he continued, "it be because the heart of Lady Bertrade, your daughter, be upon your side. Had it been with the King, her uncle, Norman of Torn had fought otherwise than he has this day. So you see, My Lord Earl, you owe me no gratitude. Tomorrow I may be pillaging your friends as of yore."

Simon de Montfort turned to look at him, but the blank wall of his lowered visor gave no sign of the thoughts that passed beneath.

"You do much for a mere friendship, Norman of Torn," said the Earl coldly, "and I doubt me not but that my daughter has already forgot you. An English noblewoman, preparing to become a princess of France, does not have much thought to waste upon highwaymen." His tone, as well as his words were studiously arrogant and insulting, for it had stung the pride of this haughty noble to think that a low-born knave boasted the friendship of his daughter.

Norman of Torn made no reply, and could the Earl of Leicester have seen his face, he had been surprised to note that instead of grim hatred and resentment, the features of the Outlaw of Torn were drawn in lines of pain and sorrow; for he read in the attitude of the father what he might expect to receive at the hands of the daughter.