CHAPTER IX

CRECY FIELD

It was Saturday, the 26th of August, in the year 1346. The harassed English host--but a little host, after all, retreating for its life from Paris--had forced the passage of the Somme by the ford which a forgotten traitor, Gobin Agache by name, revealed to them. Now it stood at bay upon the plain of Crecy, there to conquer or to die.

"Will the French fight to-day, what think you?" asked Hugh of Grey Dick, who had just descended from an apple-tree which grew in the garden of a burnt-out cottage. Here he had been engaged on the twofold business of surveying the disposition of the English army and in gathering a pocketful of fruit which remained upon the tree's topmost boughs.

"I think that these are very good apples," answered Dick, speaking with his mouth full. "Eat while you get the chance, master, for, who knows, the next you set your teeth in may be of the kind that grew upon the Tree of Life in a very old garden," and he handed him two of the best. Then he turned to certain archers, who clustered round with outstretched hands, saying: "Why should I give you my apples, fellows, seeing that you were too lazy to climb and get them for yourselves? None of you ever gave me anything when I was hungry, after the sack of Caen, in which my master, being squeamish, would take no part. Therefore I went to bed supperless, because, as I remember you said, I had not earned it. Still,

as I don't want to fight the French with a bellyache, go scramble for them."

Then, with a quick motion, he flung the apples to a distance, all save one, which he presented to a tall man who stood near, adding:

"Take this, Jack Green, in token of fellowship, since I have nothing else to offer you. I beat you at Windsor, didn't I, when we shot a match before the King? Now show your skill and beat me and I'll say 'thank you.' Keep count of your arrows shot, Jack, and I'll keep count of mine, and when the battle is over, he who has grassed most Frenchmen shall be called the better man."

"Then I'm that already, lad," answered the great yeoman with a grin as he set his teeth in the apple. "For, look you, having served at Court I've learned how to lie, and shall swear I never wasted shaft, whereas you, being country born, may own to a miss or two for shame's sake. Or, likelier still, those French will have one or both of us in their bag. If all tales are true, there is such a countless host of them that we few English shall not see the sky for arrows."

Dick shrugged his shoulders and was about to answer when suddenly a sound of shouting deep and glad rose from the serried companies upon their left. Then the voice of an officer was heard calling:

"Line! Line! The King comes!"

Another minute and over the crest of a little rise appeared Edward of England clad in full armour. He wore a surtout embroidered with the arms of England and France, but his helm hung at his saddle-bow that all might see his face. He was mounted, not on his war steed, but on a small, white, ambling palfrey, and in his hand he bore a short baton. With him came two marshalls, gaily dressed, and a slim young man clad from head to foot in plain black armour, and wearing a great ruby in his helm, whom all knew for Edward, Prince of Wales.

On he rode, acknowledging the cheering of his soldiers with smiles and courtly bows, till at length he pulled rein just in front of the triple line of archers, among whom were mingled some knights and men-at-arms, for the order of battle was not yet fully set. Just then, on the plain beneath, riding from out the shelter of some trees and, as they thought, beyond the reach of arrows, appeared four splendid French knights, and with them a few squires. There they halted, taking stock, it would seem, of the disposition of the English army.

"Who are those that wear such fine feathers?" asked the King.

"One is the Lord of Bazeilles," answered a marshall. "I can see the monk upon his crest, but the blazons of the others I cannot read. They spy upon us, Sire; may we sally out and take them?"

"Nay," answered Edward, "their horses are fresher than ours; let them

go, for pray God we shall see them closer soon."

So the French knights, having stared their full, turned and rode away slowly. But one of their squires did otherwise. Dismounting from his horse, which he left with another squire to hold, he ran forward a few paces to the crest of a little knoll. Thence he made gestures of contempt and scorn toward the English army, as he did so shouting foul words, of which a few floated to them in the stillness.

"Now," said Edward, "if I had an archer who could reach that varlet, I'll swear that his name should not be forgotten in England. But alas! it may not be, for none cam make an arrow fly true so far."

Instantly Grey Dick stepped forward.

"Sire, may I try?" he asked, stringing his great black bow as he spoke.

"Who are you?" said the King, "who seem to have been rolled in ashes and wear my own gold arrow in your cap? Ah! I remember, the Suffolk man who showed us all how to shoot at Windsor, he who is called Grey Dick. Yes, try, Grey Dick, try, if you think that you can reach so far. Yet for the honour of St. George, man, do not miss, for all the host will see Fate riding on your shaft."

For one moment Dick hesitated. Such awful words seemed to shake even his iron nerve.

"I've seen you do as much, Dick," said the quiet voice of Hugh de Cressi behind him. "Still, judge you."

Then Dick ground his heels into the turf and laid his weight against the bow. While all men watched breathless, he drew it to an arc, he drew it till the string was level with his ear. He loosed, then, slewing round, straightened himself and stared down at the earth. As he said afterward, he feared to watch that arrow.

Away it sped while all men gazed. High, high it flew, the sunlight glinting on its polished barb. Down it came at length, and the King muttered "Short!" But while the word passed his lips that shaft seemed to recover itself, as though by magic, and again rushed on. He of the foul words and gestures saw it coming, and turned to fly. As he leapt forward the war arrow struck him full in the small of the back, just where the spine ends, severing it, so that he fell all of a heap like an ox beneath the axe, and lay a still and huddled shape.

From all the English right who saw this wondrous deed there went up such a shout that their comrades to the left and rear thought for a moment that battle had been joined. The King and the Prince stared amazed. Hugh flung his arms about Dick's neck, and kissed him. Jack Green cried:

"No archer, but a wizard! Mere man could not have sent a true shaft so far."

"Then would to heaven I had more such wizards," said the King. "God be with you, Grey Dick, for you have put new heart into my and all our company. Mark, each of you, that he smote him in the back, smote him running! What reward would you have, man?"

"None," answered Dick in a surly voice. "My reward is that, whatever happens, yon filthy French knave will never mock honest English folk again. Or so I think, though the arrow barely reached him. Yet, Sire," he added after a pause, "you might knight my master, Hugh de Cressi, if you will, since but for him I should have feared to risk that shot."

Then turning aside, Dick unstrung his bow, and, pulling the remains of the apple out of his pouch, began to munch it unconcernedly.

"Hugh de Cressi!" said the King. "Ah! yes, I mind me of him and of the rogue, Acour, and the maid, Red Eve. Well, Hugh, I am told you fought gallantly at Blanche-Tague two days gone and were among the last to cross the Somme. Also, we have other debts to pay you. Come hither, sir, and give me your sword."

"Your pardon, my liege," said Hugh, colouring, "but I'll not be knighted for my henchman's feats, or at all until I have done some of my own."

"Ah, well, Master Hugh," said the King, "that's a right spirit. After the battle, perhaps, if it should please God that we live to meet again

in honour. De Cressi," he added musingly, "why this place is called Crecy, and here, I think, is another good omen. At Crecy shall de Cressi gain great honour for himself and for St. George of England. You are luck bringers, you two. Let them not be separated in the battle, lest the luck should leave them. See to it, if it please you, my lord of Warwick. Young de Cressi can draw a bow; let him fight amongst the archers and have liberty to join the men-at-arms when the time comes. Or stay; set them near my son the Prince, for there surely the fight will be hottest.

"And now, you men of England, whatever your degree, my brothers of England, gentle and simple, Philip rolls down upon us with all the might of France, our heritage which he has stolen, our heritage and yours. Well, well, show him to-day, or to-morrow, or whenever it may be, that Englishmen put not their faith in numbers, but in justice and their own great hearts. Oh, my brothers and my friends, let not Edward, whom you are pleased to serve as your lawful King, be whipped off the field of Crecy and out of France! Stand to your banners, stand to your King, stand to St. George and God! Die where you are if need be, as I will. Never threaten and then show your backs like that knave the archer shot but now. Look, I give my son into your keeping," and he pointed to the young Prince, who all this while sat upon his horse upright and silent. "The Hope of England shall be your leader, but if he flies, why then, cut him down, and fight without him. But he'll not fly and you'll not fly; no, you and he together will this day earn a name that shall be told of when the world is grey with age. Great is the chance that life

has given you; pluck it, pluck it from the land of opportunity and, dead or living, become a song forever in the mouths of men unborn. Think not of prisoners; think not of ransoms and of wealth. Think not of me or of yourselves, but think of England's honour, and for that strike home, for England watches you to-day."

"We will, we will! Fear not, King, we will," shouted the host in answer.

With a glad smile, Edward took his young son's hand and shook it; then rode away followed by his marshals.

"De Cressi," he said, as he passed Hugh, "the knave Acour, your foe and mine, is with Philip of France. He has done me much damage, de Cressi, more than I can stop to tell. Avenge it if you can. Your luck is great, you may find the chance. God be with you and all. My lords, farewell. You have your orders. Son Edward, fare you well, also. Meet me again with honour, or never more."

It was not yet noon when King Edward spoke these words, and long hours were to go by before the battle joined. Indeed, most thought that no blow would be struck that day, since it was known that Philip had slept at Abbeville, whence for a great army the march was somewhat long. Still, when all was made ready, the English sat them down in their ranks, bows and helmets at side, ate their mid-day meal with appetite, and waited whatever fate might send them.

In obedience to the King's command Hugh and Grey Dick had been attached to the immediate person of the Prince of Wales, who had about him, besides his own knights, a small band of chosen archers and another band of men-at-arms picked for their strength and courage. These soldiers were all dismounted, since the order had gone forth that knight and squire must fight afoot, every horse having been sent to the rear, for that day the English expected to receive charges, not to make them. This, indeed, would have been impossible, seeing that all along their front the wild Welsh had laboured for hours digging pits into which horses might plunge and fall.

There then the Prince's battle sat, a small force after all, perhaps twelve hundred knights and men-at-arms, with three or four thousand archers, and to their rear, as many of the savage, knife-armed Welsh who fought that day under the banner of their country, the red Dragon of Merlin. Grey Dick's place was on the extreme left of the archer bodyguard, and Hugh's on the extreme right of that of the men-at-arms, so that they were but a few yards apart and could talk together. From time to time they spoke of sundry things, but mostly of home, for in this hour of danger through which both of them could hardly hope to live, even if one did, their thoughts turned thither, as was but natural.

"I wonder how it fares with the lady Eve," said Hugh, with a sigh, for of her no news had come to him since they had parted some months before, after he recovered from the wound which Clavering gave him.

"Well enough, doubtless. Why not?" replied Dick. "She is strong and healthy, she has many friends and servants to guard her and no enemy there to harm her, for her great foe is yonder," and he nodded towards Abbeville. "Oh, without doubt well enough. It is she who should wonder how it fares with us. Let us hope that, having naught else to do, she remembers us in her prayers, since in such a case even one woman's prayers are worth something, for does not a single feather sometimes turn the scale?"

"I think that Eve would rather fight than pray," answered Hugh, with a smile, "like old Sir Andrew, who would give half his remaining days to sit here with us this afternoon. Well, he is better where he is. Dick, that knave Acour sent only insolent words in answer to my challenge, which I despatched to him by the knight I took and spared at Caen."

"Why should he do more, master? He can find plenty of ways of dying without risking a single combat with one whom he has wronged and who is therefore very dangerous. You remember his crest, master--a silver swan painted on his shield. I knew it, and that is why I shot that poor fowl just before you killed young Clavering on the banks of Blythe, to teach him that swans are not proof against arrows. Watch for the swan crest, master, when the battle joins, and so will I, I promise you."

"Ay, I'll watch," said Hugh grimly. "God help all swans that come my way. Let us pray that this one has not taken wing, for if so I, too,

must learn to fly."

Thus they talked of these and other things amongst the hum of the great camp, which was like to that of bees on a lime-tree in summer, and whilst they talked the blue August sky became suddenly overcast. Dense and heavy clouds hid up its face, a cold and fitful wind began to blow, increasing presently to a gale which caused the planted standards, blazoned with lions rampant and with fleurs-de-lis, and the pennons of a hundred knights set here and there among the long battle lines, first to flap and waver and then to stand out straight as though they were cut of iron.

A word of command was called from rank to rank.

"Sheath bows!" it said, and instantly thousands of slender points were lifted and sank again, vanishing into the leathern cases which the archers bore.

Scarcely were these snug when the storm broke. First fell a few heavy drops, to be followed by such a torrent that all who had cloaks were glad to wear them. From the black clouds above leapt lightnings that were succeeded by the deep and solemn roll of thunder. A darkness fell upon the field so great that men wondered what it might portend, for their minds were strained. That which at other times would have passed without remark, now became portentous. Indeed, afterward some declared that through it they had seen angels or demons in the air, and others

that they had heard a voice prophesying woe and death, to whom they knew not.

"It is nothing but a harvest tempest," said Dick presently, as he shook the wet from him like a dog and looked to the covering of his quiver. "See, the clouds break."

As he spoke a single red ray from the westering sun shot through a rift in the sky and lay across the English host like a sword of light, whereof the point hung over the eastern plain. Save for this flaming sword all else was dark, and silent also, for the rain and thunder had died away. Only thousands of crows, frightened from the woods, wheeled to and fro above, their black wings turning to the redness of blood as they crossed and recrossed that splendid path of light, and their hoarse cries filling the solemn air with clamour. The sight and sounds were strange, nor did the thickest-headed fellow crouched upon Crecy's fateful plain ever forget them till his dying day.

The sky cleared by slow degrees, the multitudes of crows wheeled off toward the east and vanished, the sun shone out again in quiet glory.

"Pray God the French fight us to-day," said Hugh as he took off his cloak and rolled it up.

"Why, master?"

"Because, Dick, it is written that the rain falls on the just and the unjust; and the unjust, that is the French, or rather the Italians whom they hire, use these new-fangled cross-bows which as you know cannot be cased like ours, and therefore stretch their strings in wet."

"Master," remarked Dick, "I did not think you had so much wit--that is, since you fell in love, for before then you were sharp enough. Well, you are right, and a little matter like that may turn a battle. Not but what I had thought of it already."

Hugh was about to answer with spirit, when a sound of distant shouting broke upon their ears, a very mighty sound, and next instant some outposts were seen galloping in, calling: "Arm! Arm! The French! The French!"

Suddenly there appeared thousands of cross-bow men, in thick, wavering lines, and behind them the points of thousands of spears, whose bearers as yet were hidden by the living screen of the Italian archers. Yes, before them was the mighty host of France glittering in the splendid light of the westering sun, which shone full into their faces.

The irregular lines halted. Perhaps there was something in the aspect of those bands of Englishmen still seated in silence on the ground, with never a horse among them, that gave them pause. Then, as though at a word of command, the Genoese cross-bow men set up a terrific shout.

"Do they think to make us run at a noise, like hares?" said Hugh contemptuously.

But Grey Dick made no answer, for already his pale eyes were fixed upon the foe with a stare that Hugh thought was terrible, and his long fingers were playing with the button of his bow-case. The Genoese advanced a little way, then again stood and shouted, but still the English sat silent.

A third time they advanced and shouted more loudly than before, then began to wind up their cross-bows.

From somewhere in the English centre rose a heavy, thudding sound which was new to war. It came from the mouths of cannons now for the first time fired on a field of battle, and at the report of them the Genoese, frightened, fell back a little. Seeing that the balls fell short and did but hop toward them slowly, they took courage again and began to loose their bolts.

"You're right, master," exclaimed Grey Dick in a fierce chuckle, "their strings are wet," and he pointed to the quarrels that, like the cannon balls, struck short, some within fifty paces of those who shot them, so that no man was hurt.

Now came a swift command, and the English ranks rose to their feet, uncased their bows and strung them all as though with a single hand. A

second command and every bow was bent. A third and with a noise that was half hiss and half moan, thousands of arrows leapt forward. Forward they leapt, and swift and terrible they fell among the ranks of the advancing Genoese. Yes, and ere ever one had found its billet, its quiver-mate was hastening on its path. Then--oh! the sunlight showed it all--the Genoese rolled over by scores, their frail armour bitten through and through by the grey English arrows. By scores that grew to hundreds, that grew till the poor, helpless men who were yet unhurt among them wailed out in their fear, and, after one short, hesitant moment, surged back upon the long lines of men-at-arms behind.

From these arose a great shout: "Trahison! Trahison! Tuez! Tuez!" Next instant the appalling sight was seen of the chivalry of France falling upon their friends, whose only crime was that their bow-strings were wet, and butchering them where they stood. So awful and unexpected was this spectacle that for a little while the English archers, all except Grey Dick and a few others cast in the same iron mould, ceased to ply their bows and watched amazed.

The long shafts began to fly again, raining alike upon the slaughterers and the slaughtered. A few minutes, five perhaps, and this terrible scene was over, for of the seven thousand Genoese but a tithe remained upon their feet, and the interminable French lines, clad in sparkling steel and waving lance and sword, charged down upon the little English band.

"Now for the feast!" screamed Grey Dick. "That was but a snack to sharp the appetite," and as he said the words a gorgeous knight died with his arrow through the heart.

It came, the charge came. Nothing could stop it. Down went man and horse, line upon line of them swept to death by the pitiless English arrows, but still more rushed on. They fell in the pits that had been dug; they died beneath the shafts and the hoofs of those that followed, but still they struggled on, shouting: "Philip and St. Denis!" and waving their golden banner, the Oriflamme of France.

The charge crept up as a reluctant, outworn wave creeps to a resisting rock. It foamed upon the rock. The archers ceased to shoot and drew their axes. The men-at-arms leapt forward. The battle had joined at last! Breast to breast they wrestled now. Hugh's sword was red, and red was Grey Dick's axe. Fight as they would, the English were borne back. The young Prince waved his arm, screaming something, and at that sight the English line checked its retreat, stood still, and next plunged forward with a roar of:

"England and the Prince!"

That assault was over. Backward rolled the ride of men, those who were left living. After them went the dark Welsh. Their commanders ordered them to stand; the Earl of Warwick ordered them to stand. The Prince himself ordered them to stand, running in front of them, only to be

swept aside like a straw before a draught of wind. Out they broke, grinning and gnashing their teeth, great knives in their hands.

The red Dragon of Merlin which a giant bore led them on. It sank, it fell, it rose again. The giant was down, but another had it. They scrambled over the mass of dead and dying. They got among the living beyond. With eerie screams they houghed the horses and, when the riders fell, hacked open the lacings of their helms, and, unheeding of any cries for mercy, drove the great knives home. At length all were dead, and they returned again waving those red knives and singing some fierce chant in their unknown tongue.

The battle was not over yet. Fresh horses of Frenchmen gathered out of arrow range, and charged again under the banners of Blois, Alencon, Lorraine, and Flanders. Forward they swept, and with them came one who looked like a king, for he wore a crown upon his helm. The hawk-eyed Dick noted him, and that his bridle was bound to those of the knights who rode upon his either side. On them he rained shafts from his great black bow, for Grey Dick never shot without an aim, and after the battle one of his marked arrows was found fixed in the throat of the blind king of Bohemia.

This second charge could not be stayed. Step by step the English knights were beaten back; the line of archers was broken through; his guard formed round the Prince, Hugh among them. Heavy horses swept on to them. Beneath the hoofs of one of these Hugh was felled, but, stabbing it from

below, caused the poor beast to leap aside. He gained his feet again. The Prince was down, a splendid knight--it was the Count of Flanders--who had sprung from his horse, stood over him, his sword point at his throat, and called on him to yield. Up ran Robert Fitzsimmon, the standard bearer, shouting:

"To the son of the King! To the son of the King!"

He struck down a knight with the pole of his standard. Hugh sprang like a wild-cat at Louis of Flanders, and drove his sword through his throat. Richard de Beaumont flung the great banner of Wales over the Prince, hiding him till more help came to beat back the foe. Then the Prince struggled from the ground, gasping:

"I thank you, friends," and once more the French retreated. The Welsh banner rose again and that danger was over.

The Earl of Warwick ran up. Hugh noted that his armour was covered with blood.

"John of Norwich," he cried to an aged knight, who stood leaning on his sword, "take one with you, away to the King and pray him for aid. The French gather again; we are outworn with blows; the young Prince is in danger of his life or liberty. Begone!"

Old John's eyes fell on Hugh.

"Come with me, you Suffolk man," he said, and away they went.

"Now what would you give," he gasped as they ran, "to be drinking a stoup of ale with me in my tower of Mettingham as you have done before this red day dawned? What would you give, young Hugh de Cressi?"

"Nothing at all," answered Hugh. "Rather would I die upon this field in glory than drink all the ale in Suffolk for a hundred years."

"Well said, young man," grunted John. "So do I think would I, though I have never longed for a quart of liquor more."

They came to a windmill and climbed its steep stairs. On the top stage, amid the corn sacks stood Edward of England looking through the window-places.

"Your business, Sir John?" he said, scarcely turning his head.

The old knight told it shortly.

"My son is not dead and is not wounded," replied the King, "and I have none to send to his aid. Bid him win his spurs; the day shall yet be his. Look," he added, pointing through the window-place, "our banners have not given back a spear's throw, and in front of them the field is paved with dead. I tell you the French break. Back, de Norwich! Back, de

Cressi, and bid the Prince to charge!"

Some one thrust a cup of wine into Hugh's hand. He swallowed it, glancing at the wild scene below, and presently was running with Sir John toward the spot where they saw the Prince's banner flying. They came to Warwick and told him the King's answer.

"My father speaks well," said the Prince. "Let none share our glory this day! My lord, form up the lines, and when my banner is lifted thrice, give the word to charge. Linger not, the dark is near, and either France or England must go down ere night."

Forward rolled the French in their last desperate onset; horse and foot mingled together. Forward they rolled almost in silence, the arrows playing on their dense host, but not as they did at first, for many a quiver was empty. Once, twice, thrice the Prince's banner bowed and lifted, and as it rose for the third time there rang out a shout of:

"Charge for St. George and Edward!"

Then England, that all these long hours had stood still, suddenly hurled herself upon the foe. Hugh, leaping over a heap of dead and dying, saw in front of him a knight who wore a helmet shaped like a wolf's head and had a wolf painted upon his shield. The wolf knight charged at him as though he sought him alone. An arrow from behind--it was Grey Dick's--sank up to the feathers in the horse's neck, and down it came.

The rider shook himself clear and began to fight. Hugh was beaten to his knee beneath a heavy blow that his helm turned. He rose unhurt and rushed at the knight, who, in avoiding his onset, caught his spur on the body of a dead man and fell backward.

Hugh leapt on to him, striving to thrust his sword up beneath his gorget and make an end of him.

"Grace!" said the knight in French, "I yield me."

"We take no prisoners," answered Hugh, as he thrust again.

"Pity, then," said the knight. "You are brave, would you butcher a fallen man? If you had tripped I would have spared you. Show mercy, some day your case may be mine and it will be repaid to you."

Hugh hesitated, although now the point of his sword was through the lacing of the gorget.

"For your lady's sake, pity," gasped the knight as he felt its point.

"You know by what name to conjure," said Hugh doubtfully. "Well, get you gone if you can, and pray for one Hugh de Cressi, for he gives you your life."

The knight seemed to start, then struggled to his feet, and, seizing a

loose horse by the bridle, swung himself to the saddle and galloped off into the shadows.

"Master," croaked a voice into Hugh's ear, "I've seen the swan! Follow me. My arrows are all gone, or I'd have shot him."

"God's truth! show him to me," gasped Hugh, and away they leapt together.

Soon they had outrun even the slaughtering Welsh, and found themselves mingled with fugitives from the French army. But in the gathering twilight none seemed to take any note of them. Indeed every man was engaged in saving his own life and thought that this was the purpose of these two also. Some three hundred yards away certain French knights, mounted, often two upon one horse, or afoot, were flying from that awful field, striking out to the right in order to clear themselves of the cumbering horde of fugitives. One of these knights lagged behind, evidently because his horse was wounded. He turned to look back, and a last ray from the dying sun lit upon him.

"Look," said Dick; and Hugh saw that on the knight's shield was blazoned a white swan and that he wore upon his helmet a swan for a crest. The knight, who had not seen them, spurred his horse, but it would not or could not move. Then he called to his companions for help, but they took no heed. Finding himself alone, he dismounted, hastily examined the horse's wound, and, having unbuckled a cloak from his saddle, cast down

his shield in order that he might run more lightly.

"Thanks to God, he is mine," muttered Hugh. "Touch him not, Dick, unless I fall, and then do you take up the quarrel till you fall."

So speaking he leapt upon the man out of the shadow of some thorns that grew there.

"Lift your shield and fight," said Hugh, advancing on him with raised sword. "I am Hugh de Cressi."

"Then, sir, I yield myself your prisoner," answered the knight, "seeing that you are two and I but one."

"Not so. I take no prisoners, who seek vengeance, not ransom, and least of all from you. My companion shall not touch you unless I fall. Swift now, the light dies, and I would kill you fighting."

The knight picked up his shield.

"I know you," he said. "I am not he you think."

"And I know you," answered Hugh. "Now, no words, of them there have been enough between us," and he smote at him.

For two minutes or more they fought, for the armour of both was good,

and one was full of rage and the other of despair. There was little fine sword-play about this desperate duel; the light was too low for it. They struck and warded, that was all, while Grey Dick stood by and watched grimly. Some more fugitives came up, but seeing that blows passed, veered off to the left, for of blows they had known enough that day. The swan knight missed a great stroke, for Hugh leapt aside; then, as the Frenchman staggered forward, struck at him with all his strength.
The heavy sword, grasped in both hands, for Hugh had thrown aside his shield, caught his foe where neck joins shoulder and sank through his mail deep into the flesh beneath. Down he went. It was finished.

"Unlace his helm, Dick," grasped Hugh. "I would see his face for the last time, and if he still lives----"

Dick obeyed, cutting the lashings of the helm.

"By the Saints!" he said presently in a startled voice, "if this be Sir Edmund Acour he has strangely changed."

"I am not Acour, lord of Noyon," said the dying man in a hollow voice. "Had you given me time I would have told you so."

"Then, in Christ's name, who are you?" asked Hugh, "that wear de Noyon's cognizance?"

"I am Pierre de la Roche, one of his knights. You have seen me in

England. I was with him there, and you made me prisoner on Dunwich heath. He bade me change arms with him before the battle, promising me great reward, because he knew that if he were taken, Edward of England would hang him as a traitor, whereas me they might ransom. Also, he feared your vengeance."

"Well, of a truth, you have the reward," said Dick, looking at his ghastly wound.

"Where then is Acour?" gasped Hugh.

"I know not. He fled from the battle an hour ago with the King of France, but I who was doomed would not fly. Oh, that I could find a priest to shrive me!"

"Whither does he fly?" asked Hugh again.

"I know not. He said that if the battle went against us he would seek his castle in Italy, where Edward cannot reach him."

"What armour did he wear?" asked Dick.

"Mine, mine--a wolf upon his shield, a wolf's head for crest."

Hugh reeled as though an arrow had passed through him.

"The wolf knight, Acour!" he groaned. "And I spared his life."

"A very foolish deed, for which you now pay the price," said Dick, as though to himself.

"We met in the battle and he told me," said de la Roche, speaking very slowly, for he grew weak. "Yes, he told me and laughed. Truly we are Fate's fools, all of us," and he smiled a ghastly smile and died.

Hugh hid his face in his hands and sobbed in his helpless rage.

"The innocent slain," he said, "by me, and the guilty spared--by me. Oh, God! my cup is full. Take his arms, man, that one day I may show them to Acour, and let us be going ere we share this poor knight's fate. Ah! who could have guessed it was thus that I and Sir Pierre should meet and part again."