

CONDENSED CLASSICS

SIR NIGEL

By SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Condensation by Alex G. Coover



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was born on May 22, 1859, in Edinburgh. His father, Charles Doyle, was an artist of fantastic imagination. The boy went to the University of Edinburgh, studied in Germany, and returned to take his degree at Edinburgh university in 1885. He signed as ship's doctor for a two years whaling trip in the Arctic, traveled in West Africa, and finally settled as a doctor in South...

... His restless imagination found constant expression in short stories. Sherlock Holmes made his first appearance in "A Study in Scarlet" (1887) but won his immense popularity in "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes." The original of the genius detective was Dr. Bell of Edinburgh university. The popular have lived again in "The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes," "The Hound of the Baskervilles" and "The Return of Sherlock Holmes."

Dr. Doyle drew abundantly from historical sources for his novels and plays. "The White Company," a stirring romance, first introduced Sir Nigel as an old man. In 1905 his youth was portrayed in the book named for him.

Conan Doyle served in a field hospital in the South African war, wrote two books in defense of the British army in the war, and was knighted in 1902. He has written a three-volume history of the great war.

Sir Conan Doyle is a large, athletic man, who has never lost his enthusiasm for sports. His home in Sussex, England, is filled with trophies from many parts of the world. Tennis and cricket have kept him fit for his enormous literary undertakings.

EVIL times fell upon England in the year 1348, when the great plague devastated the land. It was during this period that the story of Sir Nigel takes place.

The house of Loring, like many another noble family, felt the heavy hand of misfortune; for after the Barons War and lawsuits with Waverly Abbey the men of the church and the men of the law left nothing but the manor of Tilford for the remaining members of the family, Lady Ermyntude and her grandson Nigel.

Nigel Loring came of a race of heroes, his grandfather having fallen at the battle of Stirling, and his father in the sea fight of Sluys. Nigel, his veins thrilling with the blood of a hundred soldiers, was filled with the desire for adventure and combat; having been trained at the desire of his grandmother in skill at arms, and courage, he became also a daring rider. At times a fierce bitterness assailed Nigel at the thought of the wrongs done by the Abbot of Waverly, whom he believed had robbed the Lorings of much of their estate.

On the first day of May, the Festival of the Apostles Philip and James, consecration reigned at the Abbey, when it was found that a large pike had eaten the carp in Abbot John's fish pond. Nigel being accused of putting the pike in the pond. Abbot John and the sacrist, Brother Samuel, were in consultation upon the subject, when they were rudely interrupted by a buzz of excitement among the monks in the cloister. A white-faced brother flung open the door and rushing into the room cried, "Father Abbot, alas, alas, Brother John is dead, and the Subprior is dead, and the Devil is loose in the five virgate field."

Now what the brother called the "Devil" was a great yellow horse, held at the Abbey for the debt of his owner, Franklin Aylward; such a horse, it was said, was not to be found betwixt the Abbey and the King's stables at Windsor.

It was a sorry day that brought the horse to the Abbey, for no one there could be found who would or could ride him or conquer him; he had indeed nearly killed the Brother and the Subprior.

Abbot John and the monks, intent upon seeing, with their own eyes, this terrible creature, hurried down the stairs and gained the wall of the meadow, where looking over its top they beheld the magnificent horse standing fetlock deep in the meadow grass. Upon this wild scene there arrived riding his pony the young Squire Loring, small of stature, but with muscles of steel, and a soul of fire; his face, though tanned with the weather, was delicate of feature. His whole appearance made him a mark for the sight of any passer-by, but at the first glance, the brown face set in its golden hair and beard, and the daring light of the quick, reckless, laughing eyes, made the one strong memory left behind.

The horse was at the moment trampling his latest victim and Nigel, springing from his pony, was over the wall and at battle with the creature, proving himself master. Some discussion arose among the monks as to the killing of the yellow horse, or the giving him to Nigel as a punishment; the last suggestion finally won, and Nigel proceeded to further subdue the heretic...

fore unimpaired creature called "Pommers." The horse tried to unseat his rider, but Nigel held fast and at last they were over the four-foot gate and away. Then took place the most notable ride ever known to that part of the world, and the author's description recording it is a gem worth reading; also it is the key to Nigel's whole character. A nearly forgotten ballad upon the subject has the following refrain:

"The Doe that sped on Hinde Head,
The Kestrel on the winds,
And Nigel on the Yellow Horse
Can leave the world behind."

After a long battle of wills, the horse was broken and conquered; he fell in the heather with a sobbing sigh, throwing his rider over his head stunned. The young Squire was first to recover and kneeling by the panting, overwrought horse, he gently massed his hand over the foun-flecked face, and the whinnying Pommers thrust his nose into the hollow of Nigel's hand.

"You are my horse, Pommers," Nigel whispered, and laid his cheek against the craning head. "I know you, Pommers, and you know me, and with the help of Saint Paul we shall reach some other folk to know us both."

The monks of Waverly Abbey held Nigel for debts and wrongs against them and he was haled before the Abbot for trial, was judged guilty and sentenced to imprisonment; but when they would have restrained him, Nigel drew his sword, which angered the Abbot, who charged his bowman to draw his bow and defend holy church and her decrees. Tragedy was imminent, when Sunkin Aylward, a famous archer, came to Nigel's rescue, at once attaching himself to the young Squire's service, and afterward following him into many dangers.

Into the midst now came a man whose appearance dominated the scene. This was the famous soldier, John Chandos, with a message to Nigel Loring. Said Chandos, "He who comes to seek the shelter of your roof is your liege lord and mine, the King's high majesty, Edward of England."

While a guest at Tilford Abbey, Chandos' stories filled the mind and heart of Nigel with a stronger desire than ever for adventure, and he begged to go as Chandos' Squire, under the standards of the King, Edward of England, to which Chandos assented.

Nigel made his arrangements for leaving home; they were few and simple, for he had only his Pommers, his loyal Sam Aylward, and at the last his long-wished-for suit of armor, and a small amount of gold.

There was, however, one visit must be made before leaving home, and that was to see Mary, the daughter of the old Knight of Duplin, living in the castle at Cosford. Mary of the grave eyes of brown looking bravely at the world; the one whom Nigel loved.

At the shrine of St. Catherine, Nigel and Mary said their farewells, and the young Squire vowed to perform three noble deeds of valor in her honor, ere he came to see his Mary again; but that no thought of her should stand twixt him and this honorable achievement.

Nigel sought constantly for some deed to perform and lesser ones came to hand frequently, but it was not until he was at Winsheisa, with Chandos, that his first great opportunity came.

It was found that the plans of the attack upon the French at Calais by the Prince's army had been stolen, and it was suspected that a cunning, daring Frenchman, called the "Red Perret," had taken them and was then already on his way across the Channel. Nigel started in pursuit with Aylward and other followers. After a long chase and a hard-fought battle,

Nigel caught the Red Perret and saved the English plans; but as his enemy was so gallant a man Nigel begged his life of the King and so saved him. He sent the Perret to Mary at Cosford, with the message that the first deed was accomplished.

Nigel then stormed the famous castle of La Brohiniere, where lived the Knight called the "Fletcher of Brohiniere," who was said never to let a prisoner escape alive from his castle. Here at great risk of his own life, Nigel rescued not only his man Sam Aylward and other comrades, but a young Frenchman who later, however, died, praising his rescuer. Then news of the second deed was sent to Mary at Cosford.

Nigel had followed on with John Chandos into Brittany when the third deed was found. There had been hot, furious fighting, and Nigel, riding Pommers, plunged forward, unseating and taking captive one of the enemy. Having the Frenchman at his mercy, Nigel might have killed him at once, or held him for ransom, but he had made a gallant fight, and out of admiration and pity the young Squire spared his life and let him go, only to discover later that he had had at his mercy none other than King John of France.

When the Prince heard the story from King John himself he exclaimed, "For my part I had rather have the honor this Squire has gathered, than all the richest ransoms of France." Whereupon the Prince with his sword touched Nigel's shoulder as he knelt before him, and said, "England has lost a brave squire and gained a gallant knight; nay linger not, rise up, Sir Nigel." And a third message went to Mary.

Two months later Nigel arrived at Cosford, and kissing Mary's welcoming hand he said, "St. Catherine has brought me home!" Copyright, 1919, by the Post Publishing Co. (The Boston Post). Printed by permission of, and arrangement with, Doubleday, Page & Co., authorized publishers.

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